Power geometries of mediated care: (re)mapping transnational families and immobility of the Rohingya diaspora in a digital age

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Abstract
This article provides a new direction in digital media and communication studies and develops an emergent analytical lens of digital media and immobility in the context of forced migration. Drawing on a qualitative multi-sited research approach, I shed light on digitally mediated transnational care among the Rohingya diaspora in refugee camps in Bangladesh and in Brisbane, Australia. I draw on Massey’s idea of the ‘power geometry’ with a combination ‘immobility turn’ to consider how the socio-spatial mobility is restricted and regulated, and how these immobilities are crucial to understanding family care practices. I argue that the idea of transnational families existing beyond nation-states, and the social and spatial immobilities may help us to identify the linkages, discrepancies and power asymmetries that exist in cross-cultural settings. The findings offer a critical stance on immobility, which impacts and shapes transnational caregiving practices of forced migrants in the age of digital media.

Keywords
digital media, forced migration, immobility, inequality, space and place, mediated care, Rohingya diaspora, transnational family

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Introduction

I am 57-year old. I left all of my family members in the refugee camp in Bangladesh. I have no passport. I cannot travel. I am stuck here. I have no hope to see them in my life. (ASR, a 57-year-old Rohingya man living in Brisbane, Australia)

Separation from family and relatives in the context of forced migration often results in tension and ambiguity due to lack of communication and information about where to live and whether there is any chance to family members will meet each other again. Recent studies show that with the emergence of digital media, migrant family members can communicate and take care of each other from a distance. Yet, most literature has focussed on how the digital technologies help migrant to maintain transnational family ties of economic migrants (e.g. sending remittances), navigate or negotiate border-crossing issues (e.g. residence permits, citizenship, marriage) in the countries of settlement, especially in the Global North (e.g. Cabalquinto, 2018; Wilding et al., 2020). Drawing on a multi-sited approach, this study focuses on how digital technologies are utilised to maintain transnational family communication and mainly seeks to answer the following overarching question: How are digital media used to maintain transnational family communication among the Rohingya diaspora living in Brisbane and the refugee camps in Cox’s Bazar? This question is explored by focussing on power structures and dynamics of familial care to provide critical insight into care practices in the context of forced displacement.

In this study, almost all participants from the refugee camp fled their country Myanmar during the 2017 genocide while participants in Brisbane had previously spent a significant time in the Cox’s Bazar refugee camp. Some participants in this study believed that they won’t be able to see their family members physically as many of them are forcibly deported and detained in Myanmar as well as a travel ban for the Rohingya refugees in many other countries. Therefore, it is crucial to understand how the Rohingya diaspora connects and uses digital media to maintain long-distance family relations in a context of statelessness, genocide, pain, anxiety and subsequent forced migration.

Additionally, reflecting on Covid 19 and forced migration, how state borders and state policies are implemented is critical to understanding the ways of transnational care are practised. More specifically, drawing on Massey’s idea of ‘power geometry’ to digital migration studies (Leurs and Smets, 2018), I develop the idea of ‘power geometries of mediated care’, which extends on Bélanger and Silvey’s (2020) concept of ‘power geometries of care’, to explore how care process through communication technologies is linked to the socio-spatial (im)mobility and power asymmetries across different spaces and places. With this regard, the inspiring argument of the ‘immobility turn’ (see Adey, 2006; Shamir, 2005; Turner, 2007) has not only shown how nation state borders are applied in practices, but also how the usages of digital communication technologies in transnational family and care practices are maintained. My present argument, however, takes inspiration from an emerging call to rethink mobility-based inequalities through applying critical (im)mobility lens in media and communication studies (Cabalquinto, 2018; Smets, 2019), as well as from the idea of ‘power geometries of care’, (Bélanger
and Silvey, 2020) in migration studies and the ‘Pandemic (Im)mobilities’ (Adey et al., 2021) in mobilities studies.

In a response to contribute to an emergent analytical lens in the field of digital media studies, I foreground critical conversations on the family care practices by further investigating the wider power structures and mobility dynamics in a context of forced migration from a transnational perspective. In doing so, this paper aims to explore more precisely using the critical immobility lens to understand the digital care practices of the Rohingya families and their (re)formation in the embodiment of (im)mobility that reflects the current context of COVID-19 pandemic. In this paper, I critically focus on the social-spatial junctures in the Rohingya transnational family ties and care practices. I identify social mobilities as the capacities in the socioeconomic condition of individuals, related to occupation, income and nature of mobility. By spatial mobilities, on the other hand, I mean abilities for cross border journey for residence or resettlement, such as migration to Australia and somewhere else. Such (im)mobilities are embedded in family care practices incorporate inequalities in geographies and social settings that have been shaped by cross border connections. In this paper, I argue that the idea of transnational family communication and care practices needs go beyond nation state and avoid one-sided focus on mobility to identify the linkages, discrepancies and power asymmetries that exist in cross-cultural settings.

Deriving data from a project on the Rohingya diaspora in Brisbane and the refugee camp in Bangladesh, this paper aims to explore the impacts of immobility and forced displacement, and how digital media are utilised to maintain care giving practices. Therefore, the phenomenon of mobility restriction in everyday life of prolonged displacement of the Rohingya diaspora, and how digital media are used to navigate these restrictions in the context of forced migrations offers a key argument in this paper. Overall, the findings of this study articulate the critical link between transnational, immobility, digital media and forced migration.

This article is structured as follows: following this introduction, literature review outlines the idea of digital care practice and transnational family. Then, the theoretical framework section reviews literature on immobilities and power relations to understand the transnational family connections and care practices through communication technologies from multi-sited and transnational perspective. Next, it outlines the data collection process in Rohingya diaspora communities in Bangladesh and in Brisbane, Australia. Then, the paper presents findings and analyses the emerging themes of digital care practices in the context of immobility, and finally, I summarise presenting key findings and critical argument on the power dynamics of care as integral elements of the transnational families who have been impacted by security control and forced displacement.

**Literature review**

**Digital care and transitional family**

Care practices require togetherness to provide care in the lived space of the care receiver. Scholarship has explored the nuanced idea of migrants’ family care and transnational ties
among migrants (e.g. Bryceson and Vuorela, 2002; Skrbiš, 2008). Recent studies on communication technologies have demonstrated the significance of digitally mediated or virtual presence concerning transnational family relations and care across borders (e.g. Baldassar, 2016; Madianou and Miller, 2012; Robertson et al., 2016). Different types of care may exist in a physical form or in distance form in transnational settings through different forms such as phone and video calls, sharing images, emails and text messages. In relation to transnational family communication, major studies have recognised different forms of digital presence across distance, such as ‘mediated co-presence’ (Thompson, 1995) and ‘connected presence’ (Licoppe, 2004), ‘ordinary co-presence’ (Nedelcu and Wyss, 2016). Similarly, there is an additional form of proxy co-presence (Baldassar, 2008) where physical and digital formats (e.g. photography) embody others’ absence. For instance, Robertson et al. (2016: 231) have found that Karen refugees in Melbourne utilise digital photographs to build a ‘family imaginary’ for imagining ‘time and space with family’. In this context, transnational connections between diaspora and home is preserved through polymedia environment (Madianou and Miller, 2012) that allow different forms of communication technologies to manage family relationships and ‘virtual intimacy’ (Wilding, 2006).

However, the notion of care in the digital age is complex due to the emergence of digital technologies that have facilitated global flows of information. The blurring boundaries of spaces and places through exchanges of information flows and mediated communication lead us to rethink family care beyond geographical settings. Therefore, family communication may also experience digital inequalities, situating a central question on social and spatial (in)equalities embedded in gender, race, nationality and class (Horst, 2006; Parrenas, 2005). The use of technologies from the perspective of political economy, gender, surveillance and inequality systems impact and shape dynamics of transnational familyhood. As Horst (2006) argues ‘the mobile phone remains an object of ambivalence, bringing unforeseen burdens and obligations’ (p. 143). Acedera and Yeoh (2021) find how disparities in use and access to technologies crates a ‘hierarchy of care access’ in the way care works are maintained. Similarly, the consideration of communication technologies as ‘intrinsically desirable’ (Wilding, 2006: 127) has been criticised as she argues that ‘sunny day’ ICTs are only for ‘moments of relative equality and desirability’ (p. 134).

This study positions itself at the intersection of digital media studies, communication studies and (forced) migration and refugee studies. By engaging with literature on digital media and immobility, I investigate the process of transnational family care practices within the Rohingya community. As Silverstone defines mediation as both ‘institutionally and technologically driven’ processes of communication that ‘change the social and cultural environments’ (Silverstone, 2005: 188). In other words, mediation advances a broader perspective of media that includes different forms such as images, texts, audios, platforms in the ‘social processes of reception and consumption’ (Silverstone, 2005: 188). In this study, I focus more closely on mediated family connections as meaning-making processes and consider the social and spatial aspects of (im)mobility to explore the role of digital technologies in the caregiving experiences of the forced displaced and stateless Rohingya diaspora.
Theoretical framework

Immobility, digital media and forced migration

The growing emergence of transnational flows of information and human movements beyond borders advances the ‘new mobilities paradigm’ (Sheller and Urry, 2006) that has challenged geographically bounded socio-economic transformation, political and cultural relations in migration and border discourse. The mobility research has evolved over the past decade across humanities and social science research, in particular since the inception of the journal Mobilities in 2006 with the leadership of sociologist John Urry. However, scholars have identified that spatial and social mobilities are mediated by unequal power relations and raised the issues of structural constraints to which migrants are particularly subjected to control. For example, studies have coined several concepts, such as ‘relational politics of (im)mobilities’ (Adey, 2006); ‘enclave society’ and ‘immobility regime’ (Turner, 2007); ‘mobility regime’ (Shamir, 2005); ‘regimes of mobility’ (Glick Schiller and Salazar, 2013), which expose the paradox of mobilities paradigm that produces systematic and new systems of immobility. Recently, Schewel (2020: 328) argues that ‘migration studies suffers from a mobility bias’ that neglects the determinants and consequences of different forms of (im)mobility. To progress a research agenda on immobility, she further develops the ‘aspiration-capability framework’ as an analytical tool to understand the social factors of immobility in migration studies. In order to question the ‘mobilities turn’ in digital media and communication studies, I put my arguments in the following ways.

Primarily, this focus of immobility scholarships foregrounds the refugee and migration studies by cultural geographers from a sociological and anthropological perspective. While anthropology, sociology and migration studies however attempt to conceptualise the (im)mobility dynamics and dimensions, the central focus in the media and communication studies is on mobility, flows and digital connectivity. Scholarship that combines immobility in the digital media and (forced) migration studies is still emerging (see Seuferling, 2021; Smets, 2019). The contemporary studies of media and communication are overwhelmingly influenced by technological transformations and spectacular expansion of mobile media and communication technologies (see, Campbell, 2013). Proposing the notion of ‘mediated mobilities’, Keightley and Reading (2014: 286) examine ‘the relationships between media and mobility in contemporary culture and social life’, which includes ‘the mobility of people, the mobility of material artefacts and the mobility of data are themselves experienced and articulated through particular historically situated media ecologies’. Different categories of mobilities are referred to the ‘center of constellations of power, the creation of identities and the micro geographies of everyday life’ (Cresswell, 2011: 551), which has inspired many scholars to reflect on the media mobility nexus (Smets, 2019). Highlighting the fast and growing expansion of communication technologies, media content and institutions; digital media and communication studies has intensively focussed on how mobility is explored and understood through processes of mediation (see, Keightley and Reading, 2014). Thus, the central topic in media studies articulates how experiences of global connectivity and social relations are mediated and exchanged, while specific attention to immobility dynamics is often ignored.
Furthermore, while the ‘mobilities turn’ is widely referenced to the ideas of movement, flow, diaspora and transnationalism (Cresswell and Merriman, 2011); immobility, in contrast, has predominantly been understood as the absence of mobility in relation to multi-scalar border crossing, control, marginalisation and exclusion of undocumented migrants, refugees and asylum seekers. In relation to recent increasingly emerging border restrictions and control, many research journals introduce special issues (e.g. Bélanger and Silvey, 2020; Brandhorst et al., 2020; Merla et al., 2020) to address the contemporary inquiry of how family relations and care practices are affected by the increasingly restrictive migration regimes during the COVID-19 pandemic. However, how the care practices and experiences of immobility are mediated and shape media practices yet to be explored in media and communication studies (see Smets, 2019). With a very few exception like a study on forced migrants in Germany from a communication perspective (Witteborn, 2011) that shows how the space and place-making processes are politicised.

Spaces, places and power geometries

In this paper, I seek to rethink how power is applied in relation to transnational family care practice in a context of social and spatial immobility. Gupta and Ferguson (1992) argued, mobility regulatory practices like border control through immigration laws embody the link between ‘politics of space and the politics of otherness’ (p. 17). To progress a growing research agenda on immobility and digital media and forced migration, I attempt here to spatialise the idea of immobility with a combination of Massey’s idea of space and place, illustrating how power relations across spaces and places form the Rohingya diaspora’s care practices in the refugee camp and urban settings. Doreen Massey’s idea of the ‘power geometry of space–time compression’ (Massey, 1994: 149), is crucial to understanding power relations in human movements. Her work contributes to the emergence of a relational analysis of space, highlighting that space is ‘the product of interrelations’ and ‘always under construction’ (Massey, 2005: 9). She argued,

For different social groups and different individuals are placed in very distinct ways in relation to these flows and interconnections. This point concerns not merely the issue of who moves and who doesn’t, although that is an important element of it; it is also about power in relation to the flows and movement. Different social groups have distinct relationships to this anyway differentiated mobility: some people are more in charge of it than others; some initiate flows and movement, others don’t; some are more on the receiving-end of it than others; some are effectively imprisoned by it (Massey, 1994: 61).

Mobility and transnational communications in today’s discourse of globalisation are frequently trans-border and multi-faceted that facilitate social, cultural, economic and political flows and processes (Kearney, 1995). Massey’s idea of power-geometries provides a tool for thinking about the dynamics of modern technologies-in use, ownership and regulation- and helps us to understand why the use of technologies may have an impact on power relations (Rodgers, 2004). As Ponzanesi (2019: 555) claims that ‘the interweaving of new digital media affordances with regimes of power and knowledge
that a complex system of connectivity and belonging emerges as inextricably linked to the changing forms and experiences of contemporary migrations’. Importantly, highlighting ‘pandemic (im)mobilities’, Adey et al. (2021) have urged for a more transdisciplinary approach as the contemporary disciplinary inquiries are no longer responsive to the rapid expansion of social and environmental change. Specifically, in regards to mobilities studies, ‘we need to grasp the nettle of complexity, turbulence, disruption and unruly transitions by embracing a transdisciplinary mobile ontology for academic research, policy advocacy and critical social science that can move with the times’ (Adey et al., 2021: 16). In this context, this paper acknowledges the burgeoning scholarship to theorise the link between digital connectivity and (im)mobility, which is essential to explore the ways in which digital media are shaped and interwoven with social and spatial experiences of immobility in a context of forced migration.

**Multi-sited approach**

Although literature on migration and diaspora acknowledges simultaneous embeddedness of ‘double consciousness’ (Gilroy, 1993) and ‘simultaneity’ (Levitt and Schiller, 2004) in both home and destination countries, most studies (e.g. Dekker et al., 2018; Gifford and Wilding, 2013) are still confined in a nation state or bound geographically; while my study collects data (albeit limited amounts) in two countries. At the same time, recent forced migration and displacement has challenged the traditional spatialities in human migration phenomenon. However, to date, academics in digital migration studies have given little attention to transnational family ties and care practices from a multi-sited approach. Therefore, it is not evident how places and spaces in cross-cultural settings have affected transnational ties and caregiving practices among forced migrants.

With this respect, drawing on the emergent paradigm of ‘methodological transnationalism’ (Amelina and Faist, 2012; Faist, 2012; Schiller, 2010) that criticizes the nation-state as an unit of analysis, this paper adopts the Marcus’s (1995: 105) idea of multi-sited approach to ‘follow the people’ to engage Rohingya diaspora in an urban locality of Brisbane, and in the Rohingya refugee camp setting in Cox’s Bazar, each distinctive locations but interconnected within power structures (Glick Schiller, 2005). While Marcus specifically mentioned the significance of the approach for cultural studies and media studies, the idea of follow the people leads to take a transnational look at diasporic processes of ‘scattering’, (such as being ‘here’ and ‘there’) (King, 2018). Thus, multi-sited approach with a perspective of transnationalism is crucial to an understanding of the hyperconnected and complex flows of contemporary migrations (Marino, 2021).

Finally, I argue that there is an urgent need for theoretical and methodological rethinking to accommodate more multi-layered and complex perspectives. In contrast to the broadly referenced ‘mobilities turn’ (Sheller and Urry, 2006) and long-established ‘methodological nationalism’ (Wimmer and Schiller, 2003) in migration studies, this study fills gaps and provides new insights into media and communication studies.
Research context and methodology

The Rohingya: ‘stuck in the middle’

The Rohingya, an ethnic minority group in Myanmar, have been forcefully made stateless through constant, ongoing systemic and institutionalised persecution by the Burmese government. They are denied citizenship and any access to basic rights, including rights to education, health and free movement in Myanmar (Ibrahim, 2016; Leider, 2018). The brutal military crackdown in Rakhine state on 25 August 2017 led to the huge influx, nearly 740,000 Rohingya migrated to Bangladesh joining about 200,000 already living at refugee camps in Bangladesh (Uddin, 2019). According to the United Nations’ Human Rights Council (HRC), this is one of the biggest and most sudden forced displacements in human migration history, leading to the Rohingya becoming the ‘most persecuted minority in the world’ (UN, 2017). While Myanmar is homeland for the Rohingya, Bangladesh has been a ‘sanctuary’ for the Rohingya diaspora for at least the last four decades. In addition, many Rohingya have migrated to neighbouring countries like India, Malaysia, Indonesia and Thailand, including other middle eastern countries. Bangladesh is therefore a country of ‘second home’ for the Rohingya diaspora, and simultaneously a point of departure to other destination countries. A significant number of Rohingya have moved to Australia from Bangladesh using different routes through the Asia Pacific and Andaman sea, often as asylum seekers. All participants reported that their family members have traumatic experience of genocide in Rakhine, Myanmar.

The participants from Brisbane were either born in Cox’s Bazar refugee camp or spent a long time in the camp before migrating to Australia and can be grouped into two categories. First, boat people, who come ‘illegally’ and made a perilous journey to come to Australia and have been waiting for the decision on their asylum application. Some have received refugee status during my data collection process. Second, those who arrived in Brisbane in the early 2010s through the UN refugee settlement agreement and later became Australian citizens. The family structure of participants was varied. Most of the participants were unmarried and left their family members in the refugee camps in Bangladesh and elsewhere. Those who became Australian citizens had their own family members with them and had been able to visit their relatives living in the camp in Bangladesh and elsewhere. However, those who were asylum seekers were waiting with the hope of applying for family reunification after receiving a residence permit through the humanitarian and Temporary Protection Visa (TPV) scheme. In Australia, once granted TPVs the Rohingya community members were allowed to live and work in Australia, however, with work rights dependent on several factors. Due to a lack of reliable statistical evidence, it is difficult to ascertain the exact number of Rohingya in Australia. However, according to Rohingya participants, the number could be around 6000 Rohingya living in Australia while around 750 live in the greater Brisbane area.

On the other hand, Rohingya participants living in camps in Cox’s Bazar were mainly staying with their parents and other family members. Most participants fled to Bangladesh
during the last massive displacement in 2017. For the Rohingya diaspora in this study, Cox’s Bazar refugee camp has been a ‘second home’ for an entire Rohingya generation where they have spent a long time with their family members and relatives after fleeing from violence in Myanmar. Despite the continued presence of the Rohingya refugees in Bangladesh, there are no domestic laws to define refugees and the protection of refugees and asylum seekers, thus Bangladesh has refused to officially identify Rohingya as ‘refugees’, rather identified them as ‘forcibly displaced Myanmar nationals’ (The Daily Star, 2017). At the same time, their ancestral country, Myanmar does not recognise Rohingya as citizens libelling them as ‘Bengali migrants’. For the Rohingya diaspora in this study, Cox’s Bazar refugee camp has been a ‘second home’ for an entire Rohingya generation where they have spent long time with their family members and relatives after fleeing from violence in Myanmar.

In 2019, the Bangladeshi government ordered telecommunications companies to stop selling mobile SIM cards and shut down mobile phone services due to ‘state security’ and ‘public safety’ concerns as well as imposing several restrictive measures on mobility and digital and social media use (The Economist, 2019). In this context, the entire Rohingya ethnic minority are stuck in densely populated refugee camps in Cox’s Bazar in southern Bangladesh. Remaining hopeful while ‘stuck in the middle’, and not being allowed to work and move is a difficult condition. The lived experience of living in exile in Bangladesh and Australia is tainted by a longing for returning to Myanmar, which is full of uncertainty and unpredictability.

Methods and data

This paper draws on a larger project that investigates how the Rohingya transnational identity and their family ties are shaped and negotiated through digital media, and whether digital media strengthen the process of integration within the host community. For this paper, I follow the qualitative methods of semistructured interviews and social media scroll back interviews (Robards and Lincoln, 2019) as a visual method. As people move from offline to online or vice versa, the need to follow the medium (Rogers, 2013) demonstrates a combination of methods, which can be the appropriate way to understand the diaspora in the digital age. I interviewed 15 Rohingya from Brisbane and 10 from the Rohingya refugee camps in Cox’s Bazar, Bangladesh. They were recruited through purposive and snowball sampling (Kvale and Brinkmann, 2009). Purposive sampling was used to ensure variation in participants’ social and legal background (e.g. granted for citizenship, refugee status or asylum seekers in Australia) including community leaders and activists while snowball sampling helped provided access to hard-to-reach and ‘hidden’ participants (Heckathorn, 2011). The sampling was diverse in terms of social and economic background, education, age and gender to explore any specific and common digital media practices among participants. Although participants varied in terms of working experiences, COVID-19 has impacted all participants in Brisbane and in the Cox’s Bazar refugee camp. Ages ranged from 22 to 57-year-old. In person interviews were conducted in Brisbane, while online/mobile interviews were organised to collect data from the refugee camp in Cox’s Bazar. Scroll back interviews
were conducted with selected participants who are active on social media platforms to understand their transnational family engagement through social media platforms.

While most of the participants in Brisbane were interviewed in a mosque (*Islamic Society of Darra Inc.*), some were conducted either in their homes or a coffee shop based on participants’ preferences. On the other hand, all respondents from Cox’s Bazar refugee camps were interviewed through direct phone call. Respondents in Brisbane were compensated with gift vouchers and some were entertained with light refreshments such as tea and cold drinks paying courtesy to their time allocation. Most interviews were conducted in Rohingya language while some were in English and Bangla or mix of them. Interviews were audio recorded with the participants’ consent and translated and transcribed into English. Four participants who have applied for refugee status in Australia, and two participants from the refugee camps did not consent for being recorded. The face to face interviews lasted between 30 and 40 minutes, while scroll back interviews were between 20 and 30 minutes.

Data were analysed through a combination of open coding, which let key themes emerge from the participants’ narratives, social media images and then more structured coding (Saldaña, 2016) relevant to the research aims and questions. Following the procedure of thematic analysis (Braun and Clarke, 2006), I identified appropriate patterns and themes of digital media practices highlighting the specific study focus on digital media use in transnational family communication and care practice. I observed patterns and themes once all data are coded accordingly. Major themes were then compared across identifying similarities and differences between the two sample groups in Brisbane and the refugee camp and then linked to the different aspects of immobility such as travel ban, security control, which impact family care practices for illustrating themes and findings. In this way, data were analysed in both inductive and deductive ways followed by an iterative process. Regarding ethical considerations, ethical Approval was obtained from the Queensland University of Technology (QUT) Human Research Ethics Committee. Any identifications of participants (such as names and images) were de-identified to ensure their anonymous identity. Voluntary participation and informed consent were obtained from all participants and the purpose of the study was confirmed prior to all interviews.

*(Im)mobile lives: survival and exile*

During the global pandemic, COVID-19 restrictions have further controlled the movement of Rohingya, especially in the camps, leading to stigmatisation, isolation and immobility as they live in poor, overcrowded refugee camps. As one Rohingya man in Brisbane stated, whilst raising concerns about his family members living in the camp ‘...the entire camp has become a human bomb. Allah only can save the Rohingya’. The pandemic has forced us to redefine the realities of mobility which refers to ‘new confinements and modes of exploitation’ (Glick Schiller and Salazar, 2013: 190). Regarding transnational family connections, this has important implications for how Rohingya suffer and live in the camp in Bangladesh and Rakhine in Myanmar.

HUR, a 28-year-old Rohingya man from Kutupalong camp, summed up camp life simply. I asked him ‘how are you living in the camp?’ the answer was: ‘just want to get
out of the camp. It’s like a prison’. He further explained, many people in the camp are trying to go to bidesh (foreign countries) through illegal ways such as syndicated human trafficking. On the other hand, the Rohingya diaspora in Australia desperately wants to connect and bring their families to stay with them considering ‘no futures’ in Bangladesh or Myanmar. ASR (57), is a Rohingya in Brisbane who came by boat and has been living in Australia for the last 7 years without having any formal job or work permit due to his legal status. He fled Burma in the early 90s and spent around 20 years in the refugee camp and elsewhere in Bangladesh, before settling in Australia. Although he is happy and maintains a better life in Brisbane than his life in the camp, feels empty and anxious as he cannot visit his all family members are now in the refugee camps of Bangladesh. He blasted with frustration ‘shukh ache, shnati nai (living in Australia has happiness without tranquillity and peace)’. He further explained when I asked about his condition in Australia.

I am a quite old man. I don’t have any bad habits. I don’t smoke. I don’t go anywhere. I have received a very small amount of money from the government, with this I can hardly maintain food, house and phone. I send money to support my family in the refugee camp (Bangladesh) every month. It’s not easy for me as I am not permitted to work. What else can I do for them? In Burma, I had plenty of land and business properties like a big cloth shop [sadness appeared]. I have put jiyan [sons and daughters] they used to support me. In Bangladesh, I used to do many things, like fishing, sailing boats. Now, I am looking for work to survive and support my family in the refugee camp.

A participant in Brisbane, sent me the image (see Figure 1) which was posted and shared on Facebook to show the misery and ‘imprisoned’ life in the Cox’s Bazar refugee camp where his all family members had been living for more than a decade. To him, Rohingya are not criminals but genocide survivors who have fled from Burmese persecution, while they are treated as ‘detainees’ in the camp. Other members of the community shared the post and expressed their anger and anxiety towards such mobility restrictions. The image shows how transnational care can be shared through social media that connects the global Rohingya diaspora with family members living in the camp.

The spatial confinement in the camp constitutes more control over Rohingya mobility and their everyday lives. Staying in the refugee camp in Bangladesh equates to living in a state of indeterminacy. Participants in the camp do not know whether they will be returned to Myanmar or remained ‘confined’ in the camp. Scholarship of immobility (e.g. Hailey, 2009) highlights the spatial confinement of camp that the spatial aspects of immobility matter. Glick Schiller and Salazar (2013) among scholars of transnationalism who have raised critical discussion about power over mobility to deploy dynamics of mobility and immobility. Glick Schiller and Salazar (2013) pinpoint the idea of ‘regimes of mobility’ (p. 188) to understand ‘the relationships between the privileged movements of some and the co-dependent but stigmatised and forbidden movement, migration and interconnections of the poor, powerless and exploited’. Such regimes can be characterised by hegemonic governmentality across global power relations by analysing the ‘ongoing dynamic between situations of settlement and those of mobility within situations of unequal power’.
While the participants from Brisbane loved their life in Australia, the opening quote of ASR shows it was always stained with sadness and anxiety. They cannot help but agonise over their family members still stuck in the refugee camp and elsewhere. ‘I don’t have anyone’s phone number in my mobile except the numbers of my family members. They can’t call me as they are poor, and I need to send them money each month. . .so they’re always in my contact’, ASR further said about his connection with his family members over the mobile phone.

Figure 1. The images shows a couple of Rohingya crossing the barbed wire fence in the refugee camp, Cox’s Bazar, Bangladesh.

**Power geometries of mediated care**

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For ASR, mobile communication facilitates ‘virtual co-presence’ to compensate physical absence in maintaining familial duty and regular interactions with left-behind family members in Cox’s Bazar Refugee camp in Bangladesh. Other Rohingya participants in this study have also revealed the utmost necessity for access to a mobile phone that has been predominantly used as an essential means to maintain transnational caregiving practices. Vertovec (2004) recognises the phone call as the ‘cheap calls: social glue of transnationalism’ which allows transnational migrants to remain involved in everyday experiences and to fulfil their filial duties from a distance. From the early use of telephone calls and emails to smartphones and audio-visual convergence of communication technologies and social media have become ubiquitous within transnational family life. In this context, communication technologies have been a ‘digital lifeline’ for the Rohingya diaspora to fulfil their familial duties (such as sending remittances to their relatives in the camp) in relation to settlement in their host countries and maintain relationships with their friends and family members who are forcibly displaced from their homeland Myanmar.

KFT (32), a participant from Brisbane shared the image (Figure 2) with me which was posted on Facebook to show that a Rohingya mother living in Cox’s Bazar refugee camp needs urgent blood donation who was hospitalised in the public hospital due to her critical condition. His expression was a full of frustration.
The use of mobile phones and social media in the camp is restricted, and also Rohingya refugees don’t have access to public hospitals. I have many (Bangladeshi) friends in Cox’s Bazar city who are connected through social media. I shared the post on Facebook for their attention. What else I can do from here?

Additionally, through using hashtags, A form of transnational communication, the practice of the hashtag (such as #Rohingya_camp, #SaveRohingya) on social media serves as a ‘solidarity symbol’ (Collins, 2004: 56) with the Rohingya in camp who have gone through restrictive measures like internet blackout and security control as well as military enforcement and persecution in Rakhine state. Similarly, symbolic expression (like, love, care, anger) emojis, sharing posts and using photos (e.g. profile and cover photos), practising such pictorial symbols facilitates mediated care in a certain context of immobility through the transnational diasporic network for collective feelings of grief and pain (see Figures 1 and 2). Such arrangements are not only related to the country of origin, but also entangled with transnational families across the world, that shape the daily experiences of immobility and care practices of the Rohingya diaspora. In this way, networked transnational solidarities as a form of mediated care practices are shared beyond nation states and borders, thus contextualising immobility is crucial to understand the patterns of media practices influenced by anxiety and hope. In this context, social media can be seen as an influential tool for forcibly displaced people to share the narratives of plight, seek help for others, showing solidarities with the transnational families in ways traditional media has not.

While mobile or smartphones have been the core means of communication among the Rohingya diaspora, it can also be a risky device when it is used as a pretext to control the Rohingya movement within and outside of the camp and their digital social media usage. With some exceptions, many participants from the camp have also reported about the harassment and security surveillance over mobile phone and social media use. Here is an example of Rohingya from camp who was unable to see a doctor for his mother. Although he took permission to go outside of the camp, he was stopped by a police officer and sent back to the camp as he was found carrying a mobile phone. MHB told me that he was dumbfounded to experience such ‘inhuman treatment’.

My mother was in critical condition. I convinced the camp in charge and security officials to bring my mother to a local hospital in Cox’s Bazar city. I had an appointment with the doctor as soon as I was allowed to take my mother to a local hospital. But police stopped me at the city entrance, and I was sent back to the camp with my ailing mother. The police said, ‘Rohingya are not allowed go outside of the camp with a mobile phone.’ (MHB, 32-year-old Rohingya in Cox’s Bazar refugee camp)

Therefore, despite utilising a range of digital affordance and networked connectivity, caregiving practices are filled with pain, anxiety and ambivalent affect. It is less about smartphones and social media, as many Rohingya in the camp only have a mobile phone without access to the Internet in a context of the increasingly restrictive mobility, thus ‘ambient co-presence’ (Madianou, 2016) represents a much more ambivalent. In particular, the narratives of confinement (such as Internet blackouts in Cox’s Bazaar refugee
camp, and visa conundrum and detention centre in Australia) and recent restrictive mechanism during COVID-19 pandemic that put the Rohingya diaspora members at risk of travel ban and deportation. Such experiences of immobility shape how digital technologies are used and accessed enabling them to imagine futures elsewhere and offer transitional family care work. As we can see the participants in the camp are exceptionally vulnerable, in fear of harassment, without access to work, education and other social services. They want to end the camp life and go back to Myanmar to contribute and support their family. On the other hand, asylum seekers in Australia and (refugees in the camp) cannot travel due to the risk of being identified and deported. Space, place and immobility became intertwined in the stories of the Rohingya people I interviewed positioning themselves ‘here’ and ‘there’ and trapped in many parts of the world, which lead to spatial subjectivities (Massey, 1994). Therefore, Massey’s concern with ‘power in relation to the flows and the movement’ is critical for exploring the nature of digitally mediated care in the context of immobility and forced migration.

These findings reflect that Madianou (2014) has shown how the unequal access and use of Internet and digital services produce ‘care divides’, which influences social inequalities in a family setting. So, the mediated connectivity is not equally desirable for every family member for sharing daily personal and emotional experiences. If we consider the freedom of movement as a resource, unequal mobility creates a ‘mobility gap’ (Shamir, 2005), what I call here ‘(im)mobile divide’ as a form of digital divide and social exclusion with a combination of immobility dynamics. In this context, the care narratives of the Rohingyas in Brisbane and the camp show the impacts of care and support and its embedded social and spatial dynamics in the daily experiences of prolonged displacement. Finally, it is clear that how narratives of care manifest a central emphasis on (im)mobility rooted in uneven spatial structures (Massey, 1994). Such immobility paradigm can be helpful in highlighting the nexuses that provide some people and groups with new forms of connectivity or connectedness and empowerment, while engendering isolation and processes of exclusion for others. Therefore, mediated care practices are situated within power dynamics that are intertwined with social and spatial inequalities.

**Conclusion**

In this study, I have explored digitally mediated care and transnational family connections of the Rohingya diaspora. This paper explores how immobility and forced migration intersect with the emergence of communication technologies to understand transnational care practices in a context of power geometries, social and spatial immobilities. The findings and discussion show how the Rohingyas’ stories and worries echo these unequal power geographies of transnational family ties; hence, care practices are essentially relational, but they become entwined in places as they are closely affected by spaces and immobilities. Therefore, it is crucial to consider their survival in exile in long-term family ties and transnational caregiving practices.

The findings and analyses have explored that technologies and places facilitate the mobility of some while restricting the mobility for others, thus transnational family care processes are related to mediated flows and fluidities but also ‘stoppages and fixities’ (Gille and Riain, 2002: 275). Furthermore, the findings show it is the privileged group
(such as those who have been granted citizenship or refugee status in Australia) who can move, migrate and live in a better country other than the camp whereas, those who cannot move are unable to access capitals and resources as they are either socially or spatially inaccessible. According to my observations, it can be argued that the Rohingya diaspora in Brisbane have more human capital and financial resources (such as works, sending remittance) than the Rohingya refugees in the camp as the letter are often regarded themselves as ‘confined’ and ‘less productive’. The internalised spatial burden and care asymmetries between the global south (i.e. refugee camp) and the global north (i.e. Brisbane) have not only facilitated them to settle in Australia but have also systematically reshaped their social hierarchies and strategies of care arrangements. I argue that mediated care practice is impacted by the immobility, technological affordance, power of financial resources and human capital embedded in space and places, and the broader geographical context in which they live. Therefore, it is crucial to explore how the digital media use (such as a mobile phone and social media) and the multiplicities of entangled immobility (such as security infrastructure) in urban and camp settings shape and affect transnational family connectivity and care practices, which I argue here as a ‘power geometries of mediated care’.

The contribution in this paper explores the use of digital communication technologies of the Rohingya diaspora in rethinking the care dynamics in a context of forced migration while their mobilities are restricted, confined and subject to social and spatial control. Using the digital lens of care system, I put forward a research agenda and engage the critical discussion with specific attention to (im)mobility dynamics that is often ignored in digital media and communication studies. Highlighting the case of conflict driven Rohingya diaspora, this study provides new insights for future interdisciplinary research in social sciences. Additionally, this paper offers a new perspective and critical stance on the emerging forced migration and refugee research in digital media and communication studies. Finally, I argue that studying transnational family and digital care practice should consider a nuanced theoretical aspect of uncertainty and regulatory frame of restrictive mobility, and methodological understanding of cross-cultural settings in the age of digital media.

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