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Creating Imaginary Enemies: The Rejection of Rohingya Refugee in Aceh

Menciptakan Musuh Imajiner: Penolakan Pengungsi Rohingya di Aceh

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ABSTRACT: The rejection of Rohingya refugees in Aceh at the end of 2023 led to various negative narratives that shaped an unfavorable image of this group in the eyes of the local community. This research argues that such rejection occurred because of the portrayal of Rohingya Refugees as a threat to society. There are two questions addressed: (1) how did social media contribute to the construction of an imaginary enemy against Rohingya refugees in Aceh?; and (2) what factors drove the shift in the attitude of the Acehnese people from solidarity to rejection? This research is conducted descriptively from various sources of literature, social media content, and news in the mass media. It also borrows the netnography method developed by Kozinets to examine the culture and communities that emerge in computer-mediated communication (social media). The findings reveal that rejection of Rohingya refugees occurs in three forms: negative sentiment expressed on social media platforms, media reports of criminal acts committed by refugees, and the perception that the Rohingya refugees were morally problematic. This phenomenon is underpinned by the ineffectiveness of state mechanisms to protect the socio-economic interests of local residents and the absence of clear national government policy on Rohingya refugees. Consequently, rejection of refugees has led to dehumanization and created an imaginary enemy for local residents to justify their rejection of refugees. Refugees are no longer perceived as human beings, but rather as threats, burdens, or even as savages who lack human values. Applying the concept of imaginary enemy, this study shows that the community actions justified through the perception of refugees as an exaggerated threat which gradually escalated into fear.

ABSTRAK: *Penolakan terhadap pengungsi Rohingya di Aceh pada akhir tahun 2023 memunculkan berbagai narasi negatif yang membentuk citra buruk terhadap kelompok pengungsi tersebut di mata publik. Kajian ini berargumen bahwa penolakan terhadap pengungsi Rohingya terjadi karena adanya gambaran keberadaan mereka sebagai ancaman bagi masyarakat. Ada dua pertanyaan yang hendak dijawab: (1) bagaimana peran media sosial dalam memicu konstruksi musuh imajiner terhadap pengungsi Rohingya di Aceh?; dan (2) apa faktor yang mendorong perubahan sikap masyarakat Aceh dari bersolidaritas menjadi menolak keberadaan pengungsi Rohingya? Penelitian ini dilakukan secara deskriptif dari berbagai sumber literatur, konten media sosial dan berita pada media massa. Penelitian ini juga meminjam metode netnografi yang dikembangkan Kozinets untuk mempelajari budaya dan komunitas yang muncul dalam komunikasi komputer (media sosial). Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa penolakan terhadap pengungsi Rohingya terjadi dalam tiga bentuk, yakni melalui sentimen negatif konten sosial media, pemberitaan aksi kriminal para pengungsi pada media, dan keberadaan pengungsi Rohingya yang dianggap bermasalah secara moral. Fenomena ini dilatari oleh tidak efektifnya mekanisme negara untuk melindungi kepentingan sosio-ekonomi warga lokal, dan tidak adanya kebijakan yang jelas dari pemerintah nasional terhadap pengungsi Rohingya. Dampaknya, penolakan terhadap pengungsi telah menimbulkan dehumanisasi, dan telah menciptakan musuh imajiner bagi warga lokal untuk membenarkan penolakan mereka terhadap pengungsi. Pengungsi tidak lagi dilihat sebagai manusia, melainkan ancaman, beban atau bahkan sebagai orang biadab yang tidak memiliki nilai-nilai kemanusiaan. Dengan menggunakan konsep musuh imajiner, studi ini menunjukkan bahwa tindakan masyarakat membenarkan penolakan mereka terhadap pengungsi karena keberadaan mereka dinilai sebagai suatu ancaman yang dibesar-besarkan dan berkembang menjadi ketakutan.*

Keywords:
imaginary enemy; Rohingya refugee; refugees' rejection; dehumanization; social media

Kata Kunci:
musuh imajiner; pengungsi Rohingya; penolakan pengungsi; dehumanisasi; media sosial

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1 Introduction

The presence of Rohingya refugees stranded in Indonesian territorial waters during their voyage in search of a destination country for protection has been met with resistance from segments of the local population. On the one hand, Indonesia has served as one of the transit countries for refugees; however, from a legal standpoint, it has not adopted any formal policy to admit asylum seekers.[1] In 2023, another wave of Rohingya refugee arrivals in Aceh was once again marked by acts of persecution and harassment. In the courtyard of the Regional House of Representatives of Pidie Regency (DPRK Pidie), hundreds of residents surrounded the refugees and hurled obscene insults at them despite the presence of police officers in the same vicinity.[2] Days later, a group of university students in Banda Aceh stormed a temporary shelter housing more than one hundred Rohingya refugees, coercing them to vacate the premises as a manifestation of rejection towards the Rohingya refugees' presence.[3] The Aceh Regional Police (Polda Aceh) recorded that, from late December 2023 to early 2024, there were twenty-one (21) instances of public rejection directed at the Rohingya refugees.[4] This situation stands in stark contrast to previous conditions, when the people of Aceh had warmly welcomed the arrival of refugees and collectively donated humanitarian assistance amounting to IDR 200 million.[5]

Scholarly studies concerning the rejection of Rohingya refugees have indeed drawn the attention of numerous researchers. Such studies may, at the very least, be classified into three analytical categories. First, studies addressing the rejection of Rohingya refugees by certain states, which are often attributed to the limited availability of healthcare, education, and economic resources.[6] Second, studies focusing on the rejection of the Rohingya by the Government of Myanmar—their country of origin—where the use of law and legal institutions serves as instruments of denial and exclusion.[7] Third, studies on the rejection of Rohingya refugees in Aceh, which identify the conflict management styles employed by relevant stakeholders, including both central and local governments.[8] Accordingly, these three strands of research emphasize three corresponding dimensions: rejection by particular host states, rejection by their state of origin, and rejection within specific regional contexts. To date, however, no study has examined the rejection of Rohingya refugees in Aceh through the analytical framework of the "imaginary enemy" approach.

Within the framework of this research, the concept of imaginary enemy is construed as a form of fear towards an essence or entity that is self-constructed within one's imagination. The imaginary enemy is thus understood as a manifestation of fear towards an unreal or fictitious threat that evolves within the imagination of an individual or a group. By cultivating such imagination and designating a particular group as a political adversary—or even as an adversary to civilization itself—a segment of society positions itself as the vanguard in combating the very threats produced by its own imagination.[9] Within the conceptual framework of the imaginary enemy, perceived threats are often magnified and subsequently evolve into collective fear. This concept elucidates how a group can construct an enemy through imagination and subsequently perceive that entity as a threat to essential values such as religion, safety, and family. As Kinowska has elaborated, insofar as such threats evoke intense emotional responses, fear-based propaganda may prove effective—even where the threats themselves are purely imaginary.[10]

1 Rosmawati Rosmawati, "Perlindungan terhadap Pengungsi/Pencari Suaka di Indonesia (sebagai Negara Transit) menurut Konvensi 1951 dan Protokol 1967," *Kanun Jurnal Ilmu Hukum* 17, no. 3 (2015): 457–76.

2 Firdaus, "Pengungsi Rohingya Menjadi Objek Persekusi di Halaman Gedung DPRK Pidie," 2023, https://sinarpidie.co/news/pengungsi-rohingya-menjadi-objek-persekusi-di-halaman-gedung-dprk-pidie/index.html.

3 AFP, "Ratusan Mahasiswa Usir Rohingya di Aceh," VOA Indonesia, 2023, https://www.voaindonesia.com/a/ratusan-mahasiswa-usir-rohingya-di-aceh/7414264.html.

4 M.Haris Setiady Agus, "Polda Aceh catat 21 aksi penolakan imigran Rohingya," AntaraNews.com, 2024, https://www.antaranews.com/berita/3905553/polda-aceh-catat-21-aksi-penolakan-imigran-rohingya.

5 Pemerintah Aceh, "Dari Banda Aceh Untuk Rohingya," dalam *Seuramoe Informasi Pemerintah Aceh*, 2015, https://acehprov.go.id/berita/kategori/sosial-kemasyarakatan/dari-banda-aceh-untuk-rohingya.

6 Hassan Faruk Al Imran dan Nannu Mian, "The Rohingya Refugees in Bangladesh: A Vulnerable Group in Law and Policy," *Journal of Studies in Social Sciences* 8, no. 2 (2014).

7 Melissa Crouch, "States of Legal Denial: How the State in Myanmar Uses Law to Exclude the Rohingya," *Journal of Contemporary Asia* 51, no. 1 (2021): 87–110, https://doi.org/10.1080/00472336.2019.1691250.

8 Khamami Zada, "Collaborative Protection of Rohingya's Muslim Asylum Seekers in North Aceh," *Proceedings of 1st International Conference of Law and Justice - Good Governance and Human Rights in Muslim Countries: Experiences and Challenges (ICLJ 2017)* (Paris, France), Atlantis Press, 2018, https://doi.org/10.2991/iclj-17.2018.8.

9 Matthijs Gardenier, "The Imaginary of the Enemy in Calais," *Imago, Journal of Social Imaginary*, no. 14 (2019): 124–41.

10 Zofia Kinowska-Mazaraki, "The polish paradox: From a fight for democracy to the political radicalization and social exclusion," *Social Sciences* 10, no. 3 (2021), https://doi.org/10.3390/socsci10030112.

By associating such threats with aspects of life that are deeply valued by individuals, strong emotions can be evoked, influencing public perception and social behavior. This, in turn, leads individuals to erect barriers and defenses against an enemy that cannot be located or objectively identified.[11] Thus, when an individual is confronted with a range of challenges and problems, such threats do not necessarily originate from objective reality. In certain instances, these issues arise from an imaginary enemy—a threat that does not actually exist, or one that is exaggerated and amplified by the imagination of an individual or a collective group. Ultimately, society may expend considerable energy and resources in combating an adversary that may never materialize—or may not, in fact, exist at all.[12] Consequently, this illusory enemy can easily arouse emotions that render any form of rational reasoning blunt and ineffective.

The emergence of social media and other digital platforms plays a central role in reinforcing the collective imagination of such illusory constructions. Through social media, individuals across all social strata may, either consciously or inadvertently, participate antagonistically—driven by online rumors that feed their imagined perceptions of threats and enemies far beyond the boundaries of reality itself.[13] Based on a review of relevant literature, the imaginary enemy phenomenon generally arises from three principal factors. First, misinformation. When false or inaccurate information is disseminated or received without verification, it may give rise to distorted perceptions and create false imaginative constructs of reality. The proliferation of online media has further provided fertile ground for conspirators to propagate deviant and misleading information.[14] Second, fear and insecurity. Within the context of migrants and refugees, they are frequently perceived as threats to the identity and security of the majority population.[15] Such conditions render them targets for the projection of collective fear and hatred that are incongruent with reality. Third, prejudice and stereotype. When individuals from different cultural backgrounds interact, they inevitably confront disparities in belief systems, values, and customary practices—differences that may, at times, engender prejudice and mutual misunderstanding.[16]

This study aims to fill the existing gap in prior research which has not addressed the perspective of the imaginary enemy in explaining the rejection of Rohingya refugees. This approach is of crucial significance, as it elucidates how socially and imaginatively constructed fears influence public reactions toward out-groups, including refugees. The phenomenon of rejection of the Rohingya refugees' presence in Aceh warrants serious attention, given that the attitude displayed by Acehnese communities stands in stark contrast to their previous humanitarian responses toward refugees in earlier years. For instance, in 2015, Acehnese fishermen and local residents competed to extend assistance to stranded Rohingya refugees,[17] by establishing volunteer posts,[18] even while, at the same time, their presence was disregarded by the Commander of the Indonesian National Armed Forces (Panglima TNI).[19] However, by 2023, such reception had transformed into outright rejection, marked by a series of public acts refusing the presence of Rohingya refugees—not only through direct confrontation but also through the circulation of various contents produced and disseminated via social media. In light of these developments, two principal research questions are posed: (1) What is the role of social media in triggering the construction of the imaginary enemy toward the Rohingya refugees in Aceh? (2) What factors have driven the shift in the Acehnese community's attitude—from initial solidarity to rejection of the Rohingya refugees' presence?

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11 Ozan Varol, "Why we fight imaginary enemies (and what to do about it)," ozanvarol.com, 2019, https://ozanvarol.com/why-we-fight-imaginary-enemies-and-what-to-do-about-it/.

12 Varol, "Why we fight imaginary enemies (and what to do about it)."

13 Nevada, *Imaginary Enemies: Myth and Abolition in The Minneapolis Rebellion* (Ill Will, 2020), https://illwill.com/print/imaginary-enemies.

14 Eiríkur Bergmann, "Populism and the Politics of Misinformation," dalam *Cultures of Populism: Institutions, Practices and Resistance*, 1 ed., ed. oleh Merle A. Williams (Routledge, 2022), https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003152606.

15 Robin Cohen, *Migration and Its Enemies, Global Capital, Migrants Labour and The Nation State* (Ashgate Publishing Company, 2006), https://www.migrationinstitute.org/publications/migration-and-its-enemies-global-capital-migrant-labour-and-the-nation-state.

16 En Aeni dkk., "Hubungan antara Stereotipe dengan Prasangka Masyarakat Pribumi pada Imigran dalam Interaksi antar Budaya di Cisarua Bogor," *Jurnal Komunikatio* 2, no. 1 (2017): 45–56, https://doi.org/10.30997/jk.v2i1.205; Michael Hameleers, "Putting Our Own People First: The Content and Effects of Online Right-Wing Populist Discourse Surrounding the European Refugee Crisis," *Mass Communication and Society* 22, no. 6 (2019): 804–26, https://doi.org/10.1080/15205436.2019.1655768.

17 Ron Corben, "Aceh Berperan Besar Bantu Pengungsi Rohingya," VOA Indonesia, 2015, https://www.voaindonesia.com/a/aceh-berperan-besar-bantu-pengungsi-rohingya/2824579.html.

18 BBC, "#TrenSosial: Gotong Royong Warga Aceh Bantu Rohingya," BBC News Indonesia, 20 Mei 2015, https://www.bbc.com/indonesia/berita_indonesia/2015/05/150520_trensosial_warga_bantu_rohingya.

19 Sabrina Asril, "Panglima TNI Tolak Kapal Pengungsi Rohingya Masuk RI, tapi Bersedia Beri Bantuan," Kompas.com, 2024, https://nasional.kompas.com/read/2015/05/15/20213301/Panglima.TNI.Tolak.Kapal.Pengungsi.Rohingya.Masuk.RI.tapi.Bersedia.Beri.Bantuan#google_vignette.

This study proceeds from the argument that the rejection of the Rohingya refugees occurs as a result of social perceptions or constructed images depicting their presence as a threat to the local population. Refugees are portrayed as a group of individuals bearing negative attributes—criminal, immoral, or socially deviant. Consequently, the presence of the Rohingya refugees is perceived as a disturbance to public order and security, thereby justifying social rejection. This study seeks to complement the existing body of literature examining local community responses to the arrival of refugees across various countries. In Australia, for instance, newspapers have portrayed Rohingya refugees as an anonymous mass crowded aboard boat, deliberately omitting identifiable human faces.[20] Similar patterns of depiction have been observed in European countries. In Italy, a large portion of the population believes that they are under "attack" by asylum seekers from Africa, thereby reinforcing xenophobic sentiment.[21] Comparable phenomena have occurred across several European states.[22] A study conducted by Pandır also demonstrates that the manner in which the media frames narratives about refugees significantly shapes public opinion—potentially leading either to social cohesion or to social conflict.[23] Likewise, McCann et al. highlight that media outlets perpetuate generalized narratives about migrants and refugees, often oscillating between sympathetic portrayals and negative depictions.[24] McCann et al. further explain that such narratives do not operate in isolation; rather, they are influenced by a range of social, political, and economic factors that mediate both the content and the impact of the messages conveyed. Drawing upon a comprehensive review of prior literature, this study argues that the imagery and narratives circulating within the public sphere profoundly influence how society perceives and responds to the existence of refugees.

2 Method

This study seeks to explain the phenomenon of rejection toward the presence of Rohingya refugees in Aceh. The selection of Aceh as the locus of research is inseparable from the contrasting attitudes displayed by its residents toward the Rohingya refugees. During the initial years of their arrival, local communities enthusiastically assisted the refugees, provided aid, and organized voluntary donations. However, in 2023, rejection emerged: local residents expelled refugees, obstructed the distribution of humanitarian assistance, and participated in demonstrations urging that refugees no longer be accepted in Aceh. This research employs a descriptive qualitative method, analyzing a series of rejection incidents directed at the Rohingya refugees in Aceh during 2023. Data collection began with an extensive review of relevant literature—particularly narratives disseminated through various social media platforms concerning the presence of the Rohingya refugees, as well as news reports describing the different forms of rejection manifested by the Acehnese population toward them. The social media platforms analyzed in this study include X (formerly Twitter), Instagram, and TikTok. These three platforms were selected because they predominantly provide visual content that conveys specific imagery of bodies and social representation, in contrast to more text-based platforms such as Facebook. Furthermore, their extensive reach, high levels of user interaction, and significant influence render these platforms central in shaping public opinion within digital spaces. Meanwhile, the online news sources analyzed comprise Aceh Tribun News, Detik, Kompas, and Tribun News—as these represent both local and national media outlets that actively covered the development of Rohingya refugee issues in Aceh throughout 2023.

To collect data from social media, the researcher first determined relevant keywords corresponding to the required information. Keywords such as "Rohingya refugees," "refugee rejection," "Rohingya in Aceh," and "refugee crisis" were used to trace various posts, comments, and online news coverage. The keywords "Rohingya refugees" and "Rohingya in Aceh" were specifically employed to identify the dissemination of information concerning their presence in the study area. Meanwhile, "refugee rejection" and "refugee crisis" were used to capture broader and more contextual narratives across both social media and online news platforms. In other words, the use of these four keywords aimed to capture the variety of representations, public opinions, and sentiments regarding refugee issues in a more comprehensive manner. Indirectly, this research adopts the

20 Roland Bleiker dkk., "The Visual Dehumanisation of Refugees," *Australian Journal of Political Science* 48, no. 4 (2013): 398–416, https://doi.org/10.1080/10361146.2013.840769.

21 Maurizio Ambrosini, "The Imaginary Invasion: as the Discourse on the 'Refugee Crisis' has Impacted on Italian Politics and Society," *Institutional Research Information System* 3 (2019), https://air.unimi.it/handle/2434/684340.

22 Emile Bruneau dkk., "The Unique Effects of Blatant Dehumanization on Attitudes and Behavior towards Muslim Refugees during the European 'Refugee Crisis' across Four Countries," *European Journal of Social Psychology* 48, no. 5 (2018): 645–62, https://doi.org/10.1002/ejsp.2357.

23 Müzeyyen Pandir, "Media Portrayals of Refugees and Their Effects on Social Conflict and Social Cohesion," *PERCEPTIONS: Journal of International Affairs* 25, no. 1 (2020): 99–120.

24 Katherine McCann dkk., *The Role of Media Narratives in Shaping Public Opinion Toward Refugees: A Comparative Analysis*, IOM Migration Research Series (International Organization for Migration, 2023), https://doi.org/10.18356/9789292685546.

netnographic method developed by Kozinets, which is designed to study cultures and communities that emerge through computer-mediated communication.[25] Such digital conversations—particularly on social media—have increasingly shaped contemporary cultural norms, belief systems, and values that regulate and influence public behavior. This research thus employs a qualitative approach utilizing descriptive methods. The collected data were subsequently analyzed descriptively, with data presentation in the form of narrative and analytical interpretation by the author. The analytical stages followed the process previously outlined by Fernando et al., encompassing the systematic organization of data, thematic data condensation, and descriptive data presentation.[26] Through these three stages of analysis, the study draws conclusions regarding the forms, causal factors, and implications of the rejection of Rohingya refugees in Aceh.

3 Findings and Discussion

Refugees are individuals or groups exposed to persecution on the basis of race, religion, nationality, or membership in a particular social group. They choose to leave their countries in search of protection elsewhere, where safety and support are expected to be more assured.[27] However, the essence of refugeehood is not limited solely to persecution; it also encompasses situations in which individuals lose access to basic necessities, such as security, food, and shelter, and may extend to circumstances arising from natural disasters. One of the groups currently displaced are the Rohingya, originating from Myanmar (Burma), who have sought refuge in neighboring countries such as Bangladesh, Malaysia, India, and Indonesia. To escape violence and unsafe conditions in Myanmar, many Rohingya have been compelled to flee and seek protection abroad.[28] Bearing the status of "stateless persons", whose existence is unrecognized by their country of origin, the Rohingya confront multiple conflicts culminating in the ethnic expulsion of Rohingya from Myanmar.[29] Despite having fled, they continue to suffer mistreatment and persecution in host countries and have lived without recognized citizenship for over six generations.[30] In several host countries, their presence is perceived as detrimental to the nation's reputation.

The rejection of refugees in various countries has become a global concern. This phenomenon is not limited to Indonesia; it is also increasingly evident in European countries. It affects not only developing countries (the so-called Third World) but also extends to developed nations. According to Davies, in Asia, this situation is exacerbated by the fact that many states have not ratified international legal instruments for recognizing and protecting refugees.[31] Asia, he notes, currently hosts the second-highest refugee population worldwide, after Africa, since the end of the Second World War. The general conditions contributing to this scenario include neighborly relations, high economic costs, and social disruption. The reluctance of Asian states to adopt international legal instruments has affected their perception of refugee law. Consequently, the majority of asylum seekers in Asian countries are unable to access legal protection as refugees, reflecting the failure to establish inclusive legal frameworks for refugees.

The rejection experienced by refugees also gives rise to significant mental health challenges, particularly elevated stress levels.[32] Schoretsanitis et al. demonstrate that refugees encountering rejection may experience acute stress, potentially escalating into psychiatric emergencies. In addition, refugees are vulnerable to depression and anxiety disorders.[33] The role of governmental departments or institutions in specific states further influences

25 Robert V. Kozinets, "Immersive Netnography: A Novel Method for Service Experience Research in Virtual Reality, Augmented Reality and Metaverse Contexts," *Journal of Service Management* 34, no. 1 (2023): 100–125, https://doi.org/10.1108/JOSM-12-2021-0481.

26 Henky Fernando dkk., "The De-Existence of Islamic Political Parties in General Elections: A Case Study of Indonesia as a Muslim-Majority Country," *Cogent Social Sciences* 9, no. 1 (2023): 1–14, https://doi.org/10.1080/23311886.2023.2225838.

27 Iin Karita Sakharina, "Pengungsi dan HAM," *Jurnal Hukum Internasional* 1, no. 2 (2013): 196–207; Cipta Primadasa Primadasa dkk., "Problematika Penanganan Pengungsi di Indonesia Dari Perspektif Hukum Pengungsi Internasional," *Risalah Hukum* 17, no. 1 (2021): 44–51, https://doi.org/10.30872/risalah.v17i1.380.

28 A. K. M. Ahsan Ullah, "Rohingya Crisis in Myanmar: Seeking Justice for the 'Stateless,'" *Journal of Contemporary Criminal Justice* 32, no. 3 (2016): 285–301, https://doi.org/10.1177/1043986216660811.

29 Abdullah Hossain Mallick, "Rohingya Refugee Repatriation from Bangladesh: A Far Cry from Reality," *Journal of Asian Security and International Affairs* 7, no. 2 (2020): 202–26, https://doi.org/10.1177/2347797020938983.

30 Abul Milton dkk., "Trapped in Statelessness: Rohingya Refugees in Bangladesh," *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health* 14, no. 8 (2017): 942, https://doi.org/10.3390/ijerph14080942.

31 Sara E. Davies, "The Asian Rejection?: International Refugee Law in Asia*," *Australian Journal of Politics & History* 52, no. 4 (2006): 562–75, https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-8497.2006.00433a.x.

32 Georgios Schoretsanitis dkk., "Upon Rejection: Psychiatric Emergencies of Failed Asylum Seekers," *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health* 15, no. 7 (2018): 1498, https://doi.org/10.3390/ijerph15071498.

33 Debbie C. Hocking dkk., "Mental Disorders in Asylum Seekers: The Role of the Refugee Determination Process and Employment," *Journal of Nervous & Mental Disease* 203, no. 1 (2015): 28–32, https://doi.org/10.1097/NMD.0000000000000230.

the policies applied in handling refugees.[34] This condition reflects the presence of governmental bodies that fail to comply with standards of administrative justice and to act in accordance with their legal obligations. As a result, the rights of refugees and/or asylum seekers are compromised, exposing them to the risk of refoulement—the forced return to territories where they face persecution, threats to life, and deprivation of freedom. Moreover, the responses of local communities to the arrival and presence of refugees are equally significant. The discussion below illustrates how public reactions—whether manifested directly or mediated through social media and mass media—contribute to shaping societal perceptions of refugees.

3.1 The Acehnese Community and Rohingya Refugees

The Acehnese community has historically demonstrated sympathy and receptiveness toward the presence of Rohingya refugees, particularly given that the issues faced by Rohingya involve persecution and injustice perpetrated by their country of origin. Tracing the arrival of Rohingya refugees in Aceh, which initially occurred in 2009, only a small number of refugees landed in Sabang and Kuala Idi.[35] The largest group of refugees subsequently arrived in 2015, when thousands of migrants stranded from Myanmar were rescued by Acehnese fishermen. In contrast, the governments of Indonesia, Malaysia, and Thailand denied landing permits and provided only limited assistance.[36] Nevertheless, the Acehnese community intervened to save the refugees, despite warnings from government authorities.[37] In 2018, several small groups of Rohingya refugees were likewise rescued by Acehnese fishermen.[38]

There are three primary reasons underpinning the Acehnese community's proactive stance in rescuing Rohingya refugees. First, religious motivation. The Rohingya constitute a Muslim ethnic minority in Myanmar, sharing a common religious identity with the majority of Acehnese, who are Muslims. Consequently, the Acehnese felt a religious and moral obligation to assist fellow Muslims in distress.[39] Second, cultural values. One of the values and customary practices observed upon the arrival of the Rohingya refugees is "peumulia jamee" (honoring guests). This cultural norm is rooted in the principle of wholehearted giving to guests, manifesting in collective displays of hospitality and solidarity. Furthermore, among fishermen, there exists a belief that assisting individuals in distress, particularly at sea, brings divine blessings and prosperity.[40] Third, economic and political motives. The Rohingya refugee issue was not addressed solely by governmental authorities. Several non-governmental organizations and various Islamic organizations were actively involved in providing assistance to the Rohingya refugees.[41] This situation has been exploited by certain parties, wherein several of these humanitarian actions have served as a means for particular institutions or individuals to obtain donations or attract public attention.[42]

34 Roni Amit, *All Roads Lead to Rejection: Persistent Bias and Incapacity in South African Refugee Status Determination* (The African Centre for Migration & Society (ACMS), 2012), https://www.lhr.org.za/archive/sites/lhr.org.za/files/all_roads_lead_to_rejection_research_report.pdf.

35 Saidulkarnain Ishak, "Pengungsi Rohingya Bagaikan di Kampung Sendiri di Aceh," AntaraNews.com, 17 Februari 2009, https://www.antaranews.com/berita/133033/pengungsi-rohingya-bagaikan-di-kampung-sendiri-di-aceh.

36 Graham Thom, "The May 2015 boat crisis: the Rohingya in Aceh," *Cosmopolitan Civil Societies: An Interdisciplinary Journal* 8, no. 2 (2016): 43–62, https://doi.org/10.5130/ccs.v8i2.4816.

37 Hary Primadi, "Progres Penanganan Pengungsi Rohingnya oleh Pemerintah Indonesia di Provinsi Aceh Tahun 2016-2018," *eJournal Ilmu Hubungan Internasional* 7, no. 1 (2019): 299–308.

38 Dedy Priatmojo dan Dani Randi, "Pemerintah Aceh Mulai Kewalahan Tangani Pengungsi Rohingya," viva.co.id, 13 Desember 2018, https://www.viva.co.id/berita/nasional/1102999-pemerintah-aceh-mulai-kewalahan-tangani-pengungsi-rohingya%0A.

39 Sophia Listriani dkk., "Toward a New Legal Framework for Settling Rohingya's Refugee Crisis in Indonesia: A Lesson Learned from Aceh Province," conference paper presented pada International Conference on Law, Governance and Islamic Society (ICOLGIS 2019), Banda Aceh, Indonesia, *Proceedings of the International Conference on Law, Governance and Islamic Society (ICOLGIS 2019)*, Atlantis Press, 2020, https://doi.org/10.2991/assehr.k.200306.227; Lindsay Robbins, "The Rohingya Case in Aceh: Indonesia's Role as a Destination for Refugees," *Towson University Journal of International Affair* LIII, no. 2 (2020): 1–15.

40 Anne McNevin dan Antje Missbach, "Hospitality as a Horizon of Aspiration (or, What the International Refugee Regime Can Learn from Acehnese Fishermen)," *Journal of Refugee Studies* 31, no. 3 (2018): 292–313, https://doi.org/10.1093/jrs/fey014; Antje Missbach, "Facets of Hospitality: Rohingya Refugees' Temporary Stay in Aceh," *Indonesia* 104, no. 1 (2017): 41–64, https://doi.org/10.1353/ind.2017.0010.

41 Khamami Zada, "Collaborative Protection of Rohingya's Muslim Asylum Seekers in North Aceh," conference paper presented pada 1st International Conference of Law and Justice - Good Governance and Human Rights in Muslim Countries: Experiences and Challenges (ICLJ 2017), Serpong, Indonesia, *Proceedings of 1st International Conference of Law and Justice - Good Governance and Human Rights in Muslim Countries: Experiences and Challenges (ICLJ 2017)*, Atlantis Press, 2018, https://doi.org/10.2991/iclj-17.2018.8.

42 Lindra Darnela, "Islam and Humanity: Commodification of Aid for Rohingya in Aceh," *Al-Jami'ah: Journal of Islamic Studies* 59, no. 1 (2021): 57–96, https://doi.org/10.14421/ajis.2021.591.57-96; Missbach, "Facets of Hospitality: Rohingya Refugees' Temporary Stay in Aceh."

However, beginning in early 2023 and continuing until the end of the year, a substantial number of Rohingya refugees were repeatedly found adrift at sea, eventually landing in various areas of Acehnese territorial waters.[43] Unlike prior arrivals, which had been met with warm acceptance by the Acehnese community, the 2023 influx generated both support and opposition, ultimately resulting in widespread local rejection.[44]

3.2 Negative Image of Rohingya Refugees on Social Media

One form of rejection toward the Rohingya refugees is manifested through social media channels, including Instagram, X (formerly Twitter), and TikTok. Through these platforms, various video contents convey negative narratives and sentiments regarding the Rohingya refugees. On TikTok, a trend of protest uploads emerged, portraying the argument that while many citizens work to earn a living and acquire land, a certain group of people arrives in the country requesting food and potentially claiming land rights.[45] Meanwhile, on X (Twitter), hate speech and disparaging narratives are disseminated by fanbase accounts or forums, which often conceal the identity of the originators.[46] According to social media analysis by Drone Emprit, conducted by Ismail Fahmi, this method is highly effective in amplifying discussions, thereby easily attracting national attention.[47] Various narratives and information circulating across these social media platforms are summarized in Table 1 below.

Tabel 1. Negative Image of Rohingya Refugees on Social Media

Content Information	Social Media Platform	Statistics	Source
"*Ga heran mereka dikasih nasi dibuang, dikasih sembako dibuang, karena mereka sebenarnya ga laper. Pantes juga mereka terombang-ambing di lautan dan sampe di daratan nangisnya kenceng banget. Rohingnya yang belakangan ini datang ke Aceh bukanlah pengungsi, tapi korban TPPO*." ("No wonder they throw away the rice they are given, the aid packages are discarded, because they are actually not hungry. No wonder they were adrift at sea, and when reaching land, they cried loudly. The Rohingya who recently arrived in Aceh are not refugees, but victims of human trafficking.")	Tiktok	Views: 12M Comments: 8,292 Shares: 13.6K	allinezad, 2023/12/12
"*Bikin geram, pengungsi Rohingya ngamuk ditegur buang sampah di sungai*" ("Infuriating, Rohingya refugees throwing tantrums when scolded for dumping trash in the river.")	Tiktok	Views: 6.4M Comments: 2,605 Shares: 2,093	Tribun Jateng, 2023/12/12

43 Agus Setyadi, "Pengungsi Rohingya Silih Berganti ke Aceh Sepanjang 2023, Penolakan Kian Masif," Detik.com, 18 Desember 2023, https://www.detik.com/sumut/berita/d-7095376/pengungsi-rohingya-silih-berganti-ke-aceh-sepanjang-2023-penolakan-kian-masif.

44 Adib Hakim dan Arini Nur Annisa, "Legal Governance of Rohingya Refugee Affairs in Aceh: A Constitutional Perspective," *Jurnal Sultan: Riset Hukum Tata Negara* 2, no. 2 (2024): 21–32, https://doi.org/10.35905/sultan_htn.v2i2.7990.

45 Hesti Puji Lestari, "Gejolak Media Sosial soal Pengungsi Rohingya: Kami Kerja, Mereka Datang Minta Makan," Kabar24, 7 Desember 2023, https://kabar24.bisnis.com/read/20231207/15/1721728/gejolak-media-sosial-soal-pengungsi-rohingya-kami-kerja-mereka-datang-minta-makan.

46 BBC, "Siapa yang Menyebarkan Narasi Kebencian dan Hoaks Soal Rohingya di Media Sosial serta Apa Motifnya?," BBC News Indonesia, 12 Desember 2023, https://www.bbc.com/indonesia/articles/cl7pyd45420o.

47 Artika Rachmi Farmita, "Cekfakta #240 Ada Apa di Balik Serbuan Kabar Bohong tentang Pengungsi Rohingya di Medsos?," Tempo.co, 29 Desember 2023, https://newsletter.tempo.co/read/1815056/cekfakta-240-ada-apa-di-balik-serbuan-kabar-bohong-tentang-pengungsi-rohingya-di-medsos.

Content Information	Social Media Platform	Statistics	Source
"*Lima alasan pengungsi Rohingya harus diusir: mencuri hasil kebun warga, kabur dari kamp pengungsian, melanggar syariat Islam, mendirikan negara sendiri di Malaysia, tidak bisa diatur di negaranya sendiri*" ("Five reasons why Rohingya refugees must be expelled: stealing crops from locals, fleeing refugee camps, violating Islamic law, establishing their own state in Malaysia, unable to be governed in their own country.")	Tiktok	Views: 7.5M Comments: 3,483 Shares: 9,133	Tsendy Katsuha, 2023/11/23
"*Rohingya menuntut tanah di Malaysia. Jangan sampai di masa depan Indonesia seperti ini. Kita sudah menerima mereka sejak 2009 hingga saat ini belum ada solusi dari pemerintah*" ("Rohingya demanding land in Malaysia. Let's not allow Indonesia to become like this in the future. We have received them since 2009, yet the government has provided no solution.")	Tiktok	Views: 1,743 Comments: 5 Shares: 4	Ssarjana91, 2023/12/19
"*kasihan warga Aceh, tambaknya dijadikan tempat BAB oleh imigran Rohingya*" ("Poor Acehnese people, their ponds are being used for defecation by Rohingya immigrants.")	X (Twitter)	Views: 132 Comments: 2 Shares: -	erwinquu, 2023/12/14
"*Rakyat ingin beli tanah di negaranya sendiri aja sulit karena mahal, kudu ngumpulin uang dulu bertahun-tahun. Lah ini Rohingya enak banget mau dikasih tanah/lahan. #tolakrohingya #NoRoomForRohingya*" ("People find it hard to buy land in their own country because it is expensive and requires years of savings. Meanwhile, the Rohingya are easily given land. #RejectRohingya #NoRoomForRohingya")	X (Twitter)	Views: 243 Comments: -Shares: -	MbahSugiiono 2023/12/09
"*Benarkah Rohingya adalah muslim. Lalu kenapa tak satupun diantara mereka yang bersholawat, bahkan sujud syukur. Atau jangan jangan mereka adalah gerombolan manusia parasit yang dipelihara untuk kepentingan global, dilabeli sebagai warga muslim #TolakRohingya*" ("Are the Rohingya truly Muslims? Then why does none of them perform blessings or acts of gratitude? Or perhaps they are parasitic humans maintained for global interests, labeled as Muslims. #RejectRohingya")	X (Twitter)	Views: 87 Comments: -Shares: -	fhaturgagah, 2023/12/13

Content Information	Social Media Platform	Statistics	Source
"Kalau membahayakan bangsa dan negara apa lagi masyarakat sekitar, apa akan diterima terus. Rohingnya pengungsi yang tidak tau diuntung, suka-suka dia, tidak mematuhi aturan setempat, pemberontak #bubarkanUNHCR #TolakRohingya" ("If they endanger the nation and local community, will they continue to be accepted? The Rohingya are ignorant refugees, acting as they please, disobeying local rules, rebellious. #DissolveUNHCR #RejectRohingya")	X (Twitter)	Views: 153 Comments: -Shares: -	DanuRA22, 2023/12/10
"*Warga asli pribumi aja buat makan susah, eeh ini tiba-tiba datang Cuma makan dan tidur tapi bikin rusuh, harus ditenggelamkan emang*" #tolakrohingya #saveaceh ("Local citizens struggle to find food daily, yet these newcomers only eat and sleep while causing disturbance; they should be drowned." #RejectRohingya #SaveAceh)	X (Twitter)	Views: 96 Comments: - Shares: -	Ajisatria1301, 2023/12/08
"*Rohingya tak tahu diri! Datuk Maharaja Geram & Marah Kepada Para Pengungsi dikasih hati minta jantung, makan enak dikasih, rumah dikasih uang saku tiap bulan, masih juga kurang, itulah pengungsi Rohingya di Aceh*" ("Rohingya are ungrateful! Datuk Maharaja is furious at the refugees: given food, homes, monthly allowance, yet still dissatisfied—this is the reality of Rohingya refugees in Aceh.")	X (Twitter)	Views: 10,000 Comments: - Shares: 5	DatukMaharaja 2023/12/06
"*Bayangkan!! Rohingya makan 3x sehari, dapat uang saku, namun disaat yang sama ada anak kecil yang harusnya bermain, dipaksa ngemis namun tak ada yang bertindak! Itu dianggap tak relevan dan tak penting*" ("Imagine! Rohingya eat three times a day, receive allowances, yet at the same time, children who should play are forced to beg with no one intervening. This is considered irrelevant and unimportant.")	Instagram (story)	Views: - Comments: - Shares: -	kotabandaaceh, 2023/01/27
"*Kepada pihak yang terkait masalah Rohingya, agar segera menemukan solusi yang terbaik. Mereka makan enak tiap hari, rakyat Indonesia sendiri masih banyak yang kelaparan, kerja keras seharian demi sesuap nasi. Ayok netizen bersatu suarakan #saveaceh #usirrohingya*" ("To the relevant authorities on the Rohingya issue: find the best solution immediately. They eat well daily while many Indonesians are starving, working hard for a single meal. Let netizens unite to voice #SaveAceh #ExpelRohingya")	Instagram	Views: 95,755 Comments: 489 Shares: 99	hitzmedsos, 2023/12/10

Content Information	Social Media Platform	Statistics	Source
"*Udah bosan tinggal di Bangladesh katanya guys, jadi fixs ya kalau mereka itu bukan pengungsi tapi imigran gelap. Mana ada alasan pengungsi kok bosan tinggal di habitatnya? Yang ada pengungsi itu korban perang atau korban bencana. Semoga para roh halus ini dipulangkan ke habitat asalnya ya, kalau mereka ngotot gak mau pergi dari Indonesia, kembalikan saja mereka ke pencipta-Nya*" ("They said they were already bored living in Bangladesh, guys. So, it's confirmed that they are not refugees but illegal immigrants. How could a refugee possibly say they are bored living in their own habitat? Refugees are supposed to be victims of war or natural disasters. Hopefully, these wandering spirits will be sent back to their original habitat—and if they insist on not leaving Indonesia, then perhaps they should simply be returned to their Creator.")	Instagram	Views: 209 Comments: 1 Shares: 1	theycallme_hana08, 2023/01/18
"*Kita tiap hari banting tulang cuman cukup untuk makan boro-boro buat beli tanah. Ini pengungsi Rohingya baru dateng udah minta pulang. Ayo rakyat Indonesia Bersatu Tolak Pengungsi Rohingya Dan Bubarkan UNHCR*" ("We toil day in and day out merely to have enough to eat, let alone to purchase land. These newly arrived Rohingya refugees are already demanding repatriation. Come, people of Indonesia—unite to reject the Rohingya refugees and to dissolve UNHCR.")	Instagram	Views: 1,589 Comments: - Shares: 1	adi.syahreza, 2023/12/25
"*suasana menunggu makan siang etnis Rohingya, cukup tidur makan diantar gak peduli lingkungan kotor, kalo warga Indo kek gini gak bahaya ta..*" ("The atmosphere while waiting for lunch among the Rohingya ethnic group—just sleeping and having meals delivered without any concern for the filthy surroundings. If Indonesian citizens behaved like this, wouldn't it be dangerous?")	Instagram	Views: 8,020 Comments: 19 Shares: 3	Infolangsaku, 2024/01/22

Source:Media sosial (X, Tiktok dan Instagram)

The data presented in Table 1 shows the tendencies of negative imagery regarding the presence of Rohingya refugees in Aceh, as indicated by the strong expressions of anger from social media users, hate speech, and xenophobia. The existing comments further demonstrate attempts to demean human dignity and exhibit racial prejudice against the refugees. In Western countries, refugees are often portrayed as carriers of infectious diseases, their presence is frequently considered illegitimate, and they are perceived as potential conduits for terrorist infiltration.[48] In the context of Rohingya refugees in Aceh, the refugees are narratively represented as parties who do not appreciate the assistance provided, such as discarding rice, aid packages, and allowances. Additionally, they are depicted as a greedy community seeking to control specific resources. This is evident in statements such as, "the latest news says an island has already been provided in Riau," and "the problem is that Rohingya people, when helped, become presumptuous, demanding houses and additional food portions." The

48 Victoria M. Esses dkk., "Uncertainty, Threat, and the Role of the Media in Promoting the Dehumanization of Immigrants and Refugees," *Journal of Social Issues* 69, no. 3 (2013): 518–36, https://doi.org/10.1111/josi.12027.

refugees are also labeled as non-Muslims and illegal immigrants, as illustrated by explanations such as, "Are the Rohingya truly Muslims? Then why does none of them perform blessings or acts of gratitude?" and "…clearly, they are not refugees but illegal migrants. There is no reason for a refugee to be bored in their habitat; true refugees are victims of war or disaster."

The data in the table also reveal various contents with negative sentiments directed toward the Rohingya refugees. According to these contents, the refugees are viewed as burdens, threats, and even unwanted, such that numerous stereotypes, prejudices, and stigmas have become attached to the presence of Rohingya refugees in Aceh. TikTok emerges as the social media platform achieving the highest public engagement, with content viewed up to 12 million times and shared up to 13,000 times. Instagram content similarly attracted netizens' attention, reaching 95,000 views. In contrast, engagement on X (Twitter) regarding various Rohingya refugee contents was not as extensive as on TikTok and Instagram. Overall, the data in Table 2 identify three patterns of negative imagery toward Rohingya refugees. First, on the TikTok platform, Rohingya refugees are depicted as a group that does not appreciate aid, exhibits psychological disturbances, tends toward criminal behavior, and seeks to control specific resources in host countries. Second, on the X (Twitter) platform, Rohingya refugees are portrayed as parties exhibiting bad conduct, being non-Muslims, rebellious, endangering the nation and state, and as lazy individuals. Third, on the Instagram platform, Rohingya refugees are depicted as parties constantly demanding preferential treatment and as illegal immigrants, rendering them unworthy of assistance. Accordingly, negative imagery toward Rohingya refugees has manifested across all three social media platforms, conveyed through diverse narratives.

3.3 News Reporting of Rohingya Refugees as Perpetrators of Criminal Acts

Another form of rejection directed toward Rohingya refugees arises from the association of their presence with various alleged criminal acts. In numerous media reports, Rohingya refugees are cited as engaging in several criminal actions that allegedly threaten the social life of Acehnese society. These purported criminal acts are summarized in Table 2 below.

Tabel 2. Rohingya Refugees and Criminal Acts

Perpetrator	Criminal Act	Location	Source
RU (17 years old)	Rape of a minor	Mina Raya Foundation Shelter, Padang Tiji	Detikcom, 4 July 2023
23 persons	Escape from temporary shelter	Lhokseumawe	Detikcom, 9 Dec 2023
12 persons	Escape from temporary shelter	Ladong, Aceh Besar	Kompas.id., 22 March 2023
TS (18 years old)	Escape from temporary shelter	Lhokseumawe	Setnesasean, 8 Agust 2020
-	Theft of coconuts	Peuntut Shelter, Lhokseumawe	Acehtribunnews, 8 Dec 2022
-	Cohabitation of males and females	Peuntut Shelter, Lhokseumawe	Acehtribunnews, 8 Dec 2022
-	Escape from temporary shelter	Paya Pelawi, Aceh Timur	Tempo.co., 10 Sept 2015

Source: Online Media

The data presented in Table 2 maps the reporting of various criminal acts allegedly committed by Rohingya refugees in Aceh. Criminal conduct was not only perpetrated individually but also collectively, particularly in the form of escape from refugee shelters. The reporting was covered not only by local media but also by national outlets such as Tempo, Kompas, and Detikcom. Across these reports, at least four patterns of criminal conduct were identified among the Rohingya refugees. First, the rape of minors committed by Rohingya refugees at the shelter in Padang Tiji. Second, theft, which occurred at refugee camps in the Lhokseumawe area. Third, escape from refugee camps, a recurring act that occurred multiple times across various camps in Aceh. Fourth, illicit sexual relations (zina), constituting sexual intercourse between unmarried individuals. This act constitutes a violation of Islamic criminal law (*jinayah*) applicable in Aceh, whereby perpetrators may be subjected to public

corporal punishment (flogging). Accordingly, the presence of Rohingya refugees as alleged perpetrators of criminal acts has been widely reported by various mainstream media outlets.

3.4 Reporting on Refugees Considered Morally Problematic

In addition to criminal acts, Rohingya refugees have also been reported and depicted as morally deviant individuals. Through various news reports, images, and videos circulated across multiple media platforms, the refugees were represented as exhibiting morally transgressive behaviors. Table 3 below presents specific behaviors of this nature.

Tabel 3: Rohingya Refugees and Immoral Behavior

Behavior	Explanation	Source
Disposing of Food	Video recordings showing wrapped rice being discarded by Rohingya refugees went viral on social media.	Suara.com., 27 Dec 2023
Discarding Aid into the Sea	Residents in Bireuen, Aceh, rejected the presence of refugees coming ashore but still provided aid in the form of mineral water and wrapped rice. However, such aid was discarded into the sea by the refugees.	Detikcom, 16 Nov 2023
Filthy and Unsanitary	The environment of the multipurpose building in Jangka, serving as a Rohingya refugee shelter, was filthy and unsanitary, with garbage scattered throughout.	Acehtribunnews.com., 22 April 2022
Open Defecation	Rohingya refugees used residents' fishponds as sites for defecation and bathing.	Tribunnews.com., 18 Dec 2023
Demanding Adequate Shelter	Rohingya refugees in BMA staged a hunger strike as a form of protest against the inadequate living conditions of their shelter.	Detik.com., 24 Dec 2023

Sumber: Media daring/online

The data presented in Table 3 illustrate numerous reports concerning the morally problematic behavior of Rohingya refugees. The refugees were reported as individuals who failed to appreciate the provisions and assistance offered by the local community, such as wrapped rice and other forms of aid, which were allegedly discarded into the sea from boats. The refugees were further depicted as unhygienic, failing to maintain cleanliness, living amidst filth, and dwelling in piles of garbage. Additionally, they were characterized as individuals who misused residents' property for defecation. The presence of refugees was also narrated as rebellious and demanding whenever their requests were not met.

Overall, the data in Table 3 identify four patterns of immoral behavior associated with the Rohingya refugees. First, the discarding of food and assistance provided by the local population. Second, unsanitary and filthy living conditions observed within refugee shelters. Third, open defecation, including on land surrounding refugee camps. Fourth, demanding proper treatment through hunger strikes as a form of protest. Accordingly, these behaviors collectively reinforced the perception that the Rohingya refugees constitute a group exhibiting morally deviant conduct.

The efforts to reject the presence of Rohingya refugees in Aceh can be categorized into three findings within this study. First, the rejection is manifested in the production of social media content portraying a negative image of the Rohingya refugees. Second, mainstream media reports associate Rohingya refugees with various criminal acts. Third, the refugees are portrayed as morally problematic due to behaviors contravening social norms. These forms of rejection indicate the dominance of narratives originating from social media content and news reports, wherein negative perspectives are more prominent than accurate or balanced information. Consequently, the public is more inclined to associate the refugees with criminal acts, social burdens, and demographic threats. In other words, these forms of rejection demonstrate the emergence of disinformation across social media and news content. Emotionally, such disinformation fosters hostility toward refugees by associating them with criminality.[49] Moreover, disinformation gives rise to hate speech and xenophobia, thereby promoting animosity

49 Fulvia Teano, "Fake News and the Spread of Disinformation Regarding Migration," dalam *Riace Local Impact of a Case of Self-Valorisation of Migrant Labour in the Frame of the Global Compact* (Transform! European Network for Alternative Thinking and Political Dialogue, 2021), https://transform-network.net/wp-content/uploads/2023/05/riace.local_impact_of_a_case_of_self-valorisation_of_migrant_labour_in_the_frame_of_the_global_compact.pdf.

and discrimination against refugees and legitimizing anti-refugee policies.[50] Simultaneously, disinformation generates adverse effects for migrants by negatively influencing decisions and awareness regarding their rights.

The findings of this article further confirm that the rejection of Rohingya refugees cannot be disentangled from the ineffective mechanisms of the state in protecting the socio-economic interests of the local population and the insufficient attention afforded thereto.[51] From a socio-economic perspective, local residents perceive the arrival of Rohingya refugees as an economic and social burden.[52] Several landing and refugee settlement sites in Aceh are located in nationally designated impoverished areas, where the primary sources of income for the local population are agriculture and fishing.[53] The Province of Aceh is classified as one of the provinces with a significant population living in poverty, totaling 804,530 individuals, or 14.23 percent.[54] The state's neglect in addressing the needs of local residents has hindered the development of inclusive relations between these two groups.

Moreover, the absence of clear national-level policies regarding Rohingya refugees has influenced the attitudes of local residents in Aceh. Existing regulations do not provide clarity regarding the long-term integration of refugees, resulting in a substantial number of Rohingya refugees remaining in Aceh to date. In the absence of definitive policies, refugees continue to reside under uncertain conditions, which, in turn, may strain local resources, generate social tensions, and lead to concerns among the local populace. Indeed, President Joko Widodo signed Presidential Regulation No. 125 of 2016 on the Treatment of Foreign Refugees; however, this regulation only permits asylum seekers to reside temporarily in Indonesia. Pursuant to Article 29, asylum seekers whose refugee status applications are finally rejected by the UNHCR must undergo voluntary repatriation or deportation. Meanwhile, refugees awaiting placement to a third country may be accommodated in immigration detention facilities. Existing regulations are further criticized for failing to provide substantive measures to ensure refugee protection, leaving them subject to deportation or repatriation.[55] The national government has occasionally demonstrated ambivalence in its reception of refugees. For instance, in 2015, the government allocated IDR 2.3 billion to assist Rohingya refugees.[56] However, at other times, the government acknowledged the absence of budgetary provisions for refugee accommodation.[57] Consequently, as explained by Robbins,[58] funding has largely depended on local governments, supported by donor agencies such as the UNHCR and the IOM. Occasionally, such funding has been redirected by local officials to finance supplementary projects or to support participation in subsequent regional head elections.[59]

This article also emphasizes that the rejection of Rohingya refugees has resulted in dehumanization. As explained by Bleiker et al.,[60] the dehumanization of refugees entails that individuals seeking protection are no longer perceived as human beings with legitimate needs but are instead viewed as threats, burdens, or even as barbaric persons devoid of human values.[61] Through various widely disseminated news reports, images, and videos, the perception that refugees constitute an uncontrollable and dangerous mass—rather than individuals in need of

50 Eileen Culloty dkk., "Disinformation about Migration: An Age-old Issue with New Tech Dimensions," *World Migration Report* 2022, no. 1 (2022): e00029, https://doi.org/10.1002/wom3.29.

51 Mohammad Mohiuddin dan Ingrid Molderez, "Rohingya Influx and Host Community: A Reflection on Culture for Leading Socioeconomic and Environmental Changes in Bangladesh," *European Journal of Cultural Management and Policy* 13 (Juni 2023): 11559, https://doi.org/10.3389/ejcmp.2023.11559.

52 David Blanco-Herrero dkk., "Inequalities and the Media: Spread and Reception of Hate Speech Against Migrants and Refugees in Social Media," dalam *Research Handbook on Inequalities and Work*, ed. oleh Cynthia Forson dkk. (Edward Elgar Publishing, 2024), https://doi.org/10.4337/9781800886605.00025.

53 BPS, "Persentase Penduduk Miskin (P0) menurut Kabupaten/Kota (Persen), 2024," BPS Provinsi Aceh, 29 Agustus 2024, https://aceh.bps.go.id/indicator/23/42/1/persentase-penduduk-miskin.html; Jabal Ali Husin Sab, "Angka Kemiskinan Masih Tinggi di Sejumlah Kabupaten di Aceh, Pemerataan Pembangunan Perlu Dioptimalkan," Dialeksis.com, 13 Oktober 2023, https://dialeksis.com/aceh/angka-kemiskinan-masih-tinggi-di-sejumlah-kabupaten-di-aceh-pemerataan-pembangunan-perlu-dioptimalkan/.

54 Tempo, "20 Provinsi dengan Jumlah Penduduk Miskin Terbanyak, Jatim Pertama," Tempo.co, 2 Juli 2024, https://www.tempo.co/ekonomi/20-provinsi-dengan-jumlah-penduduk-miskin-terbanyak-jatim-pertama-43875.

55 Ganesh Cintika Putri, "The Dilemma of Hospitality: Revisiting Indonesia's Policy on Handling Refugees Under International Law," *Jurnal HAM* 13, no. 1 (2022): 113–30, https://doi.org/10.30641/ham.2022.13.113-130.

56 Fransiska Ninditya, "Pemerintah Gelontorkan Rp2,3 Miliar Bantu Pengungsi Rohingnya," AntaraNews.com, diakses 22 Agustus 2025, https://www.antaranews.com/berita/498062/pemerintah-gelontorkan-rp23-miliar-bantu-pengungsi-rohingnya.

57 Arrijal Rachman, "Mahfud Ungkap RI Tak Punya Uang Tampung Pengungsi Rohingya," CNBC Indonesia, 14 Desember 2023, https://www.cnbcindonesia.com/news/20231214170011-4-497464/mahfud-ungkap-ri-tak-punya-uang-tampung-pengungsi-rohingya.

58 Robbins, "The Rohingya Case in Aceh: Indonesia's Role as a Destination for Refugees."

59 Robbins, "The Rohingya Case in Aceh: Indonesia's Role as a Destination for Refugees."

60 Bleiker dkk., "The Visual Dehumanisation of Refugees."

61 Bleiker dkk., "The Visual Dehumanisation of Refugees."

protection—has been reinforced.[62] The arrival of refugees is broadly framed not as a humanitarian crisis requiring compassion but as a threat to the security, identity, and prosperity of local residents. According to Kirkwood, dehumanization functions to delineate outsiders from the "in-group."[63] Refugees are labeled as possessing negative and immoral characteristics, thereby rendering support for them unnecessary and inappropriate, while legitimizing punitive or defensive responses aimed at protecting the local population from perceived threats.

The findings of this article further underscore that the various content produced has led society to construct an imaginary enemy to justify their rejection of refugees. As Kinowska observes, for the sake of perceived security, individuals may consent to actions that infringe upon the freedoms and rights of others.[64] This aligns with Fromm's assertion that fear can induce people to relinquish their liberties, provided they feel secure.[65] Kinowska identifies one of the strategies employed in this process as linking perceived threats to values that are deemed important within a particular society, such as religious values, safety, family, and similar societal norms. From the perspective of social ethical values, for example, narratives emerging on news portals depict Rohingya refugees as unclean, unhygienic, ungrateful for food provided, and prone to defecating indiscriminately. From the standpoint of sacred Islamic values in Acehnese society, the narratives highlight behaviors such as neglecting prayer, appropriating the property of local residents, cohabitating with members of the opposite sex without marital bonds, and even committing acts of sexual violence. The proliferation of such negative narratives on social media has led the community to question the earlier assumption that Rohingya refugees are helpless individuals previously regarded as fellow believers, transforming them instead into an "imaginary enemy" for the local populace. In other words, through social media, members of society from any segment can indirectly participate in an antagonistic manner, as online rumors shape perceptions of threats and enemies in ways that exceed the actual reality.[66]

This study contributes to the understanding of the rejection of refugees within specific communities as a consequence of disinformation circulating via social media and news media. The article reinforces the view that media representation plays a dominant role in shaping public perception of refugees.[67] Although there exists a tendency to treat refugees as human beings, visual depictions frequently circulated in the media often serve to objectify them. Furthermore, this article contributes to the understanding of the rejection of Rohingya refugees as an effort by local residents to assert their identity and distinguish themselves from external groups. Such dynamics arise from fear of social or economic changes potentially induced by the arrival of refugees.[68] In this context, rejection tends to be social and affiliative in nature. In essence, by rejecting the presence of refugees, local communities seek to maintain a collective identity aimed at protecting their own community from unwanted social, cultural, or economic transformations.[69]

4 Conclusion

The rejection of Rohingya refugees in Aceh can be observed based on three key findings presented in this article. First, rejection occurs in the production of social media content that portrays Rohingya refugees negatively. Second, coverage in mainstream media depicts Rohingya refugees as engaging in various criminal acts. Third, the presence of Rohingya refugees is deemed morally problematic due to behavior that contravenes social norms. Such rejection demonstrates the existence of disinformation emerging from diverse content generated on both social media and news media. Consequently, emotionally, the public tends to oppose the refugees by associating them with negative attributes, criminality, and moral deviance.

The phenomenon of Rohingya refugee rejection in Aceh is attributable to the ineffectiveness of state mechanisms in protecting the socio-economic interests of local residents, leading them to perceive refugees as an economic and social burden. Furthermore, the absence of clear national policies regarding Rohingya

62 Bleiker dkk., "The Visual Dehumanisation of Refugees."
63 Steve Kirkwood, "The Humanisation of Refugees: A Discourse Analysis of UK Parliamentary Debates on the European Refugee 'Crisis,'" *Journal of Community & Applied Social Psychology* 27, no. 2 (2017): 115–25, https://doi.org/10.1002/casp.2298.
64 Zofia Kinowska-Mazaraki, "The Polish Paradox: From a Fight for Democracy to the Political Radicalization and Social Exclusion," *Social Sciences* 10, no. 3 (2021): 112, https://doi.org/10.3390/socsci10030112.
65 Erich Fromm, *The Fear of Freedom* (Routledge, 2021).
66 Nevada, *Imaginary Enemies: Myth and Abolition in The Minneapolis Rebellion*; Stephen J. Neville dan Ganaele Langlois, "Enemy Imaginaries: A Case Study of the Far Right in Canada," *Canadian Journal of Communication* 46, no. 4 (2021): 777–801, https://doi.org/10.22230/cjc.2021v46n4a3929.
67 Esses dkk., "Uncertainty, Threat, and the Role of the Media in Promoting the Dehumanization of Immigrants and Refugees."
68 Carole McGranahan, "Theorizing Refusal: An Introduction," *Cultural Anthropology* 31, no. 3 (2016): 319–25, https://doi.org/10.14506/ca31.3.01.
69 Mohiuddin dan Molderez, "Rohingya Influx and Host Community: A Reflection on Culture for Leading Socioeconomic and Environmental Changes in Bangladesh."

refugees also influences the attitudes of local communities in Aceh. As a result, the rejection of refugees has led to dehumanization, wherein refugees are no longer perceived as human beings with legitimate needs but rather as threats, burdens, or even as barbaric individuals devoid of humanitarian values. In addition, the production of various content on social media and in news media has facilitated the construction of an imaginary enemy by the public to justify their rejection of refugees. Within the concept of the "imaginary enemy," a perceived threat is often exaggerated and evolves into fear.

Although this article successfully elucidates the phenomenon of Rohingya refugee rejection in Aceh, it has not yet addressed the underlying factors behind the production of various social media content and news coverage concerning the refugees. Investigating the origins of such content that shapes public opinion is essential, as refugee rejection is generally driven by underlying ideological and economic factors. Moreover, this article does not examine the daily lives of Rohingya refugees in Aceh or their interactions with local communities. While the presence of these refugees remains controversial, a number of them continue to reside in Aceh and occupy various camps. Therefore, further research is necessary to explore the reasons behind the production of such content regarding Rohingya refugees and their interactions with local residents in Aceh.

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