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Article:	Assessing Refugee Crisis through the Lens of Media Discourse: A comparative Analysis of American and Pakistani Newspapers
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Abstract

Study focuses on portrayal refugee crisis in American and Pakistani newspapers (The Washington Post and Dawn) during one year (May 2017-April 2017). Recently two major events played a key role in heightening this tragedy, firstly post 9/11 war on terror and secondly Arab spring. The consequent conflicts in countries have caused millions of people to flee from their homelands. Now 22 million people are refugees out of the total 65.6 million of world population. America being a key player in international media, can make or break the story through its information handling techniques. Likewise Pakistan, the second largest host of refugees in the world, lost its top position only after Syrian conflict. Issue of Afghan refugees is the most delayed refugee issue in the world and Pakistan being top host has greater place at international scenario in these terms. As the refugee crisis goes on with no end in sight, increasing socio-economic pressures in neighboring countries; acceptance of refugees has become questionable. Since refugees are being subjected to major human rights violation, analyzing role of media in this regard becomes significant. While considering main objectives of the study, findings of critical discourse analysis (CDA) reveal that American and Pakistani newspapers' portray refugees as victim of human rights violations.

Keywords: Refugees, Crisis, mainstream, Newspapers, Portrayal, CDA.

Introduction

Internationally, refugees are administrated under the 1951 Convention and the 1967 Protocol regarding refugee; two main legally permitted certifications acknowledged by UN agenda (UNHCR, 1992). Defined in Article 1 (A) and (2) of the 1951 “*Refugee Convention*” refugees are persons who avow safety in another state to avoid persecution, life insecurity and human rights violations in their homelands. Thus causing host state to be responsible for their protection (Hathaway, 1999).

The conflicts in countries like Afghanistan, Iraq, Somalia, and South Sudan and Syria have displaced masses. 65.6 million Of the world population is facing forcible displacement with 22 million refugees; with 17 million registered under UNHCR and 5.3 million Palestinian refugees administrated by UNRWA “United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestinian refugees in the near east”. Turkey is top host with 3.1million refugees followed by Pakistan with 1.4million refugees (UNHCR, 2017).

Moreover Rohingya made largest and swiftest mass migration with nearly 20,000 people per day. Kutupalong (Cox’s Bazar Bangladesh) has almost 600,000 refugees, the world’s largest refugee settlement (UNHCR, 2018). Bangladesh also have Bihari refugees, still waiting to resettle in Pakistan (Sajal, 2015).

As the refugee crisis goes on with no end in sight considerable social-economic tensions have emerged in host countries. Thus world’s stable economies are expected to shoulder their fair share of the burden. Contrary to it 28 countries of the EU complained about taking in one million Syrian refugees, less than the number taken in by Lebanon alone (Farasin, 2017).

Media can play a constructive role by promoting a notion that refugee crisis is a globally shared responsibility, not confined to few countries. Most of the countries prefer their political concerns compromising the lives of millions of refugees. Media can do a lot in this regard. The key agenda that every states should endorse through media should be anti-conflict and pro-human while considering the integral role of media in such circumstances. Every state and international alliance collectively must contribute to eradicate humanitarian dilemma of refugees. (Amnesty International, 2015).

Objectives

- To examine the human rights violation faced by refugees being portrayed in American and Pakistani mainstream Newspapers.
- To examine the settlement issues (with regards to their settlement in host countries as well as to their home lands) of refugees being portrayed in American and Pakistani mainstream Newspapers.
- To compare discourses of American and Pakistani mainstream newspapers regarding portrayal of refugee crisis.

Research Questions

RQ1. Do American and Pakistani mainstream newspapers represent refugees as a victim of human rights violation?

RQ2. Do American and Pakistani newspapers portray settlement issues being faced by refugees?

Literature Review

Media and information are modes of aid in humanitarian disasters (Ghannam, 2016). Most recently refugee crisis is among the largest human dilemma and media must play its part. Media projects biased and uncertain image of the refugees. It also portrays them as threat, terrorists, illegal and foreign invaders strengthening their dehumanization (Berry, Blanco, & Moore, 2015).

Similarly Wright (2014) noted that media reports with alarming discourses keep the issue of refugees as a negatively perceived problem among the masses. For instance

metaphors like “flood”, “tides” and “waves” used by journalists for refugees make them unwanted (Parker, 2014).

A related body of work explored that the way media cover a humanitarian issue, serves as an undeniable constituent of the competency to handle the situation and also proves to be a reliable mean to organize relief availabilities (Ross, 2004).

A related study revealed that a journalist modify and manipulate pieces of information to pursue better interest of the nation, military and security, principally during war (International Council on Human Rights Policy , 2002).

A study suggested that in 2015 German media represented refugees as victims of war and human right violations. On the death of thousand refugees in April 2015 in Mediterranean Sea triggered criticism in German media on unhospitable European policy for refugees. Similarly German media also focused on empathetic stance of Angela Merkel towards refugees (Hemmelmann & Wegner, 2017).

Methodology

The issue has been studied under theoretical realm of framing theory. Norman Fairclough’s Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) guided the researcher to draw inferences and make conclusion with greater effectiveness. Both selected newspapers published during defined period of time served as population. Systematic random sampling technique was adopted.

Structural Theme for Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA)

While conducting CDA the structural theme of basic human rights of refugees has been focused.

Basic Human Rights of Refugees

The depiction of refugees as humanitarian issue related to basic human rights like health, food, shelter, clothing, education, employment, gender based rights, personal identity, right to live etc.

Findings

Dawn

A news published in Dawn quoted Amnesty international;

“Deporting and abandoning the Rohingya would be “unconscionable”.

Rhetorical representations like *“abandoning”* and *“unconscious”* refers that leaving refugees; oppressed and forced to leave their homelands, in such troublesome circumstances would be inhumane act by the host countries.

Likewise another news preferred using the word *“slaughter”* and *“massacre”* to portray the killings of Palestinian refugees in their refugee camps in 1982. The words used for killing in these terms depicts inhuman and merciless assassination of the refugees residing in the refugee camps.

Similarly *“Fleeing renewed violence in Myanmar”* raised the notion that Rohingya faced violence and persecution in their homeland and forced to escape for their lives. Moreover *“Rohingya in limbo”* denotes that refugees were not allowed to cross the border to enter Bangladesh. Likewise *“despite smoke billowing from burnt villages”* and heavy gun fires they were kept outside the borders in the dangerous territory. This rhetoric portrayed refugees as vulnerable to the violence and threats to their lives. They were forced to leave the place to never come back by burning their house so making their resettlement difficult.

Similarly *“Thousands have perished”* was used for the dead migrants/refugees trying to reach Europe through the dangerous Mediterranean Sea.

“UNSC envoys hear of rapes, murders from Rohingya refugees”

Headline of the news positions refugees as the victim human rights abuses and persecution. *“Hear”* refer to the listening to personal experiences of the human rights violations as by witnesses. *“Refugees broke down in tears”* depicts the emotional and

psychological condition as well as the miseries of the refugees in Bangladesh. Use of narrative “*harrowing stories*” strengthens the victimization and ill-treatment described by the refugees. It means that disturbing and upsetting experiences were told the UNSC envoy which visited refugee camps in Bangladesh. “*Atrocities*” was used to refer brutal killings abuses refugees have either witnessed or experience in Myanmar.

“*Trapped*” and “*Bleak scrubland*” refers to bushy place covered with bamboos granted to refugees to take refuge. “*No man’s land*” also referred uninhabited places allocated for refugees. This rhetoric denotes that the land where refugee camps have been constructed are abandoned places with no human life there due to harsh landscape.

“*Human Rights Watch called for the Rohingya crisis to be referred to the International Criminal Court*”

The involvement of Human Rights Watch also positions refugee crisis in relation with human rights. The stance of the humanitarian organization put refugees as the victim of human rights i.e. treated brutally and forced to leave their homeland.

“*Open the borders*” refers to demand of refugees to avoid deaths as result of taking illegal and dangerous routs to reach Europe.

Dawn relates the return of the refugees to be ensured with safety “*safe place for the Rohingya refugees to return to, free from fear*”. The discourse of this fragment of news argues the protection of the refugees while they go back home with no threats to life.

“*Grim displacement camps*” refers to forbidding and unpleasant situations of the refugee camps resided by the Rohingya refugees under deprived circumstances.

In another news story Afghanistan wants to extend the stay of its refugees in Pakistan. “*Voluntary return of refugees*” refers to the stance of Afghan authorities that refugees taking sanctuary in Pakistan should be authorized to leave by their will instead of sending them back by force. The narrative “*return with dignity*” also refers to the same cause i.e. the time of repatriation of Afghan refugees should be in accordance with their will. “*Extension in the stay*” also serve the same purpose duration of stay of Afghan refugees should be increased by Pakistani authorities. “*Lamented*” used to reflect the grief expressed by Afghan ambassador on this development. Editorial published in Dawn on January 18, 2018 placed Rohingya refugees as the victim of human rights violations and sufferings. “*Perilous journeys*” refers to the dangerous routs they took fleeing persecution in their homeland. “*A textbook case of ethnic cleansing*” was used in relation with UN stance of the Rohingya crisis that these are being victimized due to their ethnic differences from the Buddhist majority state of Myanmar and forced leave. “*Internment camps*” was used to refer least facilitated camps in Rakhine state for the returned refugees where they are kept in captivity and confinement. Similarly “*squalid camps clustered in Bangladesh*” refers to the poorly equipped and unclean refugee camps in Bangladesh which are overly crowded. This narrative portrays worse humanitarian conditions of the refugee camps resided by huge number of human beings. “*Herded*” narrative was used to portray the concern of human rights groups Rohingya refugees might be pushed to the camps again after their return to home which represent an inhumane narrative to be used for humans.

Editorial published in Dawn on December 18, 2017 refers to the repatriation deal of Rohingya refugees as “*shockingly inhumane*” act. Sending refugees to the burnt villages and to the “*campaign of ethnic cleansing*” is something immoral. “*Exodus shows no signs of abating*” also refers to one of the reason which questions the repatriation of Rohingya refugees back home.

Another news used the narrative “*world’s largest refugee camp*” to represent Rohingya refugee crisis as huge humanitarian suffering comprising to considerable population turned refugees and forced to live in camps spread on wide land. So it can be said that larger the refugee camp greater the number of human sufferers. “*Global pressure mounts*” refers to

concern of international communities over Rohingya refugee crisis where Myanmar authorities are reluctant to sort out the issue. The notion “*reluctant to return*” addresses the fear of Rohingya refugees to go back home despite filthy situations in the camps they endure. It depicts their security concerns and access to basic human necessities. Moreover “*granted full citizenship*” also refers to the demand of Rohingya refugee to be provided with on their return where they have been deprived access to basic human rights for not being recognized as full citizens in their homeland.

Similarly another news portrayed the victimization and miseries of Rohingya refugees while entering Bangladesh. The narrative “*killed by mines*” refers to landmines allegedly lied by Myanmar security forces along the border killing fleeing refugees. The narrative “*hundreds of latrines*” was used by Bangladeshi army official referring to the basic necessity of refugees accumulated in large in refugee camps in Bangladesh. “*On the brink of a health disaster*” used for the warning of the “Doctors without borders” pointing the health threats of the refugees may face due to unhealthy environment in densely populated refugee camps.

Editorial published in Dawn on September 30, 2017 entitled “*hate unbound*” referred that the revulsion against the Rohingya was not confined to Myanmar rather it could be witnessed in Sri Lanka as well where refugee camp for the displaced Rohingya was targeted. Moreover “*tinged with poison*” rhetoric was used to address their demand to send them back. “*World’s fastest-developing refugee emergency*” and “*humanitarian and human rights nightmare*” narratives were used by UN to refer the suffering of Rohingya refugees. Refugees are facing worse humanitarian situations during their departure for refuge as well as in camps of the host states. Poor health condition were also referred as “*acute malnutrition*”, “*acute diarrhea*” “*cholera*” acute rhetoric shows the severity of the diseases. Moreover situation in the camps was described as “*breeding ground for a major health crisis*” referring to the point that lacking hygienic conditions in the camps are facilitating the health issues among Rohingya refugees.

A related news refers to human rights violation of the Palestinian by forcing them into the refugee camps by the Israeli forces. The UN Secretary General stated “*heavy humanitarian and development burden*” was the result of Israeli occupation. “*Crowded refugee camps*” narrative was used to describe the situation in camps build for the Palestinian refugees who were “*compelled*” to live there as their territories were occupied by Israel in 1967. “*Abject poverty*” referred to the poor condition of the Palestinian refugees deprived many human necessities for the survival. Moreover “*no prospect of a better life for their children*” was reported to be the threat to the Palestinian generations as it has been 50 years since living in refugee camps depriving children of better future with no proper education or career opportunities.

Likewise news published in Dawn on May 06, 2017 referred to the narrative of ‘World Food Program’ which described food insecurity as the cause to make people flee their homelands. It related the deficient food resources for the refugees in the refugee camps. The narrative used by WFP “*refugees who are hungry or starving across the world*” referred that refugees were struggling to have access to basic human need i.e. food. Refugees all across the world have food insecurity.

The Washington Post

News items and editorials published in The Washington Post portrayed refugee crisis referring to basic human rights like food, shelter, health and education, human rights violations and sufferings they endure to find refuge in host countries.

Similarly news published on May 12, 2017 portrayed refugees as deprived of their right to seek protection in America.

“*In his dehumanization of migrants and refugees*”

The given example mentioned that Trump with his travel ban wanted to keep refugees out of the country. It is inhumane and immoral to halt the arrival of refugees to safe place who have fled war and persecution in their homeland.

News published on July 24, 2017 portrayed refugees as vulnerable to hardships. *“With winter approaching and no end in sight to the flow of migrants seeking refuge from the Syrian civil war”*

It referred to October 2016 when Germany saw huge influx of Syrian refugees constantly. Immediate shelter and protection are required for refugees to avoid harsh winters in Europe.

Similarly news portrayed refugee crisis as worst humanitarian crisis.

“The Syrian crisis is three times larger”

The notion depicted that Syrian refugee crisis became worst humanitarian suffering with the large number of displaced people with no other option than depending on other countries. It has been called larger outflow of refugees than caused by Yugoslav war in 1990s leaving 2.3 million refugees.

On August 18, 2017 a news portrayed refugees deprived of assistance by new American government.

“U.S. efforts to help refugees in particular would be jeopardized”

The notion referred to the report signed by former appointees from Bush and Obama administrations against the proposal to merge roles of the State Department and US Agency for International Development USAID as well as relocation of Bureau of Population, Refugee and Migration to Department of Homeland security. The rhetoric *“Undermine a 1980 law on U.S. treatment of refugees”* depicted that report called this proposal against the values of the United States enshrined in the American law as well, which believes in helping refugees displaced from their homes.

News published on September 30, 2017 portrayed sufferings of Rohingya refugees.

“That land was once a forest where villagers picked wild fruit”

It referred to the land allocated by Bangladesh as campsite for Rohingya refugees. It depicted that Rohingya were kept on land which was deserted forest with no human life.

“They are poor. They are in trouble. Let them come. We’ll get by”.

The example referred to the conversation among the Bangladeshi locals in a cafe regarding arrival of Rohingya refugees in huge number most of them called them a burden for Bangladesh while others had sympathetic views about them. The news discourse in the given example depicted that Bangladeshi man took the problems of refugees personally. He projected that refugees had families and children too and were in miserable condition now and needed help.

“Many arrived with nothing but the clothes on their backs”

It depicts that Rohingya refugees arrived Bangladesh in miserable circumstances they had nothing but clothes on their bodies. *“Sold them for a pittance to the boatmen who ferried them to safety”* it referred that Rohingya refugees sold all of their possession to boatmen and in return they got a space on their boats to arrive a safe place.

“Thousands of Rohingya line the main road here, begging for alms”

While reaching in Bangladesh they suffered shortage of aid and food supply. *“Begging for alms”* portrayed extreme misery of Rohingya which they faced in Bangladesh. Amount of aid supply does not meet the size of the needy Rohingya refugees. *“Tossing used clothing at refugees”* it referred that due to lack of systematic mechanism for aid distribution donors and volunteers threw things like clothes and food items randomly toward a huge crowd of refugees. This depicted an inhuman and immoral system of assistance for humans. News published on September 18, 2017 portrayed health issues of Rohingya refugees.

“150,000 children would be immunized over seven days for measles, rubella and polio”

It depicted the health threats of the Rohingya refugees in Bangladesh. To meet expected health disaster Bangladesh official in district hospital Cox Bazar has announced to vaccination of the refugee children.

News published on September 18, 2017 portrayed refugees as *“tired, huddled masses”* which depicted huge humanitarian suffering. Similarly on September 12, 2017;

“The world’s most friendless people and are undoubtedly in need of protection”

It referred to Rohingya who were forced out of their homes due to persecution and violence seeking safety in other countries. It supports the notion that refugees are helpless in dire circumstances looking towards international communities. Since the identity of Rohingya is a question, news discourse supports the identity crisis of the Rohingya refugees with no country to call them citizens.

“Bangladesh now hosts 750,000 Rohingya refugees, and the government in Dhaka recently described Burma’s actions as ‘genocide’”

Huge number of Rohingya refugees are suffering for their safety in Bangladesh. A deliberate campaign of genocide caused suffering of masses of refugees who crossed the borders to take refuge in Bangladesh.

Similarly news published on October 24, 2017 portrayed human right violations of refugees.

“600,000 people are crouching in mud, shivering with terror, telling stories of how a husband was shot, sister was raped, baby thrown on fire —state-sponsored campaign of terror was to drive them across a nearby border into a neighboring country”

It is depicted that Rohingya refugees were forced to flee their homes as a result of campaign which had official backing by Myanmar government. They were recounting the human rights abuses they endured in their homeland. They were sunk into the mud due to drenched fields they crossed to reach Bangladesh and marks of fear on their faces. They were terrorized by what they had been through in their homeland.

“The Rohingya don’t have a lot of friends right now”.

It depicted that Rohingya refugees are alone in international communities. China, Russia, and Europe, since everyone has its own concerns, have left Rohingya refugees globally isolated.

Another news portrayed sufferings of Jewish refugees during Holocaust.

“They came to Sosua unprepared, unexperienced, unselected...It is not sufficient to benevolently take these people away from their past sufferings and only deposit them in an undeveloped area”

The example referred to Jewish refugees who fled Nazi’s Holocaust from Berlin in 1939. When most of countries denied entry of Jewish refugees Dominican Republic gave them refuge on a deserted beach of Sosua under the condition to develop the area. Most of the Jewish refugees had no experience of agriculture or farming and had difficulty to adjust in a remote deserted area. It is inhumane to price the sufferings of displaced people for the development of abandoned land to settle for safety.

News published on October 30, 2017 portrayed sufferings of African refugees.

“Haley said she brought along photographs of suffering refugees”

The narrative referred to the American UN ambassador Nikki Haley who visit war-torn African countries South Sudan, Ethiopia and Democratic Republic of Congo. She also visited some of the refugee camps in Ethiopia where she saw refugees in miserable conditions.

“She toured huts, schools, a haven for traumatized women, and another for traumatized former child soldiers and a women-run bakery. She hugged rape survivors and delivered polio vaccines”.

Given example depicted refugee who underwent huge human right abuses. “Huts” referred to fragile shelter of refugees but still they were haven for the distressed refugees. Refugee children who were once abducted as enslaved in their host country and later rescued and brought to the refugee camps. Campsites were symbol of human grievances. Nikki had sympathy for the victims.

“Living in the camps can mean children are schooled irregularly or not at all. Their parents have little opportunity to work, and the children’s chances may be no better”

Poor or no education facilities in refugee camps are raising questions about the future of the generation living there. Parents of those children have no facilities to earn which means only depending on aid children have endangered future ahead.

On October 18, 2017 sufferings of refugees were covered.

“If President Trump’s newest travel ban is enforced, the Zakzok family might be permanently torn apart”

It depicted the plight of Syrian refugee in America who had two children in Turkey as refugees. He wanted to bring his two older children to America due to prevailing war in their homeland but suffering in this regard as Trump’s travel came into action. Since all family members in America except two children, he feared that his family might not be able to reunite as travel ban prevents Syrian nationals or refugees to enter United States.

Similarly on November 24, 2017 Rohingya refugees were portrayed as victim of human right abuses.

“Many of them terrified to return to an area where they have clashed violently with their Buddhist neighbors”.

The given example depicted repatriation deal signed between Bangladesh and Myanmar to start repatriation of thousands of Rohingya refugees within two months without any security assurance by Burmese officials. Most of refugees do not want to return fearing what they have endured earlier.

“It is clear that the situation in northern Rakhine state constitutes ethnic cleansing against the Rohingya.”

It referred to the statement of Secretary of State Rex Tillerson who visited Burma November 15 declared that ethnic cleansing campaign led by Burmese military caused thousands of people to suffer. After crackdown by military huge outflow of Rohingya refugees was resulted.

Similarly news portrayed human right violations of refugees.

“Thousands of Yazidi women and girls who may still be captives and survivors she hopes will be moved from camps and resettled.”

The given example referred to Yazidi woman Nadia Murad, a survivor of ISIS sex slavery in Iraq. After she escaped ISIS enslavement, she was smuggled by a family in Mosul out of IS territory and she ended in refugee camp. In 2015 she was accepted as a refugee in Germany. Now being U.N. goodwill ambassador for survivors of human trafficking she is concerned about the Yazidi women in refugee camps that those should be resettled back to their homes.

On January 18, 2018 news mentioned sufferings of Palestinian refugees.

“Any reduction of aid would be a death sentence for refugees in Gaza. The work is almost nonexistent. There are not enough jobs”.

The notion referred to the narrative of a Palestinian refugee in Gaza who considered aid reduction to UN agency for Palestinian refugees UNRWA by its largest donor United States would cause refugee families starve to death. As there are no employment

opportunities for Palestinian refugees they are dependent on the aid provided by UNRWA for their basic needs like, shelter, health, and education.

“I call on member states of the United Nations to take a stand & demonstrate to Palestine Refugees that their rights & future matter”

It mentioned the stance of UNRWA’s Commissioner General regarding aid cuts by Trump administration. It is the matter of rights of Palestinian refugees as well as their future and international communities should play their role to stand with Palestinian refugees.

“We are extremely worried... We support 1 million people with food”

It referred to the statement of UNRWA’s director in Gaza who expressed his concerns on Trump’s decision of aid cuts for agency. United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestinian refugees is responsible for huge number of Palestinian refugees displaced 70 years ago as a result of the formation of Israel in 1948. It provides them with the basic human necessities like food, education, and health assistance. Aid cuts would deprive them badly.

News published on March 06, 2018 portrayed human rights of refugees.

“He says he’d like to study nursing but, instead, at the moment, flips burgers at a fast-food restaurant”.

The example referred to a Sudanese refugee in Israel who fled war in his country about 10 years ago he was a minor an Israel’s “*dreamer*” now at risk of being deported despite he was graduated from Israel’s education system. He wants to pursue with nursing in future but now he is a waiter. Being a refugee he has little job opportunities.

Conclusion

The findings of critical discourse analysis show that American and Pakistani newspapers positions them as a victim of human rights violations in dire need to seek support from international communities. Collectively both media placed refugees as sufferers of human rights abuses. The discourse analysis of editorials published in the selected newspapers depicted that editorial policies of the newspapers of both countries addressed the issue with humanitarian cause. However Pakistani newspapers were more frequent in covering the issue in editorial publications with more focused representation of the refugee crisis as the violation of human rights, compared with American press. Similarly discourses of both newspapers were found to be addressing resettlement issues of refugees as well. The findings show that refugees have difficulties while settling in new place for protection and least options of their return to homelands due to lack of security and peace.

Therefore it can be concluded that media serves as a supervisory body of the society. At times its partial portrayal of the issue causes prejudice perception among the consumers regarding particular issue but at the same time if the news content is produced based on the facts and reality people’s discernment of the issue can modify accordingly.

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