

Chapter I

Introduction

In a country where possessions counted for everything, we had no belongings except our stories.

— Viet Thanh Nguyen, *The Refugees*

Literature acts as a powerful tool for capturing the complexities of human life across different time periods and cultures. From time in memorial, it has evolved to reflect the lives of individuals and also the hidden struggles and silenced experiences of marginalised groups. Kakembo Aisha Annet in the article titled “The Representation of Marginalized Communities in Literature” specifies, “the representation in literature has long been considered one of the key ways that interpersonal prejudices can be eradicated” (13). The refugee narratives have emerged as a significant form of expression, highlighting on the lives of displaced individuals who wrestle with identity loss, oppression, and survival, among the extensive corpus of literature for the marginalised. These narratives written by refugees themselves or by writers with deep engagement and research, offer an authentic representation of the challenges faced by millions. They explore critical issues such as the causes of displacement, the traumatic conditions of exile, and the psychological trauma of statelessness. Further, these works try to seek solutions, demanding those in power and society at large to take meaningful steps toward improving the lives of refugees.

Refugees are individuals deprived of statehood, rights, and identity, who are forced to flee their homes due to persecution, conflict, or entrenched injustice. In their disadvantaged existence, the concept of ‘home,’ a place of safety and belonging, is replaced by displacement and insecurity. FitzGerald in the article titled “The Sociology of

Refugee Migration” mentions that most sociological definitions of refugees are oriented around a set of related dichotomies that define refugees against migrants, or at least against other types of migrants. “The common thread in many of these categorizations is that refugees have less agency” (392). The reasons for the forced migration of the refugees often arise from human rights violations, ethnic hatred, and abuses of power.

Refugees endure severe violence and upon seeking asylum in foreign lands, face further marginalisation and limited acceptance. Their lives are a constant struggle between survival amidst deprivation and the pursuit of recognition in unfamiliar territories. It is very important to analyse the refugee struggles with reference to their lost agency and political struggle of denied citizenship. The present thesis, titled *Refugeehood (De)Materialised: An Analysis of Agency in Select Refugee Narratives*, questions the shifting dimensions of refugeehood as both a materially grounded and narratively reconstructed experience. The parenthetical (de) signals a critical rethinking of refugeehood—not merely as a condition of loss and dispossession, but as a space where human agency, resilience, and plurality actively emerge, in line with the Arendian frameworks guiding this study.

The refugee crisis has a long history and continues to affect millions of people all around the world. Approximately forty to sixty million people were displaced across Europe, with many sent to camps in Germany, Austria, and Italy, during World War II (1939–1945). This crisis was motivated by genocides and ethnic cleansing under totalitarian regimes. The Partition of India in 1947 and the Bangladesh Liberation War (1971–1979) created millions of refugees in South Asia. The recent crises include the Syrian Civil War (2011–present), the Venezuelan exodus, the ongoing Palestinian displacement for seventy-five years, the Rohingya genocide in Myanmar, and the Somali Civil War that began in 1991. According to UNHCR, the majority of refugees under its

protection originate from Afghanistan, Syria, Venezuela, Ukraine, and South Sudan, primarily due to continuing violence and conflicts. As the UNRWA notes, “This World Refugee Day, Palestine Refugees in Gaza are struggling to survive a humanitarian tragedy that, for the older generations, is a chilling echo of their past dispossession.” These crises underscore the persistent nature of refugee struggles, which have remained largely unchanged across generations.

Boundaries and borders that were initially created to protect people and their natural resources evolved into tools of inequality and discrimination later. Geographical borders that were intended for governance are now mechanisms for consolidating power and excluding marginalised groups. Land ownership gives authority to a select few whereas denying others basic rights, emphasizing social hierarchies. Refugees are excessively affected by these borders because, they lack stability and security on either side. They face not only geographical restrictions but also socio-political barriers that refuse them access to fundamental needs and dignity. Displacement usually begins with persecution in refugees’ homelands, deep-rooted in ethnic, racial, or communal identity.

Approximately 82.4 million refugees exist all over the world and many of them, especially children, live under the constant threat of death according to UNHCR. Refugees frequently undertake dangerous journeys toward borders, risking their lives in search of safety. Dangerously balancing between life and death and despite enduring severe mistreatment, the refugees particularly women, persist in their struggle for survival. A critical issue in the refugee crisis is the lack of awareness among the privileged, who remain detached from the harsh realities of borders and camps. Amplifying refugee voices is essential to addressing these injustices, and works by and for refugees serve as powerful tools to document their experiences, resist oppression, and advocate for meaningful change.

Refugee narratives give voice to displaced communities, highlighting their struggles with forced displacement, lack of identity, and minimal representation. Jacobsen observes, “Millions of forcibly displaced people living in and outside camps seek to support themselves and their families often with minimal humanitarian assistance, and in the face of active resistance by governments and citizens of host countries” (99). These accounts, drawn from real-life experiences and fictional works, address social and human rights issues. Writing such narratives demands courage and a commitment to social justice, as authors expose the inequalities faced by refugees and challenge oppressive systems. This literature reflects the desolation of crises, the resilience of survival, and the fragile hope of rebuilding.

Refugee narratives explore the main themes that emphasise on the past trauma and struggles of the author or narrator. Themes of hatred, inequality, conflict, and resistance recur, often revealing the deep trauma caused by acts of dehumanisation. Refugee narratives trace their displacement and survival in foreign lands, encouraging readers to empathise with their plight. “Instead of rallying for empathy and pity from a passive victim position, refugee authors present testimonies of resilience and political outrage and protest that expose the self’s unwilled implication in the fate of another” (Seemann 313). These works underscore the urgent need for peace, equality, and mutual respect to counter the cycles of oppression and violence.

Refugees around the world often experience the harsh reality of being reduced to mere bodies. Orhon Myadar and Kara E. Dempsey’s article titled “Making and Unmaking Refugees: Geopolitics of Social Ordering and Struggle within the Global Refugee Regime” recognises that while the refugee classification affords safety and security to some, the same classification leads to the exclusion and deprivation of basic rights to millions of others (368). Deprived of basic needs, they live in constant uncertainty, caught

between life and death. Many never have the chance to recognise their fundamental human rights or the opportunity to fight for them. The urgency of survival leaves little space for self-reflection, and they are often reduced to sources of cheap labour, exploited and dehumanised. Their bodies endure violence and brutality in many forms—men are beaten without reason, women are subjected to sexual violence, and children are at high risk of human trafficking. These conditions reveal the deep-rooted organised injustices refugees face, driven by ethnic hatred and prejudice.

Melissa Fleming's *A Hope More Powerful Than the Sea* published by Flatiron Books on 24th January 2017, is a significant contribution to refugee narratives. It recounts the story of Doaa, a young Syrian refugee who survives a near-drowning on a fishing boat bound for Europe and saves the life of a toddler. Fleming, with a Master's in Journalism from Boston University and a Bachelor's in German Studies from Oberlin College, has worked extensively in refugee advocacy. As the Under-Secretary-General for Global Communications since 2019 and previously the head of Global Communications at the UNHCR, she has led efforts to raise awareness and inspire action for refugees through global media campaigns and outreach.

The Amazing Adventures of Kavalier & Clay by Michael Chabon, first published on September 19, 2000 and a Pulitzer Prize winner for Fiction in 2001, is a refugee narrative that explores the lives of two cousins: Joe Kavalier, a Czech refugee and artist from Prague, and Sammy Clay, a Brooklyn-born writer. The novel delves into the hardships faced by Jewish refugees during World War II. Michael Chabon, an American novelist, screenwriter, and short story writer, is renowned for his masterful use of figurative language and his experiments with genre. His works often draw on world mythology and his Jewish heritage. His essay collections include *Maps and Legends*, *Manhood for Amateurs: The Pleasures and Regrets of a Husband, Father, and Son*, and

Pops: Fatherhood in Pieces. His young adult novel *Summerland* won the 2003 Mythopoeic Fantasy Award for Children's Literature.

Sea Prayer, by the famous author Khaled Hosseini, published by Bloomsbury on 30th August 2018, responds to the ongoing refugee crisis, telling the story in the form of a letter from a father to his son as they flee war-torn Syria. Hosseini, known for *The Kite Runner*, *A Thousand Splendid Suns*, and *And the Mountains Echoed*, has sold over 40 million copies worldwide. Appointed a goodwill ambassador for UNHCR in 2006, he established The Khaled Hosseini Foundation after a trip to Afghanistan, providing humanitarian assistance to the people of Afghanistan. Clemantine Wamariya's memoir, *The Girl Who Smiled Beads*, recollects her experiences as a child refugee from Rwanda during the 1994 genocide. Clemantine and her sister escaped the violence and spent years moving between refugee camps in Africa before being offered asylum in the United States. Wamariya's memoir provides a close look at the refugee experience, discussing the themes of survival, displacement, identity, and the psychological impact of violence. Her story is a reminder of the strength and resilience refugees exhibit in the face of their hardship.

Christy Lefteri's *The Beekeeper of Aleppo* published by Zaffre on 29th April 2019 is a poignant novel about the journey of Nuri, a Syrian beekeeper, and his wife, Afra because, they flee the war in Syria. Their journey from Aleppo to the refugee camps in Greece is full of anguish, loss, and endurance. The novel is notable for its vivid depiction of the emotional and psychological challenges that war and displacement bring in the lives of individuals when they are separated from their homes and loved ones. Lefteri's writing is deeply empathetic and brings to light the human cost of the refugee crisis, which is always diminished by political debates. In the book *What is the What* published by Penguin on 3rd July 2008, Dave Eggers tells the autobiographical story of Valentino Achak

Deng, who is one of the Lost Boys of Sudan. The novel follows Valentino's journey from his home in Sudan to a refugee camp in Ethiopia, and to the United States. Eggers vividly captures the horrors of war, the trauma of displacement, and the challenges of adapting to a new life in America through Valentino's story. The book explores the themes of identity, belonging, and the struggles refugees face when rebuilding their lives in new place.

Malala Yousafzai, the youngest Nobel Prize laureate and a female education activist, has consistently advocated for the rights of those without a voice. In *We Are Displaced: My Journey and Stories from Refugee Girls Around the World*, published on January 8, 2019 by Little Brown Books for Young Readers, she shares the stories of refugees she has encountered through her humanitarian work, shedding light on their struggles. Other notable writers in the field of refugee narratives include Samar Yazbek, Nihad Sirees, Mustafa Khalifa, Sa'dalla Wannous, Warsan Shire, Laila Lalami, Viet Thanh Nguyen, Ghassan Kanafani, Hassan Blasim, Vladimir Nabokov, and Mohsin Hamid. Contemporary writers like Leila Abdelrazaq, Poro-chista Khakpour, Dinaw Mengestu, Aleksander Hemon, Thanhha Lai, Michael Chabon, Ismail Kadare, Chris Cleave, Isabel Allende, Lorraine Adams, Dave Eggers, Tommy Wieringa, Fabio Geda, and Ruth Panofsky continue to contribute powerful stories to the refugee narrative genre.

Following a brief survey of various refugee narratives, the following works have been selected for closer study: *A Land of Permanent Goodbyes* by Atia Abawi, *The Boat People* by Sharon Bala, *First, They Erased Our Name* by Habiburrahman, *Little Daughter* by Zoya Phan, *City of Thorns* by Ben Rawlence, *How Dare the Sun Rise* by Sandra Uwiringiyimana, and *The Milk of Birds* by Sylvia Whitman. These books, which include memoirs, biographies, and fiction, offer distinct perspectives on the refugee experience from different regions around the world. They highlight the challenges faced by Syrians, Sudanese, Congolese, Sri Lankans, Rohingya, and Karen refugees, exploring both the

unique and shared aspects of displacement, survival, and identity. Particularly, Memoirs and biographies are crucial in refugee literature because they provide firsthand accounts of the struggles of those who have experienced displacement and marginalisation. These narratives document personal pain and trauma and also stand as acts of resistance, giving voice to the oppressed. These works reflect the collective experiences of millions of refugees, offering a powerful way to challenge the systems that reinforce their suffering through the stories of individuals.

Habiburahman who is also known as Habib is a Rohingya born in 1979 in Burma which is now called Myanmar. He fled his country to escape torture, persecution, and detention in order to seek refuge in neighbouring Southeast Asian countries. There also he ended up facing discrimination and violence. He reached Australia by boat in December 2009. Habib spent thirty-two months in detention centres before being released. He currently resides in Melbourne and despite years of struggle and perseverance, he remains stateless and unable to access full human rights. Habib is the founder of the Australian Burmese Rohingya Organisation, which advocates for the Rohingya community in Myanmar. He also serves as a translator, social worker, and casual support service coordinator at Refugees, Survivors and Ex-Detainees. He is also the secretary of the Arakan Rohingya National Organisation, an international Rohingya advocacy group based in the UK. Habib was appointed Refugee Ambassador in Australia in 2019. The human rights violations and hardships he has endured have made him a spokesperson for his community and also a target for opponents of the Rohingya cause.

The co-author of Habiburahman's memoir *First They Erased Our Name*, is Sophie Ansel who is a French journalist, author and filmmaker. She lived in South Asia for several years. She uses storytelling through various media, including books, films, radio, and documentaries to highlight human rights and environmental issues. Ansel has

investigated into human trafficking and slavery in Southeast Asia and has been a vocal advocate against the Rohingya genocide in Myanmar, campaigning for their cause in French media since 2012. *Burmese Moons* written with Sam Garcia and published by IDW Publishing on 17th September 2019 is a graphic novel that condemns the human rights issues in Myanmar and brings to light, the true problems of the oppressed communities struggling to live in the country. Ansel first encountered the Rohingya people and learned of their plight during a stay in Myanmar. She met Habib later in 2006 while visiting Rohingya refugee communities in Thailand and Malaysia. Ansel gained a deeper understanding of the crisis with Habib's firsthand experiences of persecution. She helped Habib write his story to shed light on the suffering of his community when Myanmar's government escalated violence against the Rohingya in June 2012. The memoir has been translated into English by Andrea Reece who specialises in translating novels, short stories, and non-fiction from French and Spanish.

Habiburahman's *First They Erased Our Name: A Rohingya Speaks* recollects his personal experiences of discrimination, ethnic conflict, and forced displacement. It highlights the struggles faced by the Rohingya within Myanmar and in neighbouring countries also, where they sought refuge. Habiburahman shares his story of oppression from childhood, alongside his father's tireless efforts to provide him with an education regardless of the significant obstacles. Education was seen as a means by him to improve their circumstances. The memoir identifies 1982 as a key moment when Myanmar's dictator, U Ne Win, implemented a citizenship law excluding groups that were not recognised among the 135 official ethnic categories. This law institutionalised discrimination against minority communities which increased prejudice and hostility. Habib details on the devastating impact of this policy on Rohingya which forced many

people into statelessness and leaving countless others drifting in oceans, jungles, and highways in search of safety.

Habiburahman also narrates the prevalent prejudice he faced during his childhood as he was being subjected to slurs like *Kalar*, a derogatory term for dark-skinned ethnic groups. This early exposure to racial attacks reflects the entrenched discrimination within Burmese society. This prejudice escalated into widespread violence, displacement, and structured oppression of the Rohingya, depriving generations of dignity and basic rights. Habib narrates his life as an undocumented migrant in Bangkok in one of the chapters. He lives in constant fear with no stable place to sleep or steady means of income after escaping Myanmar. Education becomes an unattainable luxury for him and other Rohingyas. He describes joining a rebel group with the help of a professor. However, he is attacked violently by the Bangkok police after being caught. His father's business also suffers under Myanmar's restrictive policies and as a result the family becomes destitute. Nonetheless, Habiburahman found purpose in advocating for his people amidst all the struggles. He turns his resilience into sharing his story, raising awareness about the plight of the Rohingya, and demanding justice for his community. His memoir reflects his endurance and commitment to highlighting the global refugee crisis.

Sandra Uwiringiyimana is a Refugee Advocate, Women's Rights Activist, and Author. She co-founded and is the director of the Jimbere Fund which is an organisation working to rebuild communities in the Democratic Republic of Congo. Uwiringiyimana has become a prominent voice for the Banyamulenge tribe and other displaced communities, voicing out for justice following the Gatumba massacre since her family's resettlement in 2007. Uwiringiyimana has shared her story on international stages alongside notable figures such as Angelina Jolie and Tina Brown at the 'Women in the World Summit'. She has addressed the United Nations Security Council at the invitation

of Ambassador Samantha Power in which she emphasised action on the issue of children in armed conflict. Uwiringiyimana focuses her speeches on topics such as refugee policy, resettlement challenges in the U.S., the impact of armed conflict on women and children, mental health in immigrant communities, and the power of education. She continues to work with organisations that help refugees integrate into society, covering areas such as education, employment, and social life in the U.S. She uses her experiences as a board member of Refuge Point, an organisation focused on finding solutions for at-risk refugees to highlight the overlooked struggles of refugees before and after resettlement.

Abigail Pesta is an award-winning journalist who has reported from different cities like New York, London, and Hong Kong. Her investigative and feature stories have been published in leading periodicals such as *The New York Times*, *Marie Claire*, *Newsweek*, and *The Wall Street Journal*. Pesta co-authored the memoir *How Dare the Sun Rise*, which has been praised as a “gut-wrenching, poetic memoir” by *The New York Times*. The book was named among the best books of 2017 by the New York Public Library and Chicago Public Library. She is the former vice president of the Overseas Press Club of America and her work has focused on human rights issues and in-depth investigations. Her writing is published in *Dogfight* at the Pentagon, a *Wall Street Journal* anthology of front-page featured articles.

How Dare the Sun Rise: Memoirs of a War Child written by Sandra

Uwiringiyimana with Abigail Pesta, narrates Uwiringiyimana’s distressing journey from a peaceful childhood in Congo to her life as a refugee and activist. Uwiringiyimana describes her early years in Congo, where her family was part of the Banyamulenge tribe and finds a home after escaping Rwanda in 1996. Her childhood was filled with joy and a strong connection to nature until she begins to experience discrimination at the age of six. At ten, Uwiringiyimana’s life changes drastically when her family was forced out of

Congo. They face persecution, displacement, and a loss of belonging after escaping violence. They suffer a horrific night at a refugee camp in Burundi where Uwiringiyimana's younger sister Deborah, was killed during a brutal attack.

Uwiringiyimana's path to healing begins when she started speaking publicly about her experiences. Her advocacy which is grounded in her personal story has brought attention to the struggles of the Banyamulenge people and the broader challenges faced by refugees all over the world. The memoir investigates into Uwiringiyimana's resettlement in the U.S., and also highlighting the continuing difficulties faced by the refugees even after gaining the citizenship. Uwiringiyimana describes how the challenges of being a refugee continue in new forms from cultural and language barriers to racial prejudice. Her account underscores the complexities of rebuilding a life while carrying the weight of displacement and loss.

Writer-educator Sylvia Whitman has authored numerous articles and several children's history books, including a notable picture book titled *Under the Ramadan Moon*. She has a graduation in folklore and mythology, and has been drawn to proverbs, particularly the one stating, "A book is a garden carried in the pocket." Residing in Sarasota, Florida, she teaches professional and creative writing at Ringling College of Art and Design. Whitman holds master's degrees in American studies from the University of Texas and Arab studies from Georgetown University, as well as an MFA in creative writing from the University of Virginia. Her diverse career reflects her love of learning, having worked as a newspaper copy editor, academic journal editor, public relations coordinator, writing centre coordinator, teacher, and freelance writer. She cherishes the honour of sharing and helping others tell their stories. Among her accolades, Whitman's book *The Milk of Birds* was a finalist for the Amelia Walden Award for Young Adult

Fiction and received recognition from the American Library Association for its feminist content, as well as from other prestigious organisations for its global societal impact.

The Milk of Birds is an epistolary novel which focuses on the lives of internally displaced women and girls and weaving their experiences into a narrative that appeals to young adult readers. Whitman skilfully integrates creativity into the refugee crisis by creating a story that is both poignant and accessible. The novel unfolds through an exchange of letters between two teenage girls: K.C. Cannelli who is a privileged American student and Nawra who is a Sudanese refugee in a Darfur camp. Cannelli's correspondence transforms into a deep and compassionate friendship with Nawra, despite their geographical and cultural divide. Whitman illustrates the profound comfort and strength that sisterhood provides with each girl supporting the other during life's challenges. The novel emphasises the purity of their bond as they exchange love, encouragement, and shared dreams. Cannelli is moved by her correspondence and takes steps to aid Nawra's community, demonstrating how empathy can lead to an impactful action.

The novel *The Milk of Birds* depicts the harsh realities faced by women in refugee camps. Whitman vividly portrays their daily struggles from the laborious task of collecting firewood to enduring inadequate nutrition and sanitation. Refugee women are forced to walk long distances for firewood resulting in their strength dwindling due to insufficient food. Nonetheless, they persevere to secure basic necessities like water and firewood. The camps lack proper sanitation facilities and leaves women with no choice but to suffer from debasing conditions. The limited access to healthcare also worsens their struggles. Whitman's broader body of work reflects her deep commitment to social responsibility and advocacy for marginalised voices. She boldly critiques the selfishness that continues poverty in her book *World Poverty* and the book *Children of the Frontier* explores the

challenges faced by settlers in the American frontier which dispels the myth of children's literature as mere escapism. Her other works like *Immigrant Children* and *Children of the World War II Home Front*, records the resilience of young individuals amidst entrenched challenges and historical crises. Whitman consistently addresses themes of conservation, oppression, and the struggles of both children and adults across her writings.

The sexual violence endured by refugee women and girls who face attacks by the enemy and also from those entrusted with their protection in the camps is a major theme in *The Milk of Birds*. These assaults occur in helpless moments like collecting firewood which strip women of their dignity and safety. Whitman forthrightly portrays the trauma these women endure which is intensified by societal expectations to remain silent. The central character is Nawra who exemplifies this tragedy when she becomes pregnant at sixteen due to a rape. Nawra finds solace in her friend Adeeba who stands by her during childbirth despite the lack of support from her mother. When Adeeba faces similar violence later in the camp, Nawra reciprocates the care and illustrates the strength of female camaraderie during adversity.

Zoya Phan is a Burmese political activist born on October 27, 1980 who belongs to the Karen community. She currently resides in the United Kingdom and serves as the Campaign Manager for Burma Campaign UK which is a human rights organisation advocating for democracy and justice in Myanmar. Phan emerged as a vocal critic, calling for democratic reforms and urging economic sanctions by the British government and the United Nations during the country's military dictatorship. She continues to campaign against human rights violations, particularly focusing on the use of sexual violence against ethnic women by the Burmese military despite political shifts since 2011. Phan recounts her experiences as a Karen refugee and highlights the systemic oppression in Myanmar in her 2009 autobiography, *Little Daughter: A Memoir of Survival in Burma and the West*,

co-authored with Damien Lewis. The memoir aims to raise international awareness of ongoing human rights abuses, especially in eastern Myanmar. The book received critical acclaim from publications like *The Globe and Mail* and *The Independent* when it was re-titled as *Undaunted: My Struggle for Freedom and Survival in Burma* for its U.S. release in 2010. Phan's scepticism about political reforms and her advocacy for international pressure as a means to promote democracy remain as central themes in her narrative. She was named a Young Global Leader by the World Economic Forum in March 2010 in recognition of her activism.

Phan also co-founded the Phan Foundation with her siblings in memory of their parents, Padoh Mahn Sha and Nant Kyin Shwe. The foundation addresses issues of poverty, education, and cultural preservation for the Karen people, especially on supporting young grassroots activists. It supports displaced refugees and strives to protect Karen cultural heritage which is threatened by the Burmese regime's policies of ethnic cleansing. The memoir juxtaposes Phan's comfortable childhood in Karen State with the disturbing realities of displacement caused by organised violence. It provides a poignant account of her family's resilience as they fled from one hiding place to another enduring the constant threat of death. Phan underscores the role of education in her journey reminding how the family's emphasis on learning became a path to survival and eventual empowerment. She pursued her education in Thailand which ultimately earns her a degree and enables her to advocate on behalf of her people despite the challenges of war. A transformative visit to her homeland strengthened her commitment to activism even more. Phan dedicates her life to expose injustices and advocate for equity. She has remained steadfast in her mission, amplifying the voices of Karen refugees and shedding light on the human rights crisis in Myanmar despite facing persistent threats. Zoya Phan's work

extends beyond personal survival to encompass a broader fight for justice, equality, and cultural preservation for her community and other marginalised groups.

Atia Abawi is a journalist and author who is well known for her coverage of global conflicts and her advocacy for female empowerment through her writing and reporting. She is an Afghan-American born in West Germany to parents who fled Afghanistan due to the Soviet invasion and grew up in the United States. She aspired to be a journalist from a very young age which is a goal she pursued when studying at Virginia Tech where she anchored the campus television station. Her career began with local news reporting in Maryland which covered stories ranging from politics to community issues, before she joined CNN. Abawi's dedication and skill quickly advanced her career at CNN. She worked in the international desk and reported on significant events which includes Benazir Bhutto's assassination and the Iraq war. She was appointed as CNN's Afghanistan correspondent in 2008 and there she established and managed its Kabul bureau. She worked with U.S., NATO and Afghan forces to conduct interviews with prominent figures and also reported extensively on military operations for over five years. She also covered global stories such as the Gaza Flotilla attack and Aung San Suu Kyi's trial where she covertly reported from Myanmar's military regime.

Abawi joined NBC News as its Afghanistan correspondent in 2010. Her work also included the Middle East in which she covered key events such as President Obama's visit to Israel and Palestine, the Egyptian military coup and the Kenyan mall siege. Her report highlights include her commitment to uncovering stories from conflict zones and providing a voice to those affected by war. Abawi is a celebrated author whose debut novel *The Secret Sky: A Novel of Forbidden Love in Afghanistan* reflects her deep connection to Afghan culture and issues. Her second novel *A Land of Permanent*

Goodbyes delves into the Syrian refugee crisis following the harrowing journey of a teenager fleeing war. The novel received critical acclaim for its unflinching portrayal of the humanitarian crisis which was recognised as one of the best young adult books of 2018 by *Kirkus Reviews* and *Amazon*. Abawi's accomplishments have earned her numerous awards like the George Foster Peabody Award and the DuPont-Columbia Award.

A Land of Permanent Goodbyes by Atia Abawi is a moving work of fiction which explores the Syrian refugee crisis and portrays the devastating realities faced by the people fleeing war-torn regions. The novel provides a vivid depiction of the lives of Syrians who are forced to leave their homes and livelihood due to relentless bombings and violence. The story centres on Tareq who is a Syrian teenager and his younger sister Susan, as they embark on a perilous journey to escape Syria and find refuge in Europe. Tareq's life is forever changed during the summer of 2015 when a barrel bomb claims the lives of most of his family, leaving only him, his father, and Susan. The family makes the heart-wrenching decision to leave Syria and gather all available resources to fund their escape. Their journey takes them to Raqqa which is under the control of the violent Daesh regime. Tareq witnesses horrifying acts of public executions and brutal punishments there, which underscores the oppressive and inhumane conditions endured by the people. Tareq's father uses most of their funds to bribe Daesh soldiers who allow them to escape.

Tareq's father remains behind in Syria, entrusting Tareq with the responsibility of ensuring Susan's safety on their dangerous sea voyage due to financial constraints. Refugees face exorbitant fees from agents offering overcrowded, unsafe boats for the journey. Their vessel capsizes on route and forces passengers to swim for survival. However, Tareq and Susan reach the shore alive and N.G.O. volunteers on the island provide temporary relief for them. Though offered food and shelter, refugees lack opportunities for income or stability. Tareq resolves to travel to Germany in order to seek

a better future for himself and his sister despite the hardships. However, the novel also sheds light on the darker side of refugee experiences, particularly human trafficking. Refugees, lacking official records or support systems, become vulnerable targets for exploitation. Susan is kidnapped by a foreigner, and Tareq, with the help of friends, manages to rescue her.

Atia Abawi's works consistently reflect themes of resilience and hope amid adversity. Her previous novel, *The Secret Sky: A Novel of Forbidden Love in Afghanistan* published on September 2, 2014 by Philomel Books, highlights the challenges of love in a land overshadowed by violence and strict social codes. In *She Persisted: Sally Ride*, Abawi narrates the inspiring story of Sally Ride, the first American woman in space, emphasising the perseverance required to overcome societal barriers. "Abawi is known for her strong support for women's empowerment in both her reporting and writing" (Munir 1344). Through her storytelling, Abawi not only portrays suffering but also inspires readers with messages of courage, determination, and the human capacity to fight for love, freedom, and dignity. The plight of refugees, as illustrated in *A Land of Permanent Goodbyes*, is a stark reminder of the ongoing humanitarian crisis faced by millions worldwide. Tareq's journey underscores the unending struggles of displacement, assimilation, and survival. Abawi's novel leaves readers with an indelible sense of empathy for refugees and a deeper understanding of the resilience required to endure such unimaginable hardships.

Ben Rawlence is a British writer and former researcher for *Human Rights Watch* in the Horn of Africa. He has written three books which are *Radio Congo: Signals of Hope from Africa's Deadliest War* (2012), *City of Thorns: Nine Lives in the World's Largest Refugee Camp* (2016), and *The Treeline: The Last Forest and the Future of Life on Earth* (2022). Rawlence has also contributed to prominent publications such as *The Guardian*,

The New York Times, *London Review of Books*, and *Prospect*. His work reflects his commitment in global human rights and environmental issues. Rawlence's career as a researcher with *Human Rights Watch* spanned from 2006 to 2013, during which he covered countries across the Horn of Africa, including Kenya, Nigeria, Uganda, and Zanzibar.

Rawlence's role with *Human Rights Watch* allowed him to conduct extensive fieldwork across various regions in Africa from 2006 to 2013. His research focusses on issues of displacement, human rights abuses, and conflict. He worked as an adviser to Tanzania's Civic United Front, a liberal political party and as a foreign affairs adviser to the UK Liberal Democrats in Parliament. His first book *Radio Congo: Signals of Hope from Africa's Deadliest War* (2012), examines the resilience of people surviving amid the ongoing violence in the eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo. This book received appreciation for its insightful portrayal of human endurance in one of the world's most dangerous conflict zones.

Rawlence visited the Dadaab refugee camp on the Kenyan-Somali border in 2010. Dadaab was home to approximately 300,000 refugees during that time. Rawlence made seven visits to the camp between the years 2011 and 2015. His research and interviews with young Somali refugees in Dadaab led to the publication of *City of Thorns: Nine Lives in the World's Largest Refugee Camp* (2016). The book was praised by critics for its humanising portrayal of the lives of refugees and it was reviewed positively by major publications such as *The Los Angeles Times*, *The Economist*, and *The New York Times*. Rawlence paints a vivid picture of the hardships the refugees endure while shedding light on the larger global refugee crisis in *City of Thorns*.

Rawlence's work has earned him several accolades. He was recognised by the Open Society Foundations for his contributions to human rights reporting in 2013. He was

a runner-up for the Dayton Literary Peace Prize (USA) in 2016 and was shortlisted for the Kapucinski Prize (Poland) in 2017. Rawlence was also nominated for the LA Times Book Award (USA) in 2016 for *City of Thorns*. These accolades highlight his significant contributions to both literature and human rights advocacy. Rawlence currently resides in the Black Mountains of Wales where he is the founding director of Black Mountains College. The college is focused on nurturing creative and adaptive thinking in response to the urgent challenges of climate change and ecological disruption.

City of Thorns: Nine Lives in the World's Largest Refugee Camp is a poignant and a realistic portrayal of the lives of nine refugees living in Dadaab which is the world's largest refugee camp. The book chronicles the personal stories of these refugees who fled their homes and sought shelter in Dadaab which houses over 300,000 people. Rawlence's journey began in 2010 when he visited Dadaab as a researcher for *Human Rights Watch*. Rawlence's time in Dadaab which amounted to five months, enabled him to speak directly with hundreds of refugees and gain firsthand insight into their struggles. His interviews were a blend of personal narratives, rich in detail, honesty, and the harsh realities of life in the camp.

The material for the book was collected through a combination of direct observation, interviews, photographs, and videos. Rawlence also relied on reports from media, NGOs, and the UN to enrich his account. The interviews he conducted were in Swahili and English and in Somali with the aid of translators. The stories shared in the book are factual and also deeply emotional which provides a raw account of the refugees' day-to-day lives. Rawlence used the real names of most of the refugees except for two individuals who requested for their identities to be hidden.

Rawlence captures the varied experiences of the refugees and each of them face different challenges in the camp. Economic instability is a common problem for all and the

specific struggles of each refugee are unique and deeply personal. One of the refugees in the book whose main goal is to escape the camp and gain citizenship in another country, spends his days visiting the UN office and hopes for a chance to leave. His story underscores the desperation many refugees feel to escape the dire conditions of the camp. Hunger is another constant and pressing concern. Some refugees are consumed by the fear that they might not survive another day due to the scarcity of food. Rawlence illustrates these struggles with vivid detail and shows how the refugee lives are shaped by their immediate need for basic survival as well as their long-term hopes for a better future.

Rawlence's book also explores the emotional toll that displacement takes on the refugees. The inability to marry due to the crisis is also a source of great distress for the refugees. The crowded refugee camps with limited opportunities make it nearly impossible for many to form relationships. The emotional strain is even more apparent in the stories of those who are separated from their families. Rawlence documents the intense longing and heartache of those who have been forced to leave their homes without knowing whether their loved ones are still alive. This emotional journey is one of the central themes of *City of Thorns* and it shows that the refugee experience is about survival and also includes the deep psychological impact of displacement.

The book also displays the harsh realities of labour in the camp where some refugees are subjected to gruelling work with little or no compensation at all. Rawlence describes how certain refugees are forced to labour beyond what is reasonable with their bodies suffering from the physical toll of working in such harsh conditions. They work long hours for very little in return and their health deteriorates as a result of insufficient food and medical care. Rawlence highlights the stories of individuals who are caught in a cycle of poverty and exploitation where every day is a battle just to stay alive. These

labour conditions along with the scarcity of food, paint a grim picture of life in the camp where survival is a continuing struggle for many.

Rawlence also shares the story of a woman who falls in love with a worker in the camp and faces a unique set of challenges due to her pregnancy. She faces challenges as many people harbour resentment and hostility toward those in vulnerable situations. These situations are intensified by the lack of support for women and children. This woman's story is a powerful reminder of the risks that refugees, especially women face in camps. Her struggle to stay alive and protect her unborn child from the threats of violence is a stark example of the vulnerability of refugees. Rawlence's portrayal of this woman's journey is both upsetting and enlightening which shows the combined suffering refugees experience, especially those who are women or children.

Rawlence also highlights the emotional and psychological toll on refugees especially those who have been displaced for a long time. One woman constantly thinks about the farmland she left behind when she fled her home. The memories of her life before the camp are a source of pain and longing as she dreams of returning to her land. Rawlence's sensitive portrayal of this woman's emotional turmoil reveals the deep sense of loss that also comes with displacement. These personal reflections underscore the complex nature of being a refugee. They are survivors of a crisis and also individuals with histories, dreams, and memories that are lost or forgotten in the face of their struggle for survival. In *City of Thorns*, Ben Rawlence succeeds in telling the untold stories of the refugees who live in Dadaab and offers a nuanced and intimate look at their lives. He challenges the stereotypes associated with refugees and provides a humanising portrait of their daily struggles.

Sharon Bala is a Sri Lankan - Canadian writer born on April 3, 1979, in Dubai. She currently resides in St. John's, Newfoundland and Labrador. Bala's talent was recognised

when she won the prestigious Writers' Trust McClelland & Stewart Journey Prize for her short story "Butter Tea at Starbucks" in 2017. Her debut novel *The Boat People* which was published in January 2018 won the 2019 Harper Lee Prize for Legal Fiction and the 2020 Newfoundland & Labrador Book Award. The book also received recognition as a finalist for Canada Reads 2018, the 2018 Amazon Canada First Novel Award, the 2019 Margaret and John Savage First Book Award and the 2019 Thomas Raddall Atlantic Fiction Award. It was longlisted for the Aspen Words Literary Prize 2019 and the International DUBLIN Literary Award 2020. *The Boat People* has been translated into French, German, Arabic, and Turkish. Before publication, the manuscript won the Percy Janes First Novel Award in May 2015 and was shortlisted for the Fresh Fish Award in October 2015.

Apart from her novel, Sharon has earned accolades for her short stories. She won the Journey Prize in 2017 and had another story long-listed for the anthology. A three-time recipient of Newfoundland and Labrador's Arts and Letters Award, her stories have appeared in notable publications such as *Hazlitt*, *Grain*, *Maisonneuve*, *The Dalhousie Review*, *Riddle Fence*, *Room*, *Prism International*, *The New Quarterly*, and in the anthology *Racket: New Writing from Newfoundland* (Breakwater Books, Fall 2015). Sharon has also written non-fiction pieces for *Maclean's Magazine* and *The Globe & Mail*. Sharon is an active member of the Port Authority writing group, where the group meets every second Thursday to exchange fiction. Before becoming a full-time writer, Sharon worked in public relations, event planning, and even had a brief stint as a British housewife. Today, she earns her living through her writing and offers her services for speaking engagements, articles and essays, adjudicating competitions, teaching workshops, manuscript evaluations, and editorial aid. Sharon holds a BA (Honours) in Psychology and History from Queen's University and an MA in History from the

University of Toronto. She lives in St. John's, Newfoundland, with her husband, the mathematician Tom Baird.

The Boat People is a work of fiction by Sharon Bala that powerfully depicts the struggles of Sri Lankan Tamil refugees who have borne the ethnic conflict in their homeland for years. Bala explores the challenges these refugees face when they arrive in Canada, where they are confronted with prejudice and rejection. She throws light on the consequences of being perceived as unwanted in a foreign country, where refugees are often treated with suspicion and fear. The novel draws inspiration from real events, specifically the arrival of the *Ocean Lady* and the *MV Sun Sea* in British Columbia in 2009 and 2010, which carried over 550 Tamil refugees from Sri Lanka. Bala fictionalises the stories of these refugees based on news articles and reports, aiming to give voice to those who have been silenced. As she writes, "I hope that by using the words of these anonymous individuals, I have, in a small way, given their voices a microphone" (Bala 361). Through her work, Bala brings attention to the experiences of Sri Lankan Tamils, whose stories have often been ignored or overlooked.

The Sri Lankan Tamil population has faced tremendous hardship since the 1980s due to the civil war in the country, forcing many to flee. *The Boat People* portrays the fictionalised experiences of a group of Tamil refugees who make their way to Canada by boat. The central character, Mahindan, escapes Sri Lanka with his son, Sellian, after the war takes the life of his wife. The novel explores the emotional toll of being a refugee, particularly the pain caused by the prejudice refugees face in their host country. One of the novel's most tragic moments occurs when Ranga, another refugee, is wrongly accused of being an LTTE member and ultimately takes his own life. The refugees are placed in an asylum, which resembles a prison, where they are treated as potential threats despite being survivors of violence and persecution. This highlights the devastating effects of being

labelled as 'other' and the trauma refugees face when treated as enemies, rather than victims. Mahindan's separation from his son is a major source of pain, but he later finds some peace knowing that Sellian has been adopted by a kind Canadian family.

The novel emphasises the harsh reality that once someone becomes a refugee they will continue to suffer the consequences of being stateless and unwanted, even in the country that has given them shelter. The Sri Lankan refugees in Canada are seen as a group of terrorists, even though they have escaped the violence and oppression that their label represents. This misunderstanding adds to the refugees' suffering as they are treated as criminals in the very place that offered them refuge. Ranga's tragic death in the asylum represents the unbearable burden of this false perception because, he succumbs to despair after being wrongly targeted and mistreated. In contrast, Mahindan remains hopeful, even in the face of overwhelming odds. The novel highlights the psychological toll of being treated as an outsider and the constant fear of being misunderstood. Only a few people speak on behalf of the refugees in the court system and their efforts seem futile which leaves the refugees to navigate their painful existence with little support. Over time, they lose their self-respect, becoming consumed by hopelessness. The novel ends abruptly by leaving Mahindan's future uncertain, but his enduring hope serves as a powerful reminder of resilience in the face of hardship.

Review of Literature

All the selected primary sources cover the plight of refugees resulting from ethnic clashes in the regions of Myanmar, Sudan, Syria, and Sri Lanka. The narratives explore the refugee crisis with a primary focus on identifying the initial point at which individuals are forced to flee due to ethnic hatred in their regions. Through this, the narratives highlight the fact that wrongful power politics and widespread hatred lead to the death and forced displacement of millions of refugees around the world. In the scholarly review of

literature, the thesis aims to discuss various research works on the primary sources as well as refugee narratives in general. It also cites facts published in newspaper articles, which serve as justifications for the powerful statements made in the works of literature. The review of literature attempts to explain the need for refugee storytelling and refugee studies in the field of literature and elaborates on the different perspectives presented in the narratives.

As the select primary sources are mostly recent publications, remain less explored by researchers. However, the available research articles, newspaper articles and interviews are of clear insights and distinct perspectives. Lindsey Viets, in her research article published in *Kansas English* in June 2021, titled “From Tribal War to Colour War: A Message of Survival and Belonging in *How Dare the Sun Rise*,” explores Sandra Uwiringiyimana’s memoir. Viets focuses on the ethnic hatred that led to the violence at the Darfur refugee camp and discusses how Sandra’s journey—from a refugee to a celebrated youth activist—has made her an inspiring figure for students. Madelyn Muschek, a staff writer for *The Daily Beacon*, the independent student newspaper of the University of Tennessee, covered Sandra Uwiringiyimana’s speech in her article titled “Author and Activist Sandra Uwiringiyimana Shares Refugee Experience, Educates Audience,” published in November 2020. Muschek, who later became the city news editor in 2021–22, captures the heart of Uwiringiyimana’s speech. She highlights how Sandra connected her refugee experience to the struggles of Black Americans facing discrimination. Muschek also points out powerful moments from the speech, like Sandra’s reflection that her new home wanted her to adapt but didn’t care where she came from. Another key message Sandra shared—and Muschek emphasized—is the role of education as a vital force for change in an unequal world of discrepancies.

Amarachi Nwosu, a Nigerian-American writer, in her article titled “NextGen: Congolese Author Sandra Uwiringiyimana Writes to Keep the African Spirit Alive,” published in *OkayAfrica* in October 2017, focuses on the concept of Afrofuturism in Uwiringiyimana’s speech and writing. She explains how Uwiringiyimana views Afrofuturism as a vital tool for spreading her message. Uwiringiyimana believes it provides a sense of representation for African children and youth in all areas of society. Nwosu emphasizes that this sense of representation helps young Africans feel valued and validated. She also highlights Uwiringiyimana’s strong belief that it is the responsibility of Africans to keep the African spirit alive and to safeguard their identity. In the article titled “Refugee Author Tells Students, ‘It Is the Story of Your Community,’” published in *School News Network* in November 2023, Erin Albanese describes how many people resonated with Uwiringiyimana’s experiences. She notes that students, as part of their multicultural literature class, not only discussed Uwiringiyimana’s book but also promoted it through various activities.

WBUR, Boston’s National Public Radio news station, published an article titled “U.N., U.S. Resettling 50,000 Congolese Refugees.” The article highlights that the majority of resettled refugees come from Iraq, South Sudan, Syria, Nigeria, and the Democratic Republic of the Congo. It also mentions Sandra Uwiringiyimana and her family, who were resettled in the United States with the help of Sasha Chanoff, co-founder and executive director of RefugePoint, who led the rescue proposal for survivors of the Darfur camp massacre. The article honours the efforts of the United Nations refugee agency in finding homes for displaced individuals around the world. Nick Mew, in his review article “*Little Daughter: A Memoir of Survival in Burma and the West* by Zoya Phan,” published in *The Telegraph* on June 3, 2009, reflects on the memoir’s portrayal of both tragedy and hope. He emphasises how the plight of the Karen people remains dire

and notes their resilience amidst ongoing struggles. In the article “Language of the Oppressed: Boon of Nature and Curse of Humans in the Life of a Refugee,” published in *Language, Discourse & Society* in 2021, N. Lavanya and M. Anjum Khan explore the language restrictions and other forms of oppression faced by the Karen community in Myanmar. The article stresses the voicelessness experienced by refugees and calls for breaking this silence to achieve true freedom and equality.

Justin Wintle, in his review article “*Little Daughter*,” published in *the Financial Times* under the Life and Arts section in April 2009, discusses not only the Karen community but also the struggles of other minority groups in Myanmar. He points out how the dangers of war creep too close to innocent childhoods and highlights the issues in Burma’s demography that complicate its path to democracy, drawing from Phan’s memoir. Peter Sagar, in an interview with Zoya Phan published in *North East Bylines* in December 2024, shares Phan’s dream of returning to Burma to live peacefully with her relatives. In the interview, she also expresses her hope to contribute to the country by developing schools, hospitals, and working on climate change issues. Amy Weil, in her interview “Undaunted: An Interview with Zoya Phan,” published in *Voices* by Open Society Foundations, discusses how Phan hopes her book will inspire people and governments to advocate for human rights in Myanmar. Phan also notes that her book is banned in Myanmar, but a few who managed to read it shared that it gave them hope.

Ipsita Chakrabarty and Agnidepto Datta’s article “The Silencing and Ostracization of Rohingyas: A Study of Habiburahman’s Memoir *First, They Erased Our Name: A Rohingya Speaks*” (2022), published in *New Literaria: An International Journal of Interdisciplinary Studies in Humanities*, explores how minority groups, especially the Rohingyas, face discrimination and violence, as illustrated in Habiburahman’s memoir. The article sheds light on the entrenched oppression of the Rohingyas, focusing on racial

and ethnic discrimination. Shriya Malhotra, in her review titled “Column: Lives Lived,” published in *The Daak* on 20 July 2024, discusses how the memoir helps readers understand the socio-political and historical context of Myanmar. She reflects on how Habiburrahman grows up despising his appearance, as his identity is considered offensive by the regime.

Alok Lamsal, in his article “The Politics of Displacement of Refugees in Habiburrahman’s Novel *First, They Erased Our Name: A Rohingya Speaks*” (2023), published in *Bon Voyage: A Peer-Reviewed Journal of English Studies*, brings a theoretical perspective to the book, using Beverly Crawford’s concept that refugees live three lives. He highlights the importance of theory in not only analysing the struggles of forced displacement but also in offering potential solutions for refugees’ challenges.

Khum Prasad Sharma, in the article “The Rohingya Crisis: A Cross-Border Analysis of Habiburrahman’s *First, They Erased Our Name*” (2024), published in *The Rohingya Crisis*, examines the text through the lens of Foucault’s ideas on power dynamics and biopolitics, Homi K. Bhabha’s theories of hybridity and resistance, and Agamben’s work in relation to Arendt’s concept of the ‘right to have rights.’

Gay Alcorn’s interview with Habiburrahman, published in *The Guardian* on 4th August 2019 under the title “The Land Where We Lived Has Gone: The Life Story of a Rohingya Refugee,” shares Habiburrahman’s reasons for writing his memoir. He explains that his community has faced social injustices for generations without any recognition or reporting. He asks a poignant question: why is he targeted for simply being who he is, and why isn’t there a way for him and his people to coexist and find peace in their homeland? In a news article published by Sudipta Datta in *The Hindu* on 19th September 2022, titled “Borders and Belonging for Those Without a Home,” Datta explores how the works of writers and artists have become vital in times of aggressive nationalism and the reassertion

of borders. The article along with Habiburrahman's work, also highlights powerful works by Palestinian writers, including *Palestinian Walks* (2007) and *Strangers in the House* (2002).

Martha J. Payne, in her article "*The Milk of Birds: A Proverbial Phrase, Ancient and Modern, and its Link to Nature,*" published in the *Athens Journal of Philology* on 30th May 2017, examines ancient languages like Greek to interpret the meaning of the proverb. She finds that "the general meaning refers first to someone who possesses an abundance of items, often rare or impossible" (98). Payne connects this interpretation to the novel *Milk of Birds* by Sylvia Whitman. Elizabeth Bush, in her review of the fiction published on *Project Muse* in May 2013, discusses how the plight of internally displaced people in the book will be eye-opening for many readers. She highlights the importance of having a sympathetic listener in the process of resilience and notes the significant focus on Darfur and its internally displaced persons.

The review article by Ian Birrell, published in *The Guardian* on 8 February 2016 and titled "*City of Thorns: Nine Lives in the World's Largest Refugee Camp* Review – Stories That Need to Be Heard," praises Ben Rawlence's portrayal of life in the Dadaab refugee camp in Kenya. Birrell notes that "Dadaab" means "the rocky, hard place," a fitting description for its residents who, fleeing civil war and religious extremism, find themselves trapped and often crushed in a lawless environment. The reviewer highlights the importance of such non-fiction works, stating that these are stories that demand to be heard. Neil James Wilson's review of Rawlence's book, published in the *Journal of Refugee Studies* by *Oxford Academic* in March 2019, discusses how Dadaab was once labelled the 'Nursery of Terrors.' Wilson points out Rawlence's observation that everything in the camp was either 'donated by,' 'provided by,' or 'funded by' external

sources, an aspect that, rather than alleviating their suffering, often intensified the refugees' sense of helplessness.

Jason Woods, in his review of *City of Thorns* for *HEIFER International*, discusses the book in detail and also references other notable works on refugee studies, such as *What is the What* by Dave Eggers, *Persepolis* by Marjane Satrapi, and *The Kite Runner* by Khaled Hosseini. He notes how *City of Thorns* provides readers with a personal context, making future news about refugee crises resonate more deeply after engaging with the book. Min Prasad Sharma, in his article titled "Unveiling the Humanitarian Crisis: Analysing *A Land of Permanent Goodbyes*," published in April 2023 on ResearchGate, presents a comprehensive analysis of Atia Abawi's *A Land of Permanent Goodbyes*. He elaborates on the refugee crisis in terms of humanism, trauma, and socio-politics, while also addressing the limitations of the novel, particularly its failure to fully incorporate the broader socio-political conflicts that led to the Syrian war and the mistreatment of refugees. Kate Quealy-Gainer's review of the novel, published in *Project Muse* in 2018, highlights the terrorising journey to Daesh depicted in the book. She specifies that the brutal experience of Tareq serves as a powerful voice for the countless others enduring similar suffering in Syria.

Pradip Sharma's article titled "The Politics of 'Bare Life' in Sharon Bala's *The Boat People: A Biopolitical Perspective*" published in the journal *SCHOLARS: Journal of Arts & Humanities* in the year 2020, is a biopolitical analysis which is supported by the theoretical concepts of Michelle Foucault. It details on the 'inclusive-exclusion' state of refugees on reaching Canada and being treated as terrorists. Ginger, Ching-chih Wang's article titled "The Empire Rows Back: The Postcolonial Utopia in Sharon Bala's *the Boat People*" published in the year 2023, focuses on the traumatic memory and the representation of extremism described in *The Boat People*. It also explores the book with

reference to the concept of postcolonial utopianism. Ajith K, in his article titled “Pain of departure and the cost of arrival: refugee lives in Sharon Bala’s boat people” published in *International Journal of Multidisciplinary Educational Research* on July 2022, explores the social, political, psychological and cultural issues related to refugeehood. It addresses the refugee crisis in the view of possibility of movement and the necessity of stability. To strengthen the thesis and justify the observations and findings, general articles on refugee narratives and their major problems mentioned in the select sources, are explored as follows.

Veronika Danielová, in her article “Darfur Crisis of 2003: Analysis of the Darfur Conflict from the Times of First Clashes to the Present Day,” published in *Ethnologia Actualis* in June 2014, explores the ethnic hatred that led to genocide in refugee camps and examines the ongoing aftermath. Her analysis aligns closely with the historical backdrop presented in Uwiringiyimana’s memoir. Similarly, Nadia Lahdili’s article “Darfur Conflict: The Role of International Intervention in Conflict Resolution,” published in December 2016, discusses the economic, social, political, cultural, and environmental changes following the Darfur genocide. Joanna Weschler’s article “UN Response to the Darfur Crisis,” published by *FRIDE* in March 2010, focuses on the United Nations’ evolving policies in response to the crisis, noting that at least half a million civilians have died and over two million remain displaced.

Helen Young and Abdal Monim Osman, in their article “Challenges to Peace and Recovery in Darfur: A Situation Analysis of the Ongoing Conflict and its Continuing Impact on Livelihoods,” published by the Feinstein International Centre in September 2015, discuss the Darfur Joint Assessment Mission (DJAM) and Early Recovery Plan launched in June 2006. Their study highlights the conditions of livelihoods after the crisis and promotes sustainable approaches to peace and recovery in Darfur. James Traub, in his

article titled “Unwilling and Unable: The Failed Response to the Atrocities in Darfur,” published by the *Global Centre for the Responsibility to Protect* in 2010, examines and reports the conflict that erupted in 2003 and critiques the international community’s failure to end the atrocities. Zoya Phan and Phyllis Ferguson, in their article “Sexual Violence in Modern Myanmar,” published by the *Oxford Human Rights Hub* on June 5, 2014, highlight how the Burmese government continues to deny the existence of sexual violence, stressing the urgent need for international investigations to protect citizens. They close with the hope that despite the complexity, nonviolence will be achieved someday.

Rebecca L. Thomas and Fizza Saghir have published an article titled “Conflict-Affected Karen Refugees from Myanmar: Reflections on their Resettlement in Hartford” in the 2024 International Consortium for Social Development. The article focuses on the human rights violations in Myanmar, which led to the displacement of many minorities, including the Karen refugees. The qualitative research serves as a guide for NGOs, social workers, and mental health professionals to understand the problems faced by the Karen refugees from a social and cultural perspective. “A Dream Best Forgotten: The Phenomenology of Karen Refugees’ Pre-Resettlement Stressors” is an article published in 2015 by Theodore T. Bartholomew, Brittany E. Gundel, and Neeta Kantamneni at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln. The article is divided into four major themes: (a) Loss from Oppression, (b) Resignation and Acceptance in a Context of Regular Violence, (c) Ongoing Insecurity While Confined in Camps, and (d) Redefined Selfhood, aiming to understand the resettlement lives of Karen refugees.

Sang Kook Lee, in his article titled “Scattered but Connected: Karen Refugees’ Networking in and beyond the Thailand-Burma Borderland,” published in the *Asian and Pacific Migration Journal* in June 2012, focuses on how Karen refugees are interconnected with others in camps across the border. This approach gives importance to

the mobility of refugees to better understand their lives. Daniel J. Gilhooly in the article titled “Lessons Learned: Insights into One Teacher’s Experience Working with Karen Refugee Students in the United States” in the *Journal of Southeast Asian American Education and Advancement* in January 2015. The article specifies the results of a Participatory Action Research study conducted with Karen students and discusses the wide range of resettlement problems they face. The researcher advocates for culturally responsive teaching to benefit the refugees.

Ragui Assaad, Caroline Krafft, and Jackline Wahba, in their article titled “The Lives and Livelihoods of the Displaced in Sudan: Internally Displaced Persons and Refugees,” published in June 2024 in the journal *Gender, Growth and Labour Markets in Low-Income Countries Programme*, focus on the education, health, and food security outcomes of internally displaced people. Their quantitative study concludes by emphasising the need to support displaced populations both through camp-based assistance and through policies that facilitate their transition out of camps. Dirar Adam Dirar, in his analytical study titled “Challenges of Displaced Persons in Political Participation,” published in April 2022, examines obstacles faced by displaced individuals, such as the lack of supporting documents and identity papers, low electoral awareness and education, the absence of election campaigns in displacement camps, issues caused by demographic changes, and the lack of security, including threats and intimidation. His detailed analysis also offers a series of recommendations to the Sudanese government on behalf of internally displaced persons.

Mirjana Morokvasic’s article titled “Migration and Gender” in the same book specifies the fact that the women have outnumbered men in migration from the 1930s. It also mentions the brutal truth that political engagements across borders and citizenship of migrants are just contemporary realities. Jérôme Elie’s article titled “Histories of Refugee

and Forced Migration Studies,” published in *the Oxford Handbook of Refugee & Forced Migration Studies* in 2014, provides a historiography of refugees and forced migration. The article addresses the lack of historical representation by researchers in refugee studies and outlines the benefits and importance of including history in the analysis of refugees. There are a number of other articles edited in the same book that are of high relevance and importance to refugee studies. Guy S. Goodwin-Gill’s article titled “The International Law of Refugee Protection” details the international law of refugee protection and other laws that are important in preserving the legislative rights of refugees. The article clearly amplifies the fact that refugee rights are interconnected with the judicial and administrative procedures of the countries in which they seek refuge.

Nisbet’s review article titled “Food Security Interventions among Refugees around the Globe: A Scoping Review” published in the journal *Nutrients* in January 2022, specifies that out of the 26 million refugees around the world, 80 percent of them face the problem of food insecurity, irrespective of their location. The research notes:

Efforts are necessary to work with governments to affect policy change to advocate for the rights of marginalized populations such as children, seniors, women, LGBTQIA2S+, persons with disabilities, and minority groups. It is also vital to engage host communities and NGOs to create a welcoming culture that benefits both refugees and host communities. Finally, researchers should adopt a standard feasible food security assessment tool which is needed to assess the effectiveness of interventions across locations and countries to develop best practices based on comparative results. (39)

The article titled “Bringing Care In: The Meaning of Care in Refugee Solidarity Movements,” by Chiara Martini in the *Journal of Refugee Studies* in 2024, details the

aspect of ‘care’ by specifying the help rendered by groups of people functioning as refugee solidarity activists. The article aims for a society in which freedom of movement and health rights are granted to all. The article titled “The ‘Inherent Vulnerability’ of Women on the Move: A Gendered Analysis of Morocco’s Migration Reform,” published in the same journal by Kelsey P. Norman, tries to answer the question of what the implications are of women migrants’ assumed vulnerability and fragility, with reference to in-person interviews and analysis of policy documents. Hasan’s article titled “Implications of Refugee Crisis on Public Sector Healthcare Organisations: Empirical Observation from Myanmar’s Rohingya Refugees in Bangladesh” in the same journal, details the challenges to nation states and public sector entities with regard to the refugee crisis. The help rendered by WHO, UNHCR, NGOs, and a few other notable organisations is recorded in the article.

Vaghri’s article titled “Refugee and Asylum-Seeking Children: Interrupted Child Development and Unfulfilled Child Rights,” published in the journal *Children* in 2019, highlights the negativity of stress endured by asylum-seeking refugee children. It specifies:

Pediatricians, educators, social workers, and professionals working for and/or with refugee and asylum-seeking children are best equipped to advocate for their rights. Action in this domain is two-fold: to ensure that services are conducted in a culturally safe and sensitive manner, and to ensure that the voices of these vulnerable populations are heard. By careful monitoring, reporting, and advocating for the needs of children on the move, care providers can provide a stronger voice to this often-silenced population. By partaking in discussions, joining advocacy groups, and creating safe spaces for newly resettled families, care providers have the ability to influence decision-makers and the general population. (12)

Lee's article titled "Media influence on humanitarian interventions: analysis of the Rohingya refugee crisis and international media coverage" published in the *Journal of International Humanitarian Action* in 2021, details on how the ethnic problems in Myanmar intensified with the violence and acts of inhumanities committed by the Myanmar army. It postulates the violence as the reason for increased refugee population of the Rohingyas. The research article titled "Refugees and (Im)Migrants: (Re)Conceptualizing and (Re)Contextualizing Migration in the Media" by Boris Mance published in the *Journal of Immigrant & Refugee Studies* in 2024, analyses the media coverage of migrants and refugees from five select countries from the year 2015 to 2022. It specifies that the media fails in clear conceptualisation of the crisis by generalising the terms migrants and refugees.

Fawzia G. Rehejeh's article titled "To come or not to come" published in *Saeculum* in 2020, examines the media discourse regarding the issue of immigration with regard to refugee crisis in the European Union. It also lays down the different opinions existing in the media rhetoric towards the immigrants. McIntyre's article titled "Refugee education: a critical visual analysis" published in the *International Journal of Inclusive Education*, postulates the need for inclusivity in terms of refugee education. The article points out that the refugees' sustainable development goals should include equity and social justice agendas. Tsiaousi's article titled "Teacher voices on teaching students with a refugee background in Greece" published in the *International Journal of Educational Research* records the teachers' experiences and views on teaching students with a refugee background in Greek Public Schools. The research recommends improvements in the Greek education system for inclusive education of refugees.

Cameron's article titled "Reflections on Refugee Studies and the Study of Refugees: Implications for Policy Analysts" published in the *Journal of Management &*

Public Policy focusses on analysing refugee studies as a field of academic inquiry. The article recommends that researchers should concentrate on the problems of asylum seekers as a conceptually distinct group of individuals. The article recommends: Refugee and forced migration scholars ought to consider looking more closely at the experiences of asylum seekers as a conceptually distinct group of individuals. Their phenomenological experience as well as legal rational rights as recognized by the State are radically different than that of other groups of people. It is also through studying this group that we can learn more about the State and its core functions, and through this analysis in a critical discussion, learn more about macro-level social-political phenomenon as they affect migration and ultimately human civilisation.

Skran's article titled "The study of refugees before Refugee Studies" published in the *Refugee Survey Quarterly* traces the emergence of refugee studies over the period of 1920 to 1980. It tries to find answers and solutions for the crisis with the assumption that refugees constitute a complex phenomenon worthy of attention and analysis. Collyer's article titled "Social Assistance and Forced Displacement: A New Solution to an Old Problem?" published in *Refuge*, details on how social protection can be used as a means to tackle poverty. The article further details on the importance of social protection and also specifies that the term should be used carefully with the right meaning.

Fincham's article titled "Identity Politics and Syrian refugees in Lebanon" published in *The University of Chicago Press Journals*, details on how the identity politics play a major role in the lives of the Syrian refugees. The article argues that lack of humanitarian aspects plays a major role in intensifying the power politics and existing inequalities in the lives of different refugees. Mijić's article titled "(Re-)Construction of Identity and Belonging after Forced Migration: A Sociology of Knowledge Approach" uses a sociological perspective to analyse how former Bosnian refugees in Austria have

integrated the experiences of ethicised war and forced migration into their lives over the past three decades. It further explains:

it is to be expected that societal structures, as well as common (national) narratives concerning immigration and the perception of immigrants within a nation-state, likely have significant effects on immigrant identity construction. Therefore, further research should also aim to clarify in greater detail if there are significant differences in how biographical identities evolve within historically distinct immigration settings. Doing so will further illuminate the relationship between society and individual, or structure and agency, respectively. (1122)

Selective chapters from books that explore the refugee issues all around the world are closely read and noted for the literature review. Paula Brauer's chapter titled "The Refugee Camp Between Displacement and Emplacement in Ben Rawlence's *City of Thorns*," published in January 2024 in the book *Displacement, Emplacement, and Migration: An Interdisciplinary Collection of Essays*, explores the relationship between displacement, emplacement, and migration. It identifies Rawlence as a writer who has contributed significantly to identity politics for individuals and groups within the current migration studies landscape. While this is a book chapter that explores on a select source, there are other chapters on general refugee crisis that are very crucial in analysing the refugee problems in the society.

Karen O'Reilly's chapter titled "Migration Theories: A Critical Overview" published in the *Routledge Handbook of Immigration and Refugee Studies* in 2016, details on the theoretical aspects that would be appropriate and beneficial by analysing with refugee narratives. The mentioned social science theories in the article, raise questions of identity, belonging, location, resources, social cohesion and social divisiveness. Mathias

Czaika and Hein de Haas's chapter in the same book titled "Evaluating migration policy effectiveness" compares and contrasts the difference of opinions of other researchers regarding the migration policies in restricting the migrants. The article concludes that migration policies should be designed with a long-term perspective, considering the fact that the crisis has been a long-term process of structural changes.

Costello's chapter titled "Introducing International Refugee Law as a Scholarly Field," published in the book *The Oxford Handbook of International Refugee Law* in 2021, analyses the existing refugee law and details the hindrances faced by refugees in meeting legal requirements. It highlights the difference between refugee rights and realities and specifies how administrative bodies often avoid putting the laws into practice. The chapters detail how the authors not only stop with analysis but also propose durable solutions. "Exploring both the historical development of resettlement and its regulation (in soft law and institutional practice), they conclude that it 'portrays sovereignty in its most flattering light' and is often invoked to downplay legal obligations and asylum. Laws could be created to enact 'relationships of dignity and respect between refugees and agents of power', but they are currently lacking" (16). The chapter specifies how the book focuses on deriving permanent solutions for the refugee crisis by using law and order as a tool towards their betterment.

Volkan's Chapter titled "Prejudice on a psychoanalytic couch" from the book *Immigrants and Refugees: Trauma, Perennial Mourning, Prejudice, and Border Psychology*, published in the year 2017, elaborates on the aspects of large-group prejudices that the people hold over the refugees. It is specified that the large-group prejudices can also be benign, hostile, or malignant (79). The chapter details on how the refugees are seen with prejudiced ideas of the society and explains how the large group prejudices affect the refugees with a greater impact than the individual prejudices. The

chapter titled “Border psychology and fear of newcomers” in the same book examines the refugees as the ‘other’ who pass through border and live in a place surrounded by host people. This chapter again details on the group prejudices existing in the host countries, which infuse fear of identity and belonging in the refugees. There are also a few theses on refugee studies, which of high importance for better understanding and exploration of basic refugee struggles all around the world.

Gita Basu’s thesis titled “Causes of Backwardness in Refugee Children: A Comparative Study” (1976) focuses on the psychological aspects of the refugee problem. It is a comprehensive psychological study in which the personalities of refugees belonging to various age groups are analysed. The thesis highlights that the poor social and economic conditions impact the intellectual capacity of Tibetan and East Pakistani refugees. Kajori Bhatnagar’s thesis titled “Concept of Effective Protection in International Refugee Law with Special Reference to Politics of Gatekeeping,” published in 2019 under the Department of Law, explores the origin of the term ‘the boat people,’ which emerged when refugees travelled by sea after the Vietnam War. The thesis notes, “To treat the immediate issues of refugees, states need to collaborate fully at the international level as well as have well-formulated national legislations so that basic rights of refugees are not violated” (25). It seeks solutions to the refugee crisis by suggesting greater flexibility in legislative laws to better protect vulnerable refugees.

Murugavalli S’s thesis titled “Refugees Programs in Tamilnadu with Special Reference to Burma and Ceylon Refugees” published in the year 2017 explores on the historical aspects of the Burma and Ceylon refugees. It gives details on the Indian emigration to Burma and also provides a geographical understanding of how the refugees resettled. The thesis promotes peace and hopes for a friendly relationship with the neighbouring countries for the betterment of the situation of the crisis. Aakriti’s thesis

titled “Protection of refugees rights in India A study of international conventions And judicial trends” published in 2022, elaborates on the fear of persecution existing amidst the refugees. It also details on the refugee policies and the problems of the policies changing with the change of government. It emphasizes on the enactment of specific legislation for better management of refugees by the government.

Bharti, Prem Nath’s thesis titled “Protection of Refugees under International Law Issues and Prospects” published in the year 2024, details on the nature and different dimensions of international refugee problems. It also specifies the importance of strengthening UNHCR and other organisations for the betterment of refugees. Kumar Akilesh’s thesis titled “Human Rights Law and Policy on Refugees A Critical Study” specifies how the concept of nationality acts as a vital link between an individual and the nation and how the refugees are deprived of this necessity. It emphasises on the understanding of the refugee law and better modifications in the humanitarian aspect for the benefits of the refugees. It is generally observed in the review of theses that, Indian researchers have explored much on the Tibetan refugees and resettlement process in India.

Research Gap

The review of literature observes that while there are prominent studies on refugees in the fields of Sociology, Political Science, and Anthropology, more recent research has increasingly emerged in the areas of Law, Healthcare, Economics, Environmental Science, and Literature. However, a clear theoretical gap is identified: there is limited exploration of the concept of agency within refugee narratives in existing refugee studies. A geographical gap is also evident, with a lack of comparative analyses addressing refugee agency across diverse regions such as Syria, Sudan, Myanmar, and Sri Lanka. Furthermore, a narrative gap is noted, as there is minimal focus on synthesising the shared crises of refugee agency across different cultural and political contexts. This thesis

aims to bridge these identified gaps by offering a holistic perspective that unifies theoretical insights and regional case studies within a single, comprehensive analysis.

Thesis Statement

Amid the escalating global refugee crises, refugeehood remains a profound challenge, stripping individuals of their political, social, cultural, economic, legal, and bodily agency. This study critically examines the erosion of these forms of agency and explores refugees' resilience, not through the assertion of autonomy, but through their ongoing struggle for survival in the face of systemic and enduring adversity.

Objectives

1. To explore the concept of refugeehood, its historical and contemporary significance, and the characteristics of refugee narratives, including a brief survey of contemporary refugee narratives.
2. To examine the loss of political, social, cultural, economic, and legal agency experienced by refugees, applying Hannah Arendt's concept of statelessness and the 'right to have rights'
3. To analyse the loss of bodily agency among refugees, using Arendt's idea of the 'banality of evil' to understand the corporal impact of displacement.
4. To investigate the resilience of refugee agency through survival, applying Arendt's concept of plurality to explore how refugees persist and navigate adversity within diverse social contexts.

Research Parameters for the Study

This study will engage with a diverse array of refugee narratives, drawing on both contemporary memoirs and fictional accounts to offer a nuanced exploration of the refugee experience. The geographical focus of the research spans across several regions

impacted by displacement, including Syria, Horn of Africa especially Sudan, Congo, Sri Lanka, Myanmar (Rohingya), and the Karen region. These locations were selected to provide a broad and representative overview of forced migration, encompassing a variety of causes such as conflict, political persecution, ethnic violence, and civil war. The works chosen for analysis are those that offer intimate, first-person insights, as well as creative representations of displacement, providing a balanced mix of lived experiences and symbolic narratives.

Primary Texts

The core texts under examination include *A Land of Permanent Goodbyes* by Atia Abawi, *The Boat People* by Sharon Bala, *First, They Erased Our Name: A Rohingya Speaks* by Habiburrahman written with Sophie Ansel, *Little Daughter: A Memoir of Survival in Burma and the West* by Zoya Phan written with Damien Lewis, *City of Thorns: Nine Lives in the World's Largest refugee Camp* by Ben Rawlence, *How Dare the Sun Rise: Memoirs of a War Child* by Sandra Uwiringiyimana written with Abigail Pesta, and *The Milk of Birds* by Sylvia Whitman as the primary texts. This selection includes a combination of memoirs, biographies, and works of fiction, each contributing a unique perspective on the refugee experience. Memoirs and biographies offer deeply personal, first-hand accounts, giving voice to individuals whose stories of loss and survival shed light on the political and social dynamics of forced migration. Fiction, on the other hand, serves to extend the lived experiences into the realm of imagination, where broader themes of identity, resilience, and survival can be explored symbolically and metaphorically. By integrating both genres, this study hopes to reflect the complexity of the refugee experience, balancing factual narration with the emotional and psychological depth provided by creative literature.

The theoretical framework for this research will be anchored in the works of Hannah Arendt, particularly her concepts of statelessness and the right to have rights in her work *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (1951), and the banality of evil in her work *Eichmann in Jerusalem: A Report on the Banality of Evil* (1963). These concepts provide a crucial lens through which to understand the loss of agency that refugees experience in their displacement. Arendt's idea of 'plurality', elaborated in her work, *The Human condition* (1958), will be used to analyse the forms of resilience refugees exhibit, even as they are subjected to systemic violence and exclusion.

Methodology

Methodologically, the research will employ a qualitative approach, with an emphasis on close textual analysis of the selected narratives. This analysis will seek to uncover how themes of agency and resilience are represented in the texts, paying particular attention to how the loss of political, social, cultural, and bodily agency is portrayed. Further, the research will explore how resilience is depicted as a form of agency, particularly in the face of dehumanisation and statelessness. A thematic analysis will be employed to identify recurring motifs, characters, and symbolic structures that reflect the lived realities of refugees, while also drawing upon secondary literature to contextualise the findings. All sources will be documented according to the *MLA Handbook (9th Edition)*, ensuring proper citation and adherence to scholarly standards.

Limitations

The study acknowledges certain limitations, including the selection of a limited number of texts that may not fully capture the diversity of refugee experiences across the globe. Moreover, since the primary texts include translations, there may be inherent challenges in fully preserving the nuance of the original narratives. However, these works

were chosen not only for their relevance but also for their compelling depictions of the refugee experience, offering rich insights into the resilience and survival of displaced individuals.

In terms of expected outcomes, this research aims to contribute to the ongoing conversation within refugee studies and literary scholarship by offering an in-depth exploration of how agency is lost, experienced, and reclaimed in the refugee condition. By focusing on the intersections of narrative, memory, and identity, the study seeks to bring forward a more complex understanding of resilience as a form of agency in the face of displacement and systemic violence. Furthermore, it aims to provide new interpretations of Arendt's theories, situating them within the contemporary refugee crisis and expanding the theoretical framework for understanding displacement in the modern world.

Key Terms

This thesis engages with several key terms that are central to understanding the arguments and analyses presented. Concepts such as statelessness, agency, resilience, plurality, the right to have rights, banality of evil, trafficking, narrative agency, asylum seeker, internally displaced person (IDP), alien, non-refoulement, invisibility, ghosting, and displacement are employed throughout the study. These terms are explained below to provide clarity and contextual grounding for the research.

1. Statelessness – The condition of being without nationality or citizenship, often leading to a lack of legal rights and protections.
2. Agency – The capacity of individuals or groups to act independently, make choices, and exert power over their circumstances.
3. Resilience – The ability to adapt, recover, or persist in the face of adversity or trauma, particularly in the context of displacement.

4. Plurality – A concept from Arendt that refers to the existence of diverse perspectives within a community, and the importance of recognising and respecting this diversity.
5. The Right to Have Rights – Arendt’s notion that individuals have the fundamental right to belong to a political community and have access to basic rights.
6. Banality of Evil – Arendt’s idea that ordinary individuals can commit harmful acts through thoughtless obedience to authority or bureaucracy, without a sense of moral wrongdoing.
7. Trafficking – The illegal trade or movement of people, often for forced labour or sexual exploitation.
8. Narrative Agency – The ability of individuals or groups to shape and control the narrative of their own lives, especially for marginalised populations.
9. Asylum Seeker – A person who has fled their own country and is seeking protection in another country, but whose application for refugee status has not yet been decided.
10. Internally Displaced Person (IDP) – A person who has been forced to flee their home but remains within the borders of their own country, unlike refugees who cross international borders.
11. Alien – A term used to describe someone who is not a citizen or national of the country in which they are residing. In some contexts, it can carry a legal, rather than a social, meaning.
12. Non-refoulement – A principle of international law that prohibits the forced return of refugees or asylum seekers to a country where they are at risk of persecution, torture, or inhumane treatment.

13. Invisibility – The condition in which refugees or displaced individuals are overlooked, ignored, or made unseen within social, political, and legal systems.
14. Ghosting – A metaphorical term describing how refugees’ presence and identities can be erased or rendered invisible by bureaucratic processes or societal neglect.
15. Displacement – The forced movement of individuals or groups from their homes, often due to conflict, persecution, or environmental disasters.

Structure

The thesis is divided into five chapters, including the introduction and conclusion, with three core chapters dedicated to the main research content. The first chapter introduces the contemporary issue of refugees, placing it within a global context to highlight the urgency and complexity of the refugee crisis. It explores the genre of refugee writing, discussing well-known authors and works, and identifies the common features and themes that emerge in these narratives. This chapter provides a detailed introduction to the authors and their texts chosen for the study. Following the introduction, a comprehensive review of the literature is presented, which leads to the identification of the research gap. The chapter then presents the thesis statement, clearly outlining the central argument of the study. The research objectives and parameters are articulated, followed by a brief overview of the structure of the entire thesis, which serves as a roadmap for the reader.

Chapter 2, titled “Human Debris of Statelessness,” explores the concept of statelessness through the lens of Hannah Arendt’s theory of the ‘right to have rights.’ Arendt’s exploration of the implications of statelessness, particularly the absence of legal protection and recognition, provides the theoretical framework for this chapter. This concept is used to examine the selected primary texts, showing how refugees—or those on the verge of becoming refugees—experience a profound loss of political, social, cultural,

religious, economic, and legal agency. The chapter demonstrates how the characters in these texts embody the condition of statelessness, often depicted as ‘human debris,’ a term used to describe individuals who are marginalised and excluded from society. Through this analysis, the chapter highlights how these texts illustrate the dehumanising effects of statelessness and the struggle for basic rights and recognition.

Chapter 3, titled “Bo(dies) of No Return,” focuses on the loss of bodily agency in the context of refugee experiences. Drawing on Hannah Arendt’s concept of the ‘banality of evil,’ the chapter explores how violence against the refugee body is normalised, not only by ordinary individuals but also by state actors, military personnel, and various other authorities. Arendt’s theory, which explains how entrenched evil can be perpetuated through the erosion of moral responsibility, is applied to examine how state and military violence against refugees becomes an accepted part of the status quo. The chapter delves into various forms of corporeal abuse, including sexual violence, forced labour, trafficking, physical beatings, and other forms of bodily harm. Through this analysis, the chapter demonstrates how the refugee body is subjected to dehumanisation and exploitation, rendering it a site of continuous suffering and loss of agency.

Chapter 4, titled “(Re)silience and Agency,” analyses the resilience of refugees as an ongoing and recurring process essential for their survival. This chapter focuses on how refugees, despite their marginalisation, rely on resilience as a vital means of coping with displacement. Arendt’s concept of plurality is applied to show that solidarity among refugees plays a crucial role in their ability to persist. In these collective acts of solidarity, refugees demonstrate their resilience, allowing them to endure in the face of dehumanisation and statelessness. The chapter examines how this resilience is portrayed in the selected primary texts, illustrating how refugees, through solidarity and mutual

support, navigate their hardships. Resilience becomes the only way to survive, emphasising that it is not a form of resistance but a necessary survival strategy.

Chapter 5, titled “Conclusion,” contextualises the study and synthesises the findings, illustrating how the preceding chapters are interconnected through the central theme of agency. It emphasises the key observations drawn from the analysis of the selected texts, underlining that resilience and agency are integral to the refugee experience. The chapter further examines how the theoretical frameworks discussed in earlier chapters—specifically Arendt’s concepts of statelessness, the banality of evil, plurality, and resilience—converge to offer a comprehensive understanding of refugee agency. The conclusion presents the significant findings and observations of the study, summarising how it contributes to the broader discourse on the subject. Additionally, it identifies potential areas for further research, highlighting how future studies could build on the themes of resilience, agency, and statelessness, particularly in relation to other marginalised communities.