Introducing the Writers

Arifa Sultana, Rohingya Journalist

Arifa started with this project in the hopes of using the photovoice approach to reconnect with the more marginalised women in her community by using her interviewing skills. In her paper she describes her own personal journey as a Rohingya refugee woman and journalist, who become more aware of how the most marginalised in her community are unfairly represented in the media. Importantly Arifa asked the question of how can we find ways to improve self-representation for refugees in the media and alternative platforms? In our conversations during her editing process, we discussed how difficult it was to put her journey into words.

One of the notable conversations which made its way into her paper was how as a result of anti-refugee discourse, we increasingly see how refugees are required to earn their status and basic rights to work, access education and healthcare. The focus on being deserving and the implementing frameworks of human rights forgets to include the right to dream of a better life. Hope, we realised, isn't in the refugee convention and often is not in refugees' lives. For Arifa the persecution in reflected in her identity as Rohingya women and refugee. Yet, it was her hope for a better life and her desire to be more than this limited (and violent) response to her identity, that drove her to become a critical Rohingya voice in the media.

Naima Ismail, leader of Somali Women's Association Malaysia

Naima has always been passionate about health policy and speaking up on health inequities. When I first met her she was working with the Somali Refugee Community to support as a liaison with the UNHCR and connect with her community on questions of health and gender. Her further work as a translator at Health Equities Initiative in her early days as a refugee in Malaysia motivated her desire to connect more with the women in her community to improve their ability to access care and understand their own bodies and health concerns better. In this time I worked with her as she set up the Somali Women's Association Malaysia (SWAM). We have remained in close contact since my fieldwork in 2018 and it has been wonderful to see how she has flourished in this new role as a leader. We have continued to have conversations on her challenges as a leader of her own community based organisation particular with other well-meaning partners. In our discussions during the editing process of this article, we spoke about her desire to study a masters and learn the steps to writing in more detail. She applied herself to engage in the academic writing skills, after taking on board comments and engaging in peer review. She accepted every critique and brought her own voice out. In her paper Naima speaks firmly about the challenges faced by the community but also how NGOs can be more respectful and authentically collaborative with refugee-led initiatives and organisations.

Parisa Ally, Author of Three People in A Suitcase: An Afghan girl's fight against the stigma of trauma

Parisa is an active storyteller. Ultimately, we connected over her love of writing and particularly on writing as a way to heal from trauma. Parisa is currently working on SGBV projects with the Afghan community and wishes to start a project with the refugee women from every

community. She has a strong focus on how stories can help us better share experiences but also reach a more criticality.

During our discussions, I noted her interest in critical thinking through storytelling to share with her the work of Paulo Freire, particularly in relation to the four levels of consciousness; magical, naïve, critical and finally political consciousness. We both shared how we had experiences these levels of consciousness ourselves. How the feeling of powerlessness is connected to a belief in that we are controlled by magical forces out of our control such as fate. Even past this, the lack of agency can lead to a belief can we are not strong enough to meet the challenges that the world metes out. Freire describes this as naïve consciousness. That can feel, however, rather cynical and hopeless. Parisa was most interested in speaking about critical consciousness, as this frames a great deal of her work. In the stage of critical consciousness Freire shows how a person can become more aware of the systems that oppress and empower them. Their understanding leads to the ability to share their stories and empower their own voice. It is in this stage the person can start to understand their power as well as the limits placed upon us. This leads us to the final stage, where through this ability to share realities and change perceptions that we can engage in collective action to create change. What is at the heart of the idea we need critical consciousness and action (the unity of which we call Praxis) is to create change. People who are marginalised and oppressed (and traumatized) need the ability to critical understand the systems they live in to be able to create change that is positive for their own lives and communities.

Parisa took these ideas and incorporated them into her vocabulary and through long and meaningful discussions we co-wrote her paper; on how stories can heal and raise critical consciousness.

Syedah's Journey: From Child Marriage to Activist translated by Sharifah Shakirah, Founder of Rohingya Women's Development Network (RWDN)

Syedah Husain, an anti-child marriage activist and community leader at Rohingya Women's Development Network (RWDN). She provided us an interview to explain her work and experiences of SGBV and child marriage. In the interview she speaks with Sharifah Shakirah to explain how it feels to experience the challenges of domestic violence and pressure to marry at a young age.

Sharifah, herself was a refugee in Malaysia prior to her resettlement. During her time in Malaysia Sharifah founded RWDN. An organisation aimed to support women in her community through literacy projects, SGBV workshops, entrepreneurial projects and even self-defence. Through these projects she created a team of women leaders from the Rohingya community who were able to take over RWDN after she had to leave. Sharifah continues to support the work of the women in the organisation. For this reason Sharifah chose not to write her own story but the story of a young community leader in RWDN. Syedah Husain told her story and with Sharifah's support they wrote her experiences. In the final editing process, I worked with Sharifah to fill in the blanks and highlight how the challenges of child marriage impacted Syedah's life. In Syedah's story, we learn about the pressure from within families to conform to gendered norms, post-natal depression and the destructive impact this can have on a person's life. Syedah's life has not only been a challenge due to her status as a refugee, but

as a Rohingya woman. However, her story is also an example of empowerment and growth. Syedah now spends her time working on SGBV, education and empowerment projects in RWDN and raising awareness in her community on the issues of child marriage.

Amin Kamrani, Photographer and Community Worker at Asylum Access Malaysia

Amin has been active on refugee rights since 2012. He has worked with the Malaysian Social Research Institute, Asylum Access and Parastoo (a refugee-led theatre company) to support the refugee communities. From a creative perspective, he has also supported refugees artistic endeavour and showcased their agency through this photography and work as a filmmaker. Most recently, he worked with Allie Hill to create Portraits of a Diverse City– Stories of Migration in Kuala Lumpur. This is a photozine project which was funded by the Diverse Voices Media Grant 2020 from Projek Dialog. It is hosted on the Living Refugee Archives. In addition to this, last year he curated his 20/20 exhibition, also available on the Living Refugee Archives, depicting life in Kuala Lumpur. The exhibition contains some poetry from refugee actors. This exhibition has been relaunched and is for sale and 60% percent of the proceeds will be used to support refugees who have lost their work as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic measures. In this paper Amin has contributed his thoughts on what photography means when reflecting realities, and in line with the journal of Displaced Voices' own mission, asks what the function of photography as a tool for narrating stories and documenting these realities. Again the theme of representation and visibility is shown as he discusses the dehumanisation of the refugees portrayed in the media. In this issue, Amin has also contributed his Portraits of Refugee Actors. These are people he has worked with in Malaysia and whose images challenge the negative interpretation and frequent misrepresentation in the media.

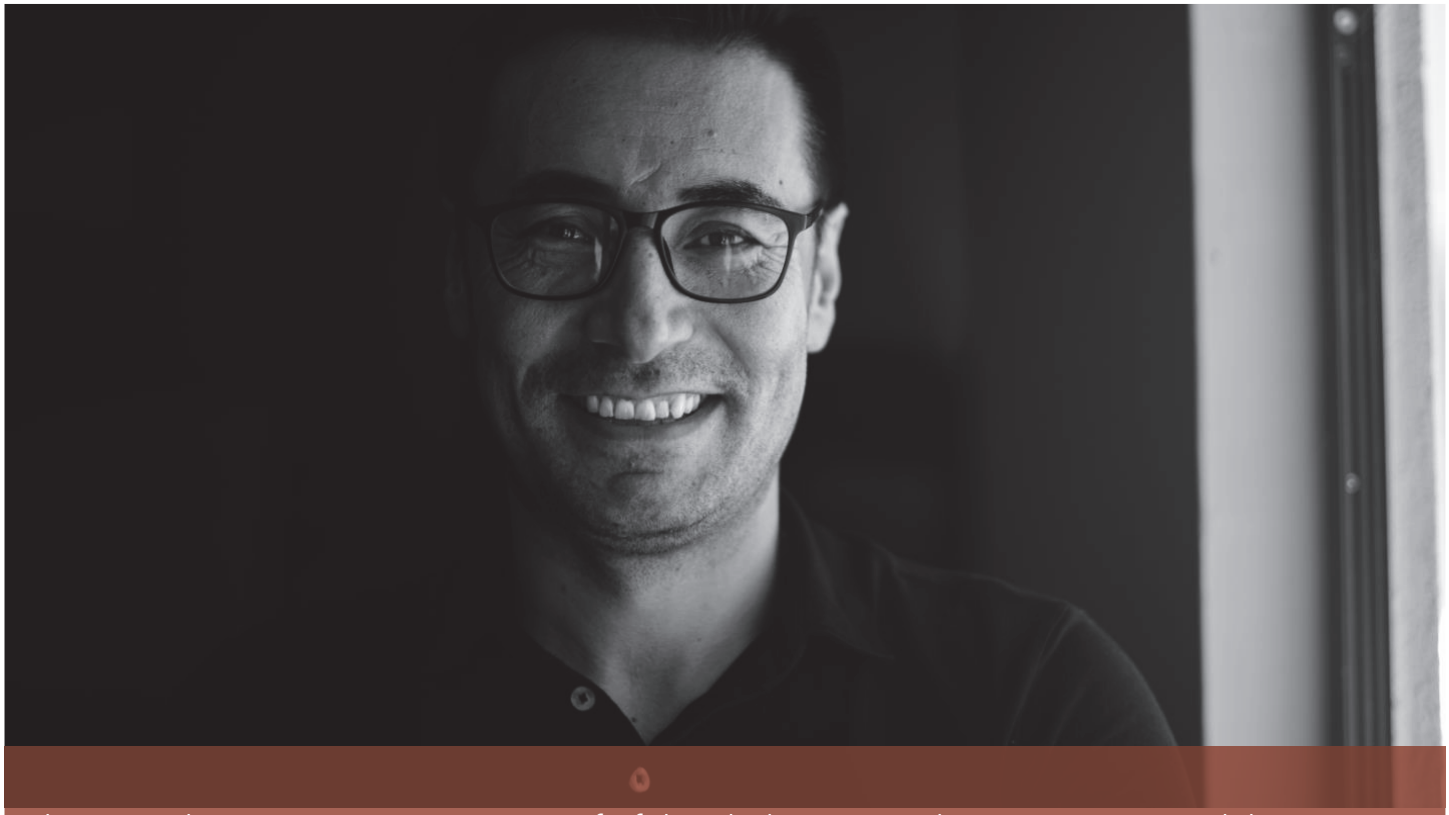


Photo Credit: Amin Kamrani. Portrait of Afghan-led Parastoo Theatre's Director Saleh Sapas