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Adjustment Racism, Othering, and the Global Socio-Cultural Impacts of the Rohingya Crisis: A Systematic Review of Evidence Published 2021-2025

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ABSTRACT
This systematic review synthesizes peer-reviewed evidence published from 2021 to 2025 on racism, xenophobia, stigma, and othering directed at Rohingya communities and evaluates documented socio-cultural impacts across origin, transit, and host contexts. Guided by PRISMA 2020 reporting principles, the review conceptually maps how racism operates through intertwined mechanisms, including digital hate narratives and incitement, host community boundary-making, and institutional exclusion from services and rights. The synthesis indicates that socio-cultural impacts extend beyond immediate safety concerns and include erosion of social cohesion, constricted belonging, barriers to education and healthcare, and intensified psychosocial suffering expressed through culturally patterned idioms of distress. Evidence also documents forms of collective agency, including community organizations and informal support networks that mitigate hardship but remain constrained by hostile reception, legal uncertainty, and politicized discourse. The review foregrounds Indonesia as a critical site where online hostility and local identity politics have shaped reception dynamics, demonstrating how global narratives travel and are re-localized through national and regional anxieties. The article concludes with practical implications for social cohesion and rights-based governance, emphasizing anti-hate measures, transparent communication, culturally safe service provision, and community dialogue mechanisms to reduce stigma while supporting coexistence.

KEYWORDS
racismhate speech; social exclusion; socio-cultural impact; Southeast Asia; Indonesia; systematic review

1. Introduction

The Rohingya crisis has become one of the most visible and protracted displacement situations in contemporary global politics, and it is increasingly recognized as a socio-cultural phenomenon as much as a humanitarian one. Racism, xenophobia, stigma, and othering shape how Rohingya communities are imagined, how their mobility is regulated, and how their everyday life is structured in camps and host societies. These social processes operate across multiple levels, from public narratives and digital media ecosystems to institutional practices governing education, healthcare, and security. The result is that harm is not limited to physical violence or legal exclusion but includes longer-term socio-cultural impacts such as fractured social cohesion, diminished dignity and belonging, and constrained participation in public life.

Recent scholarship highlights that anti-Rohingya narratives can function as an infrastructure of violence and exclusion by normalizing dehumanization and legitimizing coercion. Morada (2023) shows how hate speech and incitement in Myanmar has been used against vulnerable populations

including the Rohingya, and argues that the link between incitement and escalation of violent attacks is a persistent concern. This problem extends beyond one country and one period because contemporary mobility and platformed communication allow narratives to travel and adapt. Schissler (2024) argues that understanding the Rohingya case requires moving beyond narrow frames of "hate speech" and "misinformation" toward broader analysis of how social media infrastructures shape the production and circulation of violence-enabling narratives. These studies suggest that racist discourse is not simply a background condition but a key driver that organizes who is recognized as human, who is entitled to protection, and who is framed as a threat.

Southeast Asia is a critical region for analyzing socio-cultural impacts because it includes major transit and host contexts in which Rohingya reception is shaped by legal ambiguity, moral claims, and shifting public attitudes. In Malaysia, where refugee status is shaped by non-recognition and precarious access to rights, health inequities and discrimination have been documented as major obstacles to wellbeing, especially during and after the COVID period (Gopalan et al., 2025). In Indonesia, recent studies show that reception is not stable and may shift sharply when digital hostility, hoaxes, and political messaging generate fear and anger toward refugees. Raharema (2024) documents shifting attitudes toward Rohingya refugees in Aceh and emphasizes how rejection and forced removal episodes reflect the rise of autochthony narratives, a pattern in which belonging is defined by claims to local origin and the labeling of refugees as outsiders. Fadhil and Imtyas (2024) show how negative sentiments toward Rohingya refugees are disseminated on social media platform X, including hate narratives and hoaxes that can cultivate discrimination and hatred. Fithra et al. (2024) further highlight the complexity of integration in Aceh, emphasizing interplay among international law, local norms, religion, mass media, and social dynamics, which together shape both acceptance and resistance.

Beyond reception politics, socio-cultural impacts also include education exclusion and psychosocial suffering, which can reproduce marginalization across generations. Sudheer and Banerjee (2021) synthesize psychosocial adversities among Rohingya refugees and emphasize cultural idioms of distress and social suffering, arguing that multiple intersecting stressors shape experience and meaning. Trang et al. (2024) provide qualitative evidence on cultural concepts of distress among Rohingya refugees in Cox's Bazar, highlighting the need to attend to culturally salient expressions of suffering and community meaning systems rather than relying only on generalized trauma categories. Rahman et al. (2023) examine discrimination and intersectionality in the provision of education to Rohingya refugee children in Bangladesh, illustrating how exclusion from education is a structural pathway through which othering becomes durable.

Despite the growth of research, the evidence remains fragmented across disciplines and settings. Some studies focus on digital hate narratives, others on local conflict dynamics, and others on health, education, or psychosocial wellbeing, with limited synthesis that connects these domains into an integrated explanation of socio-cultural impact. This fragmentation matters for a multidisciplinary journal that focuses on society, culture, and human behavior, because the central analytic question is how racism travels across media, institutions, and everyday interaction to produce cumulative social harms. The present systematic review addresses this gap by synthesizing the 2021 to 2025 evidence on racism and othering targeting Rohingya communities and mapping the socio-cultural impacts across origin, transit, and host contexts, with particular attention to Indonesia as a site where global narratives and local politics intersect.

This systematic review addresses four questions. (1) How do recent studies conceptualize and operationalize racism, xenophobia, stigma, and othering in relation to Rohingya communities? (2) What mechanisms are most commonly identified, including digital narratives, host community boundary-making, and institutional exclusion? (3) What socio-cultural impacts are documented across settings, including belonging, social cohesion, education, healthcare, and psychosocial wellbeing? (4) What forms of agency and mitigation are reported, including community organization, informal support systems, and counter-narratives?

2. Method

This review was designed as a systematic review and reported using PRISMA 2020 guidance to ensure transparent identification, screening, and synthesis of studies (Page et al., 2021). The review was developed to fit the Social Science and Humanities Report scope by integrating evidence across cultural studies, sociology, political communication, education, and health-related social research, while maintaining a central focus on society, culture, and human behavior in Southeast Asia and beyond.

2.1 Eligibility Criteria

Eligible studies were peer-reviewed journal articles published between January 2021 and December 2025 that focused on Rohingya communities and examined racism, xenophobia, discrimination, stigma, othering, hate speech, incitement, or social exclusion as a central topic. Studies were included regardless of method, including qualitative, quantitative, mixed-methods, and content analytic designs. Studies were excluded if they did not focus substantively on Rohingya communities, did not engage racism or othering mechanisms, were purely descriptive without analytic relevance to socio-cultural impacts, or lacked sufficient methodological description to support interpretation.

2.2 Information Sources and Search Strategy

Searches were designed to retrieve multidisciplinary evidence relevant to social science and humanities perspectives. Databases targeted included Scopus, Web of Science Core Collection, PubMed, ProQuest, and Google Scholar, supplemented by targeted searches of regional journals and Indonesian indexed sources when relevant. Search strings combined “Rohingya” with terms such as racism, discrimination, xenophobia, stigma, othering, hate speech, incitement, social exclusion, integration, education, healthcare, mental health, host attitudes, and social cohesion. The search strategy was iteratively refined to capture both global literature and Indonesia/Southeast Asia-focused studies, including work on Aceh reception dynamics and platform-based hostility.

2.3 Study Selection

Records were screened in two stages. Titles and abstracts were screened to remove clearly irrelevant studies. Full texts were then assessed for inclusion based on eligibility criteria. A PRISMA flow diagram should report the screening counts (records identified, duplicates removed, full texts assessed, and studies included) following PRISMA 2020 conventions (Page et al., 2021).

2.4 Data Extraction

A standardized extraction sheet was used to chart study characteristics, including author, year, setting, population, design, data sources, key constructs of racism/othering, and reported socio-cultural impacts. Impacts were coded into domains including social cohesion and belonging, education access and learning outcomes, healthcare access and discrimination, psychosocial suffering and cultural idioms of distress, and community agency including organizing and advocacy.

2.5 Quality Appraisal

Given methodological diversity, quality appraisal was conducted using design-appropriate criteria, emphasizing coherence between research question, method, analysis, and claims. Qualitative studies were appraised for transparency of sampling, data collection, analytic rigor, ethical reflexivity, and credibility. Quantitative studies were appraised for measurement clarity, sampling adequacy, and interpretive validity. Mixed-methods studies were appraised for integration quality across strands. The appraisal informed cautious interpretation rather than excluding studies solely based on design type.

Because included studies varied substantially in designs and outcomes, synthesis was conducted as a thematic narrative synthesis. Themes were developed iteratively by identifying recurring mechanisms of racism and othering, then mapping socio-cultural impacts linked to those mechanisms. The synthesis aimed to connect digital narrative infrastructures with institutional exclusion and everyday lived experience, producing an integrated explanation suitable for multidisciplinary readership.

3. Results

Across the 2021–2025 literature, five dominant thematic clusters recur: (1) digital hate narratives and incitement, (2) host community boundary-making and identity politics, (3) institutional exclusion in education and services, (4) psychosocial suffering and culturally patterned distress, and (5) community agency through organization and counter-practices. The evidence base spans Myanmar, Bangladesh, Malaysia, and Indonesia, with Indonesia-focused studies emphasizing Aceh as a key reception site and social media as a critical mechanism of attitude formation.

Table 1. Included studies and key findings (2021–2025)

Author (Year)	Title	Key findings (relevant to this review)
Sudheer & Banerjee (2021)	*The Rohingya refugees: A conceptual framework of their psychosocial adversities, cultural idioms of distress and social suffering*	Rohingya psychosocial adversity is conceptualized as multidimensional social suffering; distress is expressed through culturally specific idioms of distress, implying that support must be culturally sensitive rather than relying only on generic trauma categories.
Putri & Gabiella (2022)	*The organisational pattern of Rohingya refugee community in Malaysia: Structural opportunities, constraints, and intra community dynamics*	Highlights collective agency through Rohingya community organizations that mediate welfare support and informal protection; however, their capacity is constrained by hostile socio-political climates and legal/status uncertainty.
Morada (2023)	*Hate Speech and Incitement in Myanmar before and after the February 2021 Coup*	Positions hate speech and incitement as mechanisms that normalize dehumanization and heighten escalation risks; hate narratives operate as an "infrastructure" legitimizing exclusion and violence.
Rahman, Shindaini, & Abdullah (2023)	*Provision of education to Rohingya refugee children in Bangladesh: Exploring the forms of discrimination and intersectionality*	Shows that educational exclusion is produced through structural and intersectional discrimination; education becomes a key pathway through which marginality becomes durable and intergenerational.
Schissler (2024)	*Beyond Hate Speech and Misinformation: Facebook and the Rohingya Genocide in Myanmar*	Emphasizes the role of platform infrastructures (distribution/visibility logics) in making violence-enabling narratives credible and mobilizable; analysis should move beyond "content" to the broader media ecology.
Fadhil & Imtyas (2024)	*Hate Speech in Cyberspace: Fueling the Rejection of Rohingya Refugees in Indonesia*	Identifies hate speech and hoax dynamics on platform X that shape negative sentiment and strengthen rejection; demonstrates tight links between digital ecosystems and public attitudes toward refugees in Indonesia.
Raharema (2024)	*Shifting Attitudes of Acehnese towards Rohingya Refugees: Rise of Autochthony*	Explains shifts from acceptance to rejection in Aceh through autochthony narratives; refugees are marked as "outsiders," and rejection is framed as a performance of protecting local social order.
Fithra et al. (2024)	*The Complexity of Ethnic Conflict Among Rohingya Refugees in Aceh: The Struggle Between Local Identity and International Law*	Shows that reception in Aceh is complex and negotiated: local norms, religion, media, and international law interact to produce fluctuating acceptance–resistance, with no stable moral frame.
Trang et al. (2024)	*A qualitative study of cultural concepts of distress among Rohingya refugees in Cox's Bazar, Bangladesh*	Maps Rohingya cultural concepts of distress, underscoring the need to interpret suffering through local meanings and the risk of misrecognition when interventions ignore Rohingya language/concepts.
Gopalan et al. (2025)	*Navigating health inequities and human rights violations: A narrative review on refugees and asylum seekers in Malaysia*	Synthesizes evidence that precarious status and discrimination generate barriers to healthcare and deepen inequities; stigma reinforces avoidance/delayed care, undermining wellbeing and social cohesion.

3.1 Digital Hate Narratives and Incitement

A central theme is that racism is reproduced through narrative infrastructures that circulate and normalize dehumanizing frames. Morada (2023) emphasizes the role of hate speech and incitement in Myanmar and links these dynamics to escalation risks for violence. Schissler (2024) extends this argument by showing that platform dynamics require analysis beyond individual hateful content, because infrastructures of distribution shape what becomes visible, credible, and politically mobilizable. Indonesia-focused evidence complements this line by showing how hate narratives and hoaxes can travel and be re-localized, shaping public hostility and rejection in host contexts (Fadhil & Imtyas, 2024).

3.2 Host Community Boundary-Making and Politics of Belonging

A second theme is boundary-making, where refugees are framed as outsiders who threaten social order, welfare, or identity. In Aceh, Raharema (2024) documents a shift from historically positive reception toward rejection, and interprets this shift through the rise of autochthony narratives. Fithra et al. (2024) highlight the coexistence of competing moral frames in Aceh, including religious solidarity, legal norms, and local identity, showing that acceptance and resistance are shaped by negotiated interpretations rather than fixed attitudes. Together, these studies suggest that othering in host contexts is often justified through moral language of protection and entitlement rather than explicit racial vocabulary.

3.3 Institutional Exclusion in Education and Services

A third theme concerns institutional exclusion, which makes othering durable by limiting access to capabilities, services, and safety. Rahman et al. (2023) show how discrimination and intersectional identity markers shape denial of education to Rohingya children in Bangladesh, illustrating long-term reproduction of marginality through blocked educational pathways. In Malaysia, Gopalan et al. (2025) synthesize evidence that refugees face health inequities and discrimination, particularly in contexts where legal status is precarious and public narratives frame refugees as undeserving or dangerous.

3.4 Psychosocial Suffering and Cultural Idioms of Distress

A fourth theme is that socio-cultural impacts include social suffering and culturally patterned distress that cannot be reduced to generic mental health categories. Sudheer and Banerjee (2021) emphasize that psychosocial adversities among Rohingya are multidimensional and shaped by social suffering and cultural idioms of distress. Trang et al. (2024) provide qualitative evidence on cultural concepts of distress among Rohingya refugees in Cox's Bazar, demonstrating that distress has culturally salient forms that shape help-seeking and community meaning-making.

3.5 Community Agency and Collective Organization

A fifth theme highlights forms of agency, including community organizations and informal welfare provision. Putri and Gabiella (2022) show that Rohingya community organizations in Malaysia function as focal points for welfare service and protection, mediating constraints imposed by host-state ambiguity and unfavorable socio-political climates. This evidence complicates purely victim framing by showing how collective organization sustains dignity, identity, and survival, even as external conditions limit incorporation.

Table 2. Thematic synthesis: mechanisms of racism/othering and linked socio-cultural impacts (2021–2025)

Thematic cluster	Core mechanism	Linked socio-cultural impacts	Key studies
Digital hate narratives & incitement	Dehumanizing frames, incitement, hoax ecology; platform distribution logics; transnational narrative travel and re-localization	Normalized hostility; legitimation of coercion/exclusion; fractured trust and cohesion; moral panic; rapid shifts in host sentiment	Morada (2023); Schissler (2024); Fadhil & Imtyas (2024)
Boundary-making & politics of belonging	Autochthony; outsider labeling; moralized exclusion framed as	Constricted belonging; polarized reception; public legitimacy for	Raharema (2024); Fithra et al.

	protecting local order/entitlement	rejection/forced removal; unstable hospitality	(2024)
Institutional exclusion in education/services	Gatekeeping under legal precarity; discrimination embedded in routines of schooling/healthcare	Blocked education; delayed/avoided healthcare; durable marginality; reduced capability across generations	Rahman et al. (2023); Gopalan et al. (2025)
Psychosocial suffering & cultural idioms	Social suffering under chronic insecurity and devaluation; culturally patterned distress and meaning systems	Intensified psychosocial distress; withdrawal/mistrust; misrecognition risks in generic interventions	Sudheer & Banerjee (2021); Trang et al. (2024)
Community agency & organization	Self-organization, informal support networks, welfare mediation under constraints	Partial mitigation of hardship; strengthened mutual aid and dignity; constrained incorporation due to hostility/legal uncertainty	Putri & Gabiella (2022)

4. Discussion

The 2021 to 2025 evidence indicates that racism and othering targeting Rohingya communities operates through a connected chain that links narrative production to institutional exclusion and everyday social suffering. Digital hate narratives and incitement normalize dehumanization, cultivate suspicion, and create legitimacy for coercive practices in both origin and host settings (Morada, 2023; Schissler, 2024). When these narratives circulate transnationally, they become re-localized through local anxieties and identity politics, producing rejection dynamics that may be framed as defense of community order rather than explicit racism. This is visible in Indonesia, where studies document the role of platform-based hostility and autochthony narratives in shaping rejection and forced removal episodes in Aceh (Raharema, 2024; Fadhil & Imtyas, 2024).

The synthesis also clarifies that socio-cultural impacts are cumulative and mutually reinforcing. Exclusion from education constrains future capability and deepens marginality across generations (Rahman et al., 2023). Discrimination and legal precarity restrict healthcare access and create avoidance and delayed care, undermining both individual wellbeing and broader social cohesion (Gopalan et al., 2025). In parallel, psychosocial suffering is socially produced through humiliation, statelessness, chronic insecurity, and the everyday experience of being treated as less than fully human. This suffering is expressed through culturally meaningful idioms and concepts that shape how distress is communicated and addressed (Sudheer & Banerjee, 2021; Trang et al., 2024). These findings strengthen a cultural studies claim that racism is not only an ideology but a lived structure that organizes daily life, self-perception, and social relation.

For Indonesia-focused scholarship, the evidence suggests two important implications. First, the Rohingya case demonstrates how local reception is highly sensitive to narrative environments. When public discourse is dominated by hoaxes and hostile frames, social norms of hospitality can erode quickly, and rejection becomes a socially acceptable performance of local belonging (Fadhil & Imtyas, 2024; Raharema, 2024). Second, the Aceh case indicates that religious solidarity and local identity can coexist in tension, producing fluctuating acceptance and resistance. This means that interventions cannot assume stable moral frames but must support structured dialogue, clear governance coordination, and culturally legitimate mechanisms of coexistence that reduce fear and misinformation (Fithra et al., 2024).

The review also highlights evidence of agency that can reduce harm when conditions allow. Community organizations provide welfare support, informal protection, and cultural continuity, yet they remain constrained by hostile socio-political environments and legal ambiguity (Putri & Gabiella, 2022). This suggests that policy approaches that criminalize or marginalize refugee self-organization may inadvertently deepen vulnerability. Instead, enabling safe community participation and partnership with civil society can function as an anti-stigma strategy that builds social bridges.

Finally, the synthesis identifies gaps for future research. More comparative work is needed

across Indonesian regions beyond Aceh to determine whether reception dynamics follow similar patterns or are shaped by distinct local histories. More research is needed on how youth, gender, and religious identity intersect in shaping both discrimination and coping, especially in education settings. More interdisciplinary work is needed to connect platform governance and local community mechanisms, clarifying how narrative infrastructures translate into offline exclusion and service gatekeeping.

5. Conclusion

This systematic review synthesizes 2021 to 2025 peer-reviewed evidence and concludes that racism, xenophobia, stigma, and othering targeting Rohingya communities operates through linked mechanisms of digital narrative infrastructures, host community boundary-making, and institutional exclusion. The socio-cultural impacts documented across origin, transit, and host contexts include weakened social cohesion, constrained belonging, reduced access to education and healthcare, and intensified psychosocial suffering expressed through culturally patterned distress. The evidence also shows that Rohingya communities exercise agency through organization and informal support systems, though this agency is constrained by legal precarity, hostile public narratives, and politicized reception. For Indonesia, the central implication is that sustainable coexistence requires attention to narrative governance and misinformation reduction, culturally safe service access, and community-level dialogue mechanisms that protect dignity while supporting social stability.

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