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SPECIAL ISSUE ON WOMEN REFUGEES — PART 1: ISSUES

Voice and Empowerment: The Gender Relations of Forced Migration

Over the past few years the literature on refugees has begun to address how different the experiences of refugee women are from those of their male counterparts. The unequal treatment women confront in flight, exile, resettlement, and repatriation has become an important, though still understudied focus of refugee research. In a two-part issue of *Refugee*, we address resistance and social change among refugee women internationally.

The events described in the following articles occur in diverse cultural contexts and are addressed from sociological, policy, and grassroots perspectives. The most important theme addressed is that of women voicing their need to have control over their lives—to be regarded as having rights. Women are also described as using these rights to improve their situations and those of their families and communities. The literature on refugee women is beginning to “humanize” women—to describe them as not always empowered and powerful, nor always vulnerable and “victimized.” The papers in this issue (Part

One) take this approach and address some policy and theoretical issues. Part Two (in the next issue) focuses on specific case studies concerning women refugees.

We open Part One with several papers that provide a Canadian perspective on refugee issues. The first paper by Judith Ramirez discusses the Canadian Gender Persecution *Guidelines* that are the product of the Gender

Working Group of the Immigration and Refugee Board, as well as the lobbying efforts of many NGOs. Ramirez discusses how the *Guidelines* are a response to the privatization of issues affecting refugee women, a privatization that silences them and effectively removes their right to speak out. She also refers to the position of the *Guidelines* in the context of the current debate around issues of universal human

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