CANADA'S PERIODICAL ON REFUGEES

REFUGE

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Refugee and Immigrant Women: An International Perspective, Part II

Introduction: Refugee and Immigrant Women as Workers

Guida Man

Women all over the world have always worked. From sunrise to sunset, women are always busy working. They are often engaged in the formal labour market, working in factories, hospitals, schools, businesses; and in the informal labour market, doing home sewing, baby-sitting, or bartering; as well as being occupied in household work, cooking for others, feeding their babies, washing clothes, fetching water, cleaning house, caring for the aged and the infirmed, listening to other people's problems. The work that women do are important and indispensable as part of the household strategy for survival, and yet they are often invisible and taken for granted because women are not being recognized as legitimate workers.

This issue of *Refuge* assembles a collection of studies which represent the voices of refugee and immigrant women. In particular, these studies document and analyze the day-to-day, traditional and non-traditional work of these women. From Kenya to Canada, from the isolated remote refugee camps to the hustle and bustle of cosmopolitan cities, from hauling water for daily subsistence, to providing health care to strangers for pay, these studies explore how refugee and immigrant women do their work and how they manage their daily lives.

As Jennifer Hydman's article on the daily work of Somali refugee women in the Kenyan camps of Ifo, Hagadera,

Contents

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REFUGE

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and Dagahaley illustrates, refugee women are not merely "vulnerable," helpless victims of circumstance, passively accepting their fate. Hydman de constructs this stereotypical notion by demonstrating that these women are active participants who employ various survival strategies and indigenous skills in their daily struggles, and who engage in informal cash economy to make ends meet.

For those refugee women who have higher education and professional qualifications, they have always been able to combine work and family in their home country due to the support of the extended family. This is confirmed by Rosemary Sales and Jeanne Gregory's study on the Somali refugee women in London. However, these highly educated Somali women professionals were unable to find permanent employment in Britain despite an urgent need for Somali speakers in teaching, medicine and social work. This is so because Somali qualifications are not recognized in Britain, and few refugee women have the resources to undertake thenecessary training to allow them to work in Britain. Refugee women therefore face multiple barriers to employment due to their uncertain legal status, and the racialized and gendered structures of the labour market.

The employment barriers encountered by the Somali refugee women are also experienced by the Chinese immigrant women in Canada as revealed in Guida Man's study. Man demonstrates that institutionalized discrminatory processes in the requirement of "Canadian experience," and the inadequacy of an accredition system to calibrate immigrant's qualifications make it diffi
cult for the Chinese immigrant women to obtain employment which commensurate with their qualifications and experience. Consequently, these women experienced underemployment and unemployment. The differences in the social organization of Canadian society vis-a.-vis their home country also makes life increasingly difficult for these women, intensifying their daily workload.

Despite racism, class discrimination, and gender oppression, McCabe's investigation of migrant women health care aides in Canada found their care giving practice to be an aspect of an ethics of care that allows for moments of empowerment and resistance to an oppressive social context. McCabe argues that the Canadian market for care has been shaped largely by discourses that devalue women's work and commodify migrant women caregivers.

Departing from the theme on refugee and immigrant women as workers, this issue of *Refuge* also includes two provocative papers by Maryanna Schmuki. Her first paper opens the issue by interrogating the fundamental concern of how refugee women is constructed. In particular, she poses the questions: How do the know ledges created by the West about refugee women affect the process by which a woman becomes a refugee? How does this knowledge affect the process and likelihood that the refugee will shed the label "refugee"? How do women refugees become "normal" again and how do the groups intending to aid refugees mitigate this process? Are the voices of women refugees incorporated into the knowledge production process? In answering these questions, Schmuki explores how the development and humanitarian assistance establishment as a construction site produces a distinct discourse on refugee women. She contends that the knowledge produced creates an image
of the women refugee that may be intended to benefit not only the refugee herself, but also the regimes and individuals that make up the international system of emergency relief and assist
ance. She suggests that for refugee women to be able to shed their refugee skin, a delicate balance must be struck between the power inherent in the international aid community and the liberatory effects of the new found category of refugee women.

This issue of *Refuge* concludes with Schmukis' second paper which explores the development of women refugees as a category within human rights discourse. In her final paper, Schmuki reiterates her concern that given the

western cultural values, western epistemology, and western institutional form predominant in the contemporary aid arena, how do human rights instruments and images help or hinder the process of women refugees returning to normalcy, i.e., does the construction of refugee women reflect the voices of women refugees? And how would refugee women be able to shed their refugee skin? These are significant considerations that we need to keep addressing and renegotiating. In order to adequately respond to these questions, I suggest we continue our dialogue with academics, practitioners, NGOs, grassroot organizers etc. working on issues concerning refugee and immigrant women in future issues of *Refuge*. ■

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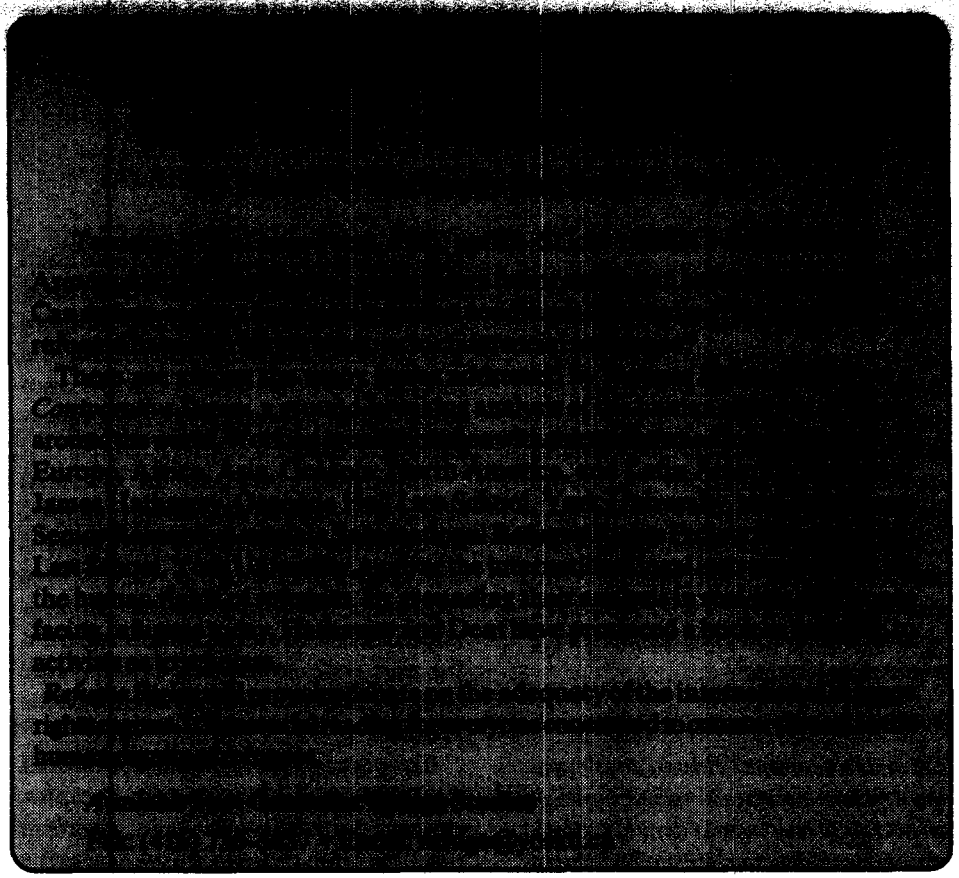

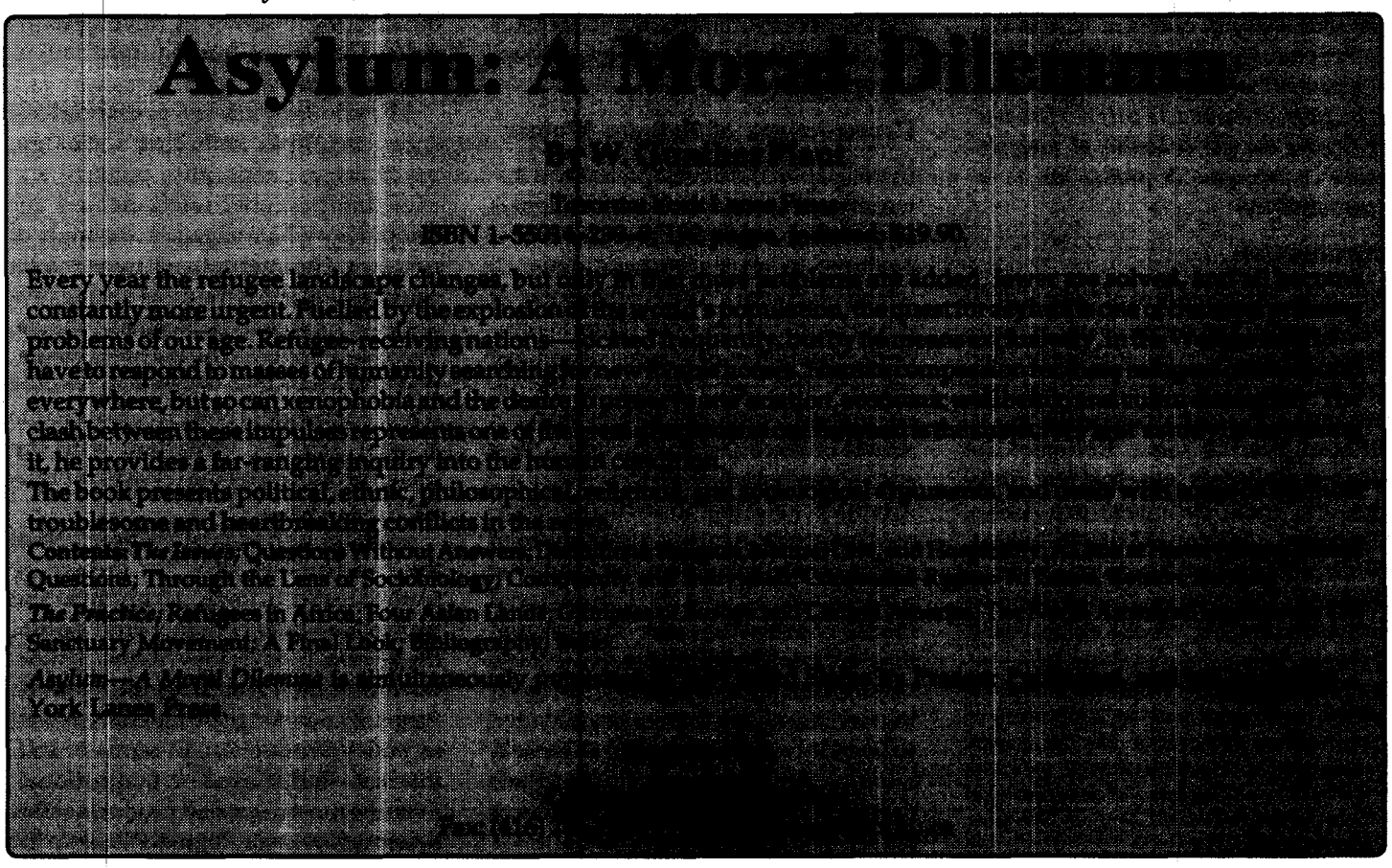

Shedding Their Refugee Skin: Constructions of Women Refugees and International Aid Regimes

Maryanna Schmuki

Abstract

This paper explores the development establishment as an institutional network, a main actor in producing social constructions of women refugees. These knowledge products are particularly rooted in Western culture. The central questions asked here are first, how does knowledge produced within the development establishment affect women refugees and second, are the voices of women refugees incorporated into the knowledge production process?

Précis

Cet article examine l'élite du développement en tant que réseau institutionnel, et en tant qu'acteur majeur dans la production de la construction sociale des femmes réfugiées. Les questions centrales posées ici sont: d'abord, comment la connaissance produite au sein de l'élite du développement affecte-t-elle les femmes réfugiées, et ensuite, la voix des femmes réfugiées est elle entendue et intégrée dans ce processus de production de la connaissance?

Introduction

Refugees, by the nature of their official status under the nation-state system, expose the cracks in the structure of that system, which has recently recognized, from an official standpoint, that not all refugees are the same. Refugees are women. Refugees are children. Refugees are men. Refugees are Asian, Chechyen, African, Haitian, babies, adults, elderly, healthy, dying, soldiers, civilians. The system of international humanitarian aid, whose obligation it is to respond to groups who have been turned into refugees, has recognized difference and diversity among refugees in a particular way, which, in turn, fits into the global and local political economies where humanitarian aid organizations operate.

"Refugees" come to the Western world in a particular package, shaped by the forces explored in this paper. I will look particularly at how forces within the development and humanitarian assistance establishment, from the mid 1980s to the mid 1990s, shape what we know of refugee women in the West.

The packaging of refugee women into a palpable, aid-driven icon is a complex process with threads of its creation reaching from refugee camps across the globe and into media coverage, academic debates, international decrees and declarations, and even peacekeeping operations.

Constructions of Refugee Women

In this paper, the development and humanitarian assistance establishment is considered a construction site and is analyzed as an institutional network which produces a distinct discourse as it works in concert with other institutional producers of images of refugee women. This paper focuses on the development construction site as the main source of discourse production. Other sites of discourse production which act to reinforce and legitimize the development establishment include the human rights construction site, the academic construction site and the international media construction site. The general thrust of knowledge production in these Western institutions creates an image of the woman refugee that may be intended to benefit not only the refugee herself, but also the regimes and individuals that make up the international system of emergency relief and assistance.

By *construction site* I am referring to the physical and conceptual space in which institutional networks carry out processes of knowledge production. This includes the technologies—social, political or technical—available at this particular historical moment.

The development site includes activity by large multinational organizations such as United Nations, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), governmental organizations and the forums convened, alliances agreed upon, conventions signed, calls to action produced, policies written, projects conceived of and carried out, and also the gritty, sometimes chaotic reality that plays itself out in many relief field projects. The human rights site includes aspects of international law and international policy considered outside the bounds of development policy, as well as human rights advocacy groups.

The scholarly site refers to social science disciplines including sociology, psychology, geography, political science, international relations and anthropology which engage in the study of refugees. The international news media construction site is the most visible producer of the archetypal woman refugee. The image projected by the news media, that of the helpless, victimized woman wholly dependent on aid for survival, is at least partially consistent with the image produced by the other three construction sites.

Even though each of the products of the construction sites has threads of truth or reality to them, it is my intention to provide evidence demonstrating that the general trend is for Western institutions to funnel resources into various forms of knowledge production, as well as policy production, in terms of self-interest—individual or institutional. Even the most respected products of this system show some degree of those in the

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West "imagining" or filling in the gaps to the identity of the refugee women, and basing policy decisions on these images. Who constructs these images and how? Are they accurate? Can we even detect the accuracy? Or is it that our insights, conventions, protocols and policy statements are so thoroughly embedded within our own culturally and socially constructed narratives that they are not universally salient?

The process of turning entire populations into "refugees" is itself profoundly gendered. It is clear that this process affects all refugees, men, women and children, but it happens in specific ways for women. Because a majority of refugee situations are caused by war, we can easily see gender differences in these groups of people. Many men are at war, if they have not already been killed in combat, while many women and children flee to refugee camps or other "safe" havens. The statistic that most analysts and fund-raisers rely on is that between 70 and 80 percent of the world's refugees are women and children.

In this analysis, the specific questions I am aiming to answer include: How do the knowledges that we in the West create about refugee women actually, first, affect the process by which a woman becomes a refugee? And later, how does this knowledge affect the process and likelihood that the refugee will shed that skin? By shedding the label "refugee," a displaced person is coming to terms with a new life, a new identity, imprinted with the scars of flight and asylum. How do women refugees become "normal" again and how do the groups intending to aid refugees mitigate this process?

By framing this paper in terms of constructions of the "refugee woman", which occurs in the mid 1980s to the late 1990s in all of these sites together, I will look at how these constructions shape the process by which any individual woman becomes a "refugee" in a way that makes the subsequent process of becoming normal again difficult or improbable for many. How do women who have gone through the process of becoming refugees to the Western imagination rebuild a life in a situation where they are no longer subjected to the gaze of the West as a spectacle or a victim in ways that undoubtedly affect their own self-conceptions in profound ways? Is this even possible in the global systems we have created that both produce and assist refugees?

It is my hope that, throughinterrogating our own constructions of the "refugee woman," we will be better able to engage in constituting constructive relationships where the voice of the refugee herself is heard clearly instead of filtered through institutions and individuals who are producing knowledge *about* refugees.

Theories

In the pursuit of some form of authentic representation of women refugees, which adequately reflects the voices of women refugees, it will become apparent that I am searching for theories and methodologies that rely on engagement, dialogue, recognition of difference and seek to create the conditions for the woman's voice to be heard and incorporated into the knowledge products. Feminist theories and methodologies critique dominant canons of knowledge production, especially in academia, but which can also be applied to development institutions, human rights advocacy organizations and mass media. I will also draw on what has been loosely labelled as "post-modern" critiques of development theory and practice.

Both bodies of thought, feministtheo rizing and post-modem development critiques, question analytical observers' claims to objectivity and view the knowledge that they produce from these observations as necessarily coloured by their own ideologies, experiences, his tories and world views. These theoretical stances also expose the power hierarchies inherent in knowledge production and attempt to "de-colonize" thought. As Donna Haraway (1991, 211) writes, "feminist objectivity means quite simply situated know ledges."

Postmodern theory and feminist theory have far-reaching implications for development theory, which is imbued with liberal economics, modernization theory as well as other forms of what is considered to be modem, structural, positivistic, rationalized thought.

Theories of Difference

Feminist theory deals with difference in a way that breaks down universal notions of concepts like equality, truth, justice and categories of analysis like the universal woman. These theories of difference are grounded in two specific arguments:

- that women's lives are best theorized from the perspective of their lives
- which yields multiple realities, and that theorizing from this standpoint needs to be from the perspective of women's lived experiences.

These theories of difference do not just take into account the issue of sex or gender difference, they also recognize difference in terms of race, class, nationality or ethnicity and acknowledge that the axes of difference (e.g. race, class, gender) are present in shifting ways within a single women's complex constellation of identities.

What can be extrapolated from theories of difference for the purposes of this paper, is that analyzing identity is relevant to both those observing and those being observed, or in the case of refugee relief, those receiving aid and those administering aid. When the identities of the observer (not to mention interests
at stake) are constituted differently from that of the observed, both need to be made topics of examination in order for the observer's analysis to be weighed and used appropriately. When the identities of the women or woman being observed are themselves disparate, this also needs to be made explicit. We need to ask, what are the political implications of knowledge that is produced from a standpoint of the observer, in this case the regimes in the West which produce knowledge on women refugees?

Standpoint Theories

Standpoint theory deals with the question of hegemonic discourses and practices by stating that since knowledges are situated, so too could theorizing be situated. In other words, those being theorized about or for should be the

starting place for producing knowledge or theories about that subject. Postmodern critiques of development characterize development discourse and practices as hegemonic, even neocolonial.

Standpoint theorists claim that all knowledge attempts are socially situated and that some of these objective social locations are better than others as starting points for knowledge projects, challenging some of the most fundamental assumptions of the positivistic, scientific world view and Western thought that takes science as a model of how to produce social knowledge. Modernization theory—which provides a theoretical foundation for contemporary models of development—is one of these positivistic models for producing social knowledge. Standpoint theory sets out a rigorous "logic of discovery" intended to maximize the objectivity of the results of research, and thereby produce knowledge that can be for marginalized people (and those who would know what the marginalized people would know) rather than for the use only of dominant groups in their projects of administering and managing the lives of marginalized people (Harding 1993). Using standpoint theory, in the case of women refugees, knowledge production would start from women refugees themselves.

Development Critiques

The notion of development coalesced into a certain kind of political practice following World War II by the U.S. government and the formation of the United Nations (Esteva 1993). Women in Development grew out of this development era—the decades following World War II—in conjunction with 1970s second wave feminism in the United States and Europe. In the past three decades, feminists have begun to raise and legitimize certain issues in many fields including politics, journalism, academics, development and law. The opening up of discourse on "women's issues" has developed simultaneously and in a parallel fashion in many fields, while certain issues have cut across several fields such as violence against women. These forces have also come together in official forums, most recently culminating in the 1995 United Nations Conference on Women in Beijing. These conditions have come together to create a time when it is possible for women's issues to appear on political agendas worldwide. Refugee policy is also one area in which reform has begun for women's issues, at least in the form of interstate conventions and decrees.

Postmodern critiques of development discourse and practice contend that development institutions follow established lines of power even when the discourse from within the institutions claims to be liberatory. Arturo Escobar (1995) has analyzed the concept of participation in development and the rise of Women in Development in this light.

Adele Mueller (1986) contends that development discourse is a strategy for producing and maintaining first world dominance in a capitalist world order through reproducing existing rules of relation. In this sense, the rules of relation are reproduced through research methods, the control of the theoretical direction for understanding key issues, and through the carrying out of projects, and in the form of declarations and policies coming out of the international women's movement in the past three decades.

These categories, designed and written into policy by the development construction site and other institutional networks, frame what will be named as development problems for women and, in turn, decide which projects will be funded and how they will be designed. The legitimization of women's issues through this type of documentation helps shed light on specific issues, and puts women's issues on political agendas globally, but it may also frame the issues in a way that does not necessarily reflect the view or voices of the marginalized.

The Development Construction Site

Because millions of people are turned into refugees each passing year—through war, famine, mass expulsion, genocide, ecological degradation—the machinery of feeding, clothing, protecting and sustaining these people remains intact. The international system of humanitarian aid is the benefactor for more than 48 million people worldwide whose status in the nation-state system is "refugee" or "internally displaced person."

Some analysts proclaim that the system created in the post World War II era for dealing with these immense crises is now in crisis itself. They cite lack of funding, poor planning, inadequate nutrition in food rations, politicized distribution of aid and decreased security for delivery of aid as evidences. Internationally accepted core critiques levelled against the contemporary system of international relief include the potential for severe dependency and idleness that can be created in refugee camp life.

Perhaps the most blatant indicator that resources provided by agencies are inadequate and that the new goals of empowerment remain unfulfilled is the high incidence and conditions of violence. Wherever refugees reside, violence is a problem for all, but is especially salient for women. Aristide Zolberg (1989) suggests in his research that refugee flows are an inherent part of the mechanisms of economic and political globalization and that violence is endemic to this process. Women experience this violence differently because of their vulnerability to sexual violence—which is often politicized. Many who scrutinize refugees have begun to realize the gendered aspects of refugee life, and have paid attention to the violence women endure and the vulnerability they withstand in their journeys. With these realizations have come adjustments to policy, discourse and knowledge produced about refugees.

Who Is a Refugee?

The international system of emergency aid is built on inaccurate notions that portray refugees as waves, floods and tides of humanity whose masses will undoubtedly scramble for limited precious resources—notions which separate us from them, the fortunate from the

unfortunate, defining refugees as the distant and unfortunate "other." Official definitions rest on UNHCR's 1951 Convention and 1967 Protocol, but their usefulness in the post- Cold War era has been called into question.

It is between the emergency phase and the reconstruction phase (or in some cases, settlement in a third country) that the official, registered refugee loses that label- or sheds his or her refugee skin. At this point in development discourse, the refugee moves from "refugee" to "former refugee" or" repatriated refugee," as if to reiterate that refugee status is the most important dimension of the individual. The"refugee," as reinforced by aid workers, can be used politically by those creating the conflict and those administering aid. In this sense, the refugee becomes a political commodity. Hence, becoming a former refugee, or shedding the refugee label altogether, will depend on all of the regimes in power in the country of flight, the country of asylum, the aid community and the donor community, each of which has its own interests at stake and strategies in place.

Women Are Refugees Too

It is easy to talk about refugees without realizing that 80 percent of all the refugees in the world today are women and their children. At first look, it seems most refugee populations are gendered in a very specific way. Women are turned into refugees with their children while men are turned into soldiers, exiled politicians or intellectuals, killed or fighting in wars as guerrillas, bandits or hired militiamen. But a closer look reveals that a small number of women are recruited as soldiers while many others are expected and required to play peripheral roles in civil conflict such as carrying supplies and ammunition. It is likely that other women are playing a complicit and supportive role from their base in a refugee settlement.

It is only recently, in the last decade, that the development regime has recognized, in the form of official policies and other proclamations or special appointments, the gendered make-up of refugee groups. These policies for women as refugees didn't develop in a historical or political vacuum, but were produced by people who are inevitably imbued with their own personal ideologies, culturally embedded narratives, and particular epistemology. The gendered characteristics of refugee groups didn't suddenly appear in the last decade as the policies were being developed, but existed long before the regimes were aware. Refugee women were tumed into a distinct issue by academics, policy makers, activists and aid workers inside and outside of the development regime, with a general thrust of discourse and knowledge production originating in Europe and North America *about* refugees in developing countries.

Progressive Policy

The international women's movement, the women's human rights movement, and the formation of Women in Development (WID) programs within the development construction site have made women more visible in many arenas as political actors. All of these influences together have buoyed the advocates who initially turned the conditions of women refugees into an issue within the international aid community.

Aid organizations have long recognized the need for refugee protection against forcible repatriation, armed attacks, banditry or unjustified detention, but it was only in the mid 1980s that these advocates brought to the attention of the international community the gendered aspects of protection. The Third World Conference on Women in Nairobi in 1985 created Strategies for Advancement which UNHCR was obligated to implement. Following the conference, the International Working Group on Refugee Women was formed in Geneva, whose mandate was to encourage NGOs, UNHCR and governments to look at the specific needs of refugee women. The WorkingGroup,as well as other NGOs and activists, was instrumental in pushing UNHCR to develop its first policy on refugee women in 1990.

The 1994 Cairo Platform for Action, and the Platform for Action from the 1995 Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing recognized refugee women as a distinct issue. The *Convention for the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women* (CEDA W), passed by the UN General Assembly in 1979, wascentral in providing a base for creating policy for women across the board. Policy on women's human rights has developed alongside and reinforced policy for refugee women.

Since the mid 1980s, UNHCR has been the leading organization among international development and humanitarian organizations in the development of the policies on women refugees, although it was spurred by NGOs and activists to do so. The International Working Group on Refugee Women lobbied UNHCR to establish the post of Senior Coordinator for Refugee Women, which was created in 1989. In 1985, UNHCR began issuing official statements which acted as building blocks, and secured a base from which the 1990 UNHCR *Policy on Refugee Women* and subsequent documents could be built. The 1990 *Policy on Refugee Women* aims to improve participation of refugee women in all programs through mainstreaming.

The 1991 *Guidelines for the Protection of Refugee Women* elaborate on practical ways to implement the recommendations in the 1990 Policy. Their purpose is "to help the staff of UNHCR and its implementing partners to identify the specific protection issues, problems and risks facing refugee women" (UNHCR 1991, 11). In 1995, UNHCR came out with the document entitled *Sexual Violence against Refugees: Guidelines on Prevention and Response,* which elaborates on physical protection issues.

Many of the professionals within the development regime agree that the strength of the policies will only be tested as they move from the paper to "the field." UNHCR and some NGOs have begun to implement the guidelines in the field, and many field workers have been trained in gender awareness. In addition to the Senior Coordinator for Refugee Women, there is now a Regional Coordinator in each of the five

UN regions, i.e. Africa, Asia, Europe, Middle East, and the Americas. Each field office and administrative office now has a Focal Point who is responsible for raising awareness about issues for refugee women and distributing policies.

Even with these constraints, there have been many successful projects initiated since the commitment of UNHCR to women refugees began in the late 1980s, including programs to increase physical security, counselling and mental health services, micro-credit and income-generating projects, maternal and reproductive health, and education and literacy training.

Aid agencies have also begun to pay attention to the gendered aspects of distributing food in camps. In some cases, camps staff are not aware of women as single heads of households, and assume the food should be distributed to the men.

Conclusion

To interrogate the knowledge production process is to query whether the discourses produced are liberating for refugee women or, on the other hand, if they subject women to increasing degrees of control over, and appropriation of, their lives by development workers and administrators, human rights advocates, journalists and scholars.

On the side of viewing the creation of the category of women refugees leading to refugees having less control over their own lives, are analysts such as Arturo Escobar (1995, 9), who asserts that development discourse in general "has created an extremely efficient apparatus for producing knowledge about, and the exercise of power over, the Third World." In this same vein, again on the category of women in WID programs, Mueller (1996) points out that researchers and development experts use standardized procedures and statistics which inevitably have the effect of the erasure of women's experience. Typical descriptions reflect "a way of knowing and a way of *not* knowing, a way of talking *about* women and a way of silencing women from speaking about the experience of their own lives as they are organized by unseen and uncontrollable outside forces" (Mueller quoted in Escobar 1995, 179). Mueller's description of WID knowledge production echoes many of the critiques brought forth in this paper which shows how women refugees are silenced, organized and controlled by the various regimes examined even when intentions of individuals and institutions are working within the development regime to empower women refugees. This distortion of the humanitarian effort is a function of how the super structures of the aid system can act to transform intentions of advocacy into the larger workings of power.

The other side of the debate, which views the creation of the category of "women refugees" as a liberating force, may be best illustrated by discourse from within the development regime. Concepts of empowerment and participation that have generally taken root in development policy are also in wide circulation when it comes to women refugees. Training programs for dealing with the gendered aspects of emergency relief are now becoming common in the international aid community. And, as we have seen, policy is well-developed now for the protection of women refugees.

The debate outlined above locates the situation in which the central question of this thesis must be asked. That question is: Does the construction of "refugee woman," which occurs in the mid 1980s to the late 1990s in all of the construction sites together, shape the process by which any individual woman also becomes a "refugee" in a way that makes the subsequent process of becoming normal again difficult or improbable? The evidence in this study suggests that the process of becoming normal again is hampered by the previous process of becoming a refugee because the constructions of the refugee woman, in many cases, act to reinforce and maintain the systems of management, administration and regulation by the regimes, especially the development regime. This does not mean that there is no liberating effect at all of the new discourse on women refugees. The discourse, policies, and projects created for women refugees need to be recognized as important contributions to the struggle for women's rights internationally, but only with the recognition that the institutionalization of bureaucratic procedures specifically for women also have the potential to open women up to state or quasi-state forms of regulation. Women who have been turned into refugees are particularly vulnerable to these forms of control because of their fragile status in the system of nation states. For these women to be able to shed their refugee skin, a delicate balance must be struck between the power inherent in the international aid community and the liberatory effects of the new found category of refugee women.

The forces that have come together in the international women's movement allow us to begin to talk about violence against women (whether they are considered refugees or not) during war in a way that makes us conscious of the victim's welfare, instead of merely reinforcing and institutionalizing women as victims. An international network of feminists, some who work in the construction sites, have begun to explain how war makers rely on specific ideas about masculinity. These feminists are documenting rape so that internationally recognized human rights can be redefined in women's favour. This trend will certainly buoy efforts by women refugees to access legal redress in crimes of sexual violence and gain protection in situations of armed conflict. ■

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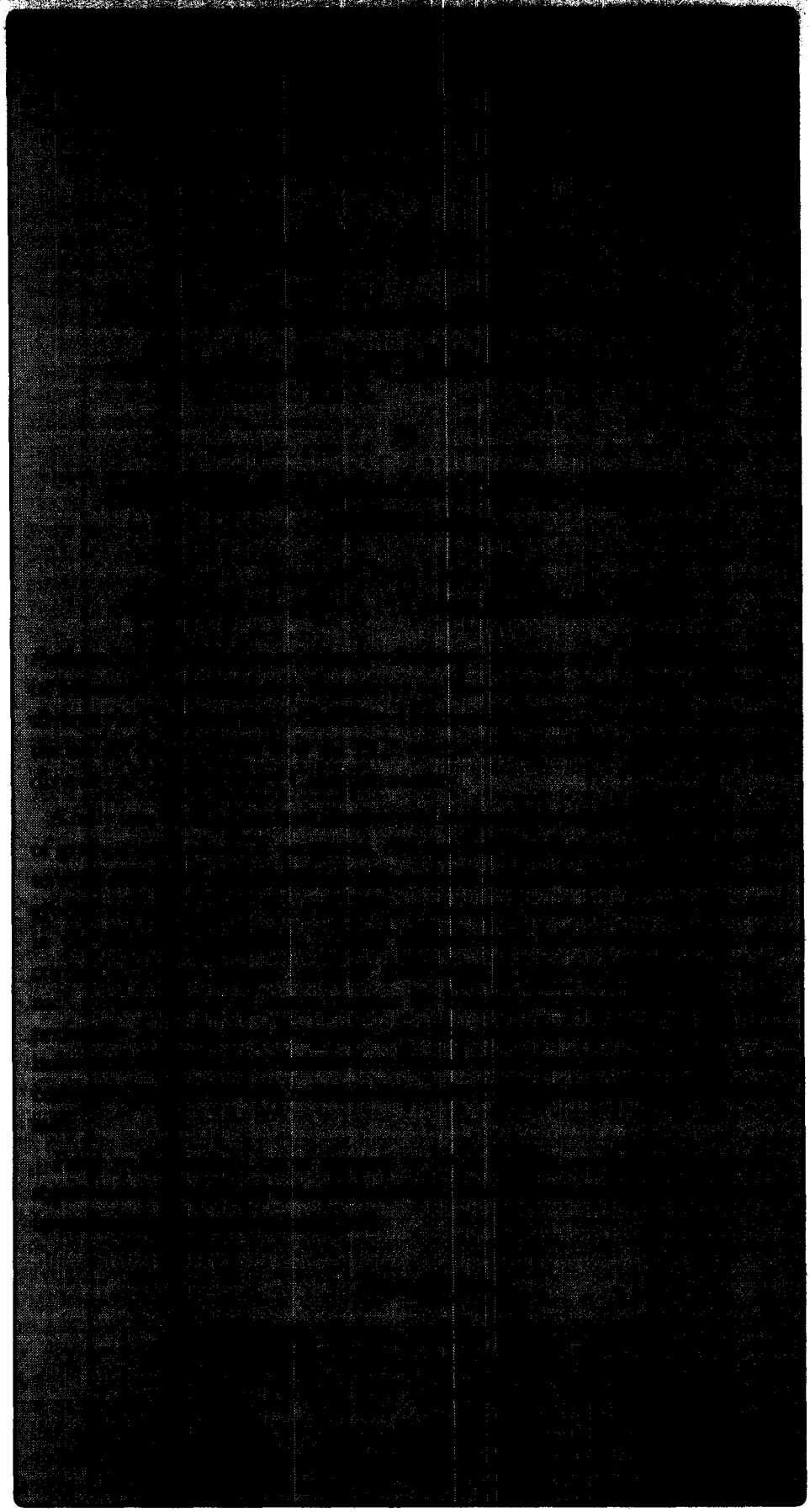

Representing Refugee Women: Gender and Work in Three Kenyan Camps

Jennifer Hyndman

Abstract

Representations of refugee women as "poor," "vulnerable," and "helpless" are often caricatures inattentive to the innovations and survival strategies they employ. Combined with the relatively few images and impressions of refugee women's experiences available, refugee relief workers and scholars have limited understanding of their worlds across time and space. This article aims to 1) discuss the politics, power relations, and problems of representing refugee women; 2) illustrate selected daily routines, concerns, and income-earning strategies of Somali refugee women in Kenya; and 3) argue that the "local capacity," or indigenous skills, of this group have not been fully recognized. Astute humanitarian policy and practice should not only promote "building local capacity"—a term often heard in relief circles today—but it should identify, mobilize, and support the kinds of local capacity identified in the Kenyan camps of Ifo, Hagadera, and Dagahaley.

Précis

La représentation courante des femmes réfugiées comme "pauvres", "vulnérables" et "démunies" procède souvent d'une vision caricaturale mal informée des stratégies novatrices de survie que ces femmes mettent en pratique. À cause du très petit nombre d'impressions et d'images reflétant l'expérience des femmes réfugiées dont on dispose, les intervenants et les spécialistes en matière de questions de réfugiés ont une compréhension fort restreinte de l'univers de ces femmes à travers le temps et l'espace. Le but de cet article est de: 1) aborder la question de la problématique politique, des rapports de pouvoirs, et des problèmes de représentations associés aux femmes réfugiées; 2) illustrer une sélection de routines quotidiennes, de problèmes concrets et de stratégies visant à générer un revenu chez des femmes somaliennes réfugiées au Kenya; et 3) présenter une argumentation selon laquelle les "capacités locales", ou savoir-faire indigène, de ce groupe n'ont pas été reconnus à leur juste valeur. Une politique et des pratiques humanitaires pertinentes ne devraient pas seulement faire la promotion de la "constitution de capacités locales"—selon une formulation ayant présentement cours dans les milieux de l'aide aux réfugiés—mais devraient identifier, mobiliser et donner un appui aux types de capacités locales identifiées dans les camps kenyans de Ifo, Hagadra, et Dagahaley.

In this brief article, I argue that representations of refugee women and their lives in camps must avoid the caricatures of "vulnerable," helpless victims of circumstance without losing sight of the daily struggles they face and survival strategies they employ. The paper exposes what might be thought of as indigenous relief strategies employed by refugee women in camps. "Building local capacity" is a common phrase in refugee relief circles, referring to the importance of enabling local individuals and groups to acquire the necessary resources, skills, and knowledge to perform essential functions and deliver necessary assistance when humanitarian organizations leave. While this is an important and laudable approach, it risks overlooking the existing "local capacity" and on-going strategies for survival. This article considers the daily work of Somali refugee women in three Kenyan camps. The women are engaged in complex arrangements of invisible work that constitute an important informal economy, easily overlooked by large-scale assessments.

Selected excerpts from twenty-five interviews conducted with refugee women in the three Dadaab camps of Ifo, Hagadera, and Dagahaley are presented below. Retelling stories recounted to me by refugee women through an interpreter to illustrate this point is, however, tricky business. By representing refugee women and their daily lives, I risk voicing over their knowledge and experience—misrepresenting them across cultural divides and differences in political status and power. By underlining their innovations, stamina, and accomplishments under arduous conditions, my story also risks saying that these women can survive whatever conditions they encounter—a dangerous conclusion in any fragile situation of human displacement. Humanitarian operations and refugee programs are heavily gendered.[1] Any insight into the ways and means by which this occurs is an important addition to the paucity of writing related to refugee women.

As a feminist and a geographer, I conducted field work in Kenya where the everyday survival strategies of refugee women living in camps constituted an important focus of my research. My own experience, first employed as a relief worker for CARE International in 1992 and then as a field officer in Somalia with UNHCR in 1993, steeped me in the intense culture of relief work. This history of working for an NGO, CARE, and UNHCR positioned me as an "insider" of sorts within the relief network in the region. At the same time, my main motivation to conduct research stemmed from observations of and reservations about refugee operations that I encountered while employed in the field. I was, and remain concerned that the means

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Kenya: Somali refugees in Liboi camp. To cook their food, refugees must collect fire wood. This can result in environmental damage.
Photo: UNHCR/21OS2/0S.1991/B. Press

by which refugees are "managed" by humanitarian agencies reinscribe neo-colonial relations of power predicated on a hierarchy of cultures in the camp, and on major asymmetries of power linked to gender and political status.2 While I was an "insider" to refugee operations having worked for two agencies, I was also critical of these operations. I was both inside and outside the project of providing humanitarian assistance.

In the camps, I found that the everyday experiences and struggles of refugee women were often invisible, inaudible, and secondary to other issues and actors in the camps. They were less likely than men to speak English; they had less access to camp jobs; and fewer opportunities to be involved in camp decision-making and consultations with relief organizations. They were, nonetheless, actively engaged in strategies to optimize their situation. Many of these refugee women were, in a different sense, both inside and outside the humanitarian project of the refugee camp. The refugee women with whom I met would be better described as left out of the project, the "abject" rather than the subjects.3While there were (and are) a number of policies in place aimed at supporting and promoting refugee women, my findings indicated that camp operations were generally inattentive to the conditions of work and home for these women.

Aware that translation is heavily invested with unequal power relations and a site for questions of representation, power, and historicity,4 my research nonetheless attempts to incorporate some two dozen interviews with Somali refugee women in camps located in Northeastern Kenya, all of which were contingent upon the availability and skills of one translator. Sherene Razack (1996) tells of the "perils of storytelling for refuge women" in particular.5 She calls for an interrogation of the construction of subjectivity on the part of those who collect and use stories, as well as a more careful examination of how we come to know what we know given the unequal relations among groups differentiated by nationality, ethnicity, class, gender, and so on. Interviews often serve to authenticate research findings by appropriating subjugated know ledges from essentialized "native informants."6 At least as problematic as cultural appropriation is the uncomfortable realization that the interview process reinscribes the same power relations that I aimed to critique and contest from

the outset.[7] Interviews exact the same kind of authoritative performances from refugees as do the relief agencies which organize access to food, medical services, and other needs. Consent becomes almost meaningless in the wholly unequal relationship between interviewer and interviewee.

Language translation poses other difficulties in the camps. Almost all of my face-to-face interactions with refugees required a translator. Translation is a critical activity for UNHCR and all other international agencies' daily operations.[8] Often, discussions and disagreements to which I was privy occurred solely around the issue of whose translator, "ours" or "theirs," would interpret. On one occasion, an incensed UNHCR local staff discovered that a rape incident had been translated to the police as "spousal assault." As Norma Alarcón (1994) notes:

> The act of translating, which often introduces different concepts and perceptions, displaces and may even do violence to local knowledge through language. In the process, these may be assessed as false or inauthentic.[9]

Refugees' displacement is both a corporeal and cultural condition. In an effort to avoid the further cultural displacement vis-à-vis the research process, I "tested" my proposed questions before commencing the interviews by having the translator—a Somali woman from the area who moved between cultures daily—review and assess whether they were conceptually and culturally "translatable."[10] "Language is not a neutral medium that passes freely and easily into the private property of the speaker's intentions; it is populated—overpopulated with the intentions of others. Expropriating, forcing it to submit to one's own intentions and accents, is a difficult and complicated process."[11] Neither translation nor the differences in cultural and professional positions of the people involved were neutral, nor were the languages employed.

Through a translator, I asked women who were randomly selected from all three camps exactly what they had done the previous day and for what duration. I also asked about the economy of the household, the adequacy of food rations distributed by CARE, and the means by which the family covered any deficits. In what ways are patterns of mobility constituted through gender relations defined by social organization, access to resources, and political status? While the brief geographical stories offered here are imperfect "sketches" of refugee women's work, my intent is to document time-space constraints and strategies which women employ under these conditions.[12] The stereotypical depiction of refugee women as vulnerable and helpless is smashed by many of these stories.

The selection of responses presented here serves to illustrate how space is negotiated during a given day and some of the activities and income-earning strategies women employed. I avoided asking questions that the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and the non-governmental organizations (NGOs) often posed, such as household size and composition, so that I might distinguish my research from the monitoring roles of administering agencies. While one cost of this approach is the absence of biographical detail with respect to refugee families, the purpose of my study was not to develop a description of their households but to understand the influence of the humanitarian agencies on their lives. My questions focused on the ways that UNHCR and NGOs affected the routines of refugee women, in terms of camp layout, organization, and supplies provided to them. All of the refugee women interviewed were at home when approached by the interpreter and myself.

The texts presented are based on the verbatim translations of the interpreter, and as such, are presented in the third person. This strategy of representation—one which inserts both the interpreter and my own cultural distance from the interviewee—is a deliberate effort to render visible, transparent, and problematic the process of translation and the power relations interviews involve.

Interview #1

(Ifo Camp, Section A6, young Somali woman with baby.) She rises at five to prepare tea and breakfast, tea alone yesterday because there was no wheat flour in the last food distribution. After an hour of washing clothes and children, she grinds and mills sorghum for lunch. While lunch is cooking, she goes to look for firewood which takes about three hours. She eats lunch with the family and relaxes until three-thirty when she goes to look for water. She returns two hours later and starts supper which is eaten between seven and seven-thirty. Then they visit as a family and go to sleep between eight-thirty and nine.

Interview #2

(Hagadera Camp, Section D3, young Somali woman with baby; the woman is grinding sorghum into flour upon our arrival.) She wakes up at six. Until nine, she is preparing breakfast, washing utensils, and cleaning the compound—sweeping and such. Between nine and ten, she goes for water. From ten to twelve, she grinds sorghum (as she is now). From twelve to two, she prepares, cooks, and eats lunch. Then she goes for firewood until four. At four, she goes back home to prepare tea and sorghum again until six. By seven-thirty, supper is eaten and finished. She is sleeping by nine.

It is worth noting that sorghum, like whole grain wheat, is one of the most labour-intensive foods to prepare because it has to be ground and milled by hand. In the camps among Somalian refugees, this work is a female responsibility and, as these excerpts suggest, consumes a large part of daily routine. Rice is both the easiest to cook and the most popular staple among Somalis. It has also become a rare ration during food distributions in the Dadaab camps. Both staples do, of course, require cooking with water and wood which are also collected by women.

Interview #3

(Dagahaley Camp, Section F0, young Somali woman with baby.) She awak-

ens at six and has her prayers first. She then prepares tea for the children, washes the utensils, cleans the house and bathes the children until about nine. She collects water, and at about nine-thirty, starts the process of preparing sorghum for the noon meal. At noon, she begins cooking for about an hour. Everyone eats at two and then rests. After three, the same grinding of sorghum for the evening meal begins. More water is fetched, and she cooks dinner. The children are fed by eight. She then visits with the neighbours for a while and goes to sleep by nine.

Sometimes her husband collects firewood to sell, but it is dangerous because bandits rob and sometimes attack people collecting firewood. This woman is part of a group of women formed in order to meet additional income needs. In a group of about five, each woman contributes an equal portion of her ration after a distribution. The total sum is sold at the market and the money is given to one of the women. The system rotates so that each woman eventually benefits by having access to credit.13

An informal economy of trade is rendered visible here. The credit afforded these women allows them to buy household items such as tea, footwear, and clothing which are not generally provided for by relief agencies. Other items, such as cooking oil, are often needed to supplement the supply distributed by CARE in the camps. Women are largely responsible for maintaining the household and earning additional income to meet other needs.

Where are the men in this picture? Given the social organization of Somali families in such a way that one man may have more than one wife, many households are led by women. One cannot speak of gender divisions of work, however, without accounting for men's activities in the camps. A requestformore information to fill this gap by UNHCR staff in Nairobi and Dadaab was met
with this response:

> It's not the same for all groups of men. The Somali men are different from the Sudanese, and so on. As far as the Dadaab camps go, a lot of men are just wandering around meeting other men. They talk politics and what have you in the shade under the tree or they go to the local cafe to rest for a coffee and to play some games (chess, cards, and local games). Some men have jobs with CARE and other NGOs.14

Men's absence from the homes at which the interviews took place was evident. Their daily activities were, as this transcript suggests, more difficult to trace. The following interviews illustrate the geographies of refugee women who did not appear to have much active male support in their households.

Interview #4

> (Ifo Camp, Section A6, a young Somali woman.) She is awake by five, lights the fire, and makes tea and food for the family. By seven, she leaves to look for firewood, which takes about three hours, and then takes the wood to the market to sell. She returns home by noon, prepares lunch, and takes a bit of rest until three when she goes to fetch water. This also takes three hours because there is a queue. Supper is prepared and the family eats by seven. Up until about nine, she talks with her neighbours who live within the same fenced compound. Then, she is ready for sleeping.
>
> The official ration is not enough. She sells firewood to buy extra food.

Interview #5

> (IfoCamp, Section A6, an old woman. The interview format varies somewhat from the others because the woman thought she was too old to be relevant to the questions posed.) This woman has two grandsons who are orphans. She has a ration card for a family of five. She doesn't go to the market (to earn extra money). She does washing and cooking, though not to the same extent as younger women. Her neighbours collect firewood in bulk and give her some. She also receives help from the AlHaramein (an NGO nearby) with her firewood supply. Sometimes she sells sorghum, but the price is very low.

While anecdotal, interviews such as this one pointed to informal support systems for households at a disadvantage. Refugees living in the same area sometimes shared water and firewood when they were in scarce supply. NGOs like AI-Haramein and CARE make some effort to identify vulnerable refugees and assist them where possible.

Interview #6

> (Dagahaley Camp, Section D4, young woman with baby.) She rises at six. She has a maid who cooks in the kitchen. Yesterday, someone-the husband of a pregnant womancame to her house and asked her to come to Section CS where the pregnantwomanlived. (She has a job with the French medical NGO as a traditional birth attendant, or TBA). She stayed there until nine, after which she went for help. A vehicle was called to take the woman to the hospital where she gave birth. The traditional birth attendant stayed with the new mother until eleven when she returned to the house. She rested, had lunch, and atthree, began to build a new *tllklll* (hut) which took about an hour. She built another one today, the one in which we're sitting. They are for the coming hot season and for Ramadhan. At four, she returned to work, stayed until six, and then came home. She bathed herself and her kids while the maid cooked. The family ate supper and stayed around the house. At eight, they slept.

While refugee women with jobs are few, their earned income affords them "extras," such as the services of a "maid" in this example. According to the interpreter with whom I conducted the interview, domestic help is common among more affluent families in Somali society. Usually, it is young unmarried women who work and live with a family in exchange for room and board and a small stipend.

Interview #7

> (Dagahaley Camp, Section DS, a Bantu-Somalian woman.) She woke up at six in the morning, made breakfast and cleaned house until eightthirty. Then she wentforwater which took two hours, until ten-thirty. Afterwards, she went to the market to buy wheat flour in order to make a

local bread which she sells. Returning at noon, she made lunch and finished eating. Then she went back for water, which took from two to six in the evening, but she came back empty-handed. (I asked why the water problem? She said the population is dense there, and the water pressure very low). She made supper for the family, arranged the beds for the children, and afterwards slept.

The considerable time and effort required to collect water and firewood is exacerbated by population concentration in the desert-based camps. Decentralized water taps are located within the camp perimeter at a distance not usually more than 500 meters from any given refugee *tukul* (hut). Nonetheless, lines can be long and pressure poor at some distribution points. Firewood is often sold in the local refugee camp markets, but must otherwise be collected well beyond the boundaries of the camps. Refugee women cover up to fifteen kilometres on a single journey to gather firewood.[15]

Just as industrial geography and sociology once spoke of "cathedrals in the desert," referring to culturally, economically, and geographically inappropriate projects established in the name of "development," refugee camps are desert cities similarly unsuited to highly concentrated human populations. While a sizable aquifer runs below the desert floor in the Dadaab area where the camps are situated, providing ample supplies of water and wood for 110,000 visiting refugees is an obvious environmental challenge. What is less obvious is the shift in demand for these commodities based on the kinds of external food aid imported. Both the Somali Kenyans and many of the Somali refugees living in the Dadaab area have a largely nomadic background based on economies of livestock—camels and cattle, in particular. Meat and milk from these sources comprise the staple foods of the population, the latter of which requires neither wood nor water to prepare. The arrival and preparation of large amounts of wheat, rice, corn-soy blend, dried kidney beans, and other non-perishable food aid from other oversupplied regions of the world to camps in Kenya pose serious environmental questions. Because each of these commodities requires considerable amounts of water and wood to prepare, the paucity of these resources is exacerbated and the daily collection of them becomes increasingly difficult for refugee women.[16]

Interview #8

(Hagadera Camp, Section E2, a Bantu-Somalian woman with a newborn baby; the woman is standing pounding sorghum as we arrive.) She wakes up at seven. From seven to eight, she prepares breakfast and the family eats it. Between eight and nine, she goes for water; from nine to twelve she prepares sorghum, crushing it, making it into powder. Between twelve and two, she cooks and eats lunch. From two to three, she went [sic] back for water; from four o'clock is supper preparation and bathing of children until five. By six, supper is ready and she makes sure the little ones are fed because they go to sleep earlier. Up until seven-thirty, the elder people have supper. From seven-thirty until eight, she chats with the children and her people (I didn't clarify the possessive adjective here but assume it means other Bantu-Somalians with whom she shares a fenced compound). She goes to sleep between eight and nine.

To earn extra money, she begins some days by fetching and selling jerry cans of water to other households. She usually sells six cans (20 litres each) at 3 shillings each in a morning. This gives her enough money (U.S. $0.33) to buy someone else's bulk firewood off a donkey cart which she then sells in smaller bundles in the market.

This elaborate income-generating arrangement suggests spatial constraints and possibly security considerations. Rather than stray far from the camp to collect her own firewood before sunrise and with children in tow, this woman hauls water closer to home to earn the seed money required to buy bulk firewood from someone else. The tiny amounts of money accrued in each exchange are part of an informal economy which is constituted through the spatially circumscribed and artificially-endowed formal economy of the camp. The sale of refugee labour and of donated commodities provide the basis for trade in the camps. Based on the collection of water and wood, and the selling of food aid, ad hoc markets which carry a range of provisions—cigarettes, spices, tea, candies, and camel milk among them—have been established in all of the camps. Refugee women's work is not simply a struggle to meet multiple household and income demands. While work is convoluted by the spatial segregation and organization of the camps, refugee women employ elaborate strategies to make ends meet. Credit schemes and labour-intensive entrepreneurial activities of various kinds are evidence of a vital informal economy.

Somali cultural practices code household work as a women's responsibility, but women's work cannot simply be reduced to the gendered division of labour. One can describe the temporary urban spaces of the desert camps as expressions of an "supra-local order," characterized by foreign foodstuffs and a layout that suits the administrators and suppliers at least as much as the refugees. It at once exacerbates the burden of work that women do and reinscribes their routines. What becomes clear from these selected geographies of refugee work is that a significant amount of time is spent performing tasks that allow for basic subsistence and survival in the camps. Dry foodstuffs generate a high demand for wood and water amid a concentrated population. The nomadic practices of many Somalis, including their reliance on meat and milk which requires less wood and water, are not incorporated into the organization of the camps.

What do these excerpts from stories of refugee women tell us? The survival strategies and cooperative ventures that humanitarian organizations aim to put in place are, in some cases, already there. There is a clear need for trade and a small informal cash economy in order to access items not distributed in refugee rations. A complex economy of both formal and informal exchange takes place within the camps. And yet the commodities available are not always

appropriate, culturally or environmentally speaking. The testimony of these refugee women suggests an on-going concern and awareness with the material conditions ofliving in the camps, as much as the political nature of their displacement. ..

Notes

1. Wenona Giles, "Aid Recipients or Citizens?: Canada's Role in Managing the Gender Relations of Forced Migration," in *Development and Diaspora: The Gender Relations of Refugee Experience,* edited by W. Giles, H. Moussa, P. Van Esterik (Dundas, Ontario: Artemis Enterprises, 1996).
2. Jennifer Hyndman, "Border Crossings," in *Antipode* 29, no. 2 (1997): 149-76.
3. Judith Butler, *Bodies that Matter: On the Discursive Limits of 'Sex'* (New York: Routledge, 1993).
4. Tejaswini Niranjana, *Siting Translation: History, Post-Structuralism, and the Colonial Context* (Berkeley: UniversityofCalifomia Press, 1992).
5. Sherene Razack, "The Perils of Storytelling for Refugee Women," in *Development and Diaspora: The Gender Relations of Refugee Experience,* edited by W. Giles, H. Moussa, P . Van Esterik (Dundas, Ontario: Artemis Enterprises, 1996), 271-89.
6. Donna Haraway, "Situated Knowledg,es" in *Simians, Cyborgs, and Women: The Reinvention of Nature* (New York: Routledge, 1991), 183-201.
7. Helene Moussa, *Storm and Sanctuary: The Journey of Ethiopian and Eritrean Refugee Women* (Dundas, Ontario: Artemis, 1993). Helene Moussa's research with Eritrean and Ethiopian refugees. addresses the "politics of research" and provided important background for my interviews with refugees. Her positioning as a researcher, however, differs significantly from my own. Her project of tracing the journeys of sixteen Eritrean and Ethiopian women from their homes in the Horn of Africa to Canada focuses on the experience of the women as refugees, rather than on UNHCR's strategies to manage refugee populations.
8. TheexceptiontothismaybeAI-Haramein, the staff of whom speak Arabic from which many Somali words are derived. However, only a few (male) elders and educated Somalis are conversant in the language.
9. Norma Alarc6n, "Traddutora, Traditora: A Paradigmatic Figure of Chicana Feminism," in *Scattered Hegemonies,* edited by I. Grewal and C. Kaplan (Minneapolis: Minnesota University Press, 1994), 113.
10. The articles included in *Scattered Hegemonies,* edited by I. Grewal and C. Kaplan (Minneapolis: Minnesota University Press, 1994) were the primary source of provocation at that time. The work of Tejaswini Niranjana is also helpful here: *Siting Translation: History, Post-Structuralism, and the Colonial Context* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992).
11. Mikhail Bakhtin cited in Norma Alarc6n, 1994, op. cit., 119.
12. Isabel Dyck, "Space, Time, and Renegotiating Motherhood: An Exploration of the Domestic Workplace," in *Environmentand Planning* D: *Society and Space,* no. 8, 1990. See also Suzanne Mackenzie, "Restructuring the Relations ofW ork and Life: women as Environmental Actors, Feminism as Geographical Analysis" in *Remaking Human Geography,* edited by A. Kobayashi and S. Mackenzie (London: Unwin Hyman, *1989),4D-61,* and Geraldine Pratt and Susan Hanson, "Women and Work Across the Life Course: Moving Beyond Essentialism," in *Full Circles: Geographies of Women over the Life Course,* edited by C. Katz and J. Monk (New York: Routledge, 1993),27-54. Doreen Massey's work on the "politics of mobility" also serves as corrective to any assumption of absolute space or equality of movement among people. See D. Massey "Power-Geometry and a Progressive Sense of Place," in *Mapping the Futures: Local Cultures, Global Change,* edited by J. Bird, B. Curtis, T. Putnam, G. Robertson, and L. Tickner, (New York: Routledge, 1993),59-69.
13. To calculate the amount of credit made available on a rotating basis, one might make the following assumptions: each of the five women has a family size of five. Each person is allotted 0.5 kg of grain per day, so that a 15 day distribution would include 7.5 kg per person and 37.5 kg per family. If each woman contributed one fifth of her total grain allocation (7.5 kg), the collective amount would equal 37 .5 kg. The price wheat flour, the most common grain staple, ranged from 3 to 5 Kenyan shillings (KSh) per kilo. This represents a total credit each time of between 112.5 KSh and 187.5 KSh, the equivalent of U.S. $2.00-3.40.
14. E-mail transcript from UNHCRin Nairobi, June 7, 1996.
15. UNHCR, *The State of the World's Refugees: In Search of Solutions* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1995).
16. In Malawi, the wood consumed by refugees was considerable: some 20,000 hectares of forest per year. In Nepal, Bhutanese refugees used 400 kilos per capita of fuelwood per year. UNHCR provided kerosene stoves and fuel in this case; see UNHCR, 1995, op. cit. While relatively expensive fuel alternatives have been employed, major changes in the refugee food basket-as a major source of the problem-havenot been entertained. UNHCR has a number of nutritionists on staff to ensure that foodstuffs provide sufficient nourishment, but the agency relies on the UN Wodd Food Program (WFP) to collect donations for the camps. 0

Refugee Women in London: The Experiences of Somali Women

Rosemary Sales and Jeanne Gregory

Abstract

This article is based on interviews with twenty Somali refugee women living in London. The interviews focused mainly on the women's experiences since arriving in Britain and their hopes and expectations for themselves and their children. The article explores the extent to which gendered roles have been reinforced or renegotiated as a result of their move to Britain. For most of the women, their lives in Somalia were based primarily within the household. Some had worked in professional occupations and had combined public and private roles through the support of female kin. For all the women, exile brought financial, social and legal insecurity and none was in permanent employment. Some, however, found new independence and confidence in exile, and have been able to renegotiate relationships from a more powerful position. Others have lost status and self-esteem, and those who had been able to combine caring roles with professional work in Somalia have found this impossible in Britain. The study exposed the gaps between the women's skills and experience and the work they have been able to find. There is an urgent need for Somali speakers in teaching, medicine and social work, but Somali qualifications are not recognized in Britain. This demonstrates the urgency of a comprehensive strategy, including training, for refugee resettlement in Britain.

Précis

Cet article est basé sur un ensemble d'entrevues avec vingt femmes somaliennes réfugiées à Londres. Les entrevues portent principalement sur l'expérience vécue de ces femmes depuis leur arrivé en Grande-Bretagne, et leurs espoirs et attentes pour elles-mêmes et pour leurs enfants. L'article explore dans quelle mesure leur rôle de sexage a été réaffirmé ou renégocié consécutivement à leur déplacement vers la Grande-Bretagne. Pour la majorité de ces femmes, la vie en Somalie se passait principalement à la maison. Certaines d'entre-elles avaient exercé des occupations professionnelles et avaient combiné rôle public et rôle privé dans leur activité de support des membres de leur famille de sexe féminin. Pour toutes ces femmes, l'exil a amené l'insécurité sur les plans financier, social et légal, et aucune d'entre elle ne détient un emploi permanent. Certaines cependant, ont trouvé une nouvelle indépendance et une nouvelle confiance en soi dans l'exil, et sont parvenues à renégocier leur relation maritale depuis une position affermie. D'autres ont perdu leur statut et leur estime de soi, et celles qui arrivaient à combiner rôle familial et activité professionnelle en Somalie n'y sont par parvenues en Grande-Bretagne. L'étude présente le hiatus accusé entre les savoir-faire et l'expérience de ces femmes d'une part et le travail qu'elles sont arrivées à trouver. Il y a un besoin criant de somaliens en enseignement, en médecine et en travail social, mais les qualifications somaliennes ne sont pas reconnues en Grande-Bretagne. Ceci tend à démontrer l'urgence d'une stratégie globale, incluant la formation, aux fins de la réinstallation de réfugiés en Grande-Bretagne.

Introduction

Britain has no permanent, central program for refugee resettlement. On arrival, refugees may be given assistance with immediate needs such as housing and interpretation by specialist organizations and refugee community groups (Duke 1996). Access to more permanent support is however limited and uneven. Like other refugees, most Somalis settle in London where there are established communities. Several thousand Somalis live in Waltham Forest, concentrated in the less prosperous areas. Most live in private rented accommodation, often sharing with other families in grossly overcrowded conditions. Some have been housed by the council, but recent legislation has prevented local authorities from housing asylum seekers in permanent accommodation.

Most Somali refugees spend several months or years in refugee camps in Africa. Those who manage to reach Britain are generally from the wealthier classes, who have the resources to purchase tickets. Many use false documents and may have difficulty proving their identity in Britain. Only one woman in our study had "Convention" status. Most had "Exceptional Leave to Remain (ELR)"[1] status, while others were awaiting decisions by the Home Office. ELR confers no right to family reunion, and for many, separation from husbands and children is the main problem they face in exile. This uncertainty makes it difficult for them to put down roots and to plan a future.

This paper is based on a small-scale study of the experiences of resettlement of Somali women refugees living in London, including interviews with twenty women carried out in early 1997.[2] All of the women arrived in London between 1990 and 1996, and most now live in the Borough of Waltham Forest in East London. The women left Somalia as a result of the civil war, and most had lost members of their close family.

Semi-structured interviews were carried out with these women. These interviews varied in length and depth. Some took place in the women's homes and others in the offices of community organizations. The first two were carried out in English and the others in Somali with an interpreter, although some women also spoke partly in English. There were often interruptions, particu-

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larly with the interviews in community centres, where the interpreter was called on to deal with emergencies, which meant that it was not always possible to probe all the issues we wished to raise. The women often sought our advice on specific problems relating to education, health and housing, and we attempted to advise where we were able.

The interviews focused mainly on the women's experiences since arriving in Britain and their hopes and expectations for themselves and their children. We were interested in the extent to which gendered roles had been reinforced or renegotiated as a result of their move to Britain. There has been a considerable amount of research on the specific problems faced by women refugees (Forbes Martin 1992; Osaki 1997; UNHCR 1995) and the difficulties they experience in gaining refugee status (Adjin-Tettey 1997; Crawley 1997; Kuttner 1997). Another theme which has emerged, however, is that women seem to find it easier than men to adapt to changed status (Kay 1989; Summerfield 1993; Buijs 1993; Refugee Council 1996). It is often men who lose most status as a result of flight. Unable to work and to fulfil their traditional role of "breadwinner," they may also have lost a public political role as well. In contrast, many women refugees experience new opportunities. Often, for the first time, they are acquiring independent income through benefits or employment. These patterns are evident in our study, although the experiences of the women varied considerably.

Our contacts with this group of women have been built up over several years during which we have been studying the resettlement needs of refugees (Sales and Gregory 1996; Duke, Sales, and Gregory 1998). Two women who were highly respected within the community acted as interpreters and introduced us to our interviewees. Mariam was a volunteer advice worker for a local women's community organization, and Ferhat was a gynaecologist in Somalia who was also known for hercampaigning work against Female Genital Mutilation (FGM). Their involvement established an atmosphere of trust and friendship which was essential not only due to the sensitive nature of much of the subject matter, but because some of the women's residence status was insecure, and they were suspicious of outsiders.

The Findings

All the women were or had been married; eighteen had married in Somalia, and two married Somali men in Britain. Ten were here without their husbands; three of the men died as a result of the war, and seven were still in Somalia or neighbouring countries. The remaining eight women had husbands in Britain, although three of these marriages had broken down. Most had suffered a serious decline in their standard of living as a result of be coming refugees. Only one was in secure employment, and most were managing with severely limited resources.

The first interviews were with Mariam and Ferhat. Unlike most other respondents, they had played a significant role in public life before the war. Their own activities, and the repercussions they suffered as a result, were decisive factors in their decision to leave.

Mariam, a science graduate, had been active in a women's group in Mogadishu which helped women displaced due to the civil war. With no welfare system, and the economy largely destroyed, the organisation attempted to find shelter, food and clothing for them. When the war spread to the capital, Mariam continued her work.
She was not interested in taking sides:

> The warlords hated me because I wouldn't support them. They claimed I was diverting my energies and those of the other helpers away from the war effort. Because we worked with everybody, regardless of which clan they belonged to, they said we were undermining support for the war. I had a lot of enemies. They used to threaten my life.

These threats eventually forced her to flee, leaving her three children behind. She was married at the age of thirteen,
but had separated from her husband many years ago. She came to Britain on her own, and was the only woman interviewed with full refugee status in her own right, which she won after an appeal against the original Home Office decision to refuse it.

Ferhat's father was a politician, and she told us her family was unusual in favouring education for girls as well as boys. When the civil war started, Ferhat continued to work in the hospital, but she too made enemies and had to leave:

> They used to say to me, "You shouldn't trea t this person, he's from the wrong clan." I said that I'm a doctor, and I will treat anybody who needs my help. They used to try and threaten me, and it became very difficult to work there.

Neither Ferhatnor Mariam was able to use their qualifications in this country. They both did voluntary work for the community, and were studying in order to be able to take up paid work. Some of the other women also had higher education and professional qualifications. They, like Ferhat, had been able to combine work and family in Somalia through the support of the extended family. Fatima had been a nurse working as a rural health worker. She left Somalia when her husband was killed. Farida worked as a chemist in a factory until the outbreak of war, despite having two young children. These women had been able to combine their public and private roles through support from other women rather than sharing domestic tasks with men. While all said their husbands were supportive of their public work, they had not changed the gendered division of labour in the household.

Most of the other women saw their lives as primarily based within the household, and spoke of a sharp divisionof gender roles as the norm in Somalia. This divergence of experience is similar to the differences found by Kay (1989) in her study of Chilean refugees, whom she describes as either "publicprivate" or "private" women. Thesedifferences have led to varied experiences in exile, although the relations between their previous and current roles are complex.

Gender Relations in Exile

As civil society in Somalia began to disintegrate, it was women who tended to keep the households together. They would grow, make and sell anything they could, whereas men would have found such activities demeaning. In Britain, whether they are with their husbands or alone, women take on the main burden of keeping the family together and dealing with landlords, teachers, social security, doctors and lawyers.

In her comparative study of Somali and Bengali women in London, Summerfield found that Somali men appeared to suffer from depression more frequently than Somali women, and, they appeared to be less in control of their lives (Summerfield 1993, 83). Several women in our study expressed concern for their husband's mental and physical well-being. The loss of self-esteem and living standard associated with refugee status had come as a severe blow. According to Ferhat, Somali men often withdrew rather than take on new challenges. Her own husband had had a highly paid government job in Somalia. She told us about him:

> He feels depressed and isolated. He sits at home and reads newspapers. He hardly ever goes out. He has a problem with his hearing which has gotten worse, but he won't get it looked at.

Another woman, Leila, whose husband had been an engineer recounted to us:

> When he sees buildings like the ones he used to build, he just stops and stares at them. He would love to be able to do that kind of work. His asthma [a stress related disease] has become chronic since we came here.

Many men seek consolation with other Somali men, often meeting to smoke *qat*.[3] This provides a temporary escape but aggravates their problems in the longer run since it makes them too lethargic to seek work, and often irritable and depressed afterwards. Some seek solace in religion and often become more observant. Mariam said:

> They think, "if I die I'll go to heaven." It helps them when they get depressed about conditions here. The men have problems with employment, they have lost their rights and status. They often take to religion, and become fanatical.

For some women, exile has led to marriage break down. Aysha had four daughters and no sons, and had lost seven children in childbirth. Sons are important to a Somali wife, as her connection to her husband's lineage is through her sons. Ferhat believed that Aysha's "failure" to bear sons was a major factor in her marriage dissociation. In Somalia, the husband might have resolved the situation by taking another wife without necessarily divorcing Aysha. She herself believed that her marriage would have ended anyway.

Ambara's husband had also left her. Though she was reluctant to go into details, it emerged that the husband had been violent and the children were relieved to see him go. Although the man's loss of status in exile is often blamed for domestic violence (Refugee Council 1996), ironically, this case involved the only husband in full-time paid employment. Mariam claimed that domestic violence is common in the community:

> Women are not listened to in the community, there is no respect. Religion is used as an indirect weapon. There is a lot of violence against women, and if they leave, they may be accused of bringing shame on the family. Men don't want women to be able to do things for themselves. Lots of families separate in England, because the women change, they become more independent.

Some of the younger women appeared to be making more demands on their husbands. Ikram had married a Somali man in Britain and had two young children. He was not prepared to help with the children, and spent his time with other men rather than looking for work. She decided she could manage better without him, and was now separated. Another woman, Feyrus, who had also gotten married in Britain said:

> Life is hard for Somali men. The way we are brought up, sisters help the man, doing all his cooking and washing. If he doesn't marry, he knows he will be looked after by his mother and sisters. It is very difficult for them to adapt.

Her young child was being looked after by her husband during the interview. She said he had found this difficult at first, but she felt strong enough to insist that he took his share to allow her to do voluntary work and study. Other studies have shown that divorce is high among Somali women in Britain as women have found more independence, and feel that they do not need to depend on a husband (Ali 1997).

Divorce is frowned upon in Somalia but is by no means unknown. Ferhat said that many young girls run away from their first husbands because of the pain and fear associated with sexual intercourse, a consequence of female genital mutilation (FGM). FGM (sometimes referred to as circumcision) is almost universal in Somalia, and the severest form, infibulation or Pharaonic, is the most common (Maxamed 1989). The sensitivity of this subject meant that it was not easy to pursue with our interviewees, particularly at the first meeting. It was sometimes brought up by the women themselves. At one meeting with eight women of varying ages and education all expressed dislike of the practice, and talked disparagingly of the insistence of Somali men that their wife's vagina be sewn up tightly after childbirth. Mariam said, "We have been spoiled, but we do not want our daughters to be. They claimed it had to be done for religious reasons, but now we know it was just to control us."

This issue is likely to remain a major source of division within the community, and the health implications are increasingly confronting a variety of professionals, such as health and social workers. Many women with young daughters have resolved not to have them circumcised, and it appears that it is women (together with their mothers) who make the decision. Nevertheless, it is still common for daughters to be sent to Africa to be circumcised, since the practice is illegal in Britain; and Somali boys often return to the refugee camps to

seek brides, to ensure that they secure a "clean" wife. Uncertainty about how long they will remain in Britain has implications for the continuation of this practice. Many Somalis fear that if their daughters are not circumcised, they would be ostracized from the community, and this would be even more intense in Somalia.

Mariam was the most outspoken in her criticism of the way religion is used to justify the oppression of women. The other women in the study all identified themselves strongly as Muslims, although the extent of their observance varied. These variations were visible in the way they dressed, although all of them covered their heads in public. Ferhat is devout, but claimed that supporters of FGM had distorted Islam since the practice is not required in the Koran.

Community groups play an important role for most of the women. Those with better language and skills are able to use these to support other members of the community. Those with less English rely heavily on the groups for help in interpreting, negotiating with officials, and pursuing their claims with the Home Office. There are five Somali organizations in the borough, including two women's groups, and these reflect ethnic divisions within the community. One women's group was set up because the women felt excluded from the maledominated association. They began meeting in each other' shomes until they were given permission to use local authority premises twice a week. The men who used the same premises on different days tried at first to prevent the women from having access. But the women's group continues to thrive, offering a range of advice and support to women. Men's response to this success is often ambivalent. Mariam, who took a leading role in establishing the group, told us, "The men say to me, 'we like what you are doing for the community, but keep away from our wives. We don't want them to become independent like you.'"

Although the groups are divided on ethnic lines, women have tended to be more open to working with women from other groups, and the women we interviewed were keen to reduce these divisions. They collaborated in community and education projects, and friendships spanned the two groups.

Employment

Refugees and asylum seekers, particularly women, face multiple barriers to employment both through theiruncertain legal status, and the racialized and gendered structures of the labour market. Only one of the women we interviewed was in permanent employment, and a few had found casual paid work as interpreters or in cleaning and other low status occupations. This is in line with national research (Carey-Wood et al. 1995) and a local survey which found high unemployment among refugee women, and that most of those employed felt theirjobs did not make use of their skills and qualifications (London Borough of Waltham Forest 1994). Many felt that employers had stereotyped views about Somali women, and that they were discriminated against because of their dress. Although many had skills that were urgently needed to support the community, for example, as teachers and health workers, none of the women with professional qualifications was able to work in the same area in Britain. Their qualifications were not recognized and the conversion courses were too expensive to be a realistic possibility for most refugees.

For women who had left high status occupations, the loss of self-esteem was hard. Fatima, who had been a nurse, said, "My work was very important in my life. Now, when we go to a hospital here, they think we are nothing, we don't know anything."

For most Somali women, preoccupation with the day to day problems of looking after their children, and adapting to a strange, often hostile, environment made employment a remote possibility. Uncertainty about legal status, and the hope of a return to Somalia also made it difficult for them to make long term commitments to education and training for employment. Nearly all the women had attended English classes, attaining various degrees of proficiency, and some had undertaken other forms of education and training. While they hoped for paid employment, they expected that their skills and experience were more likely to be used in a voluntary capacity. Many claimed that women were more adaptable and willing to take on new roles including work oflower status than they had been used to. Fatima and Ferhat, for example, are now taking a health promotion course and plan to extend their voluntary work within the community.

Feyrus, who had no qualifications or employment experience in Somalia, saw life in Britain opening up more possibilities for her. She had done language and computer courses in London, and worked voluntarily in a community centre. She planned to study full-time:

> Women don't work outside the home in Somalia. In Britain, both [husband and wife] need to work because you need both incomes. I prefer to work. You know what is happening next and feel more independent. If anything goes wrong, it is your choice.

Relations with Children

For many, their children represented a future which they felt they had lost for themselves. Their children's progress often shifted their perceptions of their future, and the possibilities of returning to Somalia if peace were to come. Most hoped to return, but as Saida said, "We are in a foreign country, we have to try very hard. If we went back to Somalia, the children would have to start again. I feel their education is here."

Those who were themselves well-educated use their skills to help their children, although the lack of books, the demands of family members, and overcrowding sometimes made this difficult. Fatima told us about her boy at secondary school, "He is a very bright boy. I teach him science and spend three or four hours with him each night. I am afraid of him getting lazy."

While many children, especially the younger ones, had settled in and were achieving well at school, others felt a painful change in their relations with

their children. Several parents of teenagers felt they were getting out of control. Khadiza said:

> Children in Somalia have to listen to their parents. Sometimes I feel children here are spoilt. I don't feel they are my children, it worries me. I can't speak English well and I don't know whether they are talking about me.

Children often see their parents as less powerful in the new society and lose respect for them, while parents have become more dependent on their children to act as interpreters for them. Using children as interpreters can cause problems because children may be involved in discussions which their parents would rather they do not hear. Zamzam said, "My older daughter interprets forme at the doctor's, but sometimes I don't want to let her know what I am feeling. I get so worried and I don't want her to know how bad things are."

Conclusion

Our interviewees presented a complex picture in terms of gender roles. Some found new independence and confidence in exile, and have been able to renegotiate relationships from a more powerful position. Others, however, have lost status and self-esteem, and those who had been able to combine caring roles with professional work in Somalia have found this impossible in Britain. These women have, nevertheless, shown remarkable adaptability, taking on a variety of roles to support the community and working to build a future for themselves and their children.

The study has exposed the gaps between the women's skills and experience, and the work they have been able to find. There is an urgent need for Somali speakers in such areas as teaching, nursing and social work, but few have the resources to undertake the necessary training to allow them to work in Britain. This demonstrates the urgency of a comprehensive strategy for refugee resettlement which would allow refugees to make their fullest contribution to their own community and to the wider society. _

Notes

1. ELR is a form of temporary residence status granted on humanitarian grounds. It involves fewer social rights than Convention status. Family reunion is possible only afterfouryears' residence and is subject to stringent conditions.
2. The study was funded by a small grant from Middlesex University Faculty of Social Science.
3. Qatisalegaldrugwhichischewed,mainly by men in groups. Its damaging effects have led to calls from the community to ban its importation.

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Migration and the Transformation of Work Processes: Voices of Chinese Immigrant Women in Canada

Guida Man

Abstract

Using feminist conceptual framework and methodology, this study examines the experience of thirty Chinese immigrant women in Canada. It demonstrates how their subjective experiences are articulated to the larger social, economic, and political relations in the form of institutional and organizational processes. In particular, it investigates how the dif ferences in the social organization of paid work and household work in Canada visa-vis their home country have tremendous impact on them, transforming their everyday lives.

Precis

Utilisant la methodologie et Ie cadre conceptuel feministes, cette etude examine l' experience de vie au Canada de trente immigrantes d'origine chinoise. On montre en quoi l' experience subjective de ces immigrantes s' articule a un ensemble plus large de relations sociales, economiques, et politiques se manifestant sous la forme de processus institutionnels et organisationnels. Specifiquement, on etudie comment les differences dans l' organisation sociale du travail salarie et du travail domestique au Canada, par rapport au pays d' origine de ces immigrantes, ont un impact majeurs sur elles en leur vie quotidienne.

Many social scientists have been investigating the socioeconomic adaptation of these immigrants. They generally derive their theoretical perspectives from four major models: (Yamanaka and McClelland 1994) assimilation model; dualeconomy /labourmarkettheory;ethnic enclave theory; and middleman minority hypothesis; These theories were formulated primarily for the analysis of male labour market experience. They eclipsed the importance of women's participation in the productive and reproductive processes, as paid workers in the labour force, and as unpaid workers in the household.

Since the 1980s, we have seen the emergence of studies on immigrant women in Canada (e.g.,Ng and Ramirez 1981; Adilman 1984; Boyd 1990; Giles and Preston 1996, 1997), and on Chinese immigrant women in particular (e.g., Nipp 1983;CCNC 1992; Man 1996, 1997). These studies have discovered Chinese women in Canada to be productive workers, who were actively involved in political and community organizing.

This study investigates the experience of Chinese immigrant women from Hong Kong. It adopts a feminist conceptual framework and methodology which places women as "subjects" (Smith 1987) of the study, and which allows individual Chinese immigrant women as subjects to voice their situations from their own locations. This methodology has enabled me to explicate how the Chinese immigrant women's experiences are articulated to the larger social, economic and political relations, and how their stories are as much their subjective experiences as they are shaped by objective structures in the form of the social organization of society.

The data for this stud y has been generated through in depth interviews with thirty Chinese immigrant women from Hong Kong. Snowball sampling method was used to locate the interviewees. Each interview lasted between one and half hour and three hours. An interview schedule was used as a guide line. All questions were open-ended. Interviewees were encouraged to talk freely about their experiences in Canada and in Hong Kong. I have artificially delineated the work organization into two spheres: household work and paid work. In actuality, these two spheres are very much interrelated. They are delineated here for investigative purposes. Similarly, the lives of women who participate in these two spheres of work cannot be neatly separated into categories. Human experiences and interactions with others occur in dialectical, rather than in linear relations. Events and feelings diverge and converge. Inevitably, the women's experiences in these two areas overlap and filter into one another.

Paid Work

The point system of the Canadian immigration policy, with its discriminatory measures in terms of race, gender, and class determine what kind of immigrants are allowed into Canada.l Within the Chinese immigrant household, the hus}-'"T\d typically entered Canada as the prir..:ipal applicant under the "independent class"2 category, while the wife and children typically entered as dependents. Having been classified as "dependents" by the immigration policy, the Chinese immigrant wives were not supposedly destined for the labour market. When these women did seek employment, institutionalized practices in the form of the requirement of "Canadian experience" rendered their previous work experience in Hong Kong irrelevant. Consequently, some women found themselves dependent on their husbands economically for the first time in their lives. The immigrant men who were professionals were often subject to the same institutionalized discrimination when they looked for employment.

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For many Chinese immigrant women, the requirement for "Canadian experience" on the part of employers posed a barrier for them to obtain employment. In an earlier study on immigrant women, "three-quarters of the unemployed women in the sample found it difficult to find a job in accordance to their training because of the so-called "Canadian experience." Many job-seekers mentioned that the employers rarely gave them a chance to discuss non-Western experience" (Murthy 1979). This in effect creates a pool of workers who are forced to accept poor wages and conditions at jobs well below their qualifications so that they may acquire at least one Canadian reference.

Carol,[3] a woman in my study, became so exasperated with her job search that she gave up the idea of entering the labour force altogether. She lamented, "It's a catch-22. I cannot get a job because I don't have Canadian experience, and yet I don't see how I can possibly get Canadian experience without being hired in the first place!"

The requirement of "Canadian experience" is a discriminatory measure which prevents immigrants from entering certain occupations. The rationale behind it is that Canadian jobs are unique, and that immigrants are unable to do them competently even if they have had similar jobs in their home country. Hence, "lack of Canadian experience" is used as an excuse for employers to refuse hiring new immigrants. But in fact, the Chinese immigrant women I interviewed contended that the actual work they did in Canada was similar to their work in Hong Kong. As Evelyn confirmed, "To a large extent, the job was similar to the one I had in Hong Kong. But of course my experience in Hong Kong was quite different, and the system here is different also."

The lack of an accreditation system to calibrate the newcomers' qualifications also made it difficult for them to obtain employment commensurate with their qualifications. One woman, Ei-ling, who was a school teacher in Hong Kong but became unemployed when she came to Canada, lamented to me:

> It's very depressing. I've been teaching in Hong Kong for fifteen years, and I have always been a good teacher, well-respected by my students. All of a sudden, I am told that I cannot teach in Canada because my teaching degree is not recognized here.

Another former teacher, Mary, concurred, "At my age [52], I am reluctant to invest so much money and energy to be retrained and recertified, and then still be unsure of whether I will get a teaching job or not ..."

Generally, the Chinese immigrant women who were looking for employment exhausted all avenues, and took whatever work they could find in order to gain "Canadian experience" and to be absorbed into the labour market. Mrs. Li[4] story is typical of what I heard from most women:

> Of course I had difficulty initially finding employment, that's why I had to settle for a part-time job. Moreover, the economy was really bad at that time. Later on, I learned how to find jobs and where to find a job, etc. I tried many different ways such as looking in the newspapers, visiting employment agencies, and trying to make contacts through friends. My part-time job was found through newspaper ads, and I got the present job with the help of a friend. I have applied for many jobs. A lot, too many. And I have had quite a few interviews. But I guess I didn't get those jobs because there was too much competition.

Those Chinese immigrant women who experienced underemployment found it difficult at first. But many had endured with patience and tenacity, for they were hoping to obtain better positions in the future. Here, Mrs. Li told me her experiences:

> It was difficult for me at first because I had been working as a bank supervisor in Hong Kong, and all of a sudden, I was only a teller here. I had to learn to be supervised by other people and to learn to take their orders rather than vice versa. I stayed in that job for over two years. It is a lot better now with this position because I am now working more independently.

The experiences of the women in this study are similar to those in a survey conducted in 1989, which focused specifically on Chinese immigrant women's needs in Richmond, B.C. (S.U.C.C.E.S.S. 1991). The study found that whereas 70 percent of the women surveyed had worked prior to immigrating to Canada, less than 50 percent were employed when surveyed. Of those who were employed, there was a significant degree of frustration and loss of self-esteem. They were frustrated by underemployment, low salaries, and limited opportunities for advancement. Nearly one quarter of the respondents stated that their foreign education was not recognized in Canada.

An earlier study on immigrant women found that immigrant women from Asia, together with those from the United Kingdom, the United States, western Europe, and the Middle East tend to have higher than average educational attainments, compared both to native-born Canadians and to immigrants from other regions, such as southern Europe (Estable 1986, 22). However, the double negative of "immigrant and female" is less of a factor in the occupational achievement of those immigrant women who are members of traditionally preferred groups (e.g., Great Britain and the United States) than it is for groups which in the past have been labelled as undesirable (such as the Asians, the Eastern European origin groups at the turn of the century) (Boyd 1990).

Household Work

In advanced industrialized societies such as Canada and Hong Kong, household work is privatized, i.e., it is considered the responsibility of individuals in the home, typically wives. The relegation of women to household work cuts across class and ethnic boundaries. Women constantly have to juggle the triple burden of housework, paid work, and childcare. From the standpoint of women, the home therefore presupposes a work process, which has to be continuously managed and organized. It is her labour which holds the family together. This work process is often ob-

scured from the perspective of men (Ng 1993).

Contrary to common stereotypical representation of "Chinese families" as large extended structures,S the prevalent form of Chinese families in Hong Kong resembles the nuclear family structure, namely, a small family unit consisting of husband, wife, and children. At the same time, in some Chinese families, (whether in Hong Kong, Canada, or elsewhere), as in other Canadian families, vestiges of aneo-extended family form still exist. In such cases, typically three generations (Le., paternalgrandparent(s), parents, and grandchildren) reside in the same residence. The latter arrangement is as much a response to the Confucian ideal stressing filial piety, as a pragmatic arrangement in response to the high cost of housing, and the shortage of provision by the state of subsidized homes for the aged. But categorizing families in terms of nuclear or extended is problematic (Eichler 1988; Fox and Luxton 1993), Chinese households appear in diverse forms and structures.

Regardless of which family structure the Chinese family adopts when they were in Hong Kong, the small geographical area of the colony enables relatives to live in close proximity to each other, thereby facilitating the development of a close-knit support network. One woman in my study, Suzanna, described her situation in Hong Kong as follows:

> When we were in Hong Kong, my mother-in-law used to live with us. She did the cooking and the cleaning. She also picked up my oldest son after school so I didn't have to rush home right after work. My mother, on the other hand, lives close to my youngest son's school, so she used to pick him up after school and looked after him until I went to her place to pick him up after work. That's why my oldest son is very close to his *maj-maj* [paternal grandmother], and my youngest one is attached to his *paw paw* [maternal grandmother]! You see, I had a lot of support in Hong Kong.

Her situation in Canada was quite different. Following her husband's decision to emigrate to Canada, she came with her husband and two sons, leaving her aging mother and mother-in-law in Hong Kong. Without the help of family members, she now had to do all the housework and childcare herself. The loss of support system in the new country thrust the Chinese immigrant women into the reality of having to confront the same child care problems as other Canadian women (i.e., the lack of affordable and quality childcare centres to accommodate working parents).

Despite the effort of femocrats, activists, and community advocacy groups, who put childcare in the forefront of the social agenda and pushed the Canadian government to acknowledge child care as a public issue, little funding has been allocated in this area, particularly at this time of fiscal constraint. Rather than accepting childcare as a public issue, the rhetoric of the state is to reinforce "family values," and to push childcare responsibility onto family members (read women). To date in Canada, childcare remains privatized, Le., it continues to be women's work in the private home, and this work is not valued. Government-subsidized daycare centres remain scarce, and privately run services are usually expensive and not well managed (Eichler 1997). Amy, a social worker, voiced her criticism of the inadequacy of daycare in Canada, "I have a S-year-old and a 2-year-old. I'm finding that daycare is a serious problem. Daycare is not flexible enough to accommodate working parents."

Another woman, Carol, told me about her difficulties in Canada:

> I am resigned to staying home to look after my daughters. I know this isn't what I set out to do. I had career ambitions, but I don't think there's any opportunity for me now. My teaching certificate is not recognized here. And anyway, with three daughters, and no household help, what can I do?

Within a household, the extra burden of domestic labour was almost always assumed by the woman as her sole responsibility. Women who tried to cope with their triple workload of house work, paid work and childcare often felt exhausted at the end of the day.

Although the gendered division of household labour is in some ways similar in patriarchal societies such as Hong Kong and Canada, the difference in the social organization of these societies transformed the situation of Chinese immigrant women, making their dayto-day living vastly different in Canada from that in Hong Kong. For the immigrant men, the home is where the tensions generated by their paid work are released, and where they find refuge from the racist environment. The wife is expected to not only provide physical comforts and a calm and tension-free home, she also has to give emotional support to her husband and to heal him of the injuries inflicted on him by his occupation. For the Chinese immigrant women in my study, the immigration process resulted in their loss of a support system in the household, and thus intensified their workload. Their husbands, however, did not feel responsible for doing household work.

The expectation that a wife will support her husband and children is very much structurally sustained and culturally reinforced. Failure to perform this function is frowned upon by others. Since many of the husbands had never done housework before, they therefore did not offer to help their wives after they immigrated to Canada, nor did these women seek their help. As one woman, May, explained to me, "I feel that if I can manage it myself, I won't ask. Furthermore, if my husband really wants to do it, he can offer to help. Buthe hasn't!"

Without any help from her husband or children, May had a very hectic sched ule. Here, she described her typical day to me:

> My day-to-day schedule changes depending on whether I work as a temp or I work at my husband's store. When I'm working as a temp, I usually get up at seven, prepare breakfast for my kids and my husband, then take the TTC to go to work ... When I'm working at my husband's store, I usually make a separate breakfast for my husband because he gets up later than the kids, and he

likes his breakfast freshly made ... I don't usually get home until six thirty or seven, make dinner, clean up, and if I'm lucky, I get to watch a bit of television before going to bed. But usually, I need to do the ironing, washing, and mending etc. I really don't have time to do much else. My husband and kids though, they watch a lot of television ...

But the husbands' inability to do household work was not the sole reason why they did not help the wives out. Cultural ideology and structural support reinforces the belief that husband's job should be accorded priority in the family. Even though the wife may have a paid job, her work is subordinated to her responsibilities for her family. Social and cultural expectations did not allow Marion, one of the women in my study, to seek household help from her husband. Her "problems" arose partly because of the constraint of the social prescription of what a wife (and in this case, a Chinese wife) should be—one who either supervises others to do the housework, or does the housework herself. Her "role perception" was shaped by external social pressure. It is conceivable that she could have attempted to ask her husband and children to help out, albeit with much resistance. But the socially constructed image of an ideal wife and mother is so powerful, and so much perpetuated by the media that women, regardless of ethnicity and class, are unable to deconstruct that image; nor are they able to extricate themselves from the guilt of not being a "loving mother" or a "virtuous wife." This ideology, which induces women to shoulder the sole burden of housework and childcare, is fundamental for the survival and perpetuation of patriarchy.

Structural forces also help to sustain the wife's subordinated position in the family. Although the majority of the Chinese immigrant women participated in the labour force when they were in Hong Kong, many became underemployed or unemployed after migration. These women's lack of power and status in the labour market has significant implications on their position in the family. For many women, management and control of their family is the only real power they have. To relinquish their control of the household is synonymous with relinquishing power. It is no wonder that despite the fact that these women are burnt out from shouldering a double and triple burden of work, they are reluctant to give up their primary role in the family.

Conclusion

In this study, I have investigated the experience of Chinese immigrant women in Canada. I have demonstrated how institutional and organizational processes inherent in Canadian society have tremendous impact on individual Chinese immigrant woman, transforming her everyday life. Consequently, after migration, due to the differences in the social organization of Canadian society vis-à-vis their home country, the work processes of the Chinese immigrant women in the paid work sphere as well as in the home has been transformed.

The point system in the immigration policy for the selection of skilled immigrants privileges male-oriented skills, while failing to value and therefore treat equitably women's work. Moreover, women's interrupted workforce participation due to child bearing and other family responsibilities is not recognized, and therefore not accounted for. The structural gender inequality which immigrants carry with them to the new country is exacerbated through the immigration process, and intensified in immigrant women's everyday lives in Canada, i.e., in their subordinate positions in the family, their ghettoization into low paying positions, and their underemployment and unemployment. Even though access to job training and employment counselling is crucial for all immigrant women who have difficulty in having their credentials and work experience recognized by Canadian employers (Boyd 1991), there are no programs designed explicitly to improve the employment opportunities of immigrant women. Programs often have restrictive eligibility criteria that reduce their usefulness to immigrant women. Employment counselling to help immigrant women identify job opportunities and compete successfully for Canadian jobs is also inadequate. The lack of a standardized accreditation system that offers a systematic calibration of immigrants' credentials has resulted in the underemployment and unemployment of these women. Boyd (1991) had previously argued convincingly that the success of retraining programs depends upon the availability of support services such as childcare that reduce the double burden on women. This study also confirms the double and triple burden undertaken by the Chinese immigrant women, thus leaving them with no time for other activities. Present and future government initiatives are urged to address these problems which confront immigrant women. ■

Notes

1. For a critical analysis of the Canadian immigration policy and its impact on Chinese immigrant women, see Guida Man, "The Effect of Canadian Immigration Policies on the Entrance of Chinese Immigrant Women (1858 to 1986)," in *The Proceedings of Asia-Pacific Conference on Canadian Studies* (Tokyo: Meiji University, 1998).
2. Immigrants can enter Canada either under family class, Convention refugees or independent class.
3. Many Hong Kong Chinese people, especially those who belong to the baby-boomer generation, typically adopt an English name for social, educational, and occupational purposes while still retaining their Chinese names for legal purposes.
4. Some women I interviewed liked to be addressed more formally, as in this case. Others were more casual, and preferred to be called by their first names.
5. The popularized stereotypical image of Chinese families as largely patriarchal extended families with several generations living under the same roof has been refuted by Ping-ti Ho, "A Historian's View of the Chinese Family system," in *Man and Civilization: The family's Search for Survival; a Symposium*, edited by Seymour M. Farber, Piero Mustacchi, and Roger H. L. Wilson (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1965). Ho reported empirical evidence that the average size of the Chinese households has always been small, even prior to industrialization (i.e., less than six people, beginning in A.D. 755, to approximately five in the first half of the twentieth century). This is as much due to economic reasons as to the social customs of the time.

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Speaking with Migrant Women Health Care Aides: On Marketing and Making Sense of Caregiving in Canada

Gail McCabe

Abstract

The objective of this research was to explore the life-world of migrant women health care aides, focusing on their own subjective understandings of caregiving and the market for care in Canada. Qualitative interviews ranging in length from one to three hours produced snapshots of the social and cultural fractures endemic to the migration and resettlement process. I argue that the women's caregiving practice is an aspect of an ethics of care that allows for moments of empowerment and resistance to an oppressive social context shaped by a matrix of race, class and gender hierarchies.

Précis

Le but de cette recherche est d'examiner le monde et la vie des immigrantes aides-soignantes, en concentrant notre attention sur leur propre compréhension subjective des soins de santé et du marché des soins de santé au Canada. Des entrevues à contenu qualitatif d'une longueur d'entre une et trois heures ont fourni un échantillonnage des fractures sociales et culturelles associées de façon endémique au processus de migration et de réinstallation. Je développe une argumentation selon laquelle la pratique féminine des soins de santé est une facette d'une éthique globale des soins qui autorise une prise de pouvoir et la résistance à un contexte social oppresseur, lui-même façonné dans le moule de la hiérarchie des races, des classes, et des sexes.

Recently, I have had a chance to observe migrant women health care workers while caring for my own father who was going through a terminal illness. It seemed to me that without the loyalty, dedication and expertise of the many women who came and supported us and shared in the nursing, we would not have persevered. Through their caregiving, we were able to realize our goal: that our father should die in the comfort of his own home with his family and friends around him. As an aspect of my own professional practice as a rehab counsellor, I know that caregiving for strangers with the same loving demeanour usually reserved for family members culls up huge resources of energy, skill and professionalism. As part of the feminist project of bringing women's history in from the margins, I want to learn more about the lives and the labour migration of these women. I want to understand how they managed to leave their own children, partners and kinship networks behind in order to care for strangers.

In this paper, I report on qualitative interviews with four migrant women health care aides. I explore their subjective understandings of the Canadian market for care and how they make sense of their work. I found that for these women, the concept of 'stranger' was mediated through their respective cultural values, so that 'caregiving for strangers' was a normative aspect of an ethical practice, a communal practice that did not differentiate between family and strangers. By integrating an *ethics of care* in their lives and in their professional practice, I argue that these women were able to generate experiences of power and resistance within an oppressive social context.

Situating My "Selves" in the Project

During the time of my father's illness, there was one Filipina woman who came to help us the most. She was a very generous person with her time and her professional practice, and we became friends. When she got married, she invited all of us to her wedding, including those caregivers who were not scheduled to support my father. When we arrived at the wedding, we found that we had been given a place of honour, and that several women friends of our caregiver had been designated to ensure our comfort. Our glasses were kept full and we were accorded all the respect of highly privileged guests. I became conscious all at once, that we *were* privileged, and perhaps we were the only ones who were not aware of our privileged status.

As white, middle-class people being supported by migrant women caregivers, we *were* the "employers" even though we had never thought reflexively about our roles of how our actions were perpetuating a particular system or set of relations. This I would attribute to the Western hegemonic ideology of a classless society. Beyond that, in recognizing and acknowledging my privileged location, I now felt pretty much stratified within that location and helpless to effect change. So I find myself intimately involved in the research process as both researcher and participant, as one piece of dialectical configuration, the stranger/employer/researcher layered up with the caregiver/migrant worker/subject.

As a social researcher, I want to ensure that the meanings and explanations arising from my investigations are those of the participants. Yet the potential for conflating my own subjective experiences and notions with those of the participants is particularly possible from the dual position of researcher and participant. Nevertheless, the feminist perspective that informs my research accounts for the duality of my position as a valued and meaningful location from which to research. The expectation is that I will continually acknowledge and account for my own subjective "thoughts and experiences ... as another layer of data for investigation" at

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every stage of the research (Kirby and McKenna 1989, 32).

Moreover, the process of working through the dual location as participant and researcher has been empowering. My role as participant allows for insights that could be acted upon in a research framework, and my role as researcher has led me to a clearer recognition of my own social location within a global framework. So my sense ofbeing locked into my stratified position as "white middle-class privileged employer" has to some extent been abrogated by my efforts to use my privilege to amplify he voices of migrant women caregivers; to bring the socially constructed matrix of race, class and gender as it defines our lived experiences into stark relief (Jhappan 1996, 15-30).

Situating the Participants in the Research

I am providing a brief introduction of the women in order to ground their commentary in this paper.1 I am acquainted with all four of these women; two of them were palliative caregivers for my father; the other two were colleagues at a not-for-profit, private social service agency serving people with acquired brain injury (ABI). Prior to this study, I had interacted with these women mainly during the course of our work together.

Caitlin is a 36-year-old woman of Filipina origin. She came to Canada in 1990 under the "Live-in Caregiver Programme." She now works as a home health-care aide for elderly and palliative care clients. In 1978, Donna, a 37year-old woman of Jamaican origin, came to Canada as a landed immigrant sponsored by an uncle. She spent almost four years as a caregiver and housekeeper for his family, living in a room in the basement of his home. Donna is now a home health-care aide for the elderly and palliative care clients. Iris, a 49-year-old woman from Sri Lanka, immigrated to Canada in May of 1995. She is working part-time as a rehab counsellor. Gerry emigrated from Ghana in 1978 under the family reunification program. Gerry is also employed part-time as a rehab counsel lor. With the exception ofIris, all of the women are highly educated, having attained either a university degree or college diploma.

An Ethics of Care in Practice

For the most part, I found that the lived experiences of these women were de fined by their commitment to an *ethics of care.* Moreover, I contend that they take up this moral and philosophical position both as an ethical and practical standpoint and as a mode of resistance. Such an explanation is subject to critiques of gender essentialism, stereotyping, "reification of femininity," ethnocentrism, and romanticism (Deveaux 1995, 116). However, there has been a great deal of scholarly work hat speaks to those critiques and provides analytical frameworks for integrating an ethics of care with a discourse of rights and justice that is applicable to labour migration flows, citizenship rights and the materialization of the "global citizen.,,2

Care can be defined as the process through which the species seek to maintain themselves and their environment (Tronto 1995, 142). As such, care is basic to social relations through the shaping of humans as embodied agents. An *ethics of care* then implies a set of values or moral principles that apply to a set of life-sustaining practices. An *ethics of care* is gender neutral, and not biologically determined (Deveaux 1995, 11516). The defining tenet of a perspective of care is that "persons are relational and interdependent" as opposed to the individual, autonomous agents that are central to a rights or justice-based ethics (Held 1995, 132). Underlying the notion of an *ethics of care* is the belief that" civilization depends on a culture of sharing and caring; a culture of caring does not depend on civilization" (Adelman 1996, 17).

Deveaux (1994, 177) suggests that critiques of an *ethics of care* reflect" a failure to recognize the nature and scope of care as both an ethic and a set of practices." By overlooking the ethical dimensions of caregivingpractice, "social and political inequalities" (ibid., 117) endemic to the gendered polarization of care are reproduced. Moreover, caregiving can be identified in social institutions beyond the social reproductive work of women. For example, Adelman (1996, 8) figures the Welfare State as the "institutionalization of care" through the "common civic understanding" of "capital, government and labour." As such, it represents the integration of an *ethics of care* with an ethics of rights and justice. The Canada Health Act is one exemplar of such an ethical position enshrined in law; the universal need for care supersedes the notion of the individual's ability to pay. From that perspective, the ongoing dismantling of the Welfare State can be read as "a throw-back to primitivism" just because caregiving is radically devalued in the ensuing structural adjustments (ibid., 9).

The Canadian Market for Care

Research outcomes and analysis have indicated that the Canadian market for care has been shaped largely by discourses that devalue women's work and commodify migrant women caregivers. Here, I examine to what extent an *ethics of care* also infuses the Canadian market for caregivers and to what extent the women themselves, bring an *ethics ofcare* to the market: How do they define their experiences within the Canadian market for care? Does an ethics of care enter consciously into their caregiving practice? How do they explain care giving for strangers and how can their practice be read as resistance to their oppressive social location within the new global economy?

Migration to Canada has proven to be a response to innumerable structural pulls, pushes, and pressures, so that there is no doubt that the choices of migrant women are severely constrained through the process. Still, I note that the choice to market caregiving in Canada is differentially experienced depending on the women's individual life circumstances and the degree to which they are able to exercise selfagency. There seems no doubt that the choice of Canada as a host country is dependent, in large part, on the global perception of Canada as a country of

human rights and justice integrated with a vision of caring. While these perceptions may be the result of deceptive recruitment practices and advertising, they are also informed by the existence of Canada's "social safety net," the "institutionalization of [an ethics of] care" (Adelman 1996, 8).

All of the women I interviewed expressed a belief that Canada was a caring place and that belief mitigated their choice to come to Canada. Iris' migration can be understood as an act of self-agency and liberation from a more oppressive environment:

> In the Asian culture, it is very hard to be separated or divorced. Women have little opportunity to go out by themselves and cannot stay out long or late at night. My husband had been very abusive, so I had to leave him and so I went to my family in England. Then I came on to Canada to be with my children. ... I love Canada because here there is freedom.

Donna stated that "it was much easier to go to Canada than any other place," and she believed that there would be good opportunities for a variety of experiences as well as employment. It does seem that in 1978, the year of her immigration, Canada had a relatively "open door" policy for people from the Caribbean. Granted, such policies are now falling victim to neo-conservative agendas and structural adjustment policies of the new global economy. Still, it can be argued that there was a Canadian vision that encompassed a culture of caring, and it was that vision that motivated Donna's migration. Although she was disillusioned by the need to live "from paycheck to paycheck," and the overt and systemic racism she has experienced, she still affirmed that Canada is "home" now.

Caitlin mentioned the potential for education as a positive attraction to Canada. She also believed there were many opportunities to practice in the health care sphere.

> Everywhere they said Canada had the best health care. I mean I wanted to be a doctor, but my mom said because of low income we could not afford it. I was working as a midwife with a low income. I was fascinated. In Canada, they said you could study by yourself.

Caitlin recognized the Canadian 'social safety net' as a huge benefit: "In the Philippines, if you have a house, you don't have as much expenses ... but when you get old or sick, it is hard, but in Canada, you will do okay. The health care system is so good." Again, the Canada Health Act can be interpreted as an *ethics of care* institutionalized in practice. It might be argued that Caitlin has chosen Canada as a permanent venue because of that vision of caring and her application for citizenship can be understood as the shaping of her life through self-agency.

Gerry came to Canada to join her husband who was doing graduate work at a Canadian university. Educational opportunities can also be interpreted as an *ethics of care* institutionalized practice. Like Donna, Gerry was disillusioned with the Canadian promise of care, justice and human rights. It seemed that racism has had a devastating effect on her "satisfaction with Canada" and her experience of herself as an independent agent.

> People tend to stereotype Africans. They really thought we lived in trees and there is a naiveté; they think Africa is one country. If I had learned about Canadian geography, it seemed strange that Canadians knew so little about Africa. ... I find that there is less positive human interaction and more differential treatment between people. Ghana is more community-based; we treat people like humans; so Ghana is home.

All the women had negative experiences of racism, although they conceptualized them differently. For example, both Iris and Caitlin denied racist experiences. Yet, their anecdotal reports seemed to contradict their denials. Caitlin seemed too polite to talk about racism when asked directly, but she recounted interactions with her Canadian employers that were indicative of racial stereotyping and oppression. In Iris's case, the recognition of racism was projected onto her co-workers: "Yes, I think there is racism, but I personally have not experienced it. I have only heard about it. The black women here, especially, believe that they are experiencing racism." Several interpretations are possible. Either Iris has been most fortunate and has not experienced the well-documented Canadian systemic racism or in her pleasure at having escaped sexist oppression in Sri Lanka, she was not yet ready to examine her refuge for other modes of oppressive signification. Then again, her reports might be indicative of hierarchies of colour since it was the "black" women who are reporting racist oppression.

I understand the social stratification by race, gender and class and other such categories to be the antithesis of an *ethics of care*, for such symbolic signifiers are the basis for oppressive socially constructed hierarchies of privilege and power. Quite clearly, the reports of the women indicated the presence of such hierarchies in Canada and the constraints such structural impediments imposed on their self-agency. On balance, Canada also offered elements of an institutionalized ethics of care that apparently facilitated acts of self-agency in the lives of these particular women.

Caregiving as Agency and Resistance

All the women indicated that caregiving was their chosen profession, although they might aspire to practice at some different level. For example, Donna indicated that she wanted to "do counselling from my church" but that she couldn't "see training for it now or in the future." This she attributed to a poor financial outlook and the high stress levels of a double day of work. Nevertheless, in defining care in relation to her present position, she said with great gusto and straight from the heart, "Oh, you do it, because you love it." Her primary concern was for the comfort of her clients, their personal hygiene, nutrition and environment.

Caitlin wanted to "be a doctor, but my mom said because of low income we could not afford it." Instead she trained as a midwife and now practices as a

health care aide. She has continued her education, augmenting her professional skills and theoretical knowledge with numerous college courses. Some of these were self-initiated; others were requisites of her agency and paid for by them. In describing her caregiving role, she said, "1 love to take care of people. It is voluntary, you do it from the heart [she is very sincere and thumps her chest over her heart]. It is sharing yourself and your own abilities."

For Iris, "nursing was [a life-long] dream." She expressed a high level of satisfaction with her work, her chief problem being co-workers who did not seem to share her concern for client welfare:

> You know with these people, it is a tragedy because they had established lives before their accidents. I also feel great sympathy for their families; even they can't keep them. And I really love to do it, care for them and then you are helping their families too.

Although Gerry had worked in a business function for the Ministry of Finance, and as a teacher in Ghana, she stated quite clearly thatcaregiving was her first choice:

> I like doing caregiving ... When I make other people happy, than I feel good myself. I would rather do caregiving then any of the other things I have tried. It's part of my personality. I did some palliative care and there was a lot of satisfaction taking care of the client; but I was happy when her suffering was over. It's a good way to make a living.

It follows from the discussion and the description of their work that these particularwomen see themselves as health care professionals and professional caregivers. They are doing an essential job and they experience a high degree of satisfaction in the process. Although they might wish for better remuneration, a higher standard of living or more equitable conditions in the workplace, they were unlikely to choose other types of work. In defining care, it seemed apparent that the women understood care not only as a practice but also as an ethical position. Although Gerry was the only one who actually spoke in terms of an ethical stance, the others did express the notion of care as a fundamental necessity of life to be provided on the basis of need rather than the ability to pay. Moreover, all but Iris defined care as a function of community, interdependence and relationship. Iris defined" taking care of other people [as] a blessing; it's love."

At the outset of this paper, I defined a dialectical tension that evolved from the social locations of the caregiver / migrant worker and the stranger / employer. As I conducted the interviews, it struck me that I had made this distinction out of my own North American cultural context where an ethics of rights, "rugged individualism," and autonomy take precedence. None of the women I interviewed differentiated between caring for strangers and caring for family, although they recognized the instrumental contract in their work. Moreover, they tended to express their practice for strangers in terms of cultural norms that included valuing humanity and respect for the sick and elderly. For example, Gerry described caregiving as a normative practice in Ghana:

> I like to do caregiving. It's something we do at home that is a norm. You rely on family and community. My mom would feed people in the neighbourhood who were in need. It was not a matter of charity; it was an interdependence that we had; the way we were raised was to be compassionate and caring.

Likewise, Donna's descriptions of Jamaica are indicative of a communal system for ensuring that individuals are cared for:

> In Jamaica, you depend on each other. It is just the way it is done; you take care of the elderly and sick. It doesn't matter if you know them or not; it's just the same. I know of one old lady who lives in her home and everyone in the village drops by and does something for her. It's the only way to make out because we don't have old folk's homes or nursing homes anyway.

According to Caitlin, there were also no" old folk's homes" in the Philippines either. The sick and elderly are taken care of "voluntarily, from the heart, as part of community." Again, this was apparently a normative practice, as the needy did not have to askfor help; it was provided. Although Iris did not link her caregiving practice to cultural norms in Sri Lanka, she did state that she also did not differentiate between caring for strangers or family: "There is no difference between strangers and family. It's the same thing. I want to do care giving and I really like my clients."

I would argue that the ways the women described and practiced caregiving were indicative of their understanding that care giving is a set of practices underpinned by a set of ethical principles. Practices and ethics were informed by the principle that all humans need caring and care should be provided as a function of human interdependence. Caregiving was an act of self-agency demonstrating membership, participation and respect for community obligations. For these women, the community encompassed all human beings, including those that exploited and oppressed them. On numerous occasions, as a participant observer, I witnessed clients denigrating these women on the basis of their race, colour and ethnic origin. What was most salient in these episodes was not the abuse, but the way the women *chose* to deal with it. They rarely followed through with institutional "policy of responding" which entailed confrontation, social disapproval and correction. They simply did not believe that such policies were ethical or effective. Instead, they would carryon with their care giving, in the same thoughtful, attentive manner as if no hateful slurs had been expressed. It seemed to me that they were empowered by their salience. At any rate, the clients were often reduced to tears, apologies and self-recrimination.

So what lessons of resistance do these four migrant women health care workers have for us? I would say that care giving can be read as resistance

when it allows for empowering moments in an oppressive social situation as the result of a self-conscious agency. When these empowering moments are integrated within a structure that is defined by its overwhelming oppressiveness and the subject is not overwhelmed, then that is resistance.

Rutman (1996, 90) reports on research workshops where "women caregivers explored the experience of 'power' through their care giving," and defined the possibilities for experiencing moments of empowerment as well as moments of powerlessness in their practice. I note that the opportunities for empowering moments identified in his workshops were congruent with those identified by the women I interviewed. Moments of empowerment were experienced as respect from clients and their families for their knowledge, skills and opinions as professional caregivers as well as from a sense of self-worth derived from providing a benefit to clients and families (ibid., 102). Consider, for example, Caitlin's description of developing working relationships with clients and families:

> ... they think you don't know what you are [doing] ... maybe because I am so small [she is under 5 feet]. But after you work with them, and you insist on doing things the right way [utilizing skills acquired through education and practice], they slowly begin to see that you know your job and they respect you [as a professional].

This is relayed with a small, satisfied chuckle as if to say that although she is small and her position may be devalued, she has prevailed because of her intrinsic worth and value.

Iris mentioned experiences of personal independence, strength and satisfaction derived directly fromherjob: "I love to do it. You do your job well and you get paid for it, and you know that you are caring for other people [when] their own families can't..." At several points in the interview, Iris mentioned the work place culture as the strongest challenge in her caregiving practice. Although she herself was quiet and unprepossessing, apparently her colleagues were not. That Iris went quietly on about her business as she defined it rather than at the dictates of others was an act of resistance. It was apparent that she also gained in confidence and strength by achieving her goals and objectives in the face of negative feedback and strong opposition from colleagues.

Congruent with the experience of other newcomers, the women seemed greatly empowered by their ability to contribute to families and communities back home, and they had strong hopes that their work would fashion a life opportunity for their children here in Canada. Their understanding of their experiences resonated through Gerry's analysis of her double day of work: "It's not hard, not hard forme. I am a woman and I accept whaU have todo." This was said without bitterness or regret. She conveyed tome throughout, in her sense of strong satisfaction and pride in her work, her achievements and her abilities.

Although the chances and choices of these women were, to a great degree, shaped by a matrix of race, class and gender hierarchies and the structural constraints of domination and legitimation, they apparently did practice an *ethics of care* that allowed for empowering moments. And even though their daily experience was one of grinding poverty, social stratification, racism, isolation, alienation and fragmentation, insofar as they experienced a sense of their own powerful self-agency through their caregiving and their ethical practice, they successfully resisted an oppressive social context. II

Notes

1. A full profile of demographic information and variables covered in the interviews for each participant is available on request therefore.
2. A full exploration oHhis body of work and the critical response to it goes beyond the scope of this paper. My goal here is to distinguish an ethics of care as both an ethical standpoint and a set of practices that can encompass not only women's traditional reproductive labour but other forms of caregiving as well.

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Human Rights: Setting the Stage for Protecting Refugee Women

Maryanna Schmuki

Abstract

This paper explores the social construction of women refugees from theperspective of the human rights regime with an eye to revealing whether the voices of refugee women are reflected. To this end the paper examines the development of women refugees as a category within human rights discourse and how this category has been bolstered by the concept of women' s human rights within the last decade.

Precis

Cet article explore la construction sociale des femmes refugiees dans la perspective du regime des droits humains avec une attention particuliere portee sur la question de sa voir si la voix des femmes refugiees y est entendue. A cette fin l' article examine l' evolution de la notion de femme refugiee commecategorieau sein du discours sur les droits humains, et comment cette categorie a ete supportee par Ie concept de droits humains feminins dans la derniere decennie.

Protecting refugees-whether they are men, women or children, internally displaced or have crossed international borders-is the prime responsibility of the international aid community. People become refugees when fleeing their home countries precisely because they are victims, or potential victims, of human rights violations and the aid regimes exist in order to protect these rights as well as to aid victims. 1 Human rights violations, as we conceive of them in the 1990s and specific to women in wartime, have occurred as long as war itself has occurred. Until recently, sexual violence has been dismissed as part of the inevitable spoils of war . In an unprecedented manner, wartime rape, along with other forms of gender-specific violence, has become visible in the last decade to the extent that aid organizations have created policy to deal specifically with these issues and their effect on refugee women. This paper will explore developments within the human rights construction site, in which participants have come to recognize women's human rights, and how this has bolstered the formation of policies specifically for women refugees. I will question whether this newest portrayal of refugee women, as constructed by the human rights regime, reflects the voices of refugee women themselves and whether the answers to this have implications both for human rights practitioners and for women as refugees.

Along with the reformulation of international human rights in the late 1980s and early 1990s to include women's human rights, there has beenrecognition that women refugees are especially vulnerable to human rights violations. Refugee women often flee their homes because of sexual violence only to find the same kind of violence in their place of refuge. Often, their journeys of flight are marked by attacks by virtually all-male bandits, soldiers, border guards and sometimes even fellow male refugees. Refugee women may themselves be diverse, but they share, as women, a vulnerability both as a result of the armed conflict they are fleeing and because they are dependent on outside aid for provision of relief. Women who are internally displaced within their own country may be even more vulnerable because the conflict and abuse they are escaping from is caused by the state regime in power-the same regime who is obligated to protect them. Also, depending on the degree to which either the society from which they are fleeing, or the society in which they find refuge is organized around the presumption that a woman lacking male protection and patronage is a woman who lacks respectability, there remains a situation shared by most women in flight that makes them especially open to abuse from males.

From Human Rights to Women's Human Rights

To conceptualize human rights law, and therefore human rights violations, is to interpret rights in a very specific manner. Feminists, such as Mary W ollstonecraft in the late 17oos, pointed out very early the gendered character of the concept of "rights," even as the ideas were still being codified by thinkers like Rousseau. W ollstonecraft took on a task that is still continuing today-showing how rights in a liberal democratic tradition were created from the perspective of white, European men. When this particularnotion of rights was first reinterpreted into contemporary human rights, and then formulated by feminists into women's human rights, the potential ramifications for women refugees, as well as the category of women refugees, were great.

The contemporary notion of human rights is a specific form of rights that were codified during the reorganization of global geopolitics following W orld War II. It was during this period that the United Nations was formed
and, in 1948, the *Universal Declaration of Human Rights* was adopted by member nations. In the early 1980s, European and North American groups began to form NGOs to monitor human rights abuses in countries with authoritarian state regimes-many of which were propped up by European and North American governments, and enmeshed in Cold War proxy politics.

International law imposes clear obligations on governments to prohibitrape and sexual violence because such abuses violate the right, at minimum, to

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security of the person under the *International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights* (ICCPR). The 1966 ICCPR contains a general prohibition on gender discrimination in civil and political rights.[2] Under ICCPR, the responsibility to protect refugees is in the hands of host governments who, according to a Human Rights Watch report, often show little concern and commit no resources for protecting refugee women.[3] Another broad human rights document, also adopted in 1966, that can be interpreted to protect both men and women refugees is the *International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights*. This covenant recognizes the equal right of men and women to enjoy economic, social and cultural rights.[4] The UN Human Rights Commission was later established to monitor compliance with these two covenants.[5]

In addition to these covenants are international laws, in situations of armed conflict, to which perpetrators of persecution based on gender and sexual violence can also be held accountable as a war crime, as a crime against humanity, or as an act of genocide.

The central and most comprehensive international legal document relating to gender-based discrimination is the *Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women* (CEDAW), which was adopted by the UN General Assembly in 1979 and which in 1994 had been ratified by 131 countries, but not the U.S. government.[6] CEDAW has been described as an international bill of rights for women and an agenda for action by countries who ratify it.[7] CEDAW has provided a legitimizing base for activists to build policy from across the board—in human rights, development, social and economic issues, and violence against women, to name a few.

With these instruments to work from, feminist activists, academics and lawyers began to reformulate human rights as women's human rights in the late 1980s. This created an opening for feminists inside major human rights NGOs in North America and Europe to begin documenting abuses of human rights as abuses of *women's human rights* and to legitimize women's human rights as a category. In 1990, Human Rights Watch established its own Women's Rights Project to monitor violence against women and gender discrimination throughout the world. This paved the way for the Women's Rights Project to later address issues of women refugees specifically.

By the early 1990s, the women's human rights movement had gained enough momentum to generate new mandates within human rights advocacy organizations, such as Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch. These mandates aimed to investigate countries whose governments have been implicated in abuse of women detainees and prisoners, governments who have imposed laws that discriminate against women, and governments who apply gender neutral laws in discriminatory ways.[8] The women's human rights movement has also prompted investigation of violence against women by private actors that is tolerated or ignored by the state.[9] Another important finding of human rights groups' investigations is that women's lack of social and economic security has compounded their vulnerability to violence and sex discrimination.[10]

In 1993, the UN Commission on Human Rights recognized the legitimacy of women's human rights for the first time by adopting a resolution calling for the integration of the rights of women into the human rights machinery of the United Nations.[11] That same year, at the World Conference on Human Rights in Vienna, the Program of Action recognized the rights of women and girls as an inalienable, integral and indivisible part of universal human rights.

Also in 1993, the UN General Assembly adopted the *Declaration on Violence Against Women* which recognized explicitly that states are obliged to fight specific forms of violence against women and called on governments to prevent, investigate and punish acts of violence against women.[12] In 1994, the UN appointed a Special Rapporteur on Violence Against Women who was given authority to recommend measures to eliminate violence, and to work closely with other rapporteurs, independent experts and members of the Commission on Human Rights.[13] The 1995 Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing gave women from governments and NGOs worldwide a forum to address issues of women's human rights and refugee women.

There are critiques of both the human rights paradigm and the women's human rights paradigm. The feminist critiques of human rights in general helped drive the theoretical development of women's human rights. One critique of women's human rights is that it is seen as a transformation of men's rights law which is thoroughly gendered to the advantage of men.[14] According to Hilary Charlesworth, with the exception of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, all general human rights instruments refer only to men. Charlesworth points out that human rights law reinforces the distinction between public and private worlds which allows the silencing of women.[15] Domestic violence was construed for decades as a private matter just as state-sponsored sexual violence was seen strictly as a "family affair" of the state until recently. In terms of refugees, this kind of attitude can be seen in aid workers in the field who choose not to deal with matters of sexual violence because they see it as a "private issue" or "inevitable by-product" of conflict.[16]

Critiques of women's human rights point out the silencing of women among different groups of women. Radhika Coomaraswarmy shows how this kind of silencing plays out in South Asia because in Asia the rights discourse is weak, in part because it privileges free, independent women, whereas Asian women tend to be attached to their communities, castes, or ethnic groups.[17] Some feminists of colour and from developing countries have asserted that the women's human rights discourse silences them by attempting to universalize a white, western view of women's rights.[18] If this charge is true to any extent, the ramifications for women refugees are great. If the policies produced to protect women refugees reflect only what western feminists imagine

refugee women need, protection may fail or be skewed toward reflecting a western imagination. But the principal opposition to acknowledging women's specific human rights has come not from the feminists, but from male-dominated governments who have seen the assertion of women' s rights (such as the right of a woman to be free of domestic violence within a particular country) as an international right to be a violation of their own government's state sovereignty.

These critiques do not, however, analyze why protection forwomenrefugees may fail. As Francoise Krill notes in his analysis of sexual violence in armed conflict, "If women in real life are not always protected as they should be, it is not due to the lack of legal basis."19

From Women's Human Rights to Women Refugees

Even though UNHCR and policies for international refugees grew out of efforts to aid refugees from World War II, and despite of the fact that Eleanor Roosevelt, an advocate for women's rights, was among the leaders who established the founding universal human rights articles for the post-World War II United Nations Charter, no policies specifically for women victims of wartime sexual violence emerged during this period. This may partially explain why, for instance, it wasn't until 1992 that knowledge of the 200,000 Korean "comfort women," who were unwilling sexual conscripts of the J apanese Army during World War II, became public, although this was known by Japanese, Korean and u.s. post-war officials.2o

In 1971, during the armed conflict which produced the newly-independent state of Bangladesh, an estimated 200,000 civilian women and girls were victims of rape by Pakistani soldiers. In an episode that looked similar to the systematic rape in Bosnia in the early 1990s, Bangledeshi women were abducted into military brothels and subjected to gang assaults. At the time, the incident was appalling enough for the new government of Bangladesh to appeal for aid from the international community to deal with the aftermath, but it was not sufficient to spur the international community (governments, international agencies and non-governmental international actors) into producing policies on sexual violence or women refugees.

In the early 1990s, while advocates for women's human rights were busy documenting the use of sexual violence for political ends and placing women's rights on international agendas, activists forrefugee women were busy creating policy within the development construction site. Advocates who lobbied for and produced policies for refugee women (such as the 1990 *Policy for Refugee Women*, the 1991 *Guidelines on the Protection of Refugee Women* and the *1995 Sexual Violence Against Refugees,* and *Guidelines for Prevention and Response),* worked in concert with advocates who turned human rights into women's human rights. Many of the issues outlined in the policies are women's human rights issues, and they gain their legal robustness through the backing of the human rights instruments examined above.

One of the main organizational goals of the advocates and formulators of the *1990 Policy on Refugee Women* is to provide protection appropriate to refugee women's specific needs. 21 Policy objectives include ensuring that protection and legal rights of refugee women are understood and responded to.22 *The Guidelines on the Protection of Refugee Women* elaborate on the causes for physicalinsecurity of women refugees and on ways for staff to become more aware of physical and sexual attacks during flight, sexual attacks in the country of asylum, spouse and child abuse, military violence and forced recruitment into military operations, sexual exploitation and prostitution, physical protection during repatriation, and the difficulties of prosecuting offenders.23 The guidelines also suggest program interventions to deal with these problems. They include recommendations to:

- provide trained staff (including women);
- train local security in the countries of asylum;
- provide culturally appropriate counselling;
- provide emergency relocation ifnecessary;
- encourage formation of internal camp legal processes; and
- educate refugee women, men and aid workers of women's rights under national and international law.24

Because the *Guidelines for Sexual Violence against Refugees* were meant to create awareness and sensitivity about the needs of refugees who have been subject to sexual violence, they inherently address women's human rights as protection issues and thus see the readers and users of the guidelines as "protectors". The Guidelines elaborate and suggest a range of measures to prevent sexual violence. These measures intend to:

- ensure the physical design and location of the camps enhance physical security;
- provide security patrols by local police and refugees; install fencing around the camps; identify and promote an alternative to living in camps;
- initiate inter-agency meetings between UNHCR, other relief organizations, refugees and government officials to develop a plan to prevent sexual violence; and
- assign to the camps a greater number of female protection officers, field interpreters, doctors, health workers and counsellors.25

The 1996-97 UN High Commissioner for Refugees, Sadako Ogata, and the holder of the recently-created post Special Rapporteur on Violence against Women for the UN Commission on Human Rights, Radhika Coomaraswamy, have recognized sexual violence against women refugees as a global outrage.

There are many reasons why rape and sexual violence are so common in refugee situations that deepen, complicate and resist the standard image of rape as inevitable in war. As human rights NGOs have begun to document in the early 1990s, rape and other forms of

sexual violence are often used as a tool of political repression.[26] Rape has sometimes been mischaracterized and dismissed by military and political leaders (those who have the power to stop it), when it is alleged within their own ranks, as committed by non-state sanctioned private actors.[27] In other cases, government officials have routinely accused enemy governments of complicity in wartime rape. U.S. and European governments accused the Japanese and German governments of such complicity in World War II[28] but have been loath to admit that their own military personnel might be engaging in rape in ways that were encouraged or ignored by their superiors.

In its investigations on rape as a tool of war, Human Rights Watch found that rape had been used as a tactical weapon to terrorize or "ethnically cleanse" communities, as a tool in enforcing hostile occupations, a means of conquering or seeking revenge against the enemy, and as a means of payment for mercenary soldiers. Rape is also used to punish women suspected of being sympathetic to the opposition.[29] In some cases, rape is used by combatants or other state-sanctioned individuals to inflict shame upon their victims, or their victims' families and communities. Sexual violence is construed and manipulated by these state actors as a profound offence against community or individual honour which many times is based on nationality or ethnicity.

Rape and sexual violence in particular are a political tool used by states in turning people (men, women and children) into refugees, and discouraging refugees from returning home. This is the basic logic for using rape as a tool for the "ethnic cleansing" in Bosnia. "Rapes spread fear and induce the flight of refugees; rapes humiliate, demoralize, and destroy not only the victim but also her family and community; and rapes stifle any wish to return," comments Alexandra Stiglmayer, a German journalist who documented the systematic use of rape in the war in the former Yugoslavia for the book *Mass Rape: The War against Women in Bosnia-Herzegovina*.[30]

The use of rape and other forms of sexual violence for "ethnic cleansing" or other political motives, which turn people into refugees, is different than sexual violence against people who are already refugees, although this too can be politically motivated. Human Rights Watch documented the rapes of Somali refugees in camps of Northeastern Kenya in 1993. This report attributed nearly all the rapes occurring in the camps to *shiftas*, i.e., well-armed bandits who sometimes joined forces with Somali militia to launch raids across the borders into the camps in search of money, food and women.[31] Analysts speculate that the *shiftas* are ethnic Somalis residing in Kenya who make a living robbing local residents.[32] Some relief workers speculate that they might be refugees who take up arms during the nights to terrorize fellow refugees.[33]

The human rights regime has a specific advocacy, monitoring and educational role to play in protecting and assisting refugee women. The work of feminist-conscious NGOs, like Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch, have solidified "refugee women" as a legitimate category of analysis in the larger realm of human rights work. Human Rights Watch has made several recommendations to UNHCR which echo the recommendations made in the *Guidelines for Refugee Women* and the *Guidelines against Sexual Violence*. They have also recommended actions for host governments to:

- ensure that national laws against sexual violence are enforced in refugee camps and spontaneous settlements;
- facilitate prevention of sexual violence against refugee women through investigating incidents and assigning female police officers to camps and border points;
- take steps to ensure that asylum adjudicators recognize gender-based persecution; and
- train adjudicators to interview female asylum applicants with sensitivity.[34]

What Human Rights Watch found in post-1994 Rwanda, which was summarized in its resultant report, *Shattered Lives: Sexual Violence during the Rwandan Genocide and its Aftermath*, was that despite the various proclamations made by the UN Human Rights Commission on women's human rights, the UN Human Rights Field Operation in Rwanda has no systematic focus to address issues specific to women.[35]

International War Crimes Tribunals

One way to redress the horrific sexual violence committed in the name of war, and was used to carry out state-sponsored agendas in the former Yugoslavia and Rwanda, is through the International War Crimes Tribunals. For the first time in history, the International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia, established by the UN Security Council in May of 1993, prosecuted soldiers for rape as a war crime.[36] The Prosecutor's Office has stated its commitment to public recognition of sexual violence against women during the war in Bosnia.[37] Even with this new-found commitment to addressing rape as a war crime, there are practical problems with prosecuting offenders. Because anonymity of witnesses is not guaranteed, and because many suspects as well as some who have been indicted remain at large, it is extremely difficult to protect women witnesses. Women are prepared to testify, but the Tribunal can only offer protection in the Netherlands where the trials are taking place. When the women return to Bosnia, they fear retribution because many suspected perpetrators remain in positions of power in Bosnia.[38]

In late 1994, the UN Security Council created the International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda, and in 1996, the Tribunal established a Sexual Assault Committee to coordinate investigation of gender-based violence. The aim of the committee is to address strategic, legal and methodological questions in prosecuting crimes involving sexual violence.[39] Within the overall aid program for reconstruction in Rwanda, very little aid is earmarked specifically for gender-related issues. Despite the U.S. $19 million in aid to the Rwandan judiciary, in 1996, there were no programs designed

to enhance the capacity of Rwandan police to investigate gender-based crimes including sexual violence during the genocide.4o

Asylum and Women Refugees

One area where the manifestations of refugee and human rights discourses and policy have had a tangible impact on women refugees is in asylum cases worldwide. Under the *Universal Declaration of Human Rights,* all refugees have a fundamental right to seek and enjoy refuge from persecution or war. Until recently, the definition ofrefugees in the 1951 Convention has not been contested in terms of gender, even though many refugee women flee due to genderbased persecution or sexual violence.41 UNHCR's policies on refugee women encourage host countries to consider these factors in their regulations on allowing women refugees asylum. Currently, the United States and Canada are the only developed nations to integrate gender into refugee policies.42 But this does not ensure that adjudicators will recognize these issues, and women refugees continue to face great difficulty in attaining refugee status based on sexual violence.

The procedure in many countries is insensitive and sometimes hostile toward women seeking asylum after rape or sexual violence. In this situation, refugees are required to describe their experiences to adjudicators. Refugee women are often reluctant to relate their experiences, especially if the adjudicators are men. Adjudicators have tended to dismiss accounts of sexual violence and rape by female asylum-seekers as personal or cultural harms which do not qualify as political persecution. Adjudicators have also excluded women with gender-related claims because they do not qualify as a "particular social group" in the 1951 Convention definition.43 Women who have become targets of sexual violence because of a male relative's political activities have a even more difficult time making claims to asylum.44

UNHCR has interpreted the 1951 Convention definition to include women as a particular social group, but the international community is slow to follow. In the mid 1980s, UNHCR started its Women at Risk program to encourage developed countries to accept women refugees identified by UNHCR as having experienced severe trauma. Three countries, Canada, New Zealand and Australia have accepted women refugees under this program, and other countries accept women refugees under their standard asylum laws.45 Women resettled through this program are very few in number. They experience other hardships once they are resettled because they typically have no knowledge of the new language and culture, have no family in their new home, and do not have skills to find jobs in industrialized countries.46

UNHCR has also resettled women refugees in other camps in cases where they have been raped or sexually abused in camps. In the camps for Somali refugees in Northeastern Kenya, UNHCR initiated a transfer system in which women could apply to move to camps along the coast, away from the Somali border where raids were taking place in 1993. This helped a few women but also caused some problems. Some women who requested a transfer had to wait so long before moving that they were assaulted again before they were transferred.47 There were also a few cases of false claims for camp transfers and resettlement to a developed country, in which women saw a tale of rape as a ticket out of the refugee camp. Binaifer Nowrojee of Human Rights Watch commented:

> Refugee women build this myth of what it means to be resettled and try to get out of the camps. They have no idea of what it really means to be picked up and sent to Sweden on their own. Camps can be bad but maybe it's better to stay.48

Conclusion

The human rights instruments developed in the last decade for women, and specifically for women refugees set the stage internationally for protecting refugee women. What still remains to be seen is how these instruments and images help or hinder the process of women refugees returning to normalcy-or shedding their refugee skin. The human rights constructions predominant in the contemporary aid arena tend to reflect western cultural values and western epistemology as well as operate in accordance with a western institutional form. This may set the stage for protection but also act to hinder the process of rehabilitation rooted in cultural and institutional values of post-war societies. •

Notes

1. This paper is a chapter excerpted from my Master's thesis entitled "Shedding Their Refugee Skin: Constructions of Refugee Women and International Aid Regimes" (Clark University, Worcester Massachusetts, 1997), which explores four areas of knowledge production as regimes of aid. The areas-human rights, development and humanitarian aid, academia and international news media-are referred to as construction sites and come together to make up the overall system of relief to refugees.
2. Christine M. Cervenak, "Promoting Inequality: Gender-Based Discrimination in UNRWA's Approach to Palestine Refugee Status," *Human Rights Quarterly 16* (1994): 341-43.
3. Human Rights Watch, *Global Report on Women' sHuman Rights* (New York: Human Rights Watch, 1995), 103.
4. Cervenak, "Promoting Inequality," 341 43.
5. Rebecca J. Cook, "State Accountability Under the Women's Convention," in *Human Rights of Women: National and International Perspectives,* edited by RebeccaJ. Cook (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1994), 231.

6. Human Rights of Women, Appendix A, 573 86. 7. Cervenak, "Promoting Inequality," 340. 8. Human Rights Watch, *Global Report on Women's Human Rights,* xiv-xv. 9. Ibid., xv. 10. Ibid., xv. 11. Ibid., xvii. 12. Ibid., xviii. 13. Ibid., xviii.

14. Human Rights of Women; and *Women's Rights, Human Rights: International Feminist Perspectives,* edited by Julie Peters and Andrea Wolper (New York; London: Routledge, 1995).

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Canadian 1ruth Commission Attempts to Overcome Guatemalan Refugees' Fear and Cynicism

Judith Pyke

A Truth Commission for the Canadian Guatemalan community finished taking the last of its testimonies from refugees in Ottawa, Montreal and Toronto, Canada on April 30, 1998. Altogether, the commission took 34 testimonies and documented 82 cases of human rights abuses in Guatemala. It was funded by Canada's Department of Foreign Affairs. The testimonies will be incorporated into a report being prepared by the year-long Truth Commission based in Guatemala, which will wrap up on July 31st, 1998.

Guatemala's thirty-five year civil war ended officially in December 1996, when government and warring guerrilla factions signed several peace accords. During the conflict, over 150,000 people died, 50,000 disappeared and thousands more were orphaned and widowed. One million people became refugees, out of a total population of 11 million.

"I think it's important from a Canadian perspective to recognize that we have people in our midst who are living with memories of these horrible situations" said Albert Koehl, a Canadian lawyer who helped initiate the Truth Commission in Canada, and who worked for the commission in Guatemala. However, Koehl acknowledges that many members of the Canadian Guatemalan refugee community, which he estimates at roughly 8,000, found that "the process just hurts too much" and did not want to participate. Others remain unsure whether the commission will have an impact on the situation in Guatemala. Those who did participate hope that public articulation of human rights abuses in Guatemala will engender public recognition of war atrocities and help Guatemalans and their CO\1l1try to begin to heal.

"This is good for future generations, and it's importantto record Guatemala's history," said Francisco Hernandez, who gave testimony atthetruthcommission's proceedings. He is "tired of the bad situation in Guatemala" and does not want the violence to repeat itself. Hernandez came to Canada as a refugee fourteen years ago, after he was threatened with kidnapping by the army. However, Hernandez, like many Guatemalans, is unsure whether a truth commission or the peace agreement will usher in a new era for Guatemala.

"Latin America has a history of sudden reversals and coups, and it would be negligent to say that there is a guarantee that things are going to keep moving in a positive direction, but that's the hope," said John Tyynella, who works for the United Nations in Guatemala. Tyynella stressed that public participation in processes like the Truth Commission and the implementation of the peace accords has to overcome a strong sense of "apathy, skepticism and a sense that there really is no way to participate in the government." Despite the fact that there are more sanctioned opportunities for discussion, Guatemala's culture of fear persists, perpetuated by continuing government corruption and fundamental economic needs throughout the country.

The brutal killing ofBishop Juan Jose Gerardi in April, after he published a report on human rights abuses in Guatemala, sent a strong message to the Guatemalan Canadian community. There is a sense that repression is starting again, said Hernandez. He, like many others, urges that continued international presence and attention is essential if Guatemala is to continue on its path to restoring a civil and just society. II

Judith Pyke is a *Toronto-based writer and media producer who has spent time in Central America.*

Legitimate and Illegitimate Discrimination: New Issues in Migration

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Freedom of movement: If the members of a state are forced to flee, the legitimacy of that government is questionable. On the other hand, if members cannot or must leave, again the government is not democratically legitimate.

Immigration control: While limiting access and determining who mayor may not become members of a sovereign state remains a legitimate prerogative of the state, the criteria, rules and processes for doing so must be compatible with its character as a democratic state.

Legitimate and Illegitimate Discrimination: New Issues in Migration, edited by Professor Howard Adelman, deals with the question oflegitimacywith cases studies from the Developing World, Europe, Australia, the United States, and Canada.

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