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CANADA'S PERIODICAL ON REFUGEES

# REFUGEE

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Volume 16

Number 2

## UPROOTING AND CONSEQUENCES

### Introduction

Ogenga Otunnu

In the last few years, millions of victims of political violence have been uprooted from their homes. Many of these people perished while seeking asylum. Those who survived, continue to languish without basic human needs and human rights. As this river of human blood, tears and trauma claims more victims, the international community adopts numerous resolutions, passively screams "never again!", tightens refugee deterrence policies and withdraws basic assistance to asylum seekers.

This issue of *Refuge* discusses the plights of those who have been violently uprooted from their homes. The first article, by Professor Asha Hans, chronicles how rape is used as an instrument of war and humiliation against Sri Lankan Tamil women in the ensuing violent crisis in Sri Lanka. The status, identities of crossing borders, trauma and resilience of Sri Lankan Tamil women in India are also examined (see also, "Special Issue on Sri Lanka," *Refuge* 13.3, June 1993). The next article, by Steven Weine and Dolores Vojvoda, discusses the traumatic effects of ethnic cleansing on two

Bosnian refugee women who fled with their families to the United States. The evolving experiences of the refugee women in both the private and public domains are carefully highlighted. Like Asha Hans, the two medical doctors focus on identity and status of the women in the country of asylum. The next article, by Jennifer Hyndman, examines the culture, practices and policies of dominant humanitarian or-

ganizations in providing assistance to refugees. The article, which is based on an extensive field research in Kenya and interviews with UNHCR officials in Geneva, shows some of the contradictions inherent in the ambiguously articulated efforts of "turning" a refugee camp into a community. A rigorous analysis of the implications of the policies and practices on gender relations in the camps is then provided. Once more, the tensions within and

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# REFUGEE

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between policies and practice is shown. This is followed by Veronica Nmoma's article on the violent conflict and mass displacement in Sierra Leone. Here, some of the causes of the conflict and attempts to resolve them through negotiated settlements are described. The article also highlights one of the myths of asylum in Africa: while at least a million Sierra Leoneans were internally displaced and hundreds of thousands became refugees in the neighboring countries, including Liberia, tens of thousands of Liberian refugees sought asylum in Sierra Leone. Since the article was written, the Foday Sonkoh's Revolutionary

United Front signed the Abidjan Peace Agreement in November 1996. However, the relative stability that followed the agreement in the war torn country was rudely shattered by Major Johnny Paul Karoma's coup on May 25, 1997. As in the past, many people were killed and many more have been uprooted. The last article, by Edward Opoku-Dapaah, suggests how Canada might improve its responses to the growing refugee crisis.

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## Asylum: A Moral Dilemma

By W. Guntler Plaut

Toronto: York Lakes Press, ISBN 1-55014-339-2, 192 pages, indexed; \$19.90.

Every year the refugee landscape changes, but only in that more problems are added, fewer are solved, and all become constantly more urgent. Fuelled by the explosion of the world's population, the quest for asylum is one of the most pressing problems of our age. Refugee-receiving nations—located frequently, but by no means exclusively, in the Western world—have to respond to masses of humanity searching for new livable homes. Human compassion for these refugees can be found everywhere, but so can xenophobia and the desire to preserve one's nation, economic well being, and cultural integrity. The clash between these impulses represents one of the great dilemmas of our time and is the subject of Plaut's study. In exploring it, he provides a far-ranging inquiry into the human condition.

The book presents political, ethnic, philosophical, religious, and sociological arguments, and deals with some of the most troublesome and heartbreaking conflicts in the news.

*Contents: The Issues; Questions Without Answers; Definitions; Religion, Natural Law, and Hospitality; A Look at History; Some Ethical Questions Through the Lens of Sociology; Community and Individual; Contested Rights: To Leave, Return, Remain.*

*The Practice: Refugees in Africa; Four Asian Lands; Gypsies of Europe and Central America; The North American Experience; The Sanctuary Movement; A Final Look; Bibliography; Index.*

*Asylum—A Moral Dilemma* is simultaneously published in the United States by Praeger Publishers, and in Canada by York Lakes Press.

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# Sri Lankan Tamil Refugee Women in India

Asha Hans

## Abstract

*The author describes the situation of displaced and refugee Sri Lankan Tamil women in camps in India. Gender, ethnicity, class status, religion, social roles and security of the person are central to this analysis of women's experiences of war as contrasted with the situation of men. The significance of clashing cultures and divergent social norms to the everyday lives of these women is highlighted. The plight of these women is linked to refugee policy and international conventions that are not salient to the actual lived experience in the camps, and some directions for change are indicated.*

## Précis

*L'auteure décrit la situation des réfugiées tamoules du Sri Lanka dans les camps indiens. Cette analyse compare le vécu des femmes dans un contexte de guerre à celui des hommes, en s'attachant particulièrement aux questions de sexe, d'ethnicité, de classe, de religion, de rôles sociaux et de sécurité personnelle. L'impact des divergences culturelles et socio-normatives sur le quotidien y est souligné. La situation critique de ces femmes est imputée aux politiques et conventions internationales sur les réfugié(e)s qui ne tiennent aucunement compte de la réalité des la vie dans les camps. L'auteure suggère des changements.*

Women and children form the majority of refugee populations anywhere. In India, this dyad of Sri Lankan refugees conforms to the pattern. To examine the Sri Lankan refugee women's status in India, a valuable starting

point is by looking at the refugee women's place in the existing power structures. Research on women's studies has noted two aspects of women refugees. They are at the same time vulnerable and indomitable. Uprooted by conflict they are the most affected refugee group. Women, whether raped, secluded, unable to feed their children, or abducted, are victims of war and suffer physically, psychologically, and spiritually. Stripped of material possessions, dignity and self-esteem, they bring with them into exile the trauma of sexual violation, of helplessly watching their children die, or of being continually stalked by violence (Mayotte 1992, 146–50). Though vulnerable in some ways, they are also seen as the backbone of the refugee community, as Judy Mayotte herself ascertains: "they are the ones who must reestablish the family in exile, so too will they be the ones to recreate the familial environment on return to the homeland" (ibid., 189). Researchers have noted that women play a more active role in exile than men. Universally, refugee women are responsible for domestic work, have to cope with changed family structures as heads of family households and also maintain their traditional culture leaving men with passive roles (Forbes 1991, 8–9). The Sri Lankan refugee women's role is studied keeping this in view and especially their socioeconomic, political and cultural environment in Sri Lanka and refuge in an ethnically similar region in India.

## Tamil Women in Sri Lanka

Women in Sri Lanka, as in other parts of the world, have tried to break barriers put up by society which place them at the bottom of the power structure. Their position in an independent Sri Lanka remains virtually unchanged. They have been shackled by cultural morals and traditional values

(Wickrematunge 1995, 12). Though they were the first group to be granted adult suffrage in Asia, their lives were constrained by political and social discrimination.

This study provides an insight into the social construction of refugee women before coming to India. Family remains the primary unit of the Tamil social system. This family, as in most traditional societies, is an "extended family." The society despite a matriarchal form is patriarchal in character. Tamil women, who came to India as part of the above streams of refugees, have been like most women, worldwide, victims of social oppression. The Sri Lankan Tamil had also to face ethnic discrimination as well as oppression by caste and class structures. Among the Sri Lankan Tamils the lower castes, for instance were not allowed to interact with the higher castes (Dias 1979, 9). This socioreligious feature found continuity across the straits in Tamil Nadu.

Despite caste restrictions, Sri Lankan law gave equality to its women. Legal protection to the Tamil Hindu women is provided by *Thesavalami* or "Customs of the Land" law of the Tamils. It is a collection of customs of Jaffna Tamils made under the Dutch Governor, General Simons, in 1706–1707. The codification was carried out later and approved by the native chiefs. The British included it as law under Regulation 1806 (Goody and Tambiah 1973, 111–13). *Thesavalami* refers to three types of property ownership, that given as dowry to the daughter by the parents (*chidam*), property inherited by male members from parents (*muthusam*), and property acquired by the married couple (*thedathaddam*). *Thesavalami* stipulates that *chidam* or hereditary property brought by the wife was to be transferred to her daughters alone at marriage as their dowry (Goody and

Tambiah 1973, 112–13). *Thesavalami* today has lost its traditional characteristics. Grossholtz argues that, in its pursuit of creating capitalist and colonialist structures to establish private ownership of property and accumulation of capital, the colonial governments gradually replaced traditional norms. The government took away land to which ownership had not been firmly established. By this act over the years 1901–1921, 50 percent of women landowners lost their paddy fields (Grossholtz 1984, 115). Consequently, they lost their social equality. Today, land constitutes a part of the dowry and is settled in the name of the woman though she has no right to sell it without her husband's consent as long as she is married.

Compared to the Tamilian in India, a Sri Lankan Tamil is governed by more liberal rights. The Indian Tamil woman has no right over land and land is not part of her dowry. Goody and Tambiah see the Sri Lankan system both as variants of the classical Indian model and a systemic transformation of that model. It was progressive in its attitude to women's rights and the important constraints that entered the legal system are traceable to English law or Roman-Dutch law (Goonesekera 1990, 154). The Tamil Muslims are guided by Islamic law. It is purely patriarchal where a woman has no right over property (ibid., 1990).

The socially-oppressed Tamil woman refugee is the product of a sociopolitical revolution which has not been paid much attention. The social status of the women related to their political role and its impact on refugees is clearly the least researched area. Women do play an important role in freedom and peace movements (Heng 1997, Vickers 1993, Yuval-Davis 1989, Jayawardena 1986) though their situations very rarely change after the revolutions are over (Einhorn 1993, Sharara 1983, Rady 1994, Diamond 1996). In the Sri Lankan case, Jayawardena argues that the women's movement did not take off because the Sri Lankan women had no atrocities to

fight against (Jayawardena 1986, 136). Insurgent movements in developing countries, make use of the issue of social oppression to recruit women to their revolutionary causes. This was also the case in Sri Lanka. Many of these women joined militancy movements to fight for a national cause, as well as to get away from social oppression. This strategy provided them with a short cut to emancipation. There are many who joined these causes due to human rights abuse, primarily sexual, by state forces while fighting militancy. The refugee women from many conflict areas who have joined revolutionary movements are the products of such rationality, which has political implications for both the host and sending countries.

The persecution of women has enabled insurgents to draw them into revolutionary movements. Encouraging women's participation in the struggle for freedom relates it to bringing in radical changes in their lives. Consciousness of women is considered as vital to their "social emancipation." The Sri Lankan Tamil women's participation in the political struggle as the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) "provides a springboard from which women can organize, identify and articulate their grievances and fight against the modes of oppression and exploitation perpetrated on them (Balasingham 1983, 30). The dedicated freedom fighter at some stage becomes a refugee. Women could be simultaneously militants and refugees. Joining the freedom movement provides a chance for women to attain social emancipation and mobilization. As freedom fighters, they achieve a social status equal to men.

The persecution of Tamil women in Sri Lanka enabled the LTTE to draw them into the insurgency movement. The LTTE has a separate fighting force of women. Akila, the leader of this force was supposed to be high in the LTTE hierarchy before her death in 1996. Most of these "Freedom Birds" are in their teens. Encouraging their participation in the struggle for Eelam, the LTTE's commitment was to bring

in radical changes in the lives and consciousness of women which they consider to be vital to their "social emancipation" (ibid., 30). The choice of militancy by some women and its relationship to refugee status becomes clearer. This was especially surprising because in comparison to other South Asian women, Sri Lankan women have had the advantage of high literacy rates and health status. Sri Lanka can also boast of two women as heads of states. It was obvious that despite the existence of a good welfare system, and the election of Srimavo Bandarnaike and Chandrika Kumartunge to the highest office of the country, most Sri Lankan women face discrimination in sociopolitical and economic spheres. The twelve women who sit in Parliament today are there as a result of the violent slaying of either their husbands or their fathers (Wickremtunge 1995, 11). Tamil women though confronted with different problems than their Sinhalese counterparts, also face the same discriminations (Jayawardena 1986, 109–36; Skjonsberg 1982, 322–25). The Sri Lankan scenario confirms this even today where only two Tamil women have entered Parliament and both of those by default. Rasamanohari Pulendran was elected after her husband was assassinated, and Ranganyagi Pathmanathan when her brother died. Both won due to sympathy votes.

In conflict situations, women have always been considered part of the spoils of war. This has recently drawn attention of researchers again (Tetreault 1993; Gallin, Ferguson, and Harper 1995). Where women are concerned the most important issue in war is that of sexual violence. Women constituting 50 percent of the population and caught up in the Tamil struggle for Eelam were equal victims of this first wave of organized racial assault by the Sri Lankan state (Balasingham 1983, 23). The Tamil women confronted with a conflict situation faced new challenges. According to the LTTE, the target of this ethnic violence were particularly women who "suffered the

worst forms of cruelty and indignity. Women have been the targets of the most vicious and hideous combination of racism and sexism—rape” (ibid., 23). Rape in conflict situations is common. Though under Sri Lankan law, a rapist can face up to twenty years imprisonment, social condemnation of victims prohibits them from seeking legal justice. This is the case in even a non-conflict situation. The male-dominated judiciary see the victim of rape as having invited it upon herself and not worthy of special consideration (Wijayatilake 1992, 31).

There is no trauma worse than sexual assault for a woman. Women all over the world are targets of this offence and state boundaries do not change the way a woman feels. What is different is the way society accepts the victims of sexual violence. In many developing countries including Sri Lanka, sexual violence is not only a personal trauma, but also has a social stigma attached to it. A woman violated sexually becomes socially outcast. It is not only the community which rejects her but also her husband and family. Rape victims are ostracized for life. This is much more among middle class or rich families. They hide the truth so that the young woman is saved from a life long imprisonment without walls. Tamil society has shown insensitivity towards women who have been sexually-abused during ethnic conflict (Hoole 1990, 318–19). The result is that non-recognition of the act of rape leaves the woman alone with a trauma. The rape victimizes a woman; the society destroys her totally (ibid., 319). In fact, society in these countries blames the woman and not the oppressor, laying the blame at the door of the victim, thus reflecting the social structure where women’s roles are always secondary.

Rape was carried out against the Tamil women, not only by the Sinhalese soldiers but also by the Indian Peacekeeping Force (IPKF) sent in 1987 to Sri Lanka. Lt. General Depinder Singh, the overall commander of the IPKF in Sri Lanka, defending his men, refused to believe that Indian men

would ever “go berserk to the extent of raping or killing women as it was against the Indian ethos and culture” (Bobb, Vankatramani, and Rehman 1987, 38). Their pleas of innocence were upset when it was highlighted that Dhanu, the suicide bomber, who assassinated Indian Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi, in 1991 had been presumably raped by the IPKF. The IPKF like the LTTE also found in women a group ready to take to arms. These women together with other cadre members became targets of LTTE wrath. Consequently they joined the IPKF and its allied insurgent groups. The trauma of Indian atrocities committed on Sri Lankan women were to leave their mark, as the killing by Dhanu demonstrated.

Though being a woman has laid them open to sexual attacks, women’s response to the war has not been only as followers in the insurgent movement. Uneducated women from Sri Lanka’s lowest income groups braved the wrath of the militants, when inter-caste rivalry split the movement and brought violence into the lives of the Tamils themselves. In this battle it was a group of women from the villages who used chili powder, knives and rice pounders to challenge the LTTE and other insurgent groups. The “natural defiance of the women from the lower classes remained a remarkable feature as opposed to the pliability of upper class women” (Hoole 1990, 92). Among the Sinhalese, a few women’s organizations were formed which were a reflection of the situation prevailing in the country. Among these were the Mothers’ Front, a movement of women protesting against the disappearance of their children (United Nations, Economic and Social Council, 1991 E/CN.4/1991/SR.42: 16). It had a broad-based membership cutting across class and caste barriers and included women from both the urban and rural areas. A large membership enabled it to protest vigorously against the atrocities committed by the state and the militants. The above vulnerability and indomitable spirit of the

Tamil Sri Lankan women was reflected in their behaviour in refuge.

### Refuge in India

The Sri Lankan refugee women who arrived in India were under a dual burden—physical and psychological in nature. Many had been physically abused and had to face problems of exile. They were now faced with new challenges in a nation though ethnically the same, still foreign in many ways. The Sri Lankan Tamil is a fun-loving person, used to an open lifestyle. This is very unlike the life led by Tamil women in Tamil Nadu who live in a closed environment suppressed by family and society. The Sri Lankan women’s open lifestyle caused misunderstandings and they were compelled to choose the lifestyle of the host community. Their style of dressing had to undergo change. Clothes worn by Sri Lankan Tamil women were western dresses or a tight blouse and a sarong. In Tamil Nadu sarees among older women and half sarees (a smaller saree over a long skirt) among the younger women was the tradition. To escape censure for not complying with Tamil cultural norms, the Sri Lankan women had to change their style of dress to suit local conditions. They now dressed more circumspectly and walked with more inhibition. Men, in contrast, needed no such change. Harassment of women in Sri Lanka, according to the refugee women was less. The Sri Lankan males extend more courtesy to women, and mixing with the opposite sex was not frowned upon. Widow remarriage was common.

In the camps, no discrimination in terms of sex is noticeable. A woman and frequently a single woman, takes over the role of camp spokesperson. At the same time, it cannot be overlooked that various structures of power exist in camps. The gender-biased power relation of the refugee as it existed in Sri Lanka continues in the camps. In addition, the institution of refugee administration extends the male-dominated structures into the camps. Women have to cope with familial and societal

patriarchal norms, the new male domination, and policies where refugees are stereotyped and programs are gender blind. Men continue to retain their dominant hierarchical position in refuge. This is despite their new economic roles where they have often lost their economic value. This loss has resulted in social problems, for example, they can lose control over their children. In all camps, the major burden of managing the family falls on the women. Besides the usual daily activities which keep them busy, they trek long distances to collect firewood. In some camps, there is no water, so they have to fetch water from a far. Some women do not approve of men helping in the households, though they themselves worked in the fields in Sri Lanka. It is therefore not surprising that they emerge as camp spokespersons, though not as camp leaders. Decision making still rests with the men. There is little change in attitudes among the older generation towards the patriarchal system which prevailed in Sri Lanka. Some changes have occurred among the younger couples who share work. Joint decisions are made within the family, though the important decisions are always made by the men.

Some women work outside the camps. Most of these women belong to the lower castes. The middle-class educated Sri Lankan refugee men do not allow their wives to work outside the camps. It is not only a case of middle-class morality, but the fact that work is available mostly for daily wage labourers in the agricultural and industrial sectors. Those who are compelled to do this work, besides the lower castes, are female heads-of-households who do not find the dole enough. Some women do admit that they contributed much more to household expenses in Sri Lanka than they do in the camps. The majority of refugees belonged to the agricultural and fishing sector. These occupations are dependent on family units pooling their resources where women played an important role. In India the economic roles are completely changed. The family as a unit in the camps does not

exist most of the time. When it does, the family can no longer act as an economic unit as they have no lands, livestock or boats of their own. They are only dependent on wage labour.

Most women admit that the standard of living in Sri Lanka they were used to was much higher. Their access and control to resources in exile is limited. In recent years, although the use of women in refugee-organized welfare activities has increased and has given women an added advantage of meeting and discussing their problems, the final decision making does not rest with them. This has been noticed even in camps where the women are in a majority.

Fewer single women are found in the camps as the LTTE does not allow women under the age of twenty-five to leave Jaffna. These women according to the refugees are recruited into the insurgent forces. Several social problems exist. Many of the refugee women have been raped. When questioned on the issue, they sidetracked, it but did not refute the fact that the acts were committed or that it bothered them. At the same, time their silence, in itself, was an answer to the trauma suffered, even if not by them directly, but by other women in their own community. As one woman quietly explained, it was a bondage among women which went above any other issue. They did not start the war but in their struggle for Eelam, women were paying a higher price than men. The women saw the sexual attacks as an organized effort by security forces to desecrate Tamils as reprisal for the part played by the men in the war effort. The fear, alienation and betrayal combined to make them take steps to flee to safety. Some fled for personal reasons but most were part of a spontaneous move by large numbers to escape the brutality of security and armed forces.

Teenage pregnancy has been among other issues worrying the refugees. Teenage pregnancy is a common problem in the camps and support is provided, again, only through the health workers. No special program is run for it. Due to lack of privacy in the camps

children grow up earlier than normal. Stress among adolescents has also contributed to the increase. This has been particularly noticed in divided families. It has to be kept in mind that many of the teenagers were either born in India in camps, or have spent their childhood there. Many have neither seen nor met their fathers or brothers. Forcing women into sexual relations by camp or Q branch (security branch) officials is the exception rather than the rule. The women have been protected by the host Tamil society, which perceives the desecration of Tamil women as a heinous crime and against the norms of Tamil culture. Prostitution, which does exist, is frowned upon and hidden, but does not meet as much disapprobation as would otherwise be the case. The women pointed out that it was not due to economic reasons or boredom, but saw the act as a sort of waywardness of some young women. It was a revolt against their existing unnatural condition.

The divorce rate among the younger people has been on an upward trend, reflecting the increasing social instability in their lives. More women are opting for divorce than earlier. Break up of families, and resultant problems in bringing up children in exile has contributed to the escalation. The women also saw it as a result of the detachment from cultural moorings.

Psychological stress caused by separation among divided families is universal. Stress is caused by lack of knowledge of the conditions, or whereabouts of those left behind, complicated by a guilt complex that they themselves are in safe conditions, while other members continue to live in daily danger. This situation has contributed to rise in violence in the camps. The women have been most affected by it. Many have left behind their husbands and sons. The grief of those left behind and the loss of support from the extended families which they are used to, makes them extremely vulnerable to psychological stress. It has also caused an increase in wife battering. Some refugee families have been divided among camps in

India. According to a Sri Lankan doctor, separation results in women becoming excessively possessive in nature creating further stress in the family.

Lack of social privacy has become a major problem for women in camps. Lack of bathrooms is a common feature. Even birth of children in some camps becomes an open visual affair. It affects the adolescent women especially who reach the stage of puberty in the camps. The puberty rituals, combined with lack of privacy in even washing sanitary cloth has escalated anxiety levels. Sanitary napkins are not supplied either by the government or the NGO's who work in the camps. In developing countries such as India where most of the local population lives below the poverty level these items are a luxury which only the rich can afford. Distribution of these by the government and NGO's would only create prejudices against the refugee population. The NGO's could as an alternate distribute cloth replacements and lay emphasis on sanitary infrastructure.

Sociocultural continuity has been found among the refugees, with the woman as the main protector of these practices. Childhood practices of piercing of the girls' ears and taking the child to the temple on the forty-first day continue. Puberty rights continue though with great difficulty as there is no privacy in most camps. Isolation becomes difficult, as does giving of a ceremonial bath, but it continues nevertheless. Female genital mutilation continues among the Muslims, though kept as a secret. Marriages are usually arranged, though an increasing trend in self arranged marriages is noticeable. During marriages, matching of horoscopes continues. Dowry is either provided or promised on return to Sri Lanka. The inability of the refugee to pay dowry has created a social upheaval. Women refugees who belonged to families, who could pay a dowry in Sri Lanka, have had to settle for lower class and out of caste marriages. Marriages have also been delayed for this reason. Though the

daughters are given a dowry, they will not have legal access to their parent's property on return to Sri Lanka. Some insist that caste is a forgotten factor, but even among the Vellalla Christians, caste divisions exist, and related customs such as dowry and arranged marriages with matching of horoscopes is a common practise. The usual dowry, ranges among the lower middle classes from ten sovereigns (gold pieces), one to three acres of wet and dry land, to fewer number of sovereigns and cash. These promises can mostly be fulfilled on return.

Caste does not play a major role among the refugees as it does in Tamil Nadu. Confined spaces break down caste barriers in many ways. The Sri Lankan refugee woman, the conservator of the cultural identity of the family, is confronted with hard choices in refuge. This is more so in Tamil Nadu, where the caste structures are rigidly stratified, and gender roles are defined by caste and not class. As long as the refugee stays in India and does not want to be a figure of ridicule by the local Tamils, she has to follow similar sociocultural practices. This creates further stress in a life already traumatized by war, violence and uprooting. The very young are trying to break away from these pressures, to forge ahead, and make attempts at social mobilization through education. Education has become the most important factor in their lives in exile. Access to it provides them a space to challenge both gendered and social roles. Since 1991, after the assassination of Rajiv Gandhi by a Sri Lankan Tamil woman, this facility was withdrawn from camps. This constituted not only a contravention of the Right of the Child but also acted as an obstacle in women's attempt at social mobility.

The refugee women in the camps and outside the camps presented a profile of a community based on family values. Values were rooted in religious and social structures. The women existed within this milieu and in exile could get protection much more easily when they enveloped themselves

within the confines of a traditional value system. Thus, when immediate family members were left behind, the women could depend on community members. In spite of the extension of this system in exile, there has been a disruption of both women's social roles and social organizations. Despite being part of a similar ethnic milieu, they are stateless, escapees from their own homes leaving behind family and material possessions. In exile both these losses become important determinants of their identities.

This transient life compels them to look at their future differently. Torn from their roots, they strive to keep themselves strong enough till they return and nurture their lives, the community and the state again. They see themselves as key figures in this future process, even though they recognize that they would not have the decision-making power equivalent to men. Seeing their men suffer both physically and psychologically, gives them the strength to fight and survive. Many of them try to hide their strength behind a veil of dependency so that they do not further impose psychological stress on their husbands by changing their socially defined roles. Protection of self respect and dignity of the family falls on the shoulders of the women in exile.

The Government of India does not develop its plans keeping this majority refugee population in mind. Whatever planning is there, is for provision of essentials, such as food, shelter, and education. Special needs of women are not given any attention. The Sri Lankan woman in India play an active role in exile. She runs her household, keeps the family together and carries out all cultural functions. All this is done despite the extra pressure she has to work under, which men do not. Nowhere did the refugee women mention that their problems were related to their secondary status in society. This is an accepted fact. They did not expect the policy makers to pay attention to their needs though they bear the major burden of work in the camps.

## Return and Rehabilitation in Sri Lanka

In 1992, the repatriation of the Sri Lankan refugees from India was initiated. In a reverse trend of refugee flows, men prefer to be repatriated before their wives and children. Thus, the large numbers of women repatriates who went later gave their reason as family unification. Women were not sent as they face physical insecurity especially sexual harassment and rape, and children being taken into custody and killed. Many refugee women in India who refused to return, referring to the conflict situation, based their knowledge on the situation in Sri Lanka, through letters received from family members and friends.

In the government-run prison-like barbed wire camps, women are increasingly found at the receiving end of violence in the camps, and have also been sexually abused in large numbers (*Manushi* 1995, 3). The refugee women in India feel that the kind of attention that should be paid to their needs is an issue that needs to be addressed. This becomes difficult in a situation where disclosure of sexual abuse by the victim becomes crucial. Where the predominant dynamic underlying any disclosure is stigmatization, more so in the social context, and where ignominy can be treated as licentiousness, strong deterrents to disclosure are in effect. Reported emotions are of fear, guilt, shame and anger, sometimes leading to suicide. As female virginity is equated to purity and virtue, the resultant trauma is augmented and any further inquiry can only aggravate the impact. The task becomes all the more difficult as patriarchal social arrangements ensure the continuation of power relations. In their perception, those in authority also tend to be insensitive to the question female dignity and security. The first step would be to sensitize the decision makers.

Refugee women in India showed a concern for the large number of widows in Sri Lanka, and the problems faced by them. Before the conflict began, if a woman lost her husband, she

would receive a pension if her husband had been a civil servant, or would be looked after by a grandson, both of which are not possible now. Though the Sri Lankan government has a program that pays compensation, especially to women,—to widows or those who have lost grown sons, but “the cumbersome application process keeps many women from applying for or receiving the grants” (SEDEC 1993, 8; Nissan 1996, 27).

Writing on the displaced and refugee Sri Lankan women, the editors of a gender periodical, *Manushi* comment that as refugees these women are the victims or potential victims of human rights abuses and acts of aggression. They suffer not only from loss of protection from the government and social networks, but also from loss of normal access to food, shelter and livelihood (*Manushi* 1995, 3). The women also told stories of the hardships faced in camps: of having to walk several miles for water, to bathe and wash their clothes, and the lack of privacy (SEDEC 1993, 22; Nissan 1996, 27). A human rights worker who described conditions as “abominable” also noted women’s attempts to make it more “tolerable.” According to her, each little enclosure testified to the efforts of the people, in particular the women, to maintain some semblance of “normalcy” in the midst of this environment of despair and deprivation (Ruiz 1994, 12). At this stage of resettlement women are concerned with daily needs, and as women carry the burden of work within the camps, they felt that attention needs to be paid to their requirements.

### Conclusion

The questions that confront the community today are how can women’s interests be incorporated in policy and how do women secure these, when natural support networks are destroyed as in Sri Lanka. The situation is aggravated by the stereo-typification of roles and expected behaviour patterns, and there is very little change despite women’s contributions and personal losses. Where gender even as

an organizational element of humanitarian assistance has been ignored and male-biased policies exist putting women into disadvantageous positions, Sri Lankan women refugees and returnees searching for freedom and protection feel they get neither. The existing mechanisms for their protection are not geared to their needs. It is not sufficient that countries sign international conventions and national laws. States have to go beyond this if women refugees are to be protected. ■

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## So That Russia be "Saved" Anti-Jewish Violence in Russia: Its Roots and Consequences

By Tanya Basok and  
Alexander Benifand

Toronto: York Lanes Press, 1993  
ISBN 1-55014-010-8; 8.5x11 61p; CDN \$9.95

The growing popularity of ultra-nationalism and neo-Nazism in Europe and to some extent in North America is truly alarming, and this publication offers a perceptive analysis of the political trends in Russia and their implications for Russian Jews. It provides an historical analysis of anti-Jewish violence in Russia and poses an important question: can those conditions which resulted in anti-Jewish pogroms at the turn of the century re-emerge today?

Dr. Basok and Dr. Benifand argue in this occasional paper that there is a number of clear indications of the popularity of the anti-Semitic and ultra-nationalist ideas not only among the masses and nationalist organizations but in the government as well.

Many of those who have been impoverished as a result of the "shock therapy" or who have grown extremely disillusioned with Yeltsin's reform policies, have become attracted to the solutions such as: getting rid of ethnic minorities, especially Jews, territorial expansion of the Russian federation to include the former Soviet republics, the extension of the Russian sphere of influence in Europe and Central Asia, protection of Russian lands (e.g., the Kurile Islands) and the curbing of ethnic nationalism within the Russian federation. Basok and Benifand's insightful analysis is an excellent attempt to understand the rise of ultra-nationalism in Russia.

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# Refugee Women Resettling in the United States at Mid-Life after Ethnic Cleansing

Stevan M. Weine and Dolores Vojvoda

## Abstract

This is a case study of two women resettling in the United States after surviving ethnic cleansing in Bosnia and a discussion of refugee women at mid-life. We learned about their lives through their participation in testimony and biographical interviewing. Daniel Levinson's study of women's lives provides a frame for thinking about the refugee woman's life after ethnic cleansing. The mid-life refugee woman's experience in the private and public spheres is changed by their traumas, but also by the transition from early to middle adulthood. Her recovery will be further shaped by the contours of her continued adult development as will the lives of her children.

## Précis

Ceci est une étude de cas portant sur deux femmes s'installant pour vivre aux États-Unis après avoir survécu à l'expérience de la purification ethnique en Bosnie. Il s'agit aussi d'une discussion de la question de la femme quadragénaire réfugiée. Nous avons eu accès aux détails de la vie de ces deux femmes grâce à leur participation à des témoignages et à des entrevues à visée biographique. L'étude de Daniel Levinson sur la vie de la femme produit le cadre de départ permettant de poser le problème de la vie de la femme réfugiée après le drame de la purification ethnique. L'expérience de la femme quadragénaire dans les sphères publiques et privées est transformée par le traumatisme qu'elle a

vécu, mais tout autant par la transition qui la voit passer de jeune adulte à adulte mûre. Son rétablissement sera désormais façonné par le profil de son développement continu dans la vie adulte. Il en est autant de la vie de ses enfants.

## Trauma and Refugee Women's Lives

The knowledge gained from mental health work with refugee women in a variety of sociohistorical contexts has appropriately drawn attention to the suffering of refugee women and served as the fundament for the current work with refugee women from Bosnia-Herzegovina. Yet the demands of this new work have made the gaps in that knowledge ever more clear. The mental health literature on refugee women has only begun to draw attention to the interactions between the psychiatric sequelae of traumatization (i.e., Post Traumatic Stress Disorder) and the familial, social, and cultural contexts of women's lives. In addition, the conditions of Bosnian refugee women has presented yet new challenges.

The most widely publicized issue in this respect has concerned the mass rape of Bosnian women, about which there have been many reports in the mass media. Rape survivors' testimonies and secondhand reports tend to focus on what has been shattered, lost or destroyed in their lives as a result of the rapes. The tendency to focus exclusively on what is broken in survivors also appears in the psychiatric literature, with its preoccupation with Post Traumatic Stress Disorder. Our ongoing experience working with many Bosnian women refugees resettling in the United States suggests that these foci, sexual traumas and severe psychiatric symptoms, however legitimate, do not provide an accurate representa-

tion of the majority of Bosnian refugee women's lives.

We wanted to find another language for talking about these women's experiences that did not focus exclusively on refugee traumas, nor overly objectify their experiences by using medical terminology, but also did not ignore the harsh transformations in their lives. We wanted to learn in more concrete details about the changes in their lives, but we also wanted to be able to reflect on the processes of struggle, recovery and growth that we observed.

Daniel Levinson's *The Seasons of a Woman's Life* studies the lives of 45 women from the vantage point of adult life structure developmental theory. Although his study did not include Bosnian refugees nor traumatized women, his concepts provide a way of guiding an inquiry into the refugee women's lives. Levinson's central idea is that of life structure, which encompasses "the person's relationship with various others in the external world" (ibid., 23), including the dimensions of:

- (1) what the Person and the Other do with each other;
- (2) the subjective meanings involved;
- (3) what the Person gives and receives—materially, emotionally, socially;
- (4) the social context of the relationship;
- (5) the place of the relationship in the person's life structure and how it connects to other relationships;
- (6) its evolution over time within the life structure. (ibid., 23)

A woman's life cycle is seen as a sequence of specific eras, each with its own developmental opportunities and challenges. Levinson described the mid-life transition, from ages 40 to 45, as the important life structure changing period that comes at the end of youth, and involves renegotiating the places of work and family in the life.

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Another major theme in women's lives that Levinson discussed pertains to gender splitting, the "splitting asunder" (ibid., 38) in women's lives in four ways: "1) the domains of the domestic sphere versus the public sphere; 2) the female homemaker and the male provisioner; 3) women's work and men's work; 4) feminine and masculine in the individual psyche" (ibid., 38-39).

Writing from another vantage point about refugee women, the psychologist Inger Agger (1992, 2) asked if their exile could be "an existential situation for women who wish to abandon their silent and invisible lives in an androcentric culture." We were interested in approaching this question by looking at the impact of refugee trauma on women's lives guided by Levinson's approach. This paper looks at two women and discusses the patterns of women's experiences in the public and private spheres in refugees lives at mid-life transition.

### **Testimony, Intensive Biographical Interviewing, and Refugee Women's Lives**

In testimony, the survivor tells the story of what happened when traumas shattered their life, and the psychiatrist or psychotherapist is the witness who records it. Together they make a document of the survivor's trauma story, and then look for appropriate ways to make the survivor's story knowable to others. In testimony, survivors do not speak only of their trauma story, but also of their participation in the way of life that was, and of what kind of future they foresee, for themselves and the collectives to which they belong.

In *The Blue Room*, Inger Agger used the testimony approach to explore the life experiences of refugee women. Agger's exploration focused on sexual traumas and other gender specific abuses. Testimony was about "one sex's painful struggle to extend its space—to move the boundaries of the permissible and fight the power of shame" (ibid., 1). Agger describes the narrative which she wrote as a:

... narrative about boundaries ...  
About bodily, psychological, cul-

tural, social and political boundaries ... about barriers that are overcome—about crossing borders and having your boundaries violated—and about being in the ambiguous borderland where you have to be careful of your own, other people's and the system's boundaries. (ibid., 1)

Our work with Bosnian refugee women, the majority of whom did not suffer sexual traumas, compelled us to look at the issues of "boundaries" in women's lives, though from a different perspective. In testimony, women would tell us about their life struggles to reconcile differing positions with respect to family and work, and to make choices about their role and identity. Testimony of this nature overlapped with Levinson's descriptions of Intensive Biographical Interviewing which was the method used in his research on women's lives.

Like testimony, Intensive Biographical Interviewing involves the joint effort to tell and document a story. However, Intensive Biographical Interviewing focuses not on a traumatic experience, but on the persons' life story. It aims to give a rich and full account of the life, but also to reflect conceptually about the life's "underlying complexity, order and chaos" (ibid., 9). Whereas testimony is organized around trauma and healing, Intensive Biographical Interviewing is organized by the life structure and its development. Testimony speaks of boundaries, their shattering, and redefinition; whereas Intensive Biographical Interviewing speaks about building and changing life structure, and its satisfactoriness, both externally "how well it works" (ibid., 28) and internally "suitability for the self" (ibid., 29).

Our dialogues with refugee women from Bosnia combined testimony and Intensive Biographical Interviewing because both seemed necessary. Testimony was a way of addressing the traumas of the survivor, and Intensive Biographical Interviewing was a way of addressing the adult developmental struggles of the refugee women. The following section presents condensed

accounts and samplings of the voices of two Bosnian refugee women at mid-life.

### **Two Bosnian Refugee Women at Mid-Life**

#### **Mrs. Hasan**

Mrs. Hasan is a tall, strong woman with a pleasant face, in her early forties. Her hands and face show traces of years of hard work. She grew up in a small village in Bosnia, where her parents were farmers. She worked before and after school on their land as long as she can remember. At age 16, she met her husband, several years her senior, dropped out of school, got married, and moved with him to a neighbouring village. After a few years, they bought their own piece of land, and had two children, a boy and a girl, who are now adolescents. Her husband worked as a carpenter, and Mrs. Hasan was in charge of the house, farm and small grocery shop that they bought several years before the war. Even though she was contributing to the household just as much as her husband was Mrs. Hasan's husband was the "boss" in the family. Although they always talked before making major decisions, his word was the final one.

The breakup of the former Yugoslavia and the ensuing violence in the spring of 1992 had found the family unprepared.

One day my husband got on a bus to Croatia, and several miles away from our village was taken off the bus by the Serbs and taken to the concentration camp ... My children and I were lined up to die in front of a firing squad, and a Serbian neighbour saved us at the last moment. We had to march for miles, almost got separated several times. The children were forced to walk past and to sleep in the fields next to the dead bodies of our neighbours. I did not know for months if my husband was alive.

The family was reunited in Zagreb, Croatia. There, Mrs. Hasan cut off her long hair that she had groomed for many years. "I finally realized then

that the old way of life, the only way we knew, was over."

We met the family just a few weeks after they arrived in the United States from Croatia. In that first meeting Mrs. Hasan was silent; Mr. Hasan was the spokesman for the family. He told us they were doing fine. He just wanted to put his family back on their feet. Later on, when her husband was not in the room, Mrs. Hasan said that not everything was "fine." "I have been waking up every night with a nightmare and I have been crying daily since we left home. People are telling me—you are lucky to be in America, but I want to be home, where I belong."

Mrs. Hasan was the one her family allowed to be in distress. She was allowed to cry and leave the room when TV news showed the war in Bosnia. She recognized that this was because she, as a woman, could be "weak" in her family's eyes. A few months after their arrival, she reported:

My husband got a job and the children started going to school. I have been staying at home, alone. I am feeling isolated, and do not like this way of life. I was used to working hard. Now I have too much time on my hands. And too many bad memories.

Mr. Hasan was often away from the home, working several jobs. At home he kept silent about what had happened while he was in a concentration camp, and she never told him about the horrors she went through with their children. "At home, we never talk about what had happened in Bosnia." But news from Bosnia kept reaching them:

I received a letter from my brother with bad news about our family's daily perils in Bosnia. I was so upset that I could not stop crying. I also got a headache so strong that the sponsors had to take me to the Emergency Room to get an analgesic. I tried to tell my husband how badly I was feeling but he just told me that our new life was here, in the U.S., not back in Bosnia.

Mr. Hasan took on two jobs and was at home even less than before. Mrs.

Hasan started English classes, and their sponsors tried to find her a job. She interviewed for a job as a saleswoman, but the manager was looking for somebody with more a fashionable hairstyle. Mrs. Hasan did not feel ready to change her ways, so she did not get the job.

Mrs. Hasan noticed that her daughter was having trouble sleeping and was upset when talking about Bosnia. Her worries were confirmed when the school psychologist suggested counselling for her. Mr. Hasan objected; in his opinion, the girl just needed to "toughen up." Quietly and persistently, Mrs. Hasan managed to arrange for her child's treatment. After several months of psychotherapy, she was doing much better.

Mrs. Hasan found a job cleaning houses. The work was hard, but she did not mind. Being able to contribute to her family's budget helped her to feel better about herself. "Besides, it is easier when I am not all alone and when I have less time to think about the changes that happened in our family."

As her children's English improved they made many friends, became better integrated in their school, and started to enjoy their life in America. They thought less and less about Bosnia, and more about the new and exciting opportunities for them in their new country. In our conversations, they spoke only in English, and we had to pause to translate to their mother, who appeared saddened. She told us: "I can not understand how our sons could forget their homeland so fast." Her husband was rarely at home, and they seldom had a chance to talk. Mrs. Hasan was trying to find a place for herself in this country and in her family. They did not seem to need her as much. She spoke of these feelings in our meetings, but otherwise, it was hard to find someone to talk with about her life.

By one year after her arrival in the US, her life seemed to change for the better. She had made the effort to make new friends in the mosque. Her English was sufficiently improved so that

she could even become friendly with some of her American neighbours. She was able to do more basic things for her children without depending on her sponsors to navigate for her. She was feeling more independent and was taking charge of her new life. Her children's speedy and successful adjustment had buoyed her up.

The news from Bosnia was still grim, but she felt more a part of her family's life in America. "I am somewhat concerned about my parents in Bosnia. I have heard that they had been taken from their house, and were most likely killed." While talking about this her voice was calm and the disappearance of her anguish from a year before was remarkable. She had not forgotten about Bosnia, but her priorities were now more clearly set with her family here.

When we visited them three years into their new life, for the first time, Mr. Hasan greeted us at the door of the house that they now owned! Mrs. Hasan showed us around the house they had completely refurbished and told us how well the family was now doing. Their son got a scholarship to college, and the daughter was doing well at school. Mrs. Hasan looked years younger. She had lost weight and got a stylish haircut. She smiled and joined the conversation. She had a well-paying job, and was busy working on her new house together with her husband. She was active in the Bosnian community and in political advocacy for Bosnia, going to meetings with her children. Mr. Hasan was more comfortable spending time at home now that he felt that he was able to provide for his family with a house and comfortable living. Not only was this not the frightened and shattered women we had met three years ago, but in many ways, her life was also so different from what it was before the war.

### *Mrs. Muhic*

Mrs. Muhic is in her early forties. She is an attractive, short-statured woman. She grew up in the city, was a good student, and took music lessons. She went to the university, and was em-

ployed in an accounting firm. When she was in her mid-twenties she met her husband and they got married. They lived in a mid-sized city in Bosnia. Even though they both came from traditional Muslim families, they were secular Muslims. Like so many Bosnians born after World War II, they felt themselves to be "Yugoslavs," meaning they did not identify themselves by their ethnic or religious identity. They have two teenage children, a girl and a boy.

Mrs. Muhic was successful at her job and was promoted several times. She was a hard and dedicated worker, and would have held one of the higher-ranked positions in the company in a few years. Her husband had an important position in his field. While maintaining a successful career, Mrs. Muhic said that she would never have sacrificed any part of her family life for her job. Her home, children and husband came first. They had a roomy apartment in the centre of the town and Mrs. Muhic had spent many afternoons decorating it. The Muhic family was considered to be well off in their community. Friends were a big part of Mrs. Muhic's life. Very frequently, at least once a week, they would have parties at their house. "We all lived together."

Before the war, Mrs. Muhic was an energetic, somewhat shy woman, content with her life, her stable marriage and her rewarding and not too demanding job. She felt secure and comfortable as a part of a couple, and would make most of her decisions in consultation with her husband. She derived her pleasure from being with her children, having friends over to her apartment and from knitting.

About a year before the actual Serbian attack, Mrs. Muhic noticed increased national awareness among her Serbian friends who started saying that they had been treated unjustly. Soon after, more obvious things started happening: non-Serbs were fired from jobs; she was not promoted, and her Serbian friends made more open militant statements. Their town was seized and taken over by the Serbian army. When Mr. Muhic refused to

"volunteer" into the Serbian army, he was fired. Mrs. Muhic continued to work. "My co-workers called me by a made-up Serbian name, because if the authorities found I was Muslim, I would be fired." Several months later, she was fired.

I was worried daily for my life, the lives of my children, and especially my husband's life. He was taken for an "interrogation" for three days, and I thought he was dead. Soldiers would come to our house and take whatever pleased them, and then would ask our children where their father was keeping guns.

Several friends and distant relatives were reported dead or just "gone." They hardly slept during the night, expecting the pounding on the door by the Serbian soldiers. "The hardest thing for me was not being able to rely on my Serbian friends any more ... My best friend became a high ranking administrator in the Serbian government, and she defended killings as necessary." To leave legally was impossible for Muslims and Croats, but a couple of Serbian friends helped the Muhics to get adequate paper work for the price of their life savings. One of the things they handed over was the apartment they owned. With only a few bags, they left the town and went to Croatia, and then the U.S.

In Bosnia, Mrs. Muhic had been established in her profession and her community, with a clear vision of her future until the war. "I felt as if my life had stopped upon our arrival to this country." When we first saw her she looked very frightened, was not able to have extended eye contact, and could not sit comfortably in a chair. She could not get rid of constant intrusive memories, and the sense of being unsafe. She did not believe the future would bring anything positive for her.

Mrs. Muhic's husband started working, took care of the family's finances and negotiated their living arrangements. His knowledge of English was very good, and he did all of the communication with sponsors and officials. Mrs. Muhic would usually just sit and smile and not understand much

of what was said. She felt powerless and useless but her efforts at learning English were very painful and slow. She was not able to communicate in English when she felt scared or uncomfortable with the person she was talking to.

Her husband had been fortunate enough to get a job in his field. She had to settle for a factory job. The work was hard, as she was not used to working with her hands. "There were many monotonous hours at work that gave me time to think about the changes that so suddenly affected my family, and how little I was in control of my life. People from work did not associate much with me, mostly because of my poor English, and I felt isolated, missing friendly chats from my Bosnian days."

Her daily routine consisted of going to work and taking care of their two children, doing house chores and occasionally visiting her cousin's family. She became acquainted with some women through the Bosnian refugee organization, but was hesitant to start any real friendships, since meeting new people usually meant talking about the hard times in Bosnia. She was also afraid of experiencing more disappointments or betrayals from new friends. At first she kept in touch with friends back in Bosnia. "I used to make regular phone calls, but the news was always grim, so gradually I cut down on the number of phone calls." She felt most comfortable when with her family.

Her husband was, however, advancing in his career and had made a larger number of acquaintances and friends. His life was much closer to what they had in Bosnia than hers. She had given up on her career ambitions and was not even considering looking for a job that would fit her qualifications better. She was most content when at home, decorating their modest apartment, so she would again have a security of having a home. She joked that she preferred to be a housewife now.

She spent a lot of time with her children especially her son who was refus-

ing to speak Bosnian. He understood what she was saying in Bosnian, but was always answering in English. She saw this as his way of putting some space between his current life and the traumatic experiences in Bosnia. Still, Mrs. Muhic couldn't help but wonder if she was being the right kind of mother for her child. Overall, the children were doing well at school and had made American friends.

Her husband remained in charge of almost all the chores outside the house, and was making decisions about finances. She found herself trying to deal with her worries about Bosnia and at the same time wanted to find out more about herself—this person that had changed so much in three years. She brought some of these issues to our meetings. "A few years ago, I was able to plan my future. Not being able to plan far ahead made me insecure and afraid. I am trying to take charge of my life again."

She tries not to "bother" her husband with her worries. "He has enough responsibilities on his shoulders already." They are still very close. She describes him as her best friend, and also as somebody that she depends on greatly now. When she sees others in the Bosnian community, she often finds herself in the position of offering support and care to those less well off. She visits her cousin every few days. Mrs. Muhic tries to comfort her cousin the way Mr. Muhic is trying to encourage her. Mrs. Muhic can't talk about her own struggles with her cousin who lost several relatives in the war and suffers greatly.

Three years after their arrival in the United States, Mrs. Muhic's English has improved somewhat, but not enough for easy communication. She knows for sure that she wants to stay in the United States. "I do not want to go back to Bosnia and have my children live through my disappointments." She still has the same job, and she is not looking for a different one. In a few years, she hopes, she might be able to quit working altogether and stay at home. Its not what she expected for her

life, but given all that they have been through, it seems pretty good to her.

## Discussion

### *The Refugee Women in the Private Sphere*

For the Bosnian refugee after ethnic cleansing, family is often the only remaining microsocial system in a chaotic and threatening social environment. For these refugee women at mid-life transition, family is the main pillar of their lives. Family has always been a central component of their lives, but as a refugee, there is a new sense of their participation in the family. The family's burden is also made more complicated, however, because the families who have survived genocide are comprised entirely of family members who were each severely traumatized, bringing many changes into the family and all its members.

A major theme Levinson identified in the mid-life transition of some women is that her caregiving to others lessens, and in place she wants to "make her own choices and pursue her own interests." These refugee women, on the other hand, are more occupied than ever, establishing and maintaining the home base for their families. Materially, it cannot be compared to the old home, but they strongly desire for it to provide some of the necessary supportive functions for their families.

They may be more of a caretaker to their husbands than ever before, especially when he has no job, speaks no English, and suffers from war traumas. Mid-life is often a time for changing a marriage that can seem no longer alive or rewarding. The marriages that survived ethnic cleansing have extraordinary additional strains. Wives may feel estranged from their husbands as a consequence of physical separations during the persecution, or the otherness of their respective trauma experiences. In some instances, wives may also be victimized by their husbands aggressiveness and domination.

The top priority for these refugee women was to take care of their children. Ironically, these women had oth-

erwise been approaching the time when motherhood would no longer be the most central component of their lives. With their children growing further into adolescence and seeking more autonomy, as mothers they would be less needed to care for them.

The refugee experience both intensifies and marginalizes their role as mothers. There are new fears, challenges and stresses for the children which intensifies their need for mothering. Yet, as time goes on and the children adjust more rapidly to the new life than their parents, children need less mothering. The parents may need a stronger connections. When children are traumatized, being with them also means confronting one's own traumatic experiences, with the potential for empathic knowing, but also for confusion and distancing. Confounding this is the mother's felt obligation to care for the yet more needy: her parents, newer refugees, the wounded and ill. She feels pulled between the life force embodied in her growing children, and the marks of loss and death that are carried in other refugees lives and in her own memories. Her existence is defined by a struggle between the dehumanizing genocide experience and the potentially humanizing experience of the life process. At no point does the refugee woman's involvement with the one make them totally immune to the other. In their lives, we can find traces of constant, unending struggle in many different forms.

### *The Refugee Women in the Public Sphere*

Levinson (1996) notes that work and career is most often the way that a woman finds an entrée into the public sphere. By and large, the only jobs available to these refugee women were unskilled or semi-skilled jobs. Both became labourers. Work often moves to occupy a larger position in the woman's life at mid-life. These refugee women are working more, but mostly out of financial necessity, not out of a sense of wanting, "to give more of themselves to the work, to receive

more from it, and to participate in new ways within the work world" (ibid., 192). They both started at the bottom. For the homemaker, it turned out to be somewhat liberating. For the professional woman it was more stifling. When the home base and the children are more settled, the place of work can be addressed.

Like other survivors of political violence, refugee women face the challenge of understanding private suffering in a public context. The turn inwards towards the family, may work against the refugee woman formulating suffering in a public context. The experience of surviving nationalism and genocide, can compel the refugee mother to raise the boundary around the family private life, keeping the social issues out. The suffering that she experiences may be more readily formulated in personal terms, as psychological or somatic distress (making the idea of psychiatric or medical treatment somewhat more palatable for women than men). She may desire to shield her children from social issues related to Bosnia and the war.

We have also noticed that for some refugee women at mid-life, their children's curiosity and commitment regarding Bosnia, may offer another pathway into the public realm. She may support and encourage the children towards political and community activism, and even join with them in those activities. Through following and facilitating her growing children's forays into the world, she can further develop her families' connectedness with the world outside, and find a new sense of place in the public realm.

The refugee woman's life cannot be what it once was, and there will never be a resolution to many of the problems she faces. But where there is good enough daily means, a struggle to learn, and a dream of a better way, it becomes as recognizable, and perhaps even as acceptable, as any life on earth. ■

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## PATHS TO EQUITY Cultural, Linguistic, and Racial Diversity in Canadian Early Childhood Education

*by Judith K. Bernhard, Marie Louise Lefebvre, Gyda Chud  
and Rika Lange*

Toronto: York Lanes Press

ISBN 1-55014-277-1; 112 pages, size 8.5x11; \$18.95

*Paths to Equity* is based on an extensive nationwide study of 77 childcare centres in Montreal, Toronto, and Vancouver on the cultural, linguistic, and racial diversity in Canadian Early Childhood Education (ECE). The report presents the results this study on how the ECE system is responding to the increasing diversity of contemporary Canadian society.

A fully one third of teachers interviewed in this study responded, at the time of graduation from ECE programs, did not feel that they were well prepared to work effectively with children and parents from diverse backgrounds. In this groundbreaking study, the authors have addressed teachers' views on diversity in the education programs; parents' difficulties in collaborating within the current education system; teachers' difficulties in understanding many "ethnic" parents; desire of many parents for better communication with staff, preferably in their own languages, and for more information about their individual children, and chances for effective input; and the evidence of some continuing problems with racism, irrespective of the good intentions of centre staff.

*Paths to Equity* will be of interest to ECE faculty, policymakers, centre supervisors and staff and others interested in the inclusion of diversity content in professional education programs.

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# Refugee Self-Management and the Question of Governance

Jennifer Hyndman

## Abstract

The author considers the organization of refugee camps as "communities" or "institutions" and takes the position that refugee camps are too institutional in character to establish or maintain traditional community-based supports. The implications that such definitions hold for camp governance and for the situation of refugee women, in particular, are discussed and the problematics for refugee self-governance are focused on the complex organizational boundaries drawn between UNHCR, NGOs and the camp refugees. A gendered framework is pivotal to the analyses.

## Précis

L'auteure examine l'organisation des camps de réfugié(e)s en "communautés" ou "institutions", et soutient que les camps de réfugié(e)s sont trop typiquement "institutionnels" pour permettre le développement de structures réellement communautaires. Elle présente l'impact que de telles définitions peuvent avoir sur la gestion des camps, et particulièrement sur les réfugiées. Cet impact est discuté dans le cadre des

*problématiques de l'autonomie des réfugié(e)s en ce qui a trait aux frontières internationales établies entre le Haut Commissariat aux réfugié(e)s des Nations Unies, les organismes non-gouvernementaux et les camps de réfugié(e)s. La sexualisation est au coeur de cette analyse*

Refugee studies often focus on a specific place of asylum or on a particular refugee population rather than on the central sites of economic and political power, namely the well-endowed international agencies that organize refugees and camp operations. In conjunction with a variety of specialized non-governmental organizations (NGOs), the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) is the main international agency responsible for coordinating, monitoring, and providing protection and assistance to refugees. Accordingly, the case can be made for "studying up" (Abu-Lughod 1991; Pred and Watts 1992): that is, examining critically the culture, practices, and policies of powerful humanitarian organizations rather than the people they serve.

Based on research in Geneva and Kenya carried out in 1994-95, this article first reviews UNHCR policies that aim to incorporate gender and cultural difference. Such policies provide the parameters within which non-governmental organizations, working with and for UNHCR in refugee camps, can operate. In the second section, I introduce the example of a particular NGO initiative in Kenyan camps implemented under the aegis of UNHCR and provide constructive criticism relating to its practical and political implications. Two related questions are discussed: "is a refugee camp a community or an institution?"; and "what are the gender implications for refugees?"

These questions are generated from the approach of studying up and from

the subsequent analysis of management practices of refugee relief agencies. It addresses issues of gender, feminist policy, and cultural politics in refugee work. UNHCR, for example, has based many of its recent policies, guidelines, and program requirements pertaining to women on selected community development principles (Overholt et al. 1985). Some of these principles are relevant and important to equitable planning and participation in refugee situations. Others employ the rhetoric of community because it is popular, acceptable, and politically strategic in humanitarian donor circles. I argue here that community is part of a strategic discourse which consolidates the institutional power of refugee relief organizations and that "tendencies toward forming a singular network derive from the emergent need to institutionalize social returns" (Mann 1986, 14).

This paper contends that a refugee camp differs from a community in several important ways. *Prima facie* refugees, involuntary migrants who are recognized by UNHCR but do not meet the Convention definition, lack legal and often physical protection. These "second-rate" refugees, whose status is determined on a group rather than an individual basis, are usually dependent on humanitarian agencies for their basic needs, having little access to resources, jobs, or other livelihoods. *Prima facie* refugees often face stigma and discrimination in the host country, this being especially true of Somalis in Kenya where historically they have been discriminated against and harassed by Kenyan authorities.

In Kenyan refugee camps, any reformulation of power and status is relational and involves at least three groups: the local Kenyan population, the refugees, and the humanitarian international. This last group refers to the cadre of international professionals working in relief organizations

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who form a cosmopolitan, liberal elite (African Rights 1994, 9). The vast majority—over ninety percent—of refugees in the Dadaab camps located near the Kenya-Somalia border are Somalis (see map). Just as cultures are hierarchically situated when they interact with one another, members of these three groups have different political statuses and differential power to influence refugee camp operations. I have argued elsewhere (Hyndman 1996) that camps are sites of neo-colonial power relations where refugees are counted, their movements monitored and mapped, their daily routines disciplined and routinized by the institutional machinery of refugee relief agencies. Proposals for change in such environments are rarely gender-neutral; culturally specific gender divisions of labour and Western-based community development principles locate women in a contradictory range of subject positions.

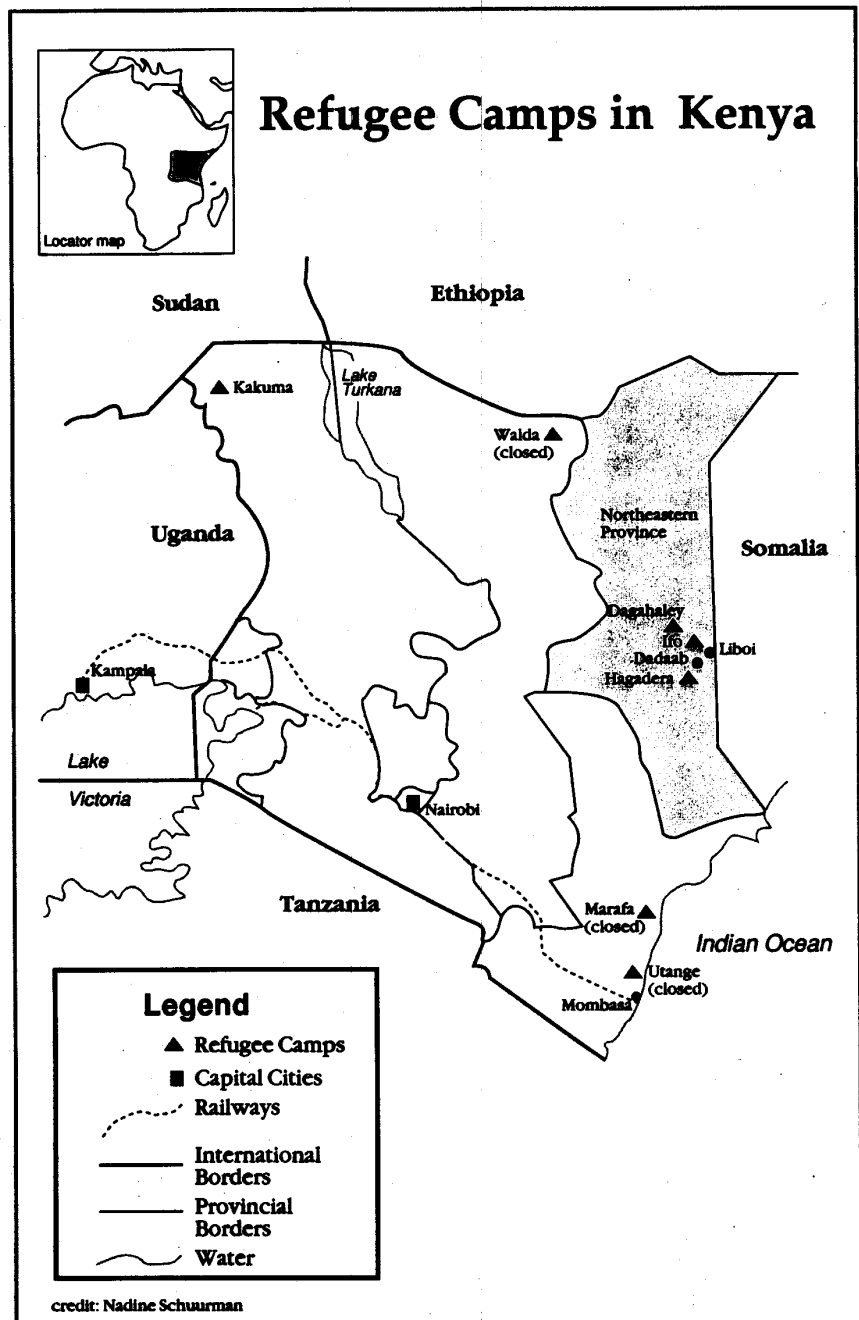
### Gendered Cultures at UNHCR

Since the late 1980s, a number of different analyses of gender have been developed as part of UNHCR's policy on refugee women. Most address the specific problems and discrimination refugee women face and thus follow the paradigm of liberal feminism. Emphasis is on equality, integration, and mainstreaming as being the most salient features. The underlying principles of the policy include "the integration of the resources and needs of refugee women into all aspects of programming, rather than creating special women's projects" (UNHCR 1990, 4). Furthermore, "becoming a refugee affects men and women differently and that effective programming must recognize these differences" in a culturally appropriate manner (ibid., 5). Such gender analysis often remains intact as policy, but as I will illustrate, implementations and conflicting professional approaches introduce difficulties.

The "People-Oriented Planning Process" (Anderson, Brazeau, and Overholt 1992), or POP as it is called, is a euphemistic title referring to a gen-

der analysis integrated with community planning. Both POP and the "Guidelines on the Protection of Refugee Women" (UNHCR 1991) identify the physical spaces in which refugee women live as important for reasons of safety as well as to ensure equitable access to basic services and supplies. UNHCR recognizes that women refu-

gees are often more vulnerable in camp situations because family protection and traditional authority structures break down and economic support is less available (UNHCR 1993). Camp layout and location are acknowledged as important factors at a general level; historical context, geopolitical factors, and cultural differences are left for the



field workers to fill in once placed in the field. UNHCR guidelines are, then, generic policies, universally applicable, in theory to all refugee situations. This liberal sensibility, which acknowledges cultural diversity and incorporates local conditions to some extent, remains part of a Western-based system of knowledge. In practice, cultural politics, host government response to refugees, and emerging political events cannot be accounted for *a priori*.

UNHCR policy pertaining to refugee women generally subordinates cultural differences to gender differences. On paper, the organization's various initiatives are a reasonably impressive collation of feminist analyses and recommended action. They include liberal, radical, and socialist sensibilities which address issues of discrimination, violence, and systemic material inequality respectively (UNHCR May and October 1993). The lack of attention paid to cultural differences and to the hierarchical positioning of cultures (Gupta and Ferguson 1992) in the camps is a major lacuna in UNHCR programming. On one hand, the frequent use of the category "woman" by UNHCR as a primary organizing concept essentializes and reinforces the primacy of gender over ethnic, clan, and other relations of difference. On the other, this usage seems contrary to the basic liberal principle articulated in UNHCR policy, namely "mainstreaming and integration." While certain groups of women refugees are listed as vulnerable and requiring special assistance in the camps (UNHCR 1994), other planning documents insist that women be equal partners in decision-making processes and that they have equitable access to services and resources (UNHCR 1990, 1991; Anderson, Brazeau, and Overholt 1992). The contradictions and complexities of refugee programming at UNHCR with respect to gender and cultural differences thus begin to emerge.

In no way can UNHCR's approach to women refugees be viewed as coherent, unitary, or internally consist-

ent. Despite policies that consistently underscore, integrationist approaches and the mainstreaming of women, professional approaches differ dramatically within the organization. This was confirmed in interviews with the Senior Coordinator for Refugee Women at UNHCR in Geneva. The Coordinator underlined the complexities of introducing an "empowerment approach" in delivering programs for refugee women in an environment that had been dominated for decades by a traditional social welfare approach, focusing on vulnerabilities and with an emphasis on traditional culture rather than universal human rights. While the renaming of social services to community services signals a commitment to, and a move towards, community-based approaches at UNHCR, changes in attitude among staff members and implementing partners will take some time to evolve.

Some critics maintain that UNHCR's policies on women are weak; they avoid the use of gender *per se* and invoke changes that are "too basic." The Senior Coordinator for Refugee Women points out that:

Bilateral development agencies such as CIDA have many years of experience in developing and implementing women in development and gender policies and programmes. Humanitarian organisations such as UNHCR which have a need to focus immediately on life-saving activities, neither have the organizational culture nor historical experience in such activities, so that introducing this type of programming in 1990 was similar to the beginnings of gender programming in the early seventies in CIDA. (Interviews October 27, 1994, and Oct. 20, 1995 by email)

Given my stated research interest in policy and programs directed at women, as well as attitudes to feminism inside the organization, the Senior Coordinator made a number of related comments during our interviews. She noted that the stereotype of feminists as man-hating radicals is still pervasive among the general public, and that she as well as many other

women are reluctant to associate themselves with this term "for fear of undermining our credibility, particularly in the conservative and multicultural climate of a UN organization" (Email transcript interview October 20, 1995). Using feminism *per se* in a climate adulterated with mainly negative connotations of the concept would not be constructive, she argued.

The UN High Commissioner, Dr. Sadako Ogata, and UNHCR management generally see the development of policies and guidelines on gender issues as short-term activities. The implementation of such policies and guidelines, which require attitudinal and organizational change, is a much longer term activity, the complexity of which is not yet clearly understood throughout UNHCR. The Senior Coordinator points out that:

introducing gender concerns is not like introducing technical changes in the way we deliver water and sanitation programmes, for example. They require consensus building, awareness raising, and organisational commitment. This is a message which is starting to permeate UNHCR and indeed the UN generally as underlined in the recent Joint Inspection Unit Report on implementing gender issues in multilateral organisations. (Email transcript interview October 20, 1995).

The post of Senior Coordinator for Refugee Women was set up at the request of the Canadian Government and funded by CIDA for the first two years after which UNHCR began funding the position which remains only temporary. The International Working Group on Refugee Women (IWGRW), a coalition of NGOs, has been lobbying UNHCR to make the position permanent and to upgrade its importance within the organizational structure.

UNHCR's commitment to gender analysis and community planning processes is uncertain. As the Senior Coordinator notes:

... one of the key issues ... is implementation of policy. We have a policy, but we have no way of ensuring that people respond to that

policy. I have no way of holding people accountable for not implementing the policy ... That's a major barrier ... and one which is acknowledged (ibid.).

Implementation of policies promoting women at UNHCR headquarters in Geneva is clearly challenging. Translating these for the field and implementing change in refugee camps is just as difficult. The initiative outlined below blends issues of representation, cultural and gender differences, and organizational politics at one location where three refugee camps host over 100,000 refugees. It responds to the questions posed at the outset: "is a refugee camp a community or an institution, and what are the gender implications for refugees?"

#### **A New Initiative: Refugee Self-Management**

"Refugee (or community) self-management" is a bold if imperfect initiative which aims to forge accountability links between donors who fund refugee agencies, the agencies that assist refugees, and the refugees themselves. Its innovation lies partly in the fact that it was developed on the ground by an NGO for a particular refugee situation and was initiated in response to a questioning of agency authority to determine refugee needs. In northeast Kenya (see map), UNHCR, CARE, and refugee leaders in three camps have collaborated to introduce this community-based approach to political process and structure. The proposal, however, has been met with some resistance. Much debate as well as disagreement has been generated among UNHCR staff at the administering sub-office in Dadaab because of its proposed redistribution of power. A brief discussion of this initiative and a sketch of competing professional approaches at work in this small, field-based office provide a context in which to address the question at hand.

The idea of Refugee Self-Management was developed by a senior employee of CARE, the agency responsible for much of the face-to-face contact with refugees, and day-to-day

operations in the camps. CARE Canada, known as CARE International in Kenya, is the main implementing partner in the camps whose job it is to provide various services to refugees, including food distribution, outreach community support, education, and social services. CARE distributes food to refugees, assists all vulnerable groups including disabled and orphaned refugees, provides basic education programs for adults and children, and is responsible for social services and camp management generally. These services are subcontracted to CARE by UNHCR, UNHCR and its donors being the funders of CARE activities in these camps.

In the fall of 1994, the CARE staff member responsible circulated an overview of the project. It proposed that decision-making power concerning refugees and camp affairs be transferred to democratically elected groups of representatives from among the refugee community. The concept of a unitary, single community in this instance undermines the heterogeneity in the camps in which several nationalities and subclans of Somalis and their various interests are represented. As well, democratic elections—in contrast to cultural systems in which elders exert legitimate authority—are very much derived from liberal Western concepts of justice.

The proposal outlines a sharing of responsibilities through a parallel structure whereby refugee representatives decide how to spend available funds for social, economic, and infrastructural development in the camps while relief agencies, responsible to their donors and to the refugees provide these goods and services as decided upon by the refugees.

The new structure will make the refugee responsible to manage its [sic] own affairs. CARE will play the role of a necessary bridge between the donor and the refugee in controlling the resources and ensuring that they are used for their intended purposes ... The new approach would make the leadership of the community accountable to the community.

Activities and programmes would be identified, planned, and implemented through community participation exercises. (CARE 1994, 2)

Responses to CARE's proposal during the months of my research visit were mixed and measured. "We have a triangle of responsibility," argues the UNHCR Head of Sub-Office in Dadaab. "There is UNCHR which looks after the political decisions and operations; it is responsible for peace-keeping and controlling the political games in the camps. NGOs provide resources and services, and the Government of Kenya (GOK) simply provides security." In his mind, UNHCR is effectively the governing body of the three camps: "We have succeeded in breaking up the traditional structures of power (in the camps)."

Refugee self-management is viewed by some senior staff as dangerous because it poses the possibility of reviving traditional power among refugees and reinscribing elders' enclaves of autocratic authority.

Another UNHCR staff member who is responsible for collaborating on this initiative with CARE staff is predictably more supportive of the idea: "Refugees are part of a culture that has learned to be dependent and we taught them that." She hesitantly uses the analogy of wild animals tamed and then unable to survive in the wild later on. While admittedly simplistic, her main point is that refugee camps produce refugee behaviours. Her argument echoes that of other critics of dependency among refugees (Kibreab 1993), namely that there is nothing intrinsically dependent or impoverished about this culture at the "pre-refugee" stage.

Arguing against the idea of refugee self-management is one of her colleagues, a UNHCR staff member who has been a refugee himself on two occasions. He views refugees with suspicion and considers the camp "a war zone." In his view

[CARE's refugee self-management] idea may be possible in five to six years. Now deals are made to 'get' what they [refugees] want. People

are only a 'community' for one meeting, purely for exigency. [The CARE staff person responsible for the initiative] is in a grey zone where there is room for hijacking ...

Another UNHCR staff member had only one comment about the Refugee Self-Management proposal: "How are we going to pay for it?" Her job in Dadaab is administration and finance; she too is rule-conscious but with a view to two goals: efficiency and effectiveness. UNHCR responds to CARE's proposal are important because the former effectively employs the latter organization to execute various activities, and specifies refugee programming agreed upon in various "sub-agreements" UNHCR holds with NGOs assisting refugees.

The proposal aims to redistribute decision-making power—increasing refugee participation and decreasing the role of agencies in determining priorities and projects in the camps. Two of the four personnel highlighted above fear this shift in power, a move away from UNHCR and NGO control. To placate these fears, the CARE manager in charge of the project divided so-called political power from control over economic resources in the camps. That is to say, refugees would be responsible for creating and participating in democratic decision-making structures, but material resources and funds to enact or follow through on those decisions would be provided by NGOs that would also act as a check on the fairness of decisions made. Despite this measure, some senior UNHCR staff in the camps remained opposed to the idea; the "big boss" at UNHCR in Nairobi, however, endorsed the initiative and, as of early 1995, implementation in the camps was under way.

### Policy versus Practice

I raised three criticisms of the initiative during my stay in the camps. First, in Kenya, a refugee camp is not a community. While there may be several sets of communal interest or allied refugees cooperating—organized for example among refugees of common nationality, subclan affiliation, or proximate

physical location—a camp is an institution organized as a temporary solution to displacement. UNHCR has a mandate to provide material assistance and physical as well as legal protection in conjunction with the Government of Kenya (GOK). The GOK insists that refugees must reside in the camps; they are the subjects of a tacit and, I would add, unsatisfactory policy of containment. "Community" is not enforced; it does not unduly restrict the movement of its members, and it usually involves a material relationship to place through access to land, jobs, and resources whereby it can sustain itself. In Kenyan refugee camps, this is not the case. Cultural politics among the refugee, local, and humanitarian groups which share this space and among refugee factions, themselves, only complicate any power-sharing agreement or notion of a unified community. Iris Young (1990) warns that "the desire for unity or wholeness in discourse generates borders, dichotomies, and exclusions."

UNHCR policy and practices relating to "headcounts" in the camps, as one example, clearly contradict any sense of camp-as-community. UNHCR's 1994 Registration manual outlines how to manage "difficult populations" during camp censuses through the use of "enclosures" into which refugees are put in order to be counted. Both Somali and Sudanese refugees were considered "difficult" by UNHCR, and physical coercion as well as community meetings were used to conduct headcounts in 1994. Community leaders do not conduct censuses of their population by coercing, containing, and then counting their members; if anything, the subjects of Western censuses volunteer to be counted—perhaps an expression of the discipline and self-surveillance of which Michel Foucault writes. While a refugee camp is not a war zone, in my view, refugees do participate in the categories of entitlement offered to them by relief agencies in their self-interest. As Trinh T. Minh-ha succinctly says, "participate or perish" (Trinh 1990, 331). Since headcounts are the

basis for ration cards which entitle refugees to food and non-food items, it makes sense that they would maximize this entitlement by resisting counting procedures. Equally, NGOs depend on donor support and supplies which are to be judiciously distributed. Their objective of obtaining an accurate refugee camp is also common sense, though the means of achieving this could be negotiated in other ways. The strategies of both parties, however, allude to the politics of institutions, not communities.

My second criticism is that responsibility for meaningful decision-making cannot be separated from the resources necessary to carry out decisions taken. John Tomlinson (1991) notes that the experience of many African states during the 1960s was that they gained nominal national independence but inherited the colonial economic structures of former European administrations. If CARE and UNHCR are unwilling to relinquish any of the economic means that would enable refugee self-management to occur, they will defeat their proposed objectives and potentially (re)produce a neo-colonial power structure. As institutions, camps may also express their power in a neo-colonial, disciplinary fashion, but such problems should be addressed first by the agencies themselves, and not deferred on the pretense of giving power away.

Finally, broad participation in camp decision-making and projects—particularly by and for women—cannot be limited to the democratic structure of elected committees. During my research in the three camps, I found that much discussion revolved around "who will represent whom?" and "what will the relationship between committees be?" The majority of refugees, especially women, do not generally attend these consultations. Refugee men are more likely to have the time, given the division of labour in the household and the labour-intensive female tasks required for its maintenance, as well as the language skills (i.e., English) necessary to converse with NGOs and participate in the po-

litical process. The gendered nature of opportunity and participation are obscured in this nominally democratic process.

My research involved a series of interviews with refugee women working in their homes. Evidence was collected of their participation in informal collaborative and individual initiatives. These included collective rotating credit schemes, small solo shops set up in the camp markets, individual collection and sale of firewood, and assistance to neighbours or family who are pregnant, infirm, or elderly. Qualitative economic, social, and political differences between Bantu Somalis—Somali nationals of Tanzanian origin but non-Somali ethnicity—and Somali Somalis were also noted. Nowhere are these differences in power and status incorporated into the Refugee Self-Management proposal. These interviews reveal that (i) women have created their own community-based arrangements, outside official circuits of refugee participation; and (ii) women are largely excluded from the so-called democratic process by their gendered cultural positioning. The vast majority of Somali refugee women in these border camps are unlikely to ever be part of the official self-management scheme proposed by CARE. One might argue that the refugees furthest from these centres of institutionalized power are quite capable of self-management—certainly no one is helping them at the moment. This is not to say, however, that they receive equitable treatment and material assistance relative to other refugees in the camp.

The democratic selection of leaders risks reproducing and reinscribing the power of those refugees already in positions of authority and privilege in the camps. Thus, even elections risk being an exercise in self-selection. At one meeting between refugee agencies and camp elders, the latter group submitted a list of those they unilaterally decided should be representatives, most of whom were the elders themselves; they also noted the remuneration expected. Agency staff mem-

bers were dissatisfied with the elders' self-appointment; they expected that the elected refugee representatives would perform their duties without being paid.

### Democratic Governance in an Age of Displacement

While partial to the idea of refugee self-governance based on my own background in community organization and planning, I harbour skepticism about the willingness of the aid agencies to give away any meaningful decision-making power to refugees, particularly with respect to the allocation of resources, and have reservations about how such changes might reinscribe women's subordination in the camps. Having grounded issues of political power, economic control, and gender equity in the example of the Refugee Self-Management initiative, I maintain that a refugee camp is not a community, nor is it treated as one by humanitarian agencies. To assume that principles of community development and organization are directly transferable to refugee camps is problematic. While "camps-as-communities" may be desirable, such a notion is also unrealistic. Given the contradictory actions of agencies—from headcounts to self-management—a lack of trust permeates all sides, a factor which seriously impedes meaningful power-sharing agreements.

Nonetheless, CARE's initiative recognizes that the status quo is undesirable and perhaps unacceptable. Researchers, policymakers, relief workers, and funders are becoming increasingly aware of the problems of gender-blind practices as well as the dangers of a "colonialism of compassion." A concrete first step on the part of refugee relief organizations, including the UN, is a systematic auto-critique. By this, I mean a review of the question posed at the outset by each organization, a discussion of what, if any, control over refugee operations could be shared and its rationale, as well as serious reconsideration of authority relationships in the camps.

How can refugee camps be made more democratic spaces, given the temporary nature of the solution, limited resources, and constraints imposed by host governments? One CARE manager argued that a refugee camp should be run by a voluntary board just as the NGOs are governed "at home." Perhaps there is some truth to this proposal, though replicating the structures of Western knowledges is more likely the problem than the solution. In an age of increasing displacement, the radically democratic governance of refugees in asylum countries poses a pressing challenge for donor governments, the United Nations, and NGOs alike. ■

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## Refugee Rights Report on a Comparative Survey

By  
James C. Hathaway and John A. Dent

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# The Sierra Leone Conflict: The Plight of Refugees and the Displaced

Veronica Nmoma

## Abstract

*As a result of the Liberian civil war, Sierra Leone became simultaneously a major generator and receiver of refugees. Charles Taylor and his National Patriotic front of Liberia, along with Sierra Leone's Foday Sankoh's Revolutionary United Front (RUF) incursion into Sierra Leone in March 1991, had a profound impact resulting in at least 10,000 casualties, about a million internally displaced peoples and some 300,000 refugees in neighbouring states. This paper argues that the RUF objective was unclear all along, as it lacked ideology and that, even now, it has yet to put forward a coherent program.*

## Précis

*La Sierra Leone est devenue à la fois nation productrice et nation-hôte de réfugié(e)s à cause de la guerre civile au Liberia, un pays voisin. Charles Taylor et son front patriotique national du Liberia, et la poussée dans son pays natal du léonais Foday Sankoh et son front révolutionnaire uni (RUF) en mars 1991, ont provoqué au moins 10 000 morts, le déplacement interne d'un million de personnes et environ 300 000 réfugié(e)s dans les contrées voisines. L'auteure soutient que l'objectif du RUF a toujours manqué de précision, de fondement idéologique et que, à l'heure actuelle, il n'a toujours pas présenté de programme cohérent.*

## Introduction

Of all Liberia's neighbours in West Africa, the one most affected by the Liberian civil war has been Sierra Leone. As the Liberian conflict spread

into Sierra Leone (a small West African country about the size of New York), both countries at once, and for the first time, were subject to the displacement of their peoples and mass refugee movements. In Sierra Leone, Corporal Foday Sankoh's Revolutionary United Front (RUF) mounted an insurrection against the APC administration of then President Joseph Momoh (1986–1992). Following a coup in 1992, the RUF offensive continued against the military government of Captain Valentine Strasser (1992–Jan 1996).

Ostensibly, RUF's objective was to end the corrupt and dictatorial government of Momoh because it failed to comply with public demands for multi-party elections. However, when the Strasser government called for the cessation of hostilities with the promise of elections for 1996, RUF failed to comply. Sankoh and his rebels continued to lay waste to villages and attack diamond and bauxite mines, while, at the same time, a heavy assault was launched on the innocent civilians whose interests RUF claims to represent.

This paper chronicles the impact of Sierra Leone's political instability on its population, much of which has been forced to seek asylum in neighbouring states. The paper argues that the interests of the people of Sierra Leone were never at the heart of the RUF rebellion. Rather, it appears that the rebels were solely driven by greed and lust for power.

## Background to Rebel Incursion: Liberian Refugee Influx into Sierra Leone—1990

Sierra Leone has been largely dysfunctional as a result of the rapid influx of refugees precipitated by the war in Liberia. This refugee movement began in May 1990 with the approach of Taylor's NPFL forces to the outskirts of

Monrovia. Approximately 1000 people, mainly Krahn and Mandingo groups from Monrovia and western Liberia crossed daily into Sierra Leone. In mid-June, more than 20,000 refugees had settled in Sierra Leone. By August of 1990, this number had risen to some 69,000. In September, the number had spiralled to 86,000, and by October, the number of Liberian refugees in Sierra Leone slightly rose to some 130,000. Still, Sierra Leone had relatively fewer Liberian refugees when contrasted with Guinea's 400,000 or Côte d'Ivoire's 300,000.

Many refugees arrived by bus loads and private cars, but the majority entered by ship. They had no difficulties gaining entry into Sierra Leone. As citizens of a member country of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) and the Mano River Union (MRU),<sup>1</sup> the Liberian refugees were not required to have visas of entry and enjoyed the benefits of freedom of movement and the right of settlement in Sierra Leone. However, following the 1992 military coup, and in light of continued rebel attacks and atrocities, the Sierra Leonean government demanded that new incoming refugees be registered on entry.

As the number of the refugees greatly increased, accommodating them presented major problems. Some of them were housed in crowded camps and settlements, while another 500 slept in Sierra Leone's national stadium. In addition, the refugees were also faced with limited access to clean water and sanitation. In most cases, the enormous responsibility of feeding and caring for the refugees fell to local families. This was particularly burdensome as many of these families were, themselves, poor and lacked the resources to support their own families.

Although the government and people of Sierra Leone were hospitable

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and generously shared their meagre resources, the political and economic impact of this massive inflow of Liberian refugees was devastating and should not be underestimated especially in the light of Sierra Leone's situation as one of the poorest African countries. At the time, Sierra Leone was already experiencing economic crisis due to its weak economy. The Liberian refugees constituted, therefore, an enormous burden on the host government and the local community networks.

The refugee influx placed a heavy demand on the country's natural resources as well. Heavier demands for fuel and timber from the forest, triggered an increase in firewood prices. The presence of refugees also increased the need to hunt for wildlife and placed a heavy burden on basic social services and related infrastructures. Rent and the prices of basic commodities jumped further straining social services, and unfortunately, the initial influx of refugees coincided with the country's hunger season (a few months before the rice harvest season). The additional hardship created by the refugees' presence was overbearing as then President Momoh explained: "We are overstressing our resources to take care of his people [Liberia's Taylor], our social amenities are being over-taxed and even our economy has been dislodged."<sup>2</sup> The influx of refugees took its toll on Sierra Leone's economy which had serious political repercussions for the government.

### **The Sierra Leone Incursion, the Displaced, and the Refugees in 1991**

In March of 1991, the Liberian civil conflict, itself, spilled into Sierra Leone. Taylor's NPFL invaded Sierra Leone's southern province, in retaliation for Sierra Leone's participation in ECOMOG and the use of Freetown Lungi Airport as a base for air strikes on NPFL positions and military facilities.<sup>3</sup> At first, the NPFL leader threatened retaliation in an attempt to force Sierra Leone to withdraw from

ECOMOG. Accordingly, the NPFL, joined forces with Sierra Leone's former Corporal Foday Sankoh and his RUF insurgents, and made several incursions into Sierra Leone. These resulted in the deaths of many Sierra Leoneans, as well as the displacement of hundreds of thousands of persons.<sup>4</sup> In addition, some 160,000 persons were forced to flee to Guinea and about 12,000 desperate persons fled to war-torn Liberia to escape the violence and attacks on civilians.

The Momoh administration then deployed 2,150 government soldiers along the Liberian border. In retaliation against Taylor's aggression, Momoh supported the Sierra Leone based United Liberation Movement for Democracy (ULIMO). ULIMO, one of the factions in the Liberian civil war, launched an offensive against Taylor's territory in Liberia, scoring major victories. The NPFL faction's incursion into Sierra Leone in March 1991 illustrates the extent and capacity of rebel forces to threaten and destabilize the security of the West African region and the international community as a whole. Taylor's guerrilla insurrection was no longer a strictly Liberian affair. The invasion of Sierra Leone raised concerns in the West African states that the presence of Liberian refugees could pose a security risk for the entire region.

At first, Taylor denied any involvement in that Sierra Leone's guerrilla insurgency, but, later, a statement by his foreign minister, Ernest Eastman, confirmed the involvement. Eastman said that Taylor regretted that "some of our boys went into the Sierra Leone section and perhaps over-indulged."<sup>5</sup> Thereafter, some eighty-three NPFL soldiers were captured by Sierra Leone's military commander, Major-General Shieku Tarawali, thus confirming the suspicions of NPFL involvement. RUF was an ally of Taylor and was supplied with weapons, personnel, and financial support from Taylor.<sup>6</sup> Following the initial incursion, Sankoh did claim responsibility, when he announced that RUF intended to

overthrow the Momoh government because of its failure to concede to demands by the Sierra Leoneans for multi-party elections. However, comparable to the Liberian case, the Momoh government was toppled in 1992, but the RUF guerrilla war has raged on. "That is the strange thing about this war," says J. O. D. Cole, Secretary General of the Sierra Leone Bar Association. "We have no idea who they are, what they're fighting for, and we don't even know who their leader is."<sup>7</sup>

The rebels professed to be waging a war against the government, claiming throughout that their goal was to protect the civilian population. Yet, the pattern of their atrocities has been very similar to that of the NPFL and some other rebel groups in Liberia. As soon as the rebels crossed into eastern Sierra Leone, they captured villages and towns, looted homes, and intimidated, terrorized, and dislocated local populations. Renegade members of the NPFL are alleged to have killed many civilians while looting homes, stealing property, and raiding the border towns of Potoru and Zimmi.<sup>8</sup> As the rebels attacked the towns of Njala and Njaiama, for example, they pounded civilians, burning some ninety-six persons to death. Convoys carrying civilians were particularly targeted, but ironically, military convoys were not attacked. Indeed, the guerrilla war traumatized the countryside, spread fear in the country, and prompted a population flight into neighbouring Guinea and Liberia.

Following the clashes with the rebels, the Sierra Leone security forces harassed and intimidated Liberian refugees in Sierra Leone.<sup>9</sup> Thus, these refugees also became victims of the border clashes between the NPFL and the Sierra Leonean national army. Worsening the situation, the Taylor faction's incursion into Sierra Leone not only displaced some 145,000 Sierra Leoneans but also caused some Liberian refugees in that country to flee again, forcing some to return to Liberia. The crisis also disrupted the relief program for some 125,000 Liberian refugees in Sierra Leone. Unfortu-



nately, the refugees who fled to Liberia were unable to receive emergency relief until the middle of 1992, as they were cut off from relief organizations following the August 1991 Ulimo rebel incursion from Sierra Leone into Liberia. Non-governmental organizations (NGOs), working in conjunction with the UNHCR, facilitated a voluntary repatriation to Monrovia of some Liberian refugees uprooted by the March assault on Sierra Leone.

Among the Sierra Leonean refugees who fled into Guinea, some went deep into the more remote areas, which were often less accessible. They settled in the Gueckedou area creating overcrowding and often outnumbering the host population. Those who settled in this area did not receive any food allotment for the first two months following their arrival.<sup>10</sup> On the other hand, the refugees that fled to other areas in Guinea were somehow fortunate in that a relief system was already in place. When the Sierra Leonean refugees arrived, the aid program was simply expanded.

Momoh's incompetent government was unable to control the rebel incursions and their deadly activities in southeastern Sierra Leone. It, therefore, sought military assistance from member states of ECOWAS. In response, Nigeria and Guinea sent troops to assist the government forces. Those foreign troops were deployed to safeguard key strategic areas, and with the aid of Nigerian and Guinean military forces, the government army secured the southeastern territory, deterred RUF attacks and regained captured areas in the southern and eastern sections. One of the places recaptured from the rebels was the town of Pejehun. An observer recounts her horrendous experience:<sup>11</sup>

The rebels arrived on Saturday, April 20, I'd heard rumors about the rebels, but hadn't thought they'd attack this town. When they did, I was engulfed in fear. A rebel entered my house ... he told my husband to go outside, then shot and killed him. I saw him being shot. I saw his blood running. They didn't allow me to bury him

until the following Thursday. His body remained on the spot ... Most people fled the town. Very few remained. I heard everywhere else had also been attacked, so I decided to stay. Every day they killed people. Before they killed them, they tied their hands behind their backs and paraded them around the town naked—men and women. They'd slice their ears off, put them in their mouths, and make them chew them.

Despite ECOWAS support, the rebel insurgency was difficult to contain because RUF employed guerrilla tactics such as hit and run attacks. In the face of the guerrilla warfare, air strikes by the military were largely ineffective, although the government seemed to have had an upper hand in that, at first, it appeared to have repelled the invasion. But the insurgency did not end as rebel guerrilla fighters, employing terror tactics, targeted schools, government buildings and facilities, institutions, government workers and health clinics. Government loyalists were ambushed and killed while recaptured towns were raided creating chaos and more displacements. After spreading more confusion, the guerillas would disappear into the bush only to return at a later date.

Some of the displaced fled to the cities where they stayed in homes of friends and relatives. Due to the fighting and poor road conditions, relief workers were unable to reach out to the needy and starving refugees among whom the Médecins Sans Frontières found a malnutrition rate of 43 percent among some 15,000 refugees.

By the end of 1991, the crisis had killed at least 10,000 persons and displaced roughly a million people. The fighting between the RUF guerrillas and the government's army in the southeastern region caused the displacement of roughly 290,000 persons. Some 140,000 people fled to Guinea and 115,000 went to Liberia. Among those that fled to Liberia were some who had arrived in Sierra Leone in 1990. This effectively began to reverse

the trend as the number of Liberians in asylum in Sierra Leone fell drastically to 50,000 in July 1991 from 125,000 in March of that year.

The decline in the number of refugees in Sierra Leone continued as the rebels intensified their offensive against the ill-trained government soldiers. By October 1991, the number of refugees remaining in Sierra Leone had dropped to some 20,000, and decreased by one half, to 10,000, by December of 1991.<sup>12</sup> Of the 10,000 Liberian refugees left in Sierra Leone, 5,000 were still settled at the Waterloo Camp near Freetown; 3,000 were scattered mainly in eastern Sierra Leone; and 2,000 were gainfully employed in the Sierra Leonean economy.

### The Worsening Situation in 1992

In the midst of the civil crisis, the Sierra Leonean case became more complicated as the country not only had to cope with hosting refugees from Liberia and repelling a guerrilla insurgency, but also experienced a military coup (not at the hands of the insurgents) staged by junior army officers. Following the coup, the newly-established National Provisional Ruling Council (NPRC) nominated 27-year-old Captain Valentine Strasser as Chairman and Head of State.<sup>13</sup> Strasser, a leader of the coup, was also a veteran of the war who had fought with the national army trying to repel the rebels in the southeastern region. Following his overthrow, President Momoh fled to Guinea joining other Sierra Leonean refugees in that country.

However, as in Liberia, the overthrow of the Momoh government did not mean an end to the Sierra Leonean civil crisis. On assuming the country's leadership, Strasser's military government vowed to bring an immediate end to the rebel incursion. Through diplomatic channels, the NPRC approached RUF rebels offering a ceasefire, unconditional talks, amnesty, and a negotiated settlement. The government and RUF were unable to reach an agreement, so that violence raged on and more civilians were forced to flee into neighbouring Guinea, Liberia,

and deeper into Sierra Leone, further away from the border.

Sierra Leone was affected again as Taylor's NPFL launched a surprise attack on Monrovia on October 15, 1992. Once again the attack displaced many Sierra Leonean refugees in Monrovia forcing the UNHCR to organize a voluntary repatriation program for them. As a result, some 5,000 refugees were voluntarily repatriated from Liberia by ship, and another 13,000 returned to their homes by land. This was in spite of worsening conditions in Sierra Leone. Similarly, during the same year, 1,600 Sierra Leonean refugees in Guinea returned home voluntarily with UNHCR assistance.

By December 1992, approximately 20 to 25 percent of Sierra Leone's 4.5 million people were displaced as a result of fighting between RUF guerrillas and government soldiers. As the Sierra Leonean government forces made progress into rebel-held territories, many internally displaced persons, trapped in these areas, received no support, and therefore, returned to government-controlled areas. Some Liberian refugees, previously accommodated in private homes as they fled from the new rebel onslaught, arrived to join others at the Waterloo Camp near Freetown. Yet, some 8,000 others remained scattered in the country, mainly in Kanema, Freetown and Bo. In addition, at year's end, some 260,000 Sierra Leoneans had sought asylum in the surrounding nations. While approximately 400,000 of the displaced were in camps, other displacees, nearly 400,000, did not reside in camps. As expected, those displaced people who sought refuge in the country lived in endless fear and experienced distress and severe hardships as they faced unexpected attacks.

#### **Intensification of the War and Its Impact in 1993-94**

Reports of human rights abuses underscored the increasing violence and atrocities committed by dissident government soldiers. These included robbery, extortion, looting, and the killing of innocent civilians.<sup>14</sup> The violence

also claimed the lives of missionaries and relief workers. Due to the security threat in southeastern Sierra Leone, relief operations were considerably impeded and, in some areas, they were actually suspended. For instance, the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) suspended its operation following an attack on its convoy in August 1993 in which two ICRC nurses were killed.<sup>15</sup> Also, at year's end, the number of Sierra Leonean refugees in Guinea and Liberia were estimated at 260,000 and the displaced at about half a million.<sup>16</sup>

Fighting intensified in 1994, spreading into the northern and central regions of the country, areas previously unaffected by the war. The civilian population, moreover, suffered from harassment, assault, torture, rape and other atrocities. Even though the country was still subject to RUF rebel attacks in 1994, many people in Sierra Leone believed that most of the human rights infractions, ambushes, looting, and raiding were caused by disgruntled government soldiers. As some displacees explained, "these former or current soldiers had discovered that they could ambush convoys, loot towns, kill and maim civilians, and control localized portions of the diamond trade with near total impunity."<sup>17</sup> In addition, officials of the United States' Committee for Refugees conducted a site visit in Sierra Leone toward the latter part of 1994 and reported that uncontrolled and vicious elements in the government army posed the "greatest threat to security, liberty, property, and human rights in Sierra Leone."<sup>18</sup> Under the circumstances, many unarmed and innocent civilians were killed not only by the RUF's undisciplined, untrained, and impoverished recruits, independent bands of bandits, but also by dissatisfied current and former government soldiers.

In April 1994, for example, about thirty persons, including children, were seized from the bush where they were taking refuge in the villages of Dodo and Kotuma. Suspected of collaborating with dissident troops, they

were brought to the town of Buedu where twenty-five of them were killed by government forces<sup>19</sup> while attacks around Bo and Kanema left many civilians dead or starving when they were cut off from relief assistance. Several persons drowned in the Sewa river as they attempted to flee the rebel attacks. Akin to Liberia, displaced people's camps were constantly terrorized by rebels precipitating multiple displacements. Even Sierra Leone's largest refugee camp in Gondoma, south of Bo, was not spared. Several persons were killed when rebels overran the settlement of 80,000 internally displaced persons on Christmas eve.

While these atrocities were being perpetrated, armed gun men hidden in bushes threatened and prevented emergency relief supplies from reaching the starving population. The rebels specifically targeted major roads, as was the case of the roads joining Bo and Kanema and also those connecting Koida and Makeni. Here one could travel only under military escort. Convoys were constantly attacked resulting in the death of many civilians and troops.

Often with the intention of looting, armed men would employ a variety of means to create rumour, confusion and fear and scare off whole villages. Once the inhabitants would flee, the men would loot and destroy homes. For example, they might fire a shot near a village they intended to plunder, or cut off a messenger's arms as a sign of their impending arrival. In one such incident, a truck driver had gone to purchase rice for the villagers and was seized by armed men. The driver recounted that "rebels cut off my hands and told me to go to Panguma to tell the soldiers that they were going to attack."<sup>20</sup> In another instance, when more than 20,000 residents of Gerihun fled towards Bo, many drowned in the river in desperate attempts to escape the armed gangs.

In 1994, therefore, over one million persons, that is, at least one-fourth of Sierra Leone's population was displaced, and many people were dis-

placed three or more times. Reports estimated that roughly 300 persons were killed each month in 1994 due to the fighting and bandit attacks. Many others died from starvation and disease. A nurse in charge of a hospital in Kanema, once a prosperous city, said poignantly:

Since December all we have known is death—by killing, by famine, or by cholera .... The rebels would attack one side of the city, and the entire population would flee to the other. For the villagers, everything has been destroyed. Nothing was left untouched.<sup>21</sup>

Thus, one refugee equally lamented:

Life in Bo is very difficult. Three months ago, there were eight of us in the family. Two of our daughters died of starvation a month ago and my brother died of cholera two weeks ago.<sup>22</sup>

Throughout 1994, the number of the displaced people was constantly increasing, as hundreds of thousands of people were uprooted several times as a result of rebel attacks. For security reasons, many of the relief organizations were unable to reach starving persons, particularly, in the eastern and northern parts of the country where the fighting continued. Similarly, many Liberian refugees in Sierra Leone had to flee again when their refugees suffered massive rebel assaults.

Equally alarming were the number of persons who remained as refugees in the neighbouring countries. In December, that number was estimated at 260,000 as noted above. Guinea had 160,000 refugees, and Liberia accommodated 100,000. In spite of the ongoing war and the degenerating conditions, over 30,000 Sierra Leonean refugees in Liberia and Guinea returned home. However, shortly thereafter, they were again uprooted as rebels accelerated their attacks. Gondama and Gerihun camps housed some 60,000 and 20,000 displaced by the year's end, and some 20,000 Liberian refugees remained in Sierra Leone.

## The 1995 Attempts at Negotiations

Attempts by the military government to negotiate an end to the turmoil were unsuccessful until 1995. A three-day-national conference was held in Freetown around mid-August 1995. An invitation was extended to the RUF rebels to attend, but the rebels did not take part in the talks. As they gained strength, the rebels refused to negotiate an end to the crisis in the belief that the government was in a weak and vulnerable position.

The situation became ever more complex for the government, as some of its own soldiers began assisting the rebels. Some of these soldiers were known to fight as part of the government force during the day, and at night, to team up with the rebels.<sup>23</sup> These "traitors" have been described and nicknamed by some Sierra Leoneans as "Sobels."

Towards the latter part of 1995, the rebels intensified their bloody campaign against civilians and military targets throughout the rural area. They frequently ambushed key roads linking two towns. This was the case when the road connecting Kono and Freetown was attacked, and the rebel activities hampered relief operations. Their tactics aimed at civilians were no different from those of the Liberian rebels. As in Liberia, Sierra Leone insurgents killed tens of thousands of civilians and destroyed whole villages. Many villagers, having nothing to eat, fed on wild roots and consequently died of starvation, malnutrition and disease. A 28-year-old mother of four, who lost two children due to malnutrition, agonized as she recounted her experience: "We lived on nothing but rice for one year, then my village was destroyed one night by the rebels. We were fortunate enough to escape, but everywhere we went there was no one to help us and nothing to eat."<sup>24</sup> Equally, over 150 displaced persons that escaped from the war-torn areas into the Mambolo Chiefdom in Kambia District were neglected by the government and humanitarian relief agencies. They were desperately in

need of food, clothing and health care services.<sup>25</sup>

However, in spite of the participation of mercenaries and troops from other countries in the region, the war has largely been one of capture (of a district, town, or a mineral strategic area) by the rebel forces and recapture by the national army. Take, for instance, the Kono mineral district: it has been captured three times by the RUF rebels. Unfortunately, within these recurring onslaughts, thousands of civilians have been killed; nearly a million people have been displaced, and hundreds of thousands of people have become refugees in neighbouring states.

## The 1996 Elections and the Expected Return of the Displaced and the Refugees

At the beginning of 1996, Strasser was replaced in a bloodless coup by Chairman Julius Maada Bio. Since the palace coup, the new military head of state has engaged in talks with the RUF, meeting for the first time in Côte D'Ivoire where both the government and rebels concluded a cease-fire agreement. In spite of attempts to disrupt voting by rebel and military factions,<sup>26</sup> Sierra Leone successfully carried out a peaceful democratic national election in March with the President elect, Ahmad Tejan Kabbah, sworn into office in April. The new government committed to real dialogue, met almost immediately with rebel leader Sankoh in Côte D'Ivoire and was able to consolidate a temporary peace accord so that the Sierra Leonean refugees would return home. Although the war-torn nation appears to be on its way to peace, a final agreement for a political solution has yet to be signed.

## Conclusion

The people of Sierra Leone have indeed been traumatized by the senseless rebel war. As one observer lamented:

... there is terror in every corner of this country today as the rebels keep mounting offensives against innocent civilians. The old men are in hid-

ing—that is those that have survived the guns and machetes of the rebels and the sobels—the old women are languishing in displaced camps, the young men and women have become fighters—either on Sankoh's side or on the government side, and our children have become aimless orphans with a dark future.<sup>27</sup>

However, until a lasting peace is attained, the rebel war will linger and the plight of the displaced and the refugees will most likely worsen. The new government has called on the refugees to return, but there are no adequate plans for the repatriation and resettlement of refugees. Since the war has largely strained the meagre resources of the diamond-rich country, Sierra Leone is still classified among the poorest African nations and this impedes the return of refugees and the displaced.

It is hoped that the new democratic government will succeed in ending the five-year-old war. As one observer noted, "a new diplomatic approach initiated by new players may very well encourage the accommodation necessary to bring an end to the war, which the NPRC has been unable to do."<sup>28</sup> With the recent multi-party elections (a motive for the war), Sankoh might finally disarm his rebels and engage in genuine dialogue committed to working out differences amicably. It is now up to the rebels, the government, and its citizens, to arrest the processes that have continued to precipitate cyclic instability and retarded development. Hopefully, a new Sierra Leone will one day emerge and become the "model African nation" its founding fathers and mothers envisioned. ■

## Notes

1. Sierra Leone, Liberia and Guinea are members of the Mano River Union (MRU) formed in 1973. One of the main objectives is that of the MRU's collective security of member nations. Besides, Sierra Leone has security treaties with both Liberia and Guinea.
2. "Momoh Lashes at Taylor," *West Africa*, 19–25 November 1990, 2875.
3. Relations between Sierra Leone and Liberia was strained for nearly one year (No-

vember 1985–August 1986), when former Liberian President Doe accused Momoh of involvement in a coup to topple his government. However, relations were normalized in August 1986 following the signing of a nonaggression treaty and security cooperation between the governments of Liberia, Sierra Leone and Guinea.

4. Sankoh is an acquaintance of Taylor. Both received military training in Libya in 1989. Sankoh participated in the December 24, 1989 Liberian invasion before moving home in 1991 with his RUF. Taylor worked in cooperation with dissident Sierra Leoneans. It is not clear what the RUF rebels want. No one is absolutely sure if Sankoh is still leaving or dead. In an interview, an observer explained that "Sankoh exists as a mask, the African mask that we put on."
5. "Liberia," *Africa Report*, May–June 1991, 7.
6. "War For The Sake Of War," *U.S. News and World Report*, 17 July 1995, 35–36.
7. *Ibid.*, 37.
8. "Liberia," *Africa Report*, 7.
9. "Conflict in Liberia: Nine More Months," *Africa News*, July 21, 1991, 9.
10. Ruiz, "Uprooted Liberians: Casualties of A Brutal War," *Issue Paper*, Washington D.C.: United States Committee on Refugees or USCR 1992, 21–22.
11. *Ibid.*, 22.
12. "Sierra Leone," *World Refugee Report*, Washington D.C.: Department of State, 1992, 44.
13. Momoh's overthrow did not threaten Sierra Leone's membership in continued participation in ECOWAS peacekeeping efforts in the war-torn Liberia. Sierra Leone had contributed some 500 to 600 troops to the ECOMOG force.

14. *Reports on Human Rights Practices*, Washington, D.C.: U.S. Department of State, 1993.
15. Tom Argent, "The Usual People," *Issue Paper*, Washington D.C.: U.S. Committee for Refugees, 1993.
16. *World Refugee Survey 1994*, Washington D.C.: U.S. Committee for Refugees, 1994, 65.
17. *World Refugee Survey 1995*, Washington D.C.: U.S. Committee for Refugees, 1995, 73.
18. *Ibid.*, 74.
19. "Sierra Leone," *Amnesty International Report*, 1995, 259.
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21. Howard French, "For Sierra Leone, Elections and Starvation Loom," *New York Times*, 26 September 1995.
22. "Sierra Leone Civil War Is Causing Starvation," *New York Times*, 31 August 1995, A6L.
23. "Sierra Leone's War Targets Civilians, Industry, Foreigners," *Africa Report*, March–April 1995, 5.
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25. "Appeal for Aid to Displaced Nationals in Mambolo," *Concord Times*, 20 December 1995, 2.
26. Howard French, "West African Peace Takes Root in Sierra Leone," *New York Times*, 5 May 1996, 1 and 12.
27. Sheka Tarawalle, "Christmas or Cries-Mass?" *Concord Times*, 20 December 1995, 4.
28. Garvas Betts, "The Road to Democracy," *For di People*, 9 January 1996, 6. □

## Breaking Ground:

### The 1956 Hungarian Immigration to Canada

Edited by Robert H. Keyserlingk

Toronto: York Lanes Press, 1993, ISBN 1-55014-232-1, 117 pages, \$6.99

This book is a collection of personal and archival-based memories on the selection, transport and settlement of about 40,000 Hungarian refugees in Canada in one year. It is a source of primary record as well as scholarly reflection on one of the most significant refugee movements to Canada after World War II—the 1956 Hungarian refugee movement.

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# Persons Needing Protection: A Reflection on Canada's Role

Edward Opoku-Dapaah

## Abstract

*This paper briefly reflects on strategies by which Canada can deal with new challenges—including fiscal constraints, phenomenal rise in the number of people needing protection, and the evolution of regional approaches to refugee protection—while at the same time promoting its own interests. The paper is organized around three interrelated questions concerning these matters.*

## Précis

*Cet article se penche brièvement sur les stratégies utilisées par le Canada pour faire face à de nouveaux défis—notamment les compressions budgétaires, une hausse substantielle du nombre de personnes ayant besoin de protection et l'évolution des approches régionales à la protection des réfugié(e)s—tout en servant ses propres intérêts. L'article examine en particulier de trois questions en corrélation à ce dossier.*

## How Can Canada Best Meet its Obligations with Respect to Persons Needing Protection?

Canada intends to be significantly involved in protection of displaced persons, yet conceptual developments have not kept pace with social and political realities in this respect. Protection is a broad humanitarian principle including enjoyment of human rights and meeting primary needs. Clarification of exactly who should be "protected" is very important. Whereas granting asylum can be a very effective way to protect a refugee in flight, other protection measures—including protection of those who have yet to flee across national borders—can be just as effective.

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Displacement of people is caused by gross violations of human rights and immense suffering throughout the world and will need to be addressed with the full range of economic, political, diplomatic and developmental responses available to the government. Some displacements may be avoided if preemptive actions are taken to resolve life-threatening conflicts; others may be amenable to development planning or may be handled through substantial assistance to countries of first asylum and regional settlement. To some analysts protection should spring from objective conditions, where the facts indicate the risk of harm for valid reasons including war, violence, conflict and massive violations of human rights (Goodwin-Gill 1995, 7; ECRE 1991). Whether Canada can fulfil such responsibility without institutional resources, such as a pool of prominent jurists and legal scholars, is questionable.

Like that of many other Western nations, Canada's obligation to refugees has been stretched by its efforts to respond to the proliferation of conflicts around the globe. The need to "define" a precise but important role within overall international efforts hovers pervasively. Adelman and Cox (1994, 266) argue that the difficulties in coping with the thousands of refugees that were displaced by the Gulf War made clear the need for greater coordination in the responses of the various UN agencies to the displacement of persons. Yet, to a large extent, coordination of available international responses and relief efforts remains unrealized. Efforts to develop a coordinating mechanism may be contingent upon effective administration, generosity in spirit and finance, and a more proactive policy (*ibid.*).

Mounting evidence clearly suggests that procedures designed to deflect asylum seekers from one's country to

other countries are both more costly and less effective than multilateral efforts. They are more costly because a great deal of expenditure must be directed at preventing asylum seekers from reaching one's shores through measures such as issuing of visas, and carrier costs to check for improper documents (Adelman 1994, 87). A review of practices in Western Europe since the 1980s suggests that stringent measures, such as detention, designated accommodation, employment restrictions, summary process, removals, carrier sanctions, and restrictive interpretations of asylum criteria, can only exercise temporary influence on the inflow of asylum seekers (Goodwin-Gill 1993, 383; ECRE 1991, 115).

Even though the magnitude of global refugee crises necessitate joint responsibility and cooperation in achieving solutions, some regional accords covering refugees provide only a limited degree of protection for those involved. Hathaway (1992, 80) argues that the Schengen accord, for instance, does not institute community monitoring of clearly defined procedural standards for status determination, much less mandate fair-minded interpretations of the UN Convention's refugee definition. Moreover, the harmonization agreements give some states an incentive to offer only the lowest common denominator in terms of protection. Commenting about the "safe third country" provision, Adelman (1994, 75) notes that this provision prevents movement to a secondary country of asylum even if there are reasons for movements, such as restrictive asylum practices in the first country of asylum relative to others, or the existence of refugee networks that can provide assistance in one jurisdiction but which are unavailable in another. Thus the "safe third country" clause has become one of the most

serious obstacles to an effective solution of the world's refugee problem, since it generalises the most restrictive community practices, thereby eroding the rights of asylum seekers (Melander 1992, 102).

To many refugee researchers protection of displaced persons around the globe requires a coherent system of solutions, rather than multiple, national and unilateral responses which are incoherent and inconsistent. For example, multilateral conventions such as the "safe third country" provision could better promote refugee protection if they were explicitly designed to allocate responsibilities among nations (Adelman 1994, 88). Furthermore, such agreements should provide that a refugee claimant is the responsibility of the country where the claimant first lands, and that countries would share the costs of refugee protection so that if one country receives only a few claimants it would assist those countries which receive more with the associated costs (*ibid.*). The objective of such an agreement should not only be to secure practical working arrangements between states, but also to clarify the responsibilities of international agencies and their new role in a changed political situation (Goodwin-Gill 1993, 385).

Canada has come a long way with respect to its international obligations towards refugees, yet it is evident that efforts by Canadian governments to confront public hostility to large-scale movement of refugees into this country remains weak (Abella 1993, 93; Angus Reid 1989). As well, despite the fact that some changes have occurred and a more gender-sensitive approach to refugee questions has become noticeable, much still needs to be done to identify key refugee women's issues and to propose adequate responses (Moussa 1993).

### **What Level of Resources Should Canada Devote to Persons in Need of Protection?**

It is extremely difficult to determine precisely what level of resources should be devoted towards protecting

refugees and displaced persons. Recent experience indicates a general need for assistance in all aspects of management and response. There is the need for a permanent or regular funding base sufficient to allow strategic planning and effective response.

By accepting refugees on humanitarian grounds, Canada's settlement policy is based on the assumption that they do not have the same qualifications and skills as independent or economic immigrants (Neuwirth 1994, 315). If refugees are unable to secure or are prohibited from seeking employment in order to sustain themselves, then their basic needs must be met through public assistance (Lanphier and Opoku-Dapaah 1997, 9). Moreover, states are not only obliged to equate resident refugees with nationals in the operation of all forms of public assistance, but also must not discriminate among and between refugee populations in the granting of relief, whatever the number of refugees or the limitation of resources (Hathaway and Dent 1995, 30).

According to some researchers, nations should collectively seek the most efficacious method for dealing with refugee protection. Adelman (1994, 86) has argued that it would be far more cost effective if the sixteen Western countries adjudicating asylum claims had a common system. At minimum, a common documentation centre for all asylum adjudication countries would eliminate duplication in preparing country profiles (*ibid.*). For Goodwin-Gill (1993, 386), joint efforts in information and counselling for those who do seek protection as refugees may indirectly enhance the capacity of systems to deal with demands for refugee status. Mandates need to be clearly explained, just as national institutional arrangements, including local non-governmental organizations, must be strengthened, both to ensure effective cooperation with relevant agencies, and to implement appropriate policies, standards and decisions (*ibid.*).

While the immediate needs of refugees may be met to some degree within the first year after arrival, due to many

arrangements in place for newcomers, in reality, the period of adjustment is far more protracted (Lanphier 1994, 5). McLellan (1995, 2) discovered that the extensive traumatic experiences of Cambodian refugees prior to arrival in Canada had residual effects which prolonged and increased their need for specialized settlement services. Yet, government and social service programs were mainly available for only the first year after arrival. Given these inadequacies, the need of Cambodians for settlement services—including translation, interpretation, documentation and escort services—has not noticeably diminished even ten years after their arrival in Canada (*ibid.*). Life history studies of newcomers have consistently demonstrated the continuous and arduous nature of adaptation to Western lifestyles, even among those whose backgrounds attest to their unusual resilience (Moussa 1993).

Available evidence indicates that expenditure on asylum seekers going through the inland refugee determination process is substantial. By all projection, the inflow of asylum seekers is likely to remain a continuous problem for Canada. Yet still, the level of resources and institutional means for serving these people are lacking (Lanphier and Opoku-Dapaah 1997). This issue is examined further below.

### **What is the Most Effective Way to Provide Fair Determination of Refugee Status in Canada?**

Efficient and expeditious procedures are the key to a successful refugee determination process. Yet, some claimants in Toronto still experience delays of up to three years before completing the inland determination process (Opoku-Dapaah 1997). A recent study of Ghanaian refugees revealed that a combination of factors including pre-arrival trauma, sparse entitlements and protracted delays in obtaining legal status, encourages passivity and financial dependency (*ibid.*). ECRE (1991, 117) maintains that cases where the decision about a refugee claim is not reached within a year from the date of application, the asylum seeker

should be granted a temporary residence permit, unless the responsibility for the delay lies entirely with the applicant. However, measures intended to shorten procedures should not lead to lowering of legal safeguards; on the other hand, procedures offering a complex range of legal interventions should not be considered inefficient.

In a 1993 report prepared for the IRB, Hathaway (1993, 76) argues that claims should be reviewed by a geographically specialized officer, and if the officer is satisfied that the claim can be accepted without a full hearing, a recommendation to that effect should be made to relevant authorities. In addition, the Chairperson should prepare and issue guidelines on the assessment of credibility (*ibid.*).

Immigration officials posted at ports and other border officers deal with asylum seekers, yet it is unclear whether these officials are kept regularly informed about developments in this field, or whether they possess the special training relating to problems posed by asylum seekers, especially women and children.

Given that refugee counsel are typically schooled in the adversarial procedure, they present proof through the detailed examination of claimant and witnesses. By contrast, Glenn (1994, 109) notes that a more investigative procedure should place no burden of proof on the refugee claimant, while the role of counsel should become one of collaboration rather than struggle. Consequently, the determination process could be expedited through a more collaborative and investigative procedure in which questioning is undertaken by CRDD members themselves rather than by refugee counsel and RHOs, while existing procedural guarantees of the right to counsel and legal aid would be retained (Cox and Glenn 1994, 298). For example, CRDD members rely on model reasons provided by the IRB for denial of claims from certain countries; this practice may be unfair and also undermines the independence of the CRDD members from executive influence (*ibid.*).

Another area of concern is the authority and credibility of documentary evidence in refugee hearings, particularly information assembled by the IRB's Documentation Centres. Although refugee claimants are given an effective opportunity to refute adverse information used against them during refugee hearings, in practice Board Members give greater probative value to documentary evidence (often produced by the IRB's Documentation Centre) than to the claimant's testimony (Houle 1994, 28). Board members often fail to weigh all the evidence in front of them or chose to ignore some of the testimony (*ibid.*). For Houle, because no criteria (other than those generally used by regular libraries) have ever been laid down for the acquisition of material by the Resource Centre, little is known about the sources used in its production of documents. This is problematic, considering that the Documentation Centre provides information to Board Members upon which important decisions are based.

Although the post-1989 refugee-determination procedure does provide all refugee claimants with an oral hearing, the legislation overlooks the importance of a reasonable and fair access to appeal (Greene and Shaffer 1992, 82). Procedures which necessarily limit appeals and judicial reviews violate the guarantee of fundamental justice given by the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms, and the guarantee of a fair hearing given by the Canadian Bill of Rights.

In sum, in the absence of durable solutions for the root causes of displacement, it is imperative that Canada continue its tradition of generosity and compassion towards refugees. A coherent strategy for meeting such an obligations calls for a well coordinated international approach, burden sharing, and clarification of Canada's precise role within multilateral efforts. With respect to asylum seekers, experience suggests that sophisticated ways of controlling frontiers do not adequately address the complexities of the issue. A fair asylum

determination procedure should be coherent, corroborative and placed in the hands of qualified officials who can conduct hearings in an efficient manner. ■

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## Polish Refugees in Canada: Statistical Data

Compiled by Edward Opoku-Dapaah

**Table 1: Refugees Resettled in Canada 1947-1967: Major Sources**

Ethnic Origin	1947-59	1960-62	1963-65	1966-67	Total
Hungarian	43,566	894	720	447	45,627
Polish	42,844	485	276	139	43,744
Russian	33,119	140	114	139	33,416
Yugoslavian	20,907	3,385	4,266	2,375	30,933

Source: International Refugee and Migration Policy Branch, November 1994.

**Table 2: Polish Refugees Resettled in Canada 1968-1978**

Year	1968-70	1971-73	1974-76	1977-78	Total
Polish refugees	597	170	81	215	1,049

Source: International Refugee and Migration Policy Branch, November 1994.

**Table 3: Refugees Resettled 1979-1994 (mid-Sept) in Canada: Major Sources by Sponsorship**

Country	Government Sponsorship	Private Sponsorship	Total
Vietnam	54,585	44,479	99,064
Poland	21,216	50,839	72,055
El Salvador	20,263	2,281	22,544
Laos	4,130	13,117	17,247

Source: International Refugee and Migration Policy Branch, November 1994.

**Table 4: Polish Refugee Determination by the RSAC 1978-1988**

Cases Decided	Rejected	Accepted	% Accepted
764	647	117	15 %

Source: International Refugee and Migration Policy Branch, November 1994.

**Table 5: Polish Refugee Determination by the IRB 1989-1994 (June)**

Total Finalized	Rejected	Accepted	% Accepted	Not Eligible	Withdrawn/Abandoned
1336	819	222	21 %	11	284

Source: International Refugee and Migration Policy Branch, November 1994.

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Contributions with 100-word abstracts are invited. They must be received not later than June 24, 1997.

Papers should be typed, double-spaced, and referenced in proper academic form. They should not exceed 16 pages or about 4000 words. Short papers of about 900 words are also welcomed. Word-processed submissions may be sent on disc or by email.

Les rédacteurs acceptent aussi des articles en français. Le style doit conformer aux normes exigées pour les articles rédigés en anglais.

**Deadline:** July 31, 1997.

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## CALL FOR PAPERS

# REFUGEE AND IMMIGRANT WOMEN: AN INTERNATIONAL PERSPECTIVE

The Centre for Refugee Studies will publish a special issue of *Refuge* on "Refugee and Immigrant Women: An International Perspective."

This special issue of *Refuge* is intended to provide a space for the voices of immigrant and refugee women from diverse cultural and geographical contexts to be heard. Researchers and practitioners from academic circles and grassroots organizations working on issues involving refugee and immigrant women are urged to submit papers which will illuminate refugee and immigrant women's experiences. Papers will address theoretical frameworks, empirical research, and policy issues with a focus on the social, economic, legal and political consequences for refugee and immigrant women.

Contributions with abstracts are invited. They must be received not later than August 31, 1997.

Papers should be typed, double-spaced, and referenced in proper academic form. They should not exceed 16 pages or about 4000 words. Short papers of about 900 words are also welcomed. Word-processed submissions may be sent on disc or by email.

Les rédacteurs acceptent aussi des articles en français. Le style doit conformer aux normes exigées pour les articles rédigés en anglais.

**Deadline: August 31, 1997.**

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