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**THE ELUSIVENESS OF GENDER-RELATED CHANGE IN INTERNATIONAL  
ORGANIZATIONS: REFUGEE WOMEN, THE UNITED NATIONS HIGH  
COMMISSIONER FOR REFUGEES AND THE POLITICAL ECONOMY OF  
GENDER**

by

Erin K Baines

Submitted in partial fulfillment  
of the requirement for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

at

Dalhousie University  
Halifax, Nova Scotia  
August 2000

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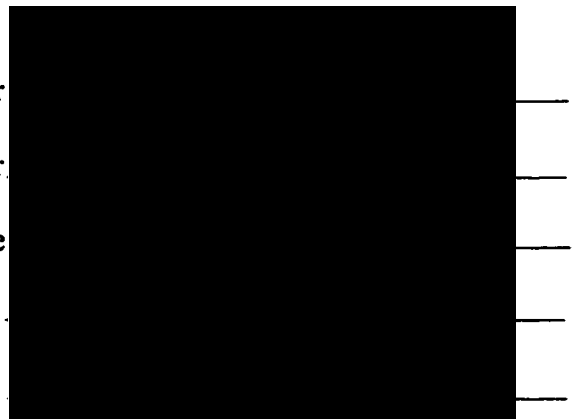
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**This thesis is dedicated to my family. For my mother, her strength and determination has inspired us all. For my father, his hard work and passion is found in each of us. For my sisters, who everyday amaze me with their verve and talents. For my brother, who will always make me smile. For my siblings' partners, who have endured our oddities and made my family richer. For my nephews and nieces, David, Christine, Scott, Ryan, William, Jillian, Aislinn, Alexia and little Spencer in heaven -- I often think of you and how much the world has changed since your grandparents were young. We may have our complexities, but this is what keeps us growing, and after all, change is what makes the world hang together.**

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## **Abstract**

In the past two decades, transnational advocates have successfully placed the issue of 'refugee women' on the agenda of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) with the aspiration of promoting gender equity within the organization's mandate. Yet despite these accomplishments, gender-related change in UNHCR institutions and field practices remains both slow and inconsistent. This discrepancy is indicative of a wider global pattern: women's movements and networks have lobbied for, and brought about, significant policy changes in international organizations, yet little progress has been made in bridging the gap between global promises and actual practices. This contradiction is not comprehensively addressed in feminist approaches to the study of global governance. Focusing on transnational activism and global structures, these approaches narrowly highlight 'external', global factors which condition the process of gender-related change. Organizational institutions and the role of 'internal' advocates are downplayed. Furthermore, feminist approaches to global governance generally fail to trace the linkages between global policies and local practices. As a result, the importance of global policy changes to women and men at the local level are often over-estimated while at the same time, national and local contexts are under-estimated.

The thesis is premised on the view that a multi-level approach which links the global, national and local is essential to explain points of intersection or gaps between global policy and practices in the field. Further, both external and internal factors conditioning institutional and policy change in gender relations within international organizations is required. Hence, the thesis proposes a hybrid of conceptual approaches: feminist approaches to global political economy, transnational advocacy networks and gender studies of institutional change. A case study approach is then introduced to situate global strategies and policies in national and local contexts, and to consider how refugee, returnee and internally displaced women and men encounter and respond to global initiatives to promote gender equality.

## **List of Abbreviations**

<b>ACPD</b>	<b>Civil Assembly of Displaced Persons (Guatemala)</b>
<b>AI</b>	<b>Amnesty International</b>
<b>AWR</b>	<b>Women at Risk Programme (Canada)</b>
<b>AOR</b>	<b>Area of Responsibility</b>
<b>BiH</b>	<b>Bosnia and Herzegovina</b>
<b>BWI</b>	<b>Bosnia Women's Initiative</b>
<b>CCPP</b>	<b>Permanent Commissions for Guatemalan Refugees</b>
<b>CCR</b>	<b>Canadian Council for Refugees</b>
<b>CEDAW</b>	<b>Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women</b>
<b>CIAM</b>	<b>Women's Centre for Research and Action (Mexico)</b>
<b>CIREFCA</b>	<b>International Conference on Central American Refugees</b>
<b>COMAR</b>	<b>Mexican Commission to Assist Refugees</b>
<b>COR</b>	<b>Country Operation Report</b>
<b>DIP</b>	<b>Division of International Protection</b>
<b>DOS</b>	<b>Division of Operational Support (UNHCR)</b>
<b>EC</b>	<b>European Community</b>
<b>ECOSOC</b>	<b>The Economic and Social Council</b>
<b>EZLN</b>	<b>Zapatista National Liberation Front (Mexico)</b>
<b>FGG</b>	<b>Feminist approaches to Global Governance</b>
<b>FoReFeM</b>	<b>Regional Forum of Refugee and Repatriated Women</b>
<b>GAD</b>	<b>Gender and Development</b>
<b>GIF</b>	<b>General Initiative Fund (UNHCR)</b>
<b>GPE</b>	<b>Global Political Economy</b>
<b>HRW</b>	<b>Human Rights Watch</b>
<b>ICRC</b>	<b>International Committee for the Red Cross</b>
<b>ICM</b>	<b>International Committee for Migration</b>
<b>ICVA</b>	<b>International Council of Voluntary Associations</b>
<b>IDP</b>	<b>Internally Displaced Person</b>
<b>IEBL</b>	<b>Inter-Entity Boundary Line (Bosnia-Herzegovina)</b>
<b>IO</b>	<b>International Organization</b>
<b>IOM</b>	<b>International Organization for Migration</b>
<b>IPE</b>	<b>International Political Economy</b>
<b>IRB</b>	<b>Immigration and Review Board</b>
<b>IRC</b>	<b>International Rescue Committee</b>
<b>IWGRW</b>	<b>International Working Group on Refugee Women</b>
<b>MMQ</b>	<b>Mama Maquin (Guatemala)</b>
<b>MOU</b>	<b>Memorandum of Understanding</b>
<b>MSF</b>	<b>Medecins Sans Frontieres</b>
<b>NAFTA</b>	<b>North American Free Trade Agreement</b>
<b>NATO</b>	<b>North Atlantic Treaty Organization</b>
<b>NGO</b>	<b>Non-governmental organization</b>
<b>OAS</b>	<b>Organization of American States</b>
<b>OAU</b>	<b>Organization of African Unity</b>
<b>OHR</b>	<b>Office of the High Commissioner (UNHCR)</b>

<b>OMS</b>	<b>Operational Management System (UNHCR)</b>
<b>OSCE</b>	<b>Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe</b>
<b>PFA</b>	<b>Platform for Action</b>
<b>POP</b>	<b>People Oriented Planning</b>
<b>PRI</b>	<b>Partido Revolucionario Institucional</b>
<b>QIP</b>	<b>Quick Impact Project</b>
<b>REF/WID</b>	<b>Refugee Women and Development</b>
<b>RS</b>	<b>Republika Srbska (Bosnia-Herzegovina)</b>
<b>RSD</b>	<b>Refugee Status Determination</b>
<b>SCRWGE</b>	<b>Senior Coordinator for Refugee Women and Gender Equality</b>
<b>TAN</b>	<b>Transnational Advocacy Network</b>
<b>UA</b>	<b>Umbrella Agency</b>
<b>UNDP</b>	<b>United Nations Development Programme</b>
<b>UNHCR</b>	<b>United Nations High Commission for Refugees</b>
<b>UNICEF</b>	<b>United Nations Children's Fund</b>
<b>UNIFEM</b>	<b>United Nations Development Fund for Women</b>
<b>UNRRA</b>	<b>United National Relief and Rehabilitation Administration</b>
<b>UNV</b>	<b>United Nations Volunteer</b>
<b>URNG</b>	<b>Unidad Revolucionaria Nacional Guatemalteca</b>
<b>USAID</b>	<b>United States Agency for International Development</b>
<b>WCC</b>	<b>World Council of Churches</b>
<b>WCRWC</b>	<b>Women's Commission for Refugee Women and Children</b>
<b>WHO</b>	<b>World Health Organization</b>
<b>WID</b>	<b>Women and Development</b>
<b>YWCA</b>	<b>Young Women's Christian Association</b>

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## **Chapter One**

### **Introduction**

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In a refugee camp in Mexico, a woman arrives at the office of the High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) seeking protection. She has been badly beaten by her husband. UNHCR protection officers arrange for her husband to be arrested and detained. The woman returns weeks later, asking for his release. She is unable to find work and cannot provide for her children.

In Kenya, women encounter rape when collecting firewood outside the boundaries of the camp. The 'international community' provides firewood, but incidents of rape continue: the roots of the problem have not been addressed.

In detention centres in Hong Kong, income generating projects were initiated with women. Their husbands and fathers perceived their involvement as a threat to their power and privilege and violently beat them.

In Pakistan, Afghan refugee boys are sent to UNHCR sponsored schools, but girls are forced to stay at home due to religious customs. UNHCR attempts to accommodate and find alternatives through home-based schools, but the private-public divide continues to be problematically reproduced.

In Bosnia-Herzegovina, UNHCR receives sanitary napkins to be distributed as part of an effort to sensitize assistance packages from a gender perspective. Several months later they have still not been distributed. When asked why, the men in charge of supply centres reply that they did not know what the napkins were for.

In Burundian refugee camps, traditional UNHCR practices of distributing assistance to male heads of households is challenged by refugee women. The practice of polygamy means that each man will often not relay the goods to all of his wives and by extension, their children

(Collective Observations of UNHCR field initiatives on gender, Observation Notes, UNHCR Geneva 1999).

#### **1.1 Introduction**

The preceding cases remind us that gender-related change "requires action on many fronts: dismantling the structures that promote women's inequality, responding to immediate concerns of women, and crafting remedies that meet women's real needs" (Ralph 1999, 1). We are also reminded that gender-related change in humanitarian work

often appears to be an elusive endeavor. Nevertheless, there is room for optimism. Transnational advocates have successfully lobbied the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) to address the plight of refugee women, recognizing that women have specific gender-related experiences, needs and resources. Thus while UNHCR had once delivered assistance and protection based on a presumed neutrality, the organization now officially recognizes gender differences within refugee populations and strives to design programmes based on this diversity. This optimism must be tempered, however; despite UNHCR policy change and dedicated resources, gender-sensitive field practices are inconsistently applied. When implemented, varied and often unintended results have followed (EPSA 1999).<sup>1</sup> This discrepancy is indicative of a wider global pattern: women's movements and networks have successfully lobbied for policy change in a number of UN bodies, yet "little progress has been made in dismantling institutionalized male privilege" (Staudt 1997, 3). As a result, Kathleen Staudt concludes that at times, "prospects for redistributive change look grim." In this respect, the case of the UNHCR and refugee women appears to be highly representative of institutional reform and the integration of gender concerns into institutions of global governance more broadly.

The apparent elusiveness of gender-related change in international organizations also points to a gap in feminist theories and conceptual approaches to global governance (Stienstra 1994; Whitworth 1994; Meyer & Prugl 1999; Winslow 1995). In the past

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<sup>1</sup> That change is slow is no small concern given that 80 percent of the 24 million persons of concern to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) are women and their dependent children (PFA 1995, 136).

decade, studies in feminist approaches to global governance (FGG)<sup>2</sup> have focused on the ability of women as activists to challenge and change ideas about gender in global governance. In doing so, these approaches have illustrated that global structures are indeed gendered, and that women are agents of change in the construction and reconstruction of gender relations. The thesis posits that a focus on 'external', global factors conditioning gender-related change in FGG downplays the role of organizational structures and 'internal' advocates in this process. Furthermore, FGG generally fails to trace the linkages between global policies and local practices. As a result, how national and local contexts, as well as agents, affect the process of gender-related change in field practices are not adequately captured.

To address this gap, the thesis proposes a multi-level analysis which links the global, national and local. In this way, the points of intersection or fissures between global policies and strategies for change and field practices come to light. Further, I argue that external and internal factors conditioning institutional and policy change in gender relations within international organizations must be analyzed together. Hence, I propose a hybrid of different conceptual approaches: feminist approaches to global political economy (Stienstra 1994; Whitworth 1994), transnational advocacy networks (Keck & Sikkink 1998) and gender studies of institutional change (Kardam 1991, 1995; Goetz 1995; Miller 1998). A case study approach is then introduced to situate the effects of global strategies and policies in national and local contexts, and to consider how

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<sup>2</sup> In this thesis, I use the umbrella term feminist approaches to global governance (FGG) to refer to a range of emerging studies which analyze gender assumptions and practices within global norms, rules and state and non-state actors. A variety of conceptual approaches are included under this term, including liberal-pluralist, post-modern, and political economy.

refugee men and women encounter and respond to global initiatives to promote gender equality in humanitarian assistance settings.

The central questions framing this thesis then, include: how does global agenda setting and policy change in UNHCR occur, and with what effect on institutionalized gender relations? How do global policies translate or fail to translate into changed practices in the field, and how do refugee women and men encounter and respond to these efforts? And what can case studies tell us about the intersections and gaps between the global, national and local, as well as feminist approaches to global governance? Drawing on the hybrid conceptual approach noted above, I argue that the interplay of global, historical structures (political economy) and transnational advocates provide useful insights into the process of policy change within UNHCR. Gender studies of institutional change further elucidate how and why gender-related change occurs, often in distorted or unintended ways, in UNHCR. Case studies then highlight the relationships between multi-level interactions or inactions around the implementation of global policies in national and local settings.

Institutional change must be distinguished from policy change or agenda setting. The introduction of a gender policy can inject new ideas into an organization, outlining a set of objectives or goals to be accomplished. However, new ideas are filtered through existing institutional arrangements and by actors working within them. Institutional change in gender relations involves a transformation of structures and practices within an organization, so that all actors assume responsibility for gender equality, and gender equality is promoted in organizational structures and practices.<sup>3</sup> The thesis is premised

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<sup>3</sup> Gender equality means that “men and women enjoy the same status. Gender equality means that women and men have equal conditions for realizing their full human rights and potential to contribute to national,



on the assumption that, in historically male-biased organizations, institutions often constrain the ability of actors to promote gender equality and implement gender-related policies. Policy gives gender advocates leverage and legitimacy to do this, but policies alone do not automatically lead to institutional change.

The concept of gender mainstreaming is a useful lens through which to analyze gender-related institutional change. It refers to a “process of assessing the implications for women and men of any planned action including legislation, policies or programmes, in any area and at all levels” (E/1997/100). Further, it is a strategy for “making women’s and men’s concerns and experiences an integral dimension in the design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of policies and programmes...” (*Ibid.*) Through this strategy and process, institutions are presumably transformed to promote gender equality. Therefore, the degree to which standard policies and programmes incorporate gender analysis, as well as the degree to which organizational practices and agents promote gender equality, are good measures of gender-related change in institutions.

At the same time, gender mainstreaming may also require “initiatives to enable refugee women as well as refugee men to formulate and express their views and participate in decision-making across all refugee related issues” (SCRWGE 2000, 6). In a word, specific initiatives may be necessary to promote equality of access, opportunity and control over resources. Nonetheless, women’s projects alone are unlikely to result in long term changes in gender relations. Institutions which affect the lives of women and men must also be engaged and transformed.

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political, economic, social and cultural development, and to benefit from the results” (SWC 1996, 3). Gender equality does not imply that males and females are/should be the same. Gender equality recognizes differences but strives to ensure that these differences do not become the basis of discrimination”.

The thesis also highlights the importance of analyzing the relationship between changes in the global political economy and recent changes in UNHCR's mandate, specifically as they affect the process of gender mainstreaming. As the previous paragraph implies, gender mainstreaming requires a *long term approach* which both engages institutions and facilitates refugee participation (a grass-roots or 'bottom-up' approach). While the ultimate goal is gender equality achieved through systemic transformation, dedicated resources are required to catalyze and move this process forward. As the second and third sections of the thesis will argue, the process of gender mainstreaming – while endorsed by a number of members of the international community (including UNHCR) in the Beijing Platform for Action (PFA 1995) and in ECOSOC Resolutions – is potentially compromised by prevailing neo-liberal economic norms which condition the activities of states and international organizations. As the mandate of UNHCR expands in the 21st century, the organization is also faced with the process of streamlining resources, staff and programmes. The simultaneous drive to promote sustainable, long term change and rapid impact, relief-based humanitarian operations results in a complex contradiction that gender advocates must begin to address and overcome.

## **1.2 Gender Studies of Forced Displacement**

The following section reviews and critiques gender analyses of legal protection and humanitarian assistance to forcibly displaced populations. While these studies highlight the relevance of gender to humanitarian work, the importance of political economy is seriously downplayed. Gender studies of forced displacement hang on the

assumption that gender is an important variable both within refugee populations and refugee-related work. For instance, gender roles and relations affect men and women's respective experiences throughout the different stages of flight, exile and return. In refugee camps, men generally experience a sense of impotence or feelings of anger and loss when they are no longer able to carry out traditional productive, public sphere roles (Turner 1999). Women who participated in public sphere activities prior to displacement have also found that they are often unable to continue to carry out these activities in exile. At the same time, most refugee women must carry on traditional domestic tasks, caring for children and the elderly, but under changed and often strenuous circumstances (Forbes-Martin 1992).

Exploring a range of issue areas, gender studies of forced displacement have documented the detrimental consequences of eliding the experiences of refugee men with those of refugee women (Kelly 1989a & b). For example, the distribution of goods and services within camps has traditionally been conducted in consultation with male leaders. Studies reveal that this method of distribution sometimes results in the malnutrition, poor health and increased workloads of refugee women not consulted (Bonnerjea 1985,13; Camus-Jacques 1992,148). Health care programmes in refugee camps which fail to recognize the specificity of women's needs or to reflect sensitivity to cultural norms have diminished women's health (Getu & Nsubuga 1996). In overcrowded camps, the health of all refugees is precarious, but women may have especially acute problems getting care. For instance, due to traditional gender relations and cultural medicinal practices, many female refugees are unlikely to seek the services of Western health-care providers if they

are male. Gynecological problems and complications related to pregnancies in particular go untreated for these reasons (Baines 1999).

In part, the exclusion or marginalization of refugee women can be explained in terms of assumptions relating to gender roles embedded in assistance processes (Baines 1999). These processes reflect the public/private split prevalent in liberal political theory and cultural norms and practices in many societies. They encode the assumption that refugee men are the sole income-earners of family units and active in the public sphere while women are engaged in reproductive work in the private sphere. Thus the economic stability and well-being of a community are thought to have been secured if the needs of men (as the productive and sole or primary income earner) are met. For instance, training and educational programmes were historically targeted at men. As a result, refugee girls are often unable to obtain an education and refugee women, the skills to get a job (Quick 1996).

Given that the 1951 Convention is the cornerstone of international legal norms underpinning refugee rights, feminist legal approaches concentrate their efforts on re-envisioning a gender-sensitive legal framework. This involves re-examining the definition of persecution, and the ground upon which one can claim refugee status (Castel 1992; Cipriani 1993; Connors 1997; Greatbatch 1989; Indra 1987; Kelly 1993a; Neal 1988). In general, most feminist legal scholars agree that the 1951 Refugee Convention separates public and private sphere issues. Consequently, gender-related persecution has been perceived as a 'private' issue and refugee women seeking asylum on this basis have been excluded from the refugee definition.

For example, “women are punished, abused, violated and terrorized for reasons that apply only to women, and in ways that are committed only against women” (Macklin 1996, 121), yet such forms of persecution and grounds for claiming persecution are generally deemed private and beyond the scope of international protection.<sup>4</sup> Rape, beatings while pregnant, dowry deaths, forced abortion or sterilization, forced marriage and forced female genital mutilation may be inflicted on a woman due to her race, religion, nationality or political opinion or because of her gender. Yet historically, international human rights laws have considered such violations as ‘personal’, based on traditional assumptions regarding the separation of the public and private. Thus according to Doreen Indra, the 1951 Refugee Convention silences the “ways in which gender may play a major role in how refugees are created, and how distinct the refugee experience can be for men and women” (1987, 3). As a result, women fleeing gender related persecution are often denied asylum on these grounds, or never considered as an applicant in the first place.

In short, feminist approaches to refugee studies/displacement identify ‘practical’ issues facing refugee and displaced women in day to day life, stemming from ‘male bias’ in assistance and protection activities. Thus, these approaches tend to focus on the ‘gender’ specific ‘problems’ of refugee/displaced women. A liberal feminist strategy of ‘adding’ women is advocated to correct male bias. However, this gender-specific focus is problematic insofar as the socio-economic and political circumstances surrounding the

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<sup>4</sup> Feminist legal scholars have identified a number of categories into which such experiences may fall, including: 1) gender-specific forms of persecution; 2) transgressing social and religious mores; 3) rape and other forms of sexual violence; 4) domestic violence; 5) relationships to family members a persecutor seeks to harm, and; 6) persecutory laws, policies or practices and methods used to implement laws (Kelly 1993a&b).

state of being a refugee/displaced person, and conditioning assistance and the provision of protection, are often neglected.

While gender studies of forced displacement advocate the institutionalization of gender-sensitive and woman inclusive approaches, the global context in which refugee movements take place and international organizations respond, has changed dramatically in the past decade. These changes place strain on actors such as the UNHCR to extend adequate protection and assistance to refugees, even as the concept of protection and practice of assistance is renegotiated by feminist academics and activists.

For example, the scale and scope of recent conflicts and refugee movements are startling and disturbing: of the 22 million people killed in armed conflict since 1945, one quarter perished between 1990-1995 alone; and of this number, between 75-90 per cent were civilians (Chopra 1997, 1). Mutilation, torture and rape of civilians have become tools of modern warfare. And as the scale of atrocities peak, persons flee *en masse*: tens of thousands of Kurds fled the scourge of biological warfare in Iraq; a sea of 500,000 Rwandans crossed the border to escape the butchery committed with machetes in their country within a few short days; and, millions have been displaced by ethnic cleansing campaigns in the Former Yugoslavia. In this decade alone, up to 42 million people have been displaced by the scourge of conflict (Feldman 2000). In short, the movement of people in the late twentieth century has been unprecedented in recent history:

Large scale movements of refugees and other forced migrants have become a defining characteristic of the contemporary world. At few times in recent history have such large numbers of people in so many parts of the globe been obliged to leave their own countries and communities to seek safety elsewhere. Never before has the issue of mass population displacement gained such a prominent position on the agenda of the United Nations and its member states (UNHCR 1995a, 11).

The end of the cold war widened the UN Security Council's range of choices with respect to humanitarian intervention. Accordingly, the number of humanitarian interventions has expanded exponentially since the early 1990s (Hicks-Stiehm 1999, 42). In 1992, the former UN Secretary General Boutros Boutros Ghali released *An Agenda for Peace*, which marked a turning point in UN approaches to peacekeeping, making and building. The focus turned to post-conflict interventions to thwart the renewal of conflict, and peacebuilding that involved the enhancement of institutional capacity of local actors to achieve this goal (Boutros-Ghali 1992).

The return and reintegration of refugees was perceived as a strategically important component in peacebuilding operations. The UN General Assembly called upon UNHCR to take a leadership role in repatriation. As a result, UNHCR's mandate has been expanded in recent years, with significant ramifications on the rights of refugees, returnees and internally displaced persons. These changes, and their implications for UNHCR's institutional structures and activities, should be analyzed from a gender perspective. In turn, gender studies of forced displacement must begin to move beyond "simply concerning [research] with including women in structures that deal with refugees...[to] examine the nature of, and constraints which are placed upon multiple structures themselves" (Oswin 1999, 10).<sup>5</sup> This involves examining the global, but also national and local political economies the UNHCR operates within.

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<sup>5</sup> Refugee women have often reminded academic, legal and NGO researchers of the need to address social, political and economic forms of violence they face on a daily basis, in addition to gender related concerns. This sentiment was articulated by representatives of refugee women at the 1989 International Consultation on Refugee Women. In the words of Tonata Emuvula: "We must not just focus our energies on helping refugee women from my country, but we must dedicate ourselves to creating conditions in Namibia which will enable all refugees to return" (In Kelly 1989a).

In other words, I suggest that a gender analysis of political economy is a central starting place to examine what opportunities and obstacles shape the process of institutional change and the implementation of policy on gender issues at the field level. Consequently, these studies fail to explain the process of change in gender relations as they may occur institutionally within refugee-assisting organizations and as they play out in different political-economic and social contexts. As Doreen Indra writes, “I can draw on no overall surveys of the frequency with which [feminist] approaches have become integrated in forced migration programming” (1999, 17). To this end, the thesis proposes the conceptual framework elaborated below.

### 1.3 Conceptual Framework

This thesis proposes a *hybrid* of different conceptual approaches to explain the process of and limitations to policy and institutional change and the gaps between global policies and practices in the field. As I will argue, this hybrid approach captures the interplay of internal and external variables acting upon advocates as they strive to promote gender related changes in UNHCR institutions and programmes. Three conceptual approaches in particular are brought together: *feminist approaches to global political economy (feminist GPE)*, which examines ‘external’ or ‘global’ variables conditioning the process of gender-related change in international organizations; *transnational advocacy networks (TANs)* (Keck and Sikkink 1998) which enhances the conceptualization of agency within feminist GPE; and, *gender studies of institutional change*, which examine ‘internal’ organizational variables affecting the same phenomenon. Moreover, I argue that in order to analyze the gaps and/or points of



intersection between global policies and practices at the field level, a multi-level analysis is required. Drawing upon a country-specific case study approach, this thesis seeks to trace the intersections of the global, national and local, to query what difference global policy and programme changes within an international organization, UNHCR, make to refugees and returnees on the ground.

As the previous section implied, the study of gender-related change in UNHCR is shaped, in part, by events within the global political economy. To this end, feminist approaches to the global political economy (Stienstra 1994; Whitworth 1994) advance a framework that captures the dynamic between transnational activists (agents) and the global political economy (structures). For example, Deborah Stienstra examines the process of gender-related change within the United Nations, focusing on shifts in the global political economy and the activism of global women's movements. Stienstra refers to macro or global forces, stemming in part from transnational (state and non-state) activities and markets, to explain changes in social relations within international organizations.<sup>6</sup> Likewise, Sandra Whitworth explains changes in gender assumptions within the policies of the International Labour Organization and International Planned Parenthood Federation in relation to shifts in global structures and the agency of transnational activists.

To elucidate the concept of agency in feminist GPE, this thesis proposes to utilize Margaret Keck and Kathryn Sikkink's concept of transnational advocacy networks (TANs). Drawing upon a set of historical case studies, Keck and Sikkink have developed a conceptual model of how and when activists working transnationally connect and

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<sup>6</sup> Although Stienstra also examined domestic changes in the forces of production to explain changes in social relations within world order.

organize to realize their objectives, usually with the aim of swaying a state or international organization to change their position on a given issue. The model advanced by these authors is adopted in this thesis to help locate the various actors involved in a transnational refugee women's network, and to examine their resources and strategies in relation to their accomplishments.

Yet this enhanced feminist GPE approach offers only a partial explanation of the process of change and limitations to realizing changes within UNHCR and its policies or programmes. In particular, feminist GPE needs to expand to incorporate the process of institutional change and the role of internal agents in the process of gender-related changes. Under what circumstances does agenda setting or policy change lead to programmatic or institutional changes? How do actors within UNHCR respond to proposed policy changes? What structures exist within the organization that shape and sometimes block the process of change? What role do internal agents play in the process?

Gender studies of institutional change (Goetz 1995; Kardam 1991, 1995; Miller 1998) have already begun to address these questions. These studies focus on the relationship between gender advocates and organizational structures, practices and agents (institutions). Therefore, this approach accounts for the reasons why, even after a policy has been adopted, results vary considerably. In effect, policies are filtered through and modified by an organization's institutions.

What I propose then, is to bridge feminist GPE with gender studies of institutional change. Together, these two compatible approaches identify both external and internal variables which condition the process of change in gender relations and policies within

UNHCR. External advocates (transnational refugee women's networks) and internal advocates (UNHCR staff promoting the issue of refugee women) work within a global political economy with hegemonic norms, rules and procedures. International organizations are actors within the global political economy, and influenced by it. However, these actors are also institutions unto themselves. Inside them, internal advocates must map and address institutional barriers and opportunities to promote change. In short, an explanation of change is amplified by examining the points of intersection or gaps between external and internal advocates and the respective structures they engage. Through this bridge, I seek also to escape the oppositional way state and non-state actors are sometimes portrayed in FGG.<sup>7</sup> This thesis will illustrate the way actors within UNHCR and activists working transnationally often (although not always) depend upon each other or work together to realize common objectives.

Finally, this thesis seeks to extend the analysis of 'global changes' to investigate the impact of these changes 'on the ground'. How and why do new policies or programmes translate or fail to translate into field operations and daily life? Do they provide new opportunities for refugees and returnees? How are these outcomes at variance with the expectations of transnational advocates? To answer these questions, I examine two cases studies, drawing out some of the inter-connections between local, national and global gender relations. A multi-leveled approach explores the relationships between global activities to promote more equitable relations within UNHCR, national level assistance programmes, and local gender relations within refugee camps or return communities.

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<sup>7</sup> There are exceptions to this. For example, Stienstra (1999) has recognized that NGOs and activists often work alongside government actors and agents within international organizations to promote policy change.

I believe this multi-level analytical approach is a natural and necessary extension of the global level of analysis in FGG. Thus, where FGG tends to focus on gender relations in global structures, this thesis attempts to draw out the linkages between these global relationships and gender structures at the national and local level. On the other hand, FGG does identify multi-level actors which engage global structures. Yet how women and men in local settings encounter policies and programmes of international organizations is in need of elaboration and closer examination.

This thesis attempts to examine how refugee women and men respond to UNHCR activities and to analyze the outcomes of specific interventions to promote gender equality/ integrate refugee women in UNHCR programmes. Through country specific case studies, it examines not only the efforts of UNHCR, but also how refugees or returnees encountered these efforts.

### *1.3.1 Epistemological and Ontological Challenges of Hybridity*

The challenges of a hybrid analysis are complex and difficult, but this thesis asserts that it is also necessary in order to advance gender related change. The feminist approaches brought together in this thesis appear to start from very different epistemological and ontological starting points. It is useful here to refer to Cox's (1981) distinction between problem-solving theory and critical theory. In problem solving theory, social and political relationships are understood as immutable, restricted by the wider parameters of social reality. Problem solving thus works within existing sets of parameters to find solutions to given problems. Both the conceptual model of TANs and gender studies of institutions appear to fall within this approach to knowledge, starting

from the assumption that the state is a central actor in international and domestic politics and seeking to carve out change by working within state parameters. Change, then, is located within the confines of existing power relationships centred on the state system.

Critical theory, on the other hand, takes an historical approach to knowledge: critical theorists 'stand back' from the prevailing world order to ask how (and why) that order came about, and importantly, how it may be changing over the long term. In this sense, the world is not 'given', but a series of socially constructed relationships in a constant state of flux and change. The role of the critical theorist then, is to de-construct existing power relations and arrangements (structures) in world orders, and to imagine the sources of change. In doing so, critical theorists work towards an emancipatory project – seeking not to 'tinker' with the existing system as problem solvers do, but to exact a revolutionary transformation. According to Cox, the emancipatory potential of critical approaches stands in contrast to problem-solving theory which in fact helps reproduce existing (and unequal) social and political relations within the narrow confines of positivist knowledge production.

Feminist approaches to GPE draw upon Cox's critical approach, with the added focus on the social construction of gender relations. As Chapter Two will discuss, feminist GPE take a historical view, analyzing the prevailing world orders to understand how gender relations are constructed, how they are changing and why. A proponent of feminist GPE might argue that only a critical approach can help guide wider, historical transformations in gendered structures. From this view, a problem-solving approach will likely only result in short term and superficial changes which ultimately contribute to the

hegemonic power of the patriarchal state. In this view, state-society relations are viewed skeptically, as the state's principle power resources are both coercion and co-option.

While at first glance these two epistemological approaches appear to be at odds, I would in fact argue that the difference between critical and problem solving theory is not as great as it may first appear. Indeed, I would argue that problem solving and critical theory should be brought together in order to deal with the immediacy of everyday world problems but with a long term, strategic and emancipatory view. What is more, both feminist critical and problem solving theory offer a new way of thinking about long term transformation by guiding strategic action in the immediate future. This proposition is revealed in the following exploration of how each feminist approach views the process of change, the state and agency.

Both feminist GPE and gender studies of institutions are concerned with the social construction of gender, the interplay of agents and structures in the process of change, and share the goal of long term, transformation of unequal gender relations. The difference lies in how one perceives the state: can the state act relatively autonomously from dominant interests? Yet even in this area, both feminist GPE and feminist institutionalism see state related change as possible – either through hegemony or relative autonomy. Further, both view it as a long term, historical process which may require incremental change. As a colleague once said, problem-solving can be “revolutionary, its just not quick”. Similarly, while the existing work on TANs may not complicate state-society relationships, it does not take this relationship as unproblematic, nor the state as a monolithic, pluralist and democratic good. Rather, Keck and Sikkink are aware of the limitation of change, and in latter works, Sikkink (1999) explores institutional

reasons why change occurs, is slow or non-existent in states. In a word, TANs may be based in problem solving theory, but a critical analysis is not precluded by this approach.

One can be a problem solver and a critical thinker; those interested in 'emancipation' have no special monopoly on this way of thinking. To assume that problem solvers are incapable of critical thought (as they always fall victim to hegemonic knowledge production) is in fact to strip these actors of agency, a politically convenient argument for critical thinkers who claim that all problem solving is static. Rather, this thesis asserts that change can come about by working within given sets of structures, with the view that said structures are dynamic and that change emanates from working within, outside and through institutions. The challenge is to retain focus on both views of the world, to draw out the relationships between immediate and long term interventions and goals. In short, a hybrid is a means of inviting problem solvers to do some critical thinking, and critical thinkers to do some strategic and tactical analysis. Given 'real world' issues and the goal of transformation of gender relations, the two can offer each other important insights.

#### **1.4 A Note on Methodology**

In the early stages of thesis writing, I sought a theoretical analysis of feminist approaches to global governance through an inter-disciplinary survey of materials relating to my thesis, including feminist legal research, feminist development studies, international organization, as well as research on global norms, gender studies, refugee studies and global political economy. This research stimulated my interest in transnational advocacy and the potential of non-state actors to promote changes in global

governance. However, this exercise in theory brought a great deal of personal frustration as well. For the most part, the bodies of work I studied did not include the perspectives of 'people' but rather wrote from a distance about 'people'. Theorizing from a 'distance' reproduces the separation of 'subject' and 'object', 'researcher' and 'researched.' (Wolfe 1996, 34-35). Inspired by feminist methodologies which seek to narrow this gap, I sought out more practical, hands-on ways of learning about my topic, namely participant observation.

In 1997, I moved to Vancouver where I became involved with a number of refugee related activist groups including Project Accompaniment, a Canadian network established to respond to the request of returning Guatemalan refugees for international accompaniment. This work provided a grass-roots perspective on refugee issues and over the course of the following years I traveled three times to Guatemala to meet with representatives of groups in Guatemalan civil society, including organizations of the internally displaced, returning refugees and women's organizations. A series of interviews in 1999 with UNHCR staff, members of three Guatemalan refugee women's organizations and conversations with international actors involved in the Guatemalan solidarity movement, complemented my academic research. This research later formed the basis of my analysis in Chapter 5.

In the Fall of 1998, I returned to Dalhousie University in Halifax to complete the thesis. Shortly thereafter, an opportunity arose to work in the Senior Co-ordinator for Refugee Women's office at UNHCR Headquarters in Geneva, Switzerland. Between May 30 and November 12 of 1999, I was employed in the Office, which had been transformed in 1999 into a Gender Unit under the Health and Community Services



Division. During my tenure in the Gender Unit, I became actively involved in the development and implementation of a strategy to mainstream a gender and child-rights perspective into UNHCR programmes and operations. This 'hands-on' experience has greatly influenced my understanding of the issues studied in the thesis, enabling me to test the theoretical propositions I had developed over years of academic study. Further, the work experience provided an inside look at the operations of the organization, and access to a wealth of information and resources on refugee issues.

Perhaps more importantly, the experience shaped my understanding of the topic. Prior to working in UNHCR, I was interested in the struggle of actors working outside the organization to promote change. After six months as an 'insider', I realized that the relationships between transnational actors and internal advocates was more fluid than I had first thought. Further, I came to understand the very real challenges to promoting change within institutions. UNHCR is indeed a set of social relationships and institutions which limit choices and pattern behavior, but it is not monolithic. The organization teems with a variety of people and personalities that contribute to this process. This experience provided much of the basis for Chapter 5 of the thesis.

In October of 1999, the Division of Operations (DOS), in which UNHCR's Gender Unit sits, agreed to support a 'mission' to evaluate the Bosnian Women's Initiative (BWI) which, despite setting an important precedent for UNHCR's work and the creation of similar initiatives in Rwanda, Kosovo and Afghanistan, had never before been systematically evaluated. Eventually, I was 'elected' to undertake this mission. The methodology consisted of a combination of individual interviews, group discussions and informal conversations as well as a review of past documents, information papers and

umbrella agency reports on the BWI. I conducted interviews with beneficiaries of BWI funding, Bosnian women's associations, local NGOs, umbrella agency staff and UNHCR personnel, including UNHCR focal points, programme and protection officers, field officers, donor relations, heads of office, members of selection committees, as well as persons from international organizations working in Bosnia-Herzegovina. At the end of my mission, I had consulted over 80 persons involved in the Initiative (See Appendix VI). In addition to qualitative methods, I gathered quantitative analyses of project figures from information papers, umbrella agency reports and BWI newsletters. However, the quantitative data available largely focused on processes of the Initiative (number of projects funded, numbers of beneficiaries, distribution of goods or services); therefore, qualitative analyses formed the basis of my assessment of the impact or 'outputs' of the BWI.

The case studies provide important insights to country specific programmes and move toward 'grounding' theory within specific national contexts. I highlight the local level by describing gender relations within refugee or returnee populations and how these connect to the national and global level. Likewise, I underscore ways in which refugees are agents themselves in this process of re-negotiating gender relations. To do so, I have had to adopt a number of methodological approaches to study my topic not traditionally found in political science, such as participant observation. Appendix IV provides an overview of the challenges of participant observation, as well as the insights gleaned from this approach to knowledge gathering.

## **1.5 Chapter Outline**

The thesis is organized into three parts incorporating eight chapters. The first part identifies the central questions of the thesis, briefly reviews the literatures which inform these questions and establishes the conceptual framework applied throughout the thesis. The second part, *The Political Economy of Gender and UNHCR*, examines the construction and potential transformation of global gender relations as they relate to refugee issues, exploring the role of non-state and state actors as they navigate and contest global, state-based structures. In the third part, *The Political Economy of Gender and Field Operations*, two cases are examined to scrutinize how UNHCR activities to integrate 'refugee women' and 'mainstream' gender into field programmes translate into new opportunities or obstacles for refugees in the field, especially women.

In Part One, Chapter Two develops the conceptual framework of the thesis. Here I explore the contributions and limitations of the three conceptual approaches utilized and 'bridged' in this thesis: feminist approaches to global political economy; TANs; and gender studies of institutional change. The chapter then makes the case for taking a multi-leveled approach to FGG, connecting the global, national and local levels of social life. It highlights the need for new methodologies in FGG, namely case studies or context specific analyses.

In Part Two, Chapter Three traces the evolution and gender dimensions of UNHCR's mandate between 1950-2000. This involves a critical analysis of how Cold War politics limited the activities of the organization and how assumptions about gender remained more or less static. In contrast, the end of the Cold War has led to a tremendous expansion of UNHCR's mandate, opening discursive spaces for the re-conceptualization of gender assumptions. This chapter provides an important entry point

to the larger context shaping gender-relations, particularly the global political economy and how it impacts on UNHCR programmes and the process of change. It therefore sets the stage for future chapters, enabling one to conceptualize the opportunities and obstacles facing advocates who strive to change UNHCR policy, programmes and practices.

Chapter Four examines how shifts in the global political economy provided opportunities for global refugee women's advocates to promote the issue of refugee women globally. Drawing on the conceptual framework of TANs, this chapter analyzes the 'global campaigns' of transnational advocates, including the relationships, resources and 'opportunity structures' which shaped this strategy. It argues that advocates were able to gain enough leverage over UNHCR to pressure the organization to adopt a policy on refugee women by the late 1980s.

Chapter Five extends the analysis developed in Chapter Four by turning to the 'internal campaigns' of UNHCR women/gender advocates within UNHCR between 1990-2000. The chapter highlights the differences between 'integrating' (or adding) women to organizations and gender mainstreaming (or the transformation of institutions so that they promote gender equality). The reasons change remains slow come to light through this distinction. The strategy pursued by internal advocates was keenly sensitive to institutional obstacles and opportunities present within and external to the organization. Therefore, an analysis of institutional change within UNHCR is situated in relation to external pressures shaping the organization.

In the third part of the thesis, two cases studies are examined to illustrate the tensions between structure and agency as they unfold at the intersections of the global,

national and local levels. As Georgina Waylen argues, feminist IO “entails considering not only the impact of different women and women’s movements on institutions and structures but how these institutions and structures can shape and alter gender relations and women’s activities *in particular contexts*” (1998, 1 emphasis mine). In other words, the historical and contextual specificity of any given refugee situation must be taken into consideration to understand how global efforts to promote gender equality translate, or fail to translate, into opportunities for refugee men and women in the field.

In Chapter Six, I analyze UNHCR support to Guatemalan women’s organizations in Mexican camps in the early 1990s. This case study illustrates how a people-oriented approach was readily adopted in the context of UNHCR-Mexico’s work. Supported by UNHCR-Mexico and other international actors, Guatemalan refugee women realized significant gains in the exercise of their rights during this period. Here, internal advocates worked with local women’s organizations to realize these gains. However, the process of return had a negative impact on these women’s associations and initiatives, as men reasserted traditional privilege claims. It is argued that UNHCR, amongst other actors, did not fully comprehend the nature of gender relations within the refugee populations. With hindsight, lessons for future activities can be drawn.

The second case study turns to UNHCR activities to support returnee, displaced and war affected women in Bosnia-Herzegovina (1996-2000) (Chapter Seven, ‘Return and Reintegration’). Its largest operation world-wide during the 1990s, UNHCR activities in Bosnia include longer term reconstruction and reintegration projects. A multi-million dollar Women’s Initiative (the Bosnian Women’s Initiative, or BWI) was co-ordinated by UNHCR between 1996 and 2000. The goals of the initiative were to

support Bosnian women's reintegration in social and economic life. Hundreds of micro-projects, mostly for income generation, were initiated with women's associations. The decision to "mainstream" the BWI into UNHCR general programmes (1999) dramatically shifted the focus of the Initiative, with dubious results for promoting gender equality in the country. As the first of a number of UNHCR Women's Initiatives in post-conflict countries, a case study of the BWI suggests much about the future directions of UNHCR activities to mainstream a gender equality perspective in the field. UNHCR-Bosnia and Herzegovina also provides a useful comparison to UNHCR-Mexico: internal advocates for gender mainstreaming were not present in Bosnia, and Bosnian women's organizations were shut out of decision-making processes partly as a result.

The two case studies were selected for both practical and theoretical reasons. In practical terms, the two cases were countries I had the opportunity of travelling to and working within. Theoretically, they provide rich cases for comparison based on the fact they represent two different periods of UNHCR operations, distinguished by the Cold War and Post-Cold war periods. Guatemala represents a more traditional UNHCR operation in a long term refugee context and was initiated prior to the organization's commitment to gender mainstreaming. In contrast, operations in Bosnia-Herzegovina took place in an in-country, post conflict setting, dealing primarily with returnees. Special projects were initiated in Bosnia to meet with gender mainstreaming commitments. Finally, that the two cases represented very different cultural contexts is important, permitting consideration of the role of culture in the process of gender mainstreaming.

UNHCR supported Guatemalan refugees in Mexico for over a decade and a half. The stability of this refugee population meant greater opportunities to reflectively design programmes that encouraged refugee participation. Ironically, refuge was a time of empowerment for many Guatemalan refugee women and men, where the support of international actors such as UNHCR enabled refugees to organize around their own right to return. In comparison, UNHCR interventions in Bosnia are symbolic of the new directions the organization has taken in the past decade. In the post-conflict period, UNHCR became a critical actor in a multi-organizational effort to 'capacitize' Bosnians in the reconstruction of their country, with the aim to build a lasting peace. UNHCR was responsible for the return and reintegration of millions of persons, all very recently displaced by the conflict, and all reluctant to return. These were entirely new areas of work for UNHCR, shifting from relief to development-oriented approaches.

Pressure from donors to act in a rapid manner meant non-inclusive, top-down approaches were often adopted to this work. In the case of the Bosnian women's initiative, women's organizations were recipients of funding and excluded from decision-making. Further, the initiative may have had a marginalizing effect on women in standard programmes. Thus, the case of Bosnia and Herzegovina contrast sharply with that of Guatemala where women's organizations were encouraged to set their own agendas, and where efforts were made to mainstream gender throughout programming. Conclusions of the case studies and implications for FGG is explored in Chapter Eight of the thesis.

## **1.6 Conclusions**

In summary, the thesis adopts a multi-level, hybrid conceptual approach to understand why gender-related change in UNHCR institutions and field practices remain slow and inconsistent. This analysis extends feminist approaches to global governance beyond an 'external' and global focus, to examine 'internal', national and local connections. As such, the thesis addresses not only the puzzle of gender-related change in refugee studies, but provides a broader set of conclusions as to why gender remains an 'elusive agenda' (Jahan 1995) in international organizations at the start of a new millennium.



## **Chapter Two**

### **Gender-related Change in International Organizations and in Field Operations: A Hybrid Approach and Multi-Level Analysis**

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#### **2.1 Introduction**

The core of this thesis is concerned with policy and institutional gender-related change, and understanding the gaps between global policies and national and local practices. In order to conceptualize the process and limitations of change in gender policy and institutional structures of international organizations, the interplay of transnational advocates and historical structures must be examined. Structures are both external and internal to the organization under study, and agents are located both outside and inside international organizations. Gender is a relational concept that does not exist in a vacuum, but in a web of other social, political and economic relations. These relations form structures that agents construct, challenge and reconstruct over time. Structures and agents interplay at different levels of social organization -- the local, national and global.

Feminist approaches to global governance have begun to explain, to varying degrees, how and why change in gender relations is possible within international organizations and global governance. This chapter argues that feminist GPE, in particular, offers important insights, conceptualizing the interplay of agents and structures within the context of the global political-economy. However, I argue that more attention needs to be paid to how, specifically, transnational actors set agendas and realize institutional changes. To this end, Sikkink and Keck's models of transnational advocacy networks is helpful, as are gender studies of institutional arrangements within international organizations. Therefore, a 'bridge' is proposed between these three approaches.

Finally, how changes in policy or gender relations in international organizations translate into activities in the field, and in turn open (or close) new opportunities for women and men at the local level requires careful study. Moreover, case studies can highlight how national and local contexts shape the process of implementing global gender policies into field projects and programmes. A multi-level analysis then, traces gender politics through various levels of social life, where men and women actively reproduce and transform gender relations in the institutions with which they interact. Through the two empirical analyses in section three of this thesis, I examine how assumptions about gender relations within UNHCR impact, or fail to impact, upon the lives of refugee men and women. This moves feminist global governance from the global to the national and local levels where millions of refugee women, men, girls and boys encounter and respond to refugee assistance and protection activities every day.

## **2.2 Feminist Approaches to Global Governance**

Feminist studies of global governance expand beyond a narrow focus on international organizations, to political processes that engage all actors – state and non-state – as well as norms and rules that emerge from but also condition the activities of global actors. Meyer and Prugl (1999), citing Kratowich, argue that global governance concerns not only the outputs of international organizations, their characteristics and processes of decision-making, but the global structures within which such international actors are constantly engaged. Feminist approaches to global governance, generally fall into one of two lines of inquiry: examining the construction of gender relations in global structures on the one hand, (Prugl 1999; Sisson Runyan 1999; Hallock-Johnson 1999;

Waring 1989) and the activities of global women's movements to promote change in global structures on the other (Joachim 1999; Higer 1999; West 1999; Miller 1999). As such, these approaches have helped to establish one of the underlying theoretical premises of this thesis: that is, ideas inform and shape practices within global governance, and both state and non-state actors actively construct, challenge and re-construct these ideas.

For instance, feminist legal scholars have argued that international human rights laws such as the Universal Declaration on Human Rights reproduce the separation of the 'public' and 'private' (Bunch 1995; Charlesworth 1995; Sullivan 1995). Although women's human rights are violated in the 'public' sphere alongside of men, women encounter violations historically constructed as 'private', such as rape and other forms of sexual violence, marital violence, reproductive violence such as forced sterilization and abortion, bride burning and forced female circumcision. Feminist legal scholars have demonstrated that state actors condone such forms of violence through their inaction and, ultimately, must be viewed as responsible for violations of women's rights (Mackinnon 1994; Copelon 1995; Rao 1996; Cook 1995; Heise 1995).

At the same time, transnational advocacy on the issue of women's rights has begun to challenge this historical separation within global norms and discourses. For example, the Women's Centre for Global Leadership based in New York, initiated a global campaign around the issue of women's rights, culminating at the 1993 Vienna Conference on Human Rights. Lobbying strategies -- such as a global petition protesting violence against women and a Tribunal on the Violation of Women's Rights -- resulted in the inclusion of a number of recommendations by women's rights groups in the final

wording of the Vienna Declaration and Program of Action (Friedman 1995; Joachim 1999; Miller 1999). Further, a transnational women's rights movement has bolstered efforts to establish a Special Rapporteur on Violence Against Women in the UN Human Rights Commission and successfully lobbied for the adoption of the Declaration on Violence against Women by the UN General Assembly in 1993. Likewise, the Inter-American Commission of Women (CIM) -- with the aid of women's groups and movements across the Americas -- pushed for and realized the adoption of the Inter-American Convention on Violence Against Women (Meyer 1999).

In short, feminist approaches to global governance attempt to “focus on women’s emancipatory strategies and the power consequences” of global gender structures (Meyer & Prugl 1999). Yet these approaches tend to either analyze the process of agenda setting, norm and policy change (agency) or deconstruct global gender structures which exclude and oppress women (structuralism). Their explanatory power would be greatly enhanced by an analysis of agent/structure engagement. Through an agent-structure analysis, the limitations of agenda setting and policy change come to light.

For example, in her study of global environment politics, Charlotte Bretherton (1998) studies the way in which the concept of gender is usually transformed to mean ‘women’ in global agendas, thereby obscuring the role of gender relations and effectively removing the issue of power as a focus of inquiry and policy formulation. To understand how this process occurs, Bretherton analyzes the relationship between human agency and the structures they create and experience: “structures are deeply embedded practices or rules, which we create and yet also experience as external to ourselves, and use to monitor our own actions and those of others” (96). Bretherton argues that the elision of

'gender' and 'women' in international agendas occurs because patriarchal structures frame processes of agenda setting. These structures are created through:

the interplay of social gender relations and re-encountered as asymmetrical patterns of constraint and opportunity which advantage some women over others but systematically favour men; they are experienced as the gender identities offered by society. Thus gender and patriarchy are mutually constitutive. In many societies, and among sections of most societies, gender identities and the asymmetries they encompass are believed, by women and men, to be natural (*Ibid.*).

Thus gender relations at the global level in part rely upon men and women to willingly act out gender roles (Enloe 1989). Yet if women and men are complicit in the construction of gender structures, so too are they capable of transforming them. Here a more engaged approach, one which captures the interplay of structures and agents, is advocated in feminist approaches to global political economy.

Drawing upon the insights of Robert Cox (1981), Sandra Whitworth (1994) and Deborah Stienstra (1994) elaborate this approach. Cox and others (e.g. Gill and Law 1988; Murphy and Tooze 1991) have made important contributions to what is today referred to as 'critical' international political economy (IPE). In this body of thought, historical structures evolve and change over time in relation to a complex set of social, political and economic relations. Cox developed a model to explain the process of change in historical structures at the global level. This model draws a relationship between historical structures and agents. Historical structures are composed of: ideas (thought patterns); material capabilities (productive forces); and institutions, (patterns of power). Human agency stems from different social relations, such as class, race and gender.

Cox evokes the Gramscian notion of 'hegemony', which "brings ideas and culture into materialist explanations of social order and social change" (MacLean 1998, 20). However, Cox tends to focus on transnational class relations in his analyses, identifying conflicts as originating in changes in the forces of production. Class conflict creates "new patterns of social relations which change the rules of the game out of which...new forms of conflict may be expected to arise" over the course of history (Cox 1981, 134). In his focus on class, Cox fails to adequately explain how class intersects with other crucial dimensions of social relations, such as gender.

Whitworth reminds us that 'gender' is not simply a social relation which conditions relationships between men and women; it is also constructed through social relations because "it is only through these relationships and struggles that understandings about gender are both created and discovered" (1994, 65). The construction of gender relations, therefore, likewise involves the interplay of both agents and social structures which shape action: "gendered agents both create and are created by the structures they face." As Whitworth explains,

...meanings about gender are maintained and contested through the practices and struggles of actors engaged in relationships with each other and the institutions in which they are involved. Thus the content of what relations of gender look like is arrived at not in any static way but through the activities of real, living human beings operating within real historical circumstances (1994, 65).

To identify and analyze this relationship between agents and structures, Whitworth focuses on the interplay of ideas, material (economic) conditions and institutions.

Ideas about gender are constructed through social relations within given economic contexts and are reflected in the institutions we create. Shifts in economic structures affect ideas and institutions. Institutions reflect collective images consistent with given

power relations. To uncover the collective images of institutions, Whitworth suggests that we study the various policy documents, objectives, goals and initiatives of an institution. This extends to international institutions which likewise reflect particular relations of power. In short:

The material conditions of people's lived existence, the ideas held by actors and the ways in which women and men engage with each other and with the institutions in which they are involved serve to create, maintain and change particular understandings of gender. Observing these activists provides us with some insight into why and how those understanding are sustained (1994, 71).

To apply this conceptualization to a discussion of gender in global governance, Whitworth examines two case studies of a governmental and non-governmental organization: the International Labour Organization (ILO) and the International Planned Parenthood Federation (IPPF) respectively. She analyzes the interplay of transnational women's movements, ideas about gender and 'material' conditions which create and re-create gender relations in and through these international organizations.

In her analysis of the ILO, for example, Whitworth argues that shifts in the global political economy, namely the entrance of women into the paid work force in Western states, intersected with ideas of women's equality with men in the workplace, eventually leading to the transformation of assumptions about gender in the 1930s. Prior references to women in ILO policies identified them with a specific gender role: that of mother. Protective legislation was created to shield women from discrimination during their pregnancy and in their position as mother. Protective legislation began to give way to policies focused on women's equality to men in the 1930s, as activists emphasized the importance of promoting women's rights in the workplace. Despite this transformation, men continued to be perceived as the universal standard 'worker', to which women were

compared. Women were still assumed to hold the ultimate responsibility for childcare and other domestic work, while men were considered the 'real' worker with no special requirements.

In *Women's Movements and International Organizations*, Deborah Stienstra analyzes the relationship between global women's movements, change in material conditions (the global economy) and shifts in gendered discourses in the texts and practices of the League of Nations and United Nations (1994). She argues that a critical feminist approach captures the "socially constructed nature of inequality between men and women as well as the historical and materially based conditions within which these inequalities are found" (1994, 27). For example, Stienstra illustrates how global political-economic changes, such as World War II, the Cold War, and the new international division of labour, have led to shifts in international texts and discourses on gender. Women's movements, organizing and responding to shifts in the global political economy, have been "players" in shifts to gendered discourses.

The first shift took place prior to the Second World War when women began to have greater visibility in the League, albeit a presence that failed to challenge the idea that women were naturally apolitical. Women's envoys to the League were recognized on the basis that women could represent 'private sphere' issues related to women. Stienstra suggests this shift occurred in response to women's suffrage movements and the increased presence of women in the workforce during the First World War. As Stienstra observes, "by limiting women's participation in international organizations to a narrow range of social issues, those in decision making positions were adapting their assumptions about gender to the changes in women's lives" (1994, 150).



The second shift occurred in the 1950s as a discourse of equal rights emerged globally, wherein the gendered division of labour was challenged. In theory, this meant that women and men could and should play new gender roles. However, the emphasis remained on women's capacity to engage in public sphere activities without diminishing their private sphere responsibilities. The third notable shift corresponds to the global economic crises and then recession in the 1970s and 1980s. The stagnation of economic development cast doubt on past strategies and an 'efficiency approach' marked the entrance of a neo-liberal era globally. During this period, domestic work was finally recognized as essential to economic growth, and women's inclusion in development projects essential to development. The women in development approach (WID) was then adopted in key UN agencies seeking to integrate women in their programmes. Stienstra argues that this final shift was a return to "the acceptance of difference, as seen in the existing roles in society, rather than, as in the equal-rights approach, an attempt to change those roles" (*Ibid.*, 151).

Helpfully, Stienstra advances a model of transnational advocacy in her text, which identifies various actors at different social locations and with contrasting access to resources (p.31). Further, Stienstra distinguishes between 'mainstreaming' and 'disengagement' strategies (p.38-40). In the first, well-organized NGOs with astute knowledge of UN protocol work closely with government officials to influence the policy making process. In the second approach, NGOs work outside official circles in search of alternative solutions to state-led ones. Disengagement may involve extensive networking with other NGOs in order to build an important information base and communication links, further improving organizational resources.

In addition, groups which work outside existing institutions might engage in 'grass-roots' level activism, raising awareness of women at the local level. Feminist analyses generally present both strategies as complementary and necessary (Stienstra 1994; Meyer & Prugl 1999; Clark, Friedman & Hochstetler 1998). However, it is important to note that NGOs are not always connected horizontally as they work toward common visions. Differing capacities regarding access to resources and/or state actors may result in schisms or tensions within a network (see Higer 1999). Therefore, it is critical to identify differences which exist in global women's movements for change, a process which Deborah Stienstra began to advance significantly in her study of women's movements and the United Nations (1994, 27-33).

Stienstra (1999) argues that the ability of non-state actors to influence norms may depend on the type of norm being engaged. She distinguishes between comprehensive norms which span world orders (for example, norms on liberalization today) and specific norms relating to a specific level of global organization, such as a regional association of states (for example, the Inter-American Commission on Women). She notes that women's movements are more likely to have an impact on specific norms where 'opportunity structures' exist, defined as "the opening up of access to participation, shifts in ruling alignments, the availability of influential allies, and cleavages within and among elites" (Stienstra quoting Tarrow 1999, 271). Stienstra's insights resonate well with an emerging body of literature on transnational activism in IR. In particular, Margaret Keck and Kathryn Sikkink's (1998) *Activists Beyond Borders: Advocacy Networks in International Politics*, provides a useful conceptual framework to assess the capacity of

transnational advocates to 'make change' globally. It is to this conceptual approach that I turn to next.

### **2.3 Transnational Advocacy Networks**

Networks are a critical resource in moving a social issue forward: they sponsor meaning, reinforce collective identity, and function as an accessible background structure of resources (Spencer-Nimmons, 1994b).

Theoretical interest in the role of non-state actors began in the sub-discipline of International Relations (IR) sometime in the late 1960s. Research centred on the capacity of non-state actors to influence foreign-policy-making in addition to the structure of international organization itself (Mitrany 1966; Keohane and Nye 1977). After a brief de-centering of transnational relations by neo-realist approaches, a renewed interest in non-state actors emerged in the late 1980s. For example, Thomas Risse-Kappen's *Bringing Transnational Relations Back In* strives to assess the conditions in which transnational non-state actors shape the policy making process of states (1995, 7). However, the works in this edited collection strive to tighten the conceptual loose ends of earlier analyses, positing that transnational actors and coalitions are shaped by both domestic and international structures.

For instance, the normative and organizational arrangements which structure state-society relations shape the degree to which non-state actors have influence. Presumably, more open state-society relations (such as those found in a democratic system) provide greater opportunities to non-state actors. On the other hand, the international institutionalization, or the extent to which specific issue-areas are regulated by (rigid or open) bilateral agreements, multilateral regimes, and/or international

organizations, likewise shape the relative degree of opportunity to non-state actors (1995, 6). Social movement theorists (Tarrow 1994) refer to these entrance points as 'opportunity structures', both in the classic sense (access to political institutions) and in a more dynamic sense (changes in political relations which provide opportunity).

A number of recent academic works contemplate how transnational actors may in fact constitute a nascent global civil society (Lipschultz 1992; Millennium, Special Issue 1994). This literature considers how the process of globalization has both linked citizens transnationally and evoked a sense of disillusionment on the part of citizens with the state. Through transnational activism, individuals are challenging the state system from both 'above' and 'below' and seeking to "reconstruct, re-imagine or re-map" global politics (Lipschultz 1992, 391). In this approach, ideas, values and norms are terrains wherein power operates and reproduces itself. Mounting challenges to power relations, then, involve contesting global norms and articulating alternative ones (Lynch 1998). Transnational labour, environmental, Indigenous, women's and peace movements for instance, challenge sets of ideas about class, capitalism, race, gender and power, seeking to transform the way states act (or suggesting alternatives to the state) by challenging the very normative foundations they act upon.

Laura MacDonald (1994) has argued that it is unhelpful to conceive of 'global civil society' as monolithic. Tensions among different actors within any civil society exist; both conservative and alternative elements are present, often working at cross-purposes on common causes. Additionally, non-governmental actors are not necessarily connected along horizontal and egalitarian lines as some proponents of the 'global civil society' approach suggest. Transnational actors within a common movement (such as

the environmental movement) often have differential access to resources and influence, sometimes leading to unequal relationships among non-state actors. Finally, a focus on global civil society as a monolith subsumes the agency of non-state actors in relation to specific changes in policies and/or institutional arrangements of state actors and international organizations. In other words, focus on a 'counter-hegemonic movement' may defuse more measurable changes that can be realized at a policy level or within international institutions.

Transnational interactions are often structured in the form of networks, linking domestic NGOs in one country, to domestic NGOs working in another, to NGOs operating at a regional or global level. Transnational activities and actors merge around a range of issues and identities – corporate, scientific, professional or epistemic. Yet as suggested above, actors are also motivated to organize transnationally around 'principled ideas', such as human rights, ant-racism, environment or women's rights.

Sikkink (1993) first introduced the concept of 'principled issue-networks' in her analysis of human rights movements and their impact on state sovereignty in Latin America. The findings of this study were later expanded and reinforced by the addition of several empirical case studies on women's suffrage, the environment, and global efforts to promote action on Violence Against Women as a universal human rights issue (Keck & Sikkink 1998). Sikkink eventually adopted the term transnational advocacy networks (TANs) to describe the inter-relationships forged among different actors around specific issues of common interest. Networks are generally composed of various actors at different levels of social interaction, including "parts of IGOs at both the international

and regional levels, international NGOs on human rights, domestic NGOs on human rights, and private foundations” (Sikkink 1993, 416).

A critical feature of TANs is the exchange of information. TANs are in fact producers of new information which is, in turn, disseminated to key actors in order to stimulate policy and institutional changes among global actors. The exchange of information is so important to TANs, that it defines the viability of the network itself: information flow between various actors comprising the network is crucial to its cohesiveness. Information exchange is both formal and informal. The latter involves an exchange of experiences, findings and strategies through informal mechanisms such as emails, websites, conversations and telephone calls. More formal exchanges take place at meetings, conferences and through reports or studies. In addition, networks are often connected through the provision of services, such as training workshops. Sikkink concludes that as a consequence of these interconnections “the members of the issue network work together in a constant but informal, uncoordinated, and non-hierarchical manner” (1993, 417).

Diverse actors within the network are linked together by a common ‘framework’ or ‘principled idea’, such as ‘anti-racism’ or ‘indigenous rights’. Cohesiveness is maintained through the ability of diverse groups to share common values with regard to a specific issue. Thus where global women’s networks encountered major rifts relating to North/South and East/West tensions in the 1980s, actors within these regions were able to come together around the issue of ‘domestic violence,’ understood as a universal problem, regardless of a country’s political regime (Sikkink and Keck 1998).

International and domestic NGOs are essential to all issue-networks. NGOs are the action initiators of issue-networks, often taking a lead role and placing pressure on larger and more powerful actors -- such as international organizations and states -- to act or adopt a certain position (Sikkink 1993, 416). At the same time, to argue that actors in a TAN are located strictly outside of state or international institutions would be misleading. In fact, individual actors may move from NGO communities to work inside state bureaucracies and back again (Stienstra 1999).

While different actors within networks may share a common interest in a given issue, contrasting access to resources and relations with state actors sometimes result in undemocratic consequences. This tension was prevalent in the Latin American women's network in the preparation for and participation in the Fifth World Conference on Women in Beijing. Latin American feminists have experienced an "NGOization and transnationalization" during the transition to democracy in the region. Many grass-roots activists who had formerly worked outside of and against the state, began to enter politics directly, or became consultants to the state and international organizations seeking to support gender equality (Schilds 1998). The expertise of feminists within state institutions or acting as consultants to the state, was distinctly favoured during the Beijing conference, revealing the degree to which more professionalized, policy-oriented feminist NGOs and actors were privileged voices in the process. Concern was expressed that the 'interfacing' (Alvarez 1998, 313) between feminist NGOs, the UN and state actors led to a co-option of the transnational Latin American women's movement. In fact, state actors claimed to have consulted civil society "by virtue of involving a handful of NGOs" even

though the majority of grass-roots groups present at Beijing were excluded from the consultation process.

At the same time, certain advantages may arise from differently situated actors, and these differences do not always lay the basis for confrontation. Deborah Stienstra (1994) has identified at least two different types of political engagement: mainstreaming (working within existing organizations) and disengagement (working outside of existing organizations to find alternatives to existing institutional arrangements). Mainstreaming may allow activists to use 'inside' connections and spheres of influence to place feminist issues on the agenda. Disengagement allows activists an opportunity to foster alternative means of organizing, free from patriarchal structures. These two strategies, and the actors likely to engage them, can work together to promote a common objective and within a common network formed around a particular issue. This point is taken up by Alvarez:

The Beijing process itself induced activists -- most often at the initiative of or under the leadership of feminist NGOs -- to forge new local, national, regional, and global coalitions, reinforcing the growing tendency to transform the largely informal linkages fashioned through numerous local and regional encuentros into the more formal, structured redes (networks) ... of the 1990s (p. 308).

This in turn, was a critical factor contributing to the improved capacity of the transnational network to influence global institutions and policy areas. From this example, then, we are reminded of the different roles actors play in the network, located in the grass-roots, or in close relation to global actors they seek to influence .

In sum, actors involved in TANs are variously located, with differential roles and access to resources. However, these actors are connected by a network around a common



issue. Communication and cohesiveness are maintained through the exchange of information.

TANs use “persuasion, socialization and pressure” to exact policy and institutional changes from global actors (Keck & Sikkink 1998, 16-25). Specific strategies include 1) *information politics* -- the ability to generate information on the issue and move it to key actors; 2) *symbolic politics* -- the use of symbols or symbolic stories (testimonials) and events to personalize the issue to generate public interest; 3) *leverage politics* -- using material (economic sanctions) or moral (shaming the actor) leverage; and, 4) *accountability politics* or prompting that actor to close the gap between rhetoric and reality with respect to a given policy or promise.

To assess the effectiveness of TANs, Keck and Sikkink suggest that both an investigation of campaigns launched, as well as outputs achieved, are useful. Campaigns are sets of “strategically linked activities in which members of a diffuse principled group...develop explicit, visible ties and mutually recognized roles in pursuit of a common goal” (p. 6). Keck and Sikkink chose to focus on campaigns because they ...

...highlight relationships – how connections are established and maintained among network actors, and between activists and their allies and opponents. We can identify resources that make a campaign possible, such as information, leadership, and symbolic and material capital. And we must consider the kinds of institutional structures, both domestic and international, that encourage or impede particular kinds of transnational activism (p. 7).

The impact of TANs can be measured over time in terms of change in agenda setting, policy positions and eventually institutional changes in the behaviour of states or international organizations.

In sum, the concept of TANs is useful to make sense of how a plurality of different actors in varying social locations employing multiple strategies aimed at

different sets of actors, are able to set global agendas, exact policy change and at times promote institutional changes in social relations within international organizations. To explain this phenomenon, Keck and Sikkink map the interplay of agents and structures. Using this approach, the success of refugee women's advocates in persuading UNHCR to adopt a policy on refugee women is explained in Chapter Four of the thesis.

However, neither TANs, feminist approaches to global governance nor feminist approaches to global political economy comprehensively analyze or explain the process of and obstacles to institutional change within international organizations. While policies or normative changes may be used as leverage over an organization, and are therefore important, they do not automatically lead to institutional changes in 'patterns of power'. Therefore, while it is important to understand the circumstances leading to policy or norm change, an analysis of gender-related change in institutions must 'go inside' the organization, to identify obstacles and opportunities to make change from 'within'. To this end, I argue that feminist GPE and TANs be supplemented to gender studies of institutional change.

#### **2.4 Gender Studies of Institutional Change**

In 1997, Kathleen Staudt observed that: "over the international decade for women, 1975-85, there were many dialogues, lobbying activities, legislative and policy mandates, yet barely a dent was made in the redistribution of resources and values from men to women" (3). Traditional and critical IR have provided few explanations as to why this is so. Within the discipline of IR the study of change in international organizations was historically explained in relation to external factors, namely the role of

the state. This view is an extrapolation of the realist perspective in IR which explains policy change fundamentally according to major state interests. As such, international organizations are viewed as possessing little autonomy. Over the past few decades, the realist view has been challenged by 'regime theorists' and studies in global governance, including feminist global governance. These collective approaches explore the role of norms, rules and decision-making processes which shape policy and operations of states and international organizations. Yet as Kardam (1991, 5) has thoughtfully argued, few of these studies pay attention to internal factors conditioning the process of change. Fewer still have examined the dynamic of gender relations within international organizations.

Yet the relative lack of substantive and distributive changes in gender relations despite years of activism and resulting norm and policy change implies that "it is necessary to go inside international agencies in order to understand organizational constraints and opportunities for change" (*Ibid.*). Indeed as Miller suggests, a look inside international organizations "illuminates certain aspects of the process of feminist engagement [with international organizations] that may otherwise be overlooked or misunderstood" (1998, 138).

Some of the most robust feminist studies of institutional change in organizations appear within women in development (WID) studies, including a number of empirical analyses of national and international development organizations (Goetz 1995; Jahan 1995; Kardam 1991; Miller 1998; Porter, Smyth & Sweetman 1999; Staudt 1998). In these works, institutional changes are seen as the result of a continuous dynamic between agents and structures where: structures are defined as the "formal and informal rules which put boundaries around experience, and act as patterns of social constraint"; and,

agents are “the individuals who bring personal variants to their practices within structures” (Goetz 1995, 5).

By limiting choice and controlling social relationships, institutions make certain forms of behaviour and their outcome predictable and routine – institutionalizing them. The project for gender-sensitive institutional change is therefore to routinize gender-equitable forms of social interaction and to challenge the legitimacy of forms of social organization which discriminate against women (Goetz 1995, 1).

Following Connell (1987), Goetz argues that institutions are made up of:

**Structures:** formal and informal rules which put boundaries around experience, and act as patterns of social constraint;

**Practice:** the everyday behaviors and processes which give substance to structure, and which reproduce structure;

**Agents:** the individuals who bring personal variants to their practices within structures.

According to Goetz, organizations “put substance” into institutional frameworks: structures are shaped by organizational hierarchies and degrees of centralization or decentralization. These in turn shape the organization’s activities, as do organizational ideologies, mandates, cultures and procedures. Together, ‘structure’ and ‘practice’ shape incentive systems and thus the behaviour of individual actors.

Internally, structures can be identified by the ‘organizational goal’ and ‘procedures’ which guide the organization’s mandate (Kardam 1991, 1). Goals are the “identifiable ends” towards which organizations strive. Thus within UNHCR, specific organizational goals include extending protection to refugees and finding durable solutions to their problems. UNHCR in turn adopts certain procedures to achieve its goals which, broadly defined, include “skills, knowledge, training of employees,... decision-making techniques (such as economic analysis, technical analysis,

or analysis based on social science techniques) and structure (whether decision making is centralized, decentralized or a combination)” (Ibid., 7). Internal structures interact with and are shaped by external factors, such as the global political economy as explained in Chapter Three of this thesis. Thus relationships with other actors in the global environment and major shifts in these relationships shape the ability of agents to promote changes within international organizations.

Agents, sometimes referred to as ‘policy entrepreneurs’ (Howarth Wiles 1993), ‘pioneers’ (Melrose 1999) or ‘internal advocates’ (this thesis) are essential for promoting changes within organizations. Without advocates, it is unlikely a particular policy will be promoted, nor will institutions re-arrange themselves. Yet policy entrepreneurs are constrained by the organizational goals and procedures described above. Paraphrasing Marx to explain the role of WID advocates in development agencies, Putnam states that internal advocates “may ‘choose’ their institutions, but they do not choose them under circumstances of their own making, and their choices in turn influence the rules within which their successors choose” (quoted in Staudt 1998, 186).

The agency/structure dynamic has been applied in a number of gender studies of organizational change, with similar conclusions. For example, Nuket Kardam (1991; 1995) found that ‘democratic’ organizations (transparent and/or inclusive decision-making process) are more likely to be influenced by advocates for women/gender. A centralized organization with strong relations between a ‘head’ office and field offices is also more likely to facilitate the process of change as lines of communication and accountability are more direct. However, Kardam underscores the important role of

internal advocates in promoting change, especially those with access to resources. She concludes that:

... increased response to gender issues is linked to the level of external pressure by donors and women's groups, the extent of 'fit' of gender issues with the mandate and procedures of an organization, and the strength of staff members who work on gender issues in translating their knowledge into agency-specific procedures (Kardam 1998).

Carol Miller (1998) likewise observes that the greater the 'fit' between the goals of entrepreneurs and of the agency, the more likely it is that gender will be incorporated within an organization. She contends that accusations of 'instrumentalism' – that internal advocates are used to further organizational goals rather than gender equality – “fail to grasp the constraints faced by internal advocates” (139). On the other hand, 'instrumentalist' strategies are criticized for failing to transform institutions often perceived to be inadequate in the first place. Thus, a number of Third World feminists argue that 'adding' women to existing development agendas does not dismantle the structural processes “that had caused gender inequalities” (Johan 1995).

Johan argues that two strategic approaches are taken within development organizations: 'integrationist' and 'agenda setting' or, as this thesis refers to the latter approach, 'mainstreaming'. The first approach, integrationist, simply integrates women into existing paradigms, through the creation of special advisors and the issuance of a specific policy or specific measures such as 'women's projects'. 'Mainstreaming' on the other hand, “implies the transformation of the existing agenda with a gender perspective.” To mainstream gender is to include new knowledges and ways of knowing and doing things. As the ECOSOC Resolution on Gender Equality Mainstreaming (E.1997.L.10.Para.4) reads:

Mainstreaming a gender perspective is the *process of assessing* the implications for women and men of any planned action including legislation, policies or programmes, in any area and at all levels. It is a *strategy* for making women's as well as men's concerns and experiences an integral dimension in the design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of policies and programmes in all political, economic and societal spheres so that women and men benefit equally and inequality is not perpetuated. *The ultimate goal is to achieve gender equality* (emphasis mine).

Therefore, gender mainstreaming is both a process and strategy to achieve the ultimate goal of gender equality. It has two general dimensions: first, that gender analyses become part of the mainstream in the life cycles of policies, programmes and projects, and; second, specific initiatives to enable women as well as men to formulate and express their views and participate in decision-making may be necessary.

The concept of mainstreaming is explored in Chapter Five: this strategic approach was applied by UNHCR in the latter part of the 1990s. For now, it is important to recognize that the various 'integrationist' approaches adopted by the majority of development organizations in the 1980s were not enough to produce substantive changes, both in terms of outcomes and gender relations within organizations. This fact helps explain why WID strategies (largely integrationist) have remained an 'elusive agenda' in development organizations (Jahan 1995). As Kardam later concludes, the challenge facing internal advocates today is to reconcile "bottom-up, empowerment strategies with the more top-down mainstreaming efforts in international and national bureaucracies, which inevitably involve long-term, incremental, and process-oriented change" (1998).

The struggles of internal advocates must be viewed in relation to those of transnational advocacy networks, as well as the global political economy. Like our analysis of TANs, a useful conceptual starting point is to focus on the 'internal

campaigns of advocates', identifying the relationships, resources and 'opportunity structures' presented within the organizational structures and practices. Thus, the relationship of internal advocates to TANs, to states, and to senior staff are important to the process of change. Resources include ideas, information, symbols, position in the organization and relationships themselves. Opportunity structures emerge not only within shifts in the global political economy, but institutional changes from the organization itself.

In summary, the strategies or 'internal campaigns' of pioneers must be understood in relation to structures which condition agency. The degree of centralization or decentralization of the organization (including the degree to which decision making is centralized) shapes the ability of internal advocates to promote changes. Likewise, the degree of 'fit' between proponents of a gender perspective and the organizations' goals and procedures shapes this process. Finally, the existence and capacity of internal agents is, in and of itself, an important element for consideration, where the resources (material and non-material) shape the ability of such agents to exercise choice. Chapter Five turns to the specific techniques and strategies employed by the office of the Senior Coordinator for Refugee Women within this framework, identifying obstacles and opportunities for promoting changes in gender relations within UNHCR over the decade, and for implementing the policy on refugee women..

## **2.5 A Multi-Level Analysis: Linking the Global, National and Local**

I have argued so far that feminist GPE and TANs usefully analyze the interplay of global historical structures and transnational agents to explain change in gender



assumptions in global policies and norms. In this way, the global political-economic and social circumstances under which changes in gender relations potentially occur are identified. Yet as Stienstra acknowledges, little redistributive change can be said to have occurred in UN institutions or, for that matter, in any international actor's activities (1994, pp). To explain the gap between normative changes and institutional transformation, it is useful to 'go inside' international organizations. To this end, gender studies of institutional change are utilized in this thesis and bridged with feminist GPE and TANs.

Yet these conceptual insights do not necessarily prompt an assessment of "the impact ... various policy achievements for women at the international level have had at the national [and local] levels" (Meyer & Prugl 1999, 13). Conversely, how actors at the local and national level encounter, resist or embrace global gendered ideas and practices is not captured. What difference do changes in global norms and practices make to women and men? How do the widely varying socio-political and economic contexts refugees are located in mediate the implementation or translation of policy into practice? These questions imply that new levels of analysis are required, as are new methodological approaches in feminist global governance.

Country specific and local level analyses advanced in the disciplines of anthropology, geography and development studies in particular provide critical accounts of the different ways refugees and the internally displaced experience exile, international assistance, resettlement and return. Case specific analyses reveal that cultural and political-economic contexts shape this experience with widely varying results (see Indra 1999; Giles, Moussa & Van Esterik; Moussa 1993). Case studies confirm the

asymmetrical relationships between international assistance organizations and refugees (Harrell-Bond 1989), but also contest the idea that refugees are helpless victims of refuge and the refugee system. On the contrary, a number of studies have elaborated the particular circumstances in which some refugee women find exile as a time of empowerment, breaking with traditional and oppressive gender roles (Rajasingham-Senanyake 1999). What these studies offer is context-specific analyses; that is, they situate UNHCR field operations within the socio-political economy of national and local spaces and events which affect UNHCR operations and refugees' lives. Context specific case studies help to account for variance between policy implementation in the field.

An important step in gender studies of forced displacement – and one could argue the same of feminist approaches to global governance – is to contextualize global analyses within national and local events. As Indra (1999) suggests, there is a “...need for much greater situationally specific, diversity-maintaining, in depth knowledge of individual women and men who are forced migrants, and of class, ethnic, cultural, sub-cultural, national, and transnational systems with which they articulate” (p.21). This likewise suggests the need for new methodologies, wherein anthropological approaches to knowledge collection are incorporated into global analyses.

Section Three of this thesis strives to consider the political economy of the field, examining national and local contexts in which UNHCR policy on refugee women is, or is not, translated into programmes. Where possible, the viewpoints of refugee women and field staff were collected through a series of interviews. The cultural, political and economic histories of each country are considered with an eye to how these shape the ability of advocates to promote gender equality within UNHCR operations. Through

these case studies, the intersections of gender, class, geography and ethnicity are highlighted. A comparison of the two case studies reveals variance in the success with which policy was translated into practice between and within national contexts, and points to reasons this is so.

## **2.6 Conclusions**

In conclusion, I argue that feminist GPE captures the interplay of transnational activities and global structures to explain, in part, processes of change. The concept of TANs enhances the conceptualization of agency in these approaches and is therefore utilized in this thesis. This explanation becomes more complete when internal variables are examined in relation to external ones. Thus, a hybrid of feminist GPE, TANs and gender studies of institutional change is proposed. However, I also intend to extend these approaches beyond a global level of analysis, to explore the inter-connections of the global, national and local using a multi-level analysis. This framework then moves us to a point where we can begin to explore not only when or why macro-level changes occur, but also what difference this makes to refugees.

## **Part Two: The Political Economy of Gender in the UNHCR**

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The previous section argued that a hybrid of different conceptual approaches is necessary to explain the process and the limitations of gender-related change within international organizations. This assertion is premised on the view that no one conceptual approach captures the complexity of internal and external sources of change and resistance to change in international organizations and field operations. A hybrid approach examines internal and external variables which shape the ability of agents to change policy and to promote gender-related changes within an organization.

In this section, I examine the process of policy change and the possibilities of gender-related institutional changes *within* UNHCR over the course of the past two decades. Taking a historical view, Chapter Three identifies gender dimensions of the organization's assistance and protection mandate, asserting that the Cold War had a profound influence over the scope and 'gendered' nature of this mandate. In the decades following the end of the Cold War, UNHCR's mandate has extended considerably. Shifting discourses and practices have opened new opportunities for advocates, providing entrance points for gender-related changes in policy and institutional approaches, albeit with a number of potentially dangerous pitfalls which must be navigated carefully. This chapter then, traces shifts in the gender dimensions of the organization's mandate in relation to shifts in the global political economy.

Chapter Four examines the global campaign on refugee women between 1980-1989. By focusing on this campaign, the relationships, resources and opportunity structures of transnational advocacy networks come into focus. Policy change in

UNHCR is explained in relation to the strategic lobbying tactics of refugee women's advocates within global 'opportunity structures'. As such, the findings of the chapter contributes an important new case study to support the assertion that non-state actors are indeed agents of change in global governance.

Chapter Five investigates the 'next step' in this process, that of the implementation of the policy and challenges of transforming institutions. The 'internal' campaigns of gender advocates within UNHCR Headquarters, more specifically, the Senior Coordinator for Refugee Women, is analyzed between 1990-2000. By the end of the decade, the policy had been implemented unevenly and, while more and more staff supported the issue of refugee women and gender equality, institutional changes were slow. I suggest that earlier campaigns did not fully engage UNHCR institutions which reproduced unequal gender relations. As a result, women were often 'added' to existing programmes, but such programmes were not fundamentally transformed. Opportunities to address both gender and institutions are considered in relation to the contradictory principles of new directions in UNHCR work and operational management approaches in the late 1990s and early 21st century.

## **Chapter Three**

### **The Global Political Economy and Gendered Dimensions of UNHCR's Mandate: An Historical Overview, 1950-2000**

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In this post-Cold War era, the international playing field has indeed been transformed by simultaneous processes of globalization and fragmentation. Accompanying conceptual shifts by pundits and practitioners alike have been profound. Alongside the conceptual transitions from strategic security to human security and peacekeeping to peace-building, new approaches to refugee issues have emerged (Oswin 1999, 28).

#### **3.1 Introduction**

The mandate of UNHCR is to protect refugees and other persons of concern, and to find durable solutions to their situations. Historically, this mandate was greatly constrained by the political-economy of the Cold War and remained more or less static during this period. However, as Natalie Oswin suggests above, the end of the Cold War ushered in a period of dramatic change globally, radically transforming UNHCR's mandate. The first part of this chapter examines UNHCR's activities during the Cold War and the gendered dimensions of these activities. The second part examines the radical changes which have occurred recently, and what implications these changes have on ideas about gender in the organization. The third part examines accompanying changes in operational management in UNHCR, and considers what obstacles/opportunities these new approaches present.

The chapter is premised on the assumption that a gender analysis of the global political economy provides a partial insight into the process and limitations of gender-related change within UNHCR. As such, this chapter informs the conceptual approach of the thesis by providing key background information on the relationship between UNHCR, gender relations and the global political economy. Chapter Four continues the

thread of this chapter, demonstrating how transnational advocates took advantage of shifts in the global political economy to lobby UNHCR and realize policy change in the late-1980s. This thread is continued in Chapter Five, where internal advocates and transnational advocates worked in a swiftly changing global and institutional environment to implement, at least formally, the Policy on Refugee Women.

### **3.2 The Cold War Era**

The Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees was created in December 1950 by Resolution 428 of the United Nations General Assembly to address the concerns associated with the tens of millions of refugees displaced in post-1945 Europe.<sup>1</sup> The UNHCR began operations on 1 January 1951 as a temporary office, with an anticipated life span of three years. Yet a series of evolving refugee crises<sup>2</sup> globally has extended the organization's mandate every five years for the past five decades. UNHCR has thus become the largest international organization responsible for protecting the rights of refugees, and was mandated to find 'durable' solutions to their problems.

UNHCR's activities are mandated by the organization's Statute, and guided by the 1951 United Nations Convention relating to the Status of Refugees and its 1967 Protocol. The Statute stipulates that UNHCR shall be both neutral and impartial in the delivery of humanitarian assistance and extension of protection (HRC/INF/1/Rev.3, 4). According to the Statute, the High Commissioner is bound to policy directives of the United Nations General assembly and the United Nations Economic and Social Council

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<sup>1</sup> Predecessors of the UNHCR were the United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Administration (UNRRA) established in 1943 to provide relief to persons in war-ravaged areas in Europe and the International Refugee Organization (IRO) which took over operations of the UNRRA in 1947.

(ECOSOC). The Executive Committee (ExCom) of the High Commissioner is composed of 53 interested governments. This body monitors and advises the work of the High Commissioner, holding annual meetings in Geneva every October to approve programmes and finances in the forthcoming year.

Originally, the mandate of the organization was limited to a legalistic interpretation of *the 1951 Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees*, and the agency's Statute. The 1951 Refugee Convention defines a refugee as "a person who, owing to well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion, is outside the country of his nationality and is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to avail himself of the protection of that country." (Article 1 A (2)). The most fundamental refugee protection principle is found in article 33 of the Convention, stating that no government will expel or return (*refoul*) a refugee where his or her life would be threatened based on one of the Convention grounds.

In the first decades of its existence, the definition found in the Convention was perceived to meet the needs of those seeking asylum in an individual basis. Most often, ideological persecution was the focus on this process. During the 1950s, Western states realized the potential of manipulating UNHCR to pursue national interests. These states channeled resources into UNHCR, and UNHCR in turn proved a useful organization for directing refugees fleeing communist states into the West. In response to Western domination, the Soviet Union refused to collaborate with a 'partial' international refugee organization (Feldman 2000, 9; Mertus 1998, 324-25). In sum, resettlement – that is,

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<sup>2</sup> The first of these crises was the erection of the Berlin wall (1953) and the Hungarian revolution in 1956, both of which produced large numbers of refugees in Europe.



settling refugees in safe third countries – was the most favoured solution in practice during the Cold War era (Chimni 1999).

Refugee crises generated by post-colonial struggles in Africa and political-civil unrest in the Americas challenged conventional thinking on refugee status in the 1960s. Western countries grew concerned with mass displacement generated by independence struggles - in particular the potential implications for such movements of persons on regional and international stability. In reaction, UNHCR's mandate was extended to these regions, and the definition of a refugee was elaborated to reflect this changing reality. The 1967 Protocol addressed the phenomenon of mass displacement, recognizing refugees *prima facie* as they crossed borders in the thousands to millions.<sup>3</sup> The Organization of African Unity (OAU 1969) and the Organization of American States (OAS 1984-85) adopted more comprehensive declarations which incorporated a broader view of causes of displacement such as “external aggression, occupation, foreign domination or events seriously disturbing public order” (OAU 1969), and “generalized violence, foreign aggression, internal conflicts, mass violations of human rights or other circumstances which have seriously disturbed public order” (OAS 1984-85).

Within emergency contexts, UNHCR expanded the scope of its work, providing non-statutory refugees with assistance such as food, medicine, shelter and other material supplies. Relief-based, community development and job or skills training programmes were likewise extended to these populations, and UNHCR additionally became involved in supervision of cease-fires, voluntary returns and confidence building measures

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<sup>3</sup> The 1967 Protocol recognized mass refugee populations *prima facie*, allowing UNHCR to avoid individual assessments.

(Feldman 2000). Operations focused on relief assistance to support 'host' countries of refugee populations.

UNHCR describes its activities during the Cold War as 'reactive', 'refugee-specific' and 'exile oriented' (1995a, 30). Principles of non-political behaviour and humanitarianism characterized UNHCR's work, as defined by the organization's Statute. UNHCR was 'reactive' and 'exile oriented' in the sense that it mobilized to meet the needs of refugees only after they had fled their country of origin. The organization was 'refugee-specific' in the sense that generally it did not work with persons considered outside their mandate. Groups excluded involved persons vulnerable to conflicts, internally displaced persons,<sup>4</sup> those who had returned to their countries of origin and economic migrants (UNHCR 1995a, 34).

While refugee movements were predicted and prepared for to the extent it was possible, little effort or resources were given to preventing displacements. It was assumed that by solely 'reacting', the organization was upholding principles of 'humanitarianism', working to solve refugee problems and not the circumstances which led to them (UNHCR 1995a, 30). In this way too, UNHCR could maintain a non-political stance. This exile-oriented approach focused UNHCR attention on the 'right to leave' a country of origin and to seek asylum in another country. Aid was delivered almost exclusively to 'host' countries, deemed responsible for protecting the rights of refugees inside their boundaries. Refugee 'producing' states were not the focus of attention, again to reinforce the 'non-political' nature of the organization. As a consequence, "the international community gave little thought to foreign aid designed to

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<sup>4</sup> Although there were a few isolated instances where UNHCR worked on behalf of IDPs during this period. See Feldman 2000.

contain refugee flows or reforming the sending country's infrastructure" (Mertus 1998, 325).

During this period, durable solutions to refugee problems fell into one of three areas: local settlement; third country resettlement; and, voluntary repatriation. Emphasis was placed on the former two solutions, local settlement and resettlement. Refugees could legally be integrated into the country of first asylum with agreement of that host country (local settlement). Refugees were also relocated to another state that had agreed to admit them (resettlement). Voluntary repatriation was less favoured until the 1980s, following mass repatriation movements in Angola, Bangladesh, Mozambique and Zimbabwe in the 1970s. However, UNHCR repatriation efforts during much of the Cold War period were limited. Activities were restricted to registration of returnees and provision of basic assistance kits. After returnees crossed the border to their homeland, they were no longer considered UNHCR's concern.

As the following sections argue, UNHCR has departed radically from its 'exile-oriented' focus in the post-Cold War era. Today, the organization has adopted a number of measures to prevent refugee flows from occurring in the first place, seeking to contain displacements from spilling across borders. When displacements do occur, UNHCR attempts to keep refugee populations close to the border of the country of origin, or to establish temporary asylum mechanisms which would facilitate return. In short, the organization has shifted from a 'reactive', 'refugee specific' and 'exiled-oriented' approach in the Cold War era, to one that is 'pro-active', 'home-land oriented' and 'holistic', as explored in the second part of this chapter. First, however, let us consider

the gender dimension of UNHCR assistance and protection activities during the Cold War era.

### *3.2.1 Gender Dimensions of the UNHCR's Mandate During the Cold War*

For most of the Cold War era, 'gender' was not factored into refugee assistance and protection work. Protection and assistance were extended on the assumption that they were gender neutral. Yet as suggested in Chapter One, gender neutral activities were in fact premised on a male norm which separated public and private spheres. This had the effect of reproducing gender inequalities and in some instances, widening the gender gap so that refugee women were marginalized from UNHCR activities meant to benefit refugees. Further, interpretations of the 1951 Refugee Convention reflected a male bias, failing to recognize gender-related forms of persecution many women faced in the private sphere (Indra 1989; Baines 1999). Refugee status determination (RSD) procedures most often proceeded on assumptions about who was a refugee and who was not, usually with men being interviewed to determine status and women involved only to corroborate her husband's testimony (SCRWGE 2000).

The 'non-political', 'non-interventionist' stance emphasized in this period contributed to the idea that intervention on behalf of women contradicted the organization's mandate. Gender inequalities were perceived as cultural and therefore private, falling outside UNHCR responsibility. Emergency relief to refugee populations was generally delivered in a 'top-down' manner. Refugees were not encouraged to participate in programme design or implementation. This practice reflected a conceptual separation of the UNHCR as a neutral organization delivering assistance 'to', but not

interfering 'with' the socio-cultural practices of refugee populations. Thus, refugees were the passive 'beneficiaries' of assistance, and assistance was delivered in a presumably neutral, charitable manner (Harrell-Bond 1986).

However, top-down approaches often led to serious misunderstandings of the socio-cultural contexts within which assistance was delivered and, as a consequence, inappropriate aid was often distributed (*Ibid.*). Further, the separation of 'donor' and 'recipient' reinforced the idea that UNHCR had no part in reproducing gender inequalities (or any other inequalities!) in refugee populations: UNHCR activities were 'neutral'. As such, the relationships between UNHCR institutional practices and gender inequalities were, in effect, erased from the equation.

### **3.3 The Post-Cold War Era**

The post-Cold War era ushered in a period of optimism and led to an opening of political space in which the UN sought to end protracted conflicts fueled by former super-power rivalry. Yet the proliferation of a new set of intra-state conflicts on the heels of this optimism has shaken the world community's "confidence in ready solutions" (Black 1995, 3). Today, conflicts more frequently take place within states than between states (Boutros Ghali 1995, 7). In some cases, the collapse of states has led to gross violations of human rights. In others, the struggle for power amongst two or more groups has made negotiation difficult. Opponents are no longer necessarily state actors or rebel groups, but may extend to renegade armies, war lords or organized criminals. Civilians have become the principal target of warfare: between 75-90 percent of all casualties of war are now civilians (Oxfam GB, 1998).

Mass human displacement has been used as an instrument of war: over 800,000 Kosovar Albanians fled Serbian forces during NATO air strikes in the winter of 1999; 1.8 million Kurds tried to flee persecution by the Iraqi regime; by 1994 2.4 million persons were displaced within Bosnia or to neighboring European countries; and, in a 24 hour period, 250,000 Rwandans marched “as a sea of people” across the border into Tanzania in 1994 (UNHCR 1997). The end of the Cold War is marred with spilled blood from campaigns of ethnic cleansing, mass rape, the recruitment of child soldiers, mutilation and strategic starvation of ‘the other.’ This led former UN Secretary General Boutros Boutros Ghali to declare that:

There is no greater symbol of the challenges that confront the United Nations in its efforts to promote peace, shared prosperity and mutual respect than the plight of the world’s displaced people. Refugees and other uprooted people are the products of failure – the failure to resolve conflict and its underlying causes: intolerance, antagonism and poverty (Boutros Boutros-Ghali, 1995).

All of this is to say that the changing nature of global politics, changing perceptions of security (McLean 1998, 32) and the new search for solutions intermingle with forced displacement/refugee issues today. Western and other ‘receiving’ states are increasingly inclined to understand population displacements as threats to national, regional or international security (Hammerstad 1999; see also Mills 1997).

States have reacted to escalating numbers of displaced persons and perceived threats to national and international security through a number of measures. Restrictive asylum procedures and containment practices are two of these measures, discussed below. Given the increasing scale of displacement and the interests of states, UNHCR has had to develop a new approach to protection and assistance. This approach is characterized as ‘preventative’ protection, whereby UNHCR has come to extend its

mandate to persons before they cross borders (UNHCR 1995a, 80 and 153-156; see also Newland and Meyers 1999, 17).

### *3.3.1 Protection for Whom? Restrictive Asylum Measures*

As growing numbers of refugees sought asylum in Western states,<sup>5</sup> 'receiving states' began to talk "less about the human rights of the uprooted and more about their own rights ... [such as] ... their right to protect their own culture and standard of living from foreign intruders" (Mertus 1998, 328). Throughout the 1990s, restrictive asylum measures have been taken in Western countries to prevent a mass influx of refugees (UNHCR 1997, 68). Direct measures include turning asylum seekers away at border crossings or detaining them once inside the 'receiving' country (Mertus 1998, 337). More indirect measures include the imposition of economic penalties on potential asylum carriers (transport ships, airlines etc.) or visa requirements, or the granting of greater decision-making powers to border guards (see Hyndman 1996b). Finally, states attempt to dissuade refugees from arriving at their borders by lowering social service standards/rights extended to them in the 'receiving' country (Mertus 1998, 338).

It is interesting to note that as Western states implemented more restrictive measures in relation to refugees in general, a number of states began to recognize gender-related persecution under the 1951 Refugee Convention.<sup>6</sup> Advocates for refugee women effectively lobbied specific states on this issue, organizing at the national and

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<sup>5</sup> For example, the number of asylum seekers in Europe, North America and Australia increased from 90,444 in 1983 to over 825,000 ten years later (Mertus 1998, 337).

<sup>6</sup> Canada was the first country to formally recognize gender persecution in 1992, followed by Australia, the United States, several Western European states, Guatemala and Panama.

transnational level.<sup>7</sup> In these instances, advocates were able to draw upon mounting evidence on gender-persecution to gain moral leverage over states which had committed to international declarations on women's rights (Spencer Nimmons 1994b). However, the numbers of women gaining entrance to Western countries on the basis of gender-related claims are minimal. In other words, the recognition of gender-related persecution did not substantially change the number of women entering a third country of asylum and, as such, did not contradict the objectives of restrictive asylum measures (Connors 1998).

At the same time, states began to view refugee movements as potential threats to regional and international security. To prevent displacement, Western states began to invest heavily in international organizations such as UNHCR and NGOs such as the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) to assist persons in war zones<sup>8</sup> (Lambert 1997, 12; Mertus 1998, 330). In the 1990s, UNHCR expanded its mandate, and NGOs began to play a larger role in emergencies, often as the organization's partner (Skran 1999). Today, UNHCR is increasingly undertaking humanitarian roles in conflict and post-conflict societies, working in partnership with other UN agencies and moving towards a 'developmental relief' approach. This involves not only extending immediate protection and assistance to vulnerable populations, but programming capacity building and sustainable development. As one international NGO put it, "development relief looks to sustain livelihoods, not just lives" (quoted in Lambert 1997, 12). This in turn has led to substantially new measures to contain refugee flows through a policy of 'preventative protection'.

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<sup>7</sup> This point is elaborated upon in Chapter 4, pp.



### 3.3.2 *'Humanitarian Crises' and the Politics of Containment*

Greenaway (2000) suggests that, "The 1990's will be remembered as the decade when regional wars were transformed, in the popular Western consciousness and to no small extent in the language of international relations, into 'humanitarian' emergencies". Indeed the 'CNN effect' drew the attention of both publics and policy makers to the mass sufferings inflicted on civilians in conflicts in Iraq, Somalia, Rwanda and Bosnia. The post-Cold War era signaled a greater opening for intervention in countries of conflict on humanitarian grounds: the violation of human rights has increasingly become a legitimate ground for intervention, with or without the acquiescence of the state involved (see Mills 1997). As a result, the number of humanitarian interventions in conflict situations between 1989 and 1997 more than doubled the number of peacekeeping operations which had taken place in the previous forty years of the UN (Hicks-Stiehm 1999, 42).

Because displacement is very often the strategy of a warring faction, the international community has taken the position that to facilitate this process (through granting asylum or assisting in flight) is to assist such a strategy. As such, 'containment' of population displacements, or preventing such displacements from spilling across borders in the first place, shifts the responsibility for protecting refugees to the refugee producing state. Preventing flight is thus a 'pro-active' measure to protecting refugees. Not coincidentally, it also protects the interests of states in keeping refugees 'over there' and squarely away from Western borders (Hyndman 1996b). "Contemporary

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<sup>8</sup> Relief budgets nearly trebled between 1980 and 1990, from \$353 million to just under \$1 billion for the European Community (Macrae 1999, 4-5)

international refugee policy...is principally articulated by developed countries to contain and manage the global refugee problem in the light of their interests" (Chimni 1993, 443). These interests have involved UNHCR, as well as other humanitarian actors (World Health Organization (WHO), United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), Medecins Sans Frontieres (MSF), ICRC) inside zones of conflict, to thwart population displacements.

A manifestation of this strategy is the creation of protectorate zones inside countries of conflict wherein UNHCR's main objective has been to bring "safety to people, not people to safety" (UNHCR 1995a, 30). The first example of this type of strategy was in Iraq, where UNHCR entered Northern Iraq to provide assistance to Kurdish refugees in 'safe zones' -- zones considered under the protection of the international community (Mills 1997, 394-96). This strategy was reproduced later in Somalia, with the creation of 'safe corridors' to provide assistance to populations caught between warring factions, in Bosnia-Herzegovina, where assistance was airlifted for 18 months to persons in UN declared 'safe zones', and in Afghanistan where 'zones of tranquility' were established for returning refugees.

A second manifestation of a containment strategy is the use of 'temporary solutions.' These include the creation of short term camps with restrictions on mobility and employment, created in areas such as Northern Iraq and along the border between Somalia and Kenya. During the Kosovo crisis in 1999, UNHCR assisted in the 'temporary resettlement' of hundreds of thousands to European countries, all of whom were expected to return after NATO bombing had ceased. 'Temporary strategies' were

justified by the assertion that the 'resettlement' of refugees only facilitated the process of ethnic cleansing.<sup>9</sup>

A third manifestation of the 'containment' strategy is the adoption of a broader definition of persons for which UNHCR is responsible, a definition falling outside the 1951 Refugee Convention and 1967 Protocol. The General Assembly may request that UNHCR work with specific groups of persons and has done so over the years. Increasingly, UNHCR is requested to work with internally displaced persons (IDPs), for whom no international Convention exists to protect their rights, nor any international organization to assist them (Cohen & Deng 1998). During the Cold War, UNHCR had only limited involvement with IDPs. Today, UNHCR works to assist between 20-25 percent of the world's IDPs (*Ibid.*, 129). Of the 22.3 million persons under UNHCR care in January 1999, 7.5 million were IDPs (along with 11.5 million refugees, 1.9 million returnees and 1.3 million asylum seekers) (UNHCR 2000). In a 1993 policy statement on IDPs, UNHCR argued it would work with IDPs where there was a risk that internal displacement may escalate into a refugee crisis (UNHCR 1993b, 2). Yet overall, UNHCR policy is ambivalent regarding criteria for intervention, and UNHCR has become involved on an ad hoc basis. Of the 56 major IDP emergencies in the 1990s, UNHCR only intervened in a third, 20 (*Ibid.*).

In short, UNHCR's new directions are described as 'pro-active' in the sense that they strive to prevent population displacements from occurring in the first place. They are holistic in the sense that they embrace an expanded view of persons falling under

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<sup>9</sup> On the one hand, temporary protection did offer some form of protection to refugees from the former Yugoslavia during a period when asylum laws were becoming increasingly difficult to negotiate. On the other hand, it compromises the rights of refugees guaranteed within the 1951 Convention. See Lambert 1997, 11.

UNHCR protection (including IDPs and returnees) as well as a larger range of issues which require developing new skills (providing assistance and protection to persons in conflict zones; monitoring protection; rehabilitation and reintegration and so on), involving larger groups of returnees and internally displaced persons (see Newland and Meyers 1999). Finally, it is home-land oriented in the sense that UNHCR now emphasizes the 'right to return' over the right to asylum. In this sense, 'temporary solutions' are intended to uphold this right and states producing refugee populations are held responsible for creating "the conditions which allow refugees to return to their homeland" (UNHCR 1995a, 43). In short, the favoured solution of UNHCR in the post-Cold War era has shifted decisively to that of 'repatriation', voluntary or otherwise.<sup>10</sup>

### 3.3.3 *UNHCR & Peacebuilding: Bridging the Relief-Development Gap?*

There can be no lasting peace without initiatives to resolve the problem of refugees, returnees and displaced persons (UNHCR 1995a, 51).

UNHCR's largest operations today are based in post-conflict countries, to facilitate the return and reintegration of persons displaced over the course of the conflict. In recent peace agreements, the return process is regarded as a fundamental element of peacebuilding.<sup>11</sup> Returnees symbolize both stability and optimism, fostering a culture of peace. Yet displaced persons may be reluctant to return to areas devastated by war, or now occupied by adversaries. New occupants likewise may be hesitant to receive returning populations.

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<sup>10</sup> In a recent paper, Chimni documents how recent global discourses regarding the subject of repatriation have incrementally introduced the idea of 'involuntary' repatriation as acceptable under certain conditions. See Chimni 1999.

To foster the conditions necessary for return and reintegration, UNHCR has pursued two principle objectives. The first is *reconstruction*, or to rebuild economic and material resources damaged or destroyed in the conflict. The second is *reconciliation*, or to foster the re-knitting of social relations torn in the conflict (UNHCR in Macrae 1999). Quick Impact Projects (QIPs) and capacity- building measures are the principle activities used to realize these objectives. QIPs aim to rebuild houses, roads, schools and so on. Reconciliation is facilitated by involving former adversaries in the planning and development of QIPs, to develop social links and community organization (Bonafacio & Lattimer in Macrae 1999). Through training courses, the provision of goods (such as office supplies), and support roles, UNHCR seeks to build the capacity of local civil organizations. A more recent UNHCR document (Furley and Otsea 1999) on capacity building suggests such an activity must be long term, involve multiple interventions and aim to make the organizations in question self-sustaining over time.

Women's right to participate in peacebuilding was officially recognized during the Fourth World Conference on Women at Beijing. The Platform for Action (PFA) adopted at this conferences obliges international actors – including UNHCR – to actively promote women's participation in the reconstruction and reconciliation of war torn societies. Specifically, the PFA states: "The equal access and full participation of women in power structures and their full involvement in all efforts for the prevention and resolution of conflicts are essential for the maintenance and promotion of peace and security" (PFA, 1995 84). The PFA goes onto state that specific measures may be required to facilitate women's active involvement in peace building. "If women are to

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<sup>11</sup> For instance, both the Guatemalan Peace Accords (1996) and Dayton Peace Agreements (1995) contain specific accords on the rights of the displaced and outline a return process. UNHCR has played a central

play an equal part in securing and maintaining peace, they must be empowered politically and economically and represented adequately at all levels of decision-making” (*Ibid.*). As Chapter Five in section two will argue, transnational activists and internal advocates within UNHCR used this platform as a lever in the 1990s to pressure UNHCR to integrate refugee women into post-conflict operations. Moreover, UNHCR began to participate in a number of multilateral forums (see UNHCR et. al. 1997) on the issue and to actively support women’s initiatives in post-conflict settings.

However, as Chapter Five will elaborate, the majority of UNHCR efforts to integrate women into post-conflict operations fall into QIPs and income generating projects referred to above.<sup>12</sup> For example, in Central America, a series of QIPS that involved solely women (FEM-QIPs) were initiated to support this goal. Income generating projects have become the focus of UNHCR sponsored grass-roots initiatives to support returnee women and men in post-conflict UNHCR operations in West and East Africa, as well as in Bosnia-Herzegovina, Kosovo, Myanmar and Afghanistan. These projects were created out of the General Initiative Fund (GIF), a set of monies earmarked to assist refugee, returnee and displaced women. Yet as Chapter Five discusses, these projects are rarely implemented from a gender perspective. Thus while ‘women’ came into focus in this area of UNHCR activities, ‘gender’ did not. As a result, unequal gender relations are not necessarily challenged within UNHCR institutions, national institutions or within populations of concern. In this sense, these projects were a classic ‘add women and stir’ approach (Rathgeber 1995).

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role in both.

<sup>12</sup> This is most likely due to the fact that the women in development approach was by now well established in international development related organizations. WID approaches were attractive to UNHCR staff

UN approaches to peacebuilding highlight new conceptual linkages forged between human rights, development, democratization and security. “Human rights guarantees and institutions are key ingredients in bringing stability to civilian populations emerging from conflict” (OCPI 1997). A circle of inter-linking needs is drawn between lack of human rights, lack of development and the presence of instability in an area (UNDP 1994). To prevent conflict and make and build peace requires a range of activities, touching on each of these related needs. Boutros-Ghali passionately outlined these objectives in *An Agenda for Peace* (1992):

To seek to identify at the earliest possible stage situations that could produce conflict, and to try through diplomacy to remove the sources of danger before violence results; Where conflict erupts, to engage in peacemaking aimed at resolving the issues that have led to conflict; Through peace keeping, to work to preserve peace, however fragile, where fighting has been halted and to assist in implementing agreements achieved by peacemakers; To stand ready to assist in peace-building in differing contexts: rebuilding the institutions and infrastructure of nations torn by civil war and strife; and building bonds of peaceful mutual benefit among nations formerly at war; And in the largest sense, to address the deepest causes of conflict: economic despair, social injustice and political oppression (1992, 7-8).

These linkages are likewise re-affirmed in the *UNDP's Human Development Report* (1994), which focused the international community's attention on the concept of 'human security'. Human security shifts attention away from traditional concepts of state security, to focus on 'people in the everyday'. Simply put, human security is fundamentally about meeting basic needs: it is the “child who did not die, a disease that did not spread, a job that was not cut, an ethnic tension that did not explode in violence, a dissident who was not silenced” (UNDP 1994, 22). Of course to realize human security, a development and rights based approach is advocated.

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because they were relatively easy to design and implement, and because they reflected the larger operational objectives of the organization in post-conflict contexts.

As UNHCR began to work within development and human rights circles, staff were increasingly exposed to discourses on women's rights and the women in development (WID) approach. By the mid 1990s, global women's movements and networks had made significant progress in promoting global norms on women's rights and the critical role of women in economic development (Friedman 1995; Kardam 1995). As conceptual links between rights, relief and development were made, new discursive spaces were opened, providing entry points for refugee women's advocates. In a word, global norms on women's rights and WID legitimized the view that refugee women have specific protection needs, as well as the right to participate alongside men in the reconstruction of their countries. This theme is picked up in the following chapter on transnational activism.

### **3.4 Assumptions in Peacebuilding Agendas**

As Macrae points out, there are two problematic assumptions made in UN peacebuilding agendas and by extension UNHCR's reconstruction and reintegration focus in post-conflict operations. The first is that some form of viable state institution exists with which to work. UNHCR reintegration efforts hang on collaboration with state actors; as a UN agency it must respect state sovereignty and assume the state is a legitimate authority, capable of facilitating return and reintegration plans (Macrae 1999, 13). Yet many states "are often deficient in the political will, institutional authority and organized power to protect human rights or provide socio-economic welfare" (Jackson in Macrae 1999, 15). At the same time, the international humanitarian community continues to pursue 'people-centred' initiatives at the grass-roots, outside the state in an



effort to foster civil society and to promote democratization of state institutions. This is likewise reflected in UNHCR approaches, such as QIPs which seek to empower local civic organizations. However, such empowerment approaches are short-term and largely economic in focus, failing to promote long term sustainability or to address power relations.

This leads to the second assumption in UN peacebuilding initiatives; that is, that the roots of conflict are found in the economic under-development of the country. The UNHCR publication *State of the World's Refugees: In Search of Solutions* explicitly highlights the relationship between refugee displacements and low levels of economic development (152). Indeed, a number of conflicts in the 1990s took place in countries with low Human Development Index (HDI) ratings: war-torn Afghanistan, Burkino Faso and Guinea filled the last three places on the index in 1995. This leads UNHCR to the conclusion that “in general, there is ample evidence to demonstrate that countries with low and declining standards of living are particularly prone to complex emergencies...and displacement” (UNHCR 1995a). At the same time, this situation is compounded by the fact that economically ‘poor’ countries are growing ‘poorer’. UNHCR refers to the fact that the income differential between richest and poorest grew from 30:1 to 78:1 in the past three decades, and that 89 of the countries categorized as “less developed” by the *Human Development Report* have significantly lower per capita incomes than a decade ago. The implication is that poverty breeds conflict.

However, as Chimni describes below, the current focus on internal economic factors shifts attention away from external factors at work. He states:

The simple recognition that economic factors have a role to play in causing displacement, important as it is, is not, however, enough. There is a need to

identify the different internal and external factors at work. For instance, when it comes to returnee aid 'economic factors' or 'development' are generally defined in narrow terms. The scope of returnee aid is delineated with the objective of establishing minimum material conditions in which the return of refugees can be promoted....[Long term development needs] ...have to be addressed by the international community, in particular those powers which formulate global economic policies. First, large scale aid needs to be offered to the country in which refugees are returning, except Northern states are unwilling to earmark the necessary resources for this purpose....Second, there is a need to address the international economic factors which are responsible for the problems in the country of origin and which contributed to creating a climate in which displacement took place (Chimni 1999).

That international financial institutions (IFIs) have contributed to the conditions for conflict in Africa is by now increasingly recognized (E/CN.4/1999/50). Thus Tim Shaw concludes in his study of African countries that, "unless SAPs are modified and moderated before the end of this century, Africa's economic marginalization and peacekeeping proliferation is likely to continue well into the next century" (1997a, 37). The UN Secretary General has himself called for a more peace friendly structural adjustment programme, asking IFIs to ease up on conditionalities. Further, we should be reminded of the gender implications of SAPs. Structural adjustment programmes have in fact burdened those perhaps least able to shoulder the weight of the transition: the poor, the majority of whom are women, must fill in the gaps left behind by receding social welfare programmes and labour standards (Enloe 1989; Bakker 1994; Moghadam 1999). It is rather ironic that IFIs rely on women to carry out traditional gender roles to make SAPs work on the one hand, while on the other, pushing income generating projects and QIPs specifically targeted at women to redress vulnerabilities produced by economic instability and thus exacerbating the burden of women's 'double day'.

### **3.5 New Approaches to Operational Management**

The scale and challenge of refugee movements in the 1990s has required UNHCR to re-evaluate its operational approach to emergency situations. Likewise, efforts to promote return and reintegration pushed the search for new, more appropriate approaches to working in such contexts. Immediately following the refugee crises in Iraq and Somalia, UNHCR strengthened its emergency section, creating emergency teams and establishing an emergency fund. New relationships with military peacekeeping forces as well as other UN agencies working in emergency contexts were forged for the first time.

In 1995, UNHCR commissioned an evaluation of its operational approach, known as the Delphi Report. The findings of this evaluation would provide the basis of a major effort to transform UNHCR's operational approach in the late 1990s, spearheaded by the Operational Management Systems (OMS) under the Division of Operational Services (DOS). The Report found that UNHCR operations were process-oriented, focusing on inputs rather than outputs. Further, they were inconsistent across operational levels, with gaps between UNHCR Headquarters and field operations. Planning was done on a short-term basis with no long-term vision. Finally, there was virtually no adequate evaluation system in place by which to measure effectiveness of results.

The new OMS approach introduced into planning the 'logical framework', linking overall goals to operational objectives, identifying inputs and outputs necessary to reach goals and building into this framework a system of constant evaluation. In a word, the OMS approach is 'results oriented'. Overall, the approach strives to make UNHCR work more effective and efficient. Pressure to transform UNHCR operations along these lines

coincides with donor pressure for UNHCR to 'streamline' its activities and promote efficiency and economy of operations.

Importantly, OMS recognized the problems of previous approaches which failed to effectively take into account the demographics of a population, as well as the socio-cultural, economic and political contexts in which UNHCR operates. Thus, OMS strives to strengthen UNHCR needs and situation assessment, advocating a 'people-oriented approach' (POP). Attempts to integrate POP match UNHCR discourse on the 'human element' of refugee problems:

Above all, the search for solutions requires a willingness to listen to and work with the people most directly affected by the problem of forced migration: refugees, returnees and displaced people themselves, as well as those communities which are affected by their presence. The refugee question is ultimately a human one, and the strategies pursued by UNHCR and its partners will only succeed if they build upon local commitment and capacities (Ogata in UNHCR 1995a, 9).

In principle at least, people-oriented approaches contrast sharply with those of past UNHCR operations, where refugees were merely recipients of assistance. Nevertheless, the introduction of a POP approach involves a long process of institutional change, one UNHCR is only just beginning. Thus a full transformation of UNHCR operations cannot be immediate, but will evolve over time. As the Director of DOS is fond of saying, "we are taking baby steps" (Observation Notes, DOS 1999).<sup>13</sup> The opportunities presented by new OMS approaches to internal advocates for refugee women are explored in Chapter Five. For now it is important to keep in mind that external changes which led UNHCR in new directions of work have likewise had an

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<sup>13</sup> It is interesting to note that the new Director is keen to mainstream gender throughout the new operational management system. She was also one of the original proponents and practitioners of QIPs in the field.

impact on its operational approach and, in turn, present new challenges to internal advocates.

### **3.6 Conclusions: Entry Points for Gender Advocates**

The changing global political economy and the subsequent expansion of the UNHCR's mandate and changes in operational approaches represent both opportunities and obstacles for feminists seeking to promote gender equality and equity in this primary refugee assisting organization. The following chapter will highlight how advocates for refugee women working in a transnational network took advantage of shifting discourses and material conditions (structures) in the global political economy to promote the issue of 'refugee women'. Chapter Five will then examine the work of internal advocates on the issue in relation to internal institutions. Both then elaborate upon the obstacles and opportunities found within the UNHCR as an institution located within and affected by a changing global political economy.

On the one hand, advocates share common ground within changing approaches to, and directions in, refugee work in the post-Cold War era. Indeed, the expansion of the organization's mandate and newly forged relationships with development and human rights organizations (NGO and INGO) open space for re-negotiating gender relations within UNHCR institutions. As Chapter Four and Five will explain, advocates for refugee women drew legitimacy from women's rights and development circles as well as the Platform for Action which addressed women's rights in armed conflict. Buttressed by these normative developments, advocates pressured UNHCR to view 'gender' as a central variable which needed to be factored into assistance and protection activities.

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On the other hand, economic development and state based security issues continue to dominate the peace-building agenda, even as principles of human security and human rights are increasingly endorsed in it. To ensure refugees stay 'over there', Western states have invested in NGOs and IOs such as UNHCR to meet the humanitarian needs of internally displaced populations. Increasingly, relief is being linked to development, where reconstruction and reintegration are premised on economic development and institution-building. At the same time, UNHCR among other actors is being pressured by states to streamline its activities and adopt results based management approaches such as those represented in the new OMS approach.<sup>14</sup>

Challenging gender relations requires long-term, strategic approaches (Personal Interview with Samara 1999). Yet participatory long-term approaches are potentially compromised by donor pressure for quick impact, results-based approaches symbolized by QIPs and short-term income generating projects. Furthermore, grass-roots initiatives which emphasize income generation must be matched by human rights initiatives to address unequal gender relations within local, national and international institutions. Chapters Six and Seven elaborate on the ramifications of the expansion of UNHCR's mandate on the process of gender-related change in field operations. The case studies of these two chapters largely coincide with the two different periods of Cold War and post-Cold War operations identified in this chapter. The periodization of UNHCR activities identified in the chapter then, is critical to understand how the global political economy shaped operational contexts in which the Policy on Refugee Women was implemented in

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<sup>14</sup> For example, in the 1999 Executive Committee Meeting, Canada raised concern that UNHCR adopt a results-based approach in programme planning and management (Observation Notes, ExCom, October 1999).

the field. It also reminds us of the importance of historically specific, contextualized analysis in the study of gender-related transformation in international organizations.

In short, a critical analysis of the changing global political economy and UNHCR activities within it are essential if feminists are to successfully map and navigate obstacles and opportunities gender related change in refugee-assisting activities. We now turn to an analysis of the strategies pursued by both external and internal gender advocates for refugee women and men.

## **Chapter Four**

### **The Global Campaign on Refugee Women: Transnational Advocacy Networks and the UNHCR, 1980-1990**

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Women are violated sexually and reproductively every day in every country in the world. The notion that these acts violate women's human rights has been created by women, not by states or governments. Women have created the idea that women have human rights out of a refusal to believe that the reality of violation we live with is what it means for us to be human....(MacKinnon 1994, 6).

#### **4.1 Introduction**

In the late-1980s, Anders Johnsson, Senior Legal Advisor for UNHCR, candidly remarked that “Women make up half, if not more, of the world’s refugees, yet since the UNHCR was established in 1950, little has been done...to deal with them as women in a particular situation and with particular needs” (1989, 222). Johnsson attributed this lack of attention to the “exclusively male-oriented” exercise of treaty making on refugee issues over the past 100 years. None of the original commentaries, nor any of the handbooks on procedures and criteria make reference to women. None of the dignitaries present to draft the 1951 Convention were women. In this view, the consistent reference to the male pronoun throughout the 1951 Convention was not a simple oversight, but a manifestation of this deeply rooted tradition. Yet in 1990, UNHCR broke with tradition, releasing a Policy on Refugee Women (1990).

In part, the introduction of this policy can be explained by the strategic organization and activism of women and a smaller number of men. Activists and organizations had both a grass-roots presence in different countries around the world and a global one in NGOs, state-based foreign departments and international organizations. Over the UN Decade for Women and in the post-Nairobi years, these groups linked



together transnationally to launch an effective campaign on the issue of refugee women's protection and assistance needs. Analyzing a range of similar transnational activity in different issue areas, Margret Keck and Kathryn Sikkink (1998) refer to these forms of activism as *transnational advocacy networks* or TANs.

The concept of TANs usefully illustrates how transnational advocates for refugee women have been able to promote policy changes of states and international organizations by mobilizing new information on refugee women and using the power of persuasion but also the politics of 'shame' (Keck & Sikkink 1998, 2). The concept is therefore premised on the idea that non-traditional global actors "help create new issues and categories to persuade, pressure, and gain leverage over much more powerful organizations and governments...to influence policy outcomes [and] to transform the terms and nature of debate" (*Ibid.*).

Utilizing Keck and Sikkink's framework, this chapter contributes a new case study within feminist GG on women as actors and agents of change in global politics (see Friedman 1995; Joachim 1999; Stienstra 1994; Meyer 1999; Whitworth 1994; Winslow 1995). The Chapter focuses on policy change and as such, does not elaborate on the relationship between advocates and gender-related changes in UNHCR institutions. However, Chapter Five continues the thread of this analysis, focusing on the strategies of TANs and 'internal advocates' to implement UNHCR's Policy on Refugee Women.

Meanwhile, this chapter focuses on an analysis of the various campaigns carried out by the refugee women's advocacy network. According to Keck and Sikkink, the campaigns of TANs provide us with important insights into three critical factors which explain policy change: *relationships* of different actors within the network and the actors

they seek to influence; *resources* (information, symbolism, leadership) required to promote consistency and gain legitimacy of an issue within a campaign; and, '*opportunity structures*' wherein TANs take advantage of shifts in international institutions to effectively promote policy changes (p.7). Through this analysis we see how it was that "women [and some men], not states or government" broke the silence of four decades.

#### **4.2 The Emergence of Refugee Women as a Global Issue, 1980-85**

The plight of refugee women emerged as a social issues during the UN Decade for Women and beyond due to a series of historical events (Spencer-Nimmons 1994a). The first event was the growing number of refugees globally in the late 1970s, where refugee women constituted a majority of these populations. It had become increasingly difficult within organized refugee camps to ignore the disproportionate number of women; in Pakistan special camps specifically for widows had to be built. Advocates for women's rights brought this fact to the attention of governments, NGOs and international organizations as they traveled home from delegations to camps.

A second development which contributed to the emergence of the issue was the fact that non-governmental organizations assumed a greater role as 'implementing' partners of humanitarian assistance programmes in the 1980s (Skran 1999). The proliferation of NGOs was matched by an increase in the numbers of women working in the 'field'. Simultaneously witnessing the negative impact of assistance delivered to refugee populations without regard to gender dimensions, some staff began to voice

concern within the local and international NGOs they worked for. Further, they took advantage of connections in the West to lobby states on behalf of refugee women.

A third event was the UN Decade for Women itself, where UN Conferences on Women provided key 'meeting points' for activists, refugee women, government representatives and staff of refugee-related organizations, including UNHCR. These conferences established and expanded network contacts where information gathered by advocates was distributed back to home countries and filtered across local grass-roots organizations working on refugee issues.

The Copenhagen Declaration adopted at the mid-decade 1980 World Conference on Women included a number of symbolic statements relating to refugee and displaced women, recognizing the specificity of refugee women's protection needs and urging UNHCR to take corrective steps to extend protection in these areas (Bonnerjea 1985, 15). While UNHCR did in fact provide a short statement at the Copenhagen Conference in response to the issue, few actions were taken in order to comply with the suggestions outlined in the Copenhagen Declaration. Few staff members inside the organization were sufficiently impressed that gender "mattered" (Camus Jacques 1989). Yet these public statements were a rallying point for activists, inspired to collect more data on the issue, and to keep due pressure on UNHCR.

A number of international conferences following Copenhagen provided advocates for refugee women with an opportunity to organize amongst themselves, and to continue to remind the international community of the seriousness of the issue. For instance, attention was drawn to the plight of refugee women on the high seas in a UNHCR workshop on Indo-Chinese refugees in 1981. Two years later, the Intergovernmental

Committee for Migration (ICM)<sup>1</sup>, met to discuss protection related issues refugee women encountered during flight and in exile, and considered special measures for addressing the situation. In 1984, a Woman in Development (WID) Conference at Harvard University left room for a specific panel on refugee women. Here a number of key advocates were brought together, ideas were exchanged and commitments made to work jointly to promote the issue more effectively on the global stage (Iris 1985, 33).

In Europe, the Dutch Refugee Association brought together thirty-seven representatives from global refugee groups in a conference on refugee women and asylum. Attendees drew up a set of recommendations for the integration of gender within national asylum laws, recognizing that gender-related violence was a form of persecution (Meijer 1988). In 1984, the European Parliament passed a precedent-setting resolution, recognizing that women are sometimes persecuted for breaking the social or cultural norms assigned to their gender. This placed additional pressure on UNHCR to adopt a public position on the issue of gender persecution.

Many women attending conferences at this time were part of larger, influential NGOs<sup>2</sup> and took information collected at such conferences back to their organizations, raising awareness within them and placing 'refugee women' on the agenda (Spencer-Nimmons 1994a). Advocates also drew upon connections with government 'insiders', producing a similar agenda-setting effect in some key government departments. This 'insider' connection would prove a powerful lobbying strategy for advocates, where donor states latter voiced their concerns to UNHCR in the Executive Committee

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<sup>1</sup> The ICM was the historical precursor to the International Organization for Migration (IOM). The organization was originally founded in 1951 at the initiative of the Belgian and US governments to address refugee issues in Europe at the time. The committee/organization continues to respond to refugee displacements today with members from different geographical regions.

(ExCom).<sup>3</sup> A number of prominent states-persons from donor countries took part in a UNHCR Roundtable on Refugee Women held in preparation for the Nairobi Conference on Women in 1985. In attendance was the former American Secretary of State, Jeanne Kirkpatrick, who bitingly reminded UNHCR that: “in gathering statistical data and in planning programs and implementing programs, UNHCR must treat women as persons, and not persons for whom any other person, namely any man, can speak or act in the camps” (quoted in Iris, 1985).

At the Nairobi Conference itself, UNHCR formally acknowledged that refugee women and girls represented most of the world's refugees, and that this “circumstance alone requires that their needs and special problems should be a major factor in the formulation of international action” (A/CONF.116/11 1985, 5). While the statement was a promising sign that some progress had been made, it offered very little by way of ‘content’ on what, exactly, women’s special needs were. This public commitment once again gave activists a point around which to organize and lobby, however. The commitment was made: the follow-through was still to come.

At the same time, Nairobi was a turning point for advocates working on behalf of refugee women, indeed for refugee women themselves. Located in Kenya, East Africa, Nairobi was an appropriate setting for the final conference given that the refugee ‘problem’ was most pressing in Africa. Hundreds of grass-roots refugee women’s organizations were able to attend the parallel NGO forum and voice their concerns to women from all over the world. Over 40 workshops on refugee women were held in the

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<sup>2</sup> Such as the World Council of Churches (WCC) and the Young Women’s Christian Association (YWCA), with a presence in hundreds of countries.

parallel NGO forum, which was attended by several thousand people. A Sub Committee on Refugee and Migrant Women had been organized prior to the Forum to produce a report on the situation of refugee women and put forth recommendations. The Sub Committee made an impressive effort to bring refugee women from other regions of the world to speak at the forum. The organization Refugee Women in Development (Ref/WID) presented videotapes of testimonials from refugee women in Haiti, El Salvador, Guatemala, Cambodia and Vietnam.

All of these activities together had the important effect of raising awareness within the NGO and governmental community of refugee and displaced women's experiences, whereas little global knowledge had existed prior to 1985. While activists in women in development or in human rights circles had been organized prior to the first World Conference on Women in Mexico in 1975, the global campaign on refugee women was only really 'kicked off' a decade later after Nairobi (Indra 1999, 10). In her study of global women's activism around the issue of refugee women, Noreen Spencer-Nimmons argues that:

The Forum facilitated the exchange of ideas by individual women, including refugee women, and those who represented NGOs at the global level, thus crossing micro- to macro- social levels for innovation and action. The two venues provided opportunities for women to merge circles of power to collectivize their shared concerns about discrimination and persecution of women, beyond their biological sex to gender related conflict which effect women as a social group (1994a, 20).

Nairobi exchanges stimulated a shared understanding of the issue at hand among different interested actors working at different levels of social organization. It was becoming increasingly well established, through information provided by these actors, that

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<sup>3</sup> To remind the reader, the ExCom is composed of 53 states which acts as an advisory and monitoring body to the High Commissioner. As most members are donors, senior level officials keenly attempt to appease

assistance and protection were, in fact, not gender neutral activities. This awareness was raised not only within NGO communities, but among sympathetic actors within states. In 1985, the Executive Committee of the UNHCR adopted a conclusion (No. 29) entitled *Refugee Women and International Protection*, in which it stressed the need for UNHCR and host governments to examine the particular protection needs of refugee women. The time was ripe to press for greater changes in UNHCR activities, starting first and foremost with the need for policy change on the issue.

In summary, during the first part of the 1980s, a nascent transnational network of advocates for refugee women began to form as activists, refugee women and officials of governments and international organizations met in international forums, exchanged ideas and information and began to strategize. This early period served to raise enough global awareness on the issue of refugee women that UNHCR officials were compelled to make position statements on the issue of refugee women. These statements would then enable advocates to gain moral leverage over UNHCR, to hold them accountable to the promises made at Nairobi. These fledgling promises were served not only by the symbolic and informational efforts of global advocates, but also by drawing upon resources of empathetic officials in government and international organizations. As we shall see, advocates working inside states, IOs and INGOs were well positioned to promote the issue in the Executive Committee of the UNHCR, an influential advisory body to the High Commissioner for Refugees.

### **4.3 Launching the Global Campaign on Refugee Women, 1986-1990**

During the post-Nairobi period, the emerging networks of advocates for refugee women were consolidated and strengthened by the formation of the International Working Group on Refugee Women (IWGRW or Working Group)<sup>4</sup> and a global campaign emerged with greater force. As the following sections illustrate, the Working Group forged new relationships amongst a wider range of NGOs assisting refugees globally, produced new information that documented the needs and resources of refugee women and launched an effective global campaign on the issue. This network continued to draw upon the resources of actors both 'inside' and 'outside' states and organizations. The campaign began to more systematically draw upon 'symbols' of refugee women and produce information that appealed to the ideas and ideology of UNHCR. Furthermore, global political and economic changes opened new opportunity structures to TANs. As a result, UNHCR was more receptive to the lobbies of the TAN by the time the Policy on Refugee Women was adopted in 1990.

The IWGRW formed primarily to hold UNHCR and other actors accountable to promises related to refugee women that were made at Nairobi. One of the first action-plans involved the distribution of a letter to major NGOs working in refugee related areas, inviting them to join the working group. The letter also requested the attendance of NGO representatives at a formal meeting to be held that Fall (1985). The idea behind these invitations was that "collective thinking and strategizing of NGOs concerned about this question is likely to be more productive and effective than isolated" (Camus-Jacques in Spencer-Nimmons, 1994a, 249).

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<sup>4</sup> The IWGRW was formed by participants of the Nairobi workshops on refugee women at a meeting of the NGO Sub-Committee on the Status of Women.



The first meeting of the IWGRW was attended by around 40 women and some men from major NGOs around the world. The meeting resulted in a formal 'statement on refugee women' which was then circulated to and endorsed by 77 organizations and individuals, though mainly based in Geneva and the United States. Later, the statement was incorporated into the International Committee for Voluntary Agencies (ICVA) statement to the UNHCR Executive Committee in its annual meeting. At this point, advocates began to lobby states through UNHCR institutional mechanisms, again in areas where UNHCR was particularly apt to listen to donor interests.

Eventually, over 100 NGOs formally joined the IWGRW. In late 1986, the working group decided to focus on three areas of activity: information sharing, advocacy and monitoring UNHCR activities on refugee women. In a comprehensive survey of its members activities relating to refugee women, IWGRW was able to compile an impressive data base (see Brenna 1990). This database provided concrete evidence to support the assertion that assistance and protection activities often had negative effects on women and girls when their specific experiences, needs and resources were not taken into account. This evidence was then widely distributed amongst the network, and used to lobby states and the UNHCR.

Advocates were concerned about the degree to which the UNHCR took the issue of refugee women seriously. Beth Ferris, member of the Working Group explains the cause of this concern:

[When I returned from Nairobi], I was impressed with all the commitments and wonderful papers UNHCR prepared about refugee women. A couple of months later, I ran into a colleague working in UNHCR's Protection Division and said something like 'well, we can't wait to see how you implement all of those policies on refugee women.' He replied 'oh, Nairobi's over. Now, it's back to business as usual' (Email exchange with Ferris 1998).

In the absence of a UNHCR policy on refugee women and dedicated resources, the IWGRW feared that UNHCR commitments to the Nairobi Declaration would be unlikely to move from rhetoric to reality. It was time to turn the heat up on the global campaign. To do so, advocacy was pivotal, and information which provided indisputable evidence on the issue would feed the campaign on refugee women. Moreover, it was time to move existing information on refugee women forward. By now it was accepted that refugee women had particular experiences, but little was known about what could be done.

To address this gap, the IWGRW convened an international consultation in 1988 on refugee women, bringing together 150 representatives from refugee groups, NGOs and international organizations as well as 50 refugee women. Five major themes were identified and discussed: protection, health, education, employment and cultural adjustment. Recommendations were put forth in a document entitled *Working with Refugee Women: A Practical Guide*, and widely distributed to relevant organizations. This was one of the first comprehensive sets of guidelines offering practical advice to refugee workers and outlining the causes and consequences of gender-related violence.

In the meantime, advocates located within major donor states were launching their own campaigns to raise the awareness of officials within relevant government bodies. For example, in Canada, a number of informal NGO meetings were held to discuss concerns raised at the Nairobi Conference (Spencer-Nimmons 1994a). In 1985, a more formal meeting was held in consultation with government officials interested in the issue, out of which a Working Group for Refugee Women was formed. Within the largest Canadian refugee advocacy group, the Canadian Council for Refugees, an Ad Hoc Working Group was also formed in May 1986 to “sensitize policy makers at the national

and international level to the needs of refugee women” (CCR quoted in Spencer-Nimmons 1994a, 256).

A year later, the Working Group joined CCR as an official sub-group of CCR, consolidating campaigns around the issue. Canadian advocacy groups frequently liaised with sympathetic staff inside relevant government bodies.<sup>5</sup> This partnership effectively placed enough pressure on relevant government bodies to initiate a wide range of changes to refugee policy, programmes and procedures. For example, the government initiated the Women at Risk (AWR) programme in the late 1980s to resettle female refugees in dire need of protection from camps to Canada (Spencer-Nimmons 1994b). In 1993, the Immigration and Refugee Board released the *Guidelines on Women Refugee Claimants Fearing Gender-Related Persecution* (IRB 1993) (herein the Guidelines).

Many of the achievements realized by Canadian advocacy groups were the result of public awareness campaigns, symbolically organized around a number of cases where female asylum seekers fleeing gender persecution were denied refugee status on the grounds that their experiences did not constitute a legitimate claim under the 1951 Convention. Lobbyists took particular interest in the case of ‘Nada’ – a Muslim woman persecuted for failing to wear the veil in Saudi Arabia (Macklin 1996). ‘Nada’ was an important symbol to galvanize public support and push for the introduction of the Canadian Guidelines.

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<sup>5</sup> For example, advocates had good working relations with members of the Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada (IRB), including Chairperson Judge Nurjehan Mawani. In a personal interview with Judge Mawani, she spoke of her commitment to gender equality issues. She envisioned that the Canadian government could go further to integrate gender equality issues were it not for conservatism in immigration and refugee policies and practices of the past (Mawani, 1998). Indeed Judge Mawani was active in promoting the adoption of Guidelines on Gender Related persecution in Canada and promoted these Guidelines in internationally forums (see 1993a, b & c; 1997). Alliances were also forged with staff working in the Canadian International Development Agency on the WID approach. CIDA would later fund the position of Senior Coordinator for Refugee Women in UNHCR.

Furthermore, advocates used 'leverage politics' to pressure the Canadian government for changes. As Kuttner (1997, 18) argues, Canadian legal norms of equality and non-discrimination embedded in the Constitution gave advocates moral leverage over the government. What is more, advocates could also point to Canadian commitments to women's rights in international legal documents to buttress their positions.

Non-governmental groups in the US likewise played an important role in raising awareness within that country. Refugee Women in Development (Ref/WID) continued to document the plight of refugee women after Nairobi, and to use this information to lobby governments and major refugee assisting organizations (Wali 1995, 337-8). An American based organization, the Women's Commission for Refugee Women and Children (WCRWC), was founded in 1989 under the auspices of the International Rescue Commission. The Commission undertook public education and advocacy on behalf of refugee women and children. This has involved organizing delegations to meet with refugee women and children in countries as diverse as Cambodia, Tanzania, the Former Yugoslavia and Guatemala. Like Ref/Wid, WCRWC strove to "give voice to the concerns of women and children uprooted by war and violence around the world" (Diaz 1995) by bringing their stories to concerned states and the UNHCR. WCRWC has also supported projects initiated by refugee women, believing that women play an important role in relief assistance and in peace processes. Finally, the WCRWC has provided technical support and expertise to other NGOs (such as the IRC, CARE or Save the Children).

As in Canada, WCRWC drew support from sympathetic actors within major government agencies such as USAID to lobby for national and international changes. In

fact, many members of these national and local refugee groups were women in positions of power inside various governmental departments or international agencies. These women used their positions of influence to provide an additional lobby from within. For example, a number of women within the WCRWC were well connected with both the press and members of the American government and, as a result, have been effective in their lobbying efforts (Diaz 1999). This means that both 'mainstream' and 'disengaged' strategies coexisted within the transnational issue network on refugee women (Roach Pierson 1995; Stienstra 1994). These lobbying strategies likewise placed pressure on UNHCR, where donor states lobby the organization to take positive measures on behalf of refugee women. Donors largely make their views known at the annual Executive Committee meeting and intermittent Standing Committee sessions.

For example, Canada actively lobbied other states to recognize the gender-related protection needs of refugee women in Executive Committee Conclusions in the 1980s. In general, Conclusions help set new policy directions for UNHCR (Golberg 1998). States have also attached conditions to their funding of UNHCR on the grounds that monies must be used to assist refugee women. The manner in which dedicated donor driven funds have affected UNHCR programming for women is explored in Chapter Seven.

Finally, it is important to note that activism and ideas spilled across borders, linking groups and individuals transnationally, but also promoting a common set of principles regarding refugee women. For instance, many of the activists in the Canadian campaign were connected with the IWGRW. Achievements within one state often affected outcomes in another. Following the release of the Canadian Guidelines, for example, similar guidelines were developed in Australia and the United States where

Working Groups for Refugee women had also formed around the issue of gender persecution (see Macklin 1999). Thus national organizations linked transnationally, using achievements in one state to compel changes in their own.<sup>6</sup> This further supports Keck and Sikkink's proposition that threats to morally embarrass a government not living up to its commitments to domestic and international laws (moral leverage) can promote policy change.

Within the INGO community, many 'standard' refugee assisting or human rights related organizations joined the global campaign on refugee women. The World YWCA – present in over eighty countries – began working with refugees as early as 1945 (Gibaut 1988, 87). In the past decade, the YWCA has turned its attention specifically to the issue of refugee women. In addition to “helping refugee women to help themselves”, the World YWCA has been involved in advocacy work on behalf of refugee women, lobbying states and organizations regarding their rights. Throughout the 1980s, “the World YWCA increasingly voiced its concern for refugee women and transmitted this message throughout its extensive global system. This increased the interest and commitment of women in YWCA branches around the world. Many of these became concerned and began turning up at meetings of advocacy groups” (Spencer-Nimmons 1994a, 212). This concern led to greater support of projects for refugee women which, in turn, fostered a sense of personal power and leadership among different groups of refugee women.

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<sup>6</sup> Unfortunately, I was not able to find documentation of women's activism outside Western, particularly North American states. This does not mean women were not actively seeking changes in refugee assistance outside of these regions throughout the decade, but rather that the locus of resources I had access to in North America was centred on this area of activism. It would be interesting to analyze comparatively how women in different regions have organized and with what results. In Panama and Guatemala for instance, gender persecution is recognized under the auspice of the law with considerably less controversy than in Canada (Informal conversation with UNHCR protection officer from Colombia).

Another example of INGO involvement is the World Council of Churches (WCC). A non-governmental organization with a global reach, key actors within the WCC were able to act as a powerful centre for information-sharing and to lobby states as well as the UNHCR. Within the broader human rights regime, non-governmental organizations such as Amnesty International (AI) and Human Rights Watch (HRW) also launched campaigns on refugee women at the global level. These campaigns formed a part of a larger effort to address the issue of women's human rights by the organizations. Campaigns on women's rights in AI and HRW symbolize an important gain for women, considering that previously human rights were perceived as gender neutral in these prominent organizations. Today, they recognize gender-related forms of violence as human rights issues (HRW 1993; 1995; AI 1995). Their work involves lobbying states and armed political groups to respect international conventions on human rights (including the Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination Against Women -- CEDAW) and to implement policies which address violence and discrimination against women. Further, AI and HRW gather important information on the human rights situation of women in different countries, contributing to the documentation of women's persecution. As Keck and Sikkink argue, the density of a network is measured by the members and degree of information exchanged between them. When symbolically powerful international NGOs such as the WCC, AI and HRW joined the TAN on refugee women, its resources were greatly increased.

In response to lobbying activities world-wide, including the actions of internal activists within government bodies, UN agendas were set by the late-1980s. ECOSOC requested a study on women in 1987, which included an analysis of refugee women. The

Division for the Advancement of Women and the Committee on the Status of Women were by now following up on the commitments of states and IOs in the Nairobi Declaration. By 1988, UNHCR's Executive Committee adopted a conclusion entitled *Refugee Women and International Protection* (No. 39) requesting that a senior level steering committee be convened to co-ordinate and oversee the assessment and revision of UNHCR policies and programmes in support of refugee women. In 1989, the Executive Committee adopted Conclusion 60, restating concern expressed in an earlier conclusion about the physical protection needs of refugee women. This conclusion also called for the development of a policy framework in order to "mainstream" women within the organization. The Steering Committee was convened in 1988 and by 1989, UNHCR agreed to establish the office of the Senior Coordinator for Refugee Women. By 1990, the *Policy on Refugee Women* had been released and adopted by the Executive Committee.

#### **4.4 The Campaign, TANs and UNHCR: Relationships, Resources and Opportunities**

This section of the chapter focuses more closely on the relationships, resources and opportunity structures which shaped the TAN's global campaign on the issue of refugee women and led to policy change in UNHCR. The case study under consideration in this chapter affirms a number of propositions advanced by Keck and Sikkink regarding campaigns (1998, 201-209). The authors argue that effective campaigns are shaped by: a strong network characterized by large numbers of participants with a dense exchange of information (relationships); the ability to generate new information and symbols and gain moral or material leverage over the target



government or organization (resources); and the vulnerability of the target to such leverage, given internal institutional arrangements and susceptibility to external pressures (opportunity structures). Thus, effective campaigns are more likely to realize policy changes and, as such, help to “transform state [and international organization] understandings of their... interests, and alter their calculations of the costs and benefits of particular policies” (p. 203).

#### *4.4.1 Relationships*

Within transnational networks on refugee women, actors within both the human rights and international development communities converged around the issue of refugee women. Interest from these two areas of activism is not surprising given the two ‘arms’ of refugee work; protection and assistance. In UNHCR, protection issues have been historically located within legal circles, and assistance in the realm of practical work, considered more ‘hands-on’. The novelty of TANs on refugee women has been to highlight the inter-relationships of assistance and protection; but by and large, these two aspects of refugee work are also conceptually separated in activist campaigns.

WID circles provided an important ‘space’ wherein advocates for refugee women could meet, analyze, organize and strategize. For instance, the 1984 Harvard Conference on WID was an important opportunity for advocates to exchange views and map common ground. The influence of WID assumptions within campaigns on refugee women is evident (Boserup 1970). WID approaches emphasized not only the ‘vulnerability’ of Third World women to development activities, but also the potential contributions and role of women to the broad goals of economic development (Kardam 1991). WID

advocates recognized that few development organizations would include women in their activities unless it was deemed relevant to their programming. Thus, WID strategically appealed to existing goals of international development organizations, drawing a relationship between women's work and economic growth. It was argued that projects could be made more efficient if women were included in their planning and implementation (Rathgeber 1995).

Advocates for refugee women, many of whom had worked within the WID approach, articulated a similar platform. They argued that assistance to refugees in short and long term camp situations was economized when the needs and capabilities of refugee women were recognized (Forbes-Martin 1993; Kelly 1987). More poignantly, advocates began to point out the disastrous effects of leaving women out of assistance planning. For example, in the distribution of food supplies to male leaders, one observer noted that:

...these male leaders may have little understanding of the needs and circumstances of those who cook the food or feed their families, that is, the women. As a result, the food distribution procedures and contents may be inappropriate. Food that is inconsistent with the refugees' and displaced persons' dietary traditions may be provided. Or, food offered may require preparation that cannot readily be accomplished in a camp setting. These problems are further compounded by cultural practices among some refugee and displaced populations that require that men be fed first. Where supplies are limited, women and children may not receive adequate food (Forbes-Martin 1992, 35).

Refugee women's participation was framed as an important step to improving assistance and eventually to the promotion of self-sustaining camps. As Forbes- Martin put it, such refugee participation "is cost effective" (1992, 11).

On the other hand, the international campaign on women's human rights was beginning to gather momentum in the 1980s. Feminist legal scholars (see Bunch 1995)

and activists (Friedman 1995) have argued that the historical separation of 'public' and 'private' has marginalized, indeed excluded, women's rights in international law, and precluded the protection of women based on their experiences in humanitarian operations. Similar arguments were put forth by advocates for refugee women (Indra 1989): for example, that gender persecution was deemed 'private' and therefore excluded from the 1951 Refugee Convention and UNHCR operations and activities (Johnsson 1989). Corrective measures have sought to 'add' refugee women into existing legal instruments and procedures.

In other words, conceptual advancements and actual achievements within development and human rights circles informed and bolstered transnational advocacy campaigns on refugee women. Among the largest supporters and participants of this campaign were persons working in both women's rights and development circles, particularly within governments and large international non-governmental bodies. The campaign was thus strengthened by these inter-connected and overlapping interests.

It is important to emphasize that within the TAN on refugee women, both mainstream and disengagement strategies were used, involving persons located within states, international organizations and international NGOs. Thus refugee women's NGOs sought to support grass-roots women's organizations by channeling resources and providing opportunities to refugees to attend and network with other refugee women in regional and global forums. Likewise refugee women NGOs liaised with empathetic persons inside government bodies to raise awareness within international organizations and states, and to push for institutional changes. That major donor states -- especially the US -- were sufficiently persuaded of the importance of the issue to join the campaign to

pressure UNHCR is significant, for government based members of the Executive Committee held strategic positions and were thus able to put the issue on the agenda, and to push for UNHCR policy change.

That 'middle' powers such as Canada offered to support UNHCR operations through provision of resources and expertise based on their experience (and reputation for being leaders in 'women's rights') in the WID field, equally left UNHCR in a position where moving forward on the issue was the only viable direction. At the same time, in the absence of non-governmental networks, it is unlikely that governments would have been persuaded to move in this direction on their own. As the first UNHCR Senior Coordinator for Refugee Women was to later remark, "a key factor in introducing change to UNHCR [policy] has been the establishment of formal and informal networks. From the beginning, [then], the non-governmental organizations were an active external lobby for improved programming for refugee women" (Howarth-Wiles 1993, 728). The relationship between advocates both within and outside state-based institutions was critical to the advancement of the issue in UNHCR.

In short, the TAN on refugee women can be said to have been characterized as both strong and dense.<sup>7</sup> The number of participants in the network grew steadily over the course of the decade. The IWGRW helped focus the network on the goal of producing new information on refugee women and distributing this information throughout the network. The IWGRW played a central leadership role in the collection, systematization and dissemination of this information to key actors. Further, IWGRW

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<sup>7</sup> As Keck and Sikkink argue, the density and strength of the network derive from the shared interests of its members in a given issue, as well as the relationships among network participants. In addition, "the 'voice' of the network is not the sum of the network component voices, but the product of an interaction of voices (and different from any single voice of a network member" (p. 207).

helped facilitate the interconnection of locally based and national activists and organizations interested in the issue. The International Working Group effectively brought on board key refugee assisting organizations, and shared information and strategies with refugee women, NGOs and sympathizers within states to push for change. As such, this Working Group helped maintain communication among the network, contributing to its consistency and vitality in the drive to push for policy change in UNHCR.

#### *4.4.2 Resources*

A critical resource of TANs is the ability to produce and distribute new information in order to persuade actors of a need for policy change. Various located actors within the refugee women's network were actively involved in gathering and disseminating data on the situation of refugee women globally, and made this information available to key actors they wanted to persuade. For example, a study in 1987 confirmed that between 75-80 per cent of all refugee populations were women and children, a powerful statistic for lobbying purposes.

Further, the symbolic use of pictures, testimonials and events were deployed to provoke a personal response from publics and international actors. Reference was often made to the graphic rape of female refugees of all ages by pirates on the high seas outside Thailand. The tragic and compelling testimonials of refugee women at world conferences were also incorporated into meetings and conferences. Pictures of 'vulnerable' refugee women were used in campaigns throughout the 1980s to evoke a similar response. Domestically, refugee women were constructed as the 'exotic, vulnerable other' in need of protection within the media, focusing on specific cases of

women fleeing female genital mutilation, domestic violence and gender persecution due to transgressing the social mores of their country (refusing to wear the veil).<sup>8</sup>

As Keck and Sikkink observe, “new ideas are more likely to be influential if they fit well with existing ideas and ideologies in a particular historical setting” (p.204). Keck and Sikkink found that two types of issues are most likely to influence governments and international organizations. These issues are usually influential if they involve “bodily harm to vulnerable individuals” (e.g. children, the elderly), and if they refer to “legal equality of opportunity” (*Ibid.*). That information and symbols focused on ‘women’s vulnerability’ helped bring on board a number of refugee-assisting NGOs, IOs and state officials. This appealed to the general sensibilities of staff in humanitarian NGOs and IOs who worked to ‘assist and protect’ the vulnerable. Further, a strategic appeal to ‘women’s rights’ resonated with human rights discourses, underscoring their work. Thus, the campaign focused on how and why gender discrimination excluded refugee women from enjoying equal access to assistance and protection. Again, this appealed to organizations such as UNHCR on the basis that their mandate was founded on equal rights principles. As a result of this strategic approach, transnational activists were able to gain moral leverage over UNHCR.

Furthermore, the production of the document *Working with Refugee Women* provided information on how UNHCR and other refugee assisting organizations could

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<sup>8</sup> Macklin (1995; 1997) and Razack (1995) have argued that the symbols used by activists and governments reinforce the idea that refugee women are ‘vulnerable’, downplaying their resources and agency. As a result, ‘receiving states’ construct themselves as morally superior to ‘refugee producing’ states. In this way, the universal gender-related forms of violence women experience – including women in refugee receiving states’ is elided. Further, by focusing on ‘women’ as an oppressed group, the multiple and varied ways in which women and men become refugees is down-played (Oswin 1999). This discursive construction reinforces power relations between refugee receiving states and refugee producing states, wherein the global and national political, economic and socio-cultural (such as disability, religion, ‘race’,

integrate refugee women's needs and resources. The document underscored the utility of working with refugee women: it argued that programmes would become more efficient and protection more effective. Appealing to common-sense issues of efficiency as well as equal opportunity, the transnational network gained a degree of material leverage: "linking the issue of concern to money, trade or prestige." As the following section elaborates, TANS timed this tactic well, as UNHCR underwent a financial crisis in the late-1980s and sought to re-legitimize its activities.

#### *4.4.3 Opportunities*

As Keck and Sikkink argue, some institutions are more open to leverage than others depending on how vulnerable they are to external pressures (p. 201). UNHCR is accountable to the UN General Assembly and ECOSOC and is bound by international laws concerning refugees. Further, UNHCR is in part dependent upon funding from donor states and thus open to the influence of state interests in its activities. The late - 1980s was a period of crises for the UNHCR, as Western states evoked restrictive asylum measures and as changes in the global political economy placed the legitimacy of the organization in question.

In the late 1980s, donors criticized UNHCR for being too top heavy and economically inefficient. In effect, UNHCR sought to mainstream and improve its activities in support of refugees in order to remain relevant in the 'eyes' of the international (especially donor) community. As Chapter Three discussed, it was during this decade that resettlement fell out of favour as a durable solution, and repatriation

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sexuality) factors which lead to displacement are down-played. The potential impact of the construction of refugee women as vulnerable on UNHCR programmes is further explored in the next Chapter.

received more attention. This focused UNHCR attention on the needs of refugees *en masse*, and the long-term development related concerns of refugees became more and more apparent. As the decade moved on, pressure to reform UNHCR activities grew more and more acute.

By 1989, UNHCR was facing a grave financial crisis. This strain, coupled by the pressure advocates placed on the organization, in part led UNHCR to re-think its previously-gender neutral approaches. By appealing to UNHCR's need to streamline and make its activities more effective, advocates made it that much easier for UNHCR to reverse its original position on the issue and begin to act on gender. Further, as UNHCR began to work inside zones of conflict and in immediate post-conflict situations in the late 1980s and early 1990s, the 'vulnerability' of refugee women, who constituted the majority of the displaced along with their children, appealed to the sensibilities of some UNHCR staff and decision-makers.

The end of the Cold War opened up political space internationally, where human rights issues could be examined in a less politically sensitive environment. This, in turn, fostered greater room for examining 'women's issues' in international forums.<sup>9</sup> As Joachim (1999, 151) explains, "while the Cold War had only a few years earlier hampered the agenda setting efforts of international women's organizations, its thaw now provided opportunities for these groups. In particular, it freed up agenda space".<sup>10</sup> International women's movements and networks continued to gain strength in the 1990s as the UN held a series of specialized meetings (on the environment, human rights and

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<sup>9</sup> At the same time, other issues (such as population, the environment, natural resource management, disease) began to receive increased attention. In addition, the international community more readily accepted the inter-connectedness of social, political and economic issues across state boundaries.



population). Moreover, the redefinition of 'security' to include a human rights perspective likewise opened space for women's organizations in the post Cold War era. 'Softer' issues such as refugees, AIDs and human rights gained attention and UN focus. A final development in the late 1980s is that the UN started to become more accessible to NGOs, eventually granting consultative status to larger and larger numbers of specialized NGOs (*Ibid.*)<sup>11</sup>

Thus a series of fundamental shifts in the global political economy provided opportunities to refugee women's networks. The UN Decade for Women was critical for galvanizing awareness and information exchange among activists. Their campaign reached a critical moment in the late 1980s, when states joined advocates to press for greater changes within UNHCR during an uncertain period of the organization's history. Advocates were therefore in a good position to pressure for changes within an organization striving to maintain legitimacy in the eyes of the international community. The momentum of the campaign was strengthened by the end of East-West tensions which had narrowly defined UNHCR directions and approaches. As human rights and new concepts of security came into focus, it was easier to advocate for the rights of 'refugee women' in UNHCR where historically, gender relations were understood as solely 'cultural' and therefore private.

At the same time, UNHCR activities were affected by shifts in the global political economy. The 'reactive', 'refugee-specific' and 'exile-oriented' approach no longer fit the realities of an increasingly globalized world. Pressure to stem refugee flows and

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<sup>10</sup> For a discussion of how the Cold War stalemated discussions during UN Decade for Women see Winslow, 1995.

<sup>11</sup> For a discussion of the types of human rights, environmental and women's rights NGOs granted consultative status in UN bodies see Clark, Friedman and Hochstetler 1998).

resolve existing refugee problems required a radically new approach in the organization. Thus a new discourse on the 'right to return' emerged, and the economics of return were considered. Linking refugee women to ideas about efficiency, advocates were able to take advantage of shifting global discourses on economic development and rights to appeal to UNHCR. This point is elaborated in Chapter Five where the consolidation of the shift of this new approach within UNHCR activities is discussed.

#### **4.5 Conclusions**

“Networks influence politics at different levels because the actors in these networks are simultaneously helping to define an issue area, convince policymakers and publics that the problems thus defined are solvable, prescribe solutions, and monitor their implementation” (Keck and Sikkink 1998, 201). This chapter has traced the activities, relationships and resources of refugee women’s networks and argues that such actors played an important role in global awareness raising, agenda setting and policy change.

An increasing number of participating NGOs and individuals strengthened the transnational network on refugee women in the post-Nairobi period. Differently situated participants in this TAN contributed different resources required to push the campaign forward. Information and symbols were powerful resources to persuade governments and international organizations. These resources were then an effective means of gaining moral or material leverage, pressuring UNHCR. Working through global networks, gender advocates exchanged information and built an important knowledge base on the particular needs of refugee women, one that was increasingly recognized by Western

states in the Executive Committee in the late-1980s and eventually by the UNHCR with the release of the Policy on Refugee Women in 1990.

The institutionalized legacy of an assumed 'gender neutrality' meant the organization was slow to react to advocates for refugee women in the earlier part of the decade. However, advocates were able to take advantage of radical changes in the global political economy in the post-Cold War period to strengthen their campaign. The campaign appealed to the sensibilities of UNHCR officials with respect to the 'efficiency' of integrating refugee women. Further, the TAN was able to gain moral leverage by appealing to humanitarian and rights based principles which underscored the work of UNHCR and states party to the Executive Committee. However this is not to say that an institutional shift automatically followed policy change. Indeed, as the following chapter illustrates, individual and organizational resistance to the implications of 'gender equality' remained high in the decade which followed.

This chapter contributes to a growing body of empirical evidence on the role of non-state actors in promoting changes in the policies of global actors. Yet the story is unfinished. While transnational refugee women's advocates have helped frame debates, open discursive spaces and pressure UNHCR for policy change, institutional change in goals, practices and culture remains a formidable challenge. In the next chapter, I examine the process and limitations of institutional change to move refugee women from the policy agenda, and into UNHCR's programmes and protection activities in the field.

**Chapter Five**  
**'Internal Campaigns' on Refugee Women and Gender Equality:**  
**The Office of the Senior Co-ordinator for Refugee Women**  
**and the UNHCR, 1990-2000**

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**5.1 Introduction**

When the first Senior Coordinator for Refugee Women arrived in Geneva in 1989, she had a rather 'chilly' welcome, with few resources<sup>1</sup> at her disposal and little enthusiasm amongst her co-workers (Personal Interview with Howarth Wiles 1998). Yet from this position, the new Senior Coordinator was able to launch an effective awareness raising campaign within the organization, securing key resources to improve programming for refugee women and men. By the time the first co-ordinator had left office in late 1996, a Policy and Guidelines had been accepted by the Executive Committee and an analytical framework had been introduced to guide field workers. Key to realizing these achievements was building a network of support amongst external and internal advocates, both governmental and non-governmental. Despite her advocacy and strategic interventions however, implementation of the policy has been slow. By the tenth anniversary of the Policy, resistance among UNHCR staff in UNHCR was still quite high (Observation Notes, Geneva 1999; Field Notes, Guatemala February 1999; Field Notes Bosnia-Herzegovina October 1999) and significant gaps remained between policy and practice in UNHCR operations in the field.

In Chapter Two I argued that policy and norm change do not adequately explain the process of gender-related change within international organizations. One must also consider the process and limitations of change by examining the promotion of and resistance to the issue by actors located *inside* pivotal organizations. This chapter

examines the 'internal campaigns' of the Senior Coordinator for Refugee Women, drawing upon the gender studies of institutional change examined in Chapter Two. Like the previous chapter on TANs, the campaigns of internal actors identify relationships of internal advocates and the people they wish to influence, resources required to raise awareness and realize implementation, and 'opportunity structures' advocates take advantage of to realize their objectives (Keck & Sikkink 1998). The chapter underscores how organizational goals, cultures and practices shape the process of change. Through this analysis, the reasons behind the apparent contradiction between policy and practice come to light. Specifically, institutional change in gender relations has yet to occur within the organization.

## **5.2 The Early Campaign of the Senior Coordinator, 1989-1996**

Canadian Anne Howarth Wiles arrived in Geneva, Switzerland to take up the position of Senior Coordinator for Refugee Women in 1989. The position was created out of ExCom Conclusion No. 54 (1988) which requested the establishment of a Steering Committee on Refugee Women to "co-ordinate, integrate and oversee the process [of integrating refugee women] throughout the UNHCR". By mid-1989, a more permanent position was created to continue the work of the Steering Committee. The terms of reference for the Coordinator were ambitious. In essence, the Coordinator was responsible for developing a strategy to integrate refugee women's special needs into UNHCR programmes globally, in nearly a hundred countries at the time.

Howarth-Wiles requested that her office be highly placed within the structure of the organization. Like other UN organizations, UNHCR is based on a rigid merit system

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<sup>1</sup> The Co-ordinator originally had no staff and no office equipment.

that is hierarchically organized. To pass to a senior level, a substantial number of years working in the UN or a recognized international agency is required. Rising through the ranks inside UNHCR is respected by staff over those who are “parachuted” in from other organizations. In particular, respect accumulates in relation to the number of difficult field missions one has undertaken. Thus at UNHCR meetings, introductions often begin with recounting field experiences as well as titles (Observation Notes, DOS 1999). Senior ranking staff command the respect of junior staff who seldom question their authority. This hierarchy is reinforced in the decision-making structure of the organization. Ultimate policy and decision making rests in Headquarters and regional Bureaus. Sub and field offices are obliged to follow these policy decisions. The Deputy High Commissioner agreed to place the Senior Coordinator's Office within the second highest policy level, (see Appendix I) allowing her to report to the Deputy High Commissioner himself. This provided Howarth-Wiles, who was disadvantaged by being an ‘outsider’, some authority in the organization, a necessity to push a new policy directive.

In an interview with the author (Howarth Wiles 1998), the first Co-ordinator stated that it soon became apparent to her that most UNHCR staff were reluctant to embrace a gender perspective. Many staff members believed that international refugee instruments applied equally to men and women and were therefore non-discriminatory. A policy which focused on refugee women was considered unnecessary from this view point. Furthermore, the issue of refugee women was thought to derive from a Western liberal feminist perspective (Howarth-Wiles, 1998). Employees within the organization perceived their work to be grounded in principles of neutrality and non-intervention: if

feminism was Western based, it was an imposition of Western values on diverse cultures. Howarth-Wiles notes that “as a North American, I was seen as someone who might be trying to undertake social engineering among refugee women along Western feminist lines” (*Ibid.*) In addition, staff tended to associate Howarth-Wiles’ work with that of affirmative action in hiring practices. To avoid a backlash, Howarth-Wiles requested that she not be responsible for affirmative action in hiring practices. This request was granted.

Howarth-Wiles knew that if any progress was to be made, the issue of refugee women had to ‘fit’ the institutional culture of the organization (Howarth-Wiles 1993, 718). This required adopting an ‘instrumentalist’ approach, convincing staff of the utility of integrating refugee women into their activities. As her colleague observed,

To avoid a perception at UNHCR of refugee women as a fringe-element with special and unique needs, the Senior Co-ordinator focused the early efforts of the office on initiatives which would assure that both women and men refugees benefited in an even and fair-handed way from UNHCR’s assistance and protection programming. She saw the issue as one related to efficient programming and wise use of resources that required a people-oriented perspective as the central feature of the planning process (Overholt 1996, 3).

The Co-ordinator developed a three pronged approach which included: 1) a *Policy on Refugee Women*, drawing a clear relationship between the *Policy* and UNHCR operational goals; 2) training materials and tools to improve UNHCR programming; and, 3) advocating awareness within and outside the organization, to maintain continued pressure on the High Commissioner and senior managers. The following sections examine these strategies, identifying obstacles to each before weighing achievements realized in this period. I then identify how each reflected the relationships, resources and opportunities of this early campaign.

### 5.2.1 *The Policy on Refugee Women and Guidelines*

Prior to assuming the position of Senior Coordinator for Refugee Women, Anne Howarth-Wiles worked for the Canadian International Development Agency where she was responsible for mainstreaming a WID approach. Based on her experience in CIDA, Howarth-Wiles knew that if any progress was to be made, activities had to be "...properly anchored and nurtured within the organization's structure and philosophy..." (1993, 718). This required integrating 'refugee women' within an organizational culture characterized by short term, 'top-down' operational approaches and a traditionally conservative perspective on women's rights.

Like the transnational refugee women's network before her, the Senior Coordinator initiated this process by 'framing' the particular needs and resources of refugee women. On the one hand, refugee women were vulnerable and therefore in need of UNHCR support: "Visit a refugee camp and the image that will stick with you will be crowds of women and children. Who looks after them?" (UNHCR n.d.). On the other hand, refugee women were also resourceful, contributing in important ways through reproductive and household work to refugee camps. This dual image underscored contrasting experiences of refugee women and framed women with respect to 'expectations' regarding her gender.

The *Policy on Refugee Women* drew a connection between UNHCR activities and refugee women's vulnerability. When staff ignored the gender-related differences of men, women, girls and boys, it was asserted, they potentially reproduced relationships of inequality within refugee populations, widening the gender gap in terms of access to and



control over resources. In turn, when women's resources were overlooked, their potential to contribute to camp life was not tapped into. To promote more efficient programmes, therefore, the *Policy* encouraged staff to identify and integrate the different needs and capacities of both men and women into UNHCR planning and programming. Framed in this way, staff were to be convinced that integrating 'refugee women' into programming wasn't just good for refugee women, but the whole of the refugee population and UNHCR.

In the following years, the Senior Coordinator worked together with the Division of International Protection (DIP) to issue the *Guidelines on the Protection of Refugee Women* (1991) and, *The Guidelines on Prevention and Response to Sexual Violence against Refugees* (1995). Both guidelines once again underscored the importance of understanding the context and composition of refugee populations. Importantly, these Guidelines make a conceptual linkage between protection and assistance, where historically the agency had delivered assistance "with little or no concern for protection" (Quick 1996).

The endorsement of the *Policy* and Guidelines in the Executive Committee<sup>2</sup> offered a period of transition wherein the Senior Co-ordinator could now focus her energies on designing a strategy to implement the Policy and guidelines in UNHCR operations. This required an awareness raising campaign and developing alternative planning tools to guide staff in their work with refugee populations.

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<sup>2</sup> To get the Executive Committee's endorsement, the Senior Coordinator solicited the support of sympathetic states such as Canada and the United States. These states lobbied from within the Executive Committee, with the transnational advocacy network pressured member states from 'outside'.

### 5.2.2 Awareness Raising and People Oriented Planning

People Oriented Planning (POP)<sup>3</sup> (UNHCR 1992b) introduced to staff an analytical framework identifying the differing roles of refugee men and women, and the relationship of these roles to assistance and protection activities. A group of US based consultants working in the WID tradition developed the framework in conjunction with the Senior Co-ordinator. In fact, POP tailors the WID Harvard Framework to fit the refugee experience (March, Smyth & Mukhopadhyay 1999). A three step analysis was established to aid field staff in their identification of the: 1) refugee profile and context 2) activities of men and women, and 3) resources of men and women. The framework focused attention on how gender roles were affected by the socio-economic contexts of refugees. Staff were then prompted to consider how such changes may increase a refugee's vulnerability relating to assistance. For example, in a POP case study, the relevance of gender roles was considered in relation to young Sudanese men separated from their mothers or wives.<sup>4</sup> Since Sudanese boys were never taught how to prepare or cook food in their culture, the young men were unable to feed themselves with their rations and suffered malnutrition as a result.<sup>5</sup>

POP also stressed the importance of refugee participation: "refugee participation is a major factor in determining whether or not a project will be successful". However,

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<sup>3</sup> The choice of terminology for the framework is revealing. Howarth Wiles explains the term 'people' was selected because if the title had referred to 'women', "no-one would have cared".

<sup>4</sup> While this case study suggests a Gender and Development (GAD) approach, POP does not emphasize value attached to different gender roles which limits access to resources and opportunities. Further, POP does not highlight relationships between men and women at local, national or global levels which lead to inequalities of access and opportunity.

<sup>5</sup> Case studies focused on a diverse range of groups, men and women, girls and boys and the elderly for several reasons. First, the designers of POP recognized that an approach which focused on women alone would have been met with resistance. They therefore wanted to highlight how POP would assist different groups of refugees as a whole. In the gender related UNHCR trainings I attended in the summer of 1999, I noticed that case studies with men or boys were grasped far more quickly than those with women and girls.

specific methodologies for involving refugees, or gender relations which often impede women's participation in decision-making and public sphere activities, were not elaborated in the framework. The POP backgrounder states "it is essential *in planning activities for refugees* that you have an in depth understanding of dynamics... within the society" (emphasis mine). Even in this improved equation, refugees are still recipients of, and not participants in, UNHCR programming.

As early as 1991, POP training was underway. To promote 'ownership' of the issue within the organization, 'super trainers' were identified amongst trainees. Super-trainers would then organize their own trainings in different regions. This approach continued well throughout the 1990s so that by mid-1996, around forty percent of staff had received training. However, a number of obstacles stymied headway, stemming in part from the organizational culture of UNHCR and in part from external events driving the agency in new directions.

As noted in Chapter Three, the organization expanded in response to rising numbers of refugees in the early 1990s: between 1991 and 1996, the number of staff more than tripled. High staff turn-over in emergency situations, and the mass influx of new personnel meant a critical mass of staff were not being reached. At first, POP was a stand-alone training component. Further, new staff received a very brief training on refugee women during their induction to the organization. Inundated with new information, new staff were more likely to place POP tools on the back burner.

The nature of emergency crises meant staff felt hard pressed to gather such detailed data as POP required (Observation Notes, ER 1999). In addition, assistance had

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I surmise that this is due to resistance of staff to women's rights issues. When gender is related to 'women', it is translated into a political or cultural issue. When related to men, it is not.

always been distributed to refugees from the refugee assisting organization and implementing partners. Involving refugees in programme planning was likewise considered an unattainable luxury in emergency situations. When refugees were involved, refugee men were usually brought into the process first because they were easier to access.<sup>6</sup> Head of household and trickle down theories (where men could adequately represent the interests of family members and would equitably distribute goods among them) were rooted in UNHCR assistance practices, and thus contributed to the idea that taking the extra effort to involve women was unnecessary in these cases (Observation Notes, DOS 1999).

Despite training, a number of external and internal evaluations revealed some disappointing results: the *Policy* and Guidelines were unevenly distributed and implementation was slow. Results of an internal survey in 1993 compelled ExCom members to request a Working Group be formed to study the problem. These internal groups found that “entrenched staff attitudes,” and a lack of sufficient resources and staff accountability were prevalent among a list of reasons for the lack of implementation. These findings were further confirmed by an external evaluation team hired by the UNHCR Central Evaluation Unit (Overholt 1996).

As a result, a renewed effort was made to expand training efforts and target senior level managers. POP training sessions also began to be integrated into existing UNHCR training programmes. The Senior Coordinator established an internal network of advocates, referred to as ‘focal points’ on refugee women. Offices were encouraged to put forth names of interested persons who would then serve as the key resource person

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<sup>6</sup> And as Jane Parpart pointed out, men were likely approached first in emergencies because they were perceived to have knowledge and authority. This point underscores the kinds of gender assumptions staff

for, and proponent of, the approach. The idea was that focal points would act as catalysts. However, often focal points were encumbered with other responsibilities and had few resources at their disposal. Nevertheless the idea was reinvigorated with the creation of four regional posts where staff were dedicated to act as Senior Advisors on Refugee Women. Posts were eventually created in Costa Rica, Nairobi, Ankara and Cairo. These posts would galvanize the process of implementing the Policy and Guidelines and Senior Advisors were encouraged to develop their own strategies to do so.

At the same time, the post of Senior Coordinator was relocated from the Deputy High Commissioner's Office to that of the Director of Operations in 1994. This reorganization was done to comply with a request by the Executive Committee to ensure "active management support for integrating refugee women's issues throughout planning, programming, budgeting and delivery of assistance programmes" (Overholt 1996, 12). However, internal advocates were concerned that staff would take the issue less seriously, as experience had demonstrated that a high level position for offices responsible for women's issues was necessary to convince staff of the importance of the issue – a point which will be returned to shortly.

### **5.2.3 Internal Advocacy and Transnational Advocacy Networks**

To promote the issue of refugee women throughout the UNHCR, the Senior Coordinator continued to identify both internal and external advocates and to establish connections with interested donor states and other international actors. A number of awareness raising initiatives were undertaken, including the release of a special issue on refugee women in *Refugees* (1995c), UNHCR's monthly publication. Around the same

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often bring to the field.

time, Susan Forbes Martin published the first comprehensive text on the issue, *Refugee Women*. Originally this text was published in collaboration with the UN NGO Liaison Services and after wide distribution within UNHCR, was released to the general public. UNHCR publicists began to incorporate 'refugee women' in public information campaigns, referring to their particular needs and resources and using images of refugee women in posters.

In addition, the Senior Coordinator actively participated in multilateral fora and held talks with bilateral actors involved in refugee assistance to ensure continued donor interest (and therefore pressure) on the issue (Overholt 1996, 3 and 6). This involved participating in events hosted by the Commission for the Status of Women and a large number of preparatory meetings for the World Conference on Women. A large number of focal points from each office were also involved in these preparations. A US based consultant group produced a publication on UNHCR initiatives to support women titled "Rebuilding the Future Together" for presentation at Beijing, later released to the general public (SCRW & CDA 1997). In addition, UNHCR exchanges with the United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM) led to the establishment of a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) between the two organizations, leading to a more consistent approach in joint activities.

The International Working Group on Refugee Women (IWGRW) lobbied the UNHCR to ensure that the Policy on Refugee Women was implemented at the field level.

As Elizabeth Ferris, a founding member of the IWGRW, explains:

It was a glorious experience in many ways, because we saw UNHCR's policies change -- we pressed for a Special Coordinator for Refugee women and saw that happen, ... we pushed for UNHCR guidelines to go to every field office (which happened, though implementation is still spotty), we called for training of all

UNHCR staff and helped develop the presently-used POP training, we raised the issue in every meeting with UNHCR staff, drafted letters, etc. And we saw some really positive, wonderful changes at the policy level -- and to a lesser extent at the field level (Ferris 1998).

The Senior Coordinator frequently met with this group, to identify priority areas and discuss strategies for creating pressure for change (Howarth-Wiles 1993; 1998). At the same time, the Senior Coordinator involved both WID specialists and government representations in Consultations on the development of the POP framework. Howarth-Wiles was an active participant alongside academics and advocates attending the landmark *International Conference on Gender Issues and Refugees: Development Implications*, in Toronto, Canada in 1993.

The Women's Commission on Refugee Women and Children (WCRWC) was likewise an active partner with the Senior Coordinator. Delegations followed up the implementation of the UNHCR's Policy and Guidelines in the field (WCRWC 1992; 1995a; 1995b). Findings were then used to lobby the UNHCR and aid the Senior Coordinator's office. Further, the WCRWC helped develop UNHCR tools, publishing a 'synopsis' of the Guidelines in hopes that a shortened version would be more likely read and referred to in the field. In the 1990s, both the IWGRW and the WCRWC received recognized status within the NGO section of the Executive Committee, as did other INGOs addressing refugee women's rights in their mandates (e.g. Human Rights Watch and Amnesty International). This was an important position to secure, ensuring a good deal of pressure was placed on both donors and UNHCR.

In short, actors within transnational advocacy networks continued to play a critical role in maintaining significant pressure on UNHCR throughout the first critical years the Senior Co-ordinator held office. Her continued relationship with state and

NGO actors can be understood, then, as an important resource in the Senior Coordinator's effort to integrate refugee women through UNHCR country operations. Further, the activities of the TAN on refugee women during this decade involved visible shifts in tactics, acting to monitor UNHCR activities and pressure for compliance to the Policy on Refugee Women.

Thus, the network on refugee women had moved onto a more developed stage of organization by the 1990s: the TAN focused less on raising debates and framing the issue, and more on holding UNHCR accountable to its commitments (Keck and Sikkink 1998, 201). Furthermore, members of the TAN, particularly IWGRW, began to work at the grass-roots level, to support women's initiatives with refugee women. Global advocacy was still an important part of the global campaign, but the TAN increasingly drew on moral and material leverage to hold UNHCR accountable. This was done by monitoring gaps between policy and practice in the field, and lobbying UNHCR to address these disjunctures.

### **5.3 The Campaign, The First Senior Coordinator and UNHCR: Relationships, Resources and Opportunities**

As the section above implies, the first Senior Coordinator for Refugee Women drew upon a variety of relationships both internally and externally to support her efforts to integrate refugee women in UNHCR programmes. First, she relied on officials within donor states to actively voice their concern for the issue within the Executive Committee. Second, she counted upon the transnational advocacy network to monitor field operations and lobby UNHCR in relation to gaps identified in the field. Third, the Coordinator



worked with WID specialists in the US and Canada to develop an analytical approach to working with refugees.

Finally, Howarth-Wiles relied upon internal allies in her efforts, although with mixed results. Her working relation with the Division of International Protection in Head Quarters (HQ) was strong, resulting in the production of Guidelines for working with refugee women and sexually-based violence. On the other hand, her ability to forge relationships with internal advocates in the field was complicated by the de-centralized nature of UNHCR's operational structure. While the creation of Regional Advisors expanded her reach in regional operations, her relationship to country focal points was weak. In addition, focal points did not always have the expertise required to integrate refugee women and their isolation from each other meant communication and common strategies did not emerge. Moreover, while POP super-trainers often had positive results in terms of 'changing attitudes', participants in POP training sessions often went back to their respective offices where they became overwhelmed by the prospects of integrating 'refugee women' in their field work (Observation Notes, DOS 1999).<sup>7</sup>

The Coordinator's relationships to transnational activists, WID specialists, DIP and key government officials in part formed the basis of her resources. The primary intention of this earlier campaign had been to build an information base on refugee women as a means of legitimizing the issue. In collaboration with these persons, the Coordinator produced important documentation of the situation of refugee women and developed tools to guide staff in their implementation of the policy and guidelines. Symbolically, refugee women were constructed as particularly vulnerable in certain

situations and thus in need of protection and special assistance. Materially, resources were drawn from donors and a number of global and national initiatives were launched to support refugee and returnee women in the grass-roots. For example, a General Initiative Fund (GIF) was established in 1996. GIF initiatives included leadership projects, skills training, income generation and participation of women in peace and reconciliation processes. Following this, a series of country-wide initiatives in post-conflict situations was established, such as the Bosnian Women's Initiative (1996) and the Rwandan Women's Initiative (1997).

Women's initiatives were created out of earmarked funds, which UNHCR administered locally. As such, these 'women's initiatives' reflected more broadly defined interests of donor countries and UNHCR to stimulate reintegration and peacebuilding than a specific commitment to 'integrating' refugee women, as elaborated in Chapter Seven on Bosnia-Herzegovina. Such projects were most often short term, calling into question their sustainability and long-term impact. Moreover, projects tended to target 'women' specifically, failing either to address gender relations locally, or to stimulate institutional changes within the UNHCR regarding gender relations, as elaborated in the following section below.

The 'internal campaign' of the first Senior Coordinator was buttressed by the global campaign on refugee women which by 1990 had begun to reach a critical mass in the wake of changes in the global political economy and the expansion of UNHCR's mandate. The Coordinator was able to take advantage of opportunity structures

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<sup>7</sup> In a number of field interviews, programme and protection officers reported they felt extremely isolated in their work. In the face of peer resistance to gender issues, they often felt silenced and disempowered in this respect.

presented in the post-Cold War world, such as emerging global norms on women's rights and the rights of women to participate in economic development.

Organizational expansion of UNHCR did pose some challenges by mid-decade however. To promote efficiency, the High Commissioner relocated the Senior Coordinator's Office into the Division of Operation. She therefore no longer reported at the highest policy level. Further, the then Director of Operations was resistant to Howarth Wiles' position (Personal Interview with Howarth-Wiles 1998). In effect, the two person's agendas clashed, as the Director held the traditional view that neutral programming met the needs and resources of refugee women and men. Nevertheless, the Senior Coordinator was able to maintain some autonomy after the then Deputy High Commissioner (DHC) for Refugees attended the Four World Conference on Women in Beijing, China (*Ibid.*). Having returned a 'converted man', the DHC worked avidly to support Howarth-Wiles' work immediately following the conference, at times overriding the Director's authority. Thus, the Platform for Action adopted at the Conference opened opportunities on two levels: it promoted the launch of UNHCR led Women's Initiatives in post-conflict countries on the one hand, and reinvigorated the Senior Coordinator's position within UNHCR headquarters on the other.

#### **5.4 Changing Senior Coordinators and Campaign Directions: From Refugee Women to Gender Equality, 1997-2000**

Prior to departing the organization, the first Senior Coordinator stated, "we could have done more, and we could have done better. We have achieved some things. But we've still got a long way to go" (Quoted in Berthiaume, 1995). Indeed, by the time

Anne Howarth Wiles left the organization, a significant number of staff had received training and specific changes could be identified in practices at the field level. Moreover, a relationship can be drawn between the presence of internal advocates in the field and increased levels of gender sensitive programming (see SCRWGE 2000).

At the same time, the implementation of the policy and guidelines was by no means even or consistent (HRW 1997). Resistance to refugee women as an issue was still high among staff. This is perhaps best illustrated in the case of sexually based violence in African refugee camps. There, incidents of rape and other forms of sexual violence are reportedly high, but UNHCR officials continue to view it as a social issue beyond the scope of their work (Burns 1999). In a study of UNHCR programmes in Burundi (Sommors 1998), UNHCR officials responded thusly to reports of rape among adolescents under their care:

“There may be a quarrel between a boy and girl refugee, [but] would that be rape if the man forced her to have sex?” A Protection Officer went still further: “Maybe a [girl] is raped to reduce her bride price, so a man can [afford to] marry her.” The officer stated that most ‘rapes’ of young girls should be considered “date rape/bride price rapes,” and concluded that, actually, “the rape that’s happening in Burundian refugee camps [is] average. It’s [mostly] between families or [it’s] incest”.

As the WCRWC Report states, “These definitions of rape as “not really rape” due to cultural or societal norms are highly dubious”. They reflect the separation of public and private sphere issues and an insensitivity to women’s rights issues.

Resistance to gender-related issues indicates that individuals within organizations often act in accordance with their own objectives and viewpoints. However, as gender studies of institutional change remind us, individuals work within a given set of institutions which pattern their behaviour, setting up a system of incentives and

disincentives for certain types of behaviour (Goetz 1995). Thus, institutional change is essential to realize changes in practices. While the first Senior Coordinator was able to raise awareness amongst individuals, institutional change was not directly targeted. The issue of refugee women was 'framed' to accommodate the institutional culture of UNHCR: excluding women was inefficient for programming. By including refugee women, programme and protection would presumably improve. However, gender relations which led to exclusionary practices in the first place, were not challenged in this early campaign. Thus, the strategy was non-transformative. The new Senior Coordinator would try to address these limitations by using a gender equality mainstreaming approach.

#### *5.4.1 Gender Equality Mainstreaming*

By 1996, the global agenda for women's issues had changed considerably, distinguished by an overall shift in thinking and approach away from 'women' to embrace the concept of 'gender'. Leadership in this shift came from development circles where WID approaches were criticized for failing to incorporate gender analysis (Indra 1999, 12). The 1995 Beijing Platform for Action (PFA), adopted at the Fourth Conference on Women, clearly highlighted the link between women's issues and gender relations based on power. At its core, the transition from 'women' to 'gender' involves developing gender analyses within policies and shifting priorities to support equitable, gender balanced and sustainable approaches. The PFA explicitly enjoins state and international organizations to "promote an active and visible policy of mainstreaming a gender perspective in all policies and programmes, so that, before decisions are taken, an

analysis is made of the effects on women and men, respectively” (PFA 1995). This mandate was reaffirmed by the UN General Assembly in Resolution 50/23 and later in the 1997 ECOSOC Resolution on Gender Mainstreaming.

Gender includes the roles of both women and men, and refers to relationships between women and men. Therefore, it is essential that men and masculinities be brought into focus in this equation. When they are not, women may experience ‘glass ceilings’, increased workloads and also backlash from male partners and masculinist institutions (Observation Notes, DOS 1999). The concept of gender, then, importantly shifts the focus away from women, to analyze relationships between men and women.

As Indra argues,

gender cannot be equated solely with women, nor solely with women’s activities, beliefs, goals, or needs....Gender is instead a key relational dimension of human activity and throughout – activity and thought informed by cultural and individual notions of men and women – having consequences for their social or cultural positioning and the ways in which they experience and live their lives.

In late 1996, a new Senior Coordinator for Refugee Women, Rita Reddy, entered the organization.<sup>8</sup> In accordance with the evolution of thinking from WID to a gender and development approach (GAD), and in the PFA, Reddy determined that the organization was ready to integrate not only ‘women’, but more importantly gender. In her view, the Policy on Refugee Women, the Guidelines and the POP framework did not sufficiently highlight *gender relations* and therefore relations of inequality between men and women that further contributed to women’s marginalization. Reddy argued that it was necessary to introduce a gender perspective.

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<sup>8</sup> Reddy came from a human rights background and took a GAD approach in her work. After spending two years in UNHCR, she would go on to work for the United Nations Commission for Human Rights.

As argued above, Howarth-Wiles had originally and importantly legitimized the issue of refugee women by focusing on the *utility* of a POP approach to overall organizational objectives: "...the inclusion of refugee women in...planning must be perceived as essential to efficient delivery of these programmes" (Quoted in Vickers 1993, 27). Given the almost hostile environment within UNHCR towards 'women's issues' in the early 1990s, Howarth Wiles wisely promoted the issue by down-playing more controversial elements within it, such as the idea of women's rights.<sup>9</sup>

However, Reddy posited that too much was at stake when a rights based approach was not taken into consideration. As it stood, initiatives to integrate refugee women into UNHCR planning and programming were generally confused with 'women's projects' despite the fact the *Policy* admonished staff that integration "...does not mean that separate women's projects are to be initiated or added on to existing general programme activities". Yet 'women's projects' were favoured by field staff precisely because they appeared to produce visible and immediate results that could be easily quantified and mistakenly assumed to meet the requirements of 'integrating women' (Conversation with Morel 1999). Further, income generation projects and 'fem' Quick Impact Projects (QIPs) constituted the majority of UNHCR grass-roots projects to support refugee, returnee and internally displaced women in post-conflict situations. As Chapter Seven illustrates, the majority of these income generation projects have been 'women'-focused, and do not address gender related issues.

Drawing on lessons learned in WID projects, Reddy argued that women-focused initiatives sometimes further marginalized women by targeting them as a 'special group'

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<sup>9</sup> Recall that the organization has a long tradition of 'non-intervention' and 'neutrality' in principle. At the time, an intervention framed as a rights-based issue would most likely have been rejected out of hand,

rather than in relation to men. Further, in this approach, the 'problem' is identified with refugee women, rather than UNHCR's approach as part of a network of institutions which sometimes unintentionally discriminate against women. As a result, women are often mistakenly treated as an inherently 'vulnerable' group, the needs of which can be addressed by affirmative action programmes<sup>10</sup> (Conversation with Samara 1999). Gender relations do not exist within the refugee population alone, but are reinforced – and also potentially transformed – by a network of institutions, including governments and international organizations (Conversations with Morel 1999; Samara 1999). Yet UNHCR continued to portray itself as the 'solution' to local cultural discrimination:

Unfortunately, women's participation in activities can be hindered by cultural norms, a lack of skills or low self-esteem. Inequality in the public sector often begins at home, with unequal power relations and unequal division of labour between men and women. UNHCR is beginning to redress this imbalance by providing basic skills training, literacy and management skills to build women's self-confidence and enable them to contribute effectively to community management (Sadaka Ogata UNHCR 1999).

By focusing on 'women' as the problem, the very principles of POP analysis are compromised. Women are portrayed as a homogenized, vulnerable group in need of UNHCR solutions. The socio-cultural context is down-played, as is participation of refugees in finding 'solutions'.

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given the common perception that gender relations were private and a product of culture.

<sup>10</sup> This 'vulnerability' model was likely reinforced by symbols of refugee women used in earlier campaigns (external and internal). However, a vulnerability model is a central part of UNHCR community services approach. The objectives of community service officers are to assist the most 'vulnerable' of refugee, returnee or displaced populations (the infirm, elderly, disabled, female heads of household, children and so on). Often community service officers are appointed by heads of office to act as focal points on refugee women (a typical association of 'women's issues' with social issues). Thus, the vulnerability model is likely also reinforced by the overwhelming number of community service officers involved in designing projects for women. This is illustrated in Chapter Seven, where a community service officer acted as the Coordinator for the Bosnian Women's Initiative.



The Women Victims of Violence project (WVV) provides a case in point. This project was created in order to address the needs of refugee women who had suffered sexual violence and rape in Dadaab camps in Northeastern Kenya (Hyndman 1996). Its intentions were to provide medical help and financial aid for women ostracized by the experience. Jennifer Hyndman, who spent a number of months in these camps, observed the precarious position in which this project placed Somali women (1997b, 1999). On the one hand, women that came forward to benefit from the project would potentially be stigmatized by their families or communities. On the other, some women were pressured into making false claims in order to get the financial compensation offered.

To further complicate the matter, rape victims required a good deal of 'proof', including medical examinations and documentation provided by Western physicians. Women were also offered Western-based solutions to their 'problems', such as therapy and legal counsel. Furthermore, the project sought to bring perpetrators to justice through official legal channels, and promoted a public campaign to raise awareness of these laws. This contrasted with Somali cultural traditions, which prefer to settle such matters outside of public purview. All these steps created what Hyndman refers to as 'institutionalized subjects':

Whereas the rule of law and the enforcement of human rights are usually the articulated reasons for projects such as WVV, the micro-physics of power that manage the politics of the body occur on a more local scale. The legal, medical, and therapeutic practices which name, authorize, and organize the treatment of sexual violence are the transfer points of power in the camps (Hyndman 1997a, 14).

In this case, Somali refugees themselves did not participate in framing the problem of rape, nor were their cultural traditions part of the solutions. As a result, culturally

specific laws of Somali refugees continue to complicate the realization of the WVV objectives and goals, not always with positive results for Somali women. Further, in an unpublished review of the WVV it was noted that little attention had been paid to refugee men in the camps. The evaluation suggests that a review should be conducted of the “causes, dynamic and effects of refugee men’s inactivity with a view to establishing a strategy which ... reduces male-perpetuated violence in situations of uprootedness”. Thus skills training of refugee men may be one means of reducing levels of violence, and consciousness raising of men, women, girls and boys may reduce discrimination against victims.

Today, a major debate is ongoing between UNHCR HQ and field offices in Kenya regarding sexual and gender based violence in camps. Where the WVV programme focused on response to rape, subsequent projects seek to prevent rape from occurring. Thus a project made possible under the Ted Turner fund programmes provided millions of dollars worth of firewood so that women would not be susceptible to rape. The number of reported rapes has dropped. But as one UNHCR staff member argued, this project still does not address why men rape: it simply seeks to guide women away from areas where rape is perceived to occur (Email Exchange with Francisco 2000)

‘Women’s projects’ or woman-focused projects are sometimes necessary to combat discrimination against women and can provide new opportunities (EC/49/SC/CRP.22 1999, 2). However, in the absence of a gender analysis, such projects may have potentially harmful consequences. For instance, cases of domestic violence rose in detention centres in Hong Kong where international refugee workers tried to provide women the opportunity to make some income through a project. Many men,

unemployed, alienated and feeling powerless, beat their wives when they returned from work. This reminds us that we want to examine women in relation to men, and to take on men and masculinities in gender work. Of course this involves a long process of engaging different actors in the community over a period of time to support women in their re-negotiation of gender relations. Yet as these examples illustrate, 'women's' projects must begin to involve men, challenge masculinist institutions and address women's relative subordination to men (Conversation with Samara 1999).

In view of these results, Reddy concluded that POP had not sufficiently incorporated gender analysis and began to work towards integrating gender concerns in the Senior Coordinator's strategy (Reddy 1998). Further, she argued that more proactive approaches needed to be taken to empower refugees vis-à-vis international refugee organizations: "To steer away from a dependency syndrome and move towards an approach based on self-reliance and independence, refugees need to take decisions and assume responsibilities for their lives" (Reddy 1997, 1). To move towards this approach, Reddy solicited the help of a Nairobi based consultant agency to revise POP and incorporate the concept of empowerment.

An empowerment framework essentially would shift the standard from a welfare to an empowerment approach. Refugees must be treated as persons who can shape their fate and future through active planning, implementation, and monitoring of the programmes. Empowerment requires refugees to take conscious action at several levels to reverse the trend of dependency (*Ibid.*, 2).

The Nairobi based agency proposed the introduction of the concept of empowerment within POP. However, a lack of consensus on the revision placed it on a back burner so that, to date, empowerment perspectives have not been incorporated within the POP framework. An internal programme officer working for the Unit argues that it does not

mainstream a gender perspective, continuing to focus on 'women' and 'girls' and at times on 'men' and 'boys', but not on relationships of power between women and men (Conversation with Samara 1999).

#### *5.4.2 A Period of Crisis in Resources*

Reddy left the organization after only 18 months for a position in the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights. The post of Senior Coordinator was not filled again on a permanent basis until April 2000.<sup>11</sup> This left the Office without a senior level person to communicate key priority issues. The vacancy of the Office was ill timed given that a new strategic approach had been just launched. While the office ran remarkably well on the initiatives and determination of the programme officer and resource person, critical advances in the development of policy on gender equality and revision of Guidelines and the POP framework could not be undertaken in the absence of a new Coordinator.

To further add to this strain, the Senior Coordinator was organizationally separated from her staff within the division of operations in 1999. The 'absent' Senior Coordinator continued to report to the director of the recently re-organized Division of Operational Support (DOS), while programme staff and resource persons were placed under the head of the Health and Community Development Services section (HCDS). In a typical gender stereotype, 'women' were in effect placed under 'community services'. In mid 1999, the position of the resource person, who had also acted as secretarial and informational support to the Senior Co-ordinator over the past decade, was ended. This

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<sup>11</sup> The only other person to fill this position between Reddy and the current Coordinator was Anne Dawson Sheppard, who served for two months.

laid the responsibility for mainstreaming gender equality throughout UNHCR's 124 country operations on the shoulders of the lone programme officer.<sup>12</sup>

The reasons for the re-organization and split of the Office<sup>13</sup> were never clearly articulated to the unit except under the vague guise that it contributed to 'mainstreaming'. One might agree with Howarth-Wiles' candid observation that 'mainstreaming' was in fact a code word for 'streamlining'.<sup>14</sup> In fact, major organizational changes in management systems, divisions within UNHCR and major cut backs to staff had a similarly negative impact in other so called 'soft' areas of work: community services, education and so on.

The Gender Unit's programme officer, Katharina Samara, had carried on a mainstreaming strategy initiated earlier by Reddy. Accountability of senior management and disseminating the approach through a global 'gender network' were two key initiatives. But it was apparent that, in the absence of a clear policy on gender equality, no consistency in mainstreaming approaches could occur. And in fact, this is what happened.<sup>15</sup> This is illustrated in the following excerpt from an internal report by one Senior Regional Advisor for Refugee Women in 1999:

Gender Mainstreaming as a policy priority has been a familiar word for everyone involved in country operations ....It has been interpreted and understood in many ways and forms. For some, gender mainstreaming rather than gender equality has been misconstrued as an ultimate goal. For others, it meant looking into the needs of vulnerable women only. For the rest, this is a subject which could be appended

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<sup>12</sup> It was during this period that I entered the newly created 'Gender Unit' for a six month period under a Canadian sponsored 'internship' programme.

<sup>13</sup> Although technically the programme officer would continue to work closely with the SC.

<sup>14</sup> Streamlining refers to cut-backs to resources and staff. Because the process of mainstreaming implied gender 'experts' would at one point no longer be necessary, as all staff would ultimately be responsible, the two terms were often confused by staff.

<sup>15</sup> In a series of trainings on gender equality mainstreaming with Headquarter staff, many expressed frustration over the term and how it differed from previous strategies. One senior staff member constantly confused the terms mainstreaming and streamlining to the extent it became a common joke in weekly meetings of the HCDS unit.

only and considered seriously in resource and financial allocations only after 'core and survival' activities had been provided for. The challenge to harmonize the understanding and implementation of this policy priority has been complicated by the assumptions that gender mainstreaming has already been happening all the while as refugee populations benefit from assistance anyway (SRARW 1998-99).

These observations highlight the continued reluctance of UNHCR staff in this area to understand gender as a dimension in the refugee experience and in refugee work. They also illustrate confusion over the term mainstreaming as a process, strategy, and objective, and uncertainty concerning who was responsible for mainstreaming. Finally, it suggests that the concept of 'gender' is still equated with, or collapsed with, 'women'. And in the absence of a clearly articulated policy position on the issue, or of trainings and tools on gender, this work would be further impeded. On a more optimistic note, the programme officer recently welcomed the arrival of a new Senior Co-ordinator for Refugee Women and Gender Equality (revised title), Joyce Mends-Cole, who has taken on these tasks as a high priority. However, the Gender Unit and Senior Co-ordinator are faced with a new set of challenges; that is, to mainstream a gender equality perspective into changing approaches to UNHCR operational management.<sup>16</sup>

### **5.5 Gender Mainstreaming in UNHCR Operational Management, 1999**

Recall that by the 1990s, UNHCR had entered into new areas of work, with new populations of concern. UNHCR's largest operations in the 1990s took place within post-conflict societies where economic and democratic institution building are understood as essential to consolidate the transition to peace. Charged with the responsibility of return and reintegration of millions displaced in recent conflicts, UNHCR has had to actively

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<sup>16</sup> This is a key area for intervention given that accountability of management for gender equality is essential to move a mainstreaming approach forward in a hierarchical organization such as UNHCR.

update its operations to match these new working environments. By the late 1990s, UNHCR was well on its way to shifting its mandate to accommodate changing international approaches to peacekeeping, security and development. So too is it exploring ways to bridge the relief-development gap. These initiatives in turn have had an interesting impact on recent mainstreaming strategies and efforts within Headquarters.

In February of 1999, Amelia Bonafacio arrived at UNHCR Headquarters to act as the new director of DOS. Bonafacio had pioneered QIPs in Central America, and was a major proponent of QIPs in return and reintegration efforts (Bonafacio & Lattimer 1992). As the new director, Bonafacio committed to 'operationalizing' the new Operations Management Systems (OMS) approach, defined in Chapter Three. In a time of major restructuring and cut backs within UNHCR, she pushed DOS staff in a new direction – to work together as a team to 'roll' OMS out into the field. Bonafacio was keen to mainstream *the Policy on Refugee Women*, as well as those on the environment and children, throughout DOS and in particular, in the OMS framework (Observation Notes, DOS 1999). During my internship, a tremendous amount of time was spent working in teams to understand how these policies could be mainstreamed, but also how the OMS framework could be mainstreamed throughout current planning, monitoring and evaluation reports in the field.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> These concerted efforts also provide a clear example of how institutions and individuals worked to frustrate the labors of gender and child advocates. In several meetings during my internship, OMS team members actively blocked gender and child advocates from realizing the objectives of the meeting (to mainstream a gender equality and child rights perspective). OMS advocates frequently and openly expressed their frustration with what they perceived to be an unwarranted agenda of the Director of DOS; that is gender mainstreaming. Over the six months I worked in the Unit a great deal of tension existed between OMS and the Gender Unit in trying to mainstream a gender equality perspective. Six months after I completed my internship, I was contracted to mainstream the OMS section of UNHCR's Handbook on Refugees, the 'bible' of the organization. To this day I am not sure the suggestions were ever taken into consideration.

The OMS framework, as described in Chapter Three, represents a distinct break from past operational approaches. It emphasizes a results based approach, linking a hierarchy of objectives and impacts or results (UNHCR 1999b). Thus sub-field objectives are linked to country level objectives which are in turn linked to objectives set in Headquarters, and outcomes are measured in terms of impact (rather than process). The idea is to streamline UNHCR activities and promote efficiency, but also to promote accountability to organizational policies such as that on refugee women, children and the environment. Within this framework, a people oriented approach is adopted although, I would argue, as yet inconsistently.

For example, in a recent internal draft of the OMS chapter to be presented in the updated UNHCR Handbook, the chapter focused on a hierarchy of objectives (or the logical framework) which, for the most part, suggested a “UNHCR focused” (as opposed to refugee focused) approach to design, planning, implementation, monitoring and evaluation.<sup>18</sup> The participation of refugee, returnee and internally displaced men and women in all these important programme areas is vital to achieve gender equality in UNHCR programmes, and in particular it is at this level (on the ground) where refugee, returnee and internally displaced women have the most opportunity to voice their interests, raise concerns and identify needs and resources. At the same time, gender must be mainstreamed within existing operational goals and procedures, within the hierarchy of the organization. In short, objectives continue to be defined by UNHCR for populations of concern. Thus a people-oriented approach and gender mainstreaming

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<sup>18</sup> I base this assertion on my analysis of the OMS section of UNHCR’s Handbook on Refugees. The promotion of POP and gender equality in a more consistent fashion was one of my key recommendations to OMS.



must be reconciled within top-down operational management, if indeed the two are reconcilable.

Further, the results-based focus of OMS promotes an approach which produces immediate, measurable impacts on refugee, returnee and displaced populations (Conversation with Samara 1999; Cremonese 1999b; Francisco 1999). While short term interventions might help meet basic needs, they cannot replace the longer term approach necessary to promote gender equality. Inevitably, gender mainstreaming and grass-roots interventions to promote gender equality require “long-term, incremental, and process oriented change” (Kardam 1998, 3). This is a point explored more fully in the case studies presented in Part Three of the thesis.

In summary, mainstreaming efforts in the Post-Beijing period are in part stymied by efforts to streamline UNHCR staff and resources and to promote efficiency within the organization. As reported to the 16<sup>th</sup> meeting of the Standing Committee in 1999, “among the most daunting challenges is that of diminishing resources” (EC/49/SC/CRP.22 1999, 5). Thus cutbacks to the Senior Coordinator's office staff and general staff in areas considered ‘soft’ (education, community services and so on), coupled with the absence of a Senior Coordinator, made it difficult for remaining internal staff to articulate a clear plan to UNHCR for gender mainstreaming. Further, there is reason to be concerned that the current direction of gender mainstreaming efforts – while focused at the heart of operations – are compromised by the contradictory elements contained in the new OMS approach. At the same time, new opportunities for gender equality mainstreaming are potentially opened by the introduction of OMS. Specifically, OMS promotes greater accountability amongst senior managers in field operations to

headquarter led policies. As a result, the organization is becoming more centralized in terms of reporting lines and communication. The extent to which gender mainstreaming can play a transformative role in emerging and changing UNHCR operations and operational management must be monitored closely in this respect.

## 5.6 Conclusions

In this analysis of internal campaigns to 'integrate' or 'mainstream' refugee women and gender into UNHCR operations, it is critical to recall that institutional cultures, goals and practices shape choices and abilities of actors. Thus entrenched ideas about the 'appropriateness' of working with women in a top-down, ostensibly neutral organization required 'selling' the relevance of refugee women to staff in earlier campaigns. The first five years was consumed with developing a Policy, Guidelines and analytical framework for achieving this goal. Integrating refugee women into UNHCR operations was justified on the basis that it would promote 'efficiency'. Throughout this earlier period and beyond, transnational advocates as well as donor states committed to the issue of refugee women maintained pressure on the organization to change. And for their collective hard work, UNHCR was recognized at Beijing as having pioneered a strategy that could serve as a model to other UN agencies (see Overholt 1996).

However, during this critical period, staff generally responded to the *Policy* with 'projects for women'. This was problematic insofar as 'women's projects' were not sustainable if they were not complemented by longer term institutional and cultural changes in gender relations at the local, national and global levels (Morel, 1999). Earlier

campaigns did not address entrenched ideas about gender within UNHCR institutions, nor consistently transform practices in the field.

In the post-Beijing period, UN resolutions and the PFA obliged UNHCR to move away from 'women' to a focus on gender, and Senior Coordinator Reddy was eager to engage in a longer term strategic approach aimed at institutional transformation (gender equality mainstreaming). This effort was stymied by wider changes taking place in the organization, including budget and staff cutbacks and streamlining measures to operations management where a results based approach was favoured. Further, a lack of clarity in the overall strategy to mainstream gender contributed to confusion in the field, where 'women's projects and 'initiatives'<sup>19</sup> continued unabated. Today, UNHCR is in a critical period of transition, which can present a window of opportunity (opportunity structure) for internal advocates, but only if the apparent tensions within and between OMS and gender mainstreaming are identified, addressed and resolved. Given strong donor pressure to 'streamline' UNHCR operations, this task will be challenging indeed.

This chapter has analyzed the internal campaigns of successive Senior Coordinators and advocates working both within and outside UNHCR from which a number of important conclusions can be drawn. First, the internal campaigns of advocates are bolstered by strong relationships, resources and opportunity structures for promoting change. This set of factors were fluid and changed over the decade of internal campaigning. During the early campaign, the first Senior Coordinator for Refugee Women enjoyed a period of relative wealth in resources, drawing upon strong relationships and taking advantage of new opportunity structures. The strength of the

earlier campaign was to raise awareness, build information and legitimacy within the organization. A new Senior Coordinator and change in campaign direction in 1997 sought to fill the gaps of the earlier campaign, namely a limited engagement of UNHCR institutions. However, a period of crisis in resources in the late 1990s slowed the gender mainstreaming approach. Transformed approaches to operational management potentially lead to new opportunities for internal advocates, although I argue such opportunities should be regarded with as much caution as optimism.

Second, the findings of this Chapter suggest that internal campaigns are influenced by institutional cultures, shifts in global political economy and changes in operational management. Thus staff resistance is in part reflective of an institutional culture which does not embrace nor actively encourage gender equality. Without accountability structures and support mechanisms in place, staff have little incentive to integrate 'refugee women' in their work.<sup>20</sup> At the same time, advocates have been able to push the issue as far as they have because of the emergence of women's rights norms in the post-Cold War era. Likewise, the extension of UNHCR's mandate has introduced not only new directions in refugee work, but also new ideas. Linking development, human rights and security to relief work, shifting discourses interject new spaces for re-considering UNHCR's role with respect to women and men, boys and girls. Yet these emerging discourses should be scrutinized in relation to neo-liberal discourses which enter into peace-building agendas, the process of return and reintegration and UNHCR

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<sup>19</sup> A US \$10 million Kosovo Women's Initiative, an Afghan Women's Initiative and a proposed Sierra Leone 'gender initiative' followed the BWI and RWI in 1999 and 2000. This places the total monies spent on such initiatives at US \$33 million.

<sup>20</sup> This is the case even when junior staff are committed to gender equality. Without senior management support and often alone in their efforts, committed staff are often disheartened or intimidated from pushing the issue (Morel 1999).

operational management. Thus OMS presents both new opportunities and challenges to gender advocates.

However, this case study of 'internal' campaigns does not provide a holistic explanation of the process and limitations of gender related changes in UNHCR. Specifically, it does not explain the processes through which global policies are translated into field operations. Indeed, the analysis in the foregoing chapters remains global, and does not examine the relationships between refugee populations, local actors such as NGOs or INGOs, host governments and branch offices of UNHCR or other UN bodies. As such, the intersections of structures and agents at the global, national and local levels are obscured. Likewise, how global norms and policies are re-shaped by national or local political-economies and cultures is not captured. To this end, Part Three of the thesis examines two case studies of UNHCR field operations.

### **Part Three: The Political Economy of Gender in the Field**

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As a scholar of feminist GG and an activist on refugee rights, I have been intrigued by the process of changing global norms to protect refugee women, men and children. But I have also found this study and struggle to be sometimes lacking in answers. What happens in the translation of policy into practice? What difference does global activism around norm and policy changes make to refugee women and men in the field? Over the course of researching this dissertation, I have come to appreciate the importance of norm and policy change at a personal level. The Policy on Refugee Women, ExCom Conclusions on Refugee Women, the Beijing Platform for Action, ECOSOC and General Assembly Resolutions on gender mainstreaming *do* provide legitimacy and leverage to advocates. As the previous section illustrates, these discursive achievements happened because of the activities of transnational advocates. Working in UNHCR Headquarters, I also came to appreciate the importance of dedicated staff to promote change from within. The Senior Coordinator's Office has played a central role in mobilizing new resources, supporting field staff and maintaining pressure on senior managers.

Despite all the accomplishments, results in the field have been inconsistent. On the one hand, transnational non-state actors, states and international organizations are, in principle, more willing than ever to recognize gender equality. On the other, successive evaluations have found unacceptable gaps between policy and practice (HRW 1998; WCRWC 1999; UNHCR 1999). How do we account for this contradiction?

The previous section offers some indications as to why Policy is not evenly translated into field operations. Staff resistance to gender equality, institutional separation of the public and private, and the shifting political economy of refugee work are some of the obstacles advocates must navigate to push gender issues forward. But what is happening on the ground, at the level of field operations? How do local and national gender relations intersect or depart from gender relations encoded in UNHCR's mandate and in the policy on refugee women? How do refugee women and men encounter and respond to UNHCR activities to 'integrate refugee women' and 'mainstream gender'? Section One of the thesis suggested that some of the answers to these questions can be found in more context specific case studies.

In this section, two case studies are examined, each representing different approaches to UNHCR operations and quite different socio-historical contexts. In Chapter Six, I analyze UNHCR activities to support Guatemalan refugees in Mexico for over a decade and a half (1982-1998). The case of Guatemalan refugees is an extraordinary one, for refugees themselves negotiated the terms of their return. Refugee women were an important group of actors in this movement. Drawing on the support of advocates within UNHCR, refugee women asserted specific rights with respect to land, education, participation and work.

In contrast, Chapter Seven examines a relatively new area of UNHCR activities: that of return and reintegration in Bosnia-Herzegovina. Unlike Guatemalans, the process of return was not grass-roots led. While women's organizations also formed over the conflict and during displacement, Bosnian women have not enjoyed the relative degree of 'integration' into UNHCR programmes at the field level that Guatemalan women did.

This is ironic given the fact that a specific initiative, the Bosnian Women's Initiative, (BWI) was created with the express purpose of promoting women's participation in the return and reconstruction of their country.

The two case studies provide a useful comparison of how different contexts and operational approaches shape the translation of policy into practice. In each chapter, I explore gender relations within the cultural communities of the refugees, returnees and displaced persons, as well as in national institutions. I then consider gender relations within UNHCR programmes and how these gender practices change or do not change as each field office works to support refugee, returnee and displaced women. A comparison and conclusions are then presented in Chapter Eight.



## **Chapter Six**

### **Mainstreaming Gender Equality in UNHCR-Mexico and Guatemala: Grass-roots Initiatives and Institutional Change**

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#### **6.1 Introduction**

In the early 1980s, over 60,000 Indigenous Guatemalans fled the brutal counter-insurgency tactics of the Guatemalan army and crossed the border into Mexico where they sought refuge. For the first time in the known history of refugee returns, Guatemalan refugees organized representative committees while in exile and successfully negotiated the conditions of their repatriation. Guatemalan women were an important group of refugees mobilized. Working together in organizations, refugee women not only supported the work of the mostly male-dominated *Comisiones Permanentes* (CCPP) but also began to assert their gender-specific rights to land, education, work outside the home, reproductive choice and to be free of domestic violence (Baines, 1999). Through their organization, women realized important changes, not least of which was a heightened sense of self-esteem regarding their potential to act as agents of change.

The experiences of Guatemalan refugee women provide insight into the way humanitarian organizations can open important political spaces and offer new opportunities to refugee women and men. This chapter examines the various initiatives of UNHCR-Mexico in the 1990s to support refugee women's organizations at the grass-roots level, but also in challenging gender assumptions in local and national institutions, as well as within the refugee-assisting organization itself. I examine how internal UNHCR advocates for refugee women worked with refugees at the local level, taking a people-oriented approach, and at a national and regional level, striving to mainstream a gender equality perspective in all areas

of UNHCR programme and protection. The efforts of internal advocates were bolstered by the socio-political context of the Central American region, and a 'refugee-centric' approach.

Yet despite important initiatives in Mexico, the process of return -- expedited by the signing of the final Peace Agreements in 1996 -- poses new challenges of transition for refugee women's organizations. In an all too common pattern of post-war periods, returnee women have been expected to re-assume traditional roles of wife and mother, their involvement no longer considered necessary to the struggle. Nevertheless, one can point to specific changes in UNHCR-Mexico and Guatemala, where awareness of gender issues were raised significantly, leading to new practices and structural relationships within the organization. This chapter then, highlights the importance of a dual approach to gender mainstreaming: grass-roots initiatives and strategic institutional change.

The chapter proceeds in three parts after a short background on the Guatemalan conflict and displacement. First, the context within which refugee women's organizations formed is analyzed, highlighting the specific gender-related concerns of women in camps and the role of UNHCR-Mexico and local NGOs in supporting women's organizing. Second, the impact of return on women's organizations is described and analyzed with reference to accomplishments in exile. Finally, I examine the conditions which facilitated the organization of Guatemalan women, the impact of gender mainstreaming efforts in UNHCR-Mexico and UNHCR-Guatemala assistance and protection activities in the 1990s. In short, the analysis in this chapter seeks to highlight the interplay of institutions and actors at the intersections of the global, national and local levels, and to understand how gender constructions at these levels work both in tension and concert, to shape the opportunities for refugee men, women, girls and boys.

## 6.2 The Guatemalan Conflict, Displacement and Exile in Mexico

The roots of the Guatemalan revolutionary movement were sown during the colonial period. Spanish colonialists forcibly and brutally took control of large areas of land for agricultural production and trade, displacing Mayan Indians and compelling hundreds of thousands into what would be centuries of forced labour and cultural resistance. Economic control was maintained through a large and well-armed military which operated at arms length from a series of undemocratic, elitist governments.

A brief historical period (1944-54) under Presidents Juan José Arévalo and Jacobo Arbenz ushered in a remarkable decade of agrarian reforms, economic modernization policies and political openings. However, such liberal reforms encroached upon the economic interests of United States businesses, leading to a US- backed *coup d'etat* in 1954 and ending what is now commonly referred to as the "ten years of springtime in the land of eternal dictatorships" (Cardoza & Aragón 1956, 74). Over the following decades, the military resumed quashing any unrest through intimidation tactics such as the assassination or 'disappearance' of opponents. A pattern emerged. The more brutal the military became, the greater the unrest in the country. By the 1960s, factions of three revolutionary armies and the Guatemalan military had led the country deep into a civil war.

The expansion of agricultural producers onto larger tracts of land and the effects of the war displaced more and more Indigenous Mayan populations. Many of the displaced settled in the northern highlands of Guatemala. Here, they formed profitable co-operatives and villages began to flourish despite an inhospitable ecological climate. However, in the

1980s, the civil war in Guatemala grew more intense, and the newly-founded villages came under increasing threat. The Guatemalan army, convinced that the highland villagers were supporting the guerrilla movement, began a campaign of terror in the region. Scorched earth tactics, forced conscription, kidnapping, disappearances, torture and rape forced highland peasants to flee from their homes (Falla 1994, Menchú 1983). At the peak of the repression, between 1980-1985, 50,000 to 75,000 Mayan peasants were murdered and 400 highland villages were completely destroyed. In total, over 200,000 peasants were forced to flee deep into the jungles and into bordering Mexican states. A further one million Guatemalans were displaced within the country as a result of the war (Worby 1999).

The UNHCR became the largest international organization involved in assisting the massive influx of refugees into Mexico in 1982 with the agreement of the Mexican government. In 1984, Guatemalan refugees were relocated by the Mexican government to the states of Campeche and Quintana Roo due to the growing tensions along the border stemming from the Guatemalan conflict and complicated by local land conflicts. This relocation was met with great reluctance on the part of refugees hoping to stay close to home, but it did “allow for a more structured assistance programme for those refugees who were relocated in the Yucatan Peninsula” (Reddy 1997, 2). Eventually, UNHCR-Mexico assumed responsibility for some 46, 000 refugee in organized camps. These refugees were settled on lands purchased with grants from the international community by UNHCR or from the Mexican government.

In the early 1980s, UNHCR-Mexico focused on delivering vital assistance such as food, shelter and water to refugees with the help of local and international NGOs and the Mexican Commission to Assist Refugees (COMAR). Reflective of historical UNHCR

procedures, this assistance was distributed exclusively to male-heads of household. Likewise, major decisions regarding camp design or project initiatives were made with male leaders because it was considered easier to communicate with men who were more likely to speak Spanish and were accustomed to speaking in groups (Garcia 1995; personal interview with Morel 1998). Assistance and protection initiatives were conducted with the "*jefe de familia*" (head of the family), assumed to be the husband. No concrete actions were taken with women to facilitate their involvement in decision-making structures during this phase.

During the 1980s, UNHCR-Mexico assistance did not take into consideration differences or inequalities between men and women; nor did assistance workers realize how ostensibly 'neutral' projects either failed to ameliorate, or in certain cases may have worsened, the situation of women by increasing their workloads (Morel 1998, 3). Small projects aimed at increasing women's nutritional knowledge, or to help women sell their handicrafts to earn extra income, did not take into consideration the structural barriers to women, in particular their lack of control over resources (*Ibid.*). Excluded from assistance programmes and cut off from information regarding their status as refugees, the capacity of Guatemalan women to influence or control their environment was even further reduced (Lozano, 1996). As men became more empowered through assistance and economic projects, women became more dependent on their husbands and fathers for survival. In this way, the early initiatives of the UNHCR intersected with oppressive gender relations at the local level, reinforcing women's marginal participation in public life and increasing their work burdens in the home. In short, UNHCR contributed to and reinforced gender equality gaps within the refugee population.

By the late 1980s, senior managers within UNHCR-Mexico redesigned assistance strategies to promote self-sufficiency among refugees, reflecting a general move away from

dependency in the organization's mandate in the late 1980s. By 1991, a three year programme made possible by donations from the European Community in Campeche and the German government in Quintana Roo, led to the "gradual discontinuation of basic assistance, whereby these communities [were] virtually self-sufficient"<sup>1</sup> (Reddy 1997). We will return to how the transition to self-sufficiency specifically affected gender relations later in the chapter.<sup>2</sup>

The primary objectives of UNHCR-Mexico have been to find durable solutions for Guatemalan refugees through the promotion of either local settlement or repatriation. UNHCR objectives have been shaped by the political economy of the region. In 1994, the Zapatista revolutionary movement (EZLN) staged a formidable front to protest grave social and material inequalities which exist in Chiapas. Members of EZLN argued that the finalization of the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) would only exacerbate local inequalities and demanded political, economic and social justice in Mexico.

This revolt was politically embarrassing for the long standing government of Mexico (Partido Revolucionario Institucional - PRI) which had introduced reforms to improve the country's human rights record and reformed the electoral system to promote free and fair elections. Further, NAFTA hinged on the perception that Mexico was stable and becoming democratic. At the same time, illegal immigrants and drugs entering the United States from Mexico were a sensitive political issue providing a negative backdrop to NAFTA negotiations. To quell US threats to deport illegal immigrants and to resolve the refugee

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<sup>1</sup> A locally managed credit system, training on productive activities and the transfer of educational and health responsibilities led to this self-sufficiency.

<sup>2</sup> UNHCR programmes in Mexico were made possible through generous financial contributions from the EC, Canada, US, Sweden and Norway. Worby argues that such funding was to act as a counter-balance to the years of counter-insurgency aid provided by the US over the 1980s.

'problem' inside its own borders, Mexico gave Guatemalans formal legal status in 1996 and together with UNHCR developed a local settlement programme.

On the other hand, many refugees wanted to return to Guatemala. Although the repatriation process began spontaneously as early as 1982, it was not until 1989 that UNHCR actively became involved in supporting the direct negotiation of return between Guatemalan refugees and Guatemalan government officials. UNHCR-Mexico's activities to support the return process must be examined in relation to the political mobilization and organization of Guatemalan refugee men and women themselves, discussed below.

### **6.3 The Mobilization and Organization of Guatemalan Refugees**

By the late 1980s, refugee men had organized themselves within camps and formed the Permanent Commissions of Guatemalan Refugees (CCPP), claiming to speak for men, women and children. The CCPP engaged in the negotiation of a return process with the Guatemalan government eventually resulting in the signing of the October 8 Accord (1992) outlining the conditions for return. The formation of CCPP was in part politically motivated by ideological beliefs of the National Guatemalan Revolutionary Unity (URNG) and organized around three different branches of regional and political elements of this revolutionary movement. Thus the revolutionary zeal of the region in fact led to a culture of solidarity, where refugees organized to make change for themselves by drawing upon support from an international solidarity network that had been established over the 1980s (see Baines 1998). This mobilization was stimulated by international actors supporting their organization: "contact with UNHCR and other NGOs gave refugees access to a transnational

political space” and refugees quickly adopted such “universalistic discourses as human rights in their organized struggles to return” (Pritchard in Krznaric, 71).

While refugee men organized, refugee women began to meet in small groups, supported by local NGOs and Church organizations. Originally, women organized to find ways to help support the CCPP in addition to facilitating their involvement in the return process. Recognizing their interest in becoming involved<sup>3</sup>, the UNHCR and local NGOs began to look for ways to support women as well. In 1989, 48 Indigenous women from Chiapas, Campeche and Quintana Roo met to form the "Organización de Mujeres Guatemaltecas Mamá Maquín" (Mamá Maquín or MMQ), which eventually became the largest organization of the Northwest Region.<sup>4</sup> Within a year, the membership of MMQ grew to 8,000 members (MMQ/CIAM 1994). Shortly after, *Nueva Union* was formed by mostly non-indigenous women in Campeche, focusing on productive projects but with a gender focus. Over the following three years, a number of other organizations formed. In Chiapas, *Flores Unidas* and *Nueva Esperanza* formed and later joined *Nueva Union* to constitute the Union of Guatemalan Refugee Women. In 1993, *Madre Tierra* and *Ixmucané* formed, eventually becoming the largest organizations representing women in the Southern and Northern regions.

All organizations created democratic and inclusive structures, striving to make decisions based on the broadest possible consultations with the ‘base’ of their support. However it is important to note that broadly, each women’s organization formed around one

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<sup>3</sup> NGOs and the UNHCR recognized this interest when they saw that women were peering in through the wooden planks that constructed the meeting room walls in order to hear what was being discussed by refugee men and the UNHCR.

<sup>4</sup> MMQ derives its name from a courageous Q'eqchi woman who was murdered along with 1000 other campesinos during a peaceful demonstration to regain their appropriated lands in 1978.



of the three verientes (branches) of the CCPP and were thus connected to the interests of the latter. This would later become relevant, when it became apparent that male-dominated leadership tolerated women's organization to attract international funding and support from donor states such as Canada, Norway and the European Community (EC).

Internal advocates for refugee women within UNHCR-Mexico worked to support refugee women's efforts to organize. In 1992, one of the first and most comprehensive survey's of refugee women was conducted in UNHCR camps in Campeche and Quintana Roo. In consultation with refugee women leaders and local NGOs, UNHCR would provide the necessary resources for projects aimed to raise women's self-esteem and empower them economically and socially.

## **6.4 Re-Negotiating Gender Relations in Refugee Camps**

### *6.4.1 Results of the Survey on Refugee Women*

Of all refugee women's organizations, Mamá Maquin was the largest, receiving the most funding from outside sources.<sup>5</sup> With training from CIAM, a number of refugee women traveled to the different camps to survey over 860 women of various ages and ethnic backgrounds. Women conducting this survey sometimes met resistance from men in the camps they entered. On occasion, men wanted to answer the questions, claiming that their wives or daughters do not "know how to talk" (MMQ/CIAM 1994). Despite this resistance, the survey, once completed, provided critical information about the demographics of refugee women – perhaps one of the very first in the history of refugee surveys. The results helped guide MMQ's future strategies of work, but also helped legitimize from below the

importance of women's opinions. In addition, the information collected helped support the position that refugee women have particular experiences of exile based on their gender.

For example, through the survey, a high incidence of domestic violence and sexual assault were detected in camps; yet few to no incidents had been reported. As Table 6.1 below shows, between 10 and 17 percent of women had experienced marital violence and around 30 percent believed their husbands had the right to beat them. Likewise, cultural practices such as the rape and kidnapping of a woman to claim her as a man's bride were considered unavoidable in certain cases (MMQ/CIAM 1994, 50). In instances of marital violence, many women thought they brought the abuse on themselves. This attitude is shared within the community, which blames women for any abuse she may endure: "If you go to your family, then your family says 'well, don't do anything that can provoke the violence.' It's up to you -- if you want the violence, then it's up to you" (Moran in Best 1995, 8).

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**TABLE 6.1**  
**Marital Violence among Guatemalan Refugees (Ethnic Group)\***

	<b>Marital Violence</b>	<b>Husband Has Right to Beat Wife</b>
Jalcalteco	17%	28%
Mam	17%	28%
Chuj	14%	71%
Non-Indigenous	13%	33%
Kanjobal	10.5%	33%
<b>Average:</b>	<b>14.3%</b>	<b>38.6%</b>

\* Numbers represent percentage of women who experienced marital violence, and who believe husband has right to beat them respectively

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<sup>5</sup> Aid mainly came from the Catholic church, the European Community, UNHCR and NGOs.

The survey also revealed the extent to which women were responsible for and restricted by domestic work. Women worked between 14 and 17 hours a day in refuge, making participation outside the home difficult. The division of labour in camps was clearly gendered. While some men did 'help' with women's domestic work, the majority saw certain tasks such as making tortillas as strictly women's work (MMQ/CIAM 1994, 46). Domestic work is not valued across different ethnic groups, nor are women's efforts to supplement the family income by selling fruits or handicrafts. Only 16 percent of women interviewed had any access to a monetary income (*Ibid.*, 36).

Yet women were responsible for providing basic necessities to the family, such as health care, food and water:

Women's daily schedule begins before 5 am and finishes around 9 or 10 at night. The workday for women increases to 18 hours during planting or harvest seasons, when, in addition to housework and caring for their husbands and children, the women also work in the fields, although they do not consider this to be their occupation (*Ibid.*, 35).

Most women have children throughout their reproductive cycle, averaging 5.5 children per mother (*Ibid.*, 46). Many women were married quite young, and often without choice. Among the Kanjobal, Mama and Chuj, it is a custom to "sell" daughters to prospective husbands at a young age when "she is more pure" (*Ibid.*, 42).<sup>6</sup> Daughters rarely leave their parent's home until they enter that of their husbands, where generally they work for their mothers-in-law to pay back the money spent to 'purchase' her. Religion and tradition both require that women exercise no control over their reproductive cycles, accepting as many children as "God sends" (*Ibid.*, 46).

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<sup>6</sup> Although the survey did find the practice of bride pricing had decreased somewhat in Mexico.

Refuge presented a number of cultural challenges to refugees. Women wear guipils, a traditional indigenous dress woven by women. Each ethnic group (and within each group, each community or region) wears a distinct form of dress which distinguishes their culture and language. Unable to buy materials to weave guipils, many women and children had to wear commercialized clothing. Languages of Mam, Jacalteco and Kanjobal were threatened in Spanish speaking Mexico, particularly as the younger generation of Guatemalans began to learn Spanish first. Traditional marriages within the same ethnic groups also began to break down. All of these threats to Indigenous lifestyles placed additional strains on refugee women who played a central role as educator of their children in the traditions and religion of their ancestors.

Of the total population, 84 percent of the women in camps were from different indigenous groups, including Kanjobal (57%), Mam (10%), Chuj (10%) and Jacalteco (7%). Each Indigenous group has a different language and the majority of refugee women were monolingual, making organization across ethnic groups difficult to facilitate. In practice, most Guatemalan women are denied access to an education, as they are not thought to need one for their future roles as mothers and wives. Refugee women had a high illiteracy rate -- up to 90 percent amongst women over the age of 35 (Lozano 1996, 2).<sup>7</sup> As one refugee woman explained: "Women study less because later they are going to get married" (Quoted in Laguna 1998, 13 *translation mine*). However, the survey also revealed that women -- occupied by domestic work -- do not have time to go to school (MMQ/CIAM 1994, 35).

The results of the survey clearly indicated a concern for educational, economic and

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<sup>7</sup> Guatemala has the highest female illiteracy rate in all of Latin America.

land issues as well as gender-related issues such as violence against women, alcoholism amongst men, relegation of women to the private sphere and lack of reproductive choice. Further, the focus of the survey suggested that illiteracy and loss of control over the reproduction of traditional familial structures diminished women's capacity to participate in either the public or private spheres. The survey, then, provided legitimacy to refugee women's work and the work of internal advocates. Importantly, the survey attracted the attention of women's groups within the transnational refugee women's network. A number of delegations were sent to Central America; for example the Women's Commission for Refugee Women visited camps in Mexico and throughout the region, producing a report (WCRWC 1992). Guatemalan refugee women began to be invited to speak at international conferences and forums, further raising awareness of their plight. This global networking would help keep Guatemalan women's organizations 'afloat' both politically and economically in the remainder of the decade.

#### *6.4.2 Initiatives to improve the situation of Refugee Women*

Mamá Maquín and supporting NGOs established education as a priority for refugee women and girls, with funding from the EC. Together they trained a literacy team which in turn started classes for women in camps. Literacy classes also included a component to discuss women's rights. The results were mixed. On the one hand, a large number of women were able to attend classes and reported an increased sense of self-esteem. On the other hand, mixed groups of men and women sometimes formed, with the result of silencing women. Likewise, childcare continued to prevent women from fully participating in classes (Lozano 1996, 8).

In order to reduce the amount of hours women spent working, the UNHCR and European Community financed the construction of common clothes washing basins, mechanical corn grinding mills and the distribution of tortilla presses and fuel-saving stoves. For the most part, these projects were successful in that women's time was freed. However, structural barriers still prevented women from fully controlling these projects and after a time many of the mills were managed by men.

Human rights workshops were held in conjunction with the UNHCR and NGOs, initiated by UNHCR-Mexico but eagerly received by refugees. Refugee women founded a radio programme to reach a wider audience. The programmes addressed questions of domestic violence and rape and emphasized the fact that women did not have to endure these forms of human rights abuses. The UNHCR, NGOs and refugee women's organizations founded a Committee for Refugee Women in 1992 to encourage women to seek legal assistance and guidance. Following a series of public education campaigns, the number of gender-related cases reported increased from 0 percent of all human rights cases to 40 percent between 1992 and 1994 (Personal Interview with Morel 1998). The Mamá Maquín considered these public denunciations as a symbol of the advances Guatemalan refugee women have made in terms of being aware of and demanding their rights.

In the meantime, interested UNHCR staff working in protection and programmes strove to prevent gender-related violence from occurring in the first place by raising awareness of the issue amongst assistance workers and refugees themselves. On the one hand this involved training field staff about appropriate legal actions to condemn perpetrators, hoping the prosecution of men would have a deterrent affect. A special medical house -- *La Casa de la Mujer* -- provided support and a private space for women seeking to

escape violence (Sayavedra 1997). On the other hand, prevention measures involved workshops on self-esteem and human rights in order to raise women's awareness. Some work was also initiated with men who perpetrated the violence or with couples in later years. Finally, the UNHCR sponsored a number of reproductive health services including information on infant mortality, breast-feeding, maternity and the training of health promoters (see *Ibid.*)

In short, a number of approaches relating to human rights, health, education, self-esteem and time-saving devices were created in Mexican refugee camps through joint initiatives of the UNHCR, NGOs and women's organizations. All of these strategies were undertaken with the aim of promoting women's rights, including their right to participate in public activities. To this end, the UNHCR began to promote a general rule that meetings should be held with the presence of women, and that important decisions should only be taken with input from women's representatives. In turn, the practice of ensuring that both husbands and wives were given assistance, or that both spousal names appeared on documents, seemed to raise women's self-esteem (Personal Interviews with Morel 1998, COMADEP 1999). To receive project funding from the UNHCR, NGOs were eventually required to include a gender component in their work (Personal Interviews with COMADEP; Cabrera 1999).<sup>8</sup>

Finally, it is interesting to note that the focus of women's organizations in Mexico was on raising the self-esteem of women. Economic projects were not pursued by many

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<sup>8</sup> NGOs received this stipulation with varying responses. Primarily, NGOs were interested in channelling resources to refugees and this was an added incentive to adopt a gender approach. A number of meetings and trainings were held, as staff within NGOs had to overcome their own inequalities within largely male dominated local NGOs. This flags the necessity of both institutional change and grass-roots initiatives to promote gender equality in refugee assistance and protection activities.

organizations<sup>9</sup> for one of two reasons identified by Morel (1998): (1) refuge was considered a temporary situation, with most women wanting to focus on their role in the return process, and; (2) some women feared that economic initiatives such as credit projects might create conflict between them and in the end not contribute to resolving their problems as women (Ibid., 5). This decision would later have an impact on the self-sufficiency and sustainability of women's organizations after their return to Guatemala.

As the previous section suggested, a priority of Guatemalan women's organizations was to raise women's self-esteem regarding the value of their work, and as women. In an interview I conducted with a leader of Madre Tierra, the fact that women had to constantly prove to others the value of their organizations in dollar terms frustrated her.

What we do can not be "quantified", it is qualitative and should be measured in terms of women's self-esteem. What is important for us is how each one of us has begun to change in our own [personal] development. We can not work toward "quantitative" results, it would not be a women's development project otherwise (Personal Interview with members of Madre Tierra, 1999).

Often women did not perceive themselves to be capable of participating in meetings or economic projects and this self-perception, coupled with machismo, was a great obstacle to their involvement. UNHCR-Mexico and leaders of Indigenous women's organizations generally agreed that by insisting on women's participation in camp decisions and projects, traditional gender roles were disrupted for men and women, as the following example illustrates (Field Notes, Guatemala 1999).

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<sup>9</sup> This is not to say that economic projects were never undertaken: in fact, this was the focus of some organizations not examined in this chapter. However, the larger organizations identified here clearly did not set income generating projects as a priority in Mexico.



### 6.4.3 *Negotiating Gender Equality in Land Rights*

By the time the *October 8th Accord* came into effect in 1992, MMQ had successfully realized the election of several of their members as representatives on the CCPP. The negotiation of the return included specific details on the right of refugees to regain or secure land, including the government promise to obtain land for all landless adults by providing a special credit agreement. In Mayan cultures, land plays a pivotal role in providing sustenance. While women play a critical role in the cultivation and harvesting of land, they are not considered 'farmers' in the sense that men are. Land titles are primarily passed through men. For example, ancestral land is usually passed through the generations to male-children, although occasionally women do inherit land. While fully supportive of the CCPP and their negotiation of the return, Guatemalan women recognized it was necessary to ensure that women's interests were protected with regard to property titles.

Legally, both the *October 8th Accord* and subsequent *Peace Accords* signed between the government and the URNG between 1994 and 1996 recognize that women and men are entitled to own land and access credit (Worby 1998). However in practice, the distribution of land titles favoured the male head of household. This was disconcerting for refugee women separated from their partners.

We realized that women who are married or in common law unions were not taken into account in regards to the right to own land, only men, widows and single mothers. That is when we decided to fight for the right to be joint owners of the land for our own security and that of our daughters and sons, so that we will not be left out in the street if the man sells the land or abandons his partner. This also means recognizing the economic value of the work that we carry out in the house and in the fields. (Mama Maquin, quoted in Worby 1999).

Thus, women's organizations – with the support of the UNHCR – began to insist on the inclusion of their right to be co-owners of land and insist on the participation of refugee women in the process of negotiation for land.

UNHCR staff devised a strategy whereby the CCPP in conjunction with the UNHCR office in Guatemala drafted and signed a document concerning the rights of women to be co-owners of land upon return. This document was then made public. Relevant state agencies were then asked to formally respond to the document. Using the document to pressure the government, UNHCR and women's organisations eventually negotiated the inclusion of refugee women's right to co-ownership.

The negotiation of gender equality in land rights highlights the importance of promoting gender awareness at both personal and institutional levels, among refugee populations, UNHCR staff and in governmental bodies. It affirmed the necessity of supporting women's grass-roots organisation, to work with both men and women in promoting women's rights. It further highlights how an international organization such as UNHCR can play a crucial role in closing the gender gap:

*While gaining direct exercise of land rights in some ways might have been considered secondary to their other needs (among them the urgency that the community as a whole to be granted land), the demand responded to women's larger agenda to protect themselves and their children and be economically protected in the case of separation with their partner. A by-product of the mobilization ... on the other hand, has been that women are seen as more important by men in their communities and are beginning to see themselves as necessary actors to the extent that institutions, such as the UNHCR, continue to insist on the importance of women's presence and formal inclusion in everything from informal meetings to land acquisition (Worby 1998, 1, emphasis mine).*

In this way, international actors did not reproduce gender roles that were limiting or oppressive, but rather empowered women vis-à-vis male dominated institutions.

The intervention of UNHCR-Mexico in turn provided critical spaces in which refugee women could reflect upon their rights and act to claim them. At first, "many women began this process [of understanding their rights] illiterate and often prisoners of their own homes and husbands, they left their homes only to wash their clothes in the river" (García 1998, 6). Yet some women came to view their exile in Mexico as a time of learning, likening it to a school (Personal Interview with members of Madre Tierra, 1999).

The small groups where we began to participate with time grew to larger groups. These [groups] became our own spaces where we talked to and listen to each other, where we began to come to our fears, where we began to know our rights, and to speak about our necessities as women (Vásquez 1998, 2; *translation mine*).

Back in Guatemala, we would never have been able to gain that learning. [Before the violence], women could not participate, or perhaps we could participate but our culture didn't support it, we ourselves devalued ourselves in our activities. By contrast, in Mexico we received help from NGOs, so we began to receive courses, many things (Interview with return woman in Taylor 1998, 40).

The refugees' adoption of a universal discourse of rights -- demonstrated in the priorities of the organizations and their desire to return -- indicates that the UNHCR and NGOs, in this particular time and place, stimulated social change by the very act of recognizing refugee women as refugees with their own particular set of rights (Krznicaric 1997). Further, these victories generated further international attention to the work and struggle of refugee women, attracting sources of future resources and support.

What processes of change in gender relations were taking place within UNHCR to facilitate these activities? To answer this question, the following section examines the role of internal advocates in Mexico, as well as the local and national socio-political environments UNHCR worked within.

## 6.5 Re-negotiating Gender Relations in UNHCR-Mexico and Guatemala

As suggested in section 6.2 above, at first UNHCR-Mexico administered assistance on the assumption it was gender neutral, with dubious results for some refugee women. I suggest that the presence of internal advocates for refugee women, as well as the activities of refugee women themselves, played a key role in challenging this assumption in the 1990s. Terry Morel was named gender focal point after UNHCR Headquarters required each country office to do so in the early 1990s. Morel explains that she first realized UNHCR activities were directly contributing to the exclusion of refugee women in the camp life in a 1990 meeting on income generating projects for refugees:

We were in the school of one of the refugee camps, a small bamboo shelter...About half an hour into the meeting, I realized that all the women in the camp were standing outside the building looking in at us through bamboo walls. They were trying to understand what was happening. But they did not dare enter, nor to participate. Nobody invited them either. I realized then that we could not afford to exclude half the refugee labour force from these projects (quoted in Garcia 1995, 1).

In the earlier part of the 1990s, Morel worked with refugee women and empathetic UNHCR and NGO staff to raise the awareness about gender equality issues. The results of the survey in 1992 were convincing, and as refugee women's organizations formed, UNHCR recognized the irony in supporting CCPP but not refugee women's organizations. Using the findings in the survey, specific projects were initiated with women (described above) to build skills and promote participation by building self esteem. That donors, namely the EC, were interested in funding women's projects at the time helped support the rationale of these initiatives.

The International Conference on Central American Refugees (CIREFCA) was held in 1992 to map regional approaches to the problem of displacement there. The Conference

promoted and provided a framework for the co-operation of NGOs, refugee groups and the Guatemalan state in the return process. Following its policy to collect more information on refugee women in general, the UNHCR in Mexico conducted an evaluation and presented their findings at a regional conference on the topic, the Regional Forum of Refugee and Repatriated Women (FoReFem). These findings were then incorporated into the CIERFCA approach. FoReFem, which was held in February 1992, provided an important networking medium for participants. Here, displaced and refugee women could articulate their demands to governments and the international community: "Conference participants learned a great deal about the situation of refugee women as they listened, most for the first time, [to] the women describe...their lives and their demands for change. As a result, the experience of refugee women was recognised and affirmed in a public way during this event" (Quoted in Worby, 1999).

Second, within Central America and Guatemala, a strong culture of solidarity based on participation and popular education existed. This culture stemmed from generations of revolutionary strategies to galvanize 'compressions' to fight for justice and equality in the region. Third, the environment within which UNHCR-Mexico worked was relatively stable, permitting long term thought and planning on the part of staff, reflected in the process of negotiating the return of refugees in an organized and dignified manner. This permitted staff to reflect upon the position of refugee women in the return process and to raise awareness among various institutions and the population regarding gender equality. It also permitted a period of negotiation and a long-term approach.

For example, reflecting upon the negotiation of land rights, the current Senior Regional Advisor on Refugee Women remarked that "when analysing the outcome for

women abandoned by their partners (and often deprived of the land or belongings of the family) and the vulnerable situation that women and their children often find themselves in, the land issue for women became self-evident” He continues, “through consciousness-raising by the women's organisations, the right that women be taken into account as co-owners became an accepted part of the agenda of the returnees in general and familiar (and no longer shocking) to the institutions (governmental and non governmental) working with them” (Email exchange with SRARWGE, April 2000).

Finally, Guatemalan women organized themselves in a way that connected them to each other in solidarity, ensuring they would not be left out of decision-making processes and providing them a forum to articulate their own demands. For example, a number of refugee women's organizations formed the Committee for the Support of Refugee Women, which included members of local NGOs and the UNHCR. Through this committee, groups such as the Mamá Maquín were able to articulate to the UNHCR as well as other agencies what refugee women are requesting, thus becoming a part of decision-making processes.

In 1996, Morel was posted to the newly created position of Regional Senior Advisor for Refugee Women in the Americas.<sup>10</sup> In this position, Morel was granted greater resources and a better position within UNHCR structures to continue to promote the issue. She eventually became responsible for mainstreaming gender throughout the regional bureau, which included country operations in all Latin America, Central America and North America. Morel clearly understood the importance of moving from ‘women’ to ‘gender

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<sup>10</sup> Recall from Chapter Five that this Regional position was created by UNHCR Headquarters to bolster the ‘integration’ of refugee women in regional bureaux.

mainstreaming', as described in the preceding chapters of this thesis. As stated in the 1997/98 Report on Gender Mainstreaming in the Americas 1997/98:

A gender equality perspective goes beyond the realms of women, children, community services and environment as it affects each of these areas and all others. Gender is not about 'taking care of a sector of the population', or setting up projects for a certain group, or who is responsible for women (e.g. the senior coordinator or community services). Gender affects girls and boys, women and men, elderly women and men, whether in the field of policy making, protection, programme, community services, public information, durable solutions or any technical assistance. Using a gender equality perspective implies understanding each of these areas in relation to how they affect women and men of all ages differently and inequitable relations that may arise or be reinforced through UNHCR interventions.

It is interesting to note that Morel adopted a discourse of 'equality' long before Headquarters was prepared to move in this discursive direction.

For Morel, equality was a basic right of all refugees, and UNHCR was obligated under international commitments to ensure equality of rights between male and female refugees. She stressed this did not imply sameness, but equality of opportunity (*Ibid.*). Further, Morel stressed that gender mainstreaming was not necessarily "equivalent to working on projects with women, although the latter may often be required in order to enable women access to equal opportunities" (*Ibid.*) She therefore recognised that both an institutional and grass-roots approach were essential to gender mainstreaming. Further, Morel stressed that 'gender' required the involvement of men in order to promote positive and sustainable changes in gender relations.

As a part of her regional strategy, the newly appointed Senior Regional Advisor (located in Mexico) identified gender focal points in each country office to act as catalysts to the regional gender mainstreaming strategy. Yet focal points, as well as

Morel herself, continued to be perceived by UNHCR staff members to be solely responsible for 'all matters relating to women' and as a result, they were inundated with work. Clearly this misunderstood the concept of both 'gender' and 'mainstreaming' described above. Moreover, isolated focal points had to deal with the continued resistance of UNHCR staff to gender equality issues. This resistance was displayed in a range of stalling tactics, jokes or the perception that by including women in a meeting, a gender perspective had been mainstreamed (Worby 1999).

As a means of overcoming the isolation and challenges focal points faced, a regional gender network was created, composed of the Senior Regional Co-ordinator, focal points and other interested staff. The network facilitates an exchange of information between countries and assisted in the development of work plans and common strategies for gender mainstreaming. Network members constantly involve heads of Office and other senior staff in their work plans to promote a sense of ownership and accountability. This is a means of shifting responsibility for gender mainstreaming to all staff members, a necessary step to avoid ghettos and promote institutional change.

Today, the network engages in a range of activities to promote a gender equality perspective. For example, the network recently revised UNHCR refugee status determination (RSD) forms and procedures. This revision requires staff to interview both men and women separately, and to gather information on the position of women in the country of origin, and to consider gender related forms of persecution in their decision-making. The mandatory extension of RSD to both men and women ensures that equality of access. By including women, the awareness of both men and women is raised with respect to women's rights. In requiring interviewers to gather information on



women's position in relation to men in their country of origin, and on gender-related persecution, 'women's' experiences and gender relations are made visible. This in turn validates both refugee women's and men's experiences in relation to each other, and in the process of obtaining asylum.

Today, both male and female staff are a part of the regional gender network; in fact, a man assumed the revised position of Senior Regional Advisor for Gender Equality after Morel left in 1999. Trainings on masculinities and male bias within UNHCR procedures are held throughout the region. These trainings are now deemed an essential component of the region's attempt to mainstream gender and promote gender equality.

## **6.6 The Process of Return: Transitional Challenges in Guatemala**

Under the *October 8 Agreement*, refugees began to return to Guatemala in organized groups as early as 1993. Refugees had achieved the recognition they demanded from the government, but faced the task of holding the government responsible for purchasing land and providing basic infrastructure. Moreover the land received often had to be cleared for planting. New homes, water systems, schools and so on had to be constructed. As a result, initiatives started in Mexican camps were put on hold for a time. But despite this, members of women's organizations were determined that "their return to Guatemala was not to return to a life they had before exile" (Vasquez 1998, 3).

The final Peace Accords were signed on December 26, 1996 -- ending the thirty seven year civil war. On the one hand, coordinators from Mamá Maquín, Ixmucané and Madre Tierra were able to establish a national presence in newly emerging democratic

structures (see López 1998). For example, refugee and displaced women are represented in the Women's Forum, a space established under the Peace Accords in order to monitor the implementation of the Accords with respect to women's issues. In addition, women's organizations were represented by a Special Coordinator in the *Asemblea Consultiva de la Población Desarrigada (ACPD)* -- a broad network of organizations representing displaced and uprooted persons in Guatemala which sits on the technical commission to oversee the implementation of the Accord on Displaced Persons. Both Madre Tierra and Mamá Maquín opened offices in Guatemala City in order to maintain pressure on the government to fulfill its obligations to the returning refugees. On the other hand, many returning refugees anticipated a return to normalcy after the war, defined in part by the re-assertion of traditional gender roles. Further, women's organizations did not anticipate the conditions encountered upon return, including: physical dispersment; diminished funding; less stable economic and political environments; and closed political spaces for women in newly established communities. The following section examines these setbacks, and UNHCR-Guatemala's response to them.

### *Physical Dispersment*

In Guatemala, women who had worked closely together in Mexican camps are now physically dispersed throughout the country. In Mexican camps, women lived in close proximity to one another, facilitating their communication and attendance of meetings. Returns to Guatemala were staggered, occurring at different times over a six year period. Women returned to different communities located all over Guatemala. Many of these communities are located in densely forested highlands or jungles not accessible by road.

Indeed, it may take up to several hours to hike into any one community and this may be an arduous journey, stymied by mud, ravines and challenging paths. Even within some 'communities', women may be separated from each other by a half hour or more walk. Without electricity or telephone, walking to carry a message may be the only means of communication.<sup>11</sup>

For women still reluctant to participate in meetings, the support of the friends they had in exile is greatly missed. For women in leadership positions, contact with the 'base' becomes a real challenge. For instance, in order to make a democratic decision, leaders would be required to visit each of the communities they represent -- a task that takes a substantial amount of time and resources. In addition, the coordinators of women's groups still have considerable domestic responsibilities, and sometimes must travel with their children as there is no daycare provided at home (Field Notes, Guatemala 1999).

### *Machismo*

A second major challenge women have encountered is a resurgence of *machismo*. As previously argued, male leaders represented in CCPP were more likely to support women's organizations in Mexico for political reasons: male leadership recognized the potential funding women's organizations attracted, in addition to the powerful image women's demands projected to the international media for their cause. Upon returning home, this role was no longer perceived as necessary and many men insisted that women reassume

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<sup>11</sup> In some cases, women from MMQ were so far from the majority of others in the organizations that they decided to join Ixmucane, who were physically closer.

traditional gender roles, for example, focusing completely on domestic 'duties' and leaving public spaces.

In one interview, a Coordinator of Mamá Maquín presently residing in Guatemala City told me she was afraid that if she went to the community her father lived in, he would make her give up her studies and marry within the community. In some cases, men's insistence that women return to 'traditional' ways has been extreme; for example, in one case, men expected women to abandon the mills and tortilla presses obtained in Mexican camps, to go back to the labour-intensive and time-consuming process of making tortillas by hand (Personal Interview with COMADEP 1999). Women have also encountered violence or threat of violence which prevents them from participating in public life.

### *Political Struggle for Control*

A third, related, factor which significantly affected the transition from refuge to return was the increase in political tensions and struggle for power and influence within return communities. Upon return, the three allied branches of the URNG fragmented. When men left a particular branch of the URNG, their wives or sisters were 'obliged' to follow them.

In addition, decision-making has changed from the broad and inclusive structures promoted by the UNHCR in Mexico, to authoritarian and hierarchical structures almost completely composed of men (Worby 1998, 11). At times, the struggle for control has had violent outcomes. In early 1997, leaders in communities of the Ixcán region accused Mamá Maquín of being supporters of the guerrillas, who were thought to be interfering with

community life. Under the direction of village authorities, an angry mob tore down and burned the meeting place of MMQ, erecting a wooden cross on the ashes to symbolize the death of the organization. As Worby argues (1998, 9), these accusations were ironic given that the same male leaders had previously supported the guerrillas.

That MMQ contested political power within these communities is more likely the cause of the attack. María Guadalupe García Hernández of Mamá Maquin suspects that machismo also plays a role in this violence, as women are seen to be 'trespassing' in men's territory. Later that same year, members of the MMQ were threatened, robbed and assaulted by supposed bandits on their return from their yearly assembly in the same region. MMQ felt this attack was also politically motivated, as assailants made specific and demeaning comments to Coordinators they knew by name. In my interviews with MMQ Coordinators, I learned that many women had been intimidated by these attacks, leaving the organization altogether.

#### *Economic Hardship and Lulls in International Support*

A fourth factor that must be taken into consideration is the harsh reality of economic survival in return communities. In Nueva Esperanza, women were intent on continuing their work in MMQ, but the energy they arrived with declined as they faced exhausting days collecting firewood, water, cleaning clothes, caring for gardens and crops, shifting and cleaning beans and corn, making tortillas, taking care of animals and children, weaving and making goods to supplement their income and so on. Indeed, many women in this community felt their participation in MMQ hindered their ability to meet their families' needs (Davis 1998). As Davis explains, assistance from the UNHCR (such as food aid and

economic projects) in camps had helped ease this burden, freeing women's time and ability to participate. In this way, the ability to survive economically in the absence of international aid in part relies upon women returning to traditional gender roles.

In part, economic instability helps explain why so few women opted to be co-owners of land upon return to Guatemala, despite the work of women's organizations and the UNHCR on the issue. Traditionally, co-operatives were founded on the principle that each member pays dues. Women were concerned they would not be able to pay their dues given their relative lack of access to monetary income. Further, women were afraid of being overburdened by fines imposed on persons who failed to attend meetings. Responsible for child care, women miss more meetings than their male counter-parts (Worby 1998, 11).

This leads to a final challenge of transition identified here -- the lull in international funding and support to return communities. At times, the reasons for this lack of funding would appear to be due to the difficulties encountered in reaching some of the more hard to reach return communities.<sup>12</sup> Presently, MMQ, Madre Tierra and Ixmucané are at various stages of becoming legal entities under the Guatemalan constitution. Official legal status will enable them to apply for funding and manage their own economic projects, in addition to giving them greater legal footing from which to lobby the government. However, women's organizations are still painfully dependent on international funding and guidance. For instance, Mamá Maquín is being forced to close their office in the capital due to a shortage of funds to keep it open. This office is critical for maintaining a presence at the national level and placing pressure on the Guatemalan government. Likewise, Ixmucané's

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<sup>12</sup> In fact, most of the returnees I spoke to saw a direct relationship between high levels of international funding and projects in communities located along major highways, and low to non-existent support of hard

representative to the ACPD had to leave her post due to lack of funding. Many of the women involved in these organizations do not have experience writing or managing economic or development projects, which requires bureaucratic skills including accounting and legal documentation. In other words, longer term capacity building is required.

### *UNHCR-Guatemala*

From the onset of the return process, UNHCR-Guatemala was involved in receiving returnees and working to ensure their protection as well as providing basic assistance packages. The incorporation of a gender equality perspective in their activities indicates that a degree of institutional change has taken place between the two UNHCR bodies working in Mexico and Guatemala. For example, both women and men were included in the design and delivery of assistance packages to returnee communities. As Worby explains in an evaluation of the Guatemalan return process, this had the positive effect of boosting women's visibility in the UNHCR:

Once women were called upon to receive their assistance, staff had to organize lists of names and receipts accordingly: making women returnees visible from an administrative point of view. On the other hand, the fact that staff were thus made to speak directly to the family as a family and not just the male head of household, made women literally more visible. They had a brief opportunity to mention directly to UNHCR staff their particular concerns and were accorded due respect in front of their families (1999, n.p).

A number of the initiatives to support women in returning communities fell short of a long term approach however. UNHCR-Guatemala attempted to involve women in QIPs, but as Worby notes, these were "normally at odds with the requirements of conducting a project

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to reach communities. This observation seemed to be supported by the one community I hiked to, San

with a gender focus". Indeed, it was easier to involve men in short term projects where women were reluctant to become involved, a phenomenon that is repeated later in Bosnia-Herzegovina (see Chapter Seven). To this end, Worby warns of the dangers of superficially involving women in such projects as they "ignore the more profound issues at hand [and] can, in some cases, further disadvantage women, either by setting them up for failure or causing men, women and institutions to conform to solutions that look good on paper but do not change their reality" (Worby 1999, n.p.).

Thus, Worby points to the need for bridging the relief-development gap prevalent in post-return situations, and also to take both a grass-roots and institutional approach to realize long term changes in gender relations. This begins with promoting women's visibility in the community and within UNHCR, national and local institutions. Worby concludes that UNHCR-Guatemala has begun to move in this direction where:

UNHCR's insistence in bringing up [women's and gender] issues repeatedly, often in the words of men in positions of importance, is deemed to have had a positive impact in sensitizing implementing partners, government officials and male returnee leaders. Other institutions often sought out UNHCR's knowledge or advice on gender issues and saw UNHCR as a pioneer in putting gender guidelines into practice. Returnee women, in particular, felt continually supported in their endeavors because of UNHCR's public and ongoing commitment (Worby 1999, n.p.).

As the following passage indicates, Guatemalan women confirm the role of UNHCR has played in their lives, as well as the importance of linking transnationally to other women's organizations:

As an organization we have become aware of the support of many people. We know the role that the UNHCR played in the growth of Mama Maquin. The UNHCR has protected us and helped us in our search for assistance in training and for international recognition of our rights. The UNHCR also has provided us with

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Rafael. Located a good two hour hike from the nearest town, San Rafael had no NGO support to speak of.



projects that have helped women meet their needs. We hope this continues as long as we are refugees. Now as more of us are returning to our homes, we are encountering new difficulties and pressures, and we need the protection of UNHCR more than ever. At the international level, we wish to maintain contact with NGOs, popular organizations and other women who demand respect for women's rights, so that they may learn about our situation, needs, struggles and work (Garcia Hernandez and Garcia 1996, 264).

## 6.7 Conclusions

This chapter illustrates the potential spaces opened by the presence of international humanitarian organizations and NGOs when women are recognized as refugees alongside men, and their particular experiences of refuge are incorporated into refugee assisting activities. Refugee women embraced political spaces and claimed them as their own in Mexico, making significant strides in the area of political participation. A number of factors facilitated the opening of this space, including a socio-cultural context receptive to the discourse of human rights, a refugee centred approach to both refuge and return, the interests of donor states and organizations, and presence of refugee women's organizations themselves, advocating on their own behalf and encouraged by local NGOs, internal advocates and transnational women's networks.

However, the spaces opened in exile were challenged by transitions in return. Training and workshops with women on their rights and the recognition of their rights in legal documentation do not go far enough to secure durable changes in gender relations (Worby 1998). As Gregoria Garcia concludes:

The changes are impressive, but problems still follow, even still there are many women, in fact the majority, that suffer machismo, their work is not valued by either herself nor for its contribution to the community, they do not know their human rights as women, even still there is fear and intimidation to speak or have an opinion in the co-operatives (García 1998, 6)

Training and workshops that involve refugee men and issues on masculinity are essential. To this end, UNHCR trainings on masculinity should be targeted at refugee, return and internally displaced communities as well as UNHCR staff from the onset of any initiative (Sayaverda 1997, 20-21, UNHCR in the Americas 1997, 1). Women's organizations such as Madre Tierra have also begun to emphasize the importance of educating children -- boys and girls -- from an early age about equality between the sexes. They further argue that consciousness raising, especially of men, about the value of women's work within the home -- and her right to participate outside it -- remains a fundamental task (Vasquéz 1998, 3-4).

If gender equality is to become part of a long-term durable solution, then longer-term accompaniment of refugee women's organizations upon return needs to occur to help maintain communication links between dispersed refugee women and aid the transition from refuge to return, emergency to development. Because of the difficulty in reaching various communities, there has been lack of a follow-up by international actors and NGOs, particularly financially. In order to build refugee women's self-sufficiency, more attention needs to be paid to linking relief to development in order to enable refugee women leaders to function autonomously; for example, accounting skills and organizational strengthening through capacity building is essential. Yet this must take a long term, gender equality perspective which engages and challenges male structures. As Worby argues, "until women's full contribution to family and community daily life is fully understood and *valued by both men and women as well as the institutions providing aid*, it will be difficult to assimilate the concept and practice of women's rights with that of

community participation in general; and their full access to and control of the resources and benefits derived from community development... will be very limited" (1999, n.p.).

It is important to recognize the role of internal advocates for gender equality issues inside organizations such as the UNHCR, states and within the NGO community working in Mexico. Historically, refugee women have been marginalized in refugee-related field operations and protection issues (as was the case initially in Mexico). The presence of a United Nations Regional Advisor on Refugee Women and a team of supportive field staff helped establish a mechanism through which women's rights were recognized and supported. This confirms the importance of internal advocates within institutions until such time that gender is fully mainstreamed in all assessment, planning and implementation processes.

Finally, the findings of this chapter suggest that gender analysis must be mainstreamed throughout all areas of UNHCR work. At the same time, we are reminded by Mama Maquin in the passage below that strategies to mainstream must ultimately be done in support of, and to work towards, empowering refugee populations, and in particular to transform gender relations within refugee populations.

Each culture has a model of subordination that constantly undergoes changes. This dynamic of change is determined by internal and external forces outside the women's control (for example, refuge, aid, and poverty). Work with women from a gender perspective necessarily includes an integral analysis of gender, class, and ethnic inequalities which allows women to better understand and influence these changes in their favour. The legitimization of these changes implies that women must be their author (MMQ and CIAM 1994, 97).

In this strategy, it is essential to recognize that every situation in which UNHCR operates is different and therefore gender mainstreaming requires also a critical understanding of the

socio-cultural, political and economic circumstances UNHCR works in. With this in mind, we now turn a case study of Bosnia-Herzegovina.

## **Chapter Seven**

### **Women's Projects and Mainstreaming in Bosnia-Herzegovina: The Political Economy of Return and Reintegration**

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[The UNHCR], believes not only that [the BWI], the first of its kind, could be a forerunner of other internationally-supported programmes to benefit women in war-torn countries and thus contribute to the peace process, but also that it will make its mark in relation to the recommendations of the Women's World Conferences at Nairobi and Beijing: that women should participate on an equal basis with men in the economic, social, cultural and political affairs of their countries (Original Concept Paper Sarajevo, 26 September 1996; see UNHCR-Sarajevo 1996).

#### **7.1 Introduction**

In the aftermath of the Bosnian conflict, UNHCR emerged as the lead agency to promote the return and reintegration of the millions of displaced persons under Annex 7 of the Dayton Peace Accords. Within this effort, the Bosnian Women's Initiative (BWI) was founded in September 1996. The initiative was to promote the role of women in the reconstruction of Bosnian social and economic institutions. Most projects were rapid impact, short-term income generation to support the most 'vulnerable'. Few of the projects engaged gender relations within returnee populations and consequently, long-term strategic changes within these populations, as well as in UNHCR institutions, have not been promoted.

Moreover, the process of 'mainstreaming' was mis-appropriately designed and initiated in Bosnian field operations in the late 1990s, with dubious results for Bosnian women and women's organizations. Originally, BWI was a stand alone project. Given the need to strengthen and streamline UNHCR activities in Bosnia, UNHCR staff decided to integrate or 'mainstream' BWI within standard programming – a development that ran parallel to the 'streamlining' process in Headquarters. Projects became far more 'donor

driven' than set by the objectives of women's groups. Increasingly, projects focused on providing economic assistance to minority return areas, or areas where returns were about to take place. This emphasis, in light of pressure experienced by UNHCR staff to promote returns, often resulted in inappropriate income generation projects with a disempowering effect on women's associations as well as the intended beneficiaries of BWI projects.

The findings of this chapter underscore the differences between 'working on projects with women' and the process of 'gender mainstreaming'. While BWI continued to support women *per se*, the overall programming approach did not mainstream a gender equality perspective. Any 'special needs' of women were then assumed to be met under BWI. Mainstreaming BWI may have had the unintentional outcome of further marginalizing women from standard UNHCR programming: ironic given the original intentions of the Initiative. Through this example, then, I expose some of the potential dangers of mainstreaming when gender equality goals are not clearly articulated.

The chapter begins with an overview of the gender dimensions of conflict and UNHCR operations during the emergency and in post-conflict Bosnia-Herzegovina. It then analyzes the structure and approach of the fund to assess what opportunities it presented to returnee and displaced women and girls. The intersections of the global, national and local become apparent through an examination of the relationships between different actors (women's groups, NGOs, UNHCR and donors) and institutions (cultural, economic, social and political) in the chapter.

## 7.2 Conflict and Displacement in Bosnia and Herzegovina

The conflict in Bosnia has been described as a complex political economic emergency “brought about by the interaction between the decay and collapse of communism and the decay and collapse of the federal state” (Aspen Institute Berlin and Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, quoted in Dahrendorf & Balian 1999). The end of Josip Broz’s (Tito’s) forty-five year dictatorship signified the disintegration of a carefully and often brutally enforced ethnic balance between the six Republics of Yugoslavia.

While the traditional Balkan family had once been a *zadruga*,<sup>1</sup> gender relations were disrupted by the country’s struggle for liberation after the German invasion in 1942. In this struggle, millions of women founded an anti-fascist movement and one hundred thousand fought alongside men. The formation of communist Yugoslavia in the post-war period was embraced by local, popular struggles for democracy and independence.

The Yugoslav economy prospered under Tito’s careful balance between East and West. Women under Tito’s regime achieved a number of advances in the public sphere: women were organized into associations bound to party structures; their participation was encouraged in politics; and, women were granted ‘equality’ to men in the workplace. Maternity leave was granted. Family law gave husbands and wives equal status, and abortion became a public right of women. However, as Cockburn points out, Tito’s Yugoslavia was patriarchal: “the socialist strategy on women responded to men’s perception of the ‘Women Question’ and in no way challenged male-dominant gender relations” (1998, 157; see also Ramet 1999).

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<sup>1</sup> A *zadruga* is several generations of an extended family living together; women moved from one home to the next only when married.

As a lot of women have pointed out since Yugoslavia's experiment in social brotherhood came to grief, 'emancipation' was always the brother's policy for the sisters, not something the sisters achieved in their own design. Marxist theory proposes that sex equality will be achieved by means of women's equal participation with men in the paid labour force. Women certainly gain by leaving home and earning an independent income. But nowhere has this resulted in sex equality (Cockburn 1998, 157).

Indeed, gender stereotyping continued to lead men and women to pursue different disciplines in educational institutions, and employment in work places (see UNDP 1998; ILWG 1999). In work, few women held managerial positions or sat on union councils (17 percent) (Cockburn 1998, 158). In rural areas, agricultural work was largely the responsibility of women. In 1987, 78 percent of production was done by older women. Yet women own less than 2 percent of land in rural areas (UNDP 1998, 90). In the 'private' sphere few interventions were made by the state. Thus domestic and sexual violence were not addressed by Tito (Medica Zenica 1999).

The economy began to suffer tremendously under the strain of a large debt incurred in the 1970s as well as hyper-inflation in the 1980s. Tito's death shook the foundations of Yugoslavia, as the three presidency successor model he had designed to maintain the precarious balance between republics began to crumble under the strain of a poor economy and emerging nationalist aspirations. These factors led the more affluent Republics of Slovenia and Croatia to declare independence in July 1991.

With political aspirations to serve as President of Yugoslavia, Serbian President Slobodon Milosevic claimed that such declarations were illegal. Amongst other actors, Milosevic fanned ultra-nationalist flames to elicit opposition to the break-away Republics. These flames were fed by the memory of past crimes and oppressions of civil rights within Yugoslavia but, ultimately, it was the power hungry leadership of political



persons, not inevitable ethnic rivalries, which led to the outbreak of war. This stands in contrast to a popular perception that the international community, lacking political will, had set the wheels of conflict in motion:

The war in Yugoslavia was not the international community's fault. The war was planned and waged by Yugoslavs. It was not historically inevitable. To attribute the calamity that engulfed the peoples of Yugoslavia to unstoppable forces is to avoid addressing oneself to the central dynamic of the war. It is also to let the guilty off the hook. And, it also provides a justification for the failure of the West, for so long, to intervene with sufficient will and vigor to end the war (Silber & Little 1995, 25).

Belgrade first attacked Slovenia in a war that lasted a short ten days before turning its forces on Croatia, then under the leadership of President Franco Tudjman, an ultra-nationalist in his own right. The Serbo-Croat conflict ended less than a year later in January 1992 with the Sarajevo Accord, and the European Community soon recognized the independence of both Slovenia and Croatia.

In March of 1992, Bosnia held its own referendum on independence, one boycotted by Serb Bosnians who favoured Milosevic's new aspirations to form a Greater Serbia. Bosnia consisted of three main ethnic groups – 43.7 percent Muslims; 31.4 percent Serbs and 17.3 percent Croats – who had lived together in urban areas and in close proximity to each other in rural areas.<sup>2</sup> As Dahrendorf and Balian write, "this co-existence 'worked as long as the state of Yugoslavia provided a common roof and acted as a referee. When the state started to disintegrate..., the Bosnian equilibrium came under severe strain' and disintegrated as well" (1999, 14).

Upon gaining international recognition, the newly independent state of Bosnia lapsed into conflict in April 1992. By the end of summer in 1992, Bosnian Serbs, with

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<sup>2</sup> Before the war, 65 percent of the Bosnian population lived in rural areas.

the help of a co-opted Yugoslav People's Army (JNA), controlled 70 percent of Bosnia after a ferocious offensive. Fighting was concentrated in the Northern and Eastern parts of the country between an allied Croat-Muslim army and the Bosnian Serb army. However, distrust and tensions emerged between Croat and Muslim leaders, heightened by Croat attempts to claim parts of Western and Southern Bosnia. The conflict thus spread to these areas between Croat and Muslim, engulfing the whole country in conflict.

Throughout the ten years of nationalist fervor which led to the outbreak of the war, gender roles were being re-defined. The 'loyalties' of the new patriotic woman were no longer to socialism, but to nationalism. Her contribution moved from the public sphere back to the private sphere where she was to regenerate the nation through motherhood. Party platforms began to call upon women to increase the number of children they had in order to stem threats to 'the nation' (Kesic 1999, 200). This fed into a "war mentality" whereby "women are there .... in their function as breeders of new generations of brave soldiers..." (Pacic in Kesic 1999, 188). For the new man, nationalist projects required him to be "protective, martial, virile, most definitely heterosexual." (Cockburn 1998, 162). Symbolically, women were guardians of the home, reproducers of children and preservers of the bloodline; men, protectors of the home and warriors of the battle (*Ibid.*). The conflict intensified.

As Walsh observes,

The war in Bosnia was fuelled by a politically manufactured ethno-nationalism which had two principle outcomes. First, distrust and fear spread among the population leading to a breakdown in community and personal relations. The second consequence, ethnic cleansing, which came to characterize the war, was at once a military strategy to prevent reprisal from defeated areas, and for the Bosnian Serbs it was also a means of expunging elements which were perceived to threaten the existence of the Serbs and the Serb nation (1997, 1).

A third outcome of significance was the mass displacement of persons over the course of the war. It is estimated that up to half of the 4.3 million pre-war population fled ethnic cleansing and the harms of conflict over the course of the war. Around 700, 000 fled Bosnia altogether, seeking asylum in Europe. Within Bosnia, entire villages were emptied and then filled again by completely different ethnic groups arriving from another purged village. In other villages, all houses and crops were completely leveled to prevent people from returning to them.

The gendered dimensions of these collective outcomes are revealed upon closer examination. First, the breakdown of community and personal relations was at once gendered. Men were both the targets of, and recruited into, armed forces, often turning neighbor against neighbor. Men leaving for the front lines left women in charge of families, often in the position of 'providing' for their dependents for the first time (UNHCR-Sarajevo, 1996).<sup>3</sup> With health care and social assistance in virtual collapse, women became responsible for all health and social welfare of their families according to their prescribed gender roles. And as communities were torn apart, the traditional support structures from which rural women benefited from were torn apart too, increasing women's workload and straining their coping strategies. As the conflict continued, the economic situation of the country deteriorated gravely. According to the World Bank, Bosnia suffered a 75% drop in Gross Domestic Product (GDP) between 1990-1995 – the most extensive economic collapse in Eastern Europe since World War II. This placed an even greater strain on female headed households, striving to meet the basic needs of their families.

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<sup>3</sup> In a recent UNHCR study of minority return women, it was found that 20 percent of such households are headed by a single woman (UNHCR 2000b).

As part of Serbian and Croat military strategies, entire cities and villages came under siege, making the delivery of assistance to populations trapped inside difficult. For example, humanitarian workers had to constantly 'negotiate' with Bosnian Serbs to fly in assistance to the besieged city of Sarajevo in the longest humanitarian airlift in history.<sup>4</sup> Representatives of the international humanitarian community were frustrated by the strangle-hold Bosnian Serb leaders held over assistance delivery (Cutts 1999). Too often, food rotted on the tarmac of the airport and critical materials were returned to places of origin.

However, an enormous effort was made to get aid into Sarajevo and other besieged areas. One aspect of this effort was the spontaneous formation of dozens of women's organizations to help facilitate the delivery of aid and to provide some relief to the enormous psychological strain. For instance, Women for Women Bosnia and Medica Zenica both formed during the conflict to provide counseling services to survivors of rape, who had arrived in their communities from a village which had been leveled. Women's organizations formed to physically assist in providing food, materials for shelter and water. Organizations also cared for war orphans, providing shelter and care for thousands of children (Personal Interview with Gedaloph 1999).

The gendered dimensions of ethnic cleansing involved a process by which civilian men and young boys were sent to concentration camps, tortured and executed. Women too were sent to camps, where they were sometimes systematically raped, often under orders from higher commanders (Stiglmayer 1994). 'Rape camps' were set up, and rape was used as a political mobilization strategy by opposing armies. Rapes also occurred in the homes of women in front of children and other family members. It has been

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<sup>4</sup> The airlift lasted from July 3, 1992 to January 9, 1996, three-and-a-half years.

estimated that between 30,000-50,000 women were raped during the war, some young children and others elderly women (Women for Women Bosnia, 1997).

It has by now been well argued within the feminist legal community (MacKinnon 1995; Thomas & Ralph 1999; Green et. al. 1998; Stiglmeier 1994) that rape has been used historically as an instrument of war, as it was in Bosnia this decade. Rape is used to intimidate and humiliate, frequently with the goal of forcing the target population to leave an area and to not return. In Bosnia, rape was used to impregnate women, to grotesquely force women to bear children of the opposing ethnic group.<sup>5</sup> “J”, a Croatian woman held in a Serbian detention camp recounts the words of Serbian military men who raped her: “He threw me on the floor, and someone else came into the room ... Both Grabovac and this other man started to beat me. They said I was an Ustasa and that I needed to give birth to a Serb – that I would then be different” (quoted in Thomas & Ralph 1999, 204). Documentation has been collected on instances where Serb soldiers held Bosniak<sup>6</sup> women until an advanced stage of pregnancy before releasing them.

Mass rape in Bosnia became a rallying point to transnational activists defending women’s rights globally. A huge number of feminist legal journals and texts on the crime of rape were produced during this period to raise awareness within legal circles and the academic and non-academic community. The mainstream media also focused on the issue to reveal the extent of the atrocities in Bosnia. Bosnian women became a symbol in the global movement to reconstruct rape as a war crime, not as a crime against honour.

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<sup>5</sup> Media reports of rape were also used as a political tool to gain sympathies, and to galvanize popular support around the military. It has been conceded by a number of leaders of women’s movements that rape was a strategy of all military forces involved, although this remains a sensitive issue for Bosniaks and others given Muslim forces were on the defensive for most of the war, and that a majority of survivors of rape were Muslim women.

<sup>6</sup> The term Bosniak refers to Slav-speaking Muslims in Bosnia.

Bosnian survivors were invited to international forums to share their stories and raise awareness. Women's groups formed in Western countries to act as support groups to the women in Bosnia, and a number of sister organizations were started between Bosnia and the United States. In this way, the transnational activist community brought international attention to the experiences of women in the conflict zones, later an important influence in the formation of the Bosnia Women's Initiative.

International efforts to end the war were stymied by a lack of political will or agreement on the appropriateness of intervention. The UN Security Council was actively involved in trying to find a solution; between 30 May 1992 and 9 November 1995, 46 Security Council Resolutions (SCR) were passed dealing with the situation in Bosnia. Significantly, all of these resolutions highlighted an explicit or implicit concern with alleviating the human suffering of civilians (Cutts 1999). A total of 16 resolutions dealt specifically with the issue of countering hindrances to the delivery of humanitarian assistance. As Cutts argues, it seems that the international community concentrated on humanitarian assistance largely in the face of a political stalemate regarding the means to end the conflict.

Under these circumstances, the UN Secretary General appointed UNHCR as the 'lead' agency for providing humanitarian assistance during the war in 1992. Altogether, UNHCR managed to deliver some 950,000 metric tonnes of humanitarian assistance to some 2.7 million beneficiaries through dangerous airlifts and land convoys over the duration of the war (Cutts 1999). As such, Bosnia became UNHCR's largest operation to date. UNHCR operations in Bosnia also represent a novel experience for the

organization, working inside an area of conflict at great personal risk to field officers.<sup>7</sup> Yet meeting UNHCR core protection objectives was complicated by a number of factors in the global political economy.

The 'crisis of asylum' refers to the erection of a number of barriers to refuge-seeking persons, including a legal tightening of the 1951 Refugee Convention and economic disincentives to carriers and asylum seekers themselves (Refugees 1999b). This crisis heightened during the Bosnia conflict, as European states were reluctant to receive the mass of Bosnians seeking refuge. UNHCR sought temporary asylum solutions, whereby asylum seekers were relocated on a short term basis. Yet even UNHCR questioned the durability of this strategy, asking "how long is temporary?" (Refugees 1995a)

In the meantime, perhaps not unrelated, was the establishment of 'safe areas' by SCRs 824 and 836, under the protection of a UN peacekeeping force, UNPROFOR. Originally, UNPROFOR worked closely with UNHCR under the mandate to assist in "creating conditions for the effective delivery of humanitarian aid." While this role extended in safe areas, UNPROFOR played a distinctly "civil-military" role, primarily concerned with protection of civilians rather than traditional peacekeeping activities. Yet doubts about the viability of this strategy were tragically confirmed by the invasion of UN designated 'safe area' Srebrenica and the slaughter of thousands of innocents (Silber & Little 1996).

Nevertheless, international mediation did help bring the Croat-Muslim fighting to an end in March 1994. A series of negotiations between Serb-Bosnian and Muslim, and Croatian forces failed in repeated attempts to broker a peace under the guise of the

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<sup>7</sup> 12 of whom died on duty between 1991-1995

International Conference on the Former Yugoslavia. However, after the shocking massacre at Srebrenica and the murder of innocent civilians at a market in Sarajevo, the international community finally intervened militarily. A series of NATO led air-strikes on Serb military bases, coupled with an offensive by re-organized Bosniak and Croat armies, finally forced Serbian leaders to the negotiating table in late 1995.

### **7.3 Return and Reintegration after Dayton: The Role of UNHCR in Peacebuilding**

The Dayton Peace Agreements, which included a series of provisions for the social, economic and political reconstruction of Bosnia, were signed in Paris on 14 December 1995. Under the agreement, the new state of Bosnia-Herzegovina (BiH) consists of two 'entities': the Federation of BiH and the Republika of Srpska (RS). An international peacekeeping force (IFOR) was immediately deployed to the region, and a framework for elections was created providing for a multi-person Presidency, representing each major ethnic group. Also included in the agreement was a new constitution, identifying responsibilities and arrangements of governing bodies. The extradition of war criminals to the International War Crimes Tribunal at The Hague was also a component of the agreement. Significantly, this tribunal has since indicted ex-combatants for the crime of rape for the first time in history. Finally, the return and reintegration of refugees – considered critical to the reconstruction and reconciliation process necessary to build peace in the country – was a specific provision of the Dayton Agreements. The UNHCR now began the task of facilitating the return of millions of persons to their homes.



The UNHCR established a main office in Sarajevo and three sub-offices in Tuzla, Mostar and Banja Luka. Five field offices were also created (Sarajevo, Mostar, Tuzla, Travnik, Bihac) and a number of smaller satellite offices were created in more rural, hard to reach areas. As the lead agency, UNHCR became involved in a range of activities traditionally falling outside their mandate (Cuncliffe & Pugh 1996), in particular economic development and reconstruction of basic infrastructure and housing. Recognizing the devastating impact of the war on the economy and infrastructure, coupled with the complications of moving from a centrally planned economy to a free market one, these activities were considered essential if refugees and the internally displaced were to return home.

As part of this initiative, UNHCR became engaged in the reconstruction of housing. 56 percent of housing was damaged or destroyed in the Federation of BiH, 29 percent in the RS (Dahrendorf & Balian 1999, 7). Working with the World Bank, UNHCR also initiated a series of income generation projects with returnees to stimulate local economies. Again, this was deemed a critical endeavor given that many Bosnian refugees in Europe were reluctant to return to a devastated economy. However, this work was also completely novel to UNHCR staff, who usually did not engage in post-conflict reconstruction or development related work.

The reconstruction of housing and return of persons to them was in general viewed as a 'gender neutral' activity by most UNHCR field staff, whereby men and women benefited equally. However, the housing issue was indeed gendered, often excluding women from the return process (Personal Interview with Cremonese & Francisco 1999; See also ILWG 1999). The war tore families apart; many couples

divorced or separated. Men are the traditional holders of land and property titles, particularly in rural Bosnia.<sup>8</sup> When divorce or separation occurred, men had legal claim to their properties, but women were not protected under the law. As a result, men returned to their reconstructed houses, leaving their ex-spouses and very often children behind in “collective centres” (UNHCR 2000b; Personal Interview with Cremonese 1999).<sup>9</sup>

While UNHCR was obligated by its own policy to make an effort to integrate women into standard income-generation projects, no statistical breakdown of beneficiaries by sex was conducted in UNHCR programming. Gender analysis was not used in this effort and therefore the impact on men, women, girls and boys was not considered in project evaluations – discouraging given that the Policy on Refugee Women and Guidelines had been adopted nearly a decade earlier (Field Notes, Bosnia and Herzegovina 1999).

A \$5.1 billion international reconstruction package for 1996-1999 was created to assist in the reconstruction. UNHCR asked for close to a \$100 million and, remarkably, received the full amount from donors, making BiH the largest financial operation in UNHCR history. A number of innovative initiatives were created to facilitate return, including bus lines which crossed entity boundaries, and universal license plates which helped minimize the identification of cars from different areas. However, the pace of return was extremely disappointing, and numbers remained very low. While 1998 was designated the Year of Return, only 100,000 refugees did so and out of this number, only

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<sup>8</sup> In 1987, it was found that rural women did 78.5 percent of the agricultural production but own less than 2 percent of land. (UNDP 1998, 90)

<sup>9</sup> Collective centres were UNHCR communal living spaces for the displaced who had no other housing alternative.

30,000 were minority returnees.<sup>10</sup> In response, UNHCR refocused its efforts and designated 1999 “The Year of Minority Return”. Again, results were disappointing: only a quarter the hoped for 120,000 returned in this year. One senior official emphasized the urgency of the situation facing UNHCR:

1998 was very disappointing and 1999 cannot be just another year. The obstacles to minority return have become clearer and more intractable, but somehow they must be overcome. This may be our last chance. If there is not a major breakthrough in the coming months then we will have to reexamine the reality on the ground (quoted in *Refugees 1999a*).

But on the ground, the situation is extremely complicated. As the UNHCR publication *Refugees* notes, “most of Bosnia’s population of four million remains deeply traumatized by the war years, by the death of close family members often at the hands of longtime neighbors, by the destruction of their homes and work places and entire ways of life” (*Refugees 1999a*). Hard-line government officials, some of whom were responsible for the atrocities of the war, remain in political power throughout the country, making the prospect of minority return difficult. Ultra-nationalist political leaders, at the state, provincial and local levels, have invented ways to hinder the return process with red tape. Violence continues to be a weapon of enforcing segregation.

UNHCR-Bosnia faced another major setback when the “Open Cities Initiative” failed to manufacture the desired results. The idea was to reward those towns and municipalities which promoted minority return and reconciliation with assistance in reconstruction. Unfortunately, only 15,000 people returned under this plan, although it was extremely expensive. Local officials received assistance but did not live up to their promises of welcoming minority returns – red tape endured, particularly for minority

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<sup>10</sup> Minority returns refer to refugees and internally displaced people who return to their homes which are now controlled by a different ethnic group than their own. As hostility toward minorities is still high,

groups. Further, assisting minority returnees in devastated areas wherein majority ethnic groups suffer caused tensions between the groups, with the latter resenting the attention minorities received.

Given the continued slow progress and under pressure from donors to eventually withdraw from the country, UNHCR reduced its operating budget to \$64 million in 1999 from \$87 million in 1998. A major restructuring in budgeting took place, with significant cuts to shelter projects (reduced by two thirds). Return remains a critical part of UNHCR-BiH's operational objectives in 2000.

On the issue of gender equality, UNHCR-BiH is committed to the Beijing Platform for Action, as well as the 1997 ECOSOC Resolution on Gender Mainstreaming. Traditional gender roles and relations have been disrupted by the conflict in Bosnia, providing new opportunities but also new sets of struggles for men and women. This should remind us that men and women require different forms of support in post-conflict situations. Cockburn further suggests a "post-war settlement" between men and women, drawing out the 'personal' gendered dimensions of the war:

The many mixed marriages and the incidence of rape make this war an extraordinary manifestation of the intimate, violent interlacing of gender with ethnic relations. This so-called ethnic war was totally gendered. Men and women played different parts, were used symbolically for different meanings, tortured with different weapons, dealt different deaths. Bosnian women had been the ones who reproduced cultural difference but also took care of those little courtesies that kept Muslim, Serb and Croat families in touch with each other. It was precisely those threads of connection spun by women that the ethnic aggression was directed towards tearing asunder. Aggression that was, *de facto*, by men (1998, 206).

Having explored the gendered dimensions of the conflict and role of UNHCR in Bosnia-Herzegovina, we can now turn our attention specifically to the Bosnian Women's

Initiative, described by the former Senior Coordinator as “a forerunner of other internationally supported programmes.”

## **7.4 The Bosnian Women’s Initiative**

### *7.4.1 Background*

In the summer of 1996, the First Conference of Women in Bosnia and Herzegovina was held, organized by Bosnian women’s associations.<sup>11</sup> Titled "Women Transform Themselves and Society", participants discussed strategies for promoting their role in post-conflict BiH, addressing issues such as work and social policy, the family, education, health, legislation, politics and the media. After a strong lobbying effort by advocates for women in Bosnia<sup>12</sup>, transnational activists were able to convince the First Lady and President of the United States to donate \$5 million dollars to "the women of Bosnia", announced at this conference. Building on UNHCR connections with NGOs and local communities in the field, the fund became the responsibility of UNHCR in the spring of 1996.

UNHCR-BiH’s first plan of action was to hire a consultant to conduct a ‘situational’ analysis of the needs and resources of Bosnian women. After meeting with a number of women's associations<sup>13</sup>, a workshop was held in order to reach a consensus on the various sectors of interest: self-sufficiency projects in urban and rural areas; literacy and skills training; higher education; psychological support and medical care; facilities

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<sup>11</sup> Throughout this chapter I use the term association and organization interchangeably to refer to the same set of actors.

<sup>12</sup> The Women’s Commission for Refugee Women and Children was one of the central actors in this lobby.

<sup>13</sup> These associations were: An informal women's groups of social workers; Zena 21; a group of judges and lawyers; Medica Zenica; Vrelo; and, Bosfam. Consultations with international organizations and with UNHCR staff also took place.

for children and the elderly; and, legal advice or resource centres. It was decided that to maintain neutrality in the dispersal of funds to different groups and areas, UNHCR-Sarajevo would direct and supervise the fund. The fund was named the 'Bosnia Women's Initiative (BWI).

#### *7.4.2 Objectives*

Shortly after the workshop, a concept paper on the BWI was released, identifying three broad sectors of concern to the BWI: skills training, income-generation and community services. Women's advocacy was also named as an important sector to support, especially through media projects and publishing. The primary objective was identified as the *empowerment of women* by promoting their social and economic reintegration. Empowerment in this sense was defined as the provision of services and/or support to "promote activities leading to employment, and eventually to management responsibilities in industry, trade and commerce" (UNHCR-Sarajevo, 1996). Women's associations were encouraged to formulate and submit project proposals and to be involved in setting the objectives of the BWI. An advisory board of women's associations was proposed and women's associations took the initiative to form one.

However, tension soon surfaced between the UNHCR and women's associations over the slow dispersal of funds, and many voiced concern over what they felt was 'international' control of a fund intended for Bosnian women. While the UNHCR reaffirmed its role as an experienced and neutral organization, pressure from both women's associations and the donor country, the United States, meant that UNHCR had

to act more quickly.<sup>14</sup> This pressure hindered UNHCR-BWI staff's ability to carry out a proper situation analysis and led to the ad hoc approval of a number of projects.

Projects approved in the Fall of 1996 ranged from community services, to skills building, to income generation. Psycho-social services were offered to women who had survived rape and other war-related violence. Vocational projects were by and large focused on handi-crafts, but also involved computer skills or vocational training in hair-dressing, laundry and tailoring. Income generating projects involved a range of areas, including small service shops (such as pie shell making), toy making and bee-keeping. Later agricultural or livestock income generating projects were incorporated, including greenhouse projects and pig, cow and goat distribution.

In early 1997, a co-ordinator and programme officer were brought on board to organize the fund and give it direction, as the process of extending grants was largely ad hoc. A set of guidelines were drawn up, reaffirming the goals set out in the concept paper: to empower Bosnian women and women's associations, focusing on the most 'vulnerable'. To maximize the scope of BWI's reach, the guidelines implied that as many women's associations should be employed to implement projects in as many areas as possible. No specific capacity building plans for local women's associations were outlined. Rather, sustainability of women's organizations was encouraged through their implementation of income generation projects.

To maximize the reach of the fund, income generating projects were restricted by a cost/benefit ratio to guarantee UNHCR that the projects supported reached as many 'vulnerables' as possible. Grants were extended solely to provide a quick infusion of

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<sup>14</sup> The US was the only donor state to the BWI in the first year, but later monies were also received from Norway, Japan and the EC.

start up funds, and dispersed over a short project period. The idea was to provide women's associations and beneficiaries a 'head start', but to discourage dependency on funding. By the end of 1997, 142 projects had been approved, 83 percent of which were focused on income generation. 85 percent of projects were implemented by women's associations or local NGOs with a woman focus. By 1998, 304 projects had been approved, although the percentage of income generation related projects (including micro-credit) dropped to around 70 percent. This number rose again in 1999, during which income generation increased sharply to 95 percent of total projects in some Areas of Responsibility (AORs) (SCRWGE 1999). This same year, minor structural changes changed the direction of the fund, as explained below.

#### *7.4.3 Mainstreaming the BWI*

In 1999, BWI become one component of a larger funding arrangement with the European Community (EC). Other components included de-mining and shelter reconstruction. The entire aid package was termed the "Community Based Reintegration Assistance to Minority Returns." Thus to meet donor interests, it was important to re-visit BWI criteria set out in the Guidelines. Late in 1998, a nation-wide meeting was held to discuss future directions of the BWI. Representatives of umbrella agencies (UAs), BWI focal points and the national Selection Committee (including the former Co-ordinator) attended, although it is amazing to note that women's associations themselves were not invited to participate in this important meeting.



The group concurred that BWI could contribute to minority return and reconciliation. Yet as was expressed in the BWI newsletter in October 1999, those directly working with BWI also saw the long term potential of the initiative:

The BWI has consistently provided an enabling environment, within the framework of project activity, to heal ethnically motivated wounds and hatred. Women of all ethnic backgrounds have learnt to co-operate with one another to secure a more promising socio-economic future for all. BWI projects have complimented this spirit of cooperation and at times have proved to be a tremendous catalyst for it.

Revisions of the guidelines attempted to confirm this objective. Projects had been required to incorporate a cross inter-entity boundary line (IEBL) component since 1998, but a renewed emphasis on this requirement was expressed at this meeting.<sup>15</sup> This involved supporting projects which strengthened cooperation or collaboration among women from different entities and ethnic groups. Further, it was made clear that projects in minority return areas would now receive priority funding.

To ensure BWI contributed to the larger effort to promote return in the country, the decision was taken to mainstream the initiative within standard UNHCR programming. This meant that in theory, BWI would be implemented as part of standard programming, while in practice, the initiative remained stand-alone more or less. Nevertheless, the impact of this decision was profound, particularly as the fund lost its national co-ordinator and decentralized decision-making to the various AORs. In effect, different AORs took varying interpretations of the revised Guidelines, with some AORs taking 'return' and 'reintegration' as the primary objective, sometimes at the expense of 'women's empowerment', explained below.

#### *7.4.4 Gender Analysis of BWI Projects*

In the 1999 programme year, one AOR adopted a 'community empowerment perspective', targeting families and communities in areas of return or potential return. In this approach, women's associations were not necessarily the implementing agency, and women were not the sole beneficiaries. In these instances, it was argued that it was more important to support returnees regardless of their sex, where few economic opportunities existed. This sentiment was also expressed in other AORs. For example, in one Selection Committee meeting in Mostar in October, 1999 where I was an observer, this justification became evident. A project to distribute cows to a return family was approved by the Committee. It was agreed that the cows would help the newly returned members survive the winter. At no point did members ask who had returned to the area, or whether or not women had been consulted in the development of the project. The fact that women may not be involved at all in this early stage of return<sup>16</sup> was apparently irrelevant. The focus was on the return itself. In other words, BWI goals were being submerged in wider donor goals.

In a similar project in Tuzla, I visited a minority return community which had recently received cows in a BWI funded livestock distribution project. Of the half dozen or so beneficiaries I spoke with, only one was a woman. Stealing a few moments with her as she prepared us coffee, I asked the returnee what her involvement had been in the project and what type of work it involved. Her answers revealed that while she was responsible for taking care of the animal, she had in no way been consulted or involved in the project. On a similar visit to another livestock distribution project in Tuzla, I spoke

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<sup>15</sup> This is the boundary between the RS and Federation of BiH. See map, Annex ??

with women who had received a goat, rather than the animal of their choice, a cow. The women complained they had no experience with a goat, of making products from its milk or for its care. Yet implementers of the project had wanted to meet the cost/benefit ratio of BWI guidelines: they could give more goats to more women than they could cows.

In still a third project, one woman I spoke with, stated that while she was responsible for raising the pigs her family had received, her husband would decide where and when to spend the money. Asked about her involvement in the project, she suggested I speak to her husband, who had been very involved. In her community, the implementing partner – a humanitarian organization with no experience working with women or gender – had approached the local assembly to discuss the project. Men constitute the majority of the council. The head of the assembly, her husband, received two pigs instead of the usual one.

In all these examples, the priority of targeting minority return areas had taken precedence over the basic principles of POP programming, which called for the consultation and participation of women as beneficiaries. Further, donor interests in return and reintegration overshadowed the original intentions of BWI: to strengthen women's associations through capacity building, and to promote their participation in the socio-economic reconstruction of the country. This is evident in the adoption of a community empowerment perspective, which is more or less a euphemism to permit the involvement of men. While the involvement of men is not in itself a bad idea, it has been done uncritically, without an awareness of gender relations, or how involving men might help to disempower women. In Banja Luka, I was told by members of the UA and

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<sup>16</sup> In BiH and the RS, it is most often elder men who will return to insecure areas, to be followed by elder women.

UNHCR that it was simply “easier” to involve men in BWI projects, as they were the first to return and most in need of some source of income.

It should be noted as well, that in AORs where a strict application of the Guidelines was maintained (matching returnee, inter-entity priorities with support to women), the rate of project approval was much lower. In fact, by the end of 1999, field offices in Sarajevo and Mostar had not yet spent their full allocation of funds. These AORs maintained, more or less, the use of women’s associations as implementing partners, and the women as strict beneficiaries. They also reported difficulties in finding NGOs to work in minority return areas. By contrast, AOR Tuzla and Banja Luka had spent the full amount of funding and were asking for more. Here, a wider net had been cast in terms of implementing partners (beyond women’s associations) and beneficiaries (including men), and where the drive to support minority return is high.

Thus the thrust of the mainstreaming effort in UNHCR-BiH subtly shifted the emphasis of BWI away from women's empowerment to that of minority return. The original concept of the BWI was to empower women by promoting their reintegration into Bosnian economic and social life. While women's or community empowerment can and does support the objective of minority return, *the objective of return does not always necessarily lead to women's empowerment*. Thus, a number of women’s associations expressed concern over UNHCR directives, which they felt compromised their own (Field Notes, Bosnia and Herzegovina 1999).

In one interview, the President of a women’s organization, Bosfam, expressed her anger with BWI, which she felt had been taken over by the interests of UNHCR. Bosfam, an association that combines skills training, counseling services and

employment for displaced women, had originally received a great deal of funding from BWI. However, this source of funding was terminated as proposals no longer met the criteria of promoting return. The President, a former resident of Srebrenica stated simply “I am not interested in going home. I do not want to even go there for one hour”. Her point was that return was not a reality for many women, but that did not mean they were not in need of projects or funding. In her view, UNHCR was not listening to the voices of refugee and displaced women, but following their own donor determined objective.

In Sarajevo, the only Bosnian UA, the New Bosnia Fund, clearly communicated the same sentiment. In their opinion, the Guidelines were almost patronizing, giving ‘little hand-outs’ to associations which need long term support. Further, they argued that focus on the most vulnerable perpetuated a needs-based model which did not support or develop the capacity of local NGOs. This approach was in part the result of the symbolic framing of Bosnian women by transnational advocates and the international media. However, that UNHCR community service officers helped shape the initial directions of the fund likely also pushed it in this direction. Recall that community services in UNHCR operate on a ‘vulnerability model’, and this, coupled with international pressure for rapid impact results, meant the fund took a vulnerability approach. However, as one staff member pointedly stated, “giving a woman a cow will not make her less vulnerable” (New Bosnia Fund, 1999).<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> In my interviews with Bosnian women, there was also a great deal of evidence that recipients of funding went through a great deal of trouble to ‘involve’ vulnerable women, although often it was at a superficial level. For example, in one instance, a woman opened a ‘gym’ for women which she hoped would become a small business for herself and her husband. To ensure it fell under BWI guidelines, the owner arranged it so that ‘vulnerable women’ could have three free visits to the gym, whether they wanted to or not. The attendance sheets were quite low. In other income generating projects, coordinators promised to include ‘vulnerable women’ by employing them in the service or production. In almost all of them, it was relatives or friends who were employed – women who did not meet the criteria of vulnerability set out in the

Focus on the most vulnerable women in Bosnia and Herzegovina, defined as the “internally-displaced and other war-affected women, particularly those who are heads of household and women...affected by traumatizing war conditions,” contributes to a rapid impact, needs-based approach. While the original concept paper and women's conferences had identified a role for the BWI in addressing institutional forms of discrimination against women (and the right of women to participate), a vulnerability model focused projects on basic needs. This raises the point of practical versus strategic interests identified by Moser (1993), and earlier in this thesis (Chapter Five). Without a long term focus, it is doubtful many of the projects initiated will have a long term impact on gender relations at a community, national or global level.

The capacities of women as leaders, organizers and active participants in their communities is not given equal weight in this model. At the same time, the short-term (3-6 month) project cycle is not always adequate to support particularly vulnerable groups with little experience in management of income generation projects. In fact, in the absence of strong managerial skills and alternative resources, BWI income generation projects are generally not sustainable. It is for these reasons that the New Bosnia Fund predicts that 80 percent of all new income generation projects will fail in their AOR. Instead, they argue that long term capacity building of a few promising NGOs should be pursued.

In sum, the attempt to mainstream the BWI in the standard programme and meet the operational objectives of UNHCR to promote minority return and inter-entity co-operation increasingly over-rides the original intentions of the BWI. As a result, the

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guidelines. Several of the BWI focal points were furious as they realized that the conditions had not been met.

original intentions of the fund are submerged under donor interests. Moreover, in the absence of a gender analysis it is dubious whether or not women's position vis-a-vis male dominated institutions is being improved. Almost all women I met with who were employed by income generating projects expressed a desire to improve their lives and frustration with the lack of opportunities which existed. Most stated that they hoped BWI would provide such opportunities in the future.

### **7.5 Non-negotiable: Gender Relations in UNHCR-BiH**

An analysis of BiH project descriptions and country operation reports (COR) (1998-99)<sup>18</sup> reveal that gender has in fact not been mainstreamed in overall programming. As a recent UNHCR study found in Bosnia, "most reports on returns, property implementation, security incidents and human rights violations, are gender neutral. Indeed, one of the difficulties in preparing this study has been the lack of gender desegregated statistics and information" (UNHCR 2000b). UNHCR statistics which could have broken the beneficiaries down by sex were not gathered for income generating projects, and no gender analysis of the impact of these projects had been conducted (Field Notes, Mostar 1999; Personal Interview with Cremonese 1999; Cremonese 1999). In fact, the only reference to women (not gender) found in 1998 project descriptions from each AOR were made in relation to BWI. When I asked UNHCR-BiH staff about gender mainstreaming efforts, they all responded by referring to the BWI.

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<sup>18</sup> Project descriptions detail projects undertaken in a given year and country reports provide details on set objectives and outcomes in a given year. All sectors of work are included in country reports.

However, as the former Coordinator of the BWI stated, the fund was “never about gender, it was about women”. The very presence of BWI then led to the assumption of UNHCR-BiH staff that gender mainstreaming throughout standard programming was not necessary. As such, the BWI represents a classic example of ‘projects for women’ which contribute to women’s marginalization in standard programming. Why did this happen? First, despite the fact that relevant staff had received people-oriented training<sup>19</sup>, the training until that point did not equip staff with gender analysis skills, nor did it highlight the need to mainstream gender analysis in standard UNHCR programming. Thus the focus was people-oriented, empowering persons – in this case vulnerable women – at the grass-roots level.

However, the short term planning cycles and pressure to produce immediate and visible results often undermined the capacity of UNHCR BWI staff and UA staff to conduct appropriate situational analysis, or to take the necessary time required to involve women at the grass-roots level. Thus it was deemed more efficient to approach male community leaders than to work with women in rural areas who were often reluctant at first to participate in public events. Furthermore, striving to include as many women’s associations as possible through short term income generating grants, UNHCR staff undercut a long-term capacity building approach. Thus in late 1999 when staff talked about ‘handing over’ the BWI to women’s associations, some UA staff pointedly argued that women’s associations were not ready to assume full responsibility, but needed longer term support so that one day they would be (Field Notes, Mostar 1999).

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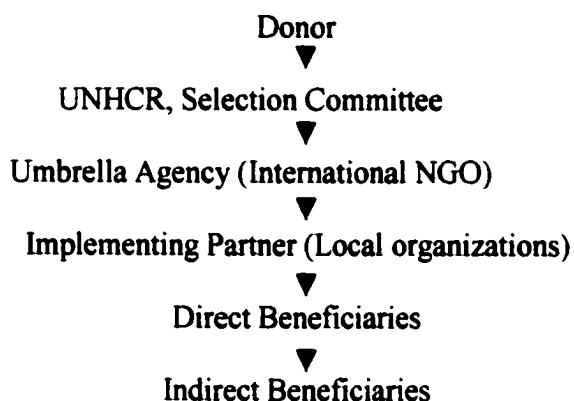
<sup>19</sup> In fact from my research I learned that women’s associations had not received POP training, despite the fact they were the majority of project implementers.



Yet donor pressure for rapid impact results was not the only reason a people-oriented approach failed to materialize for Bosnian women. The way the fund was structured contributed to the exclusion of women's associations and beneficiaries. For 1996-1998, projects had been approved at a national level, in FO Sarajevo by members of a national Steering Committee (SC).<sup>20</sup> Thus proposals were developed in individual AORs and sent to Sarajevo for approval. Members of the national SC included a representative from the donor country, the Co-ordinator and programme officer, a gender expert, UNHCR staff and a representative of 'Bosnian women'. The proposed advisory board of women's associations did not materialize as a conflict of interest existed between members of the proposed board who were also members of receiving associations. The BWI was not able to find a way of reconciling the tension which existed between the need for an inclusive approach and the need to maintain neutrality. The structure thus looked something like the following diagram:

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**Diagram 7.1 Structure of BWI**



<sup>20</sup> As explained in the previous section, decision making was decentralized in 1999: authoritative Selection Committees were located in the four different areas of responsibility.

In this structure, UNHCR staff were removed from direct communication with women's associations and beneficiaries, although UNHCR staff maintained a central decision-making role on the types of projects approved. UNHCR BWI 'focal' points were assigned in each AOR, responsible to overseeing the work of UA, and often developing close working relations with them. Further, UA staff were often invited to give their input into projects under review. Ultimately, the decision-making took place at a regional or national level, removed from the field and in particular, from the beneficiaries themselves. This later became a significant factor, as UNHCR decided future directions of the initiative with little consultation of women's organizations and beneficiaries.

BiH is one of the few countries to date which is not covered by a Regional Advisor for Refugee Women, and this may explain in part the lack of gender analysis within country operation reports and project descriptions.<sup>21</sup> Only recently has a "gender focal point" been named in the head office in Sarajevo, although I met with this woman and she expressed concern over her involvement, stating she really knew little on the topic and wanted training. Where there was interested staff with relevant skills, initiatives to mainstream gender were often met with resistance by senior and junior staff

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<sup>21</sup> However, a number of interviews with UNHCR protection officers revealed that a gender perspective was in fact being integrated into protection activities. A Sarajevo based protection officer acts as a gender focal point in all of Bosnia-Herzegovina. Yet her interaction and influence over BWI is limited. That I was not encouraged to speak with anyone from the protection unit during my 'mission', coupled with the fact that I was questioned about the relevance of conducting such an interview, is revealing. It illustrates the separation of operational programmes and protection activities. It also suggests why 'practical' and 'strategic' interests were so easily separated in BWI. If programme and protection worked together, a number of the income generation projects might have more readily incorporated a rights-based approach. Several protection officers stated they would like to see BWI evolve in that direction.

alike (Personal Interviews Cremonese and Francisco 1999).<sup>22</sup> For example, a great deal of staff I met were extremely apprehensive and even defensive when I questioned them about the relevance of gender to their work. One programme officer – who had just received gender training from headquarters – openly stated that he felt ‘gender’ was simply a form of political correctness used to negatively monitor what staff said and did (Field Notes, OCM Sarajevo 1999). Others dismissed gender as being irrelevant to the objectives of the initiative, which they perceived as short term material assistance to vulnerable women with the goal of promoting self-sufficiency. My general impression was that this resistance was rooted in a general backlash to feminism, perceived to be a political ideology biased toward women.

What is more, most BWI focal points are women from urban areas. In Bosnia-Herzegovina, there is a huge cultural gap between urban and rural populations. Some urban women argue that while ‘they’ had been liberated by Tito, rural women were still ‘stuck’ in patriarchal family and community ties (Field Notes, Sarajevo 1999). In a number of interviews held with UNHCR BWI staff, respondents stated that they had never felt discriminated against because of their gender. In fact, they were quick to defend their position in society. This stood in contrast to their perceptions of the position of rural women, who have had limited access to education, work and public life in general. I found, then, that a number of women were resistant to the idea of ‘gender’ and ‘gender equality’ because they could not relate it to their own experiences, nor see it in their lives or work. Moreover, prejudices against rural persons are high in the country.

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<sup>22</sup> These two UNVs held a gender training in their AOR at their own initiative, and conducted gender analysis of programming. However, one felt she was ‘transferred’ before she could have any significant impact. The other was frustrated by the lack of attention her extra efforts received.

Thus, female staff involved in the project might be unintentionally importing paternalism and subverting a gender equality (or strategic) approach, based on their own experiences.

Another factor explaining the lack of gender mainstreaming is the absence of co-ordination with other international NGOs working on gender issues. Both the Office of the High Commissioner (OHR) and the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) had significant initiatives with women that have begun to incorporate a gender perspective in their work.<sup>23</sup> Yet only late in 1999 were these organizations making an effort to co-ordinate on gender issues, whereas expertise could have been shared in this area to strengthen each organization's work.

In addition, there is no comprehensive accountability mechanism in the country to measure staff compliance to the Policy on Refugee Women, the Guidelines or the gender mainstreaming effort. Only recently has the Director of Operations requested that gender analysis be integrated into country reports and project descriptions; and only in late 1999 was a training provided to field staff to assist them in this endeavor.<sup>24</sup> In this case, it will be interesting to revisit this request in the next reporting cycle. Furthermore, the tenuous relationship between UNHCR as an institution and Bosnian women's associations also contributes to the problem. UNHCR programming would have been enhanced if staff listened more closely to the position and concerns of women's groups regarding UNHCR programming. In the case of BWI, the exclusion of women's associations in setting directives may have undermined the very intentions of the original concept of the fund.

Finally, a number of wider structural factors facilitated these shortcomings. Donor pressure to act in a rapid impact manner led to short planning cycles in BWI.

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<sup>23</sup> OHR and OSCE are two of the four main international organizations responsible for implementing the civilian components of the General Framework Agreement for Peace in BiH.

Furthermore, standard UNHCR programming was limited to a year by year programme cycle.<sup>25</sup> Short planning horizons made long term strategic planning difficult. Lack of follow-up on income generating projects as well as long term capacity building made strategic planning difficult. Donor pressure on UNHCR to promote return, particularly of minorities, was fuelled by the desire to consolidate peace in the country and in accordance to the Dayton Peace Accords. Further, UNHCR was named 'lead agency', co-ordinating a number of simultaneous initiatives with other international actors such as the World Bank and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP). In a relatively new and unprecedented set of roles and areas of work, UNHCR staff were overwhelmed from the very beginning. Pressure to please donors and promote return likely led to the directions 'mainstreaming' took in that country.

## **7.6 Conclusions**

This case study illustrates the potential pitfalls of affirmative action projects for 'women' which do not address gender relations, both within communities but also within local, national and international institutions. Through this analysis, it is clear that targeting 'women' is not the same as gender mainstreaming. 'Mainstreaming' BWI within UNHCR standard programmes clearly did not transform standard programmes themselves, but rather appeared to transform the BWI. Certainly, a people-oriented approach was not incorporated into planning in all initiatives. In short, the BWI became a donor driven initiative, moving beyond the grass roots and becoming a part of the political economy of international humanitarian work in the new millennium.

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<sup>24</sup> This was part of the OMS roll-out described in Chapter 5.

<sup>25</sup> This stands in contrast to UNHCR Mexico which at one point had a three year planning cycle.

While important international gender-related developments (PFA, ECOSOC Resolution on Gender Mainstreaming and UNHCR strategy on gender mainstreaming) buttressed the efforts of transnational advocates lobbying UNHCR to develop initiatives with women in post-conflict operations, global neo-liberal principles likewise shaped the structure, approach and outcome of the Initiative. Just as UNHCR Head Quarters streamlined resources within DOS (see Chapter 5) and embarked on a mainstreaming strategy, UNHCR-BiH follow a similar process, pressured by the same types of global factors. In a sense, UNHCR-BiH attempted to 'kill two birds with one stone': by mainstreaming the BWI in standard programming, it was argued, efficiency was promoted and 'women' were mainstreamed throughout UNHCR programmes.

The case study then, highlights the importance of understanding historical, cultural contexts within given political and economic historical moments. BWI was as much a part of a global shift in discourse and practice on security and peacebuilding as it was on 'women's rights'. This two shifts were not always reconcilable, often to the detriment of gender mainstreaming. Indeed, the drive to promote return and facilitate reintegration often took precedent over women's rights in the initiative. Bosnian women – with a relatively short history of grass-roots organizational experience – therefore face structural challenges on a number of cultural, political, economic fronts, as well also biases of UNHCR staff who do not see 'gender' as a relevant issue in programming. In this regard, it was particularly encouraging to note that a number of the women's and girls' associations I had interviewed were already beginning to draw upon the support of each other, as well as a variety of other global and national actors, to carry on the 'struggle' to achieve gender equality in the country. In conclusion, the chapter has drawn

out a number of relationships between the global, national and local which help explain the series of events and outcomes involved in the Bosnia Women's Association. These observations are reviewed and discussed in comparison to the case study of Mexico-Guatemala in the following, final chapter.

**8.1 Introduction<sup>1</sup>**

The adoption of the Policy on Refugee Women in 1990 established a new set of principles in the United Nation's High Commissioner for Refugees whereby the specific protection and assistance needs of refugee women were recognized for the first time in the organization's forty year history. While an accountability mechanism has yet to be established, the Policy provides a lever to advocates both within the organization and lobbying outside of it. In the Beijing Platform for Action, the specific rights of refugee, displaced and returnee women and girls were further affirmed, obliging UNHCR among other international organizations and states to actively promote the role of women in the political, economic and social reconstruction of their communities and countries. The 1997 *ECOSOC Resolution on Gender Mainstreaming* provided gender advocates further legitimacy and resources, requiring the commitment of states and international organizations such as UNHCR to integrate women's experiences throughout policy making, planning, programming, monitoring and evaluation processes. This thesis has argued that a transnational network on 'refugee women' has contributed to these normative and policy changes, and has played an consequential role in holding UNHCR officials accountable to them.

Yet it is one thing to argue that transnational activism has helped to establish new principles, set agendas and change policy, and quite another to claim that such changes have made a difference in the everyday lives of refugee women and men, girls and boys



(Risse, Ropp and Sikkink 1999, 234-35). Twenty years after the original appeal of activists working on behalf of refugee women and ten years after the adoption of a Policy on Refugee Women in the UNHCR, it is both timely and appropriate to ask what these accomplishments have changed for the women and girls described in the first paragraphs of the thesis. Indeed, this query gives rise to a broader set of questions raised throughout the thesis: Has policy change in fact led to the transformation of gender relations within UNHCR institutions? What set of factors facilitate the implementation of the Policy and what obstacles can be identified and therefore avoided? What accounts for the variance between global policies and their translation into different field operations? If UNHCR is representative of a wider, ongoing process, what do the findings of this thesis tell us about the struggle for gender-related change in other international organizations? Finally, what does it tell us about *what we know* about this process: in other words, what do the findings tell us about feminist approaches to global governance?

In this final chapter, I address these central research questions. I first review how UNHCR policy change occurred before turning to the question of how institutions mediate the process of gender-related change. I then compare the findings of the two case studies, arguing that contextual analyses are crucial to explain variances in policy implementation in field operations. Next, the relevance of these findings are considered in relation to feminist approaches to global governance, as well as the relationship between critical and problem solving theory. Finally, I conclude with a number of observations regarding how gender advocates can most effectively make change and

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<sup>1</sup> This introduction was structurally inspired by Risse, Ropp and Sikkink's concluding chapter in *The Power of Human Rights* (1999).

what UNHCR can do to promote the rights of refugee, returnee and displaced women and girls in the future.

## **8.2 How does global agenda setting and policy change occur?**

The thesis has accounted for some of the reasons a global policy comes to be adopted by examining the campaigns of transnational advocates, including internal advocates, and the opportunities which arose through changes in the global political economy and, in turn, UNHCR. I have argued that a feminist approach to the global political economy helpfully explains the macro context that influences and shapes UNHCR's mandate and the assumptions about gender within it. For example, the Cold War, coupled with prevailing patriarchal norms and practices worldwide, led to limited and regulated ideas about gender within the UNHCR. The principle of non-intervention and political neutrality reinforced the idea that 'gender equality' was akin to cultural intervention and therefore outside of UNHCR's scope.

In the post Cold War period, major changes to peacekeeping and building took place. These changes have involved UNHCR in or near conflict zones, or entering countries in the immediate post-conflict period. The expansion of UNHCR's mandate to include internally displaced persons and to assist in the reconstruction and reconciliation of post-conflict societies has been driven by donor countries "determined not to accept heavy case loads of refugees" (Newland and Meyers 1999, 17), but also concerned about the impact of refugee movements on regional and international security. All of this takes place within a more globalized UN system, where development, rights, security and refugee issues are increasingly linked. Thus, the post-Cold War period represented a

moment of change globally but also within the UN: opening new discursive and structural spaces wherein the needs, resources and rights of refugee women could be re-negotiated within UNHCR. Transnational women's movements took advantage of the relaxed and changing global policy environment to place women's rights, and more specifically refugee women's rights, on the global agenda.

Enhancing the concept of agency in feminist GPE by adding the conceptual framework of TANs, we identify not only 'opportunity structures' presented by changes in the global political economy, but also the relationships and resources within networks that ultimately contribute to its ability to lobby for policy change. As Keck and Sikkink argue, by looking at the campaigns (relationships, resources, opportunities) of transnational advocates, we can begin to understand how it is that such a diverse and widely dispersed range of individuals and groups come together around a single 'principled' issue to make change (1998, 6-7). TANs use information and symbols to raise global or national attention to an issue, and leverage and accountability politics to prompt the target actor (in this case UNHCR) to close the gap between rhetoric and reality (*Ibid.*, 16-25). This often involves using the 'power of words' to pressure targets to recognize, commit to and comply with an issue. Tactics include persuasion, shame and sometimes even flattery.

Refugee women and their advocates organized and networked in grass-roots forums, in camps and at meetings with UNHCR and international NGOs. They met in national and international forums to exchange views and information, presenting papers and testimonials at conferences, forums and workshops. They wrote books, published case studies, documented life experiences and distributed these widely. Together with

women and men in foreign ministries, advocates drew the attention of donor states to the unique experiences of women during conflict, in flight, exile and return, and shamed, cajoled and convinced decision-makers not only to listen to them, but to take action on the issue. In formal UN settings, the UNHCR was pressured to take a position on the issue early in the 1980s, but by the end of the decade transnational advocates were able to press for more concrete action. By 1990, the Executive Committee of the UNHCR formally adopted the Policy on Refugee Women, and resources were earmarked to initiate its implementation.

This case study thus confirms that transnational advocacy networks indeed “carry and re-frame ideas [and] insert them in policy debates” (Keck and Sikkink 1998, 2). As such, they are “increasingly relevant actors in policy debates” (*Ibid.*) and in part, help explain how global agenda setting and policy change occurs within the context of global political economy and international organizations.

### **8.3 Conceptualizing gender-related institutional change in international organizations**

Once a policy is in place, transnational advocates continue to act as a ‘watch dog’, ensuring that new policies are in fact implemented and new principles adhered to. The TAN on refugee women continued to pressure UNHCR in the 1990s, conducting evaluations of field operations and lobbying where gaps between policy and practice appeared. They also pushed for greater clarity on issues such as gender-related persecution, and later on, they lobbied UNHCR to mainstream a gender perspective in women’s initiatives in Bosnia and Kosovo (Observation Notes, DOS 1999). However, to understand why gaps persist, I argue that we must extend this analysis to gender studies

of institutional change (Goetz 1995; Kardam 1991, 1995; Miller 1998; Jahan 1995). These studies argue that organizational institutions (composed of structures, practices and agents) greatly shape the ability of internal advocates to implement gender-related policies. Traditional UNHCR institutions continued to reproduce the view that gender equality issues were 'cultural' and therefore outside the scope of the organization's work. The core practices continue to be based on 'gender neutral' assistance and protection responses. Failing the establishment of an accountability mechanism, staff within the organization had little incentive, or support, to implement the policy.

The decentralized nature of UNHCR operations meant that communication between UNHCR headquarters in Geneva and field offices globally was weak. This proved challenging to some advocates for refugee women who often found themselves isolated within field offices. And given that senior managers were usually not held accountable for the policy in field offices, it is not surprising that field staff did not readily comply to the policy.

Through an analysis of the 'internal campaigns' of UNHCR gender advocates, the nuances of policy implementation come to light. The first Senior Coordinator for Refugee Women (1989-1997) took an 'instrumentalist' approach, seeking to 'fit' the issue into the existing organizational structures and culture. This was an important strategy to raise awareness of staff, resulting in the production of substantial information used to legitimize the issue. The first Senior Coordinator drew support from allies in sympathetic state bodies, international NGOs and the transnational advocacy network itself to maintain pressure on senior officials and keep resources flowing into the organization for the purposes of supporting refugee women. Her position was buttressed

by shifting global discourses and structures in the 1990s, wherein women's rights and the women in development approach were increasingly endorsed in global documents and Conventions.

As argued in Chapter Five, an 'instrumentalist' approach has certain limitations; mainly, it does not engage or transform institutions which discriminate against women in the first place. As a result, 'standard' UNHCR practices and programming remained the same, and staff misinterpreted 'projects with women' as a sufficient compliance to the Policy on Refugee Women. As global approaches to the question of 'women' began to embrace a gender perspective (evident in the Platform for Action, General Assembly and ECOSOC Resolutions), the second Senior Coordinator felt it was time to introduce the principle of 'women's rights' into the organization. Thus, the strategic approach changed from 'instrumentalist' to that of gender mainstreaming, with the aim to transform institutional structures and practices so that at base, they promote gender equality and so that all staff actively promoted gender equality. Despite the verve of the new campaign, the Office of the Senior Coordinator experienced a significant loss of resources when the position was left unfilled for nearly two years, secretarial support was cut, and it was structurally placed under Health and Community Services. This left the entire global strategy in the hands of only a few overworked people at a considerably more junior level position than the first Senior Coordinator.

The first Senior Coordinator made substantial progress in raising awareness of the issue and the establishment of specific programmes for refugee women. Standard UNHCR structures and practices did not incorporate gender equality principles, and resistance among staff remained high. Staff were receptive (or at least tolerated) the

issue when it 'fit' with existing goals and when the types of programmes initiated complimented (but did not 'mess' with) standard programmes. When a more engaged campaign was launched, a setback in resources occurred and resistance grew. As one programme officer stated of mainstreaming: "people are sick to death of this!" (Observation Notes, Geneva 1999). Yet without sufficient resources, a comprehensive strategy and new policy on gender mainstreaming could not be achieved. Confusion over the term 'mainstreaming' and the specific goals of the strategy increased the anxiety and frustration of staff.

The strategy of the new Director of the Division of Operational Services (DOS) to mainstream gender in the new operational management systems (OMS) is one riddled with more pitfalls than promises. While OMS potentially provides an entry point to gender advocates seeking to transform the core of management and programming, a number of contradictions plague this effort. First, OMS in principle promotes a top-down approach to planning, programming and evaluation. This often undercuts a people-oriented approach based on consultation and participation of populations of concern.

Second, OMS draws on neo-liberal principles of efficiency, seeking to make UNHCR a results-based organization that acts in a timely manner. While tangible results are often desirable (as is speed), gender mainstreaming requires a long-term, strategic approach. Indeed, it is unlikely that a specific or universal set of indicators can be developed, as mainstreaming is an ongoing process in constant need of revision and adaptation depending on context. Further, it has been argued in the thesis that UNHCR must begin to work with other UN and INGOs to bridge the relief-development gap. The degree to which OMS promotes a developmental approach through long term planning

and partnerships is unclear. Thus, gender advocates face the rather daunting challenge of mainstreaming into a changing operational approach, while at the same time reconciling the contradictions inherent in this approach. In short, gender relations within UNHCR institutions are still in the early stages of transformation.

#### **8.4 How global policies translate, or fail to translate, into the field: Comparing case studies**

The case studies in this thesis point to a number of important conclusions on why global policies are implemented inconsistently within and across different field operations. These factors include: socio-cultural context; historical structures; and the role of transnational advocates, including internal advocates. The following section examines these factors in the case studies presented in part three. Similarities and differences are then highlighted. Through this comparison, the importance of examining national and local contexts in feminist approaches to GPE and gender studies of institutions becomes apparent.

##### *Socio-cultural contexts*

UNHCR operations take place in widely varying socio-cultural contexts. The two case studies under review are representative of these differences, and help to highlight the importance of understanding social relations and cultural norms in the context of field operations.

The 37 year civil war between the revolutionary movement (UNRG) and Guatemalan military had fostered a *culture of solidarity* among Indigenous *campesinos*, politicized by a grass roots awareness campaign of the UNRG. Exile in Mexico provided



space to Guatemalan refugees to organize politically and support by UNHCR-Mexico/Guatemala affirmed the right of refugees to return. This fact is reflected in the negotiation of refugee rights by refugee leaders themselves. Wanting international support and recognizing the 'international community's' willingness to support women's rights, male refugee leaders in turn were supportive of Guatemalan women's organizations. Thus in part, UNHCR's 'people-oriented' approach in this region was fostered by the cultural milieu of the region itself, as well as a heightened sense of solidarity of actors around the goal of return.

In Bosnia, the socio-cultural milieu was quite different. The conflict erupted quickly after a short campaign of political leaders to seize power in post-Tito Yugoslavia. Displacement was swift and decisive: persons were uprooted on a massive scale by bloody ethnic cleansing campaigns. Bosnians had little time to organize politically. Although women's groups did form during the conflict, this was largely in response to humanitarian needs. Basic survival supplanted political activism. In the post-conflict stage, UNHCR acted quickly to facilitate return, but unlike UNHCR-Mexico, this process was not refugee-centric but rather top-down in approach. Further, the fact that NGOs or civil organizations had not existed outside the state in Tito's Yugoslavia meant that Bosnians were not politically mobilized historically as they had been in Guatemala.

### *Historical Structures*

The case studies are representative of the two different eras which have thus far shaped UNHCR operations: Cold War and post-Cold War. In Mexico, UNHCR worked in a traditional setting, offering assistance and protection to Guatemalan refugees there

over a period of a decade and a half. In finding durable solutions to the refugee situation, UNHCR worked closely with the Mexican refugee agency COMAR to negotiate local settlement. The UNHCR's role in the return process was to support refugees in the negotiation and preparation of their return. UNHCR-Guatemala took some initial steps to extend returnee assistance beyond a basic assistance package. However, the relief-development gap was not quite bridged in this initiative, and QIPs remained a central tool for assisting returnees.

In contrast, Bosnia set the stage for re-examining the UNHCR's changed mandate in the Post Cold War context. UNHCR worked inside the country which produced refugees, breaking with tradition of assisting refugees after they had crossed the border into the first country of asylum. In a post-conflict setting, UNHCR established its largest operation to date to assist the repatriation and reintegration of returnees and the internally displaced. While UNHCR-Mexico's operations stretched over a 17 year period of relative stability, UNHCR-Bosnia operated in a short term period of acute crisis. These operational factors contributed to the differences in approach with respect to gender issues. The relative long term stability provided in Mexican camps opened space for reflection upon and revision of programmes. In Bosnia, pressure to expedite the return process and consolidate 'peace' meant staff had to work quickly, with few opportunities for long term planning.

### *Advocates*

The presence of internal advocates in UNHCR-Mexico was a critical factor in galvanizing the effort to integrate refugee women in programmes and in the application

of a gender perspective in that operation. In Bosnia and Herzegovina, no such advocates existed at a senior level. Whereas key UNHCR-Mexico staff had expertise in gender analysis, no senior level staff in Bosnia applied this approach, nor were any staff designated to do so. Staff were not linked into a region-wide network, nor was there an active Senior Regional Advisor for Refugee Women. Finally, whereas the survey carried out by Guatemalan refugee women's organizations, NGOs and UNHCR-Mexico had provided information and insight into the needs and resources of women in camps, no such comprehensive survey was carried out in Bosnia and Herzegovina. Without a sustained situational analysis, long-term planning with regard to gender programming was not possible in the latter country (SCRWC 1999).

Gender advocates in UNHCR-Mexico attempted to take direction from Guatemalan women's organizations and in this sense their relationship was closer to a horizontal one. In contrast, UNHCR-Bosnia and Herzegovina operated in a highly volatile context in a relatively short-term time frame and radically different operational context. The conflict had torn communities apart, and the return process attempted to fill these social gaps by promoting return and reconciliation. Women's organizations had formed over the course of the conflict and wished to continue afterwards, but UNHCR programming to support their work was top-down in nature. This approach was in part a reaction to external pressure on behalf of donors to produce quick impact and visible results.

Refugee, returnee and displaced women in both Bosnia-Herzegovina and Guatemala benefited from a transnational network of advocates working on behalf of refugee women. Their plight and struggle received international attention at conferences,

assemblies and workshops, and in the news media, journals and other publications. Solidarity networks and sister associations were formed. This connection helped maintain a global lobby on behalf of refugee, returnee and displaced women in these countries, channeling critical moral, financial and technical support to them. As suggested in part three of the thesis, this support is very often pivotal to maintain the 'life' of grass-roots women's organizations in the face of dire economic, social and political circumstances.

### **8.5 What the case studies tell us about relationships between the global, national and local**

By taking into consideration country specific contexts in which policy is, or is not, translated into field operations, this thesis helps elucidate the gaps between global policy and practice at the level of the field. In so doing, it challenges the view that global policies determine outcomes in the field and highlights the various ways policies are embraced or subverted within widely differing contexts.

The Bosnian Women's Initiative came on the heels of the Beijing World Conference on Women, where refugee women's issues were endorsed in the Platform for Actions (PFA) after considerable and impressive transnational activism on the issue. The BWI, then, was made possible through a global campaign on refugee women that had successfully lobbied and convinced the US government and UNHCR that such an initiative was an important step forward in promoting and protecting women's rights in post-conflict situations. Yet within UNHCR-BiH, staff were not prepared to apply a gender analysis to their work, nor were implementing NGOs equipped to do so. In the absence of internal gender advocates with some clout, the BWI succumbed to global

pressures to provide rapid impact projects to 'vulnerable' women. Moreover, the mainstreaming approach in the region shifted BWI objectives further away from the question of gender equality and closer toward UNHCR goals of return and reintegration. This had the effect of excluding a number of women's organizations from decision-making, marginalizing their resources and failing to build on their capacities. Internal advocates and returnee, displaced women were not in a position to negotiate with UNHCR on the mainstreaming process, with the result of distorting the original intentions of mainstreaming. Thus, a disjuncture existed between global promises and national and local practices. This is ironic given that the BWI was one of the first, if not the largest, UNHCR initiative to, in principle, promote the participation of women "on an equal basis with men in the economic, social, cultural and political affairs of their communities" (UNHCR-Sarajevo 1996).

A number of factors coincided at the global, national and local levels to promote gender equality within national and UNHCR institutions, as well as within refugee communities. Guatemalan women organized to support the return process and in doing so, they gained legitimacy in the eyes of refugee men, community leaders, NGOs, UNHCR staff – indeed, that of the 'international community'. With UNHCR sponsored trainings and support from NGOs, refugee women began to demand the right to participate in decision-making and assistance delivery. Moreover, women began to voice gender-related rights, speaking out on domestic violence, alcoholism, sexual violence and the value of domestic work.

As the former Regional Advisor for Refugee Women argues, this was an important lesson for UNHCR staff who realized that: "[Refugee women] were very clear

on their rights as women and their right protection” (Personal interview with Morel 1998). And as Worby argues, this affirmed that women were capable and willing to participate, and the UNHCR could play an important role in supporting this. As women were included in meetings, planning, assistance and distribution, refugee men also began to recognize women’s right to participate. By challenging government positions on land ownership and credit which discriminate against women, UNHCR and refugee women together challenged national institutions which otherwise would have left returnee women in particularly vulnerable legal situations.

However, some of the ‘gains’ women made in exile were compromised in return due to a number of factors. Among them, the desire to return to ‘normalcy’ was prominent, with some men and women wanting to re-establish traditional gender relations. Local gender relations thus frustrated the efforts of women who wished to continue with the struggle for women’s rights after return. The case study thus underscores the ‘Pandora’s box’ which is opened when promoting a gender perspective: layers of gender relations surface in this work and relationships between institutions (global, national and local) become apparent. In a word, there is no one universal solution to gender mainstreaming as the nuances of the global, national and local are dynamic and complex. This does not imply that the process is not attainable, but rather that it requires new and innovative ways of thinking about humanitarian work and gender issues. It further confirms the need to develop more consistent, contextually sensitive and long term approaches to achieve gender equality in humanitarian operations.

#### **8.6 What the findings of the thesis tells us about feminist approaches to global governance, with reflections on problem solving and critical theory**

The findings of this thesis illustrate that no one theory or conceptual approach is adequate to explain the limitations of gender-related change within international organizations and the gap between global policies and practice in the field. Rather, I suggest a hybrid of approaches and the extension of these approaches to a multi-levelled analysis.

Feminist approaches to the global political economy helpfully identify the interplay of global structures and agents in the process of gender related change in international organizations. By introducing the concept of TANs into feminist GPE analyses, we can identify the resources, relationships and opportunity structures which strengthen the position of advocates. Yet these approaches tend to focus on global levels of analysis, examining external factors to the neglect of internal factors. Indeed, FGG usefully advance our understanding of how change in global policies occur. These approaches, however, often fail to explain how organizational structures affect the implementation of a policy, or likewise how national and local contexts shape this process.

A natural extension then, is to 'go inside' organizations and policies. Therefore, I have forged a bridge between feminist GPE, TANs and gender studies of institutional change. What is more, the thesis proposes a multi-level analysis which examines relationships between the global, national and local. Viewing different levels of structure and agency in relation to each other, I began to map the points of synergy and disjuncture between global policies and practices in the field. A case study approach helped to situate global strategies and policies in national and local contexts, and to

consider how refugee men and women encounter and respond to global initiatives to promote gender equality. In so doing, the elusiveness of gender-related changes in both structures and practices of international organizations is clarified.

A hybrid, multi-level analysis is key to pushing forward any 'emancipatory project' of systemic transformation of global gender structures. The findings of this thesis suggest that transformation stems from both reform of existing institutions as well as alternative ways of knowing/doing feminist theory and practice. They also highlight obstacles we can anticipate in striving to promote gender equality at the local, national and global levels. In other words, transformation comes from within (working within existing institutions and structures) and without (advocacy and grass-roots alternatives), but it does not come easily nor without considerable obstacles.

Given these findings, I argue that the differences between problem-solving and critical theory may not be as great as purported by proponents of critical theory. Post-positivist theoretical positions stem from a desire to capture a dynamism inadequately addressed in positivism and to uncover knowledge production as power. Yet post-positivists and critical theorists spend considerable time debating the relative merits of different epistemological starting points and relatively little time in the empirical realm of possibility. By staying at the level of theoretical polemics, post-positivists and critical theorists reinforce the position that they have a superior epistemology (by asserting what is wrong with positivism), neglecting to expand on what is useful about post-positivism or on how the two debates could usefully inform each other. As a result, post-positivist and critical thought reproduce the tendency in academia to view knowledge claims dichotomously. And what is more, field work is viewed as a task to be done after



theories have been developed and established, or not to be done at all given its equation with positivism.

By starting our analysis with field work and then asking what relevance this has to theory, two principle conclusions arise related to the problem-solving and critical theory debate. First, it is important to note that in field work, practitioners grab at a variety of tools to understand complex political realities to guide their work. While they may adopt problem solving measures to respond to immediate goals, this does not imply they are incapable of critical thought. My field work illustrates that a number of ‘problem-solvers’ had longer term visions – continuously reflecting upon strategy and revising according to changing contexts and times. At the same time, it is essential to acknowledge that problem-solving has led to significant changes, ones that should not be underestimated for the importance they represent to refugee women seeking protection from gender persecution. In short, critical thinkers have no monopoly on critical thought any more than problem solvers have on problem solving. What is required in either, or in the hybrid proposed here, is to constantly reflect upon the position of the thinker: as Cox states “theory is always for someone and for some purpose”.

A second conclusion which can be drawn is that problem solving potentially forms part of a larger emancipatory project, where change is incremental and ad hoc but (symbolically, discursively and materially) leads to wider systemic changes. Again, the central task is to retain a critical focus on problem solving, while grounding our critical thinking in problems of the day with a view to longer term change. In short, through a hybrid, multi-leveled approach, we move beyond critical thought to map what can be done today to transform the future of gender relations. This thesis suggests that with or

without academics, this task is ongoing everyday at the local, national and global level.

### **8.7 Lessons for Advocates and the UNHCR**

A number of observations regarding advocacy and strategy can be drawn from the findings of the thesis. The following sections summarize five lessons for transnational advocates, and five for UNHCR senior officials.

#### *Transnational Advocates*

First, networking is critical to frame an issue and raise the awareness of the target organization or government. Strategic alliances between persons working inside organizations, state departments, transnational NGOs and grass-roots organizations help to lobby from 'outside' (transnational non-state actors) and 'inside' (internal advocates).

Second, as Thomas Risse, Stephen Ropp and Kathryn Sikkink argue "words matter!...they can even hurt" (1999, 276). The adoption of the Policy on Refugee Women occurred because advocates framed the issue of refugee women as vulnerable and in need of protection, but also capable and therefore critical to meeting UNHCR goals and objectives. This frame appealed to the sensibility of enough UNHCR officials and field staff to adopt the policy. Critical field reports and evaluations of UNHCR operations can have a stinging impact on the egos of staff, and motivate senior officials to take action to avoid embarrassment or shame (Observation Notes, DOS 1999). Of course, donor states pressure UNHCR as well, often with more material leverage, such as threats to cut funding. However, it must be remembered that 'words' convinced donor states in the first place, whether through socialization and sensitization to the issue, or by

‘shaming’ states for failing to maintain a consistent domestic and foreign policy on gender equality.

Third, a gender analysis of global and national political economies can highlight potential entry points for advocates. Global shifts in political economy can provide ‘opportunities’ to promote an issue. They likewise constrain the capacity of advocates: political and economic constraints limited the capacity of the Office of the Senior Coordinator over the course of the past two years. Changing domestic political-economic climates often temper opportunities for promoting the issue or for promoting the implementation of a particular policy in the field. Political economy also becomes important when considering the sources of domestic ‘backlash’ against refugees in general and refugee women in particular.

Fourth, advocates should conduct a ‘situational analysis’ of UNHCR. It was my distinct impression that most UNHCR staff knew of the Policy on Refugee Women and some even agreed with it, but did not know how to implement it. In response to critiques of their work, a number of staff responded “its never enough for you [gender advocates], tell me what else I should do!”. To this end, I think the organization is in dire need of developing good practices to illustrate to staff when, why and how gender mainstreaming can be effective. TANs could help fill this knowledge gap. Likewise TANs should maintain diligence monitoring UNHCR compliance to its commitments, revealing smoke screens to donors to add additional pressure.

Fifth, linking to and supporting women in grass-roots organizations, as well as maintaining pressure globally (through mainstreaming *and* disengagement) are two critical areas for intervention. Actors in TANs can support women in grass-roots

organizations by exchanging information, providing technical assistance, solidarity work, sponsoring their involvement in national and global forums, linking in sister organizations and so on. Through this support, refugee women's organizations maintain a level of national and global visibility which helps keep the "struggle alive".

### *UNHCR*

First, a shared understanding of the concept of gender mainstreaming is essential across different regions and field operations. While strategic approaches and initiatives will vary given different contexts, it is critical that different field workers have a similar understanding of what goals they are working toward, and the difference between mainstreaming and integration (projects for women). To this end, the promised policy on gender equality is long overdue.

Second, this thesis reminds us that each operational context is different and that a comprehensive and critical analysis of the socio-cultural, political and economic circumstances surrounding the effort to promote gender equality is required. An important tool for conducting this analysis is UNHCR's people oriented planning (POP) framework, especially when a gender analysis is incorporated. The organization must place more emphasis on staff adopting this tool, and hold them accountable when they do not.

Third, it is critical that UNHCR develops a workable mechanism to hold staff accountable to the Policy on Refugee Women. The new operational management system provides a useful entry point in this regard, following a general effort in the organization to promote consistency and accountability of protection and operational field activities to

overall UNHCR goals. However, as the findings of this thesis suggest, UNHCR must find a way to counter-balance the quick impact, results based approach which sometimes undermines a long-term, consultative process essential to promote gender equality. This is no small task to be sure, but one which nevertheless must be named and addressed in the context of changing approaches to UNHCR management and planning. It also suggests that UNHCR, NGOs and international organizations working in longer-term development areas must work in closer co-operation toward this end.

Fourth, while resources are essential to carry out an effective mainstreaming strategy, material resources alone do not guarantee that gender-related change will take place. It is ironic that gender mainstreaming in UNHCR Bosnia-Herzegovina lagged behind the Mexican and Guatemalan operations despite the significant difference in budgetary amounts. The findings of the thesis suggest that resources without institutional support (such as accountability) and gender advocates will unlikely bring about long term gender-related change. At the same time, resources *are* important. Mainstreaming should not be confused with 'streamlining' – the process of down-sizing. It was unacceptable that the Office of the Senior Coordinator was unfilled for such a long period which delayed the release of a policy on gender equality and consolidation of the global strategy for gender mainstreaming.

Finally, a gender mainstreaming strategy involves both grass-roots initiatives as well as a process of institutional change. Special initiatives with refugee, internally displaced and returnee women may be required to off-set disadvantages some women experience in terms of participation, decision-making and access and control over resources. However, gender relations are reproduced not only at a community level, but

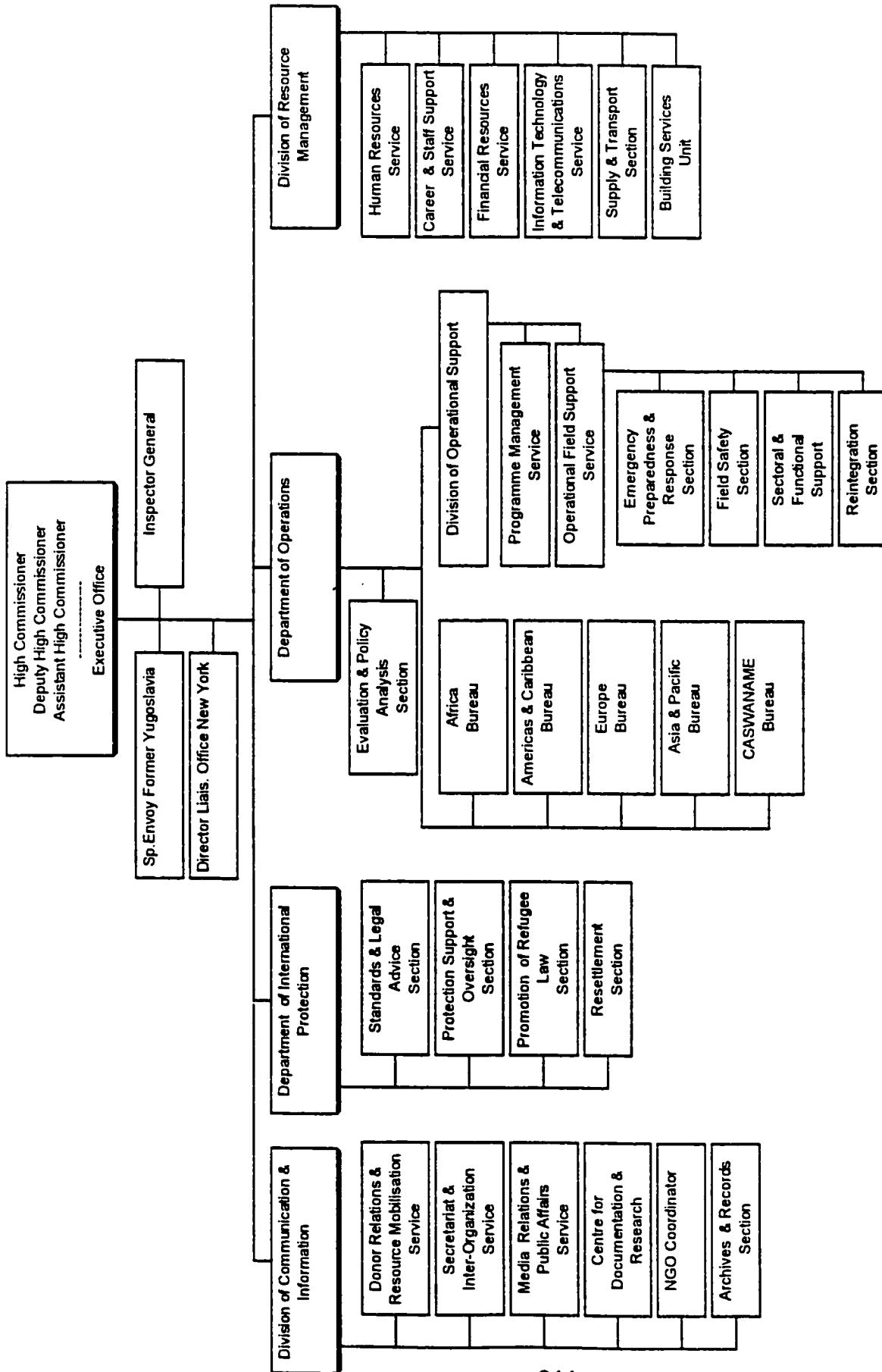
also in institutions that affect the lives of refugee women and men: it is not enough to create 'projects with women' unless UNHCR assistance and protection practices fully support and promote the rights of both women and men.

## **8.8 Conclusions**

In many ways, the case of UNHCR and the process of gender-related change in field operations is quite phenomenal. In just twenty years, 'refugee women' went from having no special representation in the organization, to becoming a policy priority. Today, UNHCR has hundreds of grass-roots initiatives to support refugee, internally displaced and returnee women globally. Moreover, advocates within the organization have developed a deeper appreciation of the complexity of gender issues, and have begun to develop multi-leveled responses to promote gender equality in UNHCR protection and assistance structures and practices. Yet as remarkable as these achievements are, the process of gender-related change is often perplexing, complex and disappointingly slow. We can begin to understand and address this complexity by examining how gender related change is mediated at the intersections of the global, national and local, and through the opportunities and constraints advocates face both outside and inside to the organization in question. In this way, gender-related change in international organizations becomes less elusive as a theoretical quandary and a practical goal.

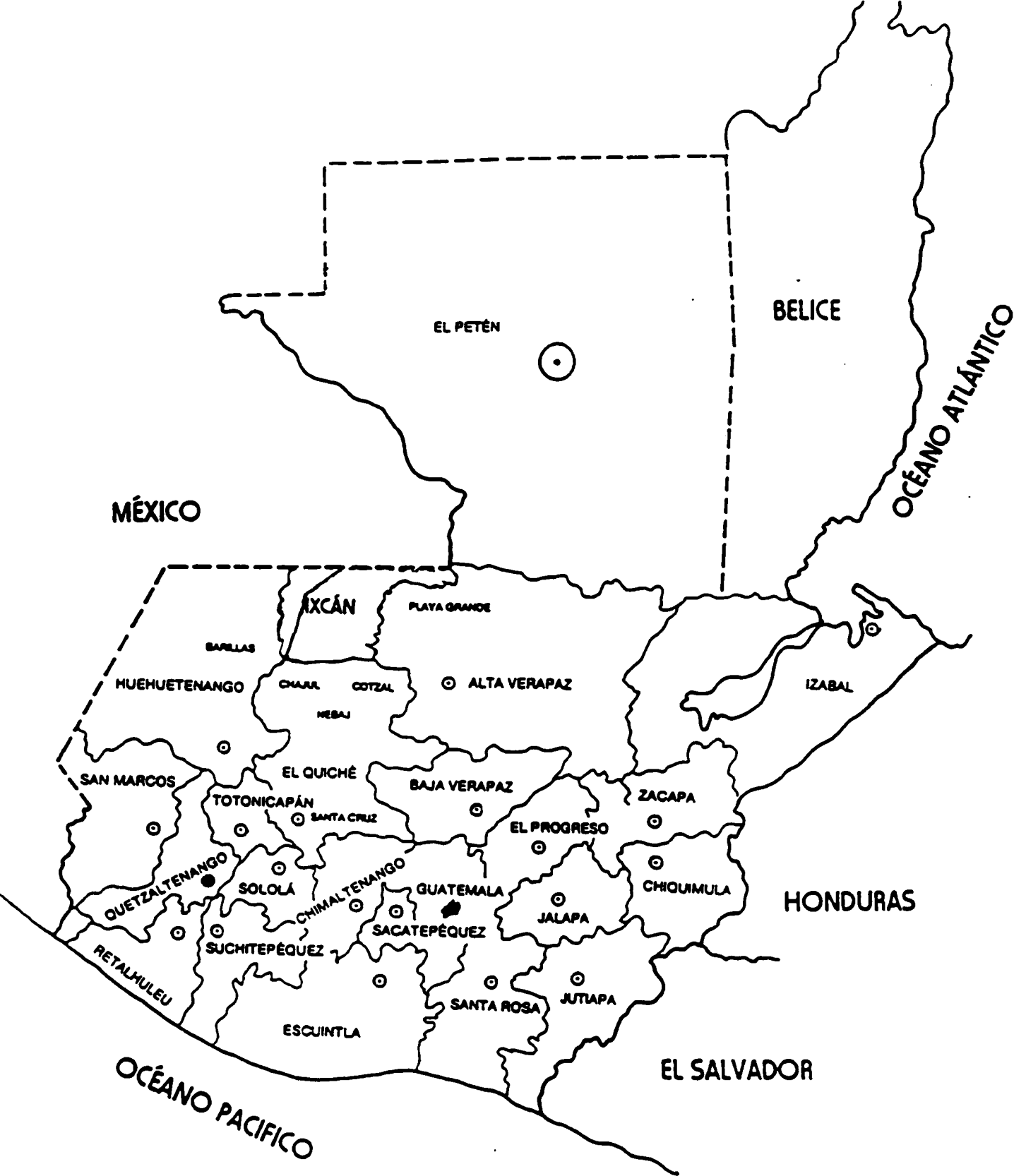
## **APPENDIX I**

# UNHCR Headquarters Structure





## **APPENDIX II**

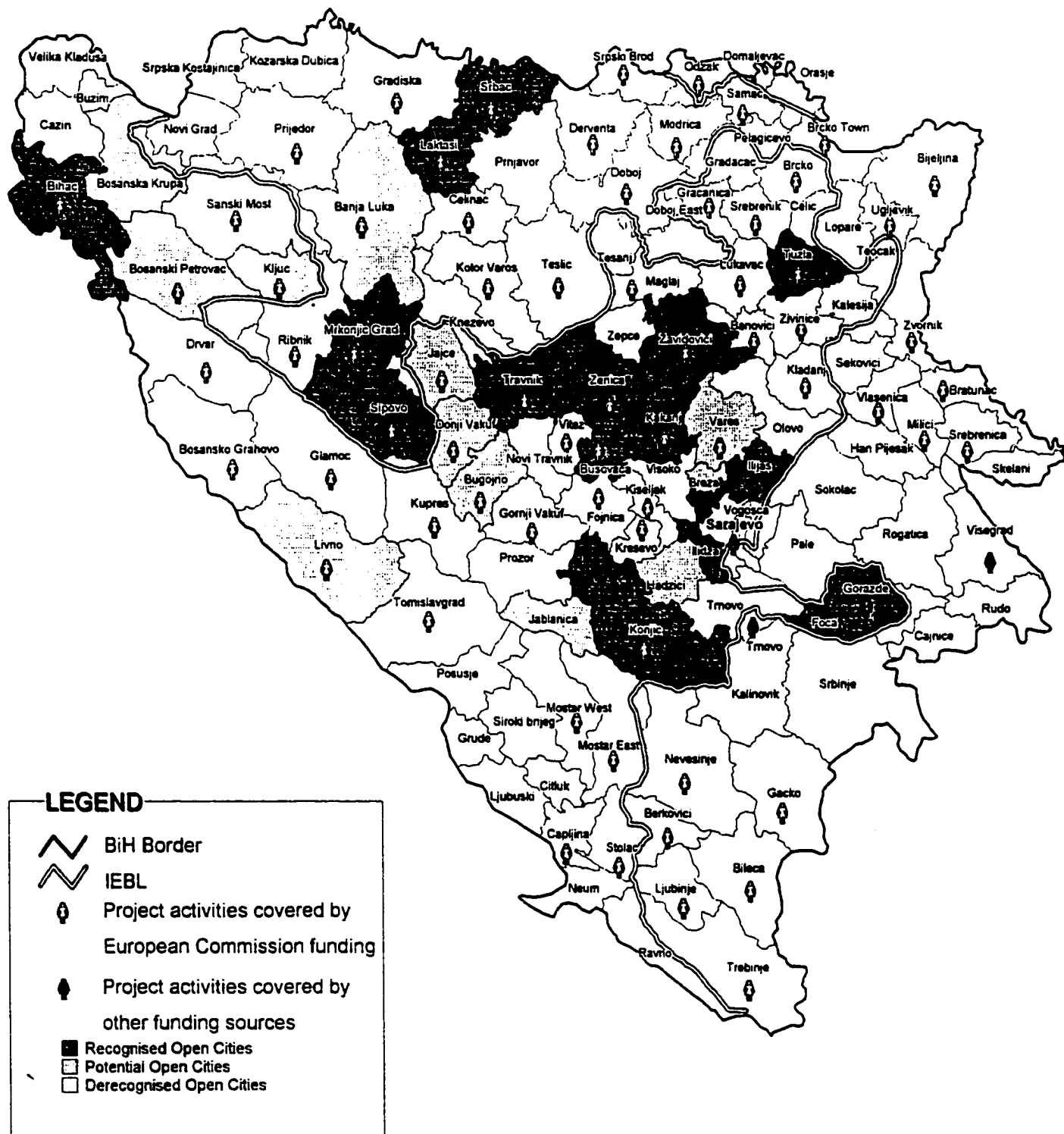


Guatemala  
Taken from Falla, p. 12

## **APPENDIX III**

# UNITED NATIONS HIGH COMMISSIONER FOR REFUGEES BOSNIAN WOMEN'S INITIATIVE Micro Projects in UNHCR's Areas of Responsibility

October 1999



## **APPENDIX IV**

## **On Methodology**

### **1. Summary of methodology**

The thesis employed a variety of methodological tools, including: participant observation; personal and group interviews; e-mail exchanges and internet searches; conference attendance in UN and academic settings; and, document analysis of primary and secondary sources. An over-riding goal of my research was to obtain a ‘hands-on’ understanding of the experiences of humanitarian workers, government officials, transnational advocates and refugees, the internally displaced and returnee women and men, girls and boys. In this way, ‘field work’ – or entering and participating in the very organizations, institutions and situations I wished to study – became an important aspect of my research. The pros and cons of these approaches are weighed in the following sections which outline methods of knowledge gathering, reflections on preparations and planning, sequence of field work, actors consulted, and a justification of principle methodologies employed in this thesis.

### **2. Methodology**

#### **A. Participant Observation**

There are of course advantages and disadvantages to the participant observation approach. The advantages largely derive from a grasp of nuances: one can gain a greater depth of understanding of the forces at work in a given time and place by being a part of it. Thus, for example, I was able to capture the elusive ‘resistance’ tactics of UNHCR colleagues to gender equality mainstreaming by actually being there to witness stalling

tactics, jokes, undermining statements and disempowering meetings with senior staff. As part of a team to mainstream gender and in wider operational goals, I participated in meetings and informal conversations where people spoke frankly about their perceptions on gender equality – something that may have been more difficult to achieve in formal interviews. My presence within UNHCR Headquarters also allowed me to access documentation such as reports I would otherwise not be privy to and in doing so, more easily discern the difference between rhetoric and reality. It was a ‘behind the scenes look’ at the carefully crafted production of humanitarian assistance.

Likewise, in traveling to Bosnia and Herzegovina as a UNHCR representative first, and academic second, I was able to draw upon a variety of resources otherwise unavailable to me. Respondents were more likely to provide information on the basis that I was a UNHCR official, just another academic researcher. In addition, seeing and being within a post-conflict country that makes the politics of that country dramatically sharpens one’s focus on that country.

The disadvantages of participant observation fall broadly into two realms: ethics and subjectivity. Working closely with certain individuals, it was inevitable that bonds of friendship would be formed. It then became difficult to write critically about a colleague’s work, to maintain a critical and constructive distance. This was particularly difficult in Bosnia, where efforts to support women were made in earnest, but criticism was necessary to point out the shortcomings of the approach. In UNHCR headquarters, a number of colleagues were interested in a critique and we talked about the usefulness of reflection many times. I was encouraged to think critically and it helped to know that my analysis would be received with interest, not antagonism.

However, I was also aware of the potential and actual power relations which existed within the organization and did not want to compromise colleagues in their jobs. Further, while my official UNHCR status in Bosnia and Herzegovina provided some advantages over staff, it posed larger obstacles to interviews with women's organizations. Often women would fashion their answers in response to what they believed I wanted to hear. It took time to convince them I would not be influential in future funding decisions, and to speak openly about their views and perspectives on the BWI. Likewise in Guatemala, I had to persuade members of women's organizations that I represented no funding agency before proceeding with interviews.

A combination of strategies were used to overcome these disadvantages. First, I tried to take a step back from my work before writing in order to gain some distance and critical reflection. This may have meant putting aside a chapter for a month or two after returning from field work. I would later return to notes and form the outline of the chapter, proceeding with a fresh mind. Second, I acted responsibly with the information I gathered, not citing names where I thought ramifications may come into play, and consulting with interviewees regarding specific quotes. I also tried to exchange information, so that the interviews and my participation therein was reciprocal: I felt it was important to avoid a common pattern of academics taking information in order to receive their respective degrees, but not giving anything back.

The following sections review the actors and organizations I actively participated in and observed. Throughout my research, different actors and organizations weave in and out of my life and work. However, I consider even a one-off meeting with a particular refugee woman as forming an important component of the overall tapestry



which eventually became my thesis. Thus while all of my inter-actions may not have been as long term, consistent and clearly defined as my stay in Geneva was, unplanned and ad hoc meetings with refugee women's groups in Guatemala, for example, nonetheless formed an important component of my research. I attempt to capture this range of actors in the list below. Again, these persons and organizations represent an attempt to understand my subject from a multi-actor, multi-leveled perspective.

*i) Transnational Human Rights Advocates/Activists*

Project Accompaniment of Canada: a Canadian network formed in response to the request of Guatemalan refugees for physical international accompaniment on their return to Guatemala. I was an active member of this network for two years, lobbying, doing public education work and fundraising. I also went to Guatemala as a regional representative of this group and met with dozens of organizations representing the internally displaced, including Sandra Moran – a refugee woman I had met in Vancouver and who then had returned to Guatemala to work in the Women's Sector of the newly formed democratic organization of civil society. PA provided an opportunity to work with grass-roots activists who took an alternative, pacifist approach to human rights work. One of the richest experiences was a 5 day retreat in which we were prompted to reflect upon the reasons we engaged in human rights work, revealing a variety of personal motivations.

Working Group for Refugee Women: a transnational network of advocates for refugee women seeking to influence UNHCR implementation of the Policy on Refugee women.

At the time I was in Geneva, this network was at a low point. I met with some of the original founders who had taken different directions in their approaches to refugee work. Some were still very active and sought new ways to invigorate the process (including planning an international conference to follow up on the monumental conference in 1998). I met with these women in 'working group' forums and we exchanged views and ideas about strategies. I also met with the present director of the network: we discussed the weaknesses of the office of the Senior Coordinator and how the Working Group could support her.

*ii) United Nations and International Organizations*

UNHCR – I worked in the gender unit for six months. This work involved interaction and support to various units in protection and operations, including: regional bureaux, operations management system, community services, security, emergency preparedness unit, resettlement and reintegration, health, the children's unit and environment.

Gender Coordinating Group, Bosnia-Herzegovina – established to co-ordinate gender initiatives of different IO in BiH (OSCE, OHR, UNHCR, UNDP), I attended a planning and discussion meeting which provided a glimpse of international co-operation around the issue of gender mainstreaming.

*iii) Grass-roots women's organizations*

Flora Unidas -- I participated in a meeting with supporting NGO, Peten, Guatemala

Neutra Voz -- Guatemalan refugee women's group located in Vancouver, B.C whom I met and worked with on several occasion in Canada and later in Guatemala.

## **B. Interviews**

Group, individual, informal and formal interviews were largely done in person, although some were also conducted over the telephone and the email. Email interviews are very useful because they also serve as a form of documentation and allow the respondent to reflect upon their responses. However, it is difficult to elicit responses from people who are extremely busy, in which case face to face interviews are preferable. Telephone and personal interviews work best when the respondent is provided with a list of questions beforehand, again to allow them to prepare their answers. Field questions for Bosnia and Herzegovina can be found in Annex VI.

*Interviews were conducted with the following groups of actors, organized by region and organization:*

Guatemala: Mama Maquin, Madre Tierra, COMADEP (implementing NGO), ACPD, Women's Sector of Civil Society Assembly, representative of GRICAR, representatives of the alternative press, UNHCR programme officials, the former Regional Policy Advisor on Refugee Women.

Bosnia-Herzegovina: see Annex V for overview of actors consulted.

UNHCR Headquarters, Geneva: informal interviews with Gender consultants, Programme Officer of Gender Unit, former Senior Coordinator for Refugee Women.

Government departments: Citizenship and Immigration Canada (CIC), Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade (DFAIT), Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA), Director of the Immigration and Refugee Board (IRB), Guatemalan Department for Women's Issues (national and regional, Quezaltenango).

### **C. Conferences**

- 1997 UN Expert Group Meeting on Gender Based Persecution. Toronto, Ontario
- 1997 Oxfam Canada National Assembly. Toronto, Ontario
- 1997 International Studies Association. Toronto, Ontario
- 1997 Regional Meetings on the Future of PA. Vancouver & Victoria, British Columbia
- 1998 Building Peace and Democracy in Post-Conflict Societies. Halifax, Nova Scotia
- 1999 International Studies Association. Washington DC, USA
- 1999 Standing Committee, UNHCR. Geneva Switzerland
- 1999 NGO Meeting on Refugee Women. (Standing Committee) Geneva, Switzerland
- 2000 NGO-Government Consultations on Peacebuilding. Ottawa, Ontario

### **D. E-mail and Internet**

A number of interviews were conducted over email, indicated in the bibliography. Key websites proved to be critical sources of information: what is not available on line can be ordered via a librarian working in the organization.

*Key websites include:*

Canadian Council for Refugees  
<http://www.web.net/~ccr/fronteng.htm>

Centre for Refugee Studies (Oxford University)  
<http://www.qeh.ox.ac.uk/rsp/>

Centre for Refugee Studies (York University)  
<http://www.yorku.ca/crs/>

UNHCR  
<http://www.unhcr.ch/>

UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs  
[http://www.reliefweb.int/ocha\\_ol/index.html](http://www.reliefweb.int/ocha_ol/index.html)

United Nations Homepage  
<http://www.un.org/>

Women's Commission for Refugee Women and Children  
<http://www.womenscommission.org/>

### **E. Document Analysis**

The bibliography details a wide range of books, edited collections, journals and UN documents consulted. It does not adequately capture other resources which informed this analysis but were not easily documented: posters; pamphlets; newsletters; leaflets; local newspapers; unpublished written documents by women's NGOs; conference materials such as attendance lists and unofficial organizational memos. All of these resources helped provide background text and were clues to how various actors perceived themselves, or what they wished to project to a wider audience.

### **3. Planning and preparations**

Preparations for field work are always challenging, involving phone calls and emails to set up interviews while working around other people's schedules and within the confines of your own limited resources to travel and stay in a given place. This task becomes even more complicated when interviewees live in remote areas where a telephone is not present or in organizations where regular hours are not kept. One of the first lessons learned from my planning experiences, then, was to be flexible. I conducted interviews in cars, in coffee houses and impromptu. While tape recorders are often the best bet for capturing all that is said, I found it was an intimidating factor overall, and

people preferred if I took notes. Taking notes means re-writing them immediately to decipher the short hand, fill in missing points and to then analyze what has been said.

#### **4. Sequence of Field Work**

##### **Guatemala**

My field work consisted in part of three trips to Guatemala over a period of four years. The first trip (1996, 8 weeks) was spent studying at a language school and in preliminary meetings with representatives from the Guatemalan government and women's organizations. The second trip (1997, 4 weeks) consisted of participating in a delegation to Guatemala with Project Accompaniment where we interviewed dozens of representatives of the displaced. A report was then drawn up to help the network decide on future directions. The third and final trip (7 weeks) was made for purely academic reasons, to meet with and interview representatives of UNHCR-Guatemala, returnee women's organizations, human rights groups and implementing NGOs for UNHCR programmes.

##### **UNHCR Headquarters, Geneva Switzerland**

For a six month period between May 28 and November 30, 1999 I worked as an intern for the Gender Unit in UNHCR Headquarters in Geneva, Switzerland. Participant Observation was conducted throughout this time period, with the knowledge of key people in the organization.

## **Bosnia and Herzegovina**

While in UNHCR I was elected to go “on mission” to Bosnia and Herzegovina to evaluate and collect lessons learned from the Bosnia Women’s Initiative. The data collected was later used in forming the basis of my analysis in Chapter Seven. I was in the country for just over three weeks in October of 1999. As stated earlier, my decision to include this as a second case study in my thesis was based not only on practicality, but also because it was UNHCR’s largest operation to date.

### **5. Justification of Methodological Approach: Participant Observation**

Participant observation enabled me to break with traditional political science methodologies of writing from a distance. In part, this was inspired by my exposure to a variety of (development related and feminist) literatures which contested the possibility of being a ‘neutral observer’ and advocated more grass-roots approaches to knowledge gathering. Thus I began my research on the premise that authentic knowledge comes from those involved, engrossed, enmeshed in politics, as well as from those who live for it, the academic.

Field work also enabled me to analyze empirical evidence from the viewpoint of persons I ‘studied’, to incorporate their perspectives and experiences and work and to appreciate the structural realities which shaped their lives. Thus I was able to map how agents resist and subvert structures which may appear to dominate their lives. For these reasons, I felt a participant observation approach greatly enriched the empirical findings of my thesis, providing insights into the utility of IR theory to explain, analyze and provide alternatives to global gender relations.

## **APPENDIX V**



## LIST OF INTERVIEWS, BOSNIA-HERZEGOVINA

Date	Name	Relation to BWI
<b>Geneve</b>		
September	Eddie Gedalof	Former National Co-ordinator
September	Danielle Guillermand	Former National Programme Officer
September	Francesca Friz-Penn	Former Programme Officer, Mostar F/O
September	Luisa Cremonese	Associate Officer, Mostar F/O
September	Esmeralda Francisco	Former BWI Focal Point, Mostar F/O
September	Carolyn Wand	Head of Office, Livno Satellite Office
<b>Sarajevo</b>		
October 6	Zita Silva	Assistant Programme Officer
October 6	Marc Rapoport	Programme Officer
October 6	Lejla Hrasnica	National BWI Focal Point
October 7	Inter-Agency Gender Coordination Meeting	Gender focal points in international organizations
October 7	Andrew McGregor	Senior Legal Advisor, OSCE
October 8	Lejla Somun	Former member of National Selection Committee
October 8	Wendy Rapoport	Public Information
October 8	Nand Bardouille	Assistant Liason Officer
October 8	Ulrike von Buchwald	Senior Liason Officer, Former member of National Selection Committee

<b>Tuzla</b>		
October	Alenka Savic, Azabagic Efad	Umbrella Agency BWI Project Manager, MCE/SEA, Tuzla
	Sanela Zahirovic	BWI Focal Point
	Caca Pejdah, Katherine Mahoney	Protection Officers
	Community Services Project (Radio)	Coordinator
	AMICA	Women's Association
	Bosfam	Women's Association
	Library Bus Community Services Project	Coordinator of Project
	Pig Distribution Income Generation Project	3 Beneficiaries
	Goat Distribution Income Generation Project	5 Beneficiaries

<b>Mostar</b>		
October 13	Bozena Bohm	Assit. Programme Officer, Selection Committee
October 13	Ethel Obordo	Bwi Focal Point
October 13	Lennart Kotsalainen	Head of Sub-Office, Chairperson of Selection Committee
October 13	Zena BiH	Women's Association
	Legal Centre	Project Coordinators
	Tailoring	3 Beneficiaries
	Club of Friendship	1 Beneficiary
	Hairdressing and Beauty Salon	6 Beneficiaries
	Anja	Umbrella Agency, Programme
	Ceramics Workshop	8 Beneficiaries
	Malteser	Umbrella Agency
	Women's Humanitarian Association (Priateljice)	Women's Association
October 15	Upholstry Business	4 Beneficiaries
October 15	Federalna Zena	Women's Association
Ocotber 15	Education Project	Coordinator of Project
	Priateljice	Women's Association

<b>Banja Luka</b>		
October 18	David M	Selection Committee Member
	Olga Femic	BWI Focal Point
	Maltezer	Umbrella Agency
October 19	Toy Production	3 Beneficiaries
	Chicken Production	3 Beneficiaries
	Fitness Centre	Beneficiaries, Coordinator
	United Women	Women's Association

<b>Sarajevo</b>		
October 20	Selma	BWI Focal Point
	Small Grain Production	Acting Coordinator, Beneficiaries
	Handi-craft Production	Coordinator
	Video-shop/CEPI	Coordinator
	Sumeja	Coordinator Beneficiaries
October 21	New Bosnia Fund	Umbrella Agency
	Amara Nubegovic	BWI Focal Point
	Women for Women	Coordinator

## **APPENDIX VI**

## **LIST OF INTERVIEW QUESTIONS, BOSNIA-HERZEGOVINA**

**List of questions that formed the basis of discussions with focal points, members of selection committees and umbrella agencies.**

1. What do you understand as the overall objectives of BWI?
2. Do existing Guidelines result in the appropriate selection of projects toward these objectives?
3. How do BWI projects contribute to minority return, reintegration and reconciliation?
4. How are projects monitored and how is the impact measured?
5. What are the major constraints in your work?
6. How are proposals solicited? For example, is there any outreach to the communities in your AOR to encourage women to put forth proposals and if so what?
7. How are implementing agencies (women's associations) selected? What expertise do they have? Do they receive any training? How has the BWI worked to improve the capacity of implementing agencies; for example, trainings or networking?
8. After the implementation period, what monitoring techniques are used to analyze the progress of implementing agencies and projects? Were performance indicators developed? What steps are taken if the project does not meet the planned objectives?
9. In your opinion -- what were some examples of successful projects and why?
10. How has the project made a contribution to the community?
11. How has it improved women's social standing in the community and increased the role of women in the reconstruction of the country?
12. Are women discriminated against in Bosnian political and economic life? If so how? Do BWI projects attempt to address this discrimination?
13. How has the BWI benefited men? Should men be more involved and if so in what ways?
14. What is the sustainability of BWI projects in relation to UNHCR proposed phase out and hand-over strategies? What is needed to hand-over?
15. What efforts have been taken to transfer responsibility of the implementation of projects to counter-parts?

16. What was the criteria for acting as a member of the Selection Committee?

17. In your opinion, how would you like to see the BWI develop in the future?

### **Questions for Women's Associations**

1. What are the goals or objectives of your association?
2. How do you identify beneficiaries and projects?
3. What needs assessment is done before developing a proposal?  
Are the needs and resources of men/women identified?  
Do the UAs assist you in needs assessment?
4. Were beneficiaries involved in the planning of the project?
5. What kind of projects do you want to support and why?
6. Have you received any training? If so what kind? If not, would you like to and on what?
7. Do you receive funding or support from any other sources? If so where?
8. How do you monitor/evaluate projects?
9. What are the major constraints to your work?
10. What would you like to do in the future?
11. What areas would you like to be supported in more in your work?

### **Questions for Beneficiaries**

1. What did you do before the conflict?
2. How has this project benefited you? Your family?
3. What skills have you learned in the project? Is there anything else you would like to learn?
4. Do you think that your work in the project changed how the community sees you?  
How your family sees you?
5. What are some of the difficulties in participating in this project; for example, is childcare a problem?

6. What would you like to do next/in the future?
7. What do you think BWI should do in the future?

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