

The Gendered Refugee Experience: Exploring Themes of Violence, Power Relations, Communities, and Empowerment

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In the 1990s, new government¹ and United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) guidelines² sought to take claims of gender-related persecution seriously. If gender was a reason for which one was persecuted, and one's gender was a social or political group, then victims of gender-based persecution who crossed a border should receive asylum. In light of these developments, this edition of *St Antony's International Review* aims to uncover and bring together new insights on the "gendered refugee experience."

Academic literature over the last three decades has addressed gender in two broad areas of refugee studies. One area explores legal and moral grounds for individuals to receive asylum and protection from gender-related persecution. The other area explores experiences prior to and after flight that have strong gender dimensions, but which may not necessarily serve as evidence for claims to asylum. Regarding the first area, Anker et al.³ argue that victims of domestic abuse ought to receive protection in a host country if governments in their countries of origin fail to protect them. Others have suggested that, though much gender-related persecution can fall under the categories in the existing 1951 Convention for the Protection of Refugees and its 1967 Protocol, there is a need for an additional category of "gender" in Refugee Status Determination (RSD) procedures.⁴ Kelly⁵ and others distinguish between gender-specific persecution, where the type of persecution is tied to the gender, and

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gender-based persecution, where persecution is inflicted because of the victim's gender. Anker and others⁶ have shown that officials often ignore either type, despite official guidelines.

Regarding the second broad area of research on gender issues—gendered experiences in general—scholars have shown how flight can lead to changing gender roles within families. Men may feel powerless when no longer able to take on the dominant role of providing for families⁷ and men and women may respond differently when faced with severe limits to basic necessities.⁸ More recent research, incorporating both interviews and aggregate data, has found that post-flight coping mechanisms differ between genders.⁹

Others have explored how these two areas—reasons for flight and post-flight experiences—are intertwined. For example, Bloch et al. have shown how post-flight RSD procedures often fail to provide conditions for women to apply for refugee status because of gender-related persecution. Men can become principle applicants due to default rules or cultural norms, even when women have stronger claims.¹⁰ Building on this, the articles in this issue of *STAIR* continue the academic exchange at the juncture of gender and refugee issues. More specifically, they address important themes that have significant implications for the intersection between reasons for flight and post-flight experiences. Four major themes emerge: sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV), power relations, economic empowerment, and communities.

The meaning of the first theme, SGBV, is often unclear. Confined choices that lead to prostitution and violent abuse often lie on a “continuum” of violence¹¹ even if regulatory systems differ in the way they “do, or do not, leave women vulnerable to [...] types of economic and physical victimization.”¹² Yet, where on the continuum an individual lies, and the context of violence, can have important implications.

In the first article of this edition, Nimmi Gowrinathan focuses on female combatants of the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE). Her work on SGBV targets a particular ethnic group that is relevant from a research perspective, even if, as Anker et al. rightly point out, victims of gender-related persecution unrelated to ethnicity can also have claims to asylum. Gowrinathan shows how gender-based violence can be a form of state repression and, in this case, lead to responses of political resistance in the form of joining the LTTE. Today, “without the umbrella of an established insurgent movement, the risks for women's political activism are higher than they have ever been” (p. 24). However, even without the support of the LTTE, state repression in the form of SGBV and displacement raises “questions of injustice, inequality, and revenge” (p. 21). Her

work is of interest for those hoping to understand the way that collective-action problems in fighting SGBV can, at times, be overcome when SGBV is viewed as a form of state oppression, rather than only a private crime against unconnected individuals. Her work is also of central significance for those interested in the relationship between insurgency and broader questions of social justice, both in terms of risks in taking part in activities deemed necessary to promote justice, and in terms of the perceptions of those taking part in such activities.

Gowrinathan's work also shows the limits of simply counting the number of options a person has to determine whether options are so constrained as to make choices involuntary, and a type of abuse. When one gender has more options and the other gender does not have them, these options themselves can be a form of coercion. Men and women in her case study have almost no access to public goods, and government officials demand sexual intercourse from women in return for the provision of public goods. One may argue, perhaps, that women are being coerced or abused in a way that men are not, regardless of whether they have greater access to public goods. When officials demand that women stay quiet after a rape in return for public goods that men have no access to, it seems that an extra form of coercion, and rape, exists for women. Persecution, discrimination, and violence need not always be associated with fewer options. For refugees, access to protection may be preferred to no access at all, yet new forms of persecution and abuse may emerge in a host country as a result of this protection.

The second major theme concerns power relations between genders. The articles explore social structures that create power relations with detrimental implications for men and women, even if no specific agent can be said to be violent or even discriminatory. Related to this, the articles move beyond sex-aggregated data comparing women and men's access to income, education, and political participation. Even when men and women have equal access to services and resources, the reasons they do may be distinct, the reasons they seek resources may be distinct, and the sanctions put on one gender to access these resources may undermine agency and autonomy. When sexual intercourse is a precondition to access resources for one gender but not the other, or when only one gender no longer has access after marriage or pregnancy, aggregate data showing equal access may mask inequality, discrimination, abuse, and possibly persecution.

In the second article, Elisabeth Olivius addresses the ways in which humanitarian aid workers in refugee camps in Thailand and Bangladesh follow a neo-liberal governmentality agenda. Humanitarian workers in Olivius' study are told to focus on measurable outputs, which often hide

underlying power relations. When girls and boys are found to drop out of school at the same rate, some humanitarian aid workers note that this hides the disparate reasons girls and boys drop out, with girls leaving because of marriage and pregnancy, and boys leaving because of the need to work or drug addiction.

The third theme, related to SGBV and power relations, is the theme of post-flight economic empowerment. Economic participation and access are often viewed as instrumental in ensuring that potential victims are not dependent on those who abuse them, whether these be government officials or members of their household, and not dependent on individuals who may coerce them into choices they do not want to make. Yet, the role of economic empowerment remains contested. Economic empowerment can be a sign of empowerment in and of itself; it can be instrumental for other types of empowerment related to gender, such as access to education and greater decision-making within families; and it can be instrumental for values not directly related to gender, such as ensuring that families have sufficient resources.

Existing literature addresses why refugees take part in income-generating activities,¹³ and the ways that international non-governmental organizations, the World Bank and UNHCR, justify dedicating resources to the economic empowerment of women.¹⁴ However, there is a need for literature that explores how refugees justify their own and their spouses' income-generating activities. Marnie Shaffer's research addresses this in the third article of this edition of *STAIR*, and discusses the changing gender roles amongst Somali men and women who live in Mayfair, South Africa. "Women and men generally believe," writes Shaffer, "that women should stay home if their husbands can provide adequate support" (p. 41). Women interviewed insist that they seek employment outside of the home because they lack other options when their husbands fail to provide resources for their families, and without any extended family networks to provide such resources. In contrast, male Somali refugees interviewed by Shaffer, including the spouses of working women, insist that women were attempting to undermine men within the family structure. Women's insistence that they were only working out of no other choice, argues Shaffer, is necessary when women are dependent on their local community. This dependency is the result of the South African government's failure to provide protection from xenophobic attacks outside of their community. This dependency means women also fear turning to the police to report SGBV.

Interestingly, both Somali refugee women in Shaffer's work and aid workers in Thailand and Bangladesh in Olivius' work view economic empowerment as instrumental for economic benefits, rather than ends

in themselves for female empowerment. Their articles, read together, raise important questions on the overlap between neo-liberal governmentality goals, and the stated goals of women who are dependent on local community networks, in the absence of full government protection.

Shaffer's article is also an excellent contribution to our understanding of SGBV and the relationship between general insecurity and gender-related insecurity. Her work shows that, even if the police could help prevent gender-related violence, victims' dependency on local communities for general security unrelated to gender is too important to risk losing by turning to the police. Government failures to provide security in one area—xenophobic attacks—are related to government failures to provide security in another area: SGBV.

This relates to the fourth main theme, the theme of local refugee community structures. Martyn Hudson discusses ethnic enclaves among refugee women in the United Kingdom. Social isolation combined with dependency on local social structures may further prevent integration within the wider society. His work explores the relationship between government top-down approaches to integration, and the limits of such an approach, which often sidelines local friendship networks that are key for addressing the social isolation that can make ethnic enclaves possible.

Gail Hickey, in this issue of *STAIR*, also discusses familial community networks. She writes on Burmese refugees' experiences in refugee camps in Thailand, and her respondents cite the loss of security that arose from the loss of these networks upon flight. However, for Hickey's respondents, though the loss of security from familial networks upon fleeing Burma was cited as a factor in the loss of security, the central factor was the failure of the Thai government to protect refugees in and outside of camps.

Like Olivius, Hickey addresses SGBV as a form of state violence. Rape of both males and females of all ages by Thai police and soldiers, severe and violent interrogations, and a lack of medical treatment were commonplace. Moreover, interviewees recall their fear of being separated from their families and communities and forced into prostitution by Thai authorities.

The themes that the five authors address—SGBV, power relations, economic empowerment, and community—are also touched upon in a practitioner's response piece by Miranda Gaanderse, a UNHCR Associate Protection Officer based in South Sudan. In addition, *STAIR* editor Mollie Gerver talked with Barbra Harrell-Bond, the founder of the Refugee Studies Center at Oxford University's Department of International Development. Harrell-Bond has founded numerous refugee legal aid organizations and established a website, www.refugeelegalaidinformation.org, as part of the director of the refugee program of Fahamu Trust. She emphasizes that

“gender” does not equal “women,” and there is a need for greater legal aid and advocacy for male victims of SGBV.

The themes raised in this issue are not unique to the study of gender and refugees. Yet, the intersection between studies on gender and studies on refugees can raise new philosophical, methodological, and empirical questions that shed light on broader questions of rights and equality. At the same time, there is much at stake in understanding how broader questions of rights and equality apply to refugees and Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) who are treated differently because of their gender. Both to ensure protection and understand persecution, research through a gendered lens remains necessary, and the articles presented in this edition are an important contribution to this endeavor.

The general section of this issue of *STAIR* similarly provides a showcase for several important pieces of topical and innovative research into under-examined areas of international affairs. The articles and academic debate that comprise this edition’s general section each provide a new and engaging perspective on three matters of ongoing international concern: the strategic utility of nuclear weapons in the post-Cold War era, Iran’s long-term military and strategic objectives, and the transformation of identity and activism in the Middle East. In doing so, they highlight the continued relevance of various forms of power—both as a concept and an actuality—to International Relations, be it in the material manifestation of a naval flotilla, nuclear weapons, or the ideational, discursive power to construct and define identity. We believe that the presence of common and intersecting themes across these diverse pieces of scholarship illustrates the importance of *STAIR*’s commitment to providing a forum wherein academic excellence in the many subfields of international affairs may be presented jointly, allowing the pieces to speak to each other and, deservedly, engage a more general audience.

In the first article, Captain Tracy Vincent draws on his years of practical experience as an officer in the United States Navy to provide a unique and highly insightful analysis of the operational and strategic future of the Islamic Republic of Iran Navy (IRIN). Utilizing an impressive collection of carefully-parsed Iranian media reports, official naval statements, and available government documents, Vincent presents a concise and much-needed diagnosis of the current state of the IRIN. Even more significantly, given the general dearth of academic materials relating to the Iranian navy, Vincent is able to place his in-depth knowledge of the IRIN in historical context, allowing him to draw fine-grained, informed conclusions as to Iranian operational and strategic aspirations for the IRIN, and their potential implications for relations with both regional powers and the West. Overall, Vincent argues that the IRIN is undergoing a gradual yet

significant operational expansion, aimed at enabling Iran to project both conventional and “soft” (diplomatic or humanitarian) maritime power beyond its traditional area of operation, the Persian Gulf, to the broader Indian Ocean. While, as a prudent analyst, Vincent is careful to note potential institutional and budgetary constraints to the wholly successful realization of Iran’s naval ambitions, he paints a convincing picture of a subtle yet distinctive move towards the creation of a “blue water” Iranian naval force with the potential to alter the regional balance of power. Scholars of strategic and security studies, as well as areas studies experts, would be well-advised to take note of this important article.

In a pleasing continuity from past issues, the second portion of the general section marks a further intervention into the ongoing debate regarding the future (and form) of deterrence theory in international relations. This section consists of a dynamic exchange between Fred Lawson and Frank Zagare who, from dramatically different perspectives, each evaluate the intellectual heritage and overall utility of “perfect deterrence theory,” a game-theoretic articulation of general deterrence theory. Lawson’s fiery analysis argues that “classical deterrence theorists,” such as Bernard Brodie and Robert Jervis, would hardly recognize, let alone endorse, both the highly abstract, instrumental conception of rationality inherent to perfect deterrence theory and its attendant conclusions. Overall, Lawson takes perfect deterrence theorists, and Stephen Quackenbush in particular, to task for what he perceives as the disconnect between the assumptions of “rationalistic” deterrence theories and the more nuanced, empirically substantiated ways in which he believes policymakers actually make decisions. On both analytic and normative grounds, Lawson thus calls for a renewed engagement with the insights of classical deterrence theory.

Zagare, in response, passionately defends the utility of perfect deterrence theory, presenting it as a corrective alternative to, from his perspective, the at times “logical inconsistency and empirical inaccuracy” (p. 152) of classical deterrence theory. In particular, Zagare takes great pains to refute Lawson’s understanding of rationality in perfect deterrence theory and his presentation of game theory, outlining what he believes to be the appropriate definition of the involved terms and concepts. Overall, *STAIR* is pleased to present this lively and stimulating debate that is a must-read not only for experts in deterrence theory, but also scholars of conflict, security and strategic studies, to say nothing of International Relations more generally.

Finally, Magdalena Karolak provides a striking analysis of the importance of new social media in not only mobilizing activists and co-ordinating protests, but also the construction of identity during the 2011 Arab

Spring. More specifically, Karolak illuminates the complicated identity dynamics inherent to an under-examined aspect of the Arab Spring—the 14 February 2011 protests in Bahrain, which have come to be known as the “Day of Rage”, and their aftermath—and the use of new social media in constructing and disseminating a transnational Shi’a identity. The depth of her analysis is amply demonstrated by her compilation and consideration of an original and innovative data source—the content of nine Facebook sites maintained by Bahraini activists, from their inception at the initial outbreak of the protests to August 2012. On the basis of this evidence, Karolak finds that the protestors worked to actively construct a revolutionary identity defined in terms of opposition to the monarchy, the fraternity of various religious sects, and primary loyalty to Bahrain itself. Overall, Karolak provides an important counterbalance to many popular perceptions of Bahraini politics and its particular manifestation of the Arab Spring, arguing that despite the centrality of religion to Bahraini society, within the context of the uprising, national identity proved to be a far more significant source of mobilization and solidarity. As such, this fascinating, in-depth examination of the nexus of Bahraini history and new social media in the construction of identities and politics of resistance will be of interest to experts in area studies, International Relations, geography, comparative politics, and international history.

In conclusion, it has been an immense pleasure to work with such enterprising scholars, and compile this collection of innovative and engaging articles. We hope you enjoy it as much as we have. ■

Notes

¹ Melinda McPhearson, Leah S. Harowitz, Dean Lusher, Sarah di Giglio, Lucy E. Greenacre, and Yuri B. Saalman, “Marginal Women, Marginal Rights: Impediments to Gender-Based Persecution Claims by Asylum-seeking Women in Australia,” *Journal of Refugee Studies* 24, no. 2 (2011): 323-347. McPhearson cites Australia’s *Guidelines on Gender Issues for Decision Makers* (DIAC 1996, 2010). See also Deborah Anker, “Women Refugees: Forgotten No Longer?,” *San Diego Law Review* 23 (1995): 771-794, who cites *United States Gender Guidelines* in 1995; INS, Office of International Affairs, “Considerations for Asylum Officers Adjudicating Asylum Claims from Women.”

² United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) “UNHCR Guidelines on International Protection: Gender-Related Persecution within the Context of Article 1A(2) of the 1951 Convention and/or its 1967 Protocol relating to the “Status of Refugees” <http://www.unhcr.org/3d58ddef4.html>

³ Deborah Anker, Lauren Gilbert, and Nancy Kelly, “Women Whose Governments are Unable or Unwilling to Provide Reasonable Protection from Domestic Violence

May Qualify as Refugees Under United States Asylum Law," *Georgetown Immigration Law Review* 11, no. 709 (1997).

⁴ Nahla Valji, Lee Anne de la Hunt, and Helen Moffett, "Where Are the Women? Gender Discrimination in Refugee Policies and Practices," *Agenda*, no. 55 (2003): 61-72.

⁵ Nancy Kelly, "Gender-Related Persecution: Assessing the Asylum Claims of Women," *Cornell International Law Journal* 26 (1993).

⁶ McPhearson et al., "Marginal Women, Marginal Rights."

⁷ Barbara Harrell-Bond, *Imposing Aid* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986).

⁸ Gaim Kibreab, "Refugee, Loss and Social Change: Eritrean Refugees and Returnees," in *Refugees and Transformation of Society*, eds. Philomena Essed, George Frerks and Joke Schrijvers (New York, NY: Berghahn Books, 2004).

⁹ Kopalapillai Amirthalingam and Rajith W. D. Lakshman, "Impact of Displacement on Women and Female-headed Households: A Mixed Method Analysis with a Micro-economic Touch," *Journal of Refugee Studies* 26, no. 1 (2013): 26-46.

¹⁰ Alice Bloch, Treasa Galvin, and Barbara Harrell-Bond, "Refugee Women in Europe: Some Aspects of the Legal and Policy Dimensions," *International Migration* 38, no. 3 (2000): 169-190.

¹¹ Liz Kelly, *Surviving sexual violence* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1988); Liz Kelly, "The Continuum of Sexual Violence," in *Sexualities: Critical Concepts in Sociology*, ed. Ken Plummer (London: Routledge, 1989), 127-39.

¹² Jo Phoenix, "Violence and Prostitution: Beyond the Notion of a 'Continuum of Sexual Violence'," in *Handbook on Sexual Violence*, eds. Jennifer M. Brown and Sandra L. Walklate (New York: Routledge, 2012), 218-36.

¹³ Kibreab, "Refugee, Loss and Social Change," 20.

¹⁴ Zo Randriamaro, "Whose Human Security? Gender, neoliberalism and the informal economy of sub-Saharan African," in *Gendered Insecurities, Health and Development in Africa*, eds. Howard Stein and Amal Hassan Fadlalla (New York, NY: Routledge, 2012), 85.

Inside Camps, Outside Battlefields: Security and Survival for Tamil Women

NIMMI GOWRINATHAN

ABSTRACT

In May of 2009, images of displaced Tamil people trapped behind the barbed wire of internment camps flashed across the world. “Everybody wanted to get out of those camps, but they were too scared to discuss their rights”, one priest recalls.¹ The Government of Sri Lanka had just declared a military victory over the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE), an insurgent group that waged a thirty-year war for a separate state for ethnic Tamils living among other minorities and the Sinhalese majority on the island. On the front lines of this resistance movement, Tamil women were in constant motion. Displaced, resettled, and recruited, these women are part of a growing number of female combatants in rebel groups whose experiences, motivations, and politics continue to complicate our understandings of warfare.²

Introduction

Among the many reasons why women take the risks associated with armed rebellion, the impact of lived experiences with displacement and gender-based violence has not been seriously examined. Existing scholarship finds that prior movement activism, biological availability, emotional trauma, social ties to the movement, and contextual pressures can all play a role in a woman’s decision to take up arms.³ Within these, state repression is identified as one of the contextual pressures responsible for the emergence and continued violence of armed insurgencies for both men and women.⁴

When looking specifically at female combatants, scholars identify state repression as a catalyst acting either independently or in conjunction with multiple factors⁵ enabling women to be independent “ideo-

logues" and active revolutionaries.⁶ An overemphasis on women's emotional responses,⁷ coupled with a tendency to cast women as victims, has limited existing research, and has robbed women of agency in their social and political beings.⁸ Where experiences with displacement and other forms of state repression are considered in their ability to shape and motivate female fighters, they are often addressed only in a very broad sense as a contextual background to participation, or are confined to considerations of psychosocial trauma.⁹

This study pulls experiences with displacement and gender-based violence out from ambiguous categorizations of trauma or contextual pressures, locating them as indirect and direct forms of state repression. Looking at the case of Sri Lanka, this paper examines the distinct impact of both on the formation of Tamil women's political identities. These identities can then be mobilized through violent and nonviolent forms of organizing.

Displacement is often seen as an inevitable by-product of warfare rather than a calculated political act within it, and is therefore ignored as a form of state repression. While some of the more obvious forms of state repression (exclusion from government jobs, targeted violence against ethnic Tamils) existed throughout the conflict in Sri Lanka,¹⁰ displacement is a less direct form of repression that has had a disproportionate impact on Tamil women.¹¹ Created and prolonged by an intractable political conflict, experiences within the context of displacement can have a formative impact on women's political selves. Among these, increased levels of gender-based violence in particular will inform new perspectives on social justice and equality. The process of being unsettled and later resettled due to ongoing violence has, and continues to have, a profound impact on social structures and particularly on women captured within a specific context.¹² As political actions, displacement and gender-based violence will have a political impact.

Looking at the position of Tamil women in Sri Lanka, I argue that the context of displacement and experiences with gender-based violence are acts of state repression which play a significant role in forming political identities activated through violent forms of resistance. This argument requires a new approach that moves beyond established binaries for female fighters of "victim vs. agent",¹³ disaggregates forms of state repression, and focuses on individual experiences framed in a collective struggle. By so doing, we can better understand the specific political impact of displacement and gender-based violence, elevating the role of state repression as a motivating factor for female fighters. The arguments made here rely on a unique set of direct interviews with former fighters conducted in Sri Lanka during and after the war. In addition, extensive conversations

with members of Sri Lankan civil society and victims of gender-based violence, as well as humanitarian reports contribute to the analysis.

Addressing the need for “culturally specific knowledge informed by the experiences of people themselves”,¹⁴ this study combines an analysis of secondary literature with extensive field interviews to understand the impact of displacement upon individual women’s lives.¹⁵ In this paper, I draw on three distinct data sets. Trust built within the Tamil community over a decade enabled me access to these populations during challenging periods of ongoing violence. The first is a set of in-depth interviews with former female fighters and civilians conducted between 2000 and 2010 for academic research. The second is a detailed analysis of humanitarian and human rights reports (both public and private) from ten organizations that look at humanitarian crises in Sri Lanka occurring from 2000 to 2010.¹⁶ Using these reports, I track the reporting of conditions in displaced camps. The categories created were developed to follow the key issues that arose in direct interviews.¹⁷ The final data set was compiled through policy research done for the International Crisis Group from 2009 to 2011.¹⁸ It relies on seventy-five direct interviews conducted in India, Sri Lanka, and London with members of civil society, lawyers, physicians, and survivors in order to understand the prevalence and impact of gender-based violence in resettled areas of the North and East.¹⁹

A Context of Constant Motion: Displacement in Sri Lanka (2000-2010)

Within the broader context of conflict, one of the most significant social processes resulting from prolonged conflict in Sri Lanka has been multiple cycles of displacement and resettlement. This process has resituated Tamil women. In the absence of solid doors and permanent shelters, their lives were largely lived in a forcibly public space.²⁰ This section examines the lived experience of Tamil women in camps from 2000 to 2010.

Over the course of the war, the number of internally displaced people (IDPs) has fluctuated between half a million and 1.2 million for a total population estimated at around twenty million,²¹ eighty per cent of whom are ethnically Tamil, including Muslims.²² Amongst this population, a significant number were displaced multiple times due to the conflict and recurring natural disasters.²³ Causes of displacement were recorded as real or perceived conflict-related violence, with some IDPs only travelling into safer territories for the night.²⁴ The sections below highlight four basic daily challenges facing women in these sprawling camps.

The first challenge was the severe shortages of food for displaced populations that came largely after 2005, but which have been an ongoing concern.²⁵ Over two thirds of the direct interviews conducted with members of civil society in 2010 and 2011 cite food shortages as critical, leaving women in a desperate situation. Women often felt this scarcity most acutely as they gave their own rations to their children and had to wait for hours in the sun to receive their food packets.²⁶ “We were given one packet of food every few days. The UN left a few utensils, and some clothes. By evening most of the children went hungry.”²⁷ In some camps, water was allocated at a rate of roughly ten litres per family for all uses, and with large numbers of female-headed households, women were left with the task of collecting additional water. The wells were often dry; pumps were too difficult for women to work, and long walks left women vulnerable to sexual assault.²⁸ “The lack of food often led to women exchanging sexual favours for outside goods,” commented one aid worker.²⁹

Shelter and Sanitation

The second practical issue centred around “temporary” shelters hastily erected in safe spaces. The primary concerns cited consistently in these camps were the flimsy nature of tent material, overcrowding, hygiene, and lack of privacy.³⁰ Several unrelated families were often in the same tent, thereby exposing women to men living in the same temporary structure.³¹ “With everyone in the same tent, we wouldn’t even want to change our clothes,” one IDP noted.³² Women often left camps, the absence of proper latrines forcing them to wander in surrounding meadows, increasing their vulnerability to sexual assault.³³ Explaining the dangers of bathing, one woman describes the situation. “There was no water to bathe, so the soldiers watched us bathe in the streams.”³⁴ Two separate IDP women drew an image depicting how close the women’s bathing area was to the adjacent army camp to highlight the lack of privacy.

Security

Security among displaced populations ranked high on the priorities for both advocacy and operational international non-governmental organizations (INGOs) operating in these areas. The list of serious concerns includes detention without charge, abductions, land mines, forced recruitment, sexual assault, intimidation, and lack of freedom of move-

ment.³⁵ One community organizer explains, “[i]n the process of looking for the LTTE, the army isolates young people. In a militarized society, young women are further isolated and placed at risk”.³⁶ Four separate female IDP interviewees recount that before reaching the camps, they were asked to strip naked and walk a long stretch while army personnel inspected them.³⁷ In an INGO session to commemorate UN Resolution 1325,³⁸ protection issues ranked highest on the list of concerns among women who were in camps or resettlement villages in the North-East.³⁹ Within the camps, women felt vulnerable to sexual assault among other forms of abuse and also feared the backlash of reporting such incidents.⁴⁰ “I have seen nearly every woman in the camp sexually harassed in some form by the soldiers,” recounts one survivor of sexual violence.⁴¹

Health and Trauma

Mental and physical health concerns for displaced persons deepened the trauma of life in the camps. The few medical doctors that continued to practice under adverse conditions also became the only available professionals to assess and deal with mental health concerns. One physician claims, “I saw people who could have been saved, the injured, lying beside the dead and I knew they would die.”⁴² Physicians were limited in their ability to deal with reproductive health due to government fears of the release of information about sexual assault.⁴³ Several of the asylum cases reviewed in London cited forced sterilization during their time in the camps, with some women being told that the foetus had been exposed to chemicals in the warzone.⁴⁴ Large-scale psychosocial trauma due to continued displacement led to a sharp increase in young women at risk of suicide.⁴⁵

Focusing on women’s experiences of vulnerability in a militarized context of displacement, this study does not imply that the impact on them is more significant or noteworthy than on other demographic groups. The emphasis on women’s experiences of displacement is, however, crucial to understanding the formation of their political identities, new forms of resistance, and their shifting position within Tamil society. This emphasis on women is often seen in the funding priorities of intervening organizations, whose program objectives ignore the political impact of traumatic events.

Some scholars highlight the flaws in these “gender-sensitive” trends in the INGO sector’s work with displaced populations as partially responsible for persistent issues affecting women.⁴⁶ In Sri Lanka, local NGOs or community-based organizations more attuned to effective responses to gender-specific concerns are often subsumed by donor interests.⁴⁷ Town-

hall style “awareness” sessions are poorly attended and can further ostracize women in displaced or resettled communities.⁴⁸ These women find themselves robbed of whatever agency a conservative society may have left them when they enter these spaces, becoming “victims to be pitied” rather than “survivors of adversity who often demonstrate unimaginable strength and dignity in the most adverse circumstances.”⁴⁹

The daily life struggles faced in camps should not further cast women into the role of victim. Rather they can be used to highlight that state repression presents itself and impacts women in less obvious ways than the measures previously used to understand its significance.⁵⁰ Both the conflict and multiple forms of overarching framings from the outside can make it challenging to identify any agency amongst this population of women, and even more difficult to discern the formation of nascent political identities.

How Women Rebelled: Displacement as State Repression (2000-2010)

Experiences with multiple forms of state repression shaped women’s agency in ways that formed the basis of emerging political identities.⁵¹ In Sri Lanka, myth and memory of moments of political repression are central to framing political identities.⁵² Applying this specifically to women, Jocelyn Viterna creates the concept of women’s “participation identities,” where multiple identities are competing for salience, offering important insights into variations in both the nature of state repression and its constantly shifting significance.⁵³

Representations of state repression are often exaggerated in political propaganda, which is then completely dismissed in existing analyses.⁵⁴ While “myth” plays a role in LTTE propaganda⁵⁵ interviews point to the superseding significance of *actual* memories of state repression for Tamil women. These memories resonated with the recruitment language of the movement but remained grounded in real experiences. Recruiting videos, statements, and indoctrination processes would have been largely ineffective in mobilizing Tamil women to take the risks required to revolt without a familiarity derived from personal experience. Among a variety of grievances, experiences with displacement were significant enough to raise the fundamental questions of justice, power, and inequality that would later inform their political activism.

Even against the backdrop of a constantly shifting and insecure physical space, an increasingly conservative Tamil society, and the restricted operational space available to women within the LTTE, women

found ways to exercise various forms of agency. Agency existed in multiple forms and at multiple levels that challenge any attempt to frame these women within an “agent” or “victim” binary.

As one form of oppositional agency, Tamil women challenged what was expected of them to confront multiple forms of state repression through their participation in armed movements.⁵⁶ Throughout the existence of the LTTE the total numbers of women varied, with estimates ranging from thirty per cent of combatants to unconfirmed rumours in the early 1990s that the number of female fighters had reached 50 per cent.⁵⁷ The most reliable estimates generally appear to be between fifteen and thirty per cent consistent participation of female fighters across the lifespan of the movement.⁵⁸

So what pushed these women to risk their lives and depart from culturally accepted roles to join the LTTE? The under-examined answer is indirect experiences with state repression, an answer that eight out of ten fighters referenced. These women highlight the process of displacement as contributing to their understandings of marginalization, repression, and social justice.

Referring to the struggle for food, Thava, who endured multiple displacements, comments: “Our family never had enough to eat, so studying didn’t seem that important to me.” She joined the LTTE initially because they offered her food three times a week.⁵⁹ Lavanya had been twice displaced from the tsunami and the conflict and had spent most of her days in camps feeling despondent about her possibilities for the future. “We would sit for hours in the hot sun, waiting for food, not knowing what we should do,” she says. When she had nightmares from the tsunami she was told she was “disturbed,” and felt like an outcast with mental illness. This is the reason she joined the LTTE to be accepted: “I thought in the LTTE, people would stop treating me as if I am crazy.”⁶⁰

Jeeva was finishing medical school when she was displaced. In the camps so many people lacked medical attention, she was able to help with basic medical knowledge: “I think through the movement I will better use my own skills, and also learn new ones.”⁶¹ Prema describes the inadequacies of shelter and the struggles of her large family. With seven brothers and sisters, her entire family lived in one tent in an IDP camp. She met the rebels who explained the situation of the Tamils and told her of other freedom struggles that had been successful. She says, “Things seemed like they were always unfair for Tamils, and in other places things had changed.”⁶²

As with the INGO reports, the most often noted concern and formative experiences were those with the lack of protection in the camps. For Yalini, “The IPKE [Indian Peacekeeping Force] came to search the

tent, and an ‘incident’ [rape] happened at that time. At least in the movement you are doing something for change.” Sri was abducted into the LTTE when walking to school. Referring to her time in the camps she said, “Someone was always dying or getting killed. I never really understood why.” She had not earlier thought of joining the movement, but was happy for the opportunity to do the same things as boys. “I never thought I would be a fighter, but when I had to go, I felt OK after a little while.”⁶³ Gaya was at the University of Jaffna and joined a group of women who intellectually related to the nationalist cause, believing in the need for a separate state. Her family was displaced once during the fighting, but was able to return to their home. “My whole life they have been everywhere, the army.”⁶⁴

Sujanthi joined as a young girl with the hope that she would have the opportunity to do something meaningful with her life. She watched her mother struggle as a widow in the camps, and the treatment she received from the community. Sujanthi felt that “[w]omen should learn to be stronger, even without men. This [joining the LTTE] was my opportunity to do something outside of this village,” she says.⁶⁵ While the reasons for joining are multiple and varied, in a majority of cases within this small sample size, experiences with displacement figured prominently in their own narratives.

Replaced and Unsettled: Gender-Based Political Violence (2009-2011)

Following the mass internment of civilians in the final war to wipe out the LTTE, communities were slowly returned to their place of origin or resettled in temporary shelters elsewhere. The experiences with this new context of an “open prison,”⁶⁶ in many ways mimicked concerns within the IDP camps. However, what was highlighted through direct interviews was the lack of protection and subsequent increased prevalence, and fear, of gender-based violence. As noted elsewhere, in post-conflict periods in Sri Lanka, the female body has been a site for violence, from both community members and at the hands of a militarized state.⁶⁷

Gender-based violence is something that is generally difficult to document,⁶⁸ but in Sri Lanka this has been increasingly so, with successive administrations clamping down on local and international organizations’ ability to address the issue.⁶⁹ My own interviews are supported by evidence and witness statements that point to higher levels of sexual assault, harassment and humiliation of women in conflict zones reported elsewhere.⁷⁰ Gender-based violence against Tamil women constitutes a

more direct form of state repression, an act of political violence more likely to reveal itself in a bracketed and finite period of time or moment leaving an indelible mark on Tamil women's emotional, social, and political beings.

When the State is Suspect

The most immediate physical concern for women was the lack of doors built on temporary shelters, exposing most of the estimated 89,000 women-headed households to a clear security threat.⁷¹ Military camps were located across the street from most "re-settlement villages," creating opportunities for abuse. Older women reported soldiers bringing food to their home, and expecting repayment in the form of sexual favours. "The soldiers observe the widows, they know if a male relative is leaving the house. Soldiers then enter the re-settled homes."⁷² Looting for gold jewellery is also reported as a gateway to rape.⁷³

Coercion is most clearly evident in the stark power differential between an army soldier and a young girl. Several interviews report young girls being given cell phones, taken to lodges, or transported to garment factories; events that led to various forms of sexual abuse. One church official reports, "[t]he lodge owner came to me, saddened in his inability to do anything. He had seen thirty young Tamil girls checked into his rooms, accompanied by soldiers."⁷⁴ Large numbers of young women "missing" from hospitals and checkpoints were assumed to have been raped or killed. One activist suggested that to understand the increase in sexual violence in the absence of clear data one has to only "check the hospital registers for the number of underage pregnancies and abortions reported."⁷⁵

*Prostitution: The Line Between Coercion and Rape*⁷⁶

Prostitution has consistently represented a gray area in our understanding of gender-based violence. One activist comments unequivocally, "prostitution in the Sri Lankan context is a form of sexual violence."⁷⁷ Observers and local residents reported that after six in the evening, the former conflict zones became a different territory. Some noticed the same soldier hovering outside a widow's home. Others worked with prostitutes who may have contracted infectious diseases. Still others noticed certain women having an easier time obtaining rations and basic supplies. Prostitution is increasingly widespread in these districts, yet never discussed for fear of both political retribution and cultural shame.⁷⁸

Those interviewed found the act of prostitution between Tamil women and members of the military to be a necessary act of survival, occupation, or exchange for protection purposes. One priest remarked, perhaps overly romanticizing life under the LTTE, that “[t]he LTTE is gone, now our girls have to sell themselves.”⁷⁹ Several interviewees had difficulty with the labels available to understand this new phenomenon: “It is hard to say whether it is rape or prostitution, as women may give in to advances in exchange for something.”⁸⁰

While the practice of prostitution or sexual exchange is largely informal, some reports indicate that local “middlemen” and police officers have begun to take advantage of an emerging underground market in sex work.⁸¹ In three distinct accounts from church and aid workers, women in awareness meetings have stood up to say, “He pays me 1000 Rupees a day, where else can I make that money for my family?”⁸² Despite the murky definitional space that sexual exchange exists within, what is clear is that between 2009 and 2011 there was a significant increase in prostitution and coercive gender-based violence.

Gender-Based Violence: A Direct Form of State Repression (2009-2011)

Though perhaps outside the scope of this study, the language used to describe gender-based violence is important to mention as a part of understanding the impact of traumatic events.⁸³ The words used to describe events that are traumatic or difficult to discuss often provide some distance from the events they describe, euphemizing them. In the same way that “conflict” is often referred to as “the problems” (*pirachachanaikal*), rape was often discussed as being “hit” (*adi*) or “the incident” (*sam-pavam*). Although these are small discrepancies in language, they do provide insight into how these events are processed and understood by both women and the larger Tamil society.⁸⁴

In all of the twenty-two cases of rape and sexual assault that I examined during this time period, where the Sri Lankan armed forces or their affiliates were the alleged perpetrators of violence, the political power dynamic was clearly skewed.⁸⁵ A general sense of triumphalism was pervasive in the extensive military apparatus now governing these areas.⁸⁶ Acts of gender-based violence occurring within this environment can be seen as political in nature where ethnic Tamil civilians are targeted, and even more distinctly in acts of gender-based violence against ex-LTTE cadres. Among the reasons for the prevalence of gender-based violence in warzones,⁸⁷ most members of the community and local civil society

felt that there were political undertones to most acts of gender-based violence, and that the opportunities for it to take place were created by a specific political context.⁸⁸

The open-ended style of interviewing, with specific follow-up questions, also revealed that the women chose to tell those aspects of their life history that were most disrupted by acts of gender-based violence. A life of poverty was highlighted in the sudden inability to get married and relieve the financial burden of elders. Academic achievements were referenced where the opportunity to excel had been interrupted. They would mention the number of younger siblings when they became suddenly conscious that their personal trauma would bring shame to the entire family.

Earlier interviews with women in the LTTE found that six out of ten women mentioned an experience with sexual assault, or the fear of sexual abuse, as a part of their decision to take up arms. "With a gun, you know you can protect yourself, even from terrible crimes like rape," said Gaya.⁸⁹ The option of joining the LTTE did not exist for these women, but similar signs of a budding political consciousness could be seen. In almost all of the cases, the act itself marked a significant departure from their expected life paths, and they began to think about, if not act upon, questions of injustice, inequality, and revenge.

Why Tamil Women Rebel: The Context of Repression

Existing theories on pathways to participation seem less relevant for the case of women in the LTTE.⁹⁰ My research takes a more incisive look at the role of contextual pressures and finds that frustrations with cultural restrictions alongside experiences with both direct and indirect forms of state repression figure most prominently in the narrative of causality.⁹¹ Between the two, state repression emerges as the most significant.

In cases where women had heard or been exposed to recruitment language that incorporated the notion of women's liberation, it increased the appeal but was never the sole or primary reason for participation. Immediate, experience-based concerns dominated their thinking in their decision (when not forced) to join the movement over ideological engagements except in the case of a select few. In these participants, political identities were still formed at a similar nexus of recruitment, motivation, and experience, though higher levels of education allowed for experiences to be situated within a particular political platform. This has been labelled by other scholars as a "participation" identity. However, in the case of Tamil women's participation in the LTTE, the partially forced nature of participation makes it more useful to understand the formation

of women's broader political identities.⁹² This study provides an insight into state repression that reveals the ways in which women's positioning through processes like displacement and gender-based violence can inform women's political identities in violent and nonviolent ways.

While less common, some of the non-fighter women interviewed, as well as several women drawn from the data set of women affected by gender-based violence, expressed forms of oppositional agency in non-violent ways. Such non-violent options were less immediately and obviously available to women, with only a few community groups working towards creating safe spaces for discussion and action.⁹³ The three interviewees who volunteered or participated in the activities of these groups felt that their experiences had created in them a desire to take action towards social change, yet they were unable or unwilling to take the risks required of joining the insurgency movement.

The constant across women who acted to change their individual situation or the collective position of Tamil society was a shift in their own self-perception. The act of taking control of even the smallest aspect of their existence did inform a new sense of identity as Tamil women, one that challenged their own belief in their capacity to act.⁹⁴

Re-resisting: The Potential for Women's Political Activism

Within the broad category of contextual pressures, cultural restrictions have been identified as weighing on some female combatants, increasing the "liberatory" draw of joining the LTTE.⁹⁵ While it is not possible within the scope of this piece to fully address the role of cultural norms, in research I conducted from 2000 to 2010, the conservative expectations of women did emerge as a relevant factor in the life histories of female combatants in the LTTE. Research carried out in 2010-2011 finds that shifts in Tamil culture due to prolonged displacement and militarization have had a distinct impact on women, which is examined here in order to paint a more complete picture of the evolving context within which Tamil women are situated.

Some studies rely on assumptions of social and cultural norms as being relatively static and uniformly applied across time and space with some variation allowed for peacetime ("normal" vs. conflict). Within the conflict zones of the North and East that were alternately under the control of state and non-state actors, these norms are often suspended, reframed, or ignored all together. In 2010 and 2011, nearly every interview with members of civil society alluded to the "destruction of the

social fabric of Tamil society”⁹⁶ through overlapping processes of militarization, displacement, and resettlement.⁹⁷

Whereas under the LTTE strict codes of behaviour prevented the disintegration of moral values, the period following the cessation of hostilities saw large increases in early marriages, domestic violence, alcoholism, and low levels of school attendance. Pervasive levels of depression among the general population question the permanence of these patterns of behaviour, or their impact on the erosion of “traditional” Tamil society. One activist frames the shifts as “an outcome of suppressed trauma and a disintegrated social structure.”⁹⁸ As Tamil society in districts across the North and East remain under the controlled supervision of the Sri Lankan army, the state of Tamil culture as it would function in a free society is difficult to ascertain. It is perhaps most useful to see it as existing in a reactive state of suspension. Within this temporary space where Tamil culture is both changing and threatened, women bear the brunt of what most people see as a disturbing re-entrenchment into traditionalism.⁹⁹

With widespread gender-based violence in the public realm, the mobility of women is strictly limited. Yet the culture refuses to soften its reception of survivors of gender-based violence. One woman who was raped stayed in the church home until she “lost some of the baby weight” to avoid the harsh censure of community gossip. Women who were involved in the movement “who before were seen as heroes, will now be seen as stupid.”¹⁰⁰ People will say: “You see this is what happens when girls get involved in politics.”¹⁰¹ These women, who have already gone through combat training and have experienced fleeting feelings of freedom, gender equality, and shifting self-perceptions, are now forced to adapt, or “reintegrate” into an even more conservative social space.

While the tendency of INGOs on the outside is to condemn “cultural” obstacles for women, it is important to note that for Tamils the symbolic threat to their identity creates a tight fist around tradition. The practical implications of more liberal behavioural patterns may have dire implications in a highly militarized environment. In its transient form, Tamil culture appears to be wrapped around security and survival, rather than rooted in traditionalism.

As culture and context begin once again to move towards extreme points of pressure on Tamil women, the future potential of political activism is in question. The first, most obvious, distinction from earlier political trajectories is the absence of the LTTE, which both addressed and capitalized upon women’s grievances to create and sustain a nationalist identity.¹⁰² Immediately following the war, large segments of the population were suspicious if not opposed to the LTTE due to the behaviour of members in the final weeks of fighting.¹⁰³ However, by 2011, there was

a discernible shift as civil society members and IDPs alike began to see violence as the only viable option to combat state repression. Despite their flaws, one community member mused, “at least they fought for the rights of Tamils, rights that are still being denied.”¹⁰⁴

Without the umbrella of an established insurgent movement, the risks for women’s political activism are higher than they have ever been.¹⁰⁵ In the context of pervasive militarization,¹⁰⁶ the physical risks of challenging the state are so high that imaginings of an armed response has largely dissipated.¹⁰⁷ Women activists in Colombo and elsewhere continue to mobilize and raise awareness on behalf of Tamil women in the North and East,¹⁰⁸ but an authentic representative voice for the concerns of Tamil women is now--and perhaps always has been--absent. Although Tamil women currently exist in a highly repressive context, a more nuanced understanding of the impact of repression on their political identities provides insight into the sustainability of the current peace, and has wide-ranging policy implications for our understanding of female participation in political violence. ■

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Notes

¹ Civil Society 6, Personal Interview, June 2011, Mannar: Sri Lanka.

² Jocelyn Viterna, “Pulled, Pushed, and Persuaded: Explaining Women’s Mobilization into the Salvadoran Guerilla Army”, *American Journal of Sociology*, Vol. 112, No.1 (July 2006):1-45. Adele Balasingham, *The Will to Freedom: An Inside View of Tamil Resistance* (London: Fairmax Publishing, 2001). Neloufer De Mel, “Agent or Victim: The Sri Lankan Woman Militant in the Interregnum”, *Women and the Nation’s Narrative: Gender and Nationalism in Twentieth Century Sri Lanka*. (New Delhi: Kali for Women, 2001). Karla Cunningham, “Cross-Regional Trends in Female Terrorism”, *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism* 26 (May-June 2003): 171-195.

³ Viterna, *Women’s Mobilization*. Balasingham, *Freedom*. Cunningham, *Female Terrorism*. Miranda Alison, “Cogs in the Wheel? Women in the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam”, *Civil Wars* 6 (Winter 2003): 37-54. Linda M. Labao, “Women in Revolutionary Movements: Changing Patterns of Latin American Guerilla Struggle” in *Women and Revolution: Global Expressions* (Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic Publishing, 1998).

⁴ Macartan Humphreys and Jeremy Weinstein, “Handling and Manhandling Civilians in Civil War: Determinants of the Strategies of Warring Factions.” *American*

Political Science Review (August 2006): 429-447. Stathis Kalyvas, "The Ontology of 'Political Violence': Action and Identity in Civil Wars", *Perspectives on Politics*, Vol.1, No.3 (September 2003): 475-494. Jason Lyall, "Does Indiscriminate Violence In-cite Insurgent Attacks? Evidence from Chechnya", *Journal of Conflict Resolution*, Vol. 53:3 (June 2009): 331-362. Robert Justin Goldstein, *Political Repression in Modern America: from 1870 to the Present* (Cambridge: MA: Schenkman Books, 1978). Christian Davenport, "State Repression and Political Order", *Annual Review of Political Science* 10 (June 2007): 1-23. "Repression involves the actual or threatened use of physical sanctions against an individual or organization, within the territorial jurisdiction of the state, for the purpose of imposing a cost on the target as well as deterring specific activities and/or beliefs perceived to be challenging to government personnel, practices or institutions" (Goldstein, *Political Repression*, xxvii). The actual activities involved in state repression include "harassment, surveillance/spy-ing, bans, arrests, torture, and mass killings by government agents and/or affiliates within their territorial jurisdiction" (Davenport, *State Repression*, 1).

⁵ Viterna, *Women's Mobilization*.

⁶ Cunningham, *Female Terrorism*, 186.

⁷ Miranda Alison, "Women as Agents of Political Violence", *Security Dialogue* 35 (December 2004): 447-463.

⁸ Barbara Harrell-Bond, "Can Humanitarian Work With Refugees be Humane", *Human Rights Quarterly* 24 (November 2002): 51-85.

⁹ Viterna, *Women's Mobilization*. Cunningham, *Female Terrorism*.

¹⁰ Dierdre McConnell, "The Tamil People's Right to Self-Determination", *Cambridge Review of International Affairs*, Volume 2.1 (March 2008).

¹¹ This study looks at Tamil women living in the Northern and Eastern Districts of the island, which have consistently been the areas directly affected by conflict, as well as the base of the Tamil resistance movement.

¹² De Mel, *Agent/Victim*. Joke Schrijvers, "Fighters, Victims and Survivors: Constructions of Ethnicity, Gender and Refugeeness Among Tamils in Sri Lanka", *Journal of Refugee Studies*, Vol. 12, No. 3 (1999). Jennifer Hyndman and Malathi De Alwis, "Beyond Gender: Towards a Feminist Analysis of Humanitarianism and Development in Sri Lanka", *Women's Studies Quarterly* 31 (Fall-Winter 2003): 212-226. Deniz Gokalp, "A Gendered Analysis of Violence, Justice, and Citizenship: Kurdish Women Facing War and Displacement in Turkey", *Women's Studies International Forum* (Volume 33: Issue 6, 2010), 561-569.

¹³ De Mel, *Agent/Victim*.

¹⁴ Schrijvers, *Refugeeness*, 307.

¹⁵ Some studies around displacement rely solely on humanitarian data due to the challenges of obtaining direct interviews (Elisabeth Jean Wood, "Variation in Sexual Violence During War", *Politics and Society* 34 (March 2009) :307.)

¹⁶ While pursuing my doctorate, I directed humanitarian operations for a disaster relief organization in Sri Lanka, India, and Pakistan also representing the organization at the United Nations and directing the Sri Lanka Working Group of INGOs. In this capacity, I had access to periodic assessments and humanitarian reports that provide a detailed picture of the broader physical spaces and policy debates which defined life for all Tamil civilians. Human rights and humanitarian reports highlight issues of specific concern to women and challenges faced by women impacted by overlapping processes of conflict, militarization, and displacement.

¹⁷ These categories are: Food, Shelter, Security, Health and Trauma, with a specific focus on the impact on women.

¹⁸ The views and analysis presented here do not represent the views of the International Crisis Group.

¹⁹ The names of all individuals are changed, or referred to by interview number due to ongoing security concerns.

²⁰ "The way gender operates in society, the public is typically the domain of the male, and the home or inner space is represented by women." (Partha Chatterjee, *Recasting Women: Essays in Colonial History* (New Delhi: Kali for Women, 1989, 239.) As the public space in the North and East became increasingly militarized throughout the conflict, the physical absence of women became more pronounced. These societal norms create a public (political)/private (apolitical) distinction, casting women as "politically invisible beings" (Spike Peterson, "Review: Women and Gender in Power/Politics, Nationalism and Revolution", *The Journal of Politics* Vol.58, No. 3 (August 1996): 870-878), contributing to women's exclusion in general from various analyses of political processes.

²¹ Over the time period looked at in this study, various humanitarian and rights groups report the numbers of displaced civilians in the conflict-affected districts as between 300,000 and 550,000 from 2000-2010, with a spike in numbers in 2005 after the 2004 Indian Ocean Tsunami (Human Rights Watch. *Besieged, Displaced, and Detained: The Plight of Civilians in Sri Lanka's Vanni Region* (December 2008); Norwegian Refugee Council. *Civilians in the Way of Conflict: Displaced People in Sri Lanka* (September 2007)).

²² Schrijvers, *Refugeeness*, 309.

²³ Norwegian Refugee Council. *Civilians in the Way of Conflict: Displaced People in Sri Lanka* (September 2007).

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Human Rights Watch. *Besieged, Displaced, and Detained: The Plight of Civilians in Sri Lanka's Vanni Region* (December 2008). NRC, 2007.

²⁶ "I", Personal Interview, March 2011, London: UK.

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ Church staff, Personal Interview, October 2010, Mannar: Sri Lanka.

²⁹ Civil Society 5, Personal Interview, October 2010, Colombo: Sri Lanka. This issue reached a critical point in September 2008, when the GOSL kicked all INGOs out of the conflict zone, a policy which "drastically worsened the plight of the civilian population, significantly reducing prospects that essential food, water, sanitation and health care would reach the population" (NRC 2007). The following year, in 2009, UNICEF, the World Food Program and others warned of severe food shortages for children and other vulnerable populations in displaced camps.

³⁰ HRW, 2008. NRC, 2007.

³¹ "L", Personal Interview, March 2011, London: UK.

³² "P", Personal Interview, June 2011, Vavuniya: Sri Lanka.

³³ Local newspapers reported that a fourteen year old girl was raped as she searched for a more remote, shaded location to relieve herself; "Dr. P", Personal Interview, June 2011, Colombo: Sri Lanka; Anonymous Civilians, Personal Interviews, Batticaloa, July 2008.

³⁴ "L", Personal Interview, March 2011, London: UK.

³⁵ HRW, 2008. NRC, 2007. Global Tamil Forum, *Sri Lankan Internment Camp: International Community Helping Interned Communities Achieve Freedom of Movement and Self Sufficiency* (September 2009).

³⁶ Civil Society 11, Personal Interview, June 2011, Vavuniya, Sri Lanka.

³⁷ Survivors 2, 3, 5, Personal Interviews, October 2011, Vavuniya, Sri Lanka.

³⁸ United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325, adopted unanimously on 31 October 2000. After recalling resolutions 1261 (1999), 1265 (1999), 1296 (2000) and 1314 (2000), the Council urged the adoption of a gender perspective that included the special needs of women and girls during repatriation and resettlement, rehabilitation, reintegration and post-conflict reconstruction. United Nations, October 2000.

³⁹ Focus-sponsored meeting. Internal notes on the Implementation of UN Resolution 1325. (January 2011).

⁴⁰ Anonymous, civilian interviews, 2010, Vavuniya: Sri Lanka.

⁴¹ "S", Personal Interview, March 2011, London: UK. Several women also reported that though UNHCR established a desk in refugee camps for women to report abuses, the hovering military personnel around the desk deterred most women from approaching or reporting any abuses. Those that did report any issues faced by women, or searched for missing young women, found themselves the subject of harassment or accusations of collaboration with the insurgent movement ("Dr. M", Physician, Personal Interview, October 2010, Vavuniya: Sri Lanka).

⁴² Physician 1, Personal Interview, October 2010, Vavuniya: Sri Lanka.

⁴³ Anonymous Aid Worker, Personal Interview, October 2010, Colombo: Sri Lanka.

⁴⁴ Lawyer 2, Survivor 4, Personal Interviews, March 2011, London: UK.

⁴⁵ Civil Society 16, Personal Interview, June 2011, Vavuniya: Sri Lanka.

⁴⁶ Hyndman and De Alwis, *Beyond Gender*. Several local interviews mentioned programming interventions which significantly increased the vulnerability of women. Among these were a USAID funded apparel training center in a remote area, next to a large military camp as well as an INGO supported "Happiness Center" where toys and games were provided by military personnel to young children (including young women) to reduce the fear of the military amongst young people.

⁴⁷ Civil Society 17, Personal Interview, Vavuniya: Sri Lanka, June 2011.

⁴⁸ Civil Society 1, Personal Interview, Colombo: Sri Lanka, October 2010.

⁴⁹ Harrell-Bond, *Humane*, 52.

⁵⁰ Davenport, *State Repression*.

⁵¹ When focusing on individual agency, it is more helpful to borrow from a discourse within Anthropology. Among those scholars who understand the "social nature of agency and the pervasive influence on human intentions, beliefs, and actions" (Laura Ahearn, "Language and Agency", *Annual Review of Anthropology* 30 (October 2001): 109-137, 129) there are those who specifically highlight multiple forms of agency (oppositional agency being one of them) (Saba Mahmood, *The Politics of Piety: The Islamic Revival and the Feminist Subject* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005)).

⁵² Valentine E. Daniels, *Charred Lullabies: Chapters in an Anthropology of Violence*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996). Bruce Kapferer, "Ethnic Nationalism and the Discourses of Violence in Sri Lanka", *Communal/Plural*, 4 (2001). Stanley J. Tambiah, *Leveling Crowds: Ethnonationalist Conflicts and Collective Violence in South Asia* (California: University of California Press, 1996).

⁵⁴ Peter Schalk, "Women Fighters of the Liberation Tigers of Tamililam: The Martial Feminism of Atel Palcinkam", *South Asia Research* No. 14, (Autumn 1994): 163-83.

⁵⁵ Radhika Coomaraswamy, "LTTE Women—Is This Liberation", *The Sunday Times*, January 5, 1997.

⁵⁶ Women did participate in other armed groups, however the data from this study is drawn from the LTTE, eventually the largest and most dominant group.

⁵⁷ Schalk, *Women Fighters*. Balasingham, Freedom.

⁵⁸ Alison, Agents. After the induction of women into the LTTE in late 1983, the women formed a separate fighting unit, the Women's Military Wing, where everything from leadership to military training was done by women themselves (Balasingham 1993, 19). After initially informally engaging in battles in the Jaffna Peninsula, the male leadership felt the women should receive formal military training, and opened the first camp site in the Jaffna Peninsula on July 1, 1987. The rigors of the initial training period are often cited by former fighters—even years after their induction into the movement.

⁵⁹ "Thava", Personal Interview, August 2006, Batticaloa: Sri Lanka.

⁶⁰ "Lavanya", Personal Interview, June 2011, Vavuniya: Sri Lanka.

⁶¹ "Jeeva", Personal Interview, July 2007, Jaffna: Sri Lanka.

⁶² "Prema", Personal Interview, November 2008, Trincomalee: Sri Lanka.

⁶³ "Sri", Personal Interview, July 2004, Killinochi: Sri Lanka.

⁶⁴ "Gaya", Personal Interview, August 2006, Batticaloa: Sri Lanka.

⁶⁵ "Sujanathi", Personal Interview, November 2011, Batticaloa: Sri Lanka.

⁶⁶ Activist 1, Personal Interview, October 2011, Colombo: Sri Lanka.

⁶⁷ Anuradha M. Chenoy, *Militarism and Women in South Asia* (New Delhi: Kali for Women, 2002). Neloufer De Mel, *Militarizing Sri Lanka: Popular Culture, Memory and Narrative in the Armed Conflict*, (New Delhi: Sage Publications, 2007).

⁶⁸ Gender-based violence has been defined as acts of sexual humiliation, rape, forced sex, prostitution, sexual slavery, and sexual assault. (Article 8 (2)(e)(vi)-I – (vi)-6, Elements of Crimes, Rome Statute). Gender-based violence is both a product of a broken social order as well as a systematic political tool deployed by both state and non-state actors (Panos Institute, 1995, p.8).

⁶⁹ Anonymous staff for Oxfam International, Personal Interview, 2009, New York: New York.

⁷⁰ John Lee Anderson, "Death of The Tiger: Sri Lanka's Brutal Victory Over its Tamil Insurgents", *The New Yorker* January 17, 2011. Center for Policy Alternatives, A Profile of Human Rights and Humanitarian Issues in the Vanni and Vavuniya, March 2009. International Crisis Group. Sri Lanka: Women's Insecurity in the North and East. *Asia Report* No 217, December 2011.

⁷¹ Civil Society 1, Personal Interview, October 2010, Colombo: Sri Lanka.

⁷² Civil Society 15, Personal Interview, June 2011, Colombo: Sri Lanka.

⁷³ Civil Society 7, Personal Interview, June 2011, Colombo: Sri Lanka.

⁷⁴ Civil Society 5, Personal Interview, June 2011, Vavuniya: Sri Lanka.

⁷⁵ Civil Society 17, Personal Interview, June 2011, Mannar: Sri Lanka.

⁷⁶ Interviews that touch on the increase and prevalence of prostitution amongst the Tamil population of women were entirely from members of civil society or caretakers of young women because nobody in the society would admit to engaging in that sort of behaviour directly.

⁷⁷ Anonymous civil society worker, Personal Interview, October 2010, Colombo: Sri Lanka. (Multiple CS 1-10). This section draws on anonymous interviews with civil society workers, carried out in October 2010 and June 2011.

⁷⁸ Civil Society 23, Personal Interview, June 2011, Colombo: Sri Lanka.

⁷⁹ Church staff, Personal Interview, October 2010, Mannar: Sri Lanka.

⁸⁰ Civil Society 4, 13, 16, Personal Interviews, June 2011, Colombo, Vavuniya: Sri Lanka.

⁸¹ Civil Society 11, Personal Interview, June 2011, Vavuniya: Sri Lanka.

⁸² Ibid.

⁸³ Veena Das, *Life and Words: Violence and the Descent Into The Ordinary* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2007).

⁸⁴ Across all of the interviews, the act of rape was difficult to discuss, women were uncomfortable, shy, or reticent to talk about the details. Some expressed their ability to discuss these issues with me, because I was "like them".

⁸⁵ Partly due to the time period and the corresponding phase of the conflict, all of

the cases involved populations in territories recently taken away from the LTTE by GOSL forces.

⁸⁶ International Crisis Group, Sri Lanka's North II: Rebuilding Under the Military, *Asia Report* No 229, March 2012.

⁸⁷ Wood, *Sexual Violence*, 307.

⁸⁸ Discussing the rape of a 55 year old woman in his district, one pastor said "She was older, and very unattractive, which, you know, must mean this is an act of political violence. An act of war" (CS 6, 2010).

⁸⁹ "Gaya" Personal Interview, August 2006, Batticaloa: Sri Lanka.

⁹⁰ Partly due to the time period and the corresponding phase of the conflict, all of the cases involved populations in territories recently taken over by government forces away from the LTTE.

⁹¹ "Our social setup, its restriction on creative expressions for women and the evils of the dowry system, are some of the social factors that led to their initial recruitment" (Rajini Thiranagama, "No More Tears Sister", *The Broken Palmyrah* . (Claremont, CA: Sri Lanka Studies Institute, 1990) 305-330, 325).

⁹² Human rights reports, as well as direct interviews find that a significant percentage of female recruits to the LTTE were forcibly abducted or coerced into the movement.

⁹³ Suriya Women's Center/UTHR.

⁹⁴ Shifting self-perceptions for Tamil women were analyzed through in-depth, open-ended interviews.

⁹⁵ Thiranagama, Tears. Adele Balasingham, *Women Fighters of The Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam* (Jaffna: LTTE International Secretariat, 1993).

⁹⁶ Anonymous, civil society worker, Personal Interview, October 2010, Colombo: Sri Lanka.

⁹⁷ The LTTE created a link between morality and the Tamil nation , and aimed to eliminate social ailments such as alcoholism, pornography, domestic violence, sexual violence (often correlated with the "impure" Singhalese occupiers) from their territories. As a result severe punishments were meted out for any case of domestic abuse or sexual violence (Schalk 2005; Wood 2009).

⁹⁸ Anonymous, Personal Interview, June 2011: Colombo: Sri Lanka.

⁹⁹ International Crisis Group, 2011.

¹⁰¹ Ibid.

¹⁰² There is an extensive debate surrounding the capacity of nationalist movements to address and improve the status of women in society. One set of arguments expects that the inclusion of women in these movements will elevate the status of women in society (Darini Rajasingham-Senanayake "Ambivalent Empowerment: The Tragedy of Tamil Women in Conflict", in *Women, War and Peace in South Asia* (New Delhi: Sage Publications, 2001): 105-125). The second deconstructs this expectation, finding that the structurally subordinate position of women in society will lead to gender inequality in the movement (Laboa 1998; Djebbar 1992; Coomaraswamy 1988; Schalk 1994). The LTTE, I find, is somewhere in between these two, with elements of their overall ideology that are practical and heavily rooted in reality, and those that are emphasized for instrumental purposes such as recruitment. The counter-militarization process that in itself created vulnerabilities for women is justified as part of a broader intention to improve the security of Tamil women in relation to the state. They also enacted several policies within controlled territories that improved the daily lives of women, leading some women nostalgically to comment: "We women had it good under the LTTE" (Crisis Group 2011).

¹⁰³ Credible reports find that the LTTE did use civilians as "human-shields" in the final phases of war. (UN Report 2011).

¹⁰⁴ Anonymous Civilian Interview, June 2011, Vavuniya: Sri Lanka.

¹⁰⁵ A recent interview in Colombo revealed that even peaceful protests by Mothers of The Disappeared in Batticaloa were interrupted by military riot police. Anonymous, Personal Interview, March 2013, Colombo: Sri Lanka.

¹⁰⁶ See an extensive discussion on state militarization in "How Women Rebel: Gender and Agency in Sri Lanka", Gowrinathan, 2012.

¹⁰⁷ Women activists report being called to military headquarters to report on activities, military involvement in the selection of beneficiaries, and military presence at any meeting over five people.

¹⁰⁸ A recent women's meeting in Girithale concluded: "It is important to broaden and strengthen the standard of governing protection and promotion of women's human rights in the post war situation, especially with a society in transition, and to move away from a framework focusing solely on violence and the protection of women. This includes engaging in many ways to focus on political, cultural, and social changes."

Gender Dynamics and Women's Changing Roles in Johannesburg's Somali Community

MARNIE SHAFFER

ABSTRACT

Somali refugees arrived in Johannesburg, South Africa following *apartheid's* official end in 1994. They have since established a well-organized community in Mayfair, a suburb just west of the city centre, which continues to grow as Somalis migrate to the country in search of peace, security, and livelihood opportunities. Life in South Africa pushes women to adopt new roles and challenge customary gender models while maintaining their household management responsibilities. Several variables shape gender dynamics and contribute to gender negotiations in Mayfair. Shifting family and household structures influence women's changing roles and complicate gender relations as more women, single and married, participate in economic activities and manage their homes and families with limited male support. Customary socio-cultural constructs largely confine women's roles to those performed in the household, but displacement and settlement processes challenge these models and push women into new roles, often with contradictory outcomes. These cultural elements are further complicated by larger South African contexts. Rampant discrimination, abuse, and xenophobic violence against migrants—and Somalis in particular—at the hands of South Africans, law enforcement officers, and state institutions charged with protecting and assisting migrants, invoke fear among Somalis. They increase women's vulnerability, and limit their opportunities as they scrape by with few economic resources. The paradox of women assuming new roles as they are simultaneously limited by the realities of living in South Africa poses important questions about how these contradictions affect gender relations. This article argues that these social and institutional structures are collectively significant to understanding how these complex processes shape refugees' lives and women's roles. It also demonstrates the importance of examining gender relationships within their specific contexts to determine how and why women's roles change and what those differences mean in refugee settlement communities.

Somalia's protracted conflict and subsequent refugee crisis created a global diaspora that continues to grow in number. With more than one million Somalis living in diaspora, and anywhere between 27,000 and 40,000 residing in South Africa alone,¹ Somali refugees span every corner of the globe but remain heavily concentrated in East Africa. Influxes of Somalis arrived in Johannesburg following *apartheid's* official end in 1994. They have since established a well-organized community in Mayfair, a suburb just west of the city centre, which thrives as Somalis migrate to the country in search of peace, security, and livelihoods.

Arriving at different times and bringing their varied experiences with them, members of the Mayfair community face monumental challenges as they negotiate and construct new identities in a country that is often hostile to foreigners. The process of uprooting, migration, and settlement influences changing gender models throughout the diaspora, and the composition of Mayfair Somalis presents an especially important opportunity to explore the ways in which shifting household, family, and community structures in tandem with the larger social, cultural, and political dynamics of South Africa shape gender relations and the construction of women's roles in the country.

Women and men often find themselves in South Africa without the familial and social networks that sustained them in Somalia. One outcome of this transformative process is the importance of women's economic participation as a survival strategy; women may provide much of a household's financial support even when living with a spouse. While women assume new roles to maintain nuclear and extended families, their activities can strain marriages and lead to divorce, a notable pattern observed in other Somali diaspora communities.² Furthermore, some members of the community may perceive women's engagement in paid labour as a challenge to the customs that define women's roles as those performed in the house, which leads to accusations of cultural and religious abandonment.

Amongst the most pressing issues in post-*apartheid* South Africa are grinding poverty, high unemployment rates, inadequate housing, and poor service delivery. Pervasive immigration—legal and illegal—invokes xenophobic attitudes and behaviours from citizens who feel migrants, and especially black migrants from around the continent, threaten to take South Africans' already scarce economic opportunities while aggravating the country's high crime rates. These realities have serious implications for Somali women in particular. While emigration

from Somalia's patriarchal society to a constitutionally progressive South Africa might intimate empowerment and greater freedom for women,³ discrimination, crime, and xenophobia hinder women's ability to act on their newly ascribed rights and opportunities outside of Mayfair. Somali socio-cultural constructs and larger social contexts play a critical role in how Somalis understand their position and opportunities in South Africa. This article explores gender dynamics and the intersection of multiple factors that shape gender relations as Somali refugees rebuild their lives in Mayfair.

Situating an Ethnographic Study in Mayfair

Mayfair is home to about eighty-nine per cent of all Somalis who live in Johannesburg,⁴ making it the uncontested heart of the Somali community. Based on estimates from community leaders, around 5,000 Somalis live in the Mayfair area. Somalis were initially drawn to this part of Johannesburg, known as the Islamic centre of the city, for the mosques, halal butchers, and Muslim cultural services that South African Indian Muslim communities established. Moreover, its proximity to the city centre was important for developing successful businesses and trading schemes.⁵ Somali shopkeepers who work in townships—or settlements outside of the city—often purchase bulk goods in Mayfair which they transport to and sell in their shops. Many of the Somalis who live in Mayfair work and interact within the confines of the area to maximize the use of their networks and employment opportunities.

Mayfair, approximately one square kilometre in area, holds dozens of Somali-owned and operated businesses, including restaurants, clothing shops, small groceries, electronics shops, internet cafés, and guesthouses. Most shops and social activities are situated on 8th Avenue and in the Somali-owned Amal Shopping Centre, where businesses flourish and Somalis spend time shopping and socializing. The Somali community is the largest and most visible ethnic group in Mayfair even as South African Indians and other migrants from around the continent live and trade in the area.

Social and institutional discrimination are an everyday reality for Somalis. Scant social and humanitarian assistance forces refugees to develop livelihood strategies that ensure survival. Moreover, even with legal refugee status, Somalis seldom receive the health, employment, and educational opportunities to which they are entitled. With national unemployment at approximately forty per cent⁶ and joblessness in Gauteng Province at more than twenty-six per cent at the time of fieldwork,⁷

Somalis are disadvantaged as they search for financial resources. Therefore, they find alternative niches to develop their livelihoods.

Xenophobic attitudes and hostility toward migrants often lead to violence, and Somalis are frequently victims of robbery and other attacks even as the threat of criminal victimization is a reality for all South Africans.⁸ The most abhorrent crime occurs in townships, where primarily male Somali shopkeepers face risks including looting, burning, and homicide. Mayfair residents also confront persistent threats or violations against them, including in their homes. Sixty-five per cent of Somalis in this study have experienced crime — defined as any harmful act against a person or her or his property — by non-Somali nationals in South Africa. Police corruption exacerbates Somalis' insecurity: seventy per cent of the Mayfair population has been subjected to police interrogations, has seen their documents destroyed, or has been forced to pay bribes.⁹

Methodology and Informant Characteristics

The author conducted ethnographic fieldwork between 2010 and 2011 to study Somali gender relations in Mayfair. Over the course of the research period, the author used chain referral selection in tandem with convenience sampling to recruit thirty women and thirty men who participated in three separate interviews—unstructured, narrative, and semi-structured. The interviewees ranged in age from eighteen to forty-seven years. The study elicits data on their experiences as migrants, including the social and institutional barriers they face in South Africa, and on their home, work, and cultural lives prior to migration and in a South African context. Spending the largest part of fieldwork in Mayfair, the author frequently held group interviews with women and men to discuss data, clarify concepts, and elaborate on events in the community. Moreover, focus group interviews provided an engaging forum for debate, covering gendered perspectives on xenophobia, barriers to employment, and changing gender roles and relations in Johannesburg. Collectively these interviews offer insight into cultural constructions and gender conflicts in Mayfair.

All informants were ethnic Somalis but vary in origin. They were born and raised throughout Somalia, Ethiopia, Kenya, and other African countries. Some never experienced Somalia's civil war directly while others survived the perils of Mogadishu or the hardship of life in refugee camps before settling in South Africa. Their demographic characteristics are variable: informants have divergent educational backgrounds, marital statuses, language abilities, household compositions, migration patterns,

and economic strategies. They arrived in South Africa between 1995 and 2010, which is important for understanding some of the conflicting ideologies in the community. Those who settled in the wake of *apartheid*, and before Somalis had established their community in Mayfair, experienced the country's euphoria at *apartheid*'s end and the subsequent disappointment fuelled by extensive social and institutional challenges. The early arrivals skirted violence in Somalia and interacted with other nationals in South Africa. Many learned English, found jobs, befriended non-Somali nationals, such as South African Indian Muslims, and enjoyed their independence. Conversely, more recent arrivals brought their experiences of conflict and war to Mayfair with them. Informants noted distinctions between these two groups: many older migrants perceive newer arrivals as culturally ignorant for never knowing a peaceful Somalia and often attribute many of the community's problems to the newer migrants, who they see as bringing suspicion, violence, and immorality to Mayfair.¹⁰

The group classified as 'new Somalis' arrived in South Africa between 2004 and 2005 onward. Generally speaking, they are more conservative religiously, reluctant to interact with those outside their community, and unwilling to learn and respect South African laws and social codes of behaviour. The significance of this cultural and ideological blurring is that Somalis find themselves marginalized in broader society and often fragmented in Mayfair. Not only does this confuse the vision of who Somalis are as they form new identities in South Africa, but it has serious implications for women's behaviour, mobility, and opportunities.

Women's Employment and Gender Relations in Settlement: A Review of the Literature

A number of variables shape refugee experiences of loss and exile. These include "structural similarities or dissimilarities between themselves and receiving societies, availability and accessibility of resources and income-generating opportunities, availability and nature of assistance at the initial stage, host government policies and practices, [and] attitudes of nationals towards refugees."¹¹ These components are collectively important to lived realities in different communities around the world, as are the socio-cultural structures refugees carry with them in settlement. Understanding the gendered dimensions of migration outcomes, changing roles, and power contests must include an examination of situational macro and micro level structures.¹²

Somalis organize their lives around kin and social relations, and they rely upon those networks for support. Women are integral to establishing

new kinship ties through marriage, a route through which the dower contract grants husbands full rights over their wives.¹³ This problematizes divorce for women who risk losing their children in the process. Households, therefore, are an important starting point for examining gender relations and the way women and men understand, bargain, and negotiate their rights and responsibilities in marriage.¹⁴ Moreover, larger structures such as families and social networks are critical in shaping and controlling social life, maintaining patriarchal systems, and influencing the construction of gender. For Somalis, these structures include layers of clan and kin relations in Mayfair and often beyond the community.

Empowerment through Economics?

Women's participation in economic activities affords them greater bargaining power in their households, especially if their financial contributions sustain the family. However, a household and national gender perspective is necessary to understand how these constructions may create other challenges. Research on female industrial workers who live in Puerto Rico, Cuba, and the Dominican Republic shows that paid employment empowers women only when the combination of state policies, access to resources, and household conditions are favourable to them.¹⁵ When a woman's wages serve as a substitute to her husband's, for example, there is little benefit to her overall status. Furthermore, condemnation is a common reaction in cases where women's participation in wage labour is a new development.¹⁶ This contradiction is apparent in Mayfair, where women work for survival resources despite the tension it can create in their households and in the larger community.

Other research shows that once migrant women access the social and economic resources customarily reserved for men, they are empowered to make important decisions and effect change in family gender relations.¹⁷ Women's economic achievements shift power structures in their favour, even as men typically maintain a higher social status.¹⁸ These transformations may grant women more privileges as respected and important players in their communities and afford them more control over personal choices, such as marriage and household decision-making. Using a household and national gender perspective to examine how women's paid employment affects gender relations in Mayfair's Somali community offers insight into how women make financial decisions, what influences their choices, and what effect their activities have on gender relations. It also helps to explain the factors that create conflict and complicate egalitarian gender relations among refugees.

A Somali woman's primary role is that of wife and mother. Conversely, men are economic providers and guarantors of security for their families. Male authority dominates all levels of society — households, families, and communities — and leaves women with limited access to legal rights and leadership roles.¹⁹ While shifting social, economic, and political factors influence changing gender relations and patriarchal behaviours in settlement countries, broad, communal acceptance of these alterations is necessary to sustain them.²⁰ Despite situational differences in settlement communities, power struggles between women and men are common challenges throughout the Somali diaspora. Measuring how or to what degree migration alters gender relations varies for different populations and depends on cultural contexts and other external forces.

Research on Hutu refugees who live in Tanzania shows that while camp life segregates and restricts refugees' movement, their seclusion enables them to easily exchange information about others in their community.²¹ Somalis' social isolation and vulnerability to crime demands the protection and security that Mayfair provides. To receive this assistance, people must demonstrate their membership in the community by maintaining cultural constructs and resisting adoption of South African values and ideologies. Somalis control individual behaviour through the threat of gossip that can damage reputations and impede assistance for those who challenge their social position and stray from acceptable cultural conduct—a risk most women cannot afford.²²

Findings and Discussion

Somali women who live in South Africa often have few opportunities, little financial support from their families, and the responsibility of leading their households. The paradox is that the Somali cultural context does not encourage women to pursue economic endeavours, even though the reality of women's lives demands their economic participation. In the absence of a husband's (or another relative's) financial contribution, women accept the responsibility to provide for their families locally and abroad despite the increased workload it creates. Women's resourcefulness enables them to navigate their lives in Mayfair as they carve out a livelihood when there are no alternatives, even as physical insecurity leads them to prefer staying in their homes or in Mayfair.

Economically successful women may face resistance from conservative community members and from individuals in their households. This

manifests in various ways, ranging from idle gossip and scolding to domestic violence. Tusmo is a woman in her forties who moved to South Africa in 1997 and her experiences illustrate the conflict between cultural customs and survival demands. Her husband quit his job in a shop several years ago and decided to stop working entirely. Tusmo sustained her husband and children by selling homemade sweets around Mayfair, and eventually sold vegetables, clothing, perfume, and jewellery in the same way. She also rented out rooms in her home to earn extra income to feed her family and put her children through school. As time passed, Tusmo's husband became abusive and beat her regularly, which she could not explain even as she noted his anger when she left the house to perform her jobs. He wanted her to stay home all day and did not think she should work, but Tusmo had no choice and became the family's breadwinner. Tusmo responded to financial demands proactively, and her husband responded to her power with violence.²³

Employment and Gender Relations

Women who need economic resources leave Mayfair and assume the associated risks only when their position requires it. Employment, for the most part, is a survival strategy that is intimately tied to life and interaction within the Somali community. Farhiya, for example, is a divorced woman with four children to support. Without a husband's financial resources, she has created several income-generating strategies to make ends meet. These include jobs that oblige her to leave Mayfair. When asked why she chose her trade, Farhiya stated, "It's to survive the life." Without start-up money to open a shop in Mayfair, Farhiya performs any number of informal jobs to buy food for her family.²⁴ Women in need of an income use their skills to develop self-employment strategies, such as cooking food for weddings or to sell in shops. This partially results from the availability of positions and scheduling work around children, but it can also involve the strength of networks as they relate to kin and clan. Even close friendships formed in South Africa do not guarantee jobs for women. This means that knowing someone's background or family in Somalia and sharing a clan identity are crucial to securing employment. Furthermore, jobs in local shops are scarce: while Mayfair is home to a thriving Somali community, employment options are limited.

The question of whether or not women's economic participation changes gender relations evoked interesting responses. Women have jobs because their family's livelihood—in South Africa and in Somalia—depends on it. In Somalia, women were not under pressure to provide financial support to their natal kin. This has changed in South Africa

as these women now feel responsible for supporting their close kin abroad.²⁵ With better economic opportunities—or rather, greater potential to create economic strategies as financial demands grow—single and married women are likely to generate monetary resources when their households and extended families necessitate it.

Most women feel their economic activities have little to do with gender relations in Mayfair; work is for survival and not for advancing women's social position. Men have the perception that women who earn an income do not need them and believe money grants women freedom from dependence on men.²⁶ This contradiction creates conflict between spouses. One man said, "Women aren't waiting for their husband's hand. This is why women aren't listening to their husbands. Before, a woman was under the man and didn't talk too much, but now women have their own money and can do whatever they want."²⁷ Regardless of how individuals feel, the significance of this change is women's financial obligation to the family. Women now contribute to household economics in ways that were once solely men's responsibility.

The women of Mayfair feel that the way men respond to their economic participation causes gender relations to shift, not the act of working itself. As one woman stated: "Only men believe women bring problems when they work. Men think women think they don't need them. Men think women can do whatever they want when they're working."²⁸ While men perceive women's economic success as a rejection of them as providers and partners, women view it as a subsistence strategy only and they crave strong partnerships built on love and support. The women explained that men's objection to their economic participation is rooted in customary gender roles that confine them to households. Activities beyond the domestic sphere require consultation with husbands.²⁹ When men lost their livelihoods in Somalia, close kin offered compensation. Women assume this role in South Africa and play a larger role in their families' financial maintenance even though women and men generally believe that women should stay home if their husbands can provide adequate support.³⁰

Somali Socio-cultural Contexts

Somali culture remains deeply patriarchal despite deviations caused by protracted conflict and migration. Survival strategies, shifting household dynamics, and exposure to new cultural and legal systems challenge these structures, effecting some degree of change. Women's new economic roles position them as family leaders in the diaspora and in Somalia, yet patriarchy manifests itself by the way families, and Somalis generally, regard

female development as members in society. Even with women's changing roles and reconstituted gender relations, men remain the expected household leaders. This view is problematic in South Africa as men struggle to succeed when faced with demanding and dangerous work prospects.

One of the challenges for women as they balance their cultural lives with their social and economic realities is how Islamic proscriptions should factor into the choices they make. Informants noted more rules and greater religious restrictions for women — on where they go and what they do — that limit and control their movement in Mayfair. Several women commented that men in particular discourage women from pursuing paid employment. They argue that men want to maintain control while women remain vulnerable and use Islam to support their position regarding women's place and roles in society.³¹ Men acknowledge the contradictory nature of this problem. As one informant said: "Religion says that women don't work and men do; women must be in the house. In South Africa, women have the freedom to work and the laws aren't dictated by religion."³² For the most part, however, it appears that women challenge their gender roles only when faced with few choices. Despite their economic need, women who defy customary gender models often confront criticism from those in the community who feel women should remain in the home at all costs, with or without financial hardship, and leave support provisions to men.³³

Families and Households

Women strongly identify with activities performed in the domestic sphere—caretaking, cooking, cleaning, and washing—and value their responsibility to support, educate, and care for children. Women lead their households in that they maintain them, but few women self-identify as household leaders, defined as managing the home, determining how money is spent, and making important decisions about housing and household composition.³⁴ Women's economic contributions do not always lead to a leadership role within the household; rather, leadership is often determined by ideological views that vary from one household member to the next. For example, Dalmar and Amina married in the mid-2000s and have three children together. Amina believes she is the household leader since she is in charge of daily operations, decides who lives in their home, and manages the household budget.³⁵ Conversely, Dalmar feels he is the leader as mandated by Islam and because he is the primary financial provider to the household.³⁶ Spousal power dynamics differ from family to family, but Dalmar and Amina's case demonstrates how individuals in a couple often interpret their position in marriage

differently. Gender arrangements and different perceptions of leadership in relationships are indicative of larger social contexts, power constructions, and inequalities that shape social order and exclude women from leadership roles in the broader community.

Conflict and Outcomes

Marital problems are frequently about resources: increased financial stress and heightened spousal expectations are primary reasons for many divorces in Mayfair. Informants argue that it is an issue of control. Halima, for example, assigns blame to men: "Some husbands want their wives to stay home but they [men] are not providing for the family. The women find it intolerable and this leads to fighting and divorce. If a wife works and the husband doesn't, the husband still wants to control the money and be the boss."³⁷ Conversely, Mohamed faults women for marital breakdowns: "Women think they were in jail in Somalia and came out with a free life. Women now think they should work as a man. It's not okay to work if they have children because they [working women] cause problems."³⁸ Men think life in South Africa instils in women ideas about earning their own money, which leads to spousal conflict. Men controlled the activities and movements of women before the Somali war, when women were mostly housewives who complied with cultural gender arrangements. Now there are female breadwinners who, from men's perspectives, demand quite a lot from their husbands and want to lead their relationships.

Despite women's ability to develop livelihood strategies, their limited opportunities make it more likely that they will remain in unsuccessful marriages for the sake of survival and for fear of losing their children and resources should they pursue a divorce. A recently divorced mother of four, Fardowsa, attributes this problem to the absence of extended family members in Mayfair who would protect women against a husband's poor behaviour and provide for her in the event of divorce.³⁹ Uncertain about their earning potential, women are financially unable or unwilling to live independently without a spouse. If a divorced woman has several children and needs a husband to provide financial support, her marriage prospects are limited.⁴⁰

South African Dynamics

Most Somali women live and interact within the confines of Mayfair, where community solidarity provides them with a sense of protection. Women are especially vulnerable to discrimination for their phenotypic features and Islamic dress that mark them as foreigners. They fear fall-

ing victim to rape, robbery, and harassment if they venture far from the safety of Mayfair. Not only does this limit integration into larger South African society, it also reduces women's economic opportunities. Women's insecurity is rooted in the pervasive social and institutional barriers that restrict their movement, and their economic choices reflect anxiety about interacting outside the community. Understanding these barriers is central to unpacking community dynamics in Mayfair, as uncertain livelihoods and unequal protection from harm force all Somalis to rely on one another for economic support and physical safety. These factors play a vital role in the way gender relations function among members of the Mayfair community.

Government Support and Social Services

The South African government's scant financial and social investment in refugee populations drives individuals to settle in urban centres, such as Johannesburg.⁴¹ It compels someone like Qani, a divorced, uneducated woman of about forty who arrived in South Africa alone, does not speak English, and has few marketable skills, to wholly depend on the Somali community for financial resources.⁴² In the absence of social services to support settlement, such as providing orientation, language classes, tertiary education, and job skills training, Somalis cannot fully realize their economic potential nor can they interact more successfully with native South Africans and integrate into broader society.

The lack of priority afforded non-nationals exacerbates discrimination against them and contradicts the state's commitment to ensuring their basic rights, such as health care and free primary education for children.⁴³ Somalis face discrimination not only from South African citizens, but also from the state, which fails to provide protection and assistance, and from the police who routinely harass and demand bribes from Somalis in Mayfair. This serves to further marginalize Somalis, ensure their distinction as a foreign group, and force them—women in particular—to live together and depend on one another for security, protection, and opportunities.⁴⁴

Xenophobia and Discrimination

South Africa's propensity toward xenophobia distinguishes the country as one of the most hostile environments for foreign migrants in the world and for black Africans in particular.⁴⁵ The fear of xenophobic attacks affects Somali women's activities and mobility, often rendering them afraid to leave their homes. Women noted their anxiety about walking down the

street even in Mayfair for fear of being attacked in broad daylight. Moreover, some women reported harassment by non-Somali neighbours who tell them to leave South Africa because they make the country dirty.⁴⁶ One woman spoke of her terror when South Africans walk by her house and shout: "We're going to start the xenophobia soon. We don't want you here. We're going to kill you."⁴⁷ Such verbal threats affect women deeply and ensure they limit their movement in the city. Even with the perils in Mayfair, women prefer the relative security their community provides and leave for work only when economic hardship necessitates it.

While men share women's safety concerns, they are more willing to accept risks by working outside of Mayfair. Men often work in townships despite the threats of robbery, looting, and physical violence, enticed by lucrative business opportunities. Most women avoid work in townships because the risk of rape poses insurmountable safety concerns which make the prospect of securing a livelihood there too dangerous for women to consider seriously.⁴⁸ Several people illustrated this threat by relaying the story of a Somali woman who lived with her three children in Queenstown, a township near Port Elizabeth in the Eastern Cape. They were murdered in 2008 and the mother was stabbed 113 times, but not before she and her daughter were gang raped.⁴⁹ While many Somali deaths in townships are not widely reported, the United Nations Human Rights Commission investigated this especially vicious assault.⁵⁰ Members of the Mayfair community know these stories of victimization in townships and claim that the threat of rape limits Somali women's economic activities to those they can perform locally.

A Conflict of Cultures: Exercising Somali Women's Rights in South Africa

Most Somalis assume that South Africa's constitution secures greater rights for women, even though it outlines measures for equality only, and that courts favour women in domestic affairs. Questions about women's rights evoked various responses from women and men about how much power Somali women hold in the country. Women who adopt South African culture, or at least adhere more to the country's ideologies and laws than to Somali customs, have and exert their autonomy but are perceived as anti-Somali, or as going against the culture. As one woman stated: "Those Somalis who don't respect their culture do what they want. Somalis who do respect their culture are limited in what they can do."⁵¹ Most women uphold their culture and have positive reputations in Mayfair, yet they hold less power as a consequence. It is critically

important that women maintain good standing in their community so that they may receive social and financial resources when other survival strategies fail. It is difficult to secure community assistance if members believe women have abandoned their cultural principles. Women must choose their battles carefully and decide for themselves whether they want to exercise their new rights or conform to Somali laws and customs. With widespread physical and economic insecurity, most women cannot gamble their position in society.

Batuulo's case demonstrates the challenges women face as they navigate their lives and new roles in Mayfair.⁵² Batuulo is an exceptionally strong woman who follows Somali custom over South African law. When the author met her, she was the family breadwinner and household leader. Her husband did not work, offered no material or emotional support to his family, and Batuulo suspected infidelity. Her achievement as an entrepreneur afforded her tremendous power in her home and, to a lesser extent, in the community. People turned to her for material and financial assistance as well as conflict mediation. Despite Batuulo's value among Somalis, her husband beat her and refused to grant the divorce she so desperately wanted, threatening to take her children and her business should she leave him. This effectively trapped her in the marriage. Both extended families, along with community members, worked tirelessly to persuade Batuulo to reconsider her position. Even with her success, Somali society still regarded her husband as the head of the family. Batuulo intimated that divorce would come with a settlement—surrendering her business and having her male kin pay her husband to divorce her.

Batuulo frequently discussed her marital woes. When asked how she balances Somali customs with her rights in South Africa, she said,

I have two hands. On one hand is our culture and religion. I am begging [my husband] for a divorce because he is the father of our children. I have tried to talk to him about it, but nothing. If things don't work behind the door, I'll go to Islamic organizations for assistance. On the other hand is my last option, and that is to take him to court, and I know the South African court will side with me.⁵³

It was not until Batuulo finally went to the police after her husband threatened to kill her that he granted her plea for a divorce. Their families, community members, and Somali elders all reluctantly agreed that the couple could not resolve their differences. As most women in similar situations do, Batuulo turned to the police only as a last resort. She felt that no one in the community listened to her problems and such a drastic measure was the only option left for her to achieve the outcome she desired.

In a focus group interview, women spoke of their dreams to build meaningful careers but feel they are unattainable in South Africa.⁵⁴ They want to learn new skills and perform jobs that enrich their lives, but instead their reality largely confines them to what they can achieve in their community. While South Africa grants all women the freedom to do as they please, Somali women do not feel that this privilege applies to them. Women who want change find it difficult to push forward as long as they lack support from the community, and these challenges frustrate them. They also recognize that South Africa is a dangerous place for women, that their actions come with risks, and that they need the protection Mayfair provides. Women explained this contradiction as manipulation, and argued that the problem is about Somalis, mostly men, who attempt to control women in South Africa. There is more freedom for women to pursue new roles and opportunities, but men try harder to maintain control in the name of culture and religion. From some women's perspective, men use women's insecurity in the country as an excuse to control them, even though men ultimately are powerless to control anyone.

The concept of gender equality has penetrated the community and modified some customary distinctions between women and men, but it appears that little has changed in practice. This is central to understanding how conflict and contradictions challenge gender relations in Mayfair. Push and pull factors empower and disempower women who often lack the close kinship networks that would protect them in Somalia. At the same time, those absent networks grant women more autonomy in their personal lives. Women accept their new roles and responsibilities but feel they must operate within a cultural system that resists change in a world where change is the only way to survive. Women are granted more power, but exercising that power might threaten their livelihood prospects. A woman who uses resources outside of the community to achieve her ends will be hard-pressed to secure community support and find a man willing to marry her as she may be perceived as likely to cause him trouble later. If women are powerless in Mayfair, it is because they cannot escape the mechanisms of social control within the community they rely upon for protection and support.

Conclusion

This paper argues that social and institutional structures collectively shape refugee lives, gender relationships, and women's roles. It shows how access to resources and competition over power play out in Mayfair while demonstrating the contradictory nature of this process. The

economic realities of South African life challenge gender relations and lead Somali women to forgo customary gender distinctions in favour of pursuing survival strategies in the absence of financial provisions from men. Somalis hold little power as refugees in South Africa, but women have proven their ability to overcome economic barriers when they must and manage to access resources when there are no alternatives. The ensuing gender contests demonstrate men's difficulty in accepting women's labour participation, which sometimes manifests in physical violence against women. Men often find women's economic empowerment and their own disempowerment problematic, as they have lost control over financial resources and their ability to control women's roles and behaviour. As gender relations undergo negotiations in Mayfair, women's economic activities will continue to serve as reminders of shifting power structures in the community and beyond.

Migration can provide an opening for women to pursue new roles and challenge subordinating customs. While reconstituted gender relations might entail greater freedom for women, other important factors can impede the degree to which change occurs. Economically active women in Mayfair, single and married, work only when household dynamics demand it. However, this is a survival strategy that may not secure women's empowerment. Conditions in South Africa also hinder this process: while South African laws grant refugees rights, such as the right to employment, entitlements are not implemented and enforced at social and institutional levels. Crime and discrimination exacerbate the effects of failed state policies and few employment options for women, along with Somali cultural contexts that pose yet additional challenges to women whose primary goal is to provide for their families. These realities have serious implications for Somalis, particularly for women whose fear of xenophobia confines them to Mayfair. Physical and economic insecurity draw women and men to live in a community where they feel their networks and ethnic kin support and protect them. Women thus find it difficult to challenge their social position and effect meaningful change in their lives because of their limited mobility and pressing social and economic needs.

Despite the colossal barriers that limit women's ability to contest gender norms in Mayfair, similar power struggles exist in Somalia and in other Somali diaspora communities as women assume new economic responsibilities. This suggests that Somalis are conflicted about the ways in which their culture is changing as they form new identities at home and abroad. It appears that broader social and institutional contexts influence the rate of change and may explain why transformation is uneven in different communities. If gender relations are to shift in a

direction that favours women and establishes egalitarian relationships, Somalis must accept women's changing roles as a positive outcome for households, families, and larger society. ■

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Notes

¹ Zaheera Jinnah, "Making Home in a Hostile Land: Understanding Somali Identity, Integration, Livelihood and Risks in Johannesburg," *Journal of Sociology and Anthropology* 1, no. 1-2 (2010): 91-99.

² See for example Rima Berns-McGown, *Muslims in the Diaspora: The Somali Communities of London and Toronto* (Toronto, Canada: University of Toronto Press, 1999).

³ Defined as new possibilities for achievement in areas from which women were previously excluded. See Sarah Mosedale, "Assessing Women's Empowerment: Towards a Conceptual Framework," *Journal of International Development* 17 (2005): 243-257, 252.

⁴ Forced Migration Studies Programme (FMSP), "Migration and the New African City: Citizenship, Transit, and Transnationalism – Descriptive Statistics-Johannesburg," (Johannesburg: FMSP, 2006).

⁵ Jinnah, "Making Home in a Hostile Land."

⁶ Stephen Ellis, "Introduction: Migration in Post-Apartheid South Africa," in *Migration in Post-Apartheid South Africa: Challenges and Questions to Policy-Makers*, eds. Aurelia Wa Kabwe-Segatti and Loren Landau (Paris: Agence Française de Développement, 2008), 47-53, 48.

⁷ Statistics South Africa, "Quarterly Labour Force Survey, Quarter 4, 2010" (Pretoria: Statistics South Africa, 2011).

⁸ Loren B. Landau, "Decentralization, Migration, and Development in South Africa's Primary Cities," in *Migration in Post-Apartheid South Africa: Challenges and Questions to Policy-Makers*, eds. Aurelia Wa Kabwe-Segatti and Loren Landau (Paris: Agence Française de Développement, 2008), 163-211 and Jean Pierre Misago, Loren B. Landau, and Tamlyn Monson Monson, *Towards Tolerance, Law, and Dignity: Addressing Violence against Foreign Nationals in South Africa* (International Organization for Migration (IOM), Regional Office for Southern Africa, 2009).

⁹ Loren Landau, "Decentralization, Migration, and Development in South Africa's Primary Cities," Agence Française de Développement (2008).

¹⁰ The author questioned interviewees about variation within the Mayfair community. One recurring theme during individual interviews was the distinction between older and more recent arrivals.

- ¹¹ Gaim Kibreab, "Refugeehood, Loss and Social Change: Eritrean Refugees and Returnees," in *Refugees and the Transformation of Societies: Agency, Policies, Ethics and Politics*, eds. Philomena Essed, Georg Frerks, and Joke Schrijvers (New York and Oxford: Berghahn Books, 2004), 19-30, 21.
- ¹² Cathy McIlwaine, "Migrant Machismos: Exploring Gender Ideologies and Practices among Latin American Migrants in London from a Multi-Scalar Perspective," *Gender, Place and Culture* 17, no. 3 (2010): 281-300.
- ¹³ Ioan M. Lewis, *Blood and Bone: The Call of Kinship in Somali Society* (Lawrenceville, NJ: The Red Sea Press, Inc., 1994), 42.
- ¹⁴ Henrietta L. Moore, *A Passion for Difference: Essays in Anthropology and Gender*. (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1994).
- ¹⁵ Helen Safa, *The Myth of the Male Breadwinner: Women and Industrialization in the Caribbean* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1995).
- ¹⁶ Mary Mills, "Gender and Inequality in the Global Labor Force," *Annual Review of Anthropology* 32 (2003): 41-62.
- ¹⁷ *ibid.*
- ¹⁸ Pierrette Hondagneu-Sotelo, *Gendered Transitions: Mexican Experiences of Immigration* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1994).
- ¹⁹ Judith Gardner and Amina Mohamoud Warsame, "Women, Clan Identity and Peace-building," in *Somalia - The Untold Story: The War Through the Eyes of Somali Women*, eds. Judith Gardner and Judy El Bushra (London: Pluto Press, 2004), 153-165.
- ²⁰ Darini Rajasingham-Senanayake, "Between Victim and Agent: Women's Ambivalent Empowerment in Displacement," in *Refugees and the Transformation of Societies: Agency, Policies, Ethics and Politics*, eds. Philomena Essed, Georg Frerks, and Joke Schrijvers (New York and Oxford: Berghahn Books, 2004), 151-63.
- ²¹ Liisa H. Malkki, *Purity and Exile: Violence, Memory, and National Cosmology among Hutu Refugees in Tanzania* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995).
- ²² This topic arose during several individual interviews with the author. It was discussed during separate focus group interviews with women, January 3, 2011, and men, January 4, 2011, and debated during a mixed gender focus group interview, January 7, 2011, all with author, Mayfair.
- ²³ Interviews with author, Mayfair restaurant, May 1, 2010 and December 9, 2010. Note that pseudonyms are used throughout the paper.
- ²⁴ Forty-four-year-old woman, interview with author, Mayfair home, July 3, 2010.
- ²⁵ Twenty-six of thirty female informants feel responsible to send remittances. In a women's focus group interview, January 3, 2011, participants noted the importance of remitting to help their families and rebuild their country.

²⁶ These issues were discussed at length during separate focus group interviews with women, January 3, 2011, and men, January 4, 2011, and debated during mixed gender focus group interviews, January 7, 2011 and January 11, 2011, all with author, Mayfair. Focus group questions developed from data collected during individual interviews and through participant observation.

²⁷ Forty-year-old divorced man, men's focus group interview with author, Mayfair guesthouse, January 4, 2011.

²⁸ Twenty-year-old married woman, interview with author, Mayfair home, October 9, 2010.

²⁹ Women's focus group interview with author, Mayfair, January 3, 2011.

³⁰ This issue was discussed during separate focus group interviews with women, January 3, 2011, and men, January 4, 2011, and during mixed gender focus group interviews, January 7, 2011 and January 11, 2011, all with author, Mayfair.

³¹ Women and men debated this point during a mixed gender focus group interview with author, Mayfair, January 7, 2011. Men argued that Islam establishes men's role as family provider, to which a thirty-six-year-old married woman responded, "Men made the rule that women stay at home."

³² Thirty-one-year-old married man, interview with author, Mayfair guesthouse, October 14, 2010.

³³ This issue was discussed during separate focus group interviews with women, January 3, 2011, and men, January 4, 2011, and during mixed gender focus group interviews, January 7, 2011 and January 11, 2011, all with author, Mayfair.

³⁴ Ten female informants self-identify as household leaders, though families living in sublet rooms may account for some lack of women's household leadership. The financial strain of life in South Africa often culminates in multiple family households regardless of family composition.

³⁵ Twenty-eight-year-old woman, interview with author, Mayfair home, July 28, 2010.

³⁶ Forty-four-year-old man, interview with author, Mayfair restaurant, July 26, 2010.

³⁷ Thirty-eight-year-old divorced woman, interview with author, Mayfair home, July 3, 2010.

³⁸ Thirty-four-year-old married man, interview with author, Mayfair guesthouse, June 25, 2010.

³⁹ Twenty-five-year-old woman, interview with author, Mayfair home, October 1, 2010. At the time of interview, Fardowsa struggled to support her children but felt

divorce was her best option, noting her former husband's abusive behaviour.

⁴⁰ This was a recurring theme during individual interviews and daily conversations, and an important topic during a women's focus group interview, Mayfair, January 3, 2011.

⁴¹ Karen Jacobsen, "Refugees and Asylum Seekers in Urban Areas: A Livelihoods Perspective," *Journal of Refugee Studies* 19, no. 3 (2006): 273-86.

⁴² Interviews with author, Mayfair guesthouse, November 29, 2010 and November 30, 2010.

⁴³ Landau, "Decentralization, Migration, and Development in South Africa's Primary Cities."

⁴⁴ Samadia Sadouni, "'God is not Unemployed': Journeys of Somali Refugees in Johannesburg," *African Studies* 68, no. 2 (2009): 235-49.

⁴⁵ Jean Comaroff and John L. Comaroff, "Naturing the Nation: Aliens, Apocalypse and the Postcolonial State," *Journal of Southern African Studies* 27, no. 3 (2001): 627-51.

⁴⁶ Women discussed the insecurity they feel during individual interviews and daily interactions, and it was an important topic during a women's focus group interview, Mayfair, January 3, 2011.

⁴⁷ Twenty-five-year-old married woman, interview with author, Mayfair home, July 15, 2010.

⁴⁸ Somali Association of South Africa representative, interview with author, Mayfair, February 13, 2010.

⁴⁹ Mavis Makuni, "Africa: SA Killings Underscore Refugees' Plight," *Financial Gazette*, October 11, 2008.

⁵⁰ IRIN, "Somalia-South Africa: Foreign Competitors Not Welcome," IRIN, October 17, 2008.

⁵¹ Twenty-nine-year-old divorced woman, interview with author, Mayfair shop, September 22, 2010.

⁵² Thirty-six-year-old female business owner in Mayfair with whom the author interviewed but also interacted on a daily basis.

⁵³ Interview with author, Mayfair home, December 20, 2010.

⁵⁴ Women's focus group interview with author, Mayfair, January 3, 2011. This discussion was in response to a question about outcomes of migration, of what the diaspora has meant for women living in Mayfair.

Gender Equality and Neo-liberal Governmentality in Refugee Camps

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ELISABETH OLIVIVUS

ABSTRACT

In recent decades, humanitarian aid to refugees has increasingly employed neo-liberal forms of governing that are characterized by an emphasis on accountability, measurement of performance, and the decentralization of responsibility for welfare. This paper examines the implications of the neo-liberalization of the international refugee regime for humanitarian aspirations to promote gender equality, and argues that neo-liberal strategies and practices of government fundamentally shape the meaning of gender equality and the organization of its promotion in humanitarian aid to refugees. The analysis draws on a Foucauldian governmentality perspective, and, based on interviews with humanitarian workers, shows how neo-liberal technologies of government are employed in gender equality programmes in refugee camps in Thailand and Bangladesh. The paper concludes that neo-liberal forms of gender equality promotion have a number of problematic effects: the meaning of gender equality becomes superficial and instrumental, and international “expertise” is privileged at the expense of refugee ownership when gender equality is constructed as a technical, administrative issue rather than an issue of power and politics.

Introduction

The end of the Cold War and the rise of neo-liberalism in western states have fundamentally altered the conditions for international refugee policy and practice in recent decades. Neo-liberal policies and the absence of Cold War rivalries have made states in Europe and North America increasingly unwilling to accept refugees from the global South. Moreover, the focus of the international refugee regime has shifted from asylum to assistance of refugees in the global south, return of refugees, and prevention of refugee flows.¹ Further, donor demands for financial accountability and the evaluation of humanitarian performance have led to the adoption of neo-liberal strategies for the management of humanitarian aid, mirroring the policies within many donor states.² In humanitarian aid to refugees, a neo-liberal emphasis on accountability,

performance-measurement, and decentralization of the responsibility for welfare manifests itself in an increased focus on the participation of refugees in the delivery of services in camps, coupled with the application of “good governance” criteria as conditions for the delivery of aid. It is also apparent in management strategies based on performance indicators and audits, such as results-based management in the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR).³

This paper examines the implications of the neo-liberalization of the international refugee regime for humanitarian aspirations to include a gender perspective and promote gender equality in humanitarian aid to refugees. Humanitarian policy and practice have moved from gender-blindness to an increased focus on gender as a dimension of difference that shapes the experience of forced displacement. Beginning in the late 1970s, this development has, to a significant extent, been driven by feminist scholarship and advocacy.⁴ Today, a commitment to gender equality as a goal integral to the humanitarian imperative to save lives, relieve suffering, and protect those without access to the protection of a sovereign state is expressed in policy documents such as the UNHCR *Handbook for the Protection of Women and Girls*, and through the implementation of UNHCR’s Age, Gender, and Diversity Mainstreaming (AGDM) strategy.⁵ However, what it means to promote gender equality in a refugee camp context can be understood in a variety of ways. For example, it can be understood as the provision of special protection for women on the basis of their vulnerability, as the realization of women’s human rights, or as the transformation of patriarchal cultures.⁶ Different constructions of the meaning of gender equality as a humanitarian policy goal will legitimize different actions and have different implications for power relations in the camp and for the effects of humanitarian gender equality interventions. The analysis presented here draws on interviews with humanitarian workers who assist Burmese refugees in Thailand and in Bangladesh. It explores how the neo-liberalization of the international refugee regime shapes the meaning of gender equality and the organization of its promotion in refugee camps. The paper takes the field practices of humanitarian aid as the analytical point of departure, and thus contributes to a better understanding of the impact of humanitarian gender policies as well as the dynamics of the neo-liberalization of the international refugee regime.

The first section of the paper outlines the theoretical framework of the study, drawing on the Foucauldian concept of governmentality, and presents the empirical material and the analytical strategy. The situation of Burmese refugees in Thailand and Bangladesh is then briefly introduced. The analysis follows, and shows how neo-liberal technolo-

gies of government are employed in humanitarian gender programming in these two refugee camp contexts. The last part discusses the effects of neo-liberal forms of gender equality promotion on the meaning of gender equality, the relations of power, and the space for social change in the camps.

Refugee Camps and Neo-liberal Governmentality

Contrary to a common conception of refugees, Robin Lui notes that refugees are not forgotten people.⁷ Rather, the government and control of “people out of place” is essential to the maintenance of a world order of territorial nation states. The international refugee regime with its assemblage of actors, institutions, policies, and programmes plays a central role in the government of populations at the margins of the nation state system.⁸ A governmentality perspective draws attention to how government, defined as the “conduct of conduct,”⁹ takes place in any context where there is an attempt to direct and influence the behaviour of individuals and groups, and is therefore useful in an analysis of power and government in sites beyond the nation-state.¹⁰

Further, governmentality studies take a novel approach to the analysis of neo-liberalism, which is understood not as ideology or philosophy but as certain practices or technologies of government that operate in locally specific ways.¹¹ Mitchell Dean argues that neo-liberal government is characterized by two types of different but intertwined technologies of government: technologies of agency and technologies of performance. Technologies of agency seek to engage the governed as active, responsible subjects who are able to manage their own lives and make rational choices. The existence of autonomous, self-regulating subjects is a precondition for practices of government that work through the agency and choice of individuals rather than through coercion and force. One version of the use of technologies of agency is that which Nicholas Rose has called a “politics of community.”¹² Governed populations, especially groups marked as problematic or at-risk, are enjoined to perceive themselves as active members of self-managing communities that can take responsibility for their own risk and address their own problems. Responsibility and regulation is thereby decentralized or transferred to the governed populations themselves.¹³ In a study of refugee camps in Tanzania, Simon Turner has shown how humanitarian organizations attempt to make the refugee population governable through various practices that “empower” refugees and encourage them to participate and take responsibility for camp life.¹⁴

However, while the agency and freedom of the subject are preconditions for neo-liberal rule, freedom must be exercised in a way conducive to the objectives of governing authorities. The activities of the self-governing subject are therefore constantly monitored, evaluated, and corrected through technologies of performance. Performance indicators, benchmarking, marketization, contracting, evaluation, and audits are techniques that are used to shape the conduct of governed subjects as to optimize performance.¹⁵ The use of governing practices that seek to discipline and control the agency of refugees in camps can be linked to a representation of refugees as deviant subjects incapable of exercising freedom and choice in a responsible way.¹⁶ While technologies of agency are used from below to foster particular forms of subjectivity, technologies of performance are deployed from above to regulate and control.

The analysis presented here is based on a total of fifty-eight interviews with actors involved in humanitarian aid to Burmese refugees in Thailand and Bangladesh. The author conducted the interviews in 2010 and 2011. In Thailand, thirty-two interviews were conducted with humanitarian staff of the UNHCR, non-government organizations (NGOs), and refugee community-based organizations (CBOs) in Mae Sot and Bangkok. In Bangladesh, twenty interviews were conducted with humanitarians working for UN agencies and NGOs in Cox's Bazar and Dhaka. Interviews conducted during fieldwork were complemented with six telephone interviews. The humanitarian workers interviewed consisted of a mix of international and national staff members and men and women of various ages. Each interview lasted for approximately one hour. Interviews focused on humanitarian organizations' gender policies and programmes, and the meanings they attributed to gender equality as a policy goal in their work.

An analysis of governmentality directs attention to the relationship between knowledge and power, or between forms of representation and forms of rule.¹⁷ Practices of government rely on conceptions about what it is that should be governed, by whom, and to what ends. The analysis of the interviews therefore seeks to identify technologies of government employed in the promotion of gender equality and examine the representations of the meaning of gender equality as a humanitarian policy goal that underlies these practices. What do humanitarians do to promote gender equality, and how do they represent the rationale for these practices? How do they represent problems and goals in relation to gender equality? The aim is not to evaluate interviewees' representations of gender equality in relation to a normative ideal, but to explore how gender equality is given meaning and employed as a governing tool. It also aims to show how par-

Burmese Refugees in Thailand and Bangladesh

The long-standing armed conflict in Burma has its roots in the geopolitics and history of the Burmese state itself. Colonialism left a legacy of weak state institutions and politicized ethnic identities in one of Asia's most ethnically diverse countries, and a number of ethno-nationalist movements have evolved since independence. Many of these movements have been involved in armed struggle against the Burmese military. Armed conflict, economic mismanagement and poverty in Burma's minority-populated border areas, and discrimination and persecution of ethnic minorities have forced millions of people to flee their homes within Burma and across its borders for six decades.¹⁸ In 2010, Asia hosted more than half of the world's refugees and Burma was the third largest country of origin for refugees in Asia, surpassed only by Afghanistan and Iraq.¹⁹ The UNHCR estimates that over 415,000 refugees from Burma are outside of their country of origin. About 140,000 of these refugees are housed in camps in Thailand.²⁰ In Bangladesh, there are 28,000 registered and more than 200,000 unregistered Burmese refugees.²¹ The refugee situations in Thailand and Bangladesh are amongst the most protracted in Asia.

The first refugee camps on the Thai side of the Thai-Burmese border were established in 1984 when Karen refugees fled across the border, following advances in the counterinsurgency campaign of the Burmese military against the Karen National Union (KNU). The number of refugees in refugee camps in Thailand has since steadily increased due to gradual losses of territory controlled by the KNU and other minority armed forces. Currently there are nine camps along the border, and a majority of the refugees belong to the Karen minority. Links between the refugee populations and the Karen armed insurgency in Burma have remained strong, and the camps have provided important bases for Karen nationalism and various forms of political activism.²² The UNHCR did not begin operations on the Thai-Burmese border until 1998. NGOs are the main humanitarian actors, although the UNHCR has been expanding its role on the border in recent years. Humanitarian aid and services are mainly provided by a network of about fifteen national and international NGOs. Further, services are coordinated and partly implemented by the refugees themselves through a system of community-based camp management. The camps are governed by elected refugee committees: the Karen Refugee Committee (KRC) in seven camps and the Karenni

Refugee Committee in the two northernmost camps. A Camp Committee is responsible for the day to day running of each camp and coordinates education, health, justice, etc.²³

Since the onset of military rule, the Rohingya Muslim minority in Western Burma has endured harsh discrimination and persecution, including denial of citizenship. Waves of intensified violence following a population registration exercise in 1978 and in the aftermath of the 1990 elections have caused two mass exoduses of Rohingya into Bangladesh in recent decades. In both cases, the majority of the refugees were eventually repatriated by the Bangladeshi government using significant amounts of violence and coercion.²⁴ Today, 28,000 Rohingya are recognized as refugees and live in two camps in eastern Bangladesh: Kutupalong and Nayapara. Most of the registered refugees arrived in 1991-1992 and managed to remain after the last repatriation exercise. Rohingya people have continued to flee to Bangladesh, but later arrivals have been denied refugee status and access to the two official camps. An estimated 200,000 unregistered Rohingya live in villages in eastern Bangladesh and in camp-like settlements in the vicinity of the official refugee camps. Humanitarian aid is provided to refugees in the official camps by UN agencies such as the UNHCR and the World Food Programme (WFP) and a small number of international and national NGOs. The Bangladeshi government does not authorize humanitarian interventions on behalf of unregistered refugees.²⁵

Technologies of Government in the Promotion of Gender Equality

Drawing on the interviews, I here identify and examine four technologies of government that are employed in humanitarian gender equality programming in the refugee camps in Thailand and Bangladesh: the production of “measurable outcomes,” the construction of self-managing “communities,” the mobilization of refugee women as humanitarian partners, and the use of “international standards” as a governing tool. While there are significant contextual differences between these two camps, these four technologies of government are dominant features in how gender equality is conceptualized and how its promotion is organized in Thailand as well as in Bangladesh. The analysis focuses on these similarities, and highlights patterns in the meaning and use of gender equality as a governing tool in humanitarian aid to refugees.

Barnett argues that the idea that humanitarian performance could and should be measured to evaluate its results was central to the adoption of neo-liberal forms of government in humanitarian aid. Neo-liberalism rejected the assumption that provision of assistance to those in need is inherently “good.” Instead, the delivery of aid was increasingly thought of in calculable terms.²⁶ This mentality permeates the promotion of gender equality in the Thai and Bangladeshi refugee camps. When discussing what gender equality means in humanitarian work, interviewees typically define it in terms of equal access to resources and services for men and women. To ensure equal access, the number of women and men who benefit from all types of programmes and services is monitored and reported on. Explaining how the promotion of gender equality is approached in the work of the organization, an NGO employee in Thailand relates: “We have quotas that have to be filled with equal numbers of males and females.”²⁷ A CBO representative in Thailand describes his impressions of the gender equality messages from humanitarian organizations in the camps by saying that gender equality “is when you work with an organization, if there are three persons two should be women, or fifty-fifty.”²⁸ Many interviewees speak of pressure from donors who require implementing organizations to present gender-balanced beneficiary data. It is sometimes not easy to achieve this quantitative target. Describing their work with a new vocational training centre, an NGO representative in Bangladesh reports that: “[The] UNHCR said there must be gender balance, fifty-fifty. We said that we can never have gender balance!”²⁹

A donor-driven gender-balanced target imposed from above tends to be separated from more substantive, principled arguments for gender equality. Consequently, humanitarian workers in the field do not always understand *why* gender balance and reporting of gender-segregated beneficiary data is important, as exemplified by an NGO representative in Thailand: “I never think about the gender issue, but USAID always ask about the number of males and the number of females at that, this, this, and this...my office staff always ask and always remind me, please look for the number of males and females.”³⁰ Moreover, a strong emphasis on measurable, quantifiable goals may preclude a deeper understanding of what gender equality could mean in the camp context: “When people say gender, okay, so we include a few women in that...you know like, a few girls in this program, a few girls in that. I think there is a...a gap of common understanding of what should be the approach and of the basis of the work we do.”³¹ Some NGO and CBO representatives in Thailand explain that they prefer the word “equity” to the word “equality,” as equality

is so strongly associated with what they consider a rigid focus on numbers at the cost of other relevant aspects of gender relations in the camps.

While attention to formal gender balance may constitute a first step toward changed power dynamics, as many interviewees point out, a narrow focus on numbers may also lead to a watering down of the meaning of gender equality. This risk is pointedly illustrated by an example from the educational sector in the Thai camps. The gender balance in basic education in the Thai camps is quite good, and for this reason there is a tendency among humanitarians who work with education to consider gender inequality a non-issue. An NGO worker critical of this attitude explains how it precludes an analysis of gendered power relations with regard to school drop-outs. Girls who drop out of school do so almost exclusively due to reasons related to pregnancy or marriage, but boys who drop out often do so because they have to work to earn an income or because of alcohol or drug abuse: "Those are very gender-specific reasons, but the numbers...I think most people working for education NGOs are like 'Well, boys drop out too, what do you want us to do about it?'"³² Thus, because the numbers of girls and boys dropping out of school are fairly equal, there is no willingness to interrogate the gendered patterns behind school drop-outs. While technologies of performance that emphasize calculation and evaluation aim to render the results of gender equality promotion measurable, they simultaneously limit the forms of change that can be envisioned.³³

Constructing Self-managing "Communities"

Prevention of and response to abuses such as rape, forced marriage, human trafficking, and domestic violence against women, commonly referred to by the term "sexual and gender-based violence" (SGBV), have become a priority concern in humanitarian operations.³⁴ In the Thai and Bangladeshi camps, one way in which humanitarian organizations seek to address SGBV is through the setting up of groups of refugee volunteers meant to raise awareness and educate the refugee population, and identify and manage cases of SGBV. In Bangladesh, these groups are called "women's support groups" and primarily consist of women who are themselves survivors of SGBV. Describing the role of these groups, a UN employee explains that "The women's support group are women who are organized to provide social support for one another, especially survivors of SGBV, and to help us identify women who have problems, vulnerable women who may be in the community, and refer them to service providers."³⁵ Women survivors of SGBV and women considered "vulnerable" are encouraged to perceive of themselves as a community,

support each other and take responsibility for the management of their risk of being abused in the camps. As suggested by Rose, a “politics of community” aims to make problematic populations governable through the utilization and shaping of their own agency.³⁶ In this case, the “community” of women in the women’s support groups are trained by humanitarian organizations and “empowered” to become active subjects who are able to take care of the problems they experience.

In the Thai camps, similar groups called “SGBV committees” have been initiated by the UNHCR to prevent SGBV as well as to coordinate case management. However, the establishment of these committees created considerable tension and conflict between humanitarian organizations and refugee CBOs such as the Karen Women’s Organization (KWO), which was working with SGBV prevention and response long before the setup of the committees. The SGBV committees were seen as creating a parallel structure to what already existed, bypassing refugee actors. After a series of meetings in the spring of 2010 where the various actors involved in SGBV programming tried to resolve the conflict, the situation eventually led the KRC to assert control over the SGBV committees and declare them part of the NRC administrative structure.³⁷

The creation of refugee groups intended to “self-manage” the problem of SGBV in the camps can be seen as a strategy that seeks to govern camp life through the agency and participation of active refugees, characterized by Dean as a technology of agency.³⁸ However, the women’s support groups and the SGBV committees illustrate how this “outsourcing” of programme implementation to refugees, far from constituting a transfer of ownership, is coupled with mechanisms for control and regulation of refugee agency that can be described as technologies of performance.³⁹ The women’s support groups in Bangladesh are provided with terms of reference that detail the scope of their activities as decided by the UN agency in charge. Moreover, their performance is regularly evaluated to ensure adherence to the terms of reference.⁴⁰ In Thailand, humanitarian workers involved with the SGBV committees make clear that “We are monitoring their activities in the camps.”⁴¹ Humanitarian representatives “capacity build, train them to do prevention activities and supervise their case management”⁴² to ensure that the activities of the SGBV committees stay in line with the operational objectives of humanitarian organizations.

Mobilizing Refugee Women as Humanitarian Partners

Programmes and strategies that specifically target women and seek to strengthen their role in camp life are an important part of humanitarian

gender programming in the refugee camps in Thailand and in Bangladesh. However, when humanitarian workers discuss the purposes of promoting women's participation, they speak as much about efficiency as about equality. In the words of an NGO worker in Thailand, women are "a better investment in terms of development...they are more likely to put what resources and what improvements happen back into their families...than men. And so to me that has been the driver in NGOs really pushing more on gender issues."⁴³ A UN worker in Bangladesh employs a similar language of economy and investment when describing why gender equality should be a humanitarian concern: "It's like, you put in this much input, you want that much output, you are not going to get that [if women are not included]".⁴⁴

Rojas has argued that in the global government of the world's poor and marginalized, women are constructed as responsible for the "good governance" of the family. The way women perform their reproductive roles is therefore crucial to the management of poverty and underdevelopment.⁴⁵ Humanitarian programmes that target women especially focus on the areas of food, hygiene, and sanitation. This is done based on the assumption that women are vital to the health and nutritional status of refugee families. Refugee women are therefore encouraged to be active subjects who claim a voice in their families and communities, and who simultaneously facilitate the achievement of humanitarian goals. For example, in Bangladesh women are encouraged to pick up the food rations for their family. This may increase women's control over an essential resource, but this is not the main objective. Rather, "putting food in the hands of women has always been seen as a way of ensuring that the household eats," a UN employee explains.⁴⁶ In Thailand as well as in Bangladesh, women are targeted by a variety of training sessions, workshops, and messages that aim to improve their ability to care for their families and manage their households. An NGO worker in Thailand relates that they use gender analysis to target their programming; women often take the main responsibility for the household, so "[w]e make a workshop with the wife or some young girls, how to clean the dishes and clean everything around the meal." The reason for this strategy is that "we know we must target the wife to have a good result."⁴⁷ In Bangladesh, an NGO worker describes that their educational interventions in the area of water and sanitation target women because "for both water, sanitation, of course hygiene practices as well, women has a particular role here."⁴⁸

By virtue of their reproductive roles, women are seen as providing strategic inroads into the refugee populations if they can be mobilized as humanitarian partners. The concern with the health, nutritional status, and reproductive behaviour of refugee populations corresponds with

what Duffield has described as a “biopolitical turn within aid policy” emphasizing the creation of “self-reliant” households and communities in the global South.⁴⁹ Governing through women’s reproductive roles is critical to such a neo-liberal project where responsibility for welfare is transferred to the governed subjects themselves. While these programmes claim to empower women in their current reproductive roles, they do nothing to change gendered divisions of labour. Existing gender relations are analysed in order to maximize the efficiency of humanitarian programs, not in order to change them.

Adhering to “International Standards”

Interviewees often describe the promotion of gender equality in refugee camps as an issue of adherence to international standards. However, the term “international standards” is used in quite an amorphous way, which makes it less than clear what humanitarian workers refer to. While a few speak in more specific terms, and make reference to international human rights conventions or humanitarian policy documents, the reference to “international standards” for most expresses a general conception of gender equality as something originating in “the international” as opposed to the camp context. In line with this conception, “international standards” are often used as the opposite of refugee culture or tradition, and the promotion of gender equality is perceived as in conflict with the cultural practices and beliefs of refugees:

I think the international humanitarian community have been trying very hard to get, you know, both formal equality and equality of outcomes, but...I think in reality it has been quite challenging to get some of those ideals into practice. And the main reason that I personally see as the reason why we haven’t been able to achieve it is because of conservative cultural barriers.⁵⁰

Despite vast differences between the culture of Karen and Rohingya refugees and between the position of women in the Thai and Bangladeshi camps, the representations of gender equality as external to the cultures of the refugees and of refugee culture as an obstacle to the promotion of gender equality are similar and recurrent in both contexts. Similar to the UN employee in Bangladesh above, when asked about the challenges for the promotion of gender equality, an NGO worker in Thailand responds: “It’s a cultural stigma...the Karen people are deeply rooted in their traditions and cultures.”⁵¹ The attempt to promote gender equality in this context is described as a conflict of “traditional values versus international standards.”⁵²

While cultural beliefs and practices may certainly constitute obstacles to gender equality in many contexts, the default assumption that

refugee culture is *generally* in conflict with gender equality is problematic as it does not acknowledge internal differences in refugee cultures or the possibility of change towards gender equality that is driven by refugees. When international humanitarian actors are assumed to be the only bearers of ideas and norms of gender equality, the relevance and legitimacy of their interpretations of problems and solutions may easily be taken for granted. In the Thai camps, several refugee women's organizations and other refugee CBOs work to increase women's political participation, raise awareness of women's rights, and combat violence against women. Despite this, many humanitarians still assume refugee culture and refugee actors in general to be obstacles to gender equality. For example, whether the largest refugee women's organization is "good for gender equality" is questioned because their conception of the meaning of gender equality is allegedly "different from a western approach," primarily due to a less individualistic conception of rights.⁵³ Scepticism towards CBOs as promoters of gender equality is the reason why humanitarian workers have considered the establishment of SGBV committees to be justified, despite the CBOs' duplication of existing services provided by refugee organizations. To ensure that international standards were met, several interviewees explained to me that it was necessary to establish their own structures.⁵⁴

The example of the SGBV committees illustrates how the notion of "international standards" is used to legitimize humanitarian control of gender equality promotion in the camps even when refugee advocates for gender equality exist. In this case, the international standards that CBOs allegedly cannot or will not adhere to, that are mentioned in interviews, are to a large extent related to procedural criteria for reporting and case statistics that are central to the production of measurable outcomes, and the quantitative evaluation of programme efficiency, rather than to the adequacy of the services provided to victims of violence. Strict procedural requirements of this kind construct gender equality as a technical issue where international expertise is needed and removes ownership from refugee actors.

The use of "international standards" to ensure humanitarian control and ownership of gender equality promotion may appear contradictory to the strategy of governing through the creation of self-managing communities discussed above. A quote from a UN employee that discusses the relationship between international human rights standards and a community-based approach is illustrative in this regard: "The goal is, you know, equal recognition of human rights for both genders, that's the kind of base standard, and the way of getting there is through community-based approaches. But yeah, these community-based approaches I think always have to be tempered in reality."⁵⁵ Active refugee communi-

ties are needed as partners to successfully achieve the goals of humanitarian organizations, but the agency of refugees needs to be “tempered” to ensure it is practiced in a way consistent with humanitarian agendas. The interplay between technologies of agency seeking to activate refugees and technologies of performance that seek to regulate them is evident here. Moreover, to understand the specific configuration of neo-liberal government in refugee camps, Edkins’ discussion of the humanitarian construction of the refugee subject is useful. Drawing on Agamben, she shows how refugees have been constructed as lives to be saved, not lives with a political voice. The camp is a site where the passivity and vulnerability of refugees is expected to be played out, not a site where refugees pursue their own political agendas.⁵⁶ This construction legitimizes a will to “activate” refugees and engage them in the promotion of gender equality as defined by humanitarian organizations, but it leaves no room for refugees as political subjects.

Conclusion

The strategies employed to promote gender equality in the refugee camps in Thailand and Bangladesh illustrate how neo-liberal technologies of government operate in the specific context of humanitarian aid work in refugee camps. In particular, the analysis presented here draws out the implications of neo-liberalism for the implementation of humanitarian gender equality policies. When the promotion of gender equality is understood and organized through a neo-liberal frame it has a number of problematic effects that constrain the possibilities to challenge existing relations of power. First, the meaning of gender equality becomes superficial and instrumental. The emphasis on measurable outcomes in humanitarian gender programming reduces gender equality to an issue of numbers and precludes a deeper analysis of gendered power relations; everything that cannot easily be measured quantitatively becomes invisible. Attention to gender is also frequently represented as a means to other ends, such as public health or efficient distribution of food. As the technology of mobilizing women as humanitarian partners illustrates, humanitarian organizations may seek to achieve these other ends through the reification of existing gender relations as well as by their transformation. Second, international actors are represented as the bearers of gender equality norms and thereby as having a superior knowledge of its meaning in the camp context. International “expertise” is privileged at the expense of refugee ownership by the construction of

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"I left my daughter over there": Gender in Burmese Refugee Narratives

M. GAIL HICKEY

ABSTRACT

More than 92,000 Burmese have come to the United States since 1990 seeking asylum from war-torn Myanmar. Burmese refugees represent diverse ethnic and religious groups. They may have experienced personal violence and/or years of living in a refugee camp prior to migration, and arrive in the US with very different socio-historical experiences than Asian immigrants. The adverse effects of living with political violence are well documented in the literature. The recent scholarship on refugees has focused on Southeast Asian and African refugee experiences. Due to the military junta's strict control over information coming out of Myanmar, however, little is known about Burmese refugee experiences. Even less is known about Burmese women's experiences of refugee camps and ethnic violence. Fort Wayne, Indiana is a major Burmese refugee resettlement site. This study explores ethnic violence and refugee camp experience through the lens of a diverse group of twelve Burmese women currently living in Fort Wayne. The purpose of this study is to advance understanding about gendered perspectives of the US Burmese refugee experience. This article focuses on two emergent themes drawn from a larger oral history study: separation from family, and refugee camp experiences.

Introduction

The numbers of refugees entering the United States is on the rise. US officials approved approximately three million applications from persons facing persecution in "Communist-controlled and conflict-ridden" countries during 1975–2010.¹ In 2011, US President Barak Obama set a limit of 80,000 refugee admissions to the United States, and a limit of 76,000 for 2012. Most of these refugees were expected to be from the Near East and South Asia.²

The United Nations High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR) works with the US Department of State to resettle identified refugees from third world countries in the United States. The UNHCR defines a refugee as:

a person who is outside his or her country of nationality or last habitual residence and is unable or unwilling to return to that country because of persecution or a well-founded fear of persecution on account of race, religion, nationality, membership in a particular social group, or political opinion.³

The migration experiences of refugees differ significantly from those of immigrants. Immigrants experience migration as a result of personal or familial choice. Refugees, on the other hand, have little choice about or control of their long-term future plans. As a result of these differences, refugees experience unique stressors related to displacement, disruption, homesickness, depression, and acculturative stress.⁴

The adverse effects of refugees' extended exposure to violence and intimidation have been well documented. Less, however, is known about Burmese refugees' experiences—for example, the population of Burmese refugees who arrived in the United States since 1990.⁵ Within the scant scholarship on recently arrived US refugee populations, virtually no studies have been published regarding Burmese women's experiences or perspectives.⁶ This study attempts to remedy that deficit by focusing on oral history interviews with Burmese women now living in the United States.

Burmese Refugees

The Burmese parliament dissolved the ruling military junta in March 2011, opening the door to the potential for democratic rule. Between 1962 and 2011, scholars and journalists had very limited access to accurate information about the people of Burma. Refugees from Burma have been pouring into the United States since shortly after the 1988 Uprising. This article portrays the experiences and perspectives of twelve Burmese refugees, with a focus on intersectionalities between ethnicity and gender.

More than 92,000 Burmese have come to the United States since 1990. Several major Burmese refugee resettlement sites have been identified by the US Department of State. The city of Fort Wayne in northeast Indiana is one of the largest and most rapidly growing US Burmese resettlement sites.

In its 2011 *Report to Congress*, the US Department of State recognises Burmese refugees under Priority 2 (Group Referrals) and Priority 3 (Family Reunification) designations. Burma⁷ is the largest country in mainland Southeast Asia. The nation is ethnically diverse and in comparison with its neighbours, China and India, is sparsely populated. Burma has been under military rule since 1962; its people continue to experience torture, imprisonment, widespread rape, and forced labour.⁸

Political upheavals and civil unrest have greatly affected the lives of the people of Burma since before World War II. Burma obtained its independence from Britain in 1948, when the parliamentary democracy known as the Union of Burma was established. The newly formed government was unstable, however, and a civil war erupted between the central authority and ethnic groups who were unhappy with the federal structure. Following a 1962 coup, Burma's General Ne Win instituted a military dictatorship founded on socialist principles. In the late 1960s, General Ne Win's government instituted the "Four Cuts" plan. The Four Cuts plan removes rebel groups' supplies of "food, funds, intelligence, and recruits."⁹ Among other things, it legalized military destruction of villages, burning or looting villagers' crops and livestock, forced relocation of villagers, forced labour, torture, intimidation of villagers suspected of aiding or cooperating with opposition groups, sending civilians ahead of soldiers to serve as landmine sweepers, and suppression of the media.¹⁰

Ne Win retained power over the country until 1988 while practising "an infamously brutal regime."¹¹ Interviewees in this study and members of their families lived in an ongoing state of fear as a result of the "continued intensity of acts committed by the military regime on citizens of Burma."¹² Many fled to Thai or Indian border refugee camps.

In March 1988, a Rangoon Institute of Technology student was killed during a pro-democracy demonstration. A series of anti-government demonstrations ensued, and, by July, General Ne Win resigned. Many more people joined the student-led demonstrations. In September 1988, the government engineered a violent crackdown on the demonstrators. Thousands of political activists and university students fled to the borders and joined ethnic insurgents or formed their own student-led armed forces.

In 1989, the military government changed Burma's name to "Myanmar" (interviewees continue to refer to the country as Burma and, out of respect for their perspective, it is referred to as Burma throughout this paper). The government held "free elections" in 1990 in the belief their candidates would win; when they did not, the military junta that seized power after crushing the pro-democracy uprising refused to recognise elected leaders. Pro-democracy leader Aung San Suu Kyi—who won the 1991 Nobel Peace Prize—was placed under house arrest in 1989 while she was campaigning for office, and essentially remained under house arrest until November 2010. While touring the United States in 2012, Aung San Suu Kyi called for unity among Burmese-Americans of different ethnic backgrounds.

An exploration of intersectionalities between gender and ethnicity necessitates a brief look at Burma's diverse ethnic groups. Eight ethnic groups are recognized in Burma: Burman, Mon, Karen, Karenni, Kachin, Chin, Shan, and Rohingya.¹³ While Burma's diverse ethnic

groups share similar concerns for the country's future, they are also engaged in a fight "to preserve their own cultures, and to maintain some degree of autonomy."¹⁴ Americans are generally unable fully to comprehend how deeply Burmese tensions are affected by ethnicity. Burma's governmental leaders propose to unite the country's diverse ethnicities and assimilate them into the majority Burman Buddhist culture. General Aung San reported in 1940 that the government's ideology is "one race, one language, one religion."¹⁵

Government authorities actively suppress minority groups' cultural-maintenance efforts, including religious practice. The use of minority ethnic languages, traditions, customs, religions, and even the teaching of ethnic histories, is taboo. The military junta discriminates against and prosecutes members of non-Buddhist religious groups by restricting educational activities as well as the construction or restoration of churches and mosques. The government also restricts publication of non-Buddhist religious texts such as the Bible or the Qur'an.¹⁶ The junta has ordered Burmese soldiers to marry ethnic minority women and convert them to Buddhism; these soldiers receive promotions and other commendations for carrying out the order.¹⁷

Readers may benefit from some general explanation about ethnic diversity in Burma. "Burmese" is a word used to describe any person from Burma, while "Burman" is used to describe an individual from the Burman ethnic group. Burmans represent the majority culture in Burma, accounting for approximately 60 per cent of the country's population of fifty-five million.¹⁸ Most Burmans are Buddhist.

About four per cent of the Burmese population identify with the Mon culture, the group credited with the robust spread of Buddhism in the area. The Mon, who are closely related to the Khmer, have one of the oldest written languages in Burma.¹⁹

The Karen (also known as Kayin) reside predominantly in Kayah State in the mountainous eastern portion of Burma. Some Kayin live on the Thai border. Most Kayin are Buddhist, although about twenty-five per cent have converted to Christianity. Some Kayin who live in the rugged mountains of east Burma continue to practise animism.²⁰ The Karenni (sometimes referred to as Kayah) also hail from Kayah State in the eastern part of Burma. Spirit worship, or animism, is widely practiced in the mountainous region; most Kayah have converted to Christianity.²¹

The people of Chin ethnicity living in northern Burma are of Tibeto-Burman origin. The majority of Chin in Burma has converted to Christianity. Many also fled to India or Bangladesh to escape Burman persecution.

The Shan State is in east-central Burma. Ethnic groups residing in Shan State include the Kachin (far north), the Wa (northern moun-

tains), and the Padaung. Shan are believed to have migrated to Burma from Yunnan in the southwest.²²

The Rohingya, an Islamic minority group, trace their origins to the tenth century. Approximately 800,000 Rohingya live in Burma, the majority of whom are of Rakhine origin living in Rakhine State. In 1991 and 1992, the Burman majority forced about 300,000 Rohingya out of Burma. These refugees escaped to Bangladesh or India. Many reside as stateless individuals in other countries—perhaps many hundreds of thousands—although it is impossible to obtain accurate figures since the Burmese government does not recognize the Rohingya as a minority ethnic group.²³

Research on Women Refugees

At least half of the world's refugees are women and children. Moreover, eighty per cent of war casualties are women and children.²⁴ Asian women's participation in international migration has increased while their voices continue to be largely absent from the literature on refugee experiences.²⁵ More research using qualitative methodology, such as oral history interviews, is needed to add to this sparse literature base.²⁶

Refugee scholarship generally fails to acknowledge the gendered nature of displacement issues "except, perhaps, as a footnote."²⁷ Maxine Seller notes that women's migration experiences are neglected by scholars due to "the persistence of negative stereotypes which made it appear that women did little worth writing about."²⁸ When refugee women's experiences are depicted in the literature, stereotypical images and victimization abound.²⁹ Feminist scholarship challenges the portrayal of women as insignificant actors in migration history, arguing against gender-biased migration perspectives.³⁰ Feminist scholars also support feminist oral history techniques.³¹ Refugee scholars invite researchers to give "voice to women who are otherwise silent or subordinate in the historical record."³²

When researchers set out to tell the story of everyday life during times of conflict or ethnic strife, Benford's question "Whose history shall be told?" helps to crystallize the research agenda. "Should it be his-story, or her-story?"³³ Women's narratives of war time experiences typically focus on family separations and emphasize suffering or loss.³⁴

The UNHCR 1991 *Guidelines on the Protection of Refugee Women* addresses gaps in refugee protection brought about by the absence of reference to gender in the UNHCR's original 1977 definition.³⁵ In 2008, the UNHCR supplemented its 1991 *Guidelines* with a *Handbook for the Protection of Women and Girls*. Clearly, UNHCR guidelines and standards support a need for research that explores gender-specific refugee experiences. This

study draws upon the feminist oral history framework as well as UNHCR guidelines to highlight Burmese women refugees' voices and perspectives and, in so doing, illuminates the pre-migration experiences of a rapidly increasing and internally diverse ethnic group in the United States.

Burmese Refugees in Fort Wayne

In 1991, the US Department of State designated Fort Wayne, Indiana, a refugee resettlement site. Local Catholic and Lutheran religious organizations have assisted displaced Burmese in Thailand's refugee camps since the late 1980s. The city of Fort Wayne (population just over 250,000) is home to one of the largest groups of Burmese refugees in the United States,³⁶ and has more Burmese speakers than any other area in the country. Partly as the result of refugee resettlement, and partly due to family reunification, approximately 7,000 Burmese now reside in Fort Wayne. Both Karen and Mon ethnic groups are well represented.

Burmese refugees began arriving in Fort Wayne in the early 1990s. These refugees are more likely than later arrivals to have been educated in Burma and to have experienced a middle-class socioeconomic status. Burmese refugees arriving in Fort Wayne a decade later are less likely to have gone to school in Burma (or in a refugee camp), and more likely to have been subsistence farmers before migration.

Method

Participants

This study explores female Burmese refugees' pre-migration memories and perspectives. The twelve participants were interviewed for a larger oral history study (n=30: 18 male, 12 female). Diverse religions are represented (six Buddhist, four Muslim, two Christian) as well as diverse ethnic groups (Mon, Karen, Burman). Five interviewees arrived in the US between 1993 and 2000; the remaining seven have lived in the US for five years or fewer. Seven interviewees are married, one is unmarried, and four are widowed. Interviewees ranged in age from twenty-one to forty-six years at the time of their interviews. All married and once-married participants have at least one child; the number of children per interviewee ranges from zero to seven.

In addition to audiotaped and transcribed oral history interviews, this study employs multiple qualitative data collection techniques—par-

ticipation in Burmese cultural events; informal conversations with key informants, and examination of related media sources—to develop the study and analyse findings. I am committed to providing an accurate reflection of interviewees' views and perspectives through inclusion of their actual words to produce "a theoretically informed interpretation of the culture."³⁷ Due to the sensitive nature of the refugee experience and possible negative repercussions on family members who continue to reside in Burma, interviewees are not identified by name.

Procedure

All interviewees were voluntary participants in a larger oral history project (see "Participants," above). Potential interviewees were approached through initial contacts at a major state university, the Catholic Charities refugee resettlement office, and through two Protestant churches' refugee resettlement efforts. Each oral history interview was conducted in the interviewee's home and averaged two to three hours in length. Interpreters were provided at the interviewee's request; and two interviews were conducted through an interpreter. Each interviewee examined and approved the final interview transcript (with assistance from an interpreter when requested).

Data were continually subjected to a filtering system from which units of information, categories, and recurring themes were identified.³⁸ Transcribed narratives were coded for main themes and sub-categories that intersect with those main themes, as well as being analysed for code, concept, and category.³⁹

Findings and Discussion

In war-torn countries and refugee camps, families are separated and women are especially vulnerable to "ethnically motivated gender-specific" violence.⁴⁰ Emergent themes explored in this paper include "separation from family" and "refugee camp experiences." Both themes are discussed in this section. I weave interview excerpts with relevant information from the literature, thereby providing a research-based context.

Separation from Family

In his essay entitled, "The Social Experience of War," Summerfield notes that secondary consequences of torture and violence, such as the disappearance of a close family member, "may affect a person more than the

torture *per se*.”⁴¹ Baca-Zinn urges Western feminist researchers to consider the “great complexity in family dynamics and important variation among families within particular racial and ethnic groups.”⁴² Gray and Elliot’s research on refugee resettlement in New Zealand finds that family reunification is a high priority for all refugees. Their study also notes that differences in men and women refugees’ experiences can be directly related to the lack of protection from traditional family networks for women refugees.⁴³ Indeed, women experiencing displacement tend to look to their family as a “source of support.”⁴⁴ Interviewees frequently refer to family in their narratives—both the persons who make up their nuclear family in the US and family members lost or left behind in Burma. Often their initial separation from family occurred at the point of fleeing Burma.

A Karen Christian interviewee and her family escaped from their home in Burma to a Thai refugee camp. Unfortunately inter-ethnic divisions resulted in frequent clashes within the camp. “The [Burmese] government created many things to split the Karen people. We have Karen Buddhist and we have Karen Christian. So [government actions] make problems between those two [groups] and we split,” she explains. “The Karen Christians and the Karen Buddhists [living in the refugee camp] fight each other.” Eventually the interviewee and her family were able to leave the troubled Thai refugee camp, with the exception of her daughter. The US refugee resettlement processing requires extensive documentation for each applicant. *Refugees International* reports that Burmese refugee families often become separated when one or more family members fail to receive official designation as a refugee.⁴⁵ “I left my daughter over there,” she says quietly and with evident sadness. “She [had to] stay in the camp because she didn’t finish her tests yet. I was afraid [to leave her], but we have no choice—only to risk [being permanently parted for the sake of gaining refugee status].”

Even after they made the difficult decision to leave their daughter behind, the process of leaving a refugee camp turned out to be more complex than the family had realized:

We are not legal to travel over there. So we have to pray...pray for [protection from being] arrested by the [Thai] police. But fortunately we had a false Thai ID card (even though we cannot speak Thai). The Karen people over there couldn’t speak Thai either; [no one is suspicious] if a Karen lady cannot speak Thai.

So we’re waiting in Bangkok, my son, my husband, and myself; waiting and writing about ourselves. [We] submit our papers to the UNHCR. Then the officer called us for interview. And we have to tell our story, [reveal] everything. My husband was interviewed, [and] myself, and my son. My daughter was not [in Bangkok with us because she had remained in the Thai camp]. When the officer

asks, "Where is your family?" I am able to explain [my husband and son escaped with me] but [as for] my daughter, I didn't know where [she was because] the Karen Buddhists raided that camp. She has to run for her [life]! But the officer had been to the border and [could] see the situation, so she believed what I said.

So after one month we were recognized as a refugee status. And staying in Bangkok, we have to be very careful. We stayed at a colonel's house, a retired officer who was a friend of [my late husband]. He take care of us so it was safe. But when we go outside we have to be careful. We have to disguise ourselves as Thai. I wear skirt or long dress like Thai lady—we wear sarong like Burmese lady in camp. In Bangkok, I [dispose of the] sarong, cut the hair and change [my mannerisms] to act like Thai lady. If Thai lady show fear in face to police [it causes suspicion]. If the police know that we were from Burma, they can always arrest us... But fortunately, we were not arrested. We waited for over two years in Bangkok. (Aye fieach interviewee has been assigned a pseudonym, 21 May 2002, Fort Wayne, Indiana, USA)

The two-year wait was not without its own struggles, yet the family eventually arrived in the United States. The interviewee's daughter was always on her mind and in her heart. "She has to stay, but the camp was burnt down over there [by Karen Buddhists]. They...she has to run [for her life] and move to another camp," the Karen Christian interviewee recalls. "At last we met an American friend who could speak Thai. He went there and brought her back [to us]!" she exclaims.

A Mon interviewee from Kaw Bian village was separated from her husband almost immediately following the August 1988 Uprising. The military came to power on September 18, and on September 16, a few students came to their home. Days later, the military came to the village looking for dissidents. "Some stay in the village [we housed students who took part in the Uprising] and the penalty was arrest and go to jail," the interviewee reports. "That's why [my husband] left home right away [once the military took power]." Her husband returned home, and the military police came to their door again. "'Why you received this student to your home?' the police ask me. My husband knew the students so that's why we have to take care of them, [shelter] them, provide them with food." The interviewee's husband left home again; she later received news he had crossed the border into Thailand.

In 1997, after not hearing from her husband for nine years, the Mon interviewee and three of her children left home to travel to the Thai border. En route, the interviewee left the children with her parents, found work at a nearby corn estate, and made friends with her co-workers. "This woman [would] like to go to Bangkok to find her husband," the new friends told the corn estate owners. She was allowed to cross the border with her three

children and, after she entered Thailand, the police caught them. “I had the baby [in my arms], and the other children ran [in different directions] and could not find each other,” she recalls, shaking her head.

Once Thai police allowed the Mon interviewee to continue into Thailand, someone told her about a Mon Buddhist temple in Bangkok. Since she had no place to stay, the interviewee went to the temple and placed herself and her baby in the care of the monks. The monks decided to help the interviewee to find her husband and reunite the family. Eventually, the monks sent a message to the interviewee’s husband that his wife and baby were at the Mon Buddhist temple in Bangkok. Ten days after receiving the monks’ message, the husband came to the temple and left to escort his wife and baby to a student camp. “After we get to the student camp, we are together and [are] happy, but the other two children [are] still missing. We have little bit of food [at the camp] and place to stay. While we stay at camp, we just think about how to get out [and find our other children],” she confesses. “[If we] stay at the camp, it’s not sufficient life.” The Mon interviewee’s family could not go back to their home in Burma or leave the camp to go elsewhere because they are not Thai citizens. “Those who are not refugees cannot stay at [the] camp,” she adds. They felt they had no identity and no freedom. Due to conditions in the camp, their elder son could not receive an education. “First we ask UNHCR to come to the United States. We [were recognized] as refugees in 1998 and can stay at camp [until we can get to the us],” the interviewee elaborates.

The children studied the English and Mon languages during the two years the family lived at the student camp. Living quarters were divided into separate ethnic communities, such as the Mon community and the Karen community. The interviewee was able to get training for sewing clothes, and started learning English at the camp. “I started [learning English] from A, B, C,” the interviewee says, laughing. She felt fortunate to get any training because “about 700 people [were] staying at the camp.”

On March 10, 1999, the Mon family left Thailand to come to the United States. Between arriving at the refugee camp and leaving for the US, they lived in fear that the Thai police would catch them again. “If the Thai police catch us, they send us back to the border, or to IDC [Immigration Detention Center]. So we have to all stay in the one place—the student camp.” Regarding life after resettlement, she says, “Here [in the US] we have happy life with freedoms. Our [children] get good education.”

The Mon interviewee’s family was divided as a result of sheltering students who took part in the 1988 Uprising. Since the Uprising, continued unrest resulted in increased numbers of Burmese seeking asylum in the United States. A Karen interviewee recalls her older brother’s in-

volvement with the 1988 Uprising. At the time, she was a fifteen year-old student in the final year of Burmese secondary school and her brother was a college student. “He was the one who was deeply involved [in the political situation],” she clarifies. The interviewee’s mother was a teacher at the high school and her father was a retired railroad engineer who stayed at home to care for the two younger children. “People like my brother would organize high school [students and teachers],” she relates. Continuing her story, the interviewee says:

We did not really take part in the leadership [of demonstrations], but we went along with the college students as they organized us. We just went along on the demonstrations [in] June. [The demonstrations occurred in] June, July, August. Then in September the military coup [happened]. (Sanda, 10 November 2002, Fort Wayne, Indiana, USA)

The interviewee’s tone and facial expression exhibit no change as she moves from the topic of students organizing demonstrations to the topic of institutionalized murder by the military junta. “So,” she continues, “they did not really start shooting the students in our town until August.” The interviewee confirms Summerfield’s finding as she describes the emotional trauma connected with her brother’s disappearance.⁴⁶ “After the military coup,” she continues, now with greater emotion in her voice, “my brother and his friends were totally in danger because of their participation in the movement...My mother had to find a way for my brother to escape.”

After consulting with their trusted social network, the interviewee’s mother managed to help her brother escape to a region known as “the liberated area” run by Karen revolutionaries. Military police interrogated “my mother...both my parents...for ‘misleading’ the students.” The interviewee’s parents were in danger of being jailed for crimes against the government and, after the police interrogated them, “one of the prominent persons in [our] town suggested [to] my mother [that we] leave the country.”

The interviewee and her parents fled to the Burma-Thai border soon after being interrogated by the military police regarding their aid to student demonstrators. Here, she describes the nature of their journey:

We left in 1988 November...We came to the Brown Area (that means the clash between Karen rebels and government troops can take place at any time. Government troops [are] heavily stationed there, and [so] it becomes an attraction for the rebels to attack). We spent a week or two [there], hiding and waiting for our contact persons. Whenever the Burmese troops came to the village where we were hiding, we had to leave the house [and] hide somewhere.

We [left the Brown Area and] started climbing the mountains [on] December 12th in order to get to the [Burma-Thai] border area. I remember [the date] because December 12th was my sister's birthday. We were on foot [and] it took us three weeks to get there. (Sanda, 10 November 2002, Fort Wayne, Indiana, USA)

The village they left was a Karen village in a highly populated area of Burma. On their journey to the border, a very different way of life emerged from the one to which they are accustomed. The differences are the result of the military junta's Four Cuts programme:

Along the way, the area was completely Karen...mountainous villages. These people—I never knew [a lifestyle like this] existed! They were completely isolated. There is absolutely no system in terms of health, education, and economic development—absolutely nothing. They have no sanitation, no school...They just do their living by slash and burn farming. Sometimes they have enough food [and] sometimes they don't have enough food. We were told sometimes the Burmese troops come in and destroy their [rice] paddies or attack them and then they have to leave their paddies and run away. We couldn't carry food with us [as we fled toward the border], and they shared their food with us.

The [lifestyle at this] border area...it's totally an epiphany. That's where I learned, for the first time, we really did not know what we were doing [when we participated in the 8-8-88 demonstrations]. We were organized and incited by the college students... we did not really know what we were doing. [Once I saw the results of the government's actions against Karen citizens], I became very angry with the government. And I'm still angry.

How could they do that to the people?! I mean, if you want to oppress [ethnic customs]... but this, to me, is completely uprooting the people. [The military junta] cut off every possibility for development. And in addition to cutting off every possibility for development, they also make sure that these people will not be able to live. (Sanda, 10 November 2002, Fort Wayne, Indiana, USA)

This interviewee's initial experience of family separation began when her older brother was forced to leave the family home and flee the country in fear of his life. As a university student, her older brother was involved in organizing students and citizens in demonstrations related to the 1988 Uprising. After her brother was interrogated by military police for aiding a suspected dissident, the interviewee and her entire family were forced to flee.

Another interviewee's husband was forced to leave their home due to his perceived political connections. The family's livelihood depended upon others' willingness to pay for her husband's work. The husband was a professional artist whose work—especially sculptures created to decorate religious pagodas—caught the attention of military government officials. The military junta had placed a ban on all art and media not

considered to be in compliance with majority Burman ethnicity or Buddhist religious teachings; this ban severely impacted minority artists' and artisans' abilities to make a living.⁴⁷ "To live in Burma is impossible for my husband," the interviewee declares. She elaborates on her family's involvement in the 1988 Uprising:

There was an uprising in 1988 and my husband participated in [a demonstration]. After that, the officials came to the house and asked me questions...The military intelligence and the police came to the house and asked questions several times. (Su, 20 November 2001, Fort Wayne, Indiana, USA)

The family arranged to escape to the Thai border but, like many others, became separated during the chaotic border crossing. Once they were reunited in a Thai refugee camp, the interviewee and her husband considered their options and decided to apply for refugee status. "To live in Burma [our lives are in danger], but to live Thailand is also impossible [because we have no legal classification]," she summarizes.

Another interviewee was too young to participate in the 1988 Uprising. Still, she recalls her father's death at the hands of Burman soldiers, and the terror her family suffered: "My father passed away when I was five years old...he was killed by the Burmese Army."

Refugee Camp Experiences

Researchers find that life in a refugee camp puts refugees at risk of serious health disorders. Post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) may occur following traumatic events experienced during war or political unrest, during the process of escaping, and also in the refugee camps themselves.⁴⁸ Many refugees continue to suffer the effects of PTSD decades after resettlement.⁴⁹ Burmese refugees think of refugee camps in Thailand as "prison-like" since once inside the camp, residents must obtain permission to leave.⁵⁰ In this study, interviewees emphasize both positive and negative aspects of refugee camp life—while they were relieved to be alive, had a semblance of shelter, and perhaps had access to training of some sort, interviewees found the lack of freedom or personal choice problematic.

Having gone without food or existing on limited supplies during their journeys through the jungle, interviewees report that they were happy to be able to eat regularly inside the refugee camps. The food's quality and variety were poor, however, as this excerpt illustrates:

We had enough food in the refugee camp...at least, we have rice and we have fish paste. [Meat and grain] were the two main things that we needed for our

Several interviewees expressed how grateful they were to live in a refugee camp that provided some type of education. "When I came to the refugee camp in 1989," says a Karen interviewee, "I went back to high school. There [were] schools—primary schools, two high schools and two middle schools." From 1962 until today, the military junta had closed many universities and high schools without notice.⁵¹ Interviewees' pleasure over being able to attend classes, however, often was tempered with fear. "My first year in the camp...the Burmese regime [fought a major battle] against the Karen. I was maybe fourteen [years old]," an interviewee explains. The camp was on the Thai side of the river, and Karen soldiers were stationed on the other side of the river. She recalls:

So on the other side of the river [from our camp there] was heavy shelling going on, and here on this side the refugees are living and going to school. We could hear shelling, heavy shelling, like big weapons all day... It's like that all day, twenty-four hours, seven days a week. We were in the classroom and we could hear that...The shelling went on for ten...twenty days [at a time]. (Aye, 21 May 2002, Fort Wayne, Indiana, USA)

Sometimes Thai soldiers or police visited Thai refugee camps and subjected Burmese families to intimidation tactics and bribery. "By law, they couldn't do anything because we were refugees," one interviewee explains. "But sometimes [they resorted to] bribing... 'If you give such and such, I may not arrest you. If you give me three hundred *bahts* (or five hundred *bahts* or one thousand *bahts*), I'll let you go free.' Many things happened that way," she continues.

Refugee camp life legitimizes and rationalizes violence, aggression, and rape.⁵² Experiencing these and other antisocial behaviours, especially within the atypical social environment of a refugee camp, has a profound effect on an individual's personality and functioning.⁵³ "Refugee camp [life] does not have a [personal] dignity," insists an interviewee. "Your dignity is always under threat." No one in the refugee camp was permitted to carry a weapon and "in the camp [are] mostly women and children." Thai soldiers surrounded the interviewee's camp, and soldiers as well as Thai civilians were allowed to enter. As she describes it, these visits were frightening events:

The way they want to come into the camp! They come in heavily drunk, which was very disturbing for us culturally (even though we have our men who drink heavily). But to go house to house ... like [being] public intoxicated in this country — it's just indecent! (Aye, 21 May 2002, Fort Wayne, Indiana, USA)

Being around men who were publicly intoxicated was not the only indignity that refugee women suffered at the hands of Thai soldiers and civilians. Leiter et al. confirm that among women refugees, the “greatest fear is ‘working for free,’ providing sexual services for Thai police and soldiers.”⁵⁴ Sometimes Thai soldiers or policemen would come to the refugee camp looking for a young unmarried woman to “work” in Thai brothels—or “work for free,” says an interviewee in this study:

[They] would come in and [say], ‘we’re looking for moonoh to work for us’ (moonoh means young girl, or single woman). They come in and... here’s no respect. You can feel it! They think, ‘You’re refugees; you’re vulnerable; you’re helpless; and you will do anything you are asked to do’, if you’re paid a few bucks or something. I always hated that. They made me angry, because there’s no respect.

Probably we [do] want money, and we [do] want to work. We [need] some income. And then they would come in and [treat us this way]. If there is any kind of respect, they would come in and ask, ‘We have this kind of job...that kind of job...available. Would you like to do this?’ (Aye, 21 May 2002, Fort Wayne, Indiana, USA)

A 2009 report estimated that as many as 40,000 Burmese women work in Thai brothels. Most of these women are ethnic minorities who lack education or formal training. Women sex workers identified in Thai refugee camps also lack the protection afforded married women who are accompanied by their husbands. As Srinivasar points out in her study of displaced women, “...the experiences of married women are quite different from those of single, divorced, deserted, or widowed women.”⁵⁵

Thai soldiers and policemen could come into the camps at “anytime, do anything to any refugees that they come across: kids, girls, boys, younger, older...doesn’t matter,” one interviewee says. “We were not only afraid,” she states, “we were ashamed to live there.” Another interviewee describes the life she left in Burma under the military government as similar to her new life in the refugee camp in that both were filled with “human rights abuses, forced labour, killing, torture, burning of the villages by the military...rapes.” Authorities seemed willing to look the other way when male, Thai civilians came into the refugee camps. Sometimes, these visits turned violent:

Often [Thai soldiers or civilians] would come in with guns, and they’d grab women—pregnant women, young women, older women—it doesn’t matter. Whoever they saw and they wanted to [rape]...they could. They could just do that... (Aye, 21 May 2002, Fort Wayne, Indiana, USA)

Geography, adverse weather, and disease also posed a danger to residents of refugee camps. "During the summer, the [river] waters are going down, and it's easy for the Karen soldiers to cross. So you have to be very careful. Some children and women were killed by the shooting," an interviewee laments.

Another interviewee shudders as she recalls experiences at a Thai refugee camp. She was fifteen years old at the time. "Over thirty people die [from] malaria," she mourns. "We can't save them, because we don't have any medicine. We just let them die...right in front of us." Residents at the camp were not trained soldiers. "Most are just students," the interviewee admits. "They don't know all about jungle life." Soldiers or not, camp residents were required to participate in physical training. Training for would-be soldiers mainly consisted of running. "Everyday like 5:30 in the morning to 6:30 in the evening, you have to run. Just run. People get tired—they don't want to keep training," she declares. One day, the training officer fired his gun toward the camp. "He take all these people to the river and tell them, 'Put your head underneath the water'," she reflects. "After that, he tell them, 'Lay down on the field [in the blazing sun],' just for punishment. Some people die because of that...getting the malaria."

"We have two children," an interviewee explains, "and both were born on the Thai-Burmese border...in the refugee camp." Her husband, who asked to be interviewed at the same time, describes their arrest and imprisonment while he sought medical treatment in Bangkok:

We were staying at the Mon Buddhist temple in Bangkok [during my treatment]. Thai police came to the temple, arrested people who had no proper travel documents and put them in the prison. All [were] arrested. All my family... me, my wife, my children. The prison condition is very, very bad...Just [a] narrow place [where] six people stay for three months. Yes. Two children sit on lap of father and mother. No space. (Thant, 10 August 2002, Fort Wayne, Indiana, USA)

Imprisonment and sentencing of Burmese citizens are simply extensions of the military interrogation process. Many citizens are sentenced and immediately incarcerated without the benefit of trial or due process. "The person being interrogated is often held in a confined space such as the cells used for prison dogs," note Hudson-Rodd and Hunt in their study entitled, "The Military Occupation of Burma."⁵⁶ Prison cells will either be completely dark or constantly flooded with light, a technique Alan Feldman refers to as "a voiding of time," intended to reduce prisoners' sense of space and chronology.⁵⁷ Military police often threaten women prisoners with "rape or exposure" (forced public nakedness), causing their interrogations to be more psychologically grueling.⁵⁸

"It's amazing," an interviewee says of her refugee camp memories. "I don't know how we did [what we did to survive], but we had to do it. That's life [in the camps]."

Concluding Remarks

This study highlights Burmese women refugees' voices and perspectives in an attempt to illuminate the pre-migration experiences of a rapidly growing and diverse US ethnic group. Twelve US Burmese women recall the 1988 Uprising and describe the traumatic events that ensued, including separation from family and/or loss of loved ones. These women's narratives also shed light upon the trauma inherent in everyday refugee camp existence. Their family's ethnicity or family members' political beliefs placed the interviewees in danger of imprisonment, torture, or death at the hands of the military junta. The greatest fears interviewees shared revolved around separation from family, arrest, and—after finding a refugee camp placement—fear of being forced to serve as a sex worker by Thai police or soldiers. Interviewees describe intense fear for their own safety and the safety of their families due to political beliefs and/or ethnic group identification; burning and/or destruction of entire villages by the military junta; raiding and burning of refugee camps where their family members had been left for safe-keeping; multiple-year refugee camp experiences beset by disease and lack of medicines; government oppression of art and media to the point that artists and their families were forced to flee for their lives; and murder. These traumatic events involve the individual, their family, and/or close friends, and deeply affect their sense of self in the host country.

Analysis of gendered perspectives among interviewees in this small study illustrates that female Burmese migrants recall personalized memories involving close relationships (sibling, spouse, family, and friends). Stewart et al. note that women are comfortable talking about personal relationships and their narratives tend to emphasize personal and affiliative issues rather than actions and events.⁵⁹ This finding is in line with Minister's writing on feminist interviews.⁶⁰

This study has significance to the body of research on women refugees. American, Canadian, Australian, and British researchers report a lack of support for asylum seekers from public organizations and the general population. Experts in resettlement agree that this continuing lack of refugee support stems from a lack of understanding about refugees' ethnic backgrounds and experiences.

Policy makers should call upon these and similar women's refugee narratives to draw special attention to the violations of human rights in refugee camps. Burmese women and girls are particularly vulnerable to abuse in refugee camps and on those occasions when permission to leave the camp is granted, women and girls risk abuse outside the camps as well. Unmarried and widowed women, and married women who are bereft of family protection, frequently are subjected to sexual assaults and other forms of violence.

Burmese refugee women's voices, in particular, have been absent from the corpus of research. Qualitative studies, such as this oral history project involving women's refugee narratives, provide first-hand accounts that help to counteract or clarify the issues identified by resettlement experts. ■

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Notes

¹ Committee on Foreign Relations. "Abandoned Upon Arrival: Implications for Refugees and Local Communities Burdened by a US Resettlement System That is Not Working." (Washington DC: US Government Printing Office), v.

² The White House. "Presidential Memorandum—Fiscal Year 2012 Refugee Admissions Numbers and Authorizations of In-Country Refugee Status." The White House. Press release, 30 September 2011. <http://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2011/09/30/presidential-memorandum-fiscal-year-2012-refugee-admissions-numbers-and-> (accessed 19 April 2013).

³ UN High Commissioner for Refugees, 24 August 1977, EC/SCP/5 (UNHCR) "Note on Determination of Refugee Status under International Instruments", <http://www.unhcr.org/refworld/docid/3ae68cc04.html> (accessed September 1, 2011).

⁴ US Committee for Refugees and Immigrants, "Asia". <http://www.refugees.org/> (accessed 19 April 2013).

⁵ Committee on Foreign Relations (2010), "Abandoned Upon Arrival", v.

⁶ A database search in PSYCHArticles using the terms "Burmese" and "women or gender" yielded zero published articles January 2000–December 2012.

⁷ The military government changed Burma's name to Myanmar in 1989 (Lang, 2002). Interviewees, however, continue to refer to their birth country as "Burma." Australia, the United States, and much of Europe use Burma when referring to the

country. Out of respect for interviewees' preference, I refer to the nation as Burma throughout the paper.

⁸ Erika Stahr, *Burmese in Australia* (Charleston: Booksurge, 2005), 9.

⁹ Marin Smith, *Burma: Insurgency and the politics of ethnicity* (London: Zed Books, 1999), 259.

¹⁰ Human Rights Watch, "Burma: Landmines kill, maim and starve civilians," <http://www.hrw.org>, (accessed September 10, 2011).

¹¹ Lisa Brooten, "The feminization of democracy under siege: 'The Lady' of Burma, and US foreign policy," *NWSA Journal* 17, no. 3 (2005): 134–156, 137.

¹² Nancy Hudson-Rodd and Myo Hunt, "The military occupation of Burma," *Geopolitics* 10, no. 3 (2005): 500–521, 501.

¹³ Carl Grundy-Warr and Elaine Wong Siew Yin, "Geographies of displacement: The Karenni and the Shan across the Myanmar-Thailand border," *Singapore Journal of Tropical Geography* 23, no. 1 (2002): 93–122, 96.

¹⁴ Victoria Amour-Hileman, *Singing to the dead: A missionary's life among refugees from Burma* (Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 2002), xiii.

¹⁵ Benedict Rogers, "The saffron revolution: The role of religion in Burma's movement for peace and democracy," *Totalitarian Movements and Political Religions* 9, no. 1 (2008): 115–118, 116.

¹⁶ US Department of State, "Burma—International Religious Freedom Report 2009," <http://www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/irf/2009/127266.htm> (accessed November 11, 2009).

¹⁷ Rogers, *The saffron revolution*, 117.

¹⁸ Thierry Falise, "On the run: In Burma's jungle hell," *World Policy Journal*, 56–64.

¹⁹ Amour-Hileman, *Singing to the dead*, xiii.

²⁰ Myanmar, "People of Myanmar," <http://www.myanmar.com/people/shan.html> (accessed February 1, 2013).

²¹ Myanmar, "People".

²² Ibid.

²³ Stahr, *Burmese in Australia*, 17.

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The Spiral Plait: Integration, Arts, and Migrant Women

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ABSTRACT

The question of integration and the formation of ethnic enclaves in the United Kingdom form a central part of the experience of refugees and migrants. Ethnic enclaves can be constructed by new communities, particularly communities of migrant women. In these enclaves, questions of physical and existential safety mean that bonding experiences within specific refugee communities are privileged over bridge-building with the prevailing dominant culture. A large part of this debate has rested on how far some sense of “Britishness” becomes part of the core identities of new communities and what policymakers and activists can do to reassert the mechanisms that make integration work. This paper will examine three aspects of this question: “enclavization” and its discontents, particularly for those who want to force integration from above; the critical gender dimension of the refugee and integration experience; and the concept of identity and heritage work with new communities of women. The latter is supported by a case-study of a set of projects in the north of England, which practise a particular vision of integration from below, or grassroots integration processes, rather than assimilation from above. Data collected for the case-studies were based on conversations with refugee women and women from settled host communities. This study bridges academic knowledge with community activists’ experiences on the ground and demonstrates a new way of working with arts and identity work amongst women where identity work is the work that women do themselves about their self-conceptions, biographies and destinations.

Introduction

“Spiral plait means colourful, cheerful mix of different people and culture. Britain to me is unity, strength, integration, common purpose, [a] multicultural society, positive.”—Christine¹

The question of integration and self-enclavization is central to the refugee experience in the United Kingdom. Ethnic enclaves are constructed by new communities of migrants and are often perceived as a threat to host communities and national identities. Within new communities, questions of physical and existential safety often mean that bonding experiences

within specific refugee communities are privileged over bridge-building with the prevailing dominant culture. A large part of this debate has rested on the degree to which some sense of “Britishness” can become part of the core identities of new communities, and what policymakers and activists can do to reassert the mechanisms that make integration work.

This paper will examine three aspects of this debate. Firstly, it will look at the enclavization process, its discontents, including those who would force integration from above, in the United Kingdom and the United States, and its implications for questions of identity, including governmental responses and integration initiatives. Much of the debate has been shaped by comparable processes in the United States, France and Sweden. Secondly, it will examine the critical gender dimension of the refugee and integration experience. Thirdly, it will look at the role of art and heritage work in identity formation among new communities of women. The latter is supported by a case-study of a set of projects in the north of England, which have tried to assert a particular vision of integration from below rather than assimilation from above, in conversation with refugee women and women from settled host communities. The debate presented here bridges academic knowledge with community activists’ practice, and asserts a new way of working with identity and arts amongst women.

Enclavization and Integration

In their study on migrant integration in Austria, France, Germany, the Netherlands, and the United Kingdom, Liz Fekete and researchers at the Institute for Race Relations have pointed to the racist nature of policy discourse, which focuses on the self-segregation and construction of parallel societies by migrants in Europe, and the ways in which governments throughout Europe have sought to challenge what amount to parallel societies distinct from the national identities and values of the host communities with new integration policies. Fekete has argued that this policy implementation is less about integration than creating some kind of punitive measure for those who refuse to conform to expectations of culture or language imposed by European member states.²

The most infamous of “enclaves” is the Rosengård quarter in the Swedish district of Malmö, which “counter-jihadists” have described as an alien state within a state, with its own anarchic governmentality profoundly at odds with wider Swedish statehood and government.³ Its 300,000 predominantly Muslim inhabitants are perceived as highly welfare-dependent by choice and are thought to have banished Swedish presence from the

territory—not only ordinary residents, but also the police, government, and emergency and social services. The community members in this quarter speak their own languages, practice their own faiths, and follow their own system of government, all of which are perceived as ideologically, profoundly at odds with Sweden, and Europe *per se*.⁴

Of course, it is true that the Rosengård district of Sweden and the *banlieues* of French cities are enclaves and self-enclaves at that. Self-enclavization processes can occur when the bonding mechanism within the community becomes more powerful than any process of bridge-building with other communities. But it is also true to say that this is mostly a consequence of profound racial hostility to new communities from host societies, legal and social barriers to employment, and what might be termed the “existential safety” or bonding of new communities, psychologically terrorized by discourses of exclusion and threats of physical violence.⁵

The UK government’s new integration policies are an affirmation of long-held beliefs regarding migrants, specifically that new communities are a problem. These policies assume an assimilationist agenda that place “British” values in opposition to those of emerging communities and expect migrant communities to conform to largely fictional expositions of “Britishness” without providing any integration resources whatsoever to facilitate this.⁶

The practice of integration including government policies from above are often seen as a project of enclave demolition but without addressing, and in fact reinforcing, the reasons why members of new communities create enclaves and self-segregate, socially, economically and increasingly, politically (e.g., by creating alternative modes of governance over streets, territories, and estates). Often, the dominant hope with integration work is that integration might enforce conformity to models of national stereotypes against diversity. Roger Waldinger, in his empirical study on enclaves in the United States has countered arguments that see the shedding of identity and the adoption of the values of the core or dominant cultural group as progressive.⁷ His rethinking of what has been known as the “enclave hypothesis,” which has been at the heart of American studies of migration, has led to a reassessment in recent years of the nature of the “enclave economy.” For example, the semi-autonomous areas of US cities structured by ethnic solidarities and economically sustained by ethnic allegiance.⁸ Waldinger argues that the question of a parallel society is largely fictional; rather, enclaves are much more integrative than exclusive.⁹

In fact, the kinds of ethnic enclaves that have emerged have been constructed as ethnic fictions by external power structures from outside or have actually been enclaves constructed by different refugee and mi-

gration flows and are therefore more ethnically diverse than the wider society. Furthermore, many enclaves are based on the fusion, hybridity, and migration flows of diverse ethnic and racial groups, and have been constructed in response to monolithic identities of exclusion. In this sense, the model for the enclavization process are city-spaces like Spitalfields and Rosengard where recurring migration flows inscribe peculiar, idiosyncratic identities onto their geographical spaces. The top-down governmental focus on integration can be seen as an assault upon the multiculturalism and ethnic plurality of streets in the name of a defined, totalitarian sense of "Britishness," rather than an attack on behalf of integration upon self-sustaining, political, and economic enclaves of pure, non-European ethnic groups. A focus on enclavization, ethnicity, and identity then raises significant reflections about the meaning of resistance and its linkages to the politics of women's lives and concerns—a specific politics that we can see emerging below in a reflection on arts and heritage integration work. In reality, it is in women's lives and creative experiences that much of the debate on integration and enclavization can be situated. The social spaces constructed by women can be instructive not only as illustrations of those processes but also because of the lessons for practice that, as we shall see, we can draw from them.

It is also true that "integration from above" is often about challenging, not cultural monolithism and multicultural segregation, but existing ethnic diversity in the name of a fictionalized core cultural competence of Europeaness or Britishness, which has, at times, reasserted the notions of Empire and colonial subjugation against the fractures and spaces that communities developed in response to racism and oppression. These communities are rarely mono-ethnic and much more akin to the multiracial enclaves on the margins of historical European and Islamic empires.

The launch of the UK government's new integration strategy marks the end of a debate on integration, which began in 1999 with the creation of the original support package for asylum seekers to the country.¹⁰ Whilst the new report and strategy is not purely refugee-focused, much of the debate is about the emergence of new communities and the ways in which these communities can be encouraged to integrate and subsequently gain formal citizenship. At the same time, this new strategy is complemented by the emergence of a more punitive asylum model, which is more returns or deportation-focused than in past administrations.

These emerging questions and the new political agenda in this area have been well-documented by Strang and Ager, who have identified four key issues for policymakers and practitioners. Firstly, there is a significant relationship between nationhood and citizenship, and social belonging. Secondly, the question of social capital is central to integration,

specifically in how bonds, bridges, and linkages can establish trust and citizenship. Thirdly, Strang and Ager raise the idea of integration as a two-way process and call into question the importance of resources for mapping factors key to integration.¹¹ Their current mapping of the field is rooted in their earlier policy work for the Home Office that guided, in many ways, the design of integration work for the past decade. Looking at the indicators by which integration and social cohesion could be measured, they identify a framework for analysis that includes: means and markers of integration such as housing, education, employment, and health status; social connections such as social bridges, bonds, and links; facilitators such as language and cultural knowledge, safety, and stability; and a structural foundation of all of the above indicators based on concepts of rights and citizenship.¹² Central to their vision of integration is a broad cultural repertoire including knowledge of customs, facilities, and procedures, as well as knowledge of the refugee context within local, host communities. Furthermore, integration is formally an active relationship between different communities coming together but also about a shared concept of nationhood and citizenship.

The longitudinal impact of proposals from this UK Home Office project were assessed in 2010 by Cebulla, Daniel and Zurawan, who again stressed the importance of cultural and friendship networks and the relationship of different integration domains for effective integration work.¹³ The original Home Office recommendations by Ager and Strang fed into what would become the new national strategy for refugee integration in 2005: *Integration Matters: A National Strategy for Refugee Integration*. This strategy document argued that the potential integration and needs of communities had to include the “development of inter-community relationships [as] a driving force for integration.”¹⁴ But beyond intercommunity relationships, it stressed the critical role of women in the integration process. It argued that the needs of women were distinct and often overlooked by policymakers and practitioners; the asylum system itself displayed little gender-sensitivity, particularly to issues such as mental health and stereotyping.¹⁵

The distinctive contribution of women to debates about integration was further noted in 2007 in the new Commission on Integration and Cohesion report. In its focus on different pasts and shared futures, the report argued for the recognition of the contribution of women, which had been lost due to persistent inequality and cultural practices within communities and further stressed women’s central role to the bridging and bonding experiences noted by Ager and Strang. *Our Shared Futures*, in its stress on civility, social capital, and meaningful contact, saw women as a central locus of integration transmission.¹⁶

A central part of the recommendations in the variety of reports was the reassertion of the idea of locality and local knowledge in supporting communities to interact with one another—rather than simply an abstract form of citizenship. This means taking seriously the micro-topographies of integration work: the role of localities like venues, estates, homes, schools and so on which are more meaningful than abstract ideas of policy change.

The integration debate itself has largely been shaped by a twofold process. On the one hand, there had been some recognition that, for communities to feel safe and empowered, there would have to be some form of induction into society and the wider community in the UK. On the other hand, there was a fear that violent extremism would find a foothold in new and emerging communities if they felt disenfranchised or dispossessed. Linked to this is a more generalized fear that new communities often did not understand either the values or the laws of their new country, which posed significant problems in legal and social terms, such as honour crimes, gender-based violence, and an unwillingness to learn the main language of a country, or the rules of conduct.

Certainly, the last decade has seen an eruption of social problems in British towns and cities as well as a rise in right-wing extremism as a response to a militant Islamism that is being transported into the UK by asylum seekers, or at least, this is often how these processes are portrayed in the media. In many ways, it was the “integrated” individual that was recruited to the cause of extremist narratives. Of course, many of those entering the UK as asylum seekers were themselves fleeing violent, misogynistic, and incipiently totalitarian Islamic regimes in countries such as Iran, Yemen, and Somalia, and, if anything, display more of a commitment to UK values and society than the average UK resident or citizen from a host community.¹⁷ Yet this question of enclaves and how to overcome them has become a significant part of the debate from those who want to impose integration from above and others, who want to implement integration from below.

One of the critical conditions of integration is the overcoming of an “enclavization” process through which communities self-enclave or are forcibly enclaved from above—physically and socially in terms of housing and social spaces, and fundamentally, in *identity* itself. It also depends on what kinds of integration processes—forced codes of “Britishness” imposed from above or the already integrating, meaningful relationships between women in a diverse array of host and new, migrant communities which can take place without the intervention of the state. But rather than a polarity, we see this as a continuum in which the self-activating integration processes of populations in movement and settlement can

also be complemented by using parts of programmes of governmental initiatives, without adapting too much to top-down intentions in shaping a “nationalizing” rather than a “localizing” integration discourse.

The vision of governmental integration initiatives set out in *Creating the Conditions for Integration* repeats much that was central to the integration policies of the previous administration and, in many ways, summarizes clearly the failures of previous initiatives whilst consolidating a new programme for the future. However, this new programme for the future is less about the use of social capital to create meaningful relationships between communities and more about increasing levels of obligation of and impositions on new communities. Central to this vision is the concept of “Britishness,” which has always been the bastion of migration and tolerance.¹⁸ In fact, the central thrust of the document is to describe the problematic status of new or “outside” communities and their inability to conform to this vision of “Britishness.” Linked to this is the social cost of integration failure, specifically in terms of the narratives of violent extremism, which can be taken up by those in new communities as a result of political disenfranchisement and economic dispossession. As Liz Fekete and others from the Institute of Race Relations argue, the integration debate, regardless of its necessity and the necessity for communities to integrate, is often used as a way of attacking new communities for their failure to assimilate rather than highlighting the failure of the government to integrate effectively.¹⁹

For the new government agenda, the status of “Britishness” is best recognized as a strategy relying on “common-sense” and the concept of “common-ground;” that space or place which Britain offers to a new community and that specific gift to the new community contains “a clear sense of shared aspirations and values, which focuses on what we have in common rather than our differences.”²⁰ This sense of common-ground becomes the meeting place in which extremism and intolerance are tackled and where a sense of participation, responsibility, and social mobility are expressed. But this sense of common-ground is not simply a space in which differences are fused together to produce a new culture, but one in which there is clearly an enforcement from above of mainstream culture. There is an English culture and an English mainstream to which new communities must conform—“There are too many people still left outside, or choosing to remain outside, mainstream society.”²¹ These traditions of difference and resistance retain their enclaves, enclaves that the “mainstream” has no constituency in or power over—separate, segregated, and self-disenfranchised. For the authors of the report, there has also been too much focus on integration projects and

The Gendered Refugee Experience

Central to the debate about integration has been the role of women. Furthermore, the discursive construction of the woman as an outsider has been central to many of the debates about what integration is and how we should do it.²² At the heart of this debate about women is what kind of integration we are talking about and whose integration we are concerned with. As Sivanandan has recently noted in Liz Fekete's study of integration problems in Europe, published by the Institute of Race Relations: "The problem of integration lies in the interpretation of integration itself."²³ Certainly, integration as it is programmatically outlined in the new government report is profoundly at odds with much of the integration work on the ground. Whilst at times it seems programmatically similar, it is clear that imposed integration has very different implications from integration by choice. This also raises the critical question of what kind of women's practice is possible and necessary for integration to work—a practice based on the kinds of arts, histories and biographies that are central to the lives of women in new communities.

It is through an exploration of the interplay between integration, identity, new communities, the enforcement of particular government visions of integration, and women in communities living and thinking their own lives through, that we can clearly begin to map a new programme for women's arts and heritage work and activism for the forthcoming decade. This could be a decade that, for asylum seekers, will be significantly shaped by private asylum support contracts outside of local authority control; the reaffirmation of racist narratives about incomers, "foreign" cultures, and of non-British origin, specifically; and the needs and aspirations of new communities and their routes to the future.

There are three broad issues that make this government programme so problematic. Firstly, its definition of integration; "whose" integration, and how integration from above is little different from some of the old assimilationist narratives of the 1970s. This imposed agenda from above can be counteracted, as we shall see, by the real, living integration that is seen in the best of women's arts and heritage practices, which is elaborated on in the next section. This agenda from below develops an idea of the lived experience of migrants in emerging communities who are enacting integration for themselves without top-down intervention.

Secondly, the focus on some core sense of British identity that is framed in opposition to the identities of new communities creates an ideological territory in which disenfranchisement can take the shape of a return to older ethnic and faith identities. These identities are often seen as not compatible with the master-narrative of the government agenda and hence considered recourse to some sense of unshared, monolithic, and potentially extremist identity. This self-enclavization confronts a government agenda that does not accept hyphenated identities or approach it in any sense of equality, leading to feelings of frustration and powerlessness on the part of the community. It is also worth pointing out that many of the things perceived as “foreign,” non-British, or non-European have actually been central to the growth of British and European culture (e.g., Islamic innovations in science, literature, and architecture; South Asian food and music; African dress) and without which, a sense of Britishness would be hugely diminished.

This territory of identity becomes the battleground over which rival dogma and orthodoxies wage war against others in foreign territories, in British territory, and most crucially, against the other within, i.e., an “other” with which we struggle with during every moment of existence. It has the potential to create what Fekete has called a “parallel society” at odds with the “mainstream.” In fact, this question of the parallel society and its dangers has been one of the major obstacles to the government’s conceptualization of integration. But the demonization of enclaves does not mean that they are any less real. Certainly, a focus on identity, self-expression, and methods to overcome enclavization is profoundly different from the kind of assimilationist doctrines perpetuated by the present administration.

Aspen Cultures: Building Friendship in Hybrid Communities

The Refugee Council has pointed to the different experiences and roles of women in new communities in the UK. Women’s needs and aspirations are distinct from other members of society and are overlooked by policymakers and practitioners, leaving them unheard as the asylum and integration process remains insensitive to their needs and unaware of the kinds of networks that they need to produce in order to thrive in a new society. Not only are women more prone to social isolation and less able to access services, they often face gender-based discrimination.²⁴ The academic debate on friendship has often evaded the kinds of networks and relationships that have been inherited and propagated by women in new communities in the UK. Arseneau and Fassinger have pointed to the lack of work on

new communities and ethnicities in terms of networks and friendships: "the literature on women's friendships...tends to be exclusive along racial/ethnic and social class lines. Most of the literature on women's friendships focuses on white or upper class women, and fails to include the experiences of women of colour or working class and poorer women."²⁵ Yet, the kinds of networks we develop are central to an identity which constitutes our sense of self as well as the narrative we share with others, specifically in what we share with others and our differences. Identity can often be exclusive or inclusive; fairly stable, static, unchanging, or dynamic and ever-changing. It can contain multiple elements which are shaped by social structures, place, and migration across territories. Fundamentally, it is a narrative we construct about ourselves and who we are. As Maggie O'Neill notes in her study of refugee women and identity:

Recovering and re-telling people's subjectivities, lives and experiences are central to better understand our social worlds with a view to transforming those worlds...Biographical work represented poetically, visually as well as textually, can help illuminate the necessary mediation of autonomous individuality and collective responsibility. Biographies help us to understand social relations, the processes, structures and lived experiences of citizenship and lack of citizenship and the experiences of humiliation, vulnerability and loss (dominant experiences for some asylum seekers/refugees). They highlight the importance of engaging with the subaltern other, creating spaces for voices and narratives to make sense of lived experience, trauma, loss, but also the productive, creative, generative dimension of forging identities and belonging in the new situation, as an 'asylum seeker' or 'refugee'.²⁶

Narratives about structures, our journeys, and who we are, shape women's politics and their routes into the future. It is clear that serious levels of disenfranchisement and self-enclavization are often the consequence of an unjust asylum system, trauma in origin countries, and racism and isolation in the United Kingdom and other societies.²⁷ This abdication of active citizenship as a consequence of dispossession can mean a retreat to older narratives of identity, which may contradict the values and morals of the wider British society. This process can be exacerbated amongst young women from newer communities who can be, at once, too integrated into patriarchal structures in their communities and too socially isolated at the same time—issues that can be exploited by community leaders to ensure the continued denigration and dispossession of women's narratives about themselves and their ideas for their future leading to new forms of segregation.²⁸

The origins and persistence of social networks which allow for the hybridity, dynamism, and extension of new kinds of identities, freedom of expression, and identity experimentation, is crucial to thinking about

identity and refugee women. But structurally, this can be extremely problematic when civil society, citizenship, leave to remain, and lack of access to education and language facilities are so restricted; in this case, the only sources of social support may be the very ethnic or faith-based enclaves from which women had originally emerged, and felt to be so restrictive. Language and identity can be the most challenging aspect of building new social networks in the UK—creating social networks and forging friendships are about modes of identity and belonging.

The Aspen Culture project was developed in conjunction with the Communities and Local Government Tackling Race Inequality Programme in 2009 and in many ways, was shaped by the task of being able to initiate a meaningful programme of integration from below within a governmental agenda. It led to three reports about the nature of women's integration experiences in the UK²⁹ although the central aim was to develop a set of projects to provide innovative integration inputs that were meaningful to women and driven by their passions and desire for self-determination. The Aspen was taken as the symbol and name of this project as it is the second most widely distributed tree in the world, able to take root in any climate and thrive within a colony or community of other Aspen trees. It is also true that if the forest of Aspens is burned down, life still survives in its roots and thrives again. This sense of rootedness was reflected during the extent of the project when the women's own sense of their roots and lineage as well as new, common, and innovative concepts of "Britishness" were forged together to form new identities. It was broadly based on participant-designed research exploring visual arts and heritage inequality. It was a collaborative programme where women explored and interpreted their own artworks, writing and narratives and their future life destinations combined with training for organizations to understand the identity and integration needs of women in both new and host communities. The onus of the project was to try and uncover the "new alignments made across borders, types, nations, essences...that now provoke and challenge the fundamentally static notion of identity."³⁰

Part of the project rationale was to uncover the reasons why women in new communities found it difficult to engage with British culture and values, particularly art, heritage, and conceptions of citizenship. The Aspen project found that aside from physical and personal barriers such as worries about the expense of museum visits and language problems, the central question was that of orientation and existential safety, particularly the existential relationship with women from white, working class communities sharing the same kinds of cultural spaces with but socially distinct from, refugee women. The question of negotiation with parallel forces and identities was then brought to bear in those moments of

meeting—changing and renegotiating the identities and heritages of all women in shared spaces. As Homi Bhabha noted, “The representation of difference must not be hastily read as the reflection of pre-given ethnic or cultural traits set in the fixed tablet of tradition. The social articulation of difference, from the minority perspective, is a complex, on-going negotiation that seeks to authorize cultural hybridities that emerge in moments of historical transformation.”³¹

Tellingly, it was in the practice of a key residential at Ford Castle in Northumberland where that notion of hybridity assumed a central import for women thinking about notions of home and Britishness. These women participants designed textiles to illustrate their concerns about their identities and futures, and complemented this activity by creating poems and songs. Britain was a resonating theme with pictures of stark words such as “safety” or “winter” and pictures illustrating moments of happiness and liberty using flowers, stars, and birds. Texts included the following:

Britain to me is freedom! The pleasant enigma of beautiful friendships...Britain to me is very fantastic. I have [a] good education and good conversation with lots people in different culture...freedom place and enjoy place...Time is like a sword if you don't cut it, it will cut you... I make a scarf for the lady who was walking in the garden flower...spiral plait means colourful, cheerful mix of different people and culture...a river springing from a dark cave...love for my friends, the new ones I made, and longing for the one I lost...freedom like birds flight. No pressure.³²

From the Aspen project, which lasted over two years, a series of findings and recommendations emerged for improving integration in new communities of women. Firstly, is it imperative to do refugee women's work in white, working class communities. This may seem contradictory but it is clear that there is significant political hostility towards refugees from the nationalist, far right, and the incipiently “nationalizing” discourse of the current administration, which finds its audience in parts of these communities. Often linked to these views is rhetoric linking the injustice facing “Our troops fighting Muslims in Iraq and Afghanistan” to excising the “Muslim bombers off our streets.” Tackling extremism and racism means ensuring that conversations and projects that look at refugee experiences include all women regardless of background.

Secondly, we should support any projects based around arts, heritage, geography, and history that challenge exclusionary identities by making the concept and practice of “identity formation” problematic. One project supported by the North of England Refugee Service and Tees Valley Museums looked at uncovering migrant histories through art and photography from local children who had no concept of themselves as

having had any kind of migrant history. In fact, many of them subsequently uncovered Cornish, German, Irish and Huguenot heritages, with the added benefit of supporting them into more empathetic relationships with people in new, migrant communities. The Aspen project looked at the ways in which lineage and the heritage of countries of origin and what they mean to women can inform and develop new ways of thinking about integration.

Thirdly, any serious, anti-racist integration project has to critically evaluate and question racist narratives. This is impossible without having some understanding of these narratives, and contextualizing them. More specifically, these racist narratives must be deconstructed, and counter-narratives informed by gender and migration experiences must be presented.³³

Fourthly, we have to understand and examine the narratives of identity that women present. This means that we must listen to their stories, support them in exploring their identities, and help cope or empathize with the challenges of living in a multicultural society. It means defending any explorations of their identity against those who want to reinforce monolithic, exclusionary, and oppressive identities against sexual freedoms, freedom of dress, and so on, often against self-appointed community leaders. Linked to this is the question that arts and heritage practice needs to support women in thinking through the relationship between their past, present, and future, and to map transitions and routes for themselves, which are based on their own fluid and multiple conceptions of themselves.

Fifthly, there was an expansive richness in the Aspen project regarding the emergence of new identities within localities. Localities comprise places, heritage, cultural organizations, museums, networks of friendship, and so on. But it is important to understand that locality is situated within both real and imagined social spaces and discourses, creating multiple narratives for the women living and creating relationships within those localities. Art and music are modes of communication to express divergent ways of approaching aspects of locality and heritage. These methods of expression help us to explore the idiosyncratic and unique sense of place that new communities have to master in order to gain citizenship, and establish a rootedness and “home.”

Finally, the complexities of identity do not sit in a vacuum. The social and political contexts of migration, warfare, human rights abuses, racism, and so on, demand recognition.³⁴ Thinking through these structures means looking at the hierarchy of need; even before they can think about their narratives, these women need to be clothed and fed, advised or counselled, supported, and made welcome and safe. In fact, refugee women must be offered both physical and existential safety by projects

and practitioners. It would be all the better if their experiences became part of the campaigning work to challenge the structural difficulties that refugees face, and also to point to the problems of disenfranchisement and dispossession in white, working class communities that can be a breeding ground for racism and extremism.

Central to the lives and future paths of women is still that pivotal question of self-determination. Fundamental to that sense of self-determination and the trajectory of women's lives is that of self-expression and self-definition—determinations, expressions and definitions that are the province of women themselves—and not states, communities, and authorities that seek to subdue and oppress them. It is the task of practitioners and policymakers who work with refugees to support women and their communities into that future. Having examined enclavization and self-enclavization processes and reasserting a more fluid, subaltern approach to integration that can counteract what we might call “nationalizing” governmental approaches, it seems that a more detailed and nuanced analysis of specific art practices of migrant communities can illustrate the kinds of political and social capital that integration projects in localities can accrue. The genealogies of different histories and the determination of common futures are not just about resources and social capital, but also ensuring that political will is maintained to support and encourage communities of assistance and empathy, and communities of resistance to conformities from above. This community of assistance and resistance is the utopia of the spiral plait, entwined, and enchanting. ■

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Notes

¹ Christine was a participant from: Aspen Culture Project. North of England Refugee Service. Britain to me is...: Ford Castle residential textiles collection (Newcastle: North of England Refugee Service, 2010).

² Liz Fekete, Naima Bouteldja, and Nina Muhe, eds., *Alternative Voices on Integration in Austria, France, Germany, Netherlands and the UK* (London: Institute of Race Relations, 2010).

³ Allan Pred, *Even in Sweden: Racisms, Racialized Spaces, and the Popular Geographical Imagination* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000).

⁴ Geraldine Smyth, Emma Stewart, and Sylvie Da Lomba, “Introduction: Critical Reflections on Refugee Integration: Lessons from International Perspectives,” *Journal of*

⁵ For further information on enforced enclaves and resistance, see Carl T. Dahlman and Trent Williams, "Ethnic Enclavisation and State Formation in Kosovo," *Geopolitics* 15, no. 2 (2010): 406-430; and Ghazi-Walid Falah, "The Geopolitics of 'Enclavisation' and the Demise of a Two-State Solution to the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict," *Third World Quarterly* 26, no. 8 (2005): 1341-1372.

⁶ Department for Communities and Local Government. *Creating the Conditions for Integration* (London: Crown, 2012).

⁷ Roger Waldinger, "The Ethnic Enclave Debate Revisited," *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research* 17, no. 3 (1993): 444-452, 444.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 445.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 450.

¹⁰ Department for Communities and Local Government, *Creating the Conditions for Integration*.

¹¹ Alison Strang and Alastair Ager, "Refugee Integration: Emerging Trends and Remaining Agendas," *Journal of Refugee Studies* 23, no. 4 (2010): 589-607.

¹² Research, Development and Statistics Directorate. *Indicators of Integration: Final Report*, by Alastair Ager and Alison Strang, Home Office Development and Practice Report 28 (London: Crown), 3; Alastair Ager and Alison Strang, "Understanding Integration: A Conceptual Framework," *Journal of Refugee Studies* 21, no. 2 (2008): 166-191.

¹³ Research, Development and Statistics Directorate. *Spotlight on Refugee Integration: Findings from the Survey of New Refugees in the United Kingdom*, by Andreas Cebulla, Megan Daniel, and Andrew Zurawan, *Research Report* 37 (London: Crown, 2010).

¹⁴ Home Office. *Integration Matters: A National Strategy for Refugee Integration*, (London: IND Corporate Communications, 2005), 23.

¹⁵ Home Office, *Integration Matters*, 26.

¹⁶ The Commission on Integration and Cohesion. *Our Shared Future*, (Wetherby: Crown, 2007), 84, III.

¹⁷ Home Office. *Community Cohesion: A Report of the Independent Review Team*, by Ted Cattle (London: Home Office, 2002).

¹⁸ Department for Communities and Local Government, *Creating the conditions for integration*, 3.

¹⁹ Fekete et al., *Alternative Voices*, 2.

²⁰ Ibid., 5.

²¹ Ibid., 6.

²² Melinda McPherson, "‘I Integrate, Therefore I Am’: Contesting the Normalizing Discourse of Integrationism through Conversations with Refugee Women," *Journal of Refugee Studies* 23, no. 4 (2010): 546-570.

²³ Fekete et al., *Alternative Voices*, 1.

²⁴ Home Office, *Integration Matters*, 26.

²⁵ Julie R. Arseneau and Ruth Fassinger, "Challenge and Promise: The Study of Bisexual Women's Friendships," in *Bisexual Women: Friendship and Social Organisation*, ed. M. P. Galupo (Binghampton: Harrington Park Press, 2011).

²⁶ Maggie O'Neill, *Asylum, Migration and Community* (Bristol: The Policy Press, 2010), 22-23.

²⁷ Fekete et al., *Alternative Voices*, 1.

²⁸ Gill Cressey, "Muslim Girls Work," *Youth and Policy* 92 (2006): 33-46; Gill Cressey, *The Ultimate Separatist Cage? Youth Work with Muslim Young Women* (Leicester: National Youth Agency, 2007).

²⁹ Aspen Culture Project. *North of England Refugee Service, Britain to me is...: Ford Castle residential textiles collection* (Newcastle: North of England Refugee Service, 2010); Aspen Culture Project, *North of England Refugee Service. Aspen futures: A research report on the cultural inequality of women and its solutions*, by Martyn Hudson and Sara Ganassin (Newcastle: North of England Refugee Service, 2010). Aspen Culture Project, *North of England Refugee Service. Building new communities: Voices of white, working class women on diversity and change* (Newcastle: North of England Refugee Service, 2011).

³⁰ Edward Said, *Culture and Imperialism* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1993).

³¹ Homi Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (London: Routledge, 1994), 2.

³² Aspen Culture Project. *North of England Refugee Service, Britain to me is...: Ford Castle residential textiles collection* (Newcastle: North of England Refugee Service, 2010).

³³ *Building new communities: Voices of white, working class women on diversity and change*.

³⁴ Martyn Hudson, "On the dead of world history," *Race and Class* 43, no. 4 (2010): 26-33.

Gender and Forced Displacement: Practical Issues and Challenges at Field Level

MIRANDA GAANDERSE

EDITORS' NOTE

This article by Miranda Gaanderse provides a view on the gendered refugee experience from the perspective of a humanitarian worker. Gaanderse responds to the articles presented in this issue and highlights their common focus on sexual and gender-based violence and evolving gender roles and power relations among displaced communities. Although guidelines, policies, and standard operating procedures exist, humanitarian workers face practical challenges in the field, which necessitate strategies particular to each situation that provide for the unique experiences of men and women, boys and girls in varied cultural contexts. Gaanderse contends that for positive change in gender equality to be lasting, it cannot be externally imposed, but must come from within.

Introduction

Forced displacement is a traumatic experience. Persons fleeing their homes to escape persecution or generalized violence face both direct and indirect threats to their safety and wellbeing at various stages of flight, often exacerbated by separation from family, a breakdown in community support structures, and weakened rule of law. In 2012, the world refugee population stood at 10.5 million,¹ with an additional 26.4 million internally displaced persons (IDPs)² due to conflict or violence. While the world's displaced population comprises a relatively equal proportion of males and females,³ their respective experiences in displacement are by no means equivalent. Women, men, girls, and boys experience forced displacement in dramatically different ways due to socially ascribed gender roles and relations in both their place of origin and their place of refuge.

This article explores these gendered experiences of displacement, from the perspective of a humanitarian worker.⁴ The focus is on key

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issues and themes put forward in four articles featured in this “The Gendered Refugee Experience” themed issue of the *St Antony’s International Review (STAIR)*. Taken together, the four articles provide a diverse cross-section of displaced populations and contexts — dealing with both refugees and IDPs, and analyzing both camp and urban contexts. This diversity reflects the fact that each displacement situation is unique, and presents its own challenges, risks, and opportunities. Yet, as seen in the articles, when it comes to the gendered experiences of displacement, commonalities exist across contexts. Among the issues that the authors bring to the foreground are the prevalence of sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV) among displaced populations, and the evolving gender roles and power relations inherent to displacement.

Beginning with a more general look at the issue of gender and displacement, this article will address the issue of SGBV and gendered power relations in terms of the practical issues and challenges faced by humanitarian actors working with displaced persons. This includes turning policy into practice, staff turnover, abuse of power and authority, gender and culture, and transforming gendered power relations.

Recognizing Gendered Experiences in Forced Displacement

Advocacy and active engagement by researchers, policymakers, donors, and humanitarian workers themselves over the past two decades have resulted in significant changes in the way the humanitarian community interprets and addresses issues related to gender in forced displacement. There is now a broad consensus among humanitarian actors – including UN agencies, non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and donors—that women, men, girls, and boys experience forced displacement differently from one another. This is most strongly articulated in instances where a displaced population’s gender roles are characterized by unequal power relations, impacting women’s and men’s access to rights and resources, and resulting in different expectations for household and community responsibilities (e.g. caretaker, breadwinner, community leader, etc.). Consequently, men and women are exposed to different risks during displacement, particularly when families are separated, when community support structures have broken down, and when rule of law and justice systems are weakened or absent.

For example, mass displacement can result in an increased number of woman-headed households, causing women to take on additional responsibilities and workloads, thereby facing new demands in provid-

ing for themselves, their children, and the elderly, while simultaneously coping with restricted access to services and resources. Similarly, breakdowns in law and order as a result of conflict may expose women and girls to increased risks of experiencing sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV), including sexual trafficking, sexual abuse, or sexual activity as a means of self-preservation (“survival sex”).

Humanitarian actors have largely acknowledged that assistance interventions cannot be one-size-fits-all—the needs and interests of displaced women and men are not the same. As such, a series of handbooks, policies, guidelines, checklists, and standard operating procedures (SOPs) have been developed by actors such as the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), the Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC), and various international and national NGOs, explaining and outlining approaches for addressing risks and challenges resulting from different gendered experiences of displacement. Broadly speaking, the focus of these initiatives has been on the risks and challenges faced by women and girls, who are considered to be at higher risk of experiencing hardship, abuse, and exploitation due to their more limited access to power and resources in most displaced communities.

Of particular note is a gradual shift in the way women’s specific experiences and needs are framed within the broader context of humanitarian response. Rather than being presented as “special” needs outside the norms of society, and to be addressed in *addition* to standard life-saving assistance, there is growing emphasis on these as core needs that require attention and planning from the outset. The needs of women and girls are thus increasingly considered part of standard assistance and, indeed, life-saving. In fact, gender is a consideration that cuts across all sectors including shelter, food, and relief item distribution, water and sanitation, general camp management, etc., because the way in which assistance is designed and delivered can directly impact women’s ability to access services, and can, in some cases, result in unintended risks and consequences. Common examples in this regard include the placement of latrines (increasing the risk of attack at night), abuses of authority during the land allocation process, physical limitations on collecting and transporting distributed food and relief items, and an increased vulnerability to violence and abuse stemming from distances travelled for firewood or water collection.

Within this scope, humanitarian partners have committed greater resources towards ensuring gender responsive approaches align with the above-mentioned policies, guidelines, and procedures on gender in both emergency and protracted displacement situations.⁵ A number of chal-

Addressing SGBV and Gendered Power Relations

The term sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV) refers to “any harmful act that is perpetrated against one person’s will and that is based on socially ascribed (gender) differences between males and females. It includes acts that inflict physical, mental, or sexual harm or suffering, threats of such acts, coercion and other deprivations of liberty, whether occurring in public or in private life.”⁶ SGBV exists throughout the world and is not unique to displacement situations. However, the nature of displacement exposes refugees and IDPs to a heightened risk or prevalence of SGBV due to breakdowns in social structures, support networks, and the rule of law. This risk exists at different stages of the displacement process—prior to flight, during flight, upon arrival at a camp or host community, and over time in the camp or host community. SGBV can be committed against both women and men, though reported incidents are significantly higher among women. Perpetrators in displacement contexts can range from family members, community members, service providers, government or security sector authorities, and aid workers.

Along these lines, Gail Hickey and Nimmi Gowrinathan clearly illustrate that refugee and IDP camp environments place women at increased risk of SGBV, including rape and “survival sex”. Marnie Shaffer also highlights the risk of SGBV faced by refugee women in urban settings, in particular with regard to domestic violence and rape experienced in the course of women’s income-generating activities. As they have rightly described, instances of rape and other forms of SGBV can have devastating impacts on the individual, the family, and the community.

Addressing SGBV in displacement at the field level is complex and requires a combination of prevention and response initiatives, which are now clearly outlined in SGBV guidelines and standard operating procedures.⁷ For example, prevention can include planning for appropriate lighting at sanitary facilities, advocating with authorities to reduce instances of abuse of power, providing services to assist with the transport of food and relief items following distribution, and providing fuel efficient stoves or increased water point coverage to reduce the need for lengthy trips outside of camps. Response, on the other hand, involves three-fold service provision: medical services, legal assistance, and psychosocial support.

Yet successfully implementing prevention and response activities to SGBV is not so straightforward for humanitarian workers in the field.

There are challenges with regards to bridging the gap between policy and practice, ensuring continuity despite high staff turnover rates, overcoming abuses of authority, and grappling with the issue of culture.

Policy and Practice Gap

First, a gap still remains between the policy, guidelines, and procedures on gender and SGBV and their implementation in practice. At a very basic level, the reference documents are not always available or practical for use in the field. Particularly in emergency operations, where humanitarian teams tend to be small and staff members are often stretched for time, there is little opportunity to read or reference these documents—some of which are hundreds of pages in length. Humanitarian agencies are gradually addressing this issue by developing quick-reference and summary documents, and by deploying “gender experts” as part of emergency teams in order to provide guidance across all sectors.

In addition, regular training and capacity building is being rolled out within many humanitarian agencies in an attempt to achieve a broader understanding of SGBV issues and programming among staff. However, training has its limits—it requires time away from an operation, as well as financial resources. It is not uncommon for international or expat staff to be prioritized for training opportunities, leaving national staff—who often have the most frequent contact and interaction with displaced persons—with limited access to training. This challenge is being overcome, to a certain extent, through field-based workshops or computer-based e-learning, and strengthened by some Country Directors, Heads of Office, and Representatives who have made a particular effort to make SGBV training more easily accessible to all staff members. Nevertheless, training does not necessarily ensure that staff members make the link between knowing what one is supposed to do, and understanding why one is supposed to do it. This has implications for how staff implement SGBV programming in the field and can result in some of the issues raised by Elisabeth Olivius with respect to humanitarian staff’s sometimes limited ability to go beyond numbers and superficial gestures to address patterns and systematic issues.

Staff Turnover

Second, high rates of staff turnover in remote and hardship duty stations—where a significant number of refugee and IDP operations are located—can have a negative impact upon the continuity of SGBV programming. While some UN and NGO staff on long-term contracts remain in-country

for two years or more, it is also common to have staff in key roles, including dealing with SGBV issues, on consultancy or temporary contracts lasting a few months at a time. This is more often the case for humanitarian organizations that struggle with uncertain funding or do not have the resources to pay competitive salaries in order to retain talented staff.

Frequent staff turnover can mean a loss of institutional memory and interim staffing gaps—and therefore a break or reduction in services. While turnover is a reality for all sectors of humanitarian operations, successful SGBV programming relies on positive relationships with the displaced community and with local authorities, as well as a solid understanding of the social dynamics of the specific displacement context. It therefore means new colleagues must re-establish working relationships with local authorities, re-build trust and understanding with the displaced population, and re-learn the context and peculiarities of a specific operation. The consequent lack of continuity and gaps in delivery of SGBV programming can become tiresome and disruptive to the displaced community, and in some cases undermine the confidence that refugees or IDPs place in humanitarian actors.

Abuse of Authority

Third, forced displacement can put individuals in vulnerable positions with regards to those in roles of power or authority. For example, Hickey and Gowrinathan document women subjected to sexual abuse during flight at the hands of soldiers, as well as in IDP and refugee camps. Shaffer similarly notes discrimination by police and the court systems against displaced and resettled refugees in urban areas, thereby limiting refugee women's access recourse in cases of domestic abuse. In fact, opportunities for abuse of power and authority, including those resulting in SGBV, exist at many stages of the displacement process—border officers can place conditions on access to the country of asylum, host government officials can demand money or services from refugees during land or plot allocation, police or soldiers can compel IDPs to comply with unethical requests, aid workers can leverage their control over relief items to elicit certain behaviours from displaced persons, or community leaders can withhold information from women or other groups as a way of reinforcing their own authority.

This is not to say that abuse of power is prevalent in all displacement situations, but rather that the potential for it to occur is ever-present. Within the humanitarian community, mechanisms for identifying and disciplining staff that take advantage of their positions are being strengthened through mandatory codes of conduct, refugee/IDP complaints mechanisms, inter-

nal investigation mechanisms, and harsher repercussions. Unfortunately, however, cases do continue to exist, and often go unreported.

On the other hand, humanitarian workers face a particular challenge when it comes to addressing instances of misconduct and abuse of power committed by government and security sector officials. In refugee contexts, the responsibility for upholding the rights and ensuring the safety of refugees rests with the host government, and the presence of UNHCR and other humanitarian agencies is subject to the authority and discretion of the host government. Cases exist where refugees have reported corruption or abuse at the hands of government and security sector officials to humanitarian workers who, upon following up on the matter, were themselves threatened and dissuaded from taking action. In some cases, humanitarian operations have been blocked and UN officials have been “PNG’ed”—declared *persona non grata* and told to leave the country—upon reporting misconduct of high-ranking officials. The situation can be even more challenging in IDP contexts, where the government and security sector can be the very reason for IDPs’ flight, and humanitarian workers depend on cordial relationships with authorities in order to gain access to internally displaced populations.

Regrettably, it is not uncommon for humanitarian workers to refrain from addressing government and security sector abuses of authority, or drawing attention to human rights abuses more generally, for fear of backlash that would compromise humanitarian access, increase security concerns for humanitarian staff, or result in UN agencies or NGOs being removed from the country altogether.

Gender and Culture

Fourth, humanitarian workers in the field are faced on a daily basis with the sometimes-controversial issue of “culture” as a justification for SGBV and other harmful gender-based practices. As Olivius notes, there can be a tension between the “international” principles and standards for gender equality and SGBV prevention and reduction—which humanitarian actors are responsible for promoting—and interpretations of the local culture and customs in terms of the treatment of women and girls. The general guidance for humanitarian workers is that the customs and culture of displaced populations are to be respected insofar as they do not violate an individual’s safety or basic rights.

While SGBV is indeed an infringement on the rights and safety of an individual, the process of addressing the “culture issue” is a sensitive one. Often, SGBV committed against women is a manifestation of wider cultural gender roles and power relations that disadvantage women in

terms of personal safety, enjoyment of rights, and access to resources. Therefore in some cases, culture does indeed play a role in enshrining the inequality that leads to SGBV and other harmful practices (for example, female genital mutilation), while in other cases culture is simply an excuse employed by persons benefitting from the position of power this interpretation of culture affords. In either case, as prevention of SGBV requires a shift in the status quo and power dynamics within the displaced community, this places humanitarian workers in a difficult position.

Attempting to change the status quo too quickly or drastically can result in backlash from certain members of the community, and could inadvertently result in increased violence and abuse towards the very group humanitarian workers had intended to protect. A balance, therefore, must be struck.

Shifting Gendered Power Relations

Fifth, gender roles and relations often shift under the pressure of forced and unexpected displacement. For example, separation from male family members—or the failure of men to deliver on their role as provider, as described by Shaffer—will often compel women to take on increased (and difficult) roles as providers and protectors of families. This tendency for women to take on new roles is often given conscious encouragement by humanitarian programmes—visible, as noted by Olivius, in policies of involving women in camp management—as it is seen as a way of shifting power relations in favour of women. Overall, it is hoped that this will be a step toward building more equitable gender relations, thereby reducing SGBV and other harmful gender-based practices in the future.

This often-exclusive focus on women and women's empowerment, is problematic, however, as it frequently overlooks the gendered experiences of men. If displacement is to be seen as an opportunity to renegotiate gender relations, then men and women must both participate in this endeavour. Otherwise, focusing solely on projects and programmes that “empower” women can contribute to eroding men's gender roles as protectors, providers, and decision-makers—and hence their social position and self esteem—but still fail to challenge the dominant gender ideology in which men's and women's roles alike are viewed as natural within a specific cultural or social context. In other words, men's gender identities do not automatically change when women's identities and practices change.

Furthermore, one can question humanitarian actors' ability to have an enduring influence on gender relations—changes in gender roles in camps, for example, may be at a superficial level that fails to challenge overall paradigms of gender differences. This not only means that such

changes are not sustained when the refugees return home, but it can leave women with new roles and little social power or leverage to fulfil them. This, clearly, would not contribute to lasting ideological changes and transformed power dynamics. As such, it is imperative that humanitarian actors recognize that women exist within a gender dynamic that also includes men, as if men are not properly included, no amount of empowerment programming can alter this dynamic. In essence, empowerment is not something that can simply be given. Rather, it is something that is developed and earned by rising within and transforming existing structures in a long-lasting and sustainable way.

Conclusion

In recent years, the humanitarian community has seen a dramatic shift in terms of understanding of, and approaches to, gendered experiences of displacement. The development of handbooks, policies, guidelines, and SOPs for addressing gender issues in general, and SGBV in particular, has signalled an important recognition that women, men, boys, and girls all experience displacement in different ways, based on their socially ascribed gender roles. Yet, as discussed above, humanitarian workers at the field level still grapple with a number of challenges that can hinder effective prevention and response to SGBV, and the promotion of gender equality more generally. Perhaps a key lesson to be drawn from this analysis is that gender power relations are complex social constructs developed over a lifetime, which may not be easily transformed by outsiders in the period of a few months or years that a community spends as refugees or IDPs. The change, to a large extent, must come from within the refugee community itself to be lasting. That said, recognition of these challenges and limitations is an important step for ensuring on-going improvement in the services offered to refugees and IDPs and the support offered to assist them in accessing their rights in situations of forced displacement. ■

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Notes

¹ UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), “State of the World’s Refugees: In

² Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre (IDMC), "Global Overview 2011: People Internally Displaced by Conflict and Violence," April 2012, <http://www.internal-displacement.org/publications/global-overview-2011.pdf>, (accessed April 23, 2013).

³ UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), "Particular Challenges and Risks," <http://www.unhcr.org/pages/49c3646cid9.html>, (accessed April 23, 2013). Note that the oft-quoted statistic that 80 per cent of refugees or IDPs are women and children has specifically not been used by the author because it can be misleading – downplaying the proportion of males affected by forced displacement, and equating the situation and needs of women to those of children.

⁴ The views expressed in this article are those of the author, and are not intended to represent the views or positions of UNHCR.

⁵ Of note is that gender is only one part of a person's identity, and gendered experiences can be influenced by other identities, such as age, status, family background, ethnicity, religion, disability, sexual orientation and socioeconomic position. This means that masculinity and femininity represent different things to different groups of men and women, in different places, and at different times. Consideration for these multiple dynamics is also an important, and increasingly humanitarian actors are approaching programming in a more holistic manner that and also encompasses aspects such as age, disability and minority groups. For the purposes of this article, the focus will be on gender more generally, since this is the scope taken by the authors discussed.

⁶ UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), "Action against Sexual and Gender-Based Violence: An Updated Strategy," June 2011, <http://www.refworld.org/docid/4e01ffeb2.html>, (accessed April 7, 2013).

⁷ Key references include: UNHCR, *Action against Sexual and Gender-Based Violence, An Updated Strategy*, June 2011; UNHCR, *UNHCR Handbook for the Protection of Women and Girls*, January 2008, Chapter 5.3.1; Inter-Agency Standing Committee, *Establishing Gender-based Violence Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) for multi-sectoral and inter-organisational prevention and response to gender-based violence in humanitarian settings*, May 2008; UNHCR, *UNHCR Standard Operating Procedures for Prevention of and Response to SGBV*, July 2006; Inter-Agency Standing Committee, *IASC Guidelines for Gender-based Violence Interventions in Humanitarian Settings*, September 2005; UNHCR, *Sexual and Gender-Based Violence against Refugees, Returnees and Internally Displaced Persons – Guidelines for Prevention and Response*, May 2003.

Combining Advocacy and Research: An Interview with Dr. Barbara Harrell-Bond

Dr. Barbara Harrell-Bond is the founder of the Refugee Studies Center at Oxford University's Department of International Development and director of the Refugee Program of Fahamu Trust.

STAIR: How is gender addressed in your current work?

Barbara Harrell-Bond: Africa and Middle East Refugee Assistance [AMERA] Egypt, the NGO I started in Egypt, and all the legal NGOs that I helped start, pay special attention to gender and sexual violence. But I do not believe that gender equals women—a fact that has been neglected. Rape does not only apply to women. It probably happens to men as much as to women, but men do not report it. It is standard practice in Sudan to rape men—including with iron bars. In Egypt, we had many cases of male rape of refugees from Iraq. There are many such reports, even from little boys. Chris Dolen gave a speech on this at the International Association for the Study of Forced Migration conference.

We had a refugee in Egypt who had been a doctor who was the deputy head of the morgue in Khartoum. He was asked to cremate the bodies of people who died in torture without doing an autopsy to confirm the cause of death; he refused. He was arrested and tortured; he was raped with broken bottles. In Cairo, where he had fled after release, his injuries were so painful that he tried to eat as little as possible to avoid defecation. One of my assistants paid for him to have an operation, and although he no longer had pain, he never fully recovered psychologically.

In all refugee situations, in my experience, men suffer in psychological terms—dare I say it?—*more* than women? Unlike women, a man's identity and role in the household and the community are likely to be totally undermined as a result of the refugee experience. The effect of rape on men has been totally underestimated. Violence as a way of asserting manhood, beginning with domestic violence, too often is the reaction. I strongly recommend you see the film, *Gender Against Men*.¹

¹"Combining Advocacy and Research: An Interview with Dr. Barbara Harrell-Bond," *St Antony's International Review* 9, no. 1 (2013): 118-122.

Barbara Harrell-Bond: The UNHCR does have a special focal point now for LGBTI cases. ‘A gay person from Ghana wrote me from Accra. The nearest country for him to reach from Ghana was Togo. Homosexuality is also illegal in Togo, but the Geneva focal point personally advised the Ghanaian just who he should see at the UNHCR offices in Lomé.

But at a UNHCR Executive Committee [ExCom] meeting, when Egypt was the chair, he challenged Erica Feller, the Deputy Protection Officer, saying Egypt were going to withdraw from ExCom if she did not stop pushing this issue.

STAIR: In Rights in Exile: Janus-Faced Humanitarianism (2005) you discuss the relationship between closed camps and IDP camps and the risks faced by women.

Barbara Harrell-Bond: I do not know if women face greater risks in IDP camps than in refugee camps. I avoid talking about IDPs; I am concerned with refugees only. You will also have observed that refugees are going off the “radar,” and being disguised by every other possible label rather than referring to them explicitly as refugees, e.g. displaced, forced migrants, irregular migrants and so on. I strongly objected to the UNHCR taking on the task of becoming the worlds’ welfare organization. It now even includes natural disasters in its target groups—it is insane. Why do I feel so strongly? Because it is the UNHCR that has a mandate to protect refugees; *no one else has this mandate!* At the same time, there are many domestic, even international organizations, with a particular responsibility for the many other categories of uprooted people who remain within their national borders.

There will always be the need for the provisions of the 1951 Refugee Convention and for some institution to promote its application. There are always going to be people who fear persecution, which is quite different in its consequences than suffering an earthquake or even being forced into a “protected village” in your own country.

Admittedly, when I visited IDP camps in Uganda, I was almost ashamed to be helping refugees, because the physical conditions for IDPs was far worse. But IDP needs should be attended to by agencies who have the specific mandate to work *within* states. No one but the UNHCR is mandated to care for people fleeing persecution across borders. Diluting its work with IDPs and others who do not face these overwhelming problems is inexcusable.

STAIR: Have you observed any changes in UNHCR policies over the years?

Barbara Harrell-Bond: I have been able to observe two changes in assistance policy since *Imposing Aid* was published in 1986. The UNHCR now sees to it that women receive some kind of sanitary equipment and shrouds are, still too irregularly, supplied so refugees do not have to use their blankets to wrap the dead.

I think as long as refugees are confined to camps, they do not have the protection that they need. And camps still exist, unfortunately, and women are, I believe, more at a threat in the camp situation than had they lived in slums in a city. But has the UNHCR done anything about it? Yes, it has belatedly introduced its urban policy.

STAIR: Should women be considered a social group under the Convention?

Barbara Harrell-Bond: Usually that is how they are considered, but recently Deborah Anker has noted that a woman, for example, who subscribes to “feminism” where it is considered to be a political issue, could have her claim for asylum defended on grounds of persecution for her political opinion.

STAIR: Often women who are victims of sexual violence are dependent on perpetrators, either because they hold positions of authority, or because of financial dependence. How can we overcome the challenges in preventing sexual violence in such circumstances?

Barbara Harrell-Bond: This is true. Protecting such women requires an infrastructure of safe houses and absolute confidentiality in dealing with their cases. That is something lacking in most refugee situations, particularly in camps.

STAIR: What is the relationship between research and advocacy?

Barbara Harrell-Bond: I have always argued that people who do advocacy must rely on good research. But research should be written so that it has the possibility of other people using it for advocacy when it is appropriate.

STAIR: Are there those who see research differently than you?

Barbara Harrell-Bond: I remember, Robert Cassen, who was head of Queen Elizabeth House Department of International Development at Ox-

ford between 1986 and 1991, telling me that academics do not do advocacy. In response, I said: "But Robert, we are not doing advocacy, we do public education." He said: "But universities do not do public education." I suggested that if that were the case, he should advise Blackwell's Bookshop to close. I suspect that research is labelled advocacy by academics when the particular research offends their own personal political views.

But I also worry about NGOs who *only* do advocacy. On the one hand, if I am a prisoner sitting in Cameroon, I would be thankful that Amnesty members write me postcards and that they are advocating against the abuse of human rights in Cameroon. But it seems to me that advocacy work that does not include some sort of direct action is a questionable use of resources. My "direct action" is to promote legal assistance for refugees which is also a first priority for refugees. Perhaps I am old-fashioned but I still believe in courts and rule of law and we should be promoting rule of law. If some of the resources that is devoted to advocacy work were redirected to taking cases to court, perhaps more positive changes would be brought about.

*STAIR: You noted in your 2005 book *Rights in Exile: Janus-Faced Humanitarianism* that, though you use the "methodological insights" of cultural relativism², the universality of human rights should be beyond dispute. How has cultural relativism impacted actions on the ground with regard to gender-based violence?*

Barbara Harrell-Bond: Unfortunately cultural relativism is still alive and well in Anthropology and too often in the humanitarian world. In the Kakuma Refugee camp UNHCR encouraged the refugees to form their own customary courts instead of applying Kenyan law. In Kakuma women accused of adultery, not even in Kenya's Penal Code, were locked up in cells that the Lutheran World Federation had built for the customary court.

STAIR: You were working in advocacy for refugees before and after the Internet was invented. How has this changed your work?

Barbara Harrell-Bond: When I was conducting research among Ugandans in southern Sudan, there was no means of communication other than the plane from Juba by which you could send letters to Nairobi and from there on to a telex. (Today, many people may not even remember what telexes were!) When we got car radios in 1983 to communicate between Yei and Juba, it was like a miracle. I now can receive messages from a refugee in Namibia from her phone to my email. (I do not have a smart phone.) You forgot to mention Skype. I can take a testimony from

a Rwandan refugee in China over Skype. I can even link an interpreter in Cairo for the interview with the refugee in China, were it needed.

Now I work on a website that brings resources to lawyers who represent refugees and encourages legal aid providers to begin to work together across national boundaries.³ Refugees are using emails now. Our website is attracting a lot of cases from around the world with whom we try to link up with lawyers who can represent them. The Internet has revolutionized the possibilities for refugee protection. ■

Interview conducted by Mollie Gerver.

Notes

¹ The movie can be found at: <http://www.refugeelegalaidinformation.org/other-resources>

² Richard Wilson, *Human Rights, Culture, and Context: Anthropological Perspectives* (London: Pluto Press, 1997), 8.

³ www.refugeelegalaidinformation.org

A New Era: The Iranian Navy, Operational Expansion, and Soft Power

TRACY A. VINCENT¹

ABSTRACT

The Islamic Republic of Iran Navy (IRIN) has embarked on a new initiative to transform its maritime operations. These changes are occurring at a time when the heightened focus on the Indian Ocean as a vital avenue for the transport of commerce and precious natural resources evokes serious debate over the future of maritime security in the region. Iran's new operational scheme incorporates a geographic reassignment with its Iranian Revolutionary Guard Corps Navy (IRGCN) counterpart, which expands the IRIN footprint across the vast Indian Ocean. This new paradigm represents the most significant change to Iranian naval operations since the foundation of the IRGCN in the mid-1980s. The prospect of a "blue water" Iranian naval force could further intensify tensions within a region already coloured by uncertainty and instability. Iranian naval operational expansion may also permit Iran to cultivate soft power options and enable Tehran to form relationships with nations across the periphery of the Indian Ocean. The IRIN, however, may face some institutional challenges, including the procurement of sufficient ships to replace an ageing fleet, which may impede Tehran's goal of greater presence across the Indian Ocean commons.

Introduction

The geopolitical landscape of the last decade has overshadowed an operational expansion recently undertaken by the Islamic Republic of Iran Navy (IRIN). Despite the growing concern among Western powers over Iran's advancing nuclear programme, reporting on Iranian naval activities has mostly received only token attention, while global interest has

Tracy A. Vincent, "A New Era: The Iranian Navy, Operational Expansion, and Soft Power," *St Antony's International Review* 9, no. 1 (2013): 123-143.

been riveted on September 11, 2001 and the subsequent wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, the rise of China, climate change and the global economic crisis. What has gone largely unnoticed, however, is a transformation in IRIN operations, marked by the growing assertiveness of the Iranian Navy beyond the traditionally plied waters along the Iranian coastline and into the Indian Ocean.

Only recently has the international community begun to take notice of IRIN activities, such as the February 2011 two-ship deployment to the Mediterranean Sea (the IRIN's first transit through the Suez Canal since the 1979 Islamic Revolution), and again in February 2012. Then, in March 2013, the IRIN 24th deployed task force completed its first transit in three decades through the Malacca Strait,² followed by operations in the South China Sea. With the international community increasingly reliant on a secure maritime domain for trade and regional stability, it is evident that Iran considers itself as a major stakeholder in the Indian Ocean commons. Under a new operational framework, Iran is expanding its maritime defensive perimeter against potential adversaries and securing its maritime interests along key Indian Ocean shipping corridors. Expanded Indian Ocean operations will also permit the IRIN to serve as an instrument that supports Tehran's growing soft power activities across the region.

The Indian Ocean: The Preeminent Global Trade and Energy Corridor

Where Europe once featured prominently in the twentieth century, the Indian Ocean and its surroundings now comprise the most hotly contested region among both local and global powers, vying for influence and the pursuit of national security interests. Upon close inspection of a world map, nowhere else will you find a backdrop so pock-marked with issues affecting the global community, including political instability, swaths of ungoverned spaces, mounting urbanization along oceans and nearby waterways, and the scourge of piracy and disputed maritime borders. Additionally, one cannot fail to mention transnational threats that run astride maritime pathways and jeopardize the flow of the region's critical resources from reaching global consumers.

Over ninety per cent of all global trade is performed by maritime shipping, which demonstrates not only the importance of sea routes within the ever-growing and sophisticated trade network, but also the remarkable extent to which maritime organizations are relied upon to support a multitude of industrial and consumer bases worldwide. Given

the increasing demand for crude oil, maritime security initiatives centred on the Indian Ocean environs will continue to occupy national defence policy planning and naval operational schemes from Western and regional navies, including the IRIN, for the next several decades.

Outlining New Operational Horizons

It is important to note that from a Western military analyst's perspective, it is very difficult to ascertain Iranian intentions pertaining to their expanding operations. This is due to the lack of available strategy documents disseminated from Tehran. Unlike China's "Defence White Paper" or the US Navy's "A Cooperative Strategy for 21st Century Seapower", there is no Iranian defence document circulated worldwide that outlines Tehran's maritime strategy in support of national objectives. IRIN activities are of great significance within the maritime community and to military planners, where concerns over miscalculation and potential escalation into full-scale war are a constant theme within Western defence organizations, not to mention the potential impact to Western Theatre Security Co-operation initiatives across the region.

Western defence officials must therefore carefully examine Iranian state-monitored press reporting to cull the hyperbole and propaganda from information that appears credible and plausible, and then merge these details with military situation reports to develop thorough assessments. State-controlled media outlets, especially *Press TV*, certainly overstate Iranian military capabilities, particularly during large-scale "Holy Prophet" exercises,³ which carry strong strategic deterrent messages to potential Western foes while simultaneously exaggerating Tehran's arsenal. Tehran's press reporting regarding Iran's maritime claims, on the other hand, is much more benign. Media networks such as *Fars News Agency* and *Mehr News* periodically mischaracterize naval manoeuvres or misstate the function or class of ships (for example, characterizing the MOWJ-class frigate as a destroyer, or the KHARG-class replenishment ship as a helicopter carrier), rather than routinely spouting exaggerated rhetoric regarding its war-making capabilities.

In reality, it is much more difficult to overstate IRIN naval operations and capabilities when most of their activities can be observed by Western navies in international waters. What is clear is that the international maritime community has detected significant changes in Iranian Navy operating patterns during the last six years, in particular naval manoeuvres of IRIN assets extending into the Indian Ocean. Western military and geopolitical analysts have also begun to identify a corresponding

increase in declarative press statements by Iranian Navy commanders and defence officials regarding their new operational framework.

Since his ascendancy to IRIN Commander in 2007, Rear Admiral Habibollah Sayyari has served as the principal spokesman for the IRIN and has described in broad terms the changes in the IRIN mission. Admiral Sayyari proclaimed in 2009 that the “Iranian Navy should prove our might and capability not only inside but outside the region, but also safeguard Iran’s interests and protect the country’s trade fleet.”⁴ Rear Admiral Sayyari also stressed the significance of Iran’s obligation to maritime regional engagement, and “pointed to the Navy’s presence in international waters in the Indian Ocean, Gulf of Aden and the Red Sea, and stressed that maintaining such a naval presence demands interaction and cooperation with neighbouring states in the North of the Indian Ocean.”⁵ More recently, Sayyari stated that “a large volume of the world’s traded goods is transported between the Strait of Hormuz, Bab el-Mandeb, and the Strait of Malacca, noting that maintaining the security of shipping lanes in this area is highly important for the economy.”⁶

A key proclamation that perhaps gives Western analysts the best perspective regarding the geographic scope of IRIN operations was revealed in 2010, when IRIN Deputy of Operations Rear Admiral Qasem Rostam-abadi stated, “by expanding our presence within a ‘Strategic Triangle’ (between the Strait of Hormuz, Gulf of Aden, and Malacca Strait), we will be able to completely oversee the transit of the world’s energy and at the same time protect our own interests.”⁷

The vertices of the “Strategic Triangle” represent three of the world’s most critical and vulnerable transit points for global commerce. A significant disruption of maritime traffic due to environmental causes or man-made events (transnational terrorist threats, or state-on-state maritime conflict) could significantly alter Iranian trade and debilitate Tehran’s economy. By volume, roughly eighty-seven per cent of Iran’s imports and ninety-nine per cent of its exports are by sea.⁸ The provision of ships near these chokepoints and along densely transited corridors allow the IRIN to be better positioned to provide security for Iranian-owned and leased commercial vessels that are vital to the maintenance of trade relations across the region.



Source: Google orthographic projection graphic of Iran, [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Iran—\(orthographic—projection\).svg](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Iran—(orthographic—projection).svg) (accessed October, 10, 2011).

A New Scheme of Manoeuvre Takes Shape

The IRIN traditionally served as a defensive buffer against maritime threats along Iran's vast 2,440-kilometre coastline, ranging from the Iran-Iraq border in the extreme Northern Persian Gulf to Iran's south-eastern boundary with Pakistan. In 2008, however, Tehran reassigned the IRIN and its Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps Navy (IRGCN) counterpart to operate within well-defined, geographically separated footprints. IRIN patrols the area enclosed by the Strait of Hormuz, the Gulf of Oman, and the Indian Ocean, while IRGCN operations are confined to the Persian Gulf.

At first glance, some may view this new geographic reassignment as a reduction in the IRIN's responsibility in favour of a more agile and varied IRGCN force. However, this appraisal fails to appreciate the weaponry, capabilities and strengths of each force. In truth, this realignment into geographically separated footprints takes advantage of the intrinsic qualities of both the IRIN and IRGCN and maximizes Tehran's maritime defences.

The IRGC was formed following the 1979 Revolution to create a military force loyal to the new Islamic regime. The IRGCN, officially established in 1985, adopted non-traditional, asymmetric tactics over conventional IRIN capabilities to retaliate against intensifying Iraqi attacks during the Iran-Iraq War. The IRGCN's use of asymmetric, or unconventional, tactics such as small boat swarm attacks were preferred over conventional force employment, as these tactics permitted Tehran to offset weaknesses in the quantity or quality of traditional weapons. The IRIN's conventional assets proved unsuitable for the kind of combat operations desired by Iranian leadership in the Gulf.⁹

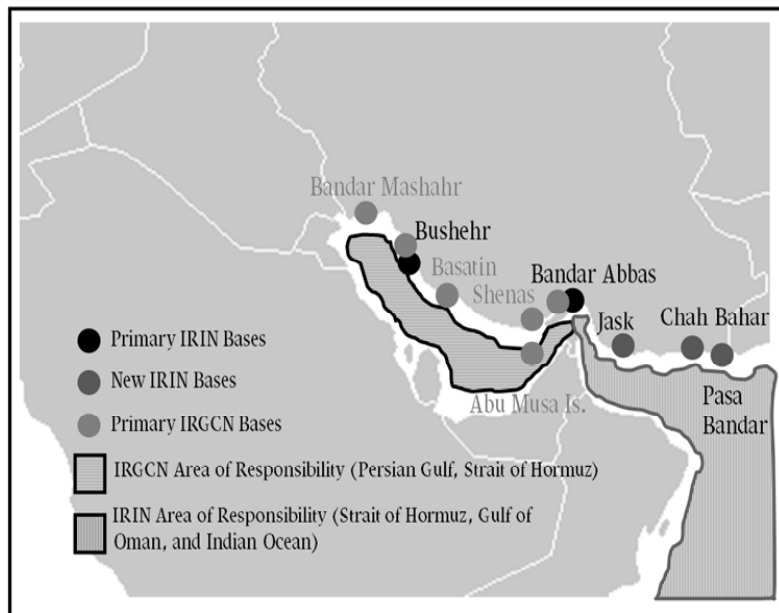
During the last three decades, the IRGCN has continued to build its asymmetric capabilities and tactics designed around close-range, multi-axis swarm attacks using dozens of small attack craft to mount overwhelming force against adversaries. Estimates of the IRGCN inventory vary; unclassified documents indicate that the IRGCN has hundreds of fast attack craft poised to swiftly respond to threats in large numbers and are designed to overwhelm conventional naval forces in the shallow, more restricted waters of the Persian Gulf.¹⁰ In essence, the IRGCN is prepared to conduct a knife fight in a phone booth in order to protect the regime.

IRGCN small boats are capable of employing mines, rockets, torpedoes, and short range surface-to-surface missiles, such as the Chinese-made C704 anti-ship missile with electro-optical guidance systems or active radar seekers that US or Western forces would have difficulty detecting and defeating in combat. While most of the fast attack craft arsenal has been procured from China and North Korea, Tehran's maritime shipbuilding infrastructure has progressed to such an extent that it produces indigenous versions of high-speed boats, weapons, and spare parts to supplement foreign acquisitions.

The IRIN, meanwhile, unlike the street gang approach of the IRGCN, is analogous to a middleweight boxing contender: it may not be championship quality, but nevertheless is capable of packing a punch. The IRIN is a conventional force comprised of frigates, patrol craft, submarines, and auxiliaries that are comparable in displacement and armament to other traditional navies across the world. Although the IRIN order-of-battle is small (consisting of approximately sixty ships and submarines) relative to

international powers like the United States and China, it nevertheless possesses an inventory that is suited for long-range, blue water operations. With the exception of India, the IRIN represents the largest naval force in the Middle East, Arabian Peninsula, East Africa, and South Asia.

IRIN Bases and IRIN/IRGCN Areas of Responsibility¹¹



In the last decade, the IRIN also began to build a more modern blue water surface fleet. Nearly every surface combatant is now equipped with Chinese C-802 surface-to-surface missiles (or indigenously produced reverse-engineered variants) that are capable of striking enemy targets at ranges exceeding fifty nautical miles, along with other modern weapons systems, sonar equipment, and radars. Tehran is also creating a subsurface force to augment its surface capabilities, which will become an additional maritime component capable of countering Western power projection platforms such as amphibious ships and aircraft carriers. Fourteen North Korean designed GHADIR-class midget submarines augment the IRIN's three KILO-class diesel-electric submarines that were purchased from Russia in the 1990s. The GHADIR, which displaces 120 tonnes and carries two to four personnel, is equipped with torpedoes and mines to provide additional surveillance capability and creates an-

other layer of defence in the Gulf of Oman and along narrow transit corridors in the Strait of Hormuz.

The IRIN continues to use existing infrastructure inside the Persian Gulf, such as the Bushehr naval base in the Northern Persian Gulf, despite its broadened scope of operations and newly assigned area of responsibility. The provision of IRIN assets from Bushehr to support Indian Ocean missions will likely persist until critical infrastructure to support the training of logistical, maintenance, and administrative elements for ships and personnel is completed at sites east of the Strait of Hormuz at Jask, Chah Bahar and Pasa Bandar (situated along the Pakistani border). Rear Admiral Sayyari stated that new IRIN bases will extend to Pasa Bandar by 2015.¹² Fortification of these sites will create a chain of bases outside the Strait of Hormuz that grants the IRIN instant access to the Gulf of Oman and extends Tehran's maritime line of defence to potential adversaries aiming to enter the Persian Gulf.

Tehran has also launched a series of naval exercises in recent years that test IRIN capabilities to defend against attack from its southern flank. In late 2007, the IRIN conducted a six-day exercise dubbed "Unity 87," designed to increase the combat readiness of its fleet by conducting war-game scenarios encompassing a 50,000 square-mile area extending into the Gulf of Oman.¹³ By May 2009, IRIN had further expanded its war-at-sea scenarios covering a 250,000 square mile area into the Northern Indian Ocean during a five-day exercise called "Velayat 89."¹⁴ The drill also emphasized the use of weapons systems produced domestically, and tested IRIN defences along shipping corridors entering the Strait of Hormuz from the Gulf of Oman and Indian Ocean. "Velayat 89" also introduced the first indigenously designed MOWJ-class frigate "Jamaran" into the IRIN fleet. These drills have become an integral part of the IRIN's annual training cycle (the IRIN usually holds two to three major exercises per year) and serve as key venues to test new military equipment and tactics, in particular a layered defensive arc that extends into the Indian Ocean.

What conclusions may be drawn from the recasting of the new IRIN's mission and area of responsibility, especially in relation to its IRGCN counterpart? First, Tehran is engineering an expanded defensive barrier that is designed to deny access and maritime freedom of manoeuvre to potential adversaries by developing a wide array of ships and weapons systems that challenge US and Western naval forces. Second, these footprints create greater flexibility for Tehran to protect Iran against perceived threats operating in the Gulf of Oman and Indian Ocean, and in particular, permit IRIN assets to conduct surveillance, early warning, and if required, counter enemy power projection capabilities that aim to

strike critical infrastructure and military targets along the Iranian coastline. Most importantly, the inventories of both the IRGCN and IRIN now match their intended capabilities: the new scheme of manoeuvre enables IRIN combatants to operate in a position of strength in distant waters, where ocean conditions, logistical constraints, and limited ranges typically impede IRGCN small boat operations. All told, this new operational model signifies the most striking change to Iranian naval operations since the foundation of the IRGCN in 1985.

Implications of Operational Expansion

As Iran reorients its naval operations towards a region spanning from East Africa to Southeast Asia, Tehran will enhance its maritime situational awareness, and Iranian-associated shipping networks will be afforded added security in areas of perceived threats. Potential hazards, however, exist that could disrupt an already troubled security environment in some areas of the “Strategic Triangle,” such as increased chances for incidents at sea that could escalate tensions with the West.

Tehran already boasts a deep land-based intelligence collection apparatus outside its borders through the Revolutionary Guard Corps’ external directorate, the Quds Force (IRGC-QF).¹⁵ IRIN operations provide an added tactical dimension to Iran’s intelligence collection system and supplement the regime’s maritime situational awareness capability beyond its traditional littoral areas of operation. The increasing operational span will breed familiarity with the Indian Ocean environs for IRIN crews, and help satisfy critical information gaps by building maritime patterns-of-life (analysis of trends and activities) of Coalition operations in waters more distant from the Iranian coastline on a near real-time basis. By deploying two or three-ship formations astride high density maritime corridors, Tehran will also be better equipped to receive early warning of maritime events such as pirate attacks and environmental hazards (oil spills, monsoons, etc.) that may affect the security and movement of cargoes.

Iran’s naval expansion may involve less benign dimensions as well. The IRISL fleet and other merchant vessels linked to Iran, often sailing under the flags of other countries, are known to transport illicit cargoes.¹⁶ Iran may opt to use the IRIN to assist smuggling networks or escort the movement of military supplies to recipients such as Palestinian militants in Gaza, Lebanese Hezbollah, or the Syrian regime.¹⁷ These situations may become precarious if regional stability in global flashpoints like the Levant is threatened and may prompt military intervention from Western powers.

While the Indian Ocean offers the IRIN a more spacious operating environment than the Persian Gulf, close interaction with Coalition ships remains very likely. Both Iran and Coalition forces possess helicopters and unmanned aerial vehicles to supplement their sea-based Intelligence, Surveillance, and Reconnaissance (ISR) capability, resulting in an increased surveillance area and dwell time over contacts of interest.¹⁸ Intrusion by either side into the airspace surrounding a foreign surface combatant, or a careless act that hinders safe navigation, could result in a collision or the loss of aircraft and aircrew. Other states may interpret benign ISR operations as provocative, especially if manoeuvres and ISR activities impede upon sensitive operations or endanger sailors or flight crews.

IRIN involvement across the Indian Ocean and Southeast Asian commons also takes on a strategic dimension that could complicate Western Theatre Security Co-operation activities. The recent deployment of the IRIN 24th task force to the South China Sea in March 2013 is one such example. This deployment, consisting of one VOSPER-class frigate and one KHARG-class replenishment oiler, marked the furthest cruise ever by the IRIN. The operation culminated with a port visit to China's PLA Navy South Sea Fleet headquarters in Zhanjiang,¹⁹ with subsequent plans for a stop in Sri Lanka during the return leg. These visits stress not only Iran's interest in expanding its naval diplomacy and forging ties with foreign naval forces, but also its willingness to combat international isolation and counter US influence in the region. Since 2009, IRIN deployments have included visits to Sudan and Syria, as well as nations with closer ties to the US and the West, such as Oman, Djibouti, Yemen, and Saudi Arabia. Iranian maritime activities should therefore compel military planners and diplomats to pause and consider the potential for diminished influence in these countries, especially as the West frames a post-Afghanistan grand strategy and the US is mired in budget deficits.

So What? The Significance of Maritime Soft Power

Apart from the conventional capabilities that can be brought to bear to defend a nation from attack, several countries use their maritime forces to execute an array of non-kinetic missions aligned to promote economic, diplomatic, and national security objectives. Exerting soft power through the employment of ships and corresponding personnel is becoming a commonly accepted tool by diplomats and military planners as a key strategic element aimed at improving relations with regional neighbours. International powers such as the United States and China

have utilized their naval forces to conduct soft power missions in all corners of the globe, including Latin America, Southeast Asia, and East Africa. In recent years, Tehran has assigned the IRIN to undertake soft power missions, signifying an additional dimension of responsibility for its regular naval force beyond its expanded war-fighting and defence missions in the Gulf Of Oman and Indian Ocean.

Western navies and their regional counterparts generally regard IRIN personnel as capable and professional sailors. Thus, the use of the IRIN as an agent of regional engagement could prove to be highly constructive as Tehran seeks to champion its interests across the commons. Some naval soft power missions performed by naval forces in recent years include:

- *Humanitarian aid response:* Western navies have rendered assistance to nations experiencing natural disasters, including the 2004 tsunami in Indonesia, the 2009 floods in Pakistan and the March 2011 earthquake in northeastern Japan. Large supply ships, aircraft carriers and amphibious ships serve as exceptional platforms to stage personnel and material to be delivered to destinations of need.
- *Medical/Dental Civic Action Projects (MEDCAP/DENTCAP):* The US Navy and People's Republic of China (PRC) Navy have served as ambassadors of goodwill throughout Southeast Asia and the Horn of Africa by deploying to remote areas where citizens have limited access to health services or cannot afford treatment. Uniformed medical personnel perform medical check-ups, vaccinations and dental cleanings in impoverished communities, often in concert with non-governmental organizations. The Chinese deployed their first newly commissioned hospital ship (coined by the PRC as the "Peace Ark") in mid-2010 for a four-month deployment to the Indian Ocean.
- *Seamanship and vocational training programmes:* Through bilateral or multilateral mechanisms, navies conduct team-building initiatives to enhance co-operation between allies and coalitions. Navigation, small arms training, search and rescue exercises, and communications drills are just a few of the areas of focus.

Developing Iranian Soft Power Ventures

During the past decade, Iran has been cultivating its soft power across the globe, including in Latin America and West Africa. However, close examination reveals Iran's engagement effort is steered towards East Africa, with additional undertakings trained on Southeast Asia. Pronouncements from Iranian leadership also illustrate its desire to dispatch the Iranian Navy across the Indian Ocean as an instrument to attain greater economic growth and development across the region. In 2009, Admiral Sayyari noted the IRIN should "contribute its share in developing Iran as the most powerful country in the region," and affirmed that the Leader of the Islamic Revolution, Ayatollah Sayyid Ali Khamenei, has also "laid much emphasis on the importance of the seas and the necessity for making an optimised use of the seas to attain sustainable development."²⁰

The pace of these soft power missions, like most diplomatic endeavours, has thus far been restrained, with several agreements only slowly taking shape. The cases below represent a candid appraisal of areas in which Iranian naval diplomacy could assist Tehran in building ties with other nations. Tehran may direct the IRIN to act as a prime mover to forge closer relations with partners, or may dictate maritime security missions such as patrols or escort operations to serve in a complementary role in attaining larger diplomatic and economic aims for Iran.

Oman

IRIN surface platforms performed search and rescue drills with the Royal Omani Navy in 2011 and again in 2013. Tehran and Muscat plan on staging these rescue drills on an annual basis, which will increase interoperability between the two countries in an area of dense maritime traffic that is prone to adverse sea and weather conditions. Press reporting has described the objective of the exercises as part of a growing bilateral effort to "enhance the readiness for the provision of relief services, rescue operations, the level of regional cooperation and the exchange of experience."²¹

Djibouti

The Horn of Africa is of paramount importance to Tehran, as it presents Iran with a strategic opening to extend its previous maritime activities beyond the Arabian Peninsula and stretches its arc several thousand miles to the south and west. Following initial high-level talks in 2006, the relationship was cemented with the signing of multiple Memoranda of Un-

derstanding (MOUs) in 2010,²² one of which included provisions to boost naval co-operation. During a January 2011 bilateral summit, IRIN Commander Rear Admiral Sayyari stressed that the Iranian Navy was ready to co-operate with Djibouti in establishing naval training camps, safeguarding territorial waters and coasts and providing security for fishermen.²³

The naval MOU will permit the IRIN to build its military influence through the implementation of a variety of bilateral security co-operation measures, which may include the provision of vocational training (specific nautical-related skills, such as navigation, small arms training, and boarding and search operations), capabilities that are often disregarded by smaller coastal navies due to a lack of well-trained personnel and the inability to fund long-term training objectives because of budgetary constraints.

Kenya

Since his election in 2005, President Ahmedinejad has invigorated relations with several Horn of Africa nations, including Kenya. A visit in 2009 involving a hundred-man delegation resulted in an agreement to increase consular relations and develop ties in the energy sector with the nation.²⁴ Kenya and Iran have also agreed to increase their co-operation in transportation, fishery, agriculture, health and industry.²⁵ Further talks in 2010 suggested a pending agreement for the creation of a free trade zone between the two nations.

Iran and Kenya have reportedly agreed to establish sea routes between Bandar Abbas and Mombasa.²⁶ Should this maritime arrangement materialize, the increased flow of maritime activity between the two nations will likely entail the movement of oil, agricultural goods and industrial supplies to and from Kenya via the Islamic Republic of Iran Shipping Line (IRISL), the regime's commercial shipping fleet.²⁷ Increasing Iranian commercial shipments to the region may prompt a commensurate augmentation of IRIN patrols along the eastern coast of Africa to safeguard its commercial fleet and guarantee energy security along vital sea-lanes.

Somalia

Iran joined the list of countries whose shipping is endangered by pirates: the Iranian decision to send the IRIN to the Gulf of Aden was spawned by the August 22, 2008 hijacking of the Iranian-leased cargo ship *M/V Delight* off the Somali coast.²⁸ Through February 2013, the IRIN has conducted twenty-three deployments to the Gulf of Aden, with each mis-

sion lasting ninety to 120 days. Each dispatched naval group (commonly referred to as a task force) typically consists of three ships—an oiler/replenishment ship, along with a combination of frigates, patrol craft, and KIL0-class submarines. The presence of the IRIN off Somali waters will enable Iran to protect IRISL's shipping fleet, but also achieve greater freedom of movement in the region.²⁹

As another sign of Iran's increasing reach into Africa, the regime directed a maritime delivery of humanitarian supplies to famine stricken Somalia in late September 2011. The Somali ambassador to Iran, Khalifa Moussa, said it was the first aid Iran had sent Somalia via the sea.³⁰ An Iranian cargo ship carried 5000 tonnes of rice, flour, cereal and sugar to citizens in need, located in refugee camps near Mogadishu. Through December 2011, nineteen additional shipments of basic provisions were delivered to Mogadishu, signalling a desire by the Iranians to sustain their presence in the troubled region.

Indonesia

Countering narcotics trafficking offers another avenue to enhance Iran's relations with the East. Officials in Jakarta have expressed concern over the increased flow of illicit drugs originating from the coasts of Iran and Pakistan, which make their way to Southeast Asian shorelines. Indonesian authorities assert that smuggling networks in Iran are the primary source of narcotics into the country, and between 2004 and 2010 they have witnessed a 300 per cent increase in illicit smuggling.³¹ Such a meteoric rise in illegal narcotics movements, mostly transported via the sea, could trigger Iran to increase its naval patrols in the eastern Indian Ocean and may compel Tehran to craft counter-smuggling initiatives and promote maritime security collaborative efforts, such as enhanced intelligence sharing and inter-agency co-ordination with coast guard and police investigative units.

Defence Budget Considerations

IRIN soft power exploits and an increased footprint cannot be sustained without a steady stream of funds to support on-going missions and modernization efforts. Tehran does not publish a defence budget, but London-based International Institute of Strategic Studies (IISS) has examined military expenditures worldwide, including in Iran. Unfortunately, the data does not parse Iranian military spending by service

(army, navy, etc.), nor are estimates available on IRGC expenditures to accurately compare IRIN and IRGCN budgets.

These reports, however, do provide sufficient numbers to ascertain overall defence spending trends, as well as the overall expenditures in relation to the national Gross Domestic Product (GDP). The estimates illustrate a significant climb in defence expenditures over the last decade. Between 2001 and 2006, estimates showed a near doubling of the Iranian defence budget.³² More recently, IISS analysis in 2012 indicated spending jumped to over twelve billion US dollars in 2011. However, while defence spending has continued to increase, expenditures as a percentage of GDP have historically remained steady. Spending is equivalent to approximately two point five per cent of GDP, which compares favourably to most Western nations (two to four per cent).³³ These statistics appear to indicate that the defence outlays are conservative, which would give Iran the flexibility to increase construction of additional IRIN vessels if required.

Institutional Challenges

An enduring operational plan to expand the IRIN's reach is not without its flaws. IRIN leadership must confront numerous institutional obstacles in order to cover the "Strategic Triangle." Inventory shortfalls and potential questions regarding operational priorities demonstrate a mismatch between Tehran's goals for greater military presence and its ability to execute this mission.

IRIN leadership must put enough ships out to sea to monitor and patrol its vast Indian Ocean operational zone and protect its maritime interests. The rate of modernization and procurement does not reflect this requirement. Most of Iran's claims regarding improvements to its conventional forces have so far not been followed by the deployment of major new capabilities and modern weapons. This aspect of Iran's military modernization effort still lags far behind the decline in conventional weaponry imposed by age, past combat, and wear.³⁴ In fact, most of the IRIN order-of battle consists of ageing frigates and patrol craft acquired prior to the demise of the Shah in 1979.³⁵

The table on the following page illustrates this point by listing the IRIN order-of battle by ship class and year of commissioning. The IRIN does not divulge planned acquisitions in official Iranian defence documents. However, some press reports do lend insight into potential procurement efforts. These reports suggest the IRIN has not fully developed plans to upgrade its inventory of frigates and patrol craft—the

type of combatants that are best suited for blue water operations. In June 2012, IRIN leadership announced plans to unveil ten new MOWJ-class frigates,³⁶ but these acquisitions may take several years to introduce into the fleet. The MOWJ construction plan will assist in procuring replacements for the ageing VOSPER, PF-103, and LA COMBATTANTE inventories. However, more acquisitions will be needed to augment existing orders-of-battle and provide depth to support multiple task force deployments or flexibility should maintenance issues prevent assigned ships from performing their rotational patrol

Islamic Republic of Iran Navy (IRIN) Order of Battle*

2013

<i>Class</i>	<i>Number</i>	<i>Year</i>
KILO SS (diesel submarine)	3	1992
GHADIR SSM (midget submarine)	14	2004
NAHANG SSC (coastal training submarine)	1	2006
MOWJ FF (frigate)	1	2010
VOSPER FFL (frigate)	3	1971
PF 103 (patrol corvette)	2	1964
LA COMBATTANTE II (KAMAN) PTG (patrol craft)	13	1977
KHARG AO (replenishment ship)	1	1980
BANDAR ABBAS AO (replenishment ship)	2	1973
DELVAR AE (cargo ship)	5	1978
HENDIJAN AG (general purpose tender)	12	1987
HENGAM LST (amphibious support ship)	4	1973

*Note: The list above, consisting of nearly sixty ships, aims to show the platforms that contribute regularly to IRIN missions. It does not denote every ship in the IRIN inventory.

Source: International Institute of Strategic Studies, *The Military Balance* 2012, 325.

<i>Class</i>	<i>Number</i>	<i>Year</i>
GHADIR SSM (midget submarine)	3	2013-2015
MOWJ FF (frigate) ^a	10	Second ship in 2014

^aIn June 2012, Iranian Fars News Agency reported that IRIN leadership announced plans to unveil ten new indigenous destroyers and frigates (specific timeline unknown). In March 2013, Mehr News reported the second MOWJ frigate would be commissioned in 2014.

The IRIN historically only dispatches one task force to distant waters at a time. If the IRIN hierarchy chooses to boost the number of simultaneous task force deployments, they must also carefully assess maritime priorities to avoid the pitfalls of operational overreach. Leadership must judiciously mix coastal defence missions and long duration patrols. While the IRIN typically maintains two to three patrollers on duty in the Gulf of Oman, Tehran may still find it challenging to quickly respond to contingencies or position key assets to defend the shores that would otherwise be unguarded. For instance, a deployed IRIN task force patrolling shipping routes east of the Asian subcontinent (approximately 3000 nautical miles from Bandar Abbas) may require as many as seven days to return to a better defensive position in the North Arabian Sea (an arc approximately one-hundred to three-hundred nautical miles from the Iranian coast) should additional assets be necessary.

The IRIN must also carefully weigh the advantages of incorporating task force units into the IRIN annual training cycle. The annual “Velayat”³⁷ exercise is just one of several large-scale drills that simulate war-at-sea scenarios and emphasize the layered defence construct beyond littoral waters and into the Gulf of Oman and the North Arabian Sea. These ships and submarines may be the first line of defence should conflict arise, and failing to fully integrate these ships in the drills reduces crew readiness and inhibits the refinement of fleet-level manoeuvre warfare and area-denial tactics across the entire IRIN fleet.

Matching its stated maritime ambitions may prove difficult unless IRIN commanders can effectively address materiel shortfalls and avoid overextension of forces. IRIN missions are entering a new level of sophistication, and a mastery of naval operational art will be critical in meeting Iranian objectives of increased power projection.

Conclusion

We are witnessing a new era in the Iranian Navy. Its expanded reach into the Indian Ocean is taking shape, not at breakneck pace but with slow and careful execution. This operational expansion comes at a time when Tehran is also deepening its aspirations to become a regional power. Iran is employing the IRIN as an instrument not only to increase its arc of defence and provide maritime security for its commercial shipping fleet, but as a tool to expand Tehran's economic and diplomatic ties. Some soft power ventures will stall or fail over the coming years, but those that do form will likely progress slowly. When Iran does forge closer bonds with other countries, in particular in Africa and Southeast Asia, expect IRIN operations to focus along communication lanes in order to fulfil missions of common strategic value to Iran and its partners.

The IRIN is certainly not being demoted in favour of IRGCN forces. The regime's strategic calculus to craft an operational model for both the IRIN and IRGCN that matches its inventories is well founded; smaller, more agile IRGCN fast attack craft patrolling the restricted Persian Gulf waters, and larger, conventional frigates and submarines taking on missions in blue waters.

Unfortunately for the IRIN brass, it may not have the navy it wants, but it must employ the navy it has. The IRIN will likely find it must augment its order-of-battle to provide more depth and operational flexibility and to more effectively protect Iran's interests along the heavily traversed maritime corridors within the "Strategic Triangle." Given the modest IRIN acquisition forecast in the next few years, IRIN operations will likely not replicate high endurance Western schemes of manoeuvre. Multiple simultaneous patrols on a persistent basis across large swaths of the Indian Ocean are unlikely. Scalable operations based on perceived threats or specific areas of interest are more attainable objectives.

As the United States and the West contemplate a post-Afghanistan geopolitical environment, it will be important to take into account the operational and strategic implications of Iran's naval undertaking. Western naval planners and operators must be acutely aware of Iran's pursuits beyond its traditional operational domain, and planners would be well to strongly consider sustaining many military Theatre Security Co-operation activities in these areas, even when threatened by reduced footprints and budgetary constraints. ■

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Notes

¹ The opinions expressed in this article are the author's own, and do not represent the official policy position of the US Navy, the US Department of Defence, or any other branch of the US government.

² Mehr News, "Iran's Battle Group Enters Pacific Ocean," <http://old.mehrnews.com/en/newsdetail.aspx?NewsID=1817823> (accessed February 26, 2013).

³ Anthony Cordesman, "The Gulf Military Balance in 2010," <http://csis.org/files/publication/100422—GulfMilBal.pdf> (accessed February 26, 2012), 107.

⁴ Tehran Fars News Agency, "Iran's Goal to be Regional Superpower—Deploys Submarine in High Seas," <http://english.farsnews.com/newstext.php?nn=8910061571> (accessed January 13, 2011).

⁵ Tehran Fars News Agency, "Iranian Navy to Expand Operational Zone in Indian Ocean," <http://english.farsnews.com/newstext.php?nn=9102111879> (accessed May 22, 2012)

⁶ Bernama News, "Iranian Warships Pass Through the Strait of Malacca," <http://www.bernama.com/bernama/v7/wn/newsworld.php?id=930413> (accessed February 26, 2013).

⁷ Islamic Republic of Iran Broadcasting, Interview with Admiral Sayyari and Rear Admiral Rostamabadi, August 2010.

⁸ The Office of Naval Intelligence, *Iran's Naval Forces: From Guerrilla Warfare to a Modern Naval Strategy* (Suitland, MD: Office of Naval Intelligence, Fall 2009), 3.

⁹ Fariborz Haghshenass, "Iran's Asymmetric Naval Warfare," *The Washington Institute for Near East Policy Policy Focus* 87 (September 2008): 25.

¹⁰ International Institute for Strategic Studies (IISS), *The Military Balance 2012* (London: Routledge, March 2012), 324. (Note: IISS states that the IRGCN operates a substantial number of smaller boats with a displacement of less than 10 tonnes. There are likely several hundred additional small boats the IRGCN can "militarize" and bring to bear in a naval conflict). See also, United States Department of Defence, "Unclassified Military Report on Military Power of Iran, April 2010," <http://www.fas.org/man/eprint/dod—iran—2010.pdf> (accessed January, 23, 2012), 5. (Note: This report states the "IRGCN controls hundreds of small patrol boats").

¹¹ The Office of Naval Intelligence, *Iran's Naval Forces*, 12. The graphic depicts the new geographic operational assignments of the IRIN and IRGCN forces, with the IRIN area of responsibility highlighted in blue, and the IRGCN operational zone noted in red. Before the operational reassignment in 2008, IRIN and IRGCN ships manoeuvred in the same areas and shared the same patrol areas within the Persian Gulf, and in vicinity of the Strait of Hormuz and coastal waters near the approaches to the Gulf of Oman. The IRIN still relies on its Bushehr naval base in the northern Persian Gulf

to support many of its patrol craft, auxiliaries, and corvettes, and will likely continue to use this facility until more infrastructure is developed at Jask, Chah Bahar, and Pasa Bandar. IRGCN bases are scattered throughout the Persian Gulf, with some of its key facilities highlighted on the map (Bandar Mashahr, Bushehr, Basatin, Shenas, Abu Musa Island, and Bandar Abbas).

¹² The Office of Naval Intelligence, *Iran's Naval Forces*, 11.

¹³ Anthony Cordesman, "The Gulf Military Balance in 2012," <http://csis.org/files/publication/120518—Gulf—Military—Balance—2012.pdf> (accessed February 26, 2012), 106.

¹⁴ Anthony Cordesman, "The Gulf Military Balance in 2012," <http://csis.org/files/publication/120518—Gulf—Military—Balance—2012.pdf> (accessed February 26, 2012), 107.

¹⁵ Anthony Cordesman, "The Gulf Military Balance in 2010," <http://csis.org/files/publication/100422—GulfMilBal.pdf> (accessed January 17, 2012), 119. (Note: The Quds Force is a special unit of the IRGC that is assigned the mission of exporting Iran's Islamic Revolution, and is known to have provided aid to Lebanese Hezbollah and the Taliban in Afghanistan. While the exact composition of the IRGC-QF is unknown, it is assessed to have up to 15,000 members and presence across the Middle East, North Africa, the Levant, Central Asia, Europe, and North America).

¹⁶ Jamsheed K. Choksy, "Why Iran's Blue-Water Ambition Matters," *The American Interest* 5 (August 2011), <http://www.the-american-interest.com/article.cfm?piece=1025> (accessed 16 January 2012).

¹⁷ For example, in January 2009, twenty tons of explosives were seized from the Cyprus-flagged M/V MONCHEGORSK during transit from Bandar Abbas to Latakia, Syria in violation of United Nations sanctions. On board were 3,300 pallets containing high explosive, bullet casings and primers. The US and Israel believed the supplies were destined for Hamas militants in Gaza. The shipment in violation of 2007 UN sanctions banning the export of weapons from Iran.

¹⁸ The International Institute for Strategic Studies, *The Military Balance 2012* (London: Routledge, March 2012), 325. The Iranian Navy utilizes ten AB-212/214 and ten SH-3D Sea King helicopters for anti-submarine warfare and may also be employed to support surveillance of broad ocean areas to help assimilate a common operational picture. The Iranian military has also developed multiple unmanned aerial vehicles (UAV), including the Mohajer and Ababil-series UAV's, which employs electro-optical and infrared sensors that may be relay full motion video to a controller on the ground (or ship) in real-time.

¹⁹ Tehran Fars News Agency, "Iranian Fleet of Warship Docks in China's Southern Port," <http://english.farsnews.com/newstext.php?nn=9107149924> (accessed March 4, 2013).

²⁰ Tehran Fars News Agency, "Iran Deploys Submarines in High Seas," <http://english.farsnews.com/newstext.php?nn=8910061571> (accessed December 14, 2011).

²¹ Iran English Radio online, "Iran, Oman to Hold Joint Naval Drill," <http://english.trib.ir/news/political4/item/105517-iran,-oman-to-hold-joint-naval-drill> (accessed February 16, 2013).

²² Tehran Fars News Agency, "Iran, Djibouti Sign Multiple MOUs to Boost Mutual Cooperation," <http://english.farsnews.com/newstext.php?nn=8909161756> (accessed

²³ Tehran Fars News Agency, "Iran, Djibouti Agree on Naval Co-operation," <http://english.farsnews.com/newstext.php?nn=8910211562> (accessed January 16, 2012).

²⁴ Mehr News Agency, 'Iran Signs Eleven Agreements with Djibouti, Kenya, and Comoros', <http://www.mehrnews.com/en/newsdetail.aspx?NewsID=840233> (accessed January 13, 2012).

²⁵ Tehran Fars News Agency, "Ahmedinejad Terms Iran-Kenya Relations Improving," <http://english.farsnews.com/newstext.php?nn=8712070925> (accessed December 18, 2011).

²⁶ Intelligence and Terrorism Information Center, "Iran's Activity in East Africa, the Gateway to the Middle East and the African Continent," <http://www.terrorism-info.org.il/en/article/18244> (accessed December 6, 2011), 15.

²⁷ Business Week, "Company Overview of Islamic Republic of Iran Shipping Lines," <http://investing.businessweek.com/research/stocks/private/snapshot.asp?privcapId=24225355> (accessed February 16, 2013). (Note: IRISL operates a fleet of more than 100 ships that provide sea transport services throughout the Middle East, Africa, Europe, Asia, and South America).

²⁸ Iran may have also been seeking greater publicity for their actions, as Iran announced its decision to send a fleet to counter pirate activity off Somalia immediately following a European Union decision to deploy a maritime task force in the region and the decision by Western maritime coalition to create a counter-piracy task force based out of Bahrain. Several other major maritime powers, India and Russia among others, also announced they would provide ships independent of any coalition effort.

²⁹ Intelligence and Terrorism Information Center, "Iran's Activity in East Africa," 21.

³⁰ Tehran Fars News Agency, "Iranian Ship Carrying Aid Docks at Mogadishu Seaport," <http://english.farsnews.com/newstext.php?nn=9007271574> (accessed November 1, 2011).

³¹ Tempo Interactive, "Indonesia Drug Use Sees Shifting in Trend," <http://www.tempointeractive.com/hg/hukum/2010/06/28/brk,20100628-259171,uk.html> (accessed November 23, 2011).

³² Frederic Wehrey, et. al., *Dangerous But Not Omnipotent: Exploring the Reach and Limitations of Iranian Power in the Middle East* (Santa Monica: RAND Project Air Force, 2009), 42.

³³ International Institute for Strategic Studies (IISS), *The Military Balance 2012*, 470.

³⁴ Anthony Cordesman, "The Gulf Military Balance in 2010," <http://csis.org/files/publication/100422—GulfMilBal.pdf> (accessed January 17, 2012), 5.

³⁵ The International Institute for Strategic Studies, *The Military Balance 2012*, 325.

³⁶ Tehran Fars News Agency, "Iran to Unveil Several Home-made Destroyers, Missile Frigates Soon", <http://english.farsnews.com/newstext.php?nn=9103082786>, (accessed June 19, 2012).

³⁷ Anthony Cordesman, "The Gulf Military Balance in 2012," <http://csis.org/files/publication/120518—Gulf—Military—Balance—2012.pdf> (accessed February 26, 2012), 107-109.

Back to the Future in the Study of Deterrence

FRED LAWSON

ABSTRACT

Recent scholarship on deterrence takes a highly abstract and rationalistic form that calls itself "perfect deterrence theory." Proponents of this approach claim that it represents an improvement on the classical writings that appeared in the 1950s and 1960s. Discrepancies between the two schools, however, reflect longstanding debates over the dynamics of deterrence. On the whole, classical theorists offer a more coherent and persuasive set of analytical concepts than do the champions of perfect deterrence theory, and provide a more useful guide to policy-making.

Now that it is clear that the end of the Cold War has not brought an end to international conflict, scholars and policy-makers alike have started once again to look closely at longstanding debates over deterrence. Stephen Quackenbush's recent essay on the state of the art regarding deterrence theory reminds us that conceptual and practical controversies surrounding the operation and analysis of deterrence that took shape in the 1950s and 1960s continue to cast a shadow over current scholarship.¹ More specifically, the rivalry between what Quackenbush calls "classical deterrence theory" and what he labels "perfect deterrence theory" has its origins in the clash between the ideas of Bernard Brodie, William Kaufman, Hedley Bull, Michael Howard, Lawrence Freedman, Thomas Schelling, Glenn Snyder and Robert Jervis on the one hand, and those of Albert Wohlstetter, Henry Kissinger, Herman Kahn, Paul Nitze and Colin Gray on the other.

Brodie argued forcefully that the appearance of nuclear weapons marked a major turning point within international relations and strategic thought. Instead of the limited destruction that could be inflicted by conventional arsenals, the world now faced an "absolute weapon" that could inflict virtually unlimited damage, against which there was no practical defence.² The arrival of the superbomb (that is, the hydro-

gen bomb), in particular, marked the moment at which “the nuclear revolution” transformed strategic dynamics. Wohlstetter, by contrast, expressed scepticism that the world changed very much with the advent of the nuclear age.³ In his view, nuclear bombs were just like any other kind of explosive device, only bigger. Not even the deployment of the super-bomb changed the basic nature of warfare, nor the dynamics of strategic behaviour. As with any weapons system, what mattered was how many warheads and delivery vehicles each country possessed (particularly in relation to its adversaries) and what steps might be taken to protect military installations and civilian population centres against attack. Defensive measures might well turn out to be wildly expensive and require a massive amount of effort, but it would be irrational for any government to ignore the obvious necessity to prepare for civil defence.

More importantly, Brodie claimed that although the existence of nuclear weapons made the world uncomfortable, the nuclear age was likely to exhibit a high degree of strategic stability. Even a small number of superbombs had the capacity to inflict “unacceptable damage,” therefore threats to punish aggressors with nuclear retaliation could be expected to be taken quite seriously. It was rational in a broad sense for leaders considering launching an attack to be worried that a status quo country (or, to use Quackenbush’s term, “defender”) would actually follow through on a threat to retaliate, and such rationality did not have to be precise, comprehensive or “perfect.” The risk of nuclear retaliation, following an attack, would be sufficient to convince an aggressor (or “challenger”) to refrain from carrying out the initial strike. Wohlstetter believed, by contrast, that it was necessary to possess large quantities—perhaps even superior numbers of nuclear weapons—for a threat of retaliation to be “credible.” For retaliatory threats to be perceived accurately, evaluated properly and countered effectively, it was vital that all actors behave “rationally” in the narrow, cost-benefit sense. Great store was attached to the credibility of threats, as well as to the certainty that threats would be carried out in response to an attack. If the challenger were unconvinced that the defender would follow through on its promise to retaliate, the challenger was likely to make an advance.

Wohlstetter, Kissinger, Nitze, and Gray assert that atomic weapons are just like any other kind of armaments. This viewpoint laid the foundation for subsequent studies that set out to calculate the exact size of the nuclear arsenal that would be required (both before and after an attack) in order for retaliatory threats to be credible. Such studies investigated the degree of rationality that leaders must possess in order for deterrence to work. Analysts attempted to measure and estimate just how “fragile” deterrence would be under a variety of military and political circum-

stances (or “scenarios”). This wide-ranging research programme generated increasingly sophisticated models that drew on notions of rational choice and game theory, which have now culminated in the finely-tuned decision trees that characterize perfect deterrence theory.⁴

But are we better off as a result of these conceptual developments? Do we understand the dynamics of deterrence more fully now than Brodie and the classicists did at the dawn of the nuclear age? As late as 1989, Jervis concluded that we are, in fact, not better off, and that fundamental components of nuclear strategy continued to elude the grasp of scholars and policy-makers alike.⁵ Quackenbush’s essay reminds us that the situation stands much the same today: fundamental misconceptions still haunt the study of deterrence, both nuclear and otherwise.

Models of Deterrence

Quackenbush offers a highly abstract model of deterrence, which is supposed to illustrate the most important aspects of strategic interaction in the real world. The model is represented by three separate decision trees, in which a challenger first decides whether or not to attack, followed by a defender choosing whether to acquiesce in the attack or undertake a forceful response. The initial presentation of the model, which is labelled the “classical deterrence game,” posits that two actors “both agree” that “the worst possible outcome” is one in which the challenger initiates an attack and the defender resists, resulting in war.⁶ It further asserts that if the challenger knows (or strongly suspects) that the defender is going to cave in and not respond forcefully to an attack, then the challenger “will always attack and deterrence will always fail.”⁷ A variant of the model, which draws on perfect deterrence theory, assumes that the worst possible outcome for the defender occurs when the challenger attacks and the defender backs down.⁸ If the challenger knows that the defender prefers to respond forcefully in the event of an attack, then “Challenger would believe Defender’s threat; that is, Defender’s threat would be credible” and the challenger will refrain from striking.⁹

Two things are problematic about this model. First, it looks much more like a summary of the operation of defence than it does deterrence. Leaders have to decide all the time whether or not to challenge other countries. They no doubt do so on the basis of careful calculations of the most likely response to be given by the prospective target. If the target appears more likely to capitulate, then the challenger can be expected to move ahead. On the other hand, if the defender possesses the capacity and fortitude to stand up to the challenger—that is, to raise the

costs to the challenger of carrying out an attack, then the challenger will probably refrain from striking. At best, this situation approximates what Glenn Snyder calls “deterrence by denial,” rather than “deterrence by punishment.”¹⁰ At worst, this line of argument ignores any threats of retaliation by the defender that precede the attacker’s decision to strike, and therefore sheds little, if any, light on the mechanics of deterrence.

Conflating deterrence and defence is a conceptual error that can be traced to the earliest years of nuclear strategy. Much of the impetus for the publication of *National Security Council Memorandum 68* came from Soviet military activities that appeared to undermine the position of the United States in Europe, the Middle East and East Asia, making it more difficult for Washington to maintain control over these far-flung regions.¹¹ A central component of the Truman administration’s new strategic posture was “substantial increases” in the number of US troops, aircraft and atomic bombs positioned overseas.¹² Plans to make use of nuclear weapons on the battlefield percolated around the halls of the Pentagon as early as July 1945.¹³ These plans were dusted off after warfare erupted on the Korean Peninsula five years later.¹⁴ The Strategic Air Command consistently put a high priority on targeting Soviet nuclear capabilities,¹⁵ despite the fact that effective deterrence demands that retaliation be directed against cities rather than the missile bases that presumably would already have shot their bolt. The US Joint Chiefs of Staff explicitly “task[ed] the Strategic Air Command in the fall of 1949 with ‘retardation of Soviet advances in Western Europe,’”¹⁶ rather than with dissuading Moscow from launching an attack in the first place.

Notions rooted firmly in deterrence gained influence in US policy-making circles at the beginning of the 1970s,¹⁷ but the election of Ronald Reagan to the presidency in 1980 ushered in a reversion to conceptions of nuclear strategy more closely associated with defence. In particular, greater attention was devoted to the circumstances under which nuclear weapons might be put to use on the battlefield. The idea that atomic bombs had a role to play in combat became so pervasive that one prominent strategist, who otherwise rejected the Reagan administration’s military policies, went so far as to suggest that “in order to deal with unexpected contingencies, the separate NATO nuclear command should have plans to fire [nuclear weapons] on a variety of targets, including Warsaw Pact forces conducting military operations in Europe. It should be remembered at all times, however,” he added somewhat incongruously, “that the sole purpose of firing nuclear explosive devices is to signal determination and will, not to fight a tactical nuclear war.”¹⁸ “It is hard to believe,” observed Lawrence Freedman in reply, “that this fine distinction will be appreciated in [wartime] conditions, or that there will

appear to be any pressing reason to sustain it, once the original intention of avoiding nuclear war has failed.”¹⁹

Second, the model claims that deterrence is more likely to succeed if the defender prefers war to backing down in the face of an attack. The situation that Quackenbush calls the “classical” deterrence game resembles a game of Chicken, in which mutual defection is the worst possible outcome for both players. And what he calls “a simple deterrence game with a credible threat” has the same pay-off structure as a Prisoner’s Dilemma game. According to the tenets of perfect deterrence theory, first strikes can be expected to be deterred in the latter but not in the former.²⁰

Yet applications of game theory to international conflict generally demonstrate that Chicken games produce mutual co-operation more reliably than do Prisoner’s Dilemma games. States that set out to minimize their maximum possible loss (i.e. that adopt a “minimax” strategy) have a strong incentive to co-operate in Chicken and defect in the Prisoner’s Dilemma. If actors move sequentially rather than simultaneously, then the underlying dynamics shift. Glenn Snyder and Paul Diesing conclude, on the basis of an exhaustive analysis of contemporary international crises, that Chicken games with sequential moves tend to result in capitulation by the side that moves second, while Prisoner’s Dilemmas set the stage for bilateral compromise.²¹ Neither of these two outcomes constitutes successful deterrence, although one might infer that a challenger will make more severe demands in a Chicken game than in a Prisoner’s Dilemma before it decides to stand down.

Rationality and Deterrence

It is a cliché to remark that the classical theory of deterrence is “rooted in the assumption of rationality.”²² This assertion is usually made by unsympathetic critics of strategic analysis, who go on either to point out that strict rationality is impossible to achieve and maintain in practice, or to underscore the analytical shortcomings and limitations of the narrow, cost-benefit conception of rationality, as asserted by neoclassical economists. Quackenbush, by contrast, appears to intend the statement to be a compliment, since the assumption of pervasive rationality enabled Brodie, Bull and Schelling to pave the way for the highly abstract analyses of rational choice that evolved later.

But classical theorists would hardly recognize their arguments in the austere models that pass for rigorous analysis of deterrence today. The slippery slope begins with the remarkable definition, taken from a standard textbook on game theory, that a rational actor is “one who,

when confronted with 'two alternatives which give rise to outcomes... will choose the one which yields the more preferred outcome'."²³ One can hardly imagine a more tightly circular definition of rationality. For Brodie, rational policy-makers exhibit instead a wide range of nuanced and imaginative thought processes.²⁴ What is rational may well reflect the circumstances in which a decision is taken; pressing constraints of time, information or resources; or the particular objectives at hand.²⁵ My guess is that he —like Jervis—would be intrigued by insights drawn from prospect theory, which undercut neoclassical economists' conceptions of rationality.²⁶

Classical deterrence theorists would be especially irritated by studies that distort reality in an attempt to squeeze real life decision-making into fixed analytical schemas. As Jervis observes in a related context, "even if deductive models are parsimonious, rigorous, and produce fascinating propositions, they will remain little more than toys unless they can be verified,"²⁷ or, in other words, unless they adequately reflect the subtleties that pervade empirical cases. Exploring just what constitutes rationality in actual instances of crisis decision-making is one of the most promising research programs associated with the study of deterrence over the past two decades. Even sympathetic critics of the effort to formulate abstract schemas assert that "there is much to do before rational deterrence models begin to track certain key features of important historical crises, and a good deal of empirical work remains before the overall usefulness of rational deterrence in explaining actual policy decision can be assessed." Ultimately, as Christopher Achen and Duncan Snidal point out, "better theories based on more realistic assumptions about human decision making may be developed."²⁸ When this at last comes to pass, both classical and rational choice-based theories of deterrence will be greatly enhanced.

For now, Quackenbush claims simply and categorically that because nuclear war "invites one's own destruction," no threat to respond forcefully to an attack can ever be "credible."²⁹ Furthermore, *pace* Schelling, he affirms that "threats that leave something to chance" are equally unpersuasive. Here Quackenbush provides a telling example of Achen and Snidal's point that "Schelling's 'threat that leaves something to chance' has yet to be given a coherent statement within rational-choice theory."³⁰ This peculiar form of threat is not one that "increase[s] the risk of inadvertent war," but rather, and more intriguingly, one in which the defender signals that if an attack occurs, who knows what might happen next? Perhaps the defender will turn out to be hurt even more than the attacker, yet the attacker will nevertheless be deterred by the prospect of suffering unacceptable damage.³¹

Mutual Assured Destruction Revisited

Throughout the Cold War, classical deterrence theorists argued that the impossibility of protecting countries from nuclear weapons set the stage for strategic stability through the workings of mutual assured destruction. Any country that launched an attack could never be completely sure that the first strike would destroy all of the adversary's nuclear weapons. If even one or two superbombs survived (or were launched between the time the attackers' missiles took off and the instant they reached their targets), these would end up inflicting unacceptable damage on the attacker. Consequently, challengers found themselves persistently persuaded not to carry out a first strike.

It is crucial to remember that mutual assured destruction only kept the peace so long as it operated in conjunction with its mirror-image: the assurance that if an attack did not occur, then retaliation would not take place. Jervis and Janice Gross Stein have been particularly adamant that both of these complementary promises are necessary in order to dissuade a challenger from acting precipitately.³² If there is even a slight possibility that the defender might go ahead and fire its missiles anyway—inadvertently or for some other reason—then the attacker has no choice but to launch its weapons before they get destroyed.

This aspect of classical deterrence theory is overlooked by Quackenbush, who instead presents a brief discussion of the similar sounding notions of “unilateral deterrence” (UD) and “mutual deterrence” (MD). UD is present “if one state seeks to alter the status quo but the other does not,” whereas MD refers to “a situation where both sides of a dyad seek alterations to the status quo.”³³ In other words, UD takes place if one country convinces the adversary not to carry out an attack, whereas MD operates whenever two aggressors simultaneously persuade each other not to launch attacks against one another. Just how often the latter state of affairs actually happens is open to question. Perhaps National Socialist Germany and Soviet Russia displayed MD for a couple of years during the late 1930s, but otherwise this looks like an extremely rare phenomenon in international affairs.

In the abstract, proponents of perfect deterrence theory claim that UD is “more stable” than MD. The grounds for this claim are that it has been demonstrated empirically that “imposed settlements [to militarised interstate disputes] lead to unilateral deterrence whereas negotiated settlements and disputes ending without a settlement require mutual deterrence to maintain peace.”³⁴ This somewhat tangled statement prompts Quackenbush to assert time and again that “UD is more stable than

MD.”³⁵ The implication is that the classical deterrence theorists have been misguided in their analysis of mutual assured destruction. But Brodie, Bull, Howard and Jervis never claimed that two aggressors would have a hard time trying to deter one another. They point out, instead, that so long as any one country possesses the capacity to carry out a nuclear attack and its adversary does not, things are apt to be extremely dangerous. Once both states gain the capability to inflict certain destruction on one another, however, stability will tend to prevail.

Conventional Deterrence

Classical theorists have insisted from the outset of the nuclear era that it is a fundamental mistake to analyse strategic bargaining that involves the absolute weapon in the same way that one does when thinking about conventional armaments. Nuclear weapons make it possible for countries to issue credible threats to inflict unacceptable damage on aggressors without having to deploy overwhelming military force on the battlefield. And since it is, for all practical purposes, impossible to protect military facilities and populations from nuclear attack, even a small number of warheads will be sufficient to follow through on a threat of retaliation.

Generally, it may be correct to say that “the concept of deterrence is broad and is not limited to either nuclear or conventional conflicts.”³⁶ Yet Quackenbush’s faulty treatment of the logic of deterrence and overly restrictive notion of rationality belie the further pronouncement that “classical deterrence theory’s claims about nuclear deterrence...are contradicted both logically and empirically.” There is thus no reason to accept the conclusion that “deterrence theory should focus on general explanations of the dynamics of deterrence, rather than limited [sic] explanations of nuclear or conventional deterrence.” On the contrary, while it is useful to investigate both types of deterrence in a systematic and rigorous manner, it is crucial to maintain the distinction between instances of nuclear deterrence and episodes of conventional deterrence. Major contributions have been made to our understanding of conventional deterrence across a broad range of cases.³⁷ Examples of nuclear deterrence have so far—and thankfully—been few and far between.

In the aftermath of the Cold War, though, there may well be a trend toward the proliferation of nuclear weapons. The Democratic People’s Republic of Korea shows every sign of having constructed a rudimentary atomic bomb, and Western governments are convinced that the nuclear research programme presently underway in the Islamic Republic of Iran is aimed at producing a similar stockpile. The great debate over whether

or not the spread of nuclear weapons will enhance or diminish global stability remains unresolved.³⁸ No matter the outcome of the broader question, it would be well worth the effort to explore the processes that characterize conflicts between states that possess nuclear weapons and ones that do not.

With regard to the Gulf, most specialists stand firmly convinced that Iran has been deterred from engaging in military adventures by the combined actions of the United States and the member-states of the Gulf Co-operation Council (GCC). Such deterrence has so far operated more-or-less exclusively in the conventional realm, although the leadership in Tehran is no doubt fully aware that US warships and aircraft deployed in the area could easily arm themselves with nuclear missiles. What would change if Iran were to obtain one or two atomic bombs? Could it then make threats against the US, Saudi Arabia or Israel that are more convincing than the ones it routinely issues now? Or might it even be able to deter the US or Israel from launching a military strike against its territory? And if it managed at last to persuade surrounding states to refrain from behaving aggressively towards it, might the Islamic Republic adopt a more conciliatory and accommodative posture in regional affairs?

Deterrence also needs to be investigated more thoroughly to examine relations between the People's Republic of China and Japan, among the states that encircle the Spratly Islands, among the countries of Central Africa and perhaps between a resurgent Russia and the former Soviet republics of Central Eurasia and the Caucasus. Quackenbush complains that the case studies that have been undertaken so far "have typically examined classical deterrence theory, a formal framework characterized by logical inconsistency and empirical inaccuracy."³⁹ This comment, we can now see, is wrong on its face. Classical deterrence theory continues to be more coherent and straightforward than rococo embellishments, like perfect deterrence theory, as well as more conducive to productive case studies than the just-so stories that pass for "analytic narratives" of past conflicts.⁴⁰

Conclusion

It is no doubt irritating to proponents of perfect deterrence theory that their writings have been "conspicuously absent" from respected surveys of the field like Patrick Morgan's *Deterrence Now*.⁴¹ Yet this may be a very good thing. If it is indeed the case that "an application of perfect deterrence theory demonstrates that national missile defence can enhance deterrence stability," then it is just as well that policy-makers remain

ignorant of this academic research programme.⁴² The world somehow managed to survive the Reagan administration's commitment to policy prescriptions derived from the writings of Wohlstetter, Kissinger, Nitze and Gray.⁴³ We may not be so lucky if classical deterrence theory gets dismissed a second time in such a cavalier fashion as it is at the close of Stephen Quackenbush's text.

Perfect deterrence theory could well be substantially improved if it incorporated insights drawn from classical writings. Instead of focusing exclusively on calculations related to defence, or perhaps deterrence by denial, one could experiment with modelling threats of punishment and the ways that promises to retaliate might affect the initial decision whether or not to launch an attack. In place of narrow, largely circular conceptions of rationality, one might explore broader, contextually-shaped notions of rational decision-making. Analysing reciprocal threats of retaliation between non-aggressive states would provide new insight into a significant number of real world cases, both during and after the Cold War. And last, but by no means least, recognizing the profound difference between situations in which nuclear weapons are present and other, non-nuclear worlds, would underscore the dramatic impact that the proliferation of nuclear armaments is likely to have on interstate crises in the foreseeable future. ■

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Notes

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³ Albert Wohlstetter, "The Delicate Balance of Terror," *Foreign Affairs* 37 (January 1959). See also Henry Kissinger, *Nuclear Weapons and Foreign Policy* (New York: Harper, 1957); Herman Kahn, *On Thermonuclear War* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1961); Paul H. Nitze, "Deterring our Deterrent," *Foreign Policy* no. 25 (Winter 1976-77); Colin S. Gray, "Nuclear Strategy and the Case for a Theory of Victory," *International Security* 4 (Summer 1979).

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⁶ Quackenbush, "Deterrence Theory," 744.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Ibid., 746.

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¹⁸ Morton H. Halperin, *Nuclear Fallacy: Dispelling the Myth of Nuclear Strategy* (Cambridge, Mass.: Ballinger 1987), III.

¹⁹ Lawrence Freedman, "I Exist; Therefore I Deter," *International Security* 13 (Summer 1988), 190.

²⁰ Quackenbush, "Deterrence Theory," 744, 746; see also Frank C. Zagare, "Classical Deterrence Theory: A Critical Assessment," *International Interactions* 21 (January 1996), 380-381.

²¹ Glenn H. Snyder and Paul Diesing, *Conflict among Nations* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1977), 482.

²² Quackenbush, "Deterrence Theory," 748.

²³ R. Duncan Luce and Howard Raiffa, *Games and Decisions* (New York: Wiley, 1957), as quoted in Quackenbush, "Deterrence Theory," 749.

²⁴ Bernard Brodie, "Why were We So (Strategically) Wrong?" *Foreign Policy* no. 5 (Winter 1971-72).

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²⁹ Quackenbush, "Deterrence Theory," 746.

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³³ Quackenbush, "Deterrence Theory," 750.

³⁴ *Ibid.*

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 750, 757, 762.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 752.

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³⁹ Quackenbush, "Deterrence Theory," 755.

⁴⁰ Frank C. Zagare, "Explaining the 1914 War in Europe: An Analytic Narrative," *Journal of Theoretical Politics* 21 (January 2009).

⁴¹ Quackenbush, "Deterrence Theory," 762.

⁴² *Ibid.* Note that Quackenbush's view of this matter does not square with that of Zagare, "Reconciling Rationality," 135.

⁴³ Michael E. Howard, "On Fighting a Nuclear War," *International Security* 5 (Spring 1981); Theodore H. Draper, "Nuclear Temptations," *New York Review of Books*, 19 January 1984; Robert Jervis, *The Illogic of American Nuclear Strategy* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1984).

Deterrence Theory, Then and Now: There is No Going Back

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FRANK C. ZAGARE

ABSTRACT

Perfect Deterrence Theory is a general theory of interstate conflict that is applicable to a wide variety of real-world circumstances, including acute crises and both conventional and nuclear deterrence relationships. The theory is comprised of a set of closely related game-theoretic models that are explored under conditions of complete and incomplete information. Like any theory, Perfect Deterrence Theory's major propositions and policy recommendations are contingent on its defined terms and concepts. The failure to take note of these definitions when evaluating the theory not only does a disservice to the theory, but it also undermines the academic enterprise itself.

During the 1950s and early 1960s, theoretical and policy debates among security study specialists focused squarely on issues that involved deterrence. To maintain at least the semblance of objectivity, many of the most prominent deterrence theorists used game theory to confront these questions in the abstract. Policy analysts, however, made little attempt to hide the fact that their central concern was to formulate defence postures that would enable the United States to deter a Soviet attack on itself and its NATO allies.

The body of literature that emerged from these debates is sometimes referred to as "rational" or "classical" deterrence theory. The labels suggest convergence around a common set of concepts, assumptions, theoretical constructs, and policy recommendations. Of course, there were dissenters, as there always are, and unresolved arguments, as there always will be. Nonetheless, as time passed, classical deterrence theory emerged as a recognizable subfield unified by both a commonality of focus and generally compatible theoretical and policy propositions.

I have argued elsewhere, and at great length, that the classical formulation suffers from both logical inconsistency and empirical inaccuracy,¹ two shortcomings that are fatal to the health and well-being

Frank C. Zagare, "Deterrence Theory, Then and Now: There is No Going Back," *St Antony's International Review* 9, no. 1 (2013): 157-167.

of any theory. I am also largely responsible for developing an alternative theoretical specification called Perfect Deterrence Theory that I claim, rightly or wrongly, corrects for the deficiencies of classical deterrence theory.² Using this theoretical framework as a guide, Stephen Quackenbush explored the strategic implications of national missile defence systems.³ And, in a subsequent review of current theory, he observed that his “application of perfect deterrence theory demonstrates that national missile defence can enhance deterrence stability.”⁴

It is largely on the basis of Quackenbush’s comment about the efficacy of national missile defence systems that Fred H. Lawson situates Perfect Deterrence Theory in the context of a debate in the earlier literature between proponents of “classical deterrence” and advocates of “defence.”⁵ Perfect Deterrence Theory, Lawson claims, falls on the wrong side of the argument along with theorists like Albert Wohlstetter, Henry Kissinger, and Herman Kahn who argue that atomic and, later, nuclear weapons were usable in war and that, therefore, defensive systems and deployments were called for.

It is an interesting argument, especially since Stephen Walt has previously suggested that Perfect Deterrence Theory is simply a reinvention of “the central elements of [classical] deterrence theory.”⁶ It is also wrong. Perfect deterrence theory neither reinvents classical deterrence theory, as Walt charges, nor advocates using nuclear weapons in war and/or uncategorically prescribes national defence systems as an effective mechanism for stabilizing the status quo. Rather, it explores the theoretical implications of a variety of strategic environments, including those where the credibility of deterrent threats are less than perfect (i.e. are uncertain), where war costs may range from low to high (i.e. where the capability or hurtfulness of deterrent threats are not constant) and where the dissatisfaction of states with the existing order is not taken as a given (i.e. where all states are not undifferentiated).⁷ It is therefore a general theory of interstate conflict that is easily calibrated to take account of a wide variety of hypothetical or empirical circumstances, only one of which Quackenbush explores in his discussion of national missile defence systems. Such subtleties seem to be beyond the reach of the author of “Back to the Future.” I can only speculate as to why.

One reason may be that Professor Lawson has not taken the time to fully understand the theory he so cavalierly attacks. Evidence for this explanation lies in the fact that I have elsewhere staked out a somewhat different position than Quackenbush on the efficacy of national missile defence systems.⁸ Specifically, I suggested that there were conditions under which such a system would not seriously undermine strategic stability,⁹ but that it would likely do so in the long run if its deployment (by the

United States) antagonized a rival state (either Russia or China).¹⁰ Thus, it is incorrect to suggest or conclude that Perfect Deterrence Theory is deficient simply because it provides a nuanced understanding to a policy question that runs counter to the prescriptions of some classical deterrence theorists and, presumably, of Professor Lawson.

It is also important to point out that Quackenbush notes that his conclusions stem from an *application* of the theory, not from the theory itself.¹¹ This is not a trivial point. Perfect Deterrence Theory is a general theory that can be used to explore the strategic implications of a wide variety of theoretical or empirical conditions. Quackenbush's application begins with an argument about what those conditions are and draws conclusions about their consequences using the theory as a guide. The theory itself is agnostic about what conditions govern any strategic relationship. Thus, given different assessments about the strategic environment, contradictory policy recommendations can be derived. In other words, while Lawson may not find the policy implications of Quackenbush's application to be sound, his objection would not necessarily be with Perfect Deterrence Theory. Rather, the source of his judgment would likely lie in a rejection of the initial conditions assumed by Quackenbush.¹²

For example, two economists, using the same theoretical construct may reach policy conclusions that are at odds with one another simply because one assumes a future low national economic growth rate and the other a much higher rate. In such cases, it is not the model or theory that leads to the policy disagreement; it is a lack of consensus about what the state of the world is or is going to be at the time the theory is applied. To reject or dismiss the theory, simply because of the discrepant policy recommendations, is to throw the baby out with the bath-water.¹³

Another reason for Professor Lawson's premature and unfounded rejection of Perfect Deterrence Theory may be traced to a fundamental misunderstanding of game theory in general and of its rationality postulate in particular. Since Perfect Deterrence Theory is comprised of a series of logically consistent game-theoretic models and rests on the assumption that the actors (players) in these models are "rational," one might easily concur with Lawson that it is highly "rationalistic." Whether that is a good or bad trait, however, depends entirely on what one means by rational. At times Professor Lawson seems to equate the concept with a neoclassical economists' view or what Herbert Simon calls "procedural rationality."¹⁴ This definition of rationality presumes a near omniscient decision-maker who makes a "cool and clearheaded ends-means calculation"¹⁵ that takes account of all possible courses of action and weights the pros and cons of each of them before making a decision. While this definition of rationality has certain merits,¹⁶ it is

not the way rationality is defined or used in either game theory or in Perfect Deterrence Theory.

To be sure, there are some outliers, but most game theorists, including Quackenbush and myself, take an instrumentalist view of rationality, as Lawson clearly notes. Instrumental rationality involves a simple ends-means connection: players are rational when they take actions that they perceive will further their goals. Lawson is certainly correct when he notes the circularity of this definition; it is indeed a tautology, albeit a most useful one. The innocuous assumption of instrumental rationality allows an analyst to connect choices or decisions with policy preferences or goals. In other words, it simply presumes that decision-makers are purposeful, that when they act, they do so for a reason, and that they do not act randomly. These goals might be wrong-headed, they might be based on misinformation, they might be emotionally driven, and they might even be disastrous. But the players who pursue them are nonetheless “rational” *if* one takes a limited view of what rationality requires. Thus, unlike procedurally rational actors, instrumentally rational actors sound a great deal like ordinary, fallible, human beings. All of which is to say that the definition of instrumental rationality is more than consistent with Lawson’s observation that “what is rational may well reflect the circumstances in which a decision is taken.”¹⁷ In his rush to condemn, Lawson fails to recognize that the very definition of rationality he rejects, is his own.

It should also be noted that the definition of procedural rationality presumes instrumental rationality, but not the other way around. In other words, the assumption of instrumental rationality does not rule out (or in) the “nuanced and imaginative thought processes...[that]... may well reflect the circumstances in which decisions are taken: constraints of time, information or resources; or the primary objectives at hand” that Lawson at once embraces and associates with Brodie, and his other theoretical role models.¹⁸ All of which is to say that the assumption of instrumental rationality is a minimalist view that undermines Lawson’s claim that Perfect Deterrence Theory is highly “rationalistic.”¹⁹ If anything, it presumes very little about human behaviour, which is one reason why game-theorists use it and one reason why it is so powerful an assumption. It is, therefore, more than ironic that Lawson at once denigrates the usefulness of this particular rationality postulate, wrongly associates it with the work of Wohlstetter, Kissinger and others, and then unwittingly uses it himself, throughout his essay, to draw conclusions about deterrence, as do most diplomatic historians and strategic theorists.²⁰ In the end, it is difficult to argue with Lawson’s main conclusion that “fundamental misconceptions still haunt the study of deterrence.”

Unfortunately, "Back to the Future" is a case in point. The linear relationship Lawson posits between Perfect Deterrence Theory and those who argue for missile defence systems and the wartime use of nuclear weapons simply does not exist. If anything, it actually runs the other way. For example, Lawson rightly attributes to Brodie and presumable other like-minded classical deterrence theorists, the view that the "risk of nuclear retaliation, following an attack, would be sufficient to convince an aggressor (or 'challenger') to refrain from carrying out the initial strike."²¹ There is nothing in this statement that is inconsistent with the gestalt of Perfect Deterrence Theory.

Lawson's misconceptions, however, are not limited to a non-existent connection between the advocates of defence and proponents of Perfect Deterrence Theory. His understanding of the nature of game-theoretic models also leaves much to be desired. To wit: Lawson finds a simple model of deterrence that Quackenbush describes to be "problematic" for two reasons. First "it looks much more like a summary of the operation of defence than it does deterrence."²² He says this simply because the model contains a *possible* choice for a defender of the status quo (or target). Why this is a problem, remains unclear. As Lawson himself asserts "[l]eaders have to decide all the time whether or not to challenge other countries. They no doubt do so on the basis of careful calculation about the response of the prospective target."²³ The rudimentary model Lawson finds problematic was designed to capture the very calculation that he claims is made "all the time." In other words, it is factually incorrect to claim as Lawson does that the model "ignores any threats of retaliation by the defender that precede the attacker's decision to strike."²⁴ The model simply takes Defender's threat as a given. Challenger's initial (node 1) decision is determined by its evaluation of the threat's potency (i.e., capability) and credibility (i.e., believability or rationality). Contrary to Lawson's assertion, the model sheds a great deal of "light on the mechanics of deterrence."²⁵ Under complete information, deterrence will succeed (no attack will take place) if Defender's threat is both capable and credible;²⁶ and it will fail if Defender's threat lacks either credibility or capability or both.²⁷

Professor Lawson also finds fault with the model's implication that "deterrence is more likely to succeed if the defender prefers war to backing down in the face of an attack," a preference configuration that he correctly associates with a Prisoners' Dilemma game.²⁸ Conversely, when Defender prefers backing down to war, the model suggests that deterrence will fail. Again, Lawson rightly associates this preference configuration with the game of Chicken. He wrongly concludes, however, that the model is problematic because "applications of game theory to in-

ternational conflict generally demonstrate that Chicken games produce mutual cooperation more reliable than Prisoner's Dilemma games do."²⁹ The only source he gives for this claim is Snyder and Diesing's "exhaustive analysis of international crises."³⁰

While there are many things to be admired in this classic, but now dated, study of interstate conflict, Snyder and Diesing's application of game theory to crisis decision-making is not one of them.³¹ Perhaps Professor Lawson was led astray because he has relied on a source that is over thirty-five years old. Whatever the reason, his erroneous analysis rests on a misunderstanding about the definition of a game.

Games are defined by both their rules *and* the preference (pay-off) functions of the players. Thus games with different rules, but congruent preferences, constitute different games and may imply different outcomes.³² Prisoners' Dilemma and Chicken are normal-form games in which the players are assumed to make a single strategy choice *before* the game begins. By contrast, the game models that constitute Perfect Deterrence Theory are extensive-form games in which the players make choices sequentially and (in games of incomplete information) update their beliefs about each other's preferences as they observe each other's action choices. Thus, the theoretical expectations of these models are quite different than those of the two classic games of Prisoners' Dilemma and Chicken, even when the preferences of the players in both sets of models are identical.

But even if this were not the case, Lawson's observations about the implications of Snyder and Diesing's empirical conclusions are also off the mark. Ironically, Kilgour and I point to these findings in our 2000 book as support for one of Perfect Deterrence Theory's key conclusions: successful deterrence generally requires threats that are not only capable, but credible as well.³³ By our definitions, both players in Chicken lack credible threats, but both players in a game with Prisoners' Dilemma-like preferences, have threats that are rational/believable/credible. Snyder and Diesing's case summary clearly suggests that deterrence is unlikely to succeed in games in which the players' preferences are the same as those of the players in Chicken, and likely to succeed when they are the same as those in Prisoners' Dilemma. Their empirical summary is patently more than consistent with the theoretical expectations of Perfect Deterrence Theory—unless one somehow concludes, as does Lawson, that the compromise outcome that Snyder and Diesing associate with those crises with the structural characteristics of a Prisoners' Dilemma game has nothing to do with deterrence. The compromise outcome in this game can only come about when both players *co-operate* with one another. It is not only my view, but it is also the view of Snyder and Diesing and

the vast majority of strategic analysts who use game theory to analyse interstate conflict, that mutual deterrence and mutual cooperation are one and the same thing.³⁴

Professor Lawson also finds fault with Perfect Deterrence Theory's seemingly straightforward conclusion that one-sided (or unilateral) deterrence is easier to achieve than two-sided (or mutual) deterrence—a conclusion that has strong empirical support.³⁵ Lawson's problem stems from his belief, which is also consistent with the corpus of Perfect Deterrence Theory, that a power without nuclear weapons (i.e., without a capable threat) will not be able to deter a nuclear power dissatisfied with the status quo. Perfect Deterrence Theory's conclusions about the relative stability of unilateral and mutual deterrence relationships, however, rests on the condition that each actor in either type of deterrence relationship possess a threat that, when executed, will hurt the other. Thus, Lawson's ill-informed objection is beside the point. Moreover, Lawson's suggestion that Quackenbush somehow implied that classical deterrence theorists have claimed that "two aggressors would have a hard time trying to deter one another" is factually incorrect.³⁶ The inference exists only in Lawson's mind. In fact, Perfect Deterrence Theory explicitly rejects the argument of the vast majority of deterrence theorists who claim that parity constitutes a sufficient condition for deterrence success.³⁷ It is unfortunate indeed that the author of "Back to the Future" has chosen to disparage a theory he does not understand and a methodology he does not fully comprehend to defend a deficient and discredited theory that he firmly believes in.

In his rush to judgment, Professor Lawson also makes a specious connection between a general *relationship* of mutual deterrence and the *condition* of mutual assured destruction (MAD), which may (or may not) characterize any deterrence relationship, unilateral or mutual. Mutual assured destruction refers to a situation in which each of two states is unable to prevent an unacceptable retaliatory attack by the other. But in Perfect Deterrence Theory, a relationship of mutual deterrence is narrowly defined as one in which both states are dissatisfied with the status quo and, therefore, would prefer to alter it. (In a relationship of unilateral deterrence, there is only one dissatisfied state, the challenger). It should be clear that the vulnerability of one state to a retaliatory attack by another is independent of its satisfaction or dissatisfaction with the status quo. Were this not the case, the United States and Canada would currently be in a relationship of unilateral deterrence at best, and of mutual deterrence at worst.

Theories like Perfect Deterrence Theory are complexes of assumptions, definitions, and logically connected hypotheses.³⁸ The definitions

matter. Had Professor Lawson made an effort to understand how mutual deterrence is defined in Perfect Deterrence Theory, he would have likely not conflated two unrelated terms simply because they shared the same first name. Nowhere is his inattention to the specifics of the theory he attempts to diminish more obvious than when he recommends that deterrence theorists should “experiment with modeling threats of punishment and the ways that promises to retaliate might affect the initial decision whether or not to launch an attack”—for that is precisely what Perfect Deterrence Theory does.³⁹

To summarize, Professor Lawson is certainly correct that Perfect Deterrence Theory can be thought of as a theoretical alternative to classical formulations of deterrence, Walt notwithstanding. Its axiomatic base, its theoretical characteristics, its major propositions, and its common-sense policy recommendations⁴⁰ clearly set it apart from the standard theory that traces its roots to the work of Bernard Brodie, Thomas Schelling, Glenn Snyder, and several others.⁴¹ Nonetheless, it does not necessarily follow that Perfect Deterrence Theory’s intellectual roots can be found in the work of those defence intellectuals whose policy recommendations included the wartime use of nuclear weapons. In point of fact, Perfect Deterrence Theory stands on its own, apart from the debates of the 1950s and early 1960s. And, in a way, it subsumes both of these approaches. The models that comprise Perfect Deterrence Theory allow for an examination of a variety of strategic circumstances that may vary according to the credibility of threats, the capability of threats, and the satisfaction of the players. What those conditions are at any one point in time is an empirical rather than a theoretical question. Thus, Lawson could make his own assessment of the strategic environment, and then use Perfect Deterrence Theory to determine the logical consequences of that assessment. What may either surprise or dismay Professor Lawson is the strong possibility of a convergence between many of his expectations and those of a theory he has not made a good-faith effort to scrutinize. ■

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¹ Frank C. Zagare, "Classical Deterrence Theory: A Critical Assessment," *International Interactions* 21, no. 4 (1996): 365-387; Frank C. Zagare, "Reconciling Rationality with Deterrence: A Re-examination of the Logical Foundations of Deterrence Theory," *Journal of Theoretical Politics* 16, no. 2 (2004): 107-41.

² Frank C. Zagare and D. Marc Kilgour, *Perfect Deterrence* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000); Frank C. Zagare, *The Games of July: Explaining the Great War* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2011).

³ Stephen L. Quackenbush, "National Missile Defense and Deterrence," *Political Research Quarterly* 59, no. 4 (2006): 533-41.

⁴ Stephen L. Quackenbush, "Deterrence Theory: Where Do We Stand?" *Review of International Studies* 37 (2011): 762.

⁵ Michael Charlton, *From Deterrence to Defense: The Inside Story of Strategic Policy* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1987).

⁶ Stephen M. Walt, "Rigor or Rigor Mortis? Rational Choice and Security Studies," *International Security* 23, no. 4 (1999): 5.

⁷ The assumption of undifferentiated actors is a modal assumption of modern realist theory of which classical deterrence theory is a variant. For this argument, see Jeffrey W. Legro and Andrew Moravcsik, "Is Anybody Still a Realist," *International Security* 24, no. 2 (1999): 5-55. For an example, see Kenneth N. Waltz, *Theory of International Politics* (Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley, 1979).

⁸ Zagare, "Reconciling Rationality," 135. After this was pointed out in an initial review of "Back to the Future," Lawson added a footnote acknowledging the differences between my conclusions about the effectiveness of a national missile defence system and Quackenbush's. This significant fact, however, did not deter him from clinging to an argument that falls apart once it is established.

⁹ It is difficult to understand how this highly qualified statement can be construed as an endorsement of either the development or the deployment of a national missile defence system.

¹⁰ Quackenbush, "National Missile Defense" also notes that the dissatisfaction with the status quo that results from the deployment of a defensive system may undermine strategic stability.

¹¹ Quackenbush, "Deterrence Theory," 762.

¹² None of this should be taken as a rejection of Quackenbush's argument which stands on its own.

¹³ Of course, there may be other reasons for rejecting the theory. Logical inconsistency and/or empirical inaccuracy stand out as obvious grounds for dismissal.

¹⁴ Herbert A. Simon, "From Substantive to Procedural Rationality," in *Method and Appraisal in Economics*, ed. S.J. Latsis (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1976).

¹⁵ Sidney Verba, "Assumptions of Rationality and Non-rationality in Models of International Systems," in *The International System: Theoretical Essays*, eds. Klaus Knorr and Sidney Verba (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1961): 95.

¹⁶ Frank C. Zagare, "Rationality and Deterrence," *World Politics* 42, no. 2 (1990): 238-260.

¹⁷ Fred Lawson, "Back to the Future in the Study of Deterrence", *St Antony's International Review* 9 no. 1 (2013): 149.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 149.

¹⁹ It is, however, "abstract" as Lawson charges. But all theories, by their nature, are abstractions.

²⁰ For example, Lawson's assertion that deterrence will tend to prevail "once both states gain the capability to inflict certain destruction on one another" rests on the innocuous assumption (of instrumental rationality) that both states prefer not to be destroyed and that they act accordingly.

²¹ Lawson, "Back to the Future", 145.

²² *Ibid.*, 146.

²³ *Ibid.*, 146.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 147.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 147.

²⁶ When deterrence succeeds, Challenger is never faced with a choice (at node 2).

²⁷ The model's implications are slightly different when information is incomplete. Complete and incomplete information are technical terms in game theory. In a game of complete information, the players know each other's preferences (pay-off functions). If that is not the case, the game is said to be a game of incomplete information.

²⁸ Lawson, "Back to the Future", 148.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 148.

³⁰ Glenn H. Snyder and Paul Diesing, *Conflict among Nations: Bargaining, Decision Making and System Structure in International Crises* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1977).

³¹ For example, Snyder and Diesing neither mention nor use the concept of a Nash equilibrium, the accepted measure of rational behaviour and the basis of all solution concepts for the normal- (or strategic-) form games they explore.

³² Lawson seems to recognize this, but only when discussing the differences between a simultaneous choice and a sequential choice play of Chicken.

³³ Zagare and Kilgour, *Perfect Deterrence*, 299.

³⁴ Snyder and Diesing, *Conflict among Nations*, 497. See also Robert Jervis, "Deterrence Theory Revisited," *World Politics* 31, no. 2 (1979): 289-324.

³⁵ Paul D. Senese and Stephen L. Quackenbush "Sowing the Seeds of Conflict: The

Effect of Dispute Settlements on Durations of Peace," *Journal of Politics* 65, no. 3 (2003): 696–717; Stephen L. Quackenbush and Jerome F. Venteicher II, "Settlements, Outcomes, and the Recurrence of Conflict," *Journal of Peace Research* 45, no. 6 (2008): 723–42.

³⁶ Lawson, "Back to the Future", 151.

³⁷ Zagare, *Games of July*, 42.

³⁸ Lisa Martin, "The Contributions of Rational Choice: A Defense of Pluralism," *International Security* 24, no. 2 (1999): 74–83.

³⁹ Lawson, "Back to the Future", 153.

⁴⁰ Perfect Deterrence Theory provides theoretical support for a policy of minimum deterrence and for meaningful arms control agreements. It also recommends conditionally cooperative foreign policy initiatives and negotiating stances that are based on reciprocity. Conversely, it opposes both an "overkill" capability and the proliferation of nuclear and other weapons of mass destruction.

⁴¹ For a concise comparison, see Zagare, *Games of July*, 42.

Social Media and the Arab Spring: Searching for Emerging Identities in the Arab Gulf

MAGDALENA KAROLAK

ABSTRACT

The series of recent uprisings in the Middle East is often referred to as a “Facebook Revolution” due to the role of social media in gathering supporters, organizing the movement, and coordinating widespread protests. Anti-government sentiment has been fermenting in Bahrain for the past three decades and has occasionally led to violent upheavals. However, the successes of the Tunisian and Egyptian popular uprisings provided an opportunity to bring international sympathy and attention to Bahrain. In this paper, I focus on the aftermath of the Bahraini Day of Rage. I analyse how and to what extent social media act as a tool for formation and expression of a transnational Shi’a identity. This paper is based on the analysis of web content written by Bahraini Facebook activists. The analysis reveals that the Shi’a community in Bahrain reaches out to attract worldwide support and that social media fosters the formation of transnational identities. This research also found that, in the case of Bahrain, identities based on religious affiliation remain secondary to national identity. The web content surrounding the conflict focuses on the content of the primary national identity: who is Bahraini and what does it mean to be a Bahraini.

Introduction

In his assessment of new social movement (NSM) theories, Beuchler highlights that the effect of NSMs lies in their ability to “render visible the peculiarly modern form of power that resides behind the rationality of administrative procedures; in this way, collective action emphasizes the socially constructed nature of the world and the possibility of alternative arrangement.”¹ Unlike classic social movements, NSMs focus on issues of equality based on human rights rather than purely economic demands. NSMs “motivate and mobilise hundreds of millions of people in all parts of the world—mostly outside established political and social institutions that people find inadequate to serve their needs.”² As a result, thanks to participation in NSMs, “groups previously incapable of politi-

cal action [...] find their voices.”³ In the Middle East, the ways in which NSMs operate depend on the country-specific context. Roy attributes these differences to the structures of power that the authoritarian rulers have kept in place.⁴ Hence, the pro-democratic movements display ethnic (Iraq), denominational (Bahrain), or tribal (Yemen) characteristics. These particular identities foster activism in NSMs in the Middle East. In this context, it is important to examine whether these movements encourage these identities to acquire a transnational character. Based on the case study of Bahrain, this paper analyses how information and communication technologies (ICT) strengthen transnational Shi’a identity in the aftermath of the Arab Spring. Indeed, as observed by Petersen:

[T]he internet has been a prime driver on the social and economic fronts, reducing the cost of communication and possibly contributing to the growing homogenization of Gulf Shi’a culture in the future. Beyond the internet, the spread of other technologies like satellite television and cell phones have further connected the Gulf’s Shi’a, fostering a growing sense of unity at the same time that Gulf societies grow larger and more complex.⁵

The analysis uses the case of the Day of Rage events in Bahrain—the only uprising of the Arab Spring that was perceived in sectarian terms in the region. Although Bahraini activists claimed to represent both Sunnis and Shi’as, the unfolding events accentuated the sectarian reading of the protests and split the society into supporters of the Sunni dynasty of Al Khalifa and its opponents based mostly on religious belonging. In this context, quelling of the uprising by Peninsula Shield forces sent from Sunni neighbouring countries constituted an assault on the Shi’a community. Consequently, it is possible to study how the online activism reflects the situation when the Shi’a identity is threatened. The expression of shared Shi’a identity was captured by social media portals related to the Bahraini Arab Spring. This paper assesses how the formation of transnational identity through such portals interacts with the expression of national Bahraini identity.

This paper is structured as follows: The first section presents Della Porta and Diani’s definition of collective identity and collective action and provides a discussion about Shi’a collective identity in light of the Castells typology of identities.⁶ Section two provides an overview of the transformation of Shi’a identities, with a specific focus on the recent developments in Bahrain and their contribution to the sectarian identity discourse. Section three explains the methodological considerations and the results obtained through the web site content analysis. The last section offers conclusions about the transformation of transnational identity through social media and suggests areas for further research.

Collective identity is an integral part of social movements that foster collective action.⁷ Collective identity sets the boundaries between actors in a conflict situation, creates networks of trust among movement actors in complex social environments, and, ultimately, assigns meanings to experiences of collective action over time and space. Formation of a collective identity is a complex process. Della Porta and Diani locate its beginning in a sense of self-identification with a particular “grouping.”⁸ The latter may be based on specific social traits or membership in an organization as well as shared orientations, values, attitudes, world-views, and lifestyles. Collective identity of a group requires a clear boundary between the group and the “others” that allows members to identify as part of the social movement. Indeed, “a group has an identity if it succeeds to define itself *vis-à-vis* to other groups by attributing meaning to itself that is stable over time.”⁹ Factors that facilitate the identification of members within a group may include behaviours and rituals, objects and personalities that have played significant roles in movement action or in the development of the movement’s ideology, and historical events and places that carry a symbolic significance for the group. Nonetheless, the relation with the “other” is especially important. Castells notes that construction of identity is always defined by power relations.¹⁰ Touraine further assumes that the construction of identity implies both a positive definition of those participating in a certain group, and a negative identification of those who are not only excluded but actively opposed.¹¹

Castells established a typology of three identities. The legitimizing identity is used by dominant institutions to justify their domination and authority in society. Secondly, the resistance identity created by actors in position of powerlessness differs from or opposes the principles of the dominant institutions. Lastly, the project identity seeks to redefine the position of a specific group in society by building a new identity and consequently, restructuring society overall.¹²

According to Della Porta and Diani, collective identity construction and transformation occurs through the experiences of collective activism.¹³ In these processes, meanings are assigned to collective action experiences that are dislocated over time and space. As a result, separate instances of activism may be linked together into a continuous effort of movement. On an individual level, such processes allow people to create meaning and coherence in their biographies. Thus, identity is a social construct.¹⁴ The identity-building material is drawn from history,

geography, biology, productive and reproductive institutions, collective memory, personal fantasies, power apparatuses, and religious revelations. However, in the process of identity construction this material is processed, and its meaning is rearranged. This process is dependent upon who constructs the identity and for what purpose. Consequently, as stated by Hall, identities:

[a]re subject to a radical historicisation, and are constantly in the process of change and transformation. [...] Though they seem to invoke an origin in a historical past with which they continue to correspond, actually identities are about questions of using the resources of history, language and culture in the process of becoming rather than being: not 'who we are' or 'where we came from', so much as what we might become, how we have been represented and how that bears on how we might represent ourselves.¹⁵

This approach to understanding identity as a fluid concept is in line with Cole's assessment of Shi'a identity not as a "primordial identity, but rather as a socially constructed one into which individuals are mobilized in every generation or which they adopt for their own reasons."¹⁶ After a brief overview of the formation of the Shi'a identity from a historical perspective, I will focus on the processes of its transformation in the specific context of Bahrain.

Taking into account their shared religious identity, which transcends borders of particular countries, Shi'as may be referred to as a transnational community.¹⁷ Geographically, Shi'as inhabit what is commonly called the "Shi'a crescent." The crescent shape is formed by Lebanon, Syria, Iran, and Arab countries in the Gulf region that have a substantial Shi'a population. In Iraq, Shi'as constitute sixty per cent of the population; in Kuwait twenty-five per cent; in Saudi Arabia ten to fifteen per cent, while in Bahrain Shi'as are estimated to make up at least 60 per cent of the population.¹⁸ It is important to note, however, that the existence of Shi'a religious identity predates the processes of modern state formation in the Middle East. Hence, Brubaker's concept of "borders-crossing people" reflects the character of transnational Shi'ism in the region.¹⁹ The transnational character of Shi'ism is strengthened by the nature of the Shi'a religious leadership (*marja'iyya*). Local Shi'a religious authorities may look up to Shi'a authority figures located abroad; these are Ayatollah Muhammad Hussayn Fadlallah in Lebanon, Ayatollah Ali al-Sistani in Iraq, Ayatollah Ali Khamenei in Iran, Grand Ayatollah Muhammad Sadiq al-Shirazi in Qom and Ayatollah Muhammad Taqi al-Mudarrasi in Karbala.²⁰ In addition to the religious leadership structure, Shi'as share the "common religious, social, political, and economic factors," which have been shaping their collective identity in the Middle East.²¹

Nonetheless, Shi'as do not form a homogenous group; they comprise several ethnicities, languages, and religious schools. Studies suggest that in the case of Shi'as in the Middle East, national identities rank more important than religious sentiments.²² Hence, Shi'as think of themselves as citizens of a particular country first. Belonging to a particular religious sect is a secondary identity marker. In this context, it is important to ask, following Hébert and Murji, "if the community's identity is based on religion, then how do individuals maintain cultural identities without coming into conflict with the religious ethos?"²³ In the case of Shi'a identity, Fuller and Francke observe that "external circumstances tend to determine the salience of one facet of an individual's identity over another at any given time. Discrimination against a particular feature of one's identity reinforces that feature in relation to others."²⁴ Indeed, Driedger notes that "religious or political ideology can rally followers to a goal beyond cultural and institutional values."²⁵ In addition, charismatic leadership "can adapt that ideology to a current situation linking it symbolically with the past and using the media to effectively transform the present into a vision of the future."²⁶ The shifting geopolitical situation fostered growing Shi'a aspirations to leadership in the region. As a result, in the processes of shaping modern Shi'a identity, the past and the present are transformed into a vision for the future.

Shi'a Collective Identity: From the Early Days to the Bahraini "Day of Rage"

Taking power relations as a central aspect of defining identity, Shi'a identity is one of resistance. The split between Sunnis and Shi'as is directly linked to a power struggle over the rightful leadership of *umma*—the community of Muslim believers. Since the split in the seventh century, Shi'as perpetuate the memory of martyrdom and oppression at the hands of Sunni rulers. The martyrdom of Hussein, the last descendant of the Prophet Muhammad, and his followers in the battle of Karbala is the central event in the Shi'a history and "has become the leitmotif of the Shi'ite interpretation of the world."²⁷ Hussein was killed by the Sunni Umayyad caliph Yazid. Consequently, Shi'as "[have] always seen themselves as the righteous few struggling against the unjust many."²⁸ In this context, Shi'as refer to themselves as *ahl al beit*, people of the house of the Prophet, which strengthens the opposition between the "righteous" and the "wicked." Nonetheless, their Sunni co-religionists often consider Shi'a as a splinter group and in most radical cases do not acknowledge Shi'as as Muslims but declare them as polytheists. This consideration is essential since re-

sistance identity aims at “reversing the value judgment while reinforcing the boundary.”²⁹ Indeed, Shi’a oppression will terminate with the return of the Twelfth Imam who will deliver the world from evil.³⁰ Apart from adhering to the five pillars of Islam, the Shi’a system of beliefs, rituals and texts focus on the martyrdom of Hussein and on *ahl al beit*. These elements form the very basis of Shi’a collective identity that sets it apart from Sunni Islam.³¹ In the annual procession of Ashura, Shi’as commemorate the martyrdom of Hussein during which intense grieving over his death often takes form of self-flagellation. Secondly, veneration of *ahl al beit* is practiced through visits to the network of holy shrines in Iraq and Iran. Apart from separate theology, Shi’ism also has separate legal traditions that differ from Sunni schools of law. In addition, Shi’as have developed their own networks of tax collection and endowments.

In the context of Bahrain, modern Shi’a collective identity often takes the character of resistance to the Sunni dynasty of Al Khalifa. The relations between Bahraini Sunnis and Bahraini Shi’as have been branded in such binary terms as the conqueror and the conquered. Al Khalifas who arrived in Bahrain from the mainland were followed by Sunni families from the Nejd who subsequently settled in Bahrain. Since that time, the split between the Shi’a and Sunni population has been a cause of tension. Rural Arab Shi’as (*Baharna*), who often highlight the fact that they are the indigenous inhabitants of Bahrain, perpetuate till this day a memory of the conquest of Bahrain by Al Khalifas and their subsequent subservience to new masters of the land. The era before the conquest is depicted in the form of an idealized myth of a “golden era.”³² The struggle for a share of power is a relatively recent phenomenon. Although opposition movements existed during the British mandate, the conflict between citizens and the ruling dynasty has been most pronounced in the period after Bahrain’s independence. In 1973, the very first constitution of Bahrain stipulated that legislative power would be vested in a unicameral parliament elected in general elections. The first election to the parliament took place in 1973. However, two years after its establishment, the Bahraini Parliament was dissolved for almost thirty years. Consequently, Bahrain was ruled singlehandedly by the amir Isa Bin Salman Bin Hamad Al Khalifa (1961-1999) under the state of emergency law. The ultimate years of amir’s rule saw Bahrain in a state of permanent upheaval, known as the Intifada (1994-1999). Open clashes with security forces were predominant in Shi’a villages, while urban Sunnis and urban Shi’as petitioned the amir for change on a number of occasions.³³ The opposition to the amir united Sunni and Shi’a activists.

The end of the twentieth century marked a change in Bahraini politics with Sheikh Hamad bin Isa Al Khalifa’s ascension to the throne in

1999. The new ruler initiated a plan to establish the National Action Charter. The document was submitted afterwards for approval in a national referendum and was accepted with an overwhelming ninety-eight-point-four per cent Bahrainis voting in favour of it. On December 16, 2002, Bahrain became a constitutional monarchy. However the initial euphoria soon turned into disappointment. A parliament was re-established but as a bicameral body with solely the Council of Representatives, the lower house, elected by universal suffrage. In comparison to the Constitution of 1973, the role of the parliament was reduced. The upper house of the parliament, selected directly by the king, approves bills of the lower house before they are implemented. Moreover, the king has the ultimate right to veto all bills. In a demonstration of their discontent, Shi'a political associations boycotted the first parliamentary elections in 2002. This step allowed Sunni candidates to dominate the parliament.

The controlled liberalization of the country ultimately led to a societal split. Sunnis almost overwhelmingly backed the new reforms, while Shi'as called for further progressive amendments. The elections in 2006 brought a change of strategy as Al Wefaq, the largest Shi'a opposition group, announced its participation. The elections were marked by disputes over distribution of electoral wards. Shi'a opposition denounced gerrymandering that would grant Sunnis advantage in the upcoming elections. Indeed, Al Wefaq did not gain a majority of seats in the parliament but became the largest party in the parliament with seventeen out of the forty available seats. Moreover, participation in parliament was not a particularly fruitful experience. For instance, in the years 2006-2007, twenty-five of the twenty-seven bills proposed by the lower house of the parliament were rejected by the upper house.³⁴ In 2006, relations were further inflamed by a leaked report that allegedly implicated governmental officials in a planned naturalization of Sunni citizens to weaken the Shi'a majority.³⁵ Participation of the opposition in the current political system may have been a disappointment, which led to formation of splinter groups that boycott the current political system.³⁶ In the years 2008-2010, protests organized by the opposition intensified and led to violent clashes with the police. These past tensions and accumulated grievances cast a shadow over the 2010 parliamentary elections. Al Wefaq used a parliamentary debate to push for further democratic reforms, while opposition circles outside of the political system applied different strategies. Youths set burning tires on the roads as makeshift blockades. Rumours of planned electoral sabotage by the opposition were circulated. The situation seemed to slip out of governmental control. In September 2010, official sources announced they had uncovered a terrorist plot to topple the Al Khalifa dynasty. Several members of the opposition were

arrested. The first decade of the twenty-first century has contributed to the aggravation of a power struggle, which gradually took on a sectarian character. This phenomenon was mirrored in the Bahraini procession of the Ashura where the commemorations of Hussein's death embody the long-term struggle of the Shi'a against the "unjust" rulers, who are represented by the Bahraini royal family.³⁷ The link between the death of Hussein and the contemporary socio-political context binds the Shi'as into a continuous effort for emancipation, which forms the basis of their collective identity.

The 2011 uprising in Bahrain is part of a much longer and continuous series of unrest. Despite the fact that the protest included Sunni reformers and the opposition movement used the slogan "no Sunni, no Shi'a, just Bahraini" to emphasize its non-sectarian message, the events that unfolded led to a polarization of society that accentuated sectarian religious sense of belonging. Indeed, the deployment of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) military troops from Bahrain's Sunni neighbours to quell the upheaval, accentuated the sectarian dimension of the protest. Gradually all citizens, including children, were forced to take a stand by supporting or opposing the revolutionary movement, which was based in large part on religious affiliations.³⁸ The sectarian level of the uprising also affected mixed Sunni-Shi'a families who felt the split within their own households.³⁹ Furthermore, the sectarian dimension of the Bahraini upheaval was accentuated on the international scene. Shi'a populations across the Middle East and their leaders condemned Bahrain's ruling dynasty. Shi'a populations in Iran, Lebanon, and Iraq, as well as in Kuwait and Saudi Arabia, staged demonstrations in support of the Bahraini opposition. In the meantime, Sunni governments supported the ruling dynasty by providing any assistance deemed necessary.

Developments on the international scene and within Bahrain led to increased antagonism between different segments of society and to a dramatic radicalization of opinions. The sectarian dimension of the 2011 protests became paramount, while the divide within Bahraini society grew wider. Ultimately these events had a profound impact on the Shi'a population in the region and on their identity of resistance.

Expression of Collective Identity on Facebook Portals: Methodology and Results

The expression of Shi'a collective identity was assessed based on web content on Facebook portals about the Day of Rage events in Bahrain. These sites, maintained by Bahraini activists, provide a source of detailed

information about the revolutionary movement and served as an online tool to rally people around common goals and activities. Consequently, taking Bahraini activists as a point of departure, the study analyses the multiple layers of the collective identity formed online, which is heavily influenced by current events in the region. The sites used in this study were chosen using key search-words such as, “Bahrain,” “Revolution,” and “Facebook”. Secondly, Facebook profiles visible to the public were selected. The Facebook sites included in the study are listed in Table 1.

Table 1: Facebook Sites Included in the Study

<i>URL name</i>	<i>Active online since</i>	<i>Number of likes</i>
TrueRoyalDemocracy	January 26, 2011	93,502
Coalition14th	2011 (no day date)	61,456
Rage.Day.14Feb	January 29, 2011	16,186
Bahrain.Feb14	March 20, 2011	10,256
BahrainARevolution	July 15, 2012	97
FreedomSquare	February 2011	20,779
yaskot.hamd	September 22, 2011	3,176
Indignation-arrest-al-Khalifa-family-for-crimes-against-humanity	September 23, 2011	1,060
Free.Bahrain2011	August 15, 2011	8,614

In order to assess the content expressed on these web sites, an inductive approach to qualitative content analysis was applied. In the initial stage, the content of the web sites was downloaded starting from the very first activity until August 20, 2012 and analysed in order to derive content categories for analysis. The data was subsequently grouped under broader order categories. Following the observation of Evans that “collective identities result from framing process,” the analysis proceeded from the identification of frames to study their impact on the formation of collective identity in the context of the Bahraini Day of Rage.⁴⁰ The content analysis focused solely on the expression of collective Shi’a identity. It revealed three levels of collective identity expression namely, Middle Eastern level, regional level, and Bahraini level. On these three levels the boundary between the in-group and the out-group is clearly demarcated by identifying the forces that oppose Shi’ism.

The limitations of the research method based entirely on web site content must be acknowledged. Web sites are very dynamic thus their content changes frequently, which limits the ability of the researcher to capture new developments. Consequently, the study is confined to a specific time frame. On the other hand, the further question arises: how representative is social media? The views expressed online are only representative of the social media users, not necessarily of the general population. Nevertheless, the number of “likes” on Facebook “provides an accurate way of estimating user interests and an effective way of sharing/promoting information in social media.”⁴¹ Consequently, the number of “likes” may serve as a form of estimate of the online activism when projected over the numbers of Bahraini nationals in the kingdom. The census data of 2011 estimated the numbers of Bahraini nationals to be 568,399. In addition, Internet connectivity constitutes another important indication: seventy-seven per cent of all inhabitants of Bahrain are Internet users.⁴²

The analysis proceeds from the expression of the most inner layer, which is the Bahraini identity that generates the most Facebook engagement visible in the content size devoted to the subject. On the other hand, broader Gulf as well as Middle Eastern identities are also visible on the margins of online activism.

Bahraini Identity

In Bahrain, the shared identity is built in opposition to the ruling dynasty. The authorities are often accused of “cruelty” and attacks against the people, which are carried out by the “mercenaries” of the regime. Furthermore, the king is called a “dictator” and a “Khulaifi usurper.” Indeed, the legitimacy of the monarchy presents a divergence between Sunnis and Shi’as. Legitimacy of a Sunni ruler is naturally derived from Sunni Islam and it is by itself a sufficient factor to uphold the legitimacy of the monarchy in Sunni eyes. Khuri analyses this phenomenon in the following passage: “[Legitimacy] is derived from the application of divine scriptures, not from popular vote, which gives government, tribally based or otherwise, a [legitimacy] without resort to public delegation or any other system of representation.”⁴³ Moreover, from the point of view of the Sunni theological tradition, influential philosophers support the idea that “it is in the nature of states that authority gets concentrated in one person.” Furthermore, they denounce rebellion against the ruler as “the most heinous of crimes” for fear of strife.⁴⁴ This theological background, which supports the Sunni ruling dynasties, creates a difference between Sunnis

and Shi'as. For the Sunnis, rebellion against the king is considered almost blasphemous, while Shi'as can stand against a tyrant and depose him.

On the other hand, the collective identity is built on the idea of constant suffering, oppression, and martyrdom, which is deeply rooted in Shi'a theology. Since the death of the Prophet Muhammad left Muslim communities with a dilemma over succession, the caliphate evolved to provide a solution to this uncertainty. A caliph held religious and political authority, yet he did not possess the metaphysical qualities of the Prophet Muhammad.⁴⁵ Nonetheless, a group within the Muslim community claimed allegiance to the Prophet's cousin and son-in-law Ali, whom they believed to be appointed by the Prophet before his death. Upon Ali's death, his younger son Hussein strived to regain power. He summoned his supporters to fight by his side to depose the Umayyad caliph Yazid. Yet, before the battle of Karbala, Shi'a tribes intimidated by the numbers of Sunni adversaries abandoned Hussein. Nonetheless, Hussein refused to surrender and was massacred along with his companions by the superior forces of Yazid's army. Hussein's troops proved bravery despite lack of food and water for three days preceding the battle. Yet, the great inequality of forces decided the outcome. Hussein's remaining relatives were captured and treated with cruelty by Yazid. The Martyrdom of Hussein, comparable to the Passion of Jesus in Christianity, is a source of deepest emotions and uncontrollable grief.⁴⁶ Martyrdom and perpetuating suffering until the day of absolution are central to the conception of Shi'ism and have become internalized as part of Shi'a identity. Consequently, the Karbala myth finds itself repeated and relived in modern events in Bahrain, as the struggle over leadership continues. As in Karbala, protesters who were killed are referred to as "martyrs" who sacrificed their lives for the cause. Despite the family's grief, the death of their "martyr" relatives is a source of pride. Above all, martyrdom sets the goal for the movement as stated in one of the Facebook posts:

All the martyrs who have lost their lives during the Revolution remind us this lesson of life: We all have a mission on this Earth, our life is supposed to help the whole Humanity and to reach the best values we need to live on this planet. Disconnect yourself from everything, only your humanity will guide you and your people. All our prayers to those who have helped us in this fight of human rights.⁴⁷

The memory of the martyrs was revived during the last *Eid Al-Fitr* celebrations when followers of the movement were urged to visit the graves of the martyrs and to renew their "pledge" to the goals of the revolution.

During the uprising Bahrain has witnessed a growing split between the pro-government supporters and the opposition movement. Religious

belonging in Bahrain constituted a pre-existing social cleavage and the suspicion of Shi'as acting as a "fifth column" to promote Iranian interests in Bahrain surfaced in the perception of some citizens.⁴⁸ Consequently, the pro-government camp has often branded the protesters as "terrorists" who place their loyalties with "Iran" and "Hezbollah" and accused them of being "traitors" who secretly "gather weapons" to carry out instructions of foreign powers. The suspicion over Shi'a loyalties was reflected in the perception of the Bahraini identity. Posters presenting the king with the inscription, "I am Bahraini," sought to convey the message that being Bahraini means supporting the monarchy. On the contrary, those who oppose the monarchy are believed to be agents of foreign powers. The protesters build their Bahraini identity around the revolutionary cause. Despite references to the religious heroes of Shi'ism, they attempted to refrain from the sectarian rhetoric by highlighting the fact that Shi'as and Sunnis are "brothers" in their quests for rights. Instead of targeting a particular group based on their religious denomination or origin, the opposition refers to the forces of the monarchy as "mercenaries," a reference to foreigners serving in the security forces, and "criminals," which emphasizes their detachment from the Bahraini nation. Throughout their activity, the opposition presents itself as the embodiment of Bahrain—often wearing Bahraini flags over their clothing. In addition, the slogan "Ready to die for Bahrain" adopted to represent the revolutionary spirit is a clear message of their devotion to Bahrain. It is important to note that this content of the Bahraini identity is disputed by the supporters of the ruling dynasty who also present themselves as patriots.

Shi'a Gulf Identity

On the regional level, Shi'a identity is expressed among the Shi'a Gulf population. The connection is especially visible between the Bahraini movement and the Eastern Province of Saudi Arabia, which is inhabited in majority by Shi'as who also staged pro-reform protests in 2011 and in 2012. Furthermore, the participation of the Peninsula Shield Forces, mostly from Saudi Arabia, in quelling the uprising in Bahrain strengthens the perception of the common enemy. The solidarity between the opposition movements in Saudi Arabia and in Bahrain was expressed during numerous demonstrations held in both countries.⁴⁹ Their online community with Shi'as of the Eastern Province is highlighted in the expressions of "Solidarity with the Bahraini prisoners and Saudi martyrs" and "Qatif and Bahrain are one people" as well as calls to support "our people in Qatif." Details of the protests in the Eastern Province, as well

as attacks on demonstrators and clerics were uploaded on Facebook portals. The reports of their fate, similar to the Bahraini ones, are filled with suffering and overwhelming perception of “injustice,” which is inflicted on the Shi’as jointly by the regimes of both countries. Consequently, Bahraini sites thank supporters in areas of Saudi Arab Eastern Province for their “solidarity” and “rejection” of “Peninsula Shield criminals” as well as “Khulaifi dictators.” Furthermore, rulers of both countries are presented as symbols of “corruption” and “oppression.”

Shi’a Revolutionary Identity in the Middle East

On the broadest level of analysis, Shi’a collective identity is reflected in the Shi’a militancy for a Middle East free from “foreign” interference. The Middle East is under “occupation” by Israel, supported by the Western powers that “corrupted” Arab regimes. Consequently, in their opinion, the “West defends the tyrants” because of interests in the Middle East to control the flow of oil from the Persian Gulf as well as to prevent Iran and resistance groups from fighting Israel. Through this narrative, Gulf monarchs are thought to be serving US imperialist policies, which is why they are branded as “hypocrites,” “liars,” “traitors,” “accomplices of American Zionist project,” and friends of “Jewish infidel dogs.” The United States is attacked in the Facebook portals for “selling weapons” to Bahrain that were used in quelling the uprising. In this context, Bahraini activists feel a strong connection with the Palestinian cause, which is also commemorated in Iran as Quds (Jerusalem) Day. The 2012 celebrations of the Quds Day were a reason for displays of solidarity of the Bahraini protesters with the Palestinian cause. Bahraini protesters aim at “reviving the issue of Jerusalem” and “supporting the Palestinian people.” The struggle for “freedom” in Palestine and in Bahrain is highlighted by the statement “Our Palestine Bahrain.” Moreover, there is a connection between the forces that oppose the liberation movements as “mercenaries” in Bahrain and in Palestine are portrayed “arresting freedom seekers” the same way. The Bahraini movement is also accusing “international bodies” of lack of reaction, while “the real holocaust” is occurring in Bahrain. Within the Palestinian narrative that is now in use among protesters, the Bahraini movement’s connection to groups fighting for the Palestinian cause is more prominent. Quds Day originated with the advent of the Islamic Republic of Iran and hence, has a particular meaning for the Shi’a populations in the Middle East. A Bahraini protester killed on this day was named “a martyr of Jerusalem Day.” Facebook portals of Bahraini activists began to include references

Conclusion

This paper presents an analysis of the formation of the collective Shi'a identity in the Middle East based on the events of the Bahraini "Day of Rage." Highly influenced by modern day developments, Shi'a identity is expressed over three geographic levels, namely, the Middle East, the Gulf, and Bahrain. Consequently, this collective Shi'a identity can be easily mobilized through activism in social media depending on the political circumstances. Nonetheless, as assessed by Nakash: "Each Shi'a community is driven by a different agenda. Shi'ism is not monolithic, and the absence of unified political or religious leadership allows national and ethnic identities to play major roles in defining individual identity."⁵⁰ Indeed, it is the core of the Bahraini identity that is the most disputed as the perception of religious belonging and political affiliations may be difficult to overcome.

Given the dynamism of the situation, further research is needed to assess how the Internet forms alternative media for social movements that are excluded from the mainstream media and the extent to which social media can promote collective action and whether such pressures to exert change can become successful in the Arabian Gulf region. Furthermore, the question of Bahraini identity should be studied in detail to assess whether and under which circumstances a unifying identity will be promoted as an alternative to sectarian narratives. ■

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Notes

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Joyce P. Kaufman and Kristen P. Williams.
*Women and War: Gender Identity and
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ANNETTE BEHRENS (Gender Institute, London School of Economics
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While the subject of women and International Relations (IR) has enjoyed a resurgence of interest since Cynthia Enloe's *Bananas, Beaches and Bases* (1990), the integration of gender studies in subsequent theory is still incomplete. Whereas the subjectivities of women in times of conflict are often made invisible, Joyce Kaufman and Kristen Williams' book is unique in its focus on retracing the gendered identity of women's activism in conflict. A spectre of theories and a myriad of examples of different conflicts, such as in South Africa, Cyprus, El Salvador and Northern Ireland, give a detailed explanation across spaces and temporalities and discuss different types of women's activism at the outbreak, duration, and conclusion of conflict.

In the preface and introduction, Kaufman and Williams indicate an urgency to find and document the missing women in studies of war. The second chapter summarises contemporary feminist International Relations theories, which lays the groundwork for anyone not familiar with this area and its connections to nationalist conceptions and identities that affect women and men in roles of victimization and agency. The third chapter further illuminates the role of sexual violence during conflict. Women endure escalated sexual violence during conflict for various reasons, some of which are related to the construction of masculinity, nationalism and militarism. While some women remain in conflict areas, others become refugees, countering other challenges. The authors assert that men's structural (sexual) violence towards women

civilians is critical to how women respond politically and become activists. In chapter four, through focusing on peace activism, the authors describe how, during conflict, gender roles often undergo critical change as generally men go off to fight while women remain to take care of their households and families. In short, women often counter a juxtaposition of identity in times of conflict: on the one hand they suffer from an increased vulnerability but on the other hand, they may also obtain greater agency in responding to conflict and political participation. Moreover, the authors distinguish between women's political identity and their identity as women: not all women activists self-identify as feminists—some women's movements documented in the book advocate traditional gender roles and enact essentializing attributes, such as the “naturally” peace-building woman. Chapter five reviews women's exclusion in larger and predominantly male political arenas contrasted with women's predominance at grassroot levels in post-conflict temporalities.

In the conclusion, the authors show that the roles women play in conflict are diverse; they are neither solely victims nor hold complete agency. Although women are affected by masculine atrocities and brutality, they are nevertheless able to respond under violent circumstances. The authors move away from the rigid concepts of conflict and female victimization. Just as war and conflict have different consequences at different stages, the mobilisation and activism of women in these circumstances is accordingly diverse. In times of conflict, women transgress the public-private divide. Whether they identify as political actors or not, they react to prevailing violence, seizing agency during period of vulnerability in the name of political urgency. ■

Albrecht Schnabel and Anara Tabyshalieva (eds). *Defying Victimhood: Women and Post-Conflict Peacebuilding*.

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AUDREY REEVES (School of Sociology, Politics and International
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In *Defying Victimhood: Women and Post-Conflict Peacebuilding*, Albrecht Schnabel and Anara Tabyshalieva introduce fourteen essays exploring women's victimization during wartime and their contributions to post-conflict peacebuilding efforts. The volume offers a detailed reiteration of points raised by feminist scholars and women's rights activists over the last fifteen years. Among these are that individuals' experiences of war are mediated by gender and that women can and should be included in conflict resolution efforts. The argument is illustrated by primary and secondary sources drawn from a variety of post-conflict contexts.

The volume is composed of six parts. In Part I, the editors and Lisa Schirch conceptualize peacebuilding from a liberal perspective. Aimed at preventing states from spiralling back into violent conflict, peacebuilding initiatives strengthen national capacities, foster respect for human rights norms, and encourage democratic practices. The authors argue that in order to build a peace that benefits the population as a whole, gender analysis is necessary to identify how women's experiences of violence may differ from men's, and how women can contribute to reconstruction efforts.

In Part II, Krishna Kumar, Sumie Nakaya, and Rose M. Kadende-Kaiser explore women's experiences of victimhood and participation in grassroots and high-level peacebuilding efforts in contexts such as Cambodia, Timor-Leste, and Burundi. Part III explores related issues, namely women's strategies of survival and conflict resolution in relation to experiences of motherhood and childcare with a focus on Southeast Europe (Constantine P. Danopoulos, Konstantinos S. Sknadalis, and Zlatko Isakovic; Deborah Davis) and Tajikistan (Svetlana Sharipova and Hermine De Soto). In Part IV, Lyn S. Graybill and Ancil Adrian-Paul look at international efforts at redressing some of the wrongs done to women in wartime, with emphasis on transitional justice institutions in South Africa, Rwanda, and Sierra Leone and the promotion of women's peacebuilding efforts in Liberia.

Part V provides the more empirically and theoretically up-to-date contributions by examining women's participation in the reform of formal political and security institutions in post-war contexts, looking at state-building in Palestine (Vanessa Farr), post-conflict political decision-making in Lebanon (Kari H. Karamé), and female security personnel in various post-conflict contexts (Kristin Valasek). The editors conclude in Part VI by offering practical recommendations that may help international, national, and local actors to integrate women in post-conflict peacebuilding efforts.

Overall, the edited volume offers a detailed overview of arguments raised in favour of taking women's experiences of conflict seriously in

post-conflict peacebuilding, supported by a wealth of concrete examples from the ground. Scholars and practitioners unfamiliar with the literature on women and peacebuilding will find it an accessible yet detailed introduction to the topic. However, readers with a background in gender studies or social theory may find the dominant conceptual framework reductionist. Most chapters focus on experiences of women as victims, peace activists, and mothers. This may come across to some as obscuring the experiences of women that do not fit these dominant representations of post-war femininity (e.g. female perpetrators of violence), and those of men that might (e.g. male victims of sexual violence). By drawing on their lived experiences as researchers and practitioners in various post-conflict contexts, the several contributors nonetheless succeed at opening new outlooks on the deeply human—and gendered—experiences that make up contemporary dynamics of (in)security. ■

Sharon Pickering. *Women, Borders and, Violence—Current Issues in Asylum, Forced Migration, and Trafficking.*

New York: Springer, 2011. 133 pp. £81 (hbk).

ISBN: 9781441902702.

CAROLINE AUSSERER (Pontificia Universidade Católica PUC, Rio de Janeiro)

This book analyzes experiences of flight, persecution, and conflict as a starting point to chart ways in which violence and criminality control extra-legal border crossing. In *Women, Borders and Violence*, Sharon Pickering criticizes the dearth of scholarship on women's border crossing and aims at broadening existing theorizations of the relationship between women, security, and violence. She challenges the traditional understanding of "border," shifting the meaning beyond the physical territorial border into "a range of functional border policing moments" (p. 3). Pickering argues that extra-legal border crossing is a "segment of continuum of border crossing that has no beginning and no end" (p. 4).

The book is organized in six chapters along a migration continuum: starting after introductory words with the description of journeys to the

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The volume is composed of six parts. In Part I, the editors and Lisa Schirch conceptualize peacebuilding from a liberal perspective. Aimed at preventing states from spiralling back into violent conflict, peacebuilding initiatives strengthen national capacities, foster respect for human rights norms, and encourage democratic practices. The authors argue that in order to build a peace that benefits the population as a whole, gender analysis is necessary to identify how women's experiences of violence may differ from men's, and how women can contribute to reconstruction efforts.

In Part II, Krishna Kumar, Sumie Nakaya, and Rose M. Kadende-Kaiser explore women's experiences of victimhood and participation in grassroots and high-level peacebuilding efforts in contexts such as Cambodia, Timor-Leste, and Burundi. Part III explores related issues, namely women's strategies of survival and conflict resolution in relation to experiences of motherhood and childcare with a focus on Southeast Europe (Constantine P. Danopoulos, Konstantinos S. Sknadalis, and Zlatko Isakovic; Deborah Davis) and Tajikistan (Svetlana Sharipova and Hermine De Soto). In Part IV, Lyn S. Graybill and Ancil Adrian-Paul look at international efforts at redressing some of the wrongs done to women in wartime, with emphasis on transitional justice institutions in South Africa, Rwanda, and Sierra Leone and the promotion of women's peacebuilding efforts in Liberia.

Part V provides the more empirically and theoretically up-to-date contributions by examining women's participation in the reform of formal political and security institutions in post-war contexts, looking at state-building in Palestine (Vanessa Farr), post-conflict political decision-making in Lebanon (Kari H. Karamé), and female security personnel in various post-conflict contexts (Kristin Valasek). The editors conclude in Part VI by offering practical recommendations that may help international, national, and local actors to integrate women in post-conflict peacebuilding efforts.

Overall, the edited volume offers a detailed overview of arguments raised in favour of taking women's experiences of conflict seriously in

post-conflict peacebuilding, supported by a wealth of concrete examples from the ground. Scholars and practitioners unfamiliar with the literature on women and peacebuilding will find it an accessible yet detailed introduction to the topic. However, readers with a background in gender studies or social theory may find the dominant conceptual framework reductionist. Most chapters focus on experiences of women as victims, peace activists, and mothers. This may come across to some as obscuring the experiences of women that do not fit these dominant representations of post-war femininity (e.g. female perpetrators of violence), and those of men that might (e.g. male victims of sexual violence). By drawing on their lived experiences as researchers and practitioners in various post-conflict contexts, the several contributors nonetheless succeed at opening new outlooks on the deeply human—and gendered—experiences that make up contemporary dynamics of (in)security. ■

Sharon Pickering. *Women, Borders and, Violence—Current Issues in Asylum, Forced Migration, and Trafficking.*

New York: Springer, 2011. 133 pp. £81 (hbk).

ISBN: 9781441902702.

CAROLINE AUSSERER (Pontificia Universidade Católica PUC, Rio de Janeiro)

This book analyzes experiences of flight, persecution, and conflict as a starting point to chart ways in which violence and criminality control extra-legal border crossing. In *Women, Borders and Violence*, Sharon Pickering criticizes the dearth of scholarship on women's border crossing and aims at broadening existing theorizations of the relationship between women, security, and violence. She challenges the traditional understanding of "border," shifting the meaning beyond the physical territorial border into "a range of functional border policing moments" (p. 3). Pickering argues that extra-legal border crossing is a "segment of continuum of border crossing that has no beginning and no end" (p. 4).

The book is organized in six chapters along a migration continuum: starting after introductory words with the description of journeys to the

border (from Somalia to Europe), the author continues with the analyses of the borderlands with case studies of politically active women at the Thai-Burma border. This is followed by a discussion of difficulties experienced with the determination of refugee status on the ground of gender-based persecution. Finally, Pickering explores how the border itself is policed by analyzing the contemporary discourse about trafficking in Australia. She closes with a summary of her views.

Throughout the book Pickering makes three assertions:

1. Border crossings neither begin nor end with the physical crossing of a territorial border;
2. Border crossings occur in the context of unchecked violence, and;
3. Border policing occurs within and beyond territorial borders and is enacted by state and non-state actors.

The author explores the process of journeying to a border by using examples of women who flee from Somalia towards Europe. She shows how opportunistic elements of organized crime shape the conditions of exit, transit, and reception. If women faced by these circumstances survive all the dangers and arrive in Malta (or another European port), the violence they experience is often perpetrated in a different context, “within the European system of warehousing asylum seekers” (p. 28).

Next, Pickering analyzes borderland policing by state and non-state actors at the Thai-Burma border. In order to succeed in crossing the border, women must negotiate various layers of relationships with Thai authorities. Using Soguk and Whitehall’s concept of transversality,¹ “which takes the voices of the migrants as the starting point, in disrupting state-centric narratives of sovereignty and borders,” (p. 41) Pickering emphasizes borderlands as ambivalent spaces. “[B]orders are not only marked as lines on maps but are played out in social, gendered and racial contests which are often violent and are often played out on the bodies of individuals” (p. 54). She argues that the policing of transversal individuals helps to define state borders. An example of this is the trafficking practices of the sex industry. The trafficking of women demonstrates how borders have become mutable and have become attached to individuals rather than to specific places. Those who are trafficked have become another target of the complex border-inscription practices. “Thus, the border that requires policing morphs into a person that requires policing” (p. 106).

In sum, this book advances the debate surrounding tensions among developments in globalization, security, violence, and mobility by analyzing the experience of women. By investigating how women have negoti-

ated “the unending act of border crossing,” (p. 110) the book produces non-state-based views of violence, migration and security. It questions conventional understandings of borders and the state that permeate the International Relations literature. The author pays particular attention to the use of borders and migration status as a means of exclusion, realized through processes of criminalization. Pickering suggests introducing more ethical regulations of borders to overcome these paradigms of securitization. Yet, the promise that the book would be based on interviews with women is not fully fulfilled, since only one chapter directly cites interviews, and it proceeds without an informed discussion of methodology. Nevertheless, Pickering’s book represents a valuable contribution to critiques of state-centric views and confirms the importance to include women’s voices. ■

Notes

¹ Soguk, Nevzat and Whitehall, Geoffrey (1999). Wandering Grounds. Transversality, Identity, Territoriality, and Movement. *Millennium, Journal of International Studies* 28, 675-698.

Alexander Betts (ed.). *Global Migration Governance*.

Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011. 368 pp. £61 (hbk).
ISBN: 9780199600458.

FRIEDERIKE BARTHE (Institut National des Langues et Civilisations Orientales, Paris)

Lifestyle migrants, refugees, and ethnic and religious diasporas all represent “the most obvious contemporary manifestation of globalisation” (p. 1): international migration. These diverse groups are also the protagonists of Alexander Betts’ edited volume *Global Migration Governance*, a book that discusses a broad range of policy categories in an attempt to expose how they are governed at the global level. The book is based on the findings of a workshop held in 2008; the majority of the authors are academics from the University of Oxford.

In the opening lines of this comprehensive and meticulous study, the editor recognizes the “inherently political” and “trans-boundary” character that international migration shares with other global issues like climate change and international trade (p. 3). Despite these common features, Betts observes that “there is no formal or coherent multilateral institutional framework regulating states’ responses to international migration” (p. 1).

The book has twelve chapters, each dedicated to a distinct policy field, including refugees, remittances, and root causes of migration. The chapters revolve around four broad categories: labour migration, “voluntary” mobility, forced migration and new and emerging areas of global migration governance. Each chapter deals with three transversal questions: which institutions exist in this policy category? What are the politics behind these institutions? Which arguments support reform of the existing systems of governance?

This tripartite structure—though slightly artificial—allows the reader to easily distinguish facts, analysis and policy advice. Another advantage is that each chapter provides a “stand-alone introduction” that addresses its particular policy category. The inconvenience of this approach is that, in aggregate, the book fails to underscore common features that link many of the policy areas discussed. Other authors, such as Tim Coles and David Timothy in *Tourism, Diasporas and Space* (2004), have demonstrated this important aspect of migration governance.

Readers concerned with the first question will find the meticulous compilation of information on the institutions governing each policy category very handy. They will particularly appreciate the remarkable chapter by Rey Koslowski on international travel (chapter four), which provides insight into the institutional structure of this under-studied policy field. Caroline Oliver’s findings are also of particular interest: she illustrates the aspects of lifestyle migration to which policy makers have paid little attention so far (chapter five).

Readers looking for answers to the second question—the politics of it all—will first discover that the incoherence of migration governance, described as a paradox in Betts’ introduction, entails no contradiction at all. Reluctance to yield control over migration has curtailed international cooperation on these issues, and North-South power imbalances have shaped global governance of migration to serve the interests of the global North. The concept of global public goods and game theory are handily applied by the authors and elucidate states’ bargaining strategies. However, as the authors recognize, these methods account for only a “narrowly state-centric perspective” (p. 313).

The text could have addressed the role played by perceptions and ideology in shaping states’ international posture on migration politics.

Although Oliver's chapter touches on this subject by pointing out the arbitrary opposition between the (northern) "tourist" and the (southern) "vagabond," (p. 139) many of the other authors fail to assess similar issues at the symbolic level.

The third question aims to address "how global migration governance should look in each area" (p. 318). While the authors' declared objective at the beginning of the book is not to call for "more" or "better" migration governance, but to build common ground for an informed debate on the subject, this laudable intention is somewhat compromised by the policy recommendations at the end of each chapter, which anticipate the normative debate that they wish to inform. Betts attempt to sidestep this contradiction by acknowledging that a definite answer to this question "would require serious engagement with moral and political philosophy" and is "beyond the scope of this book" (p. 318). In light of this hesitant stance, the vagueness of the policy recommendations that the authors present is unsurprising.

Although the contributors come from a range of disciplinary backgrounds, including some practitioners, their collected works illustrate an astonishing consistency of ideas at the expense of presenting diverging viewpoints in what are heated debates on migration governance. For example, it is unfortunate that none of the authors represent the Global South. Nevertheless, overall, *Global Migration Governance* covers a wide range of issues in remarkable depth and will therefore remain a useful analytical resource for students, researchers and practitioners interested in migration. ■

Michel Agier. *Managing the Undesirables: Refugee Camps and Humanitarian Government*

Cambridge: Polity Press, 2011. 268 pp. £17.99 (pbk).
ISBN: 9780745649016.

GUSTAV M. MEIBAUER (London School of Economics)

In late 2012, a representative from Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF) addressed the worsening refugee crisis in Dadaab, Kenya. He stated that "the assistance provided here [...] is completely overstretched and is

not meeting the current needs,” and added that “since the beginning of December [...] the shelter and sanitation situation that was already precarious [...] has become even more deplorable. [...] This has had dramatic consequences.”¹ In the months following these public remarks, the situation in Dadaab, known as the world’s largest refugee camp, has continued to deteriorate, negatively affecting up to 500,000 inhabitants. Michel Agier, renowned ethnologist and anthropologist, used his connection with MSF and his own research to shed light on this and similar camps around the world. In doing so, he not only provides a comprehensive overview of the oft-overlooked issues confronting refugees, internally displaced persons, and other members of a stigmatized and other-directed pariah. He also carves out two essential theses on the management of this societal group of “undesirables.”

His first thesis is that the categorization of human beings into different definitory blocs such as “refugee” or “displaced” as well as their placement in isolated camps, and their being “managed” by a nexus of governments, NGOs and international organizations, is as much an issue of control and isolation of an unwanted population as it is one of humanitarian concern. Although Agier’s argument is neither new nor surprising, it nevertheless convinces through its conclusive presentation. The author illustrates that states all over the world that are unable or unwilling to cope with the mobile masses that flee from disaster, conflict, or poverty, move them off to camps, transit centres and the like. There, they are retained, stripped of all rights, and often left to die. He pointedly describes the perspective shift on refugees: no longer considered politically accepted asylum seekers, they become unwanted liabilities, who are then criminalized and isolated from society. This descriptive process is complemented with a marked criticism of such “management,” and of humanitarian intervention in general. Agier does not doubt the good will of involved NGOs and international organizations to genuinely help those in need. However, in so doing, they do contribute to the perpetuation of a system of control rather than support.

It is unclear, up to this point, if the author has a potential remedy in mind: his own claim not to be polemical or fatalistic can be easily forgotten in his rigorous critique of the deplorable condition “modern” management puts refugees into. Also, presumably due to his own experiences and education, Agier tends to focus on French examples, and he draws inspiration from French scholars and experts. The latter lead him into digressions into sociological, ethnological, and philosophic theory, which are sometimes difficult to follow, but always worth another look.

The description and criticism of refugee management is interesting for its conciseness and comprehensive approach, but it is Agier’s second

thesis on the “urbanization” of camps that makes his book an informative read for students, scholars and practitioners, and a remarkable contribution to his field. On the basis of case studies from different refugee sites around the world, the author compellingly argues that even though the institutionalized management of undesirables through a mixture of pity and containment strips them of all rights, it cannot prevent them from active participation and political innovation. “Camps become towns,” in the sense that they develop intricate political hierarchies, from informal “marketplaces of ideas” to hybrid proto-institutions, in which the refugees are able to mobilize, and start to express their humanity again. Agier describes this as the “reconstruction of social life,” a transformation of “the originally empty setting in which the camps were built” (p. 132). In each of the cases, Agier is able to show how refugees shape the new social order of their camp, and manage to transform “displacement” into “emplacement.” In Dadaab, for example, pre-existing ethnic rivalries have been overturned, and new social groups and activities that are not based on ethnic legitimacy have emerged and led to dynamic and self-empowering processes. Thus, despite the deplorable overall situation in Dadaab, Agier describes it as a “town in the making” (p. 145).

Based on his focus on descriptive ethnography rather than policy-driven analysis, Agier largely refrains from offering a blueprint of “better management.” Yet this mode of analysis may inspire scientists and practitioners alike: where broad-based studies of the complex quasi-political systems inside the camps could yield further insights into the dynamics of this new social order, allowing, encouraging, and potentially formalizing such processes may be an innovative way to break out of the cycle of permanent emergency in the camps. If camps can become towns, can these towns be integrated into the state surrounding them? Can they be empowered to take responsibility over their own organization? Should camps develop into towns not only politico-socially, but also materially? Through his exploratory approach, Agier points to a large field for future empirical and more policy-gearred research. While the author cannot offer comprehensive answers to those questions himself, he does deserve credit for raising them. ■

Notes

¹ Medecins Sans Frontieres (2012): *Dadaab - A new influx of refugees will worsen already dire situation*, accessible at <http://www.msf.org/msf/articles/2012/12/en/kenya-possible-new-influx-of-refugees-will-worsen-already-dire-situation-for-refugees-in-dadaab.cfm>.

Leah Bassel. *Refugee Women: Beyond Gender Versus Culture.*

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London/New York: Routledge, 2012. 212 pp. £80 (hbk).

ISBN: 9780415603607.

JANNE MENDE (University of Giessen)

Some of the most challenging questions of our time are those addressing culture, religion and secular values. In *Refugee Women*, Leah Bassel aims to broaden the scope of existing frames of discourse and of action on these points of contention. She discusses the experience of Somali Muslim refugee women in the context of French laicism, which bans religious symbols in public spaces, and in the Canadian debate surrounding religious arbitration tribunals. Having worked with refugees and homeless people in Paris as an emergency outreach worker, Bassel provides insight into their struggles. She relies on interviews she conducted with refugees, social workers, and NGOs, and outlines border regimes (“external borders”), racism and marginalization (“internal borders”) as topics of central relevance. Bassel argues that these topics are made invisible by the commonly adopted frame of interpretation, a frame that is restricted only to a conflict between gender and elements of culture and religion.

The author contends that this discursive frame, used by the media and in politics, reinforces a dichotomy in which culture means repression and particularism, whereas gender stands for universalism and emancipation. It reduces the main subjects of those discussions—Muslim women—either to mere victims of their culture or to agents who are opposing their culture. Those “women are ‘only listened to’ when ‘bashing’, or defending, culture or religion” (p. 21). Concentrating on only two poles, Bassel argues, is too narrow. It excludes various axes of domination and power as well as the “simultaneous and interacting effects of race, class, gender and other axes of social position” (p. 26).

By invoking debates about headscarves in France and religious arbitration in Canada, Bassel illustrates the manifold exclusion of numerous positions when these discourses are limited to terms of gender versus culture. Bassel claims to challenge the resultant dichotomies by pluralizing the terms of debate. She emphasizes women’s agency by using an intersectional approach that includes questions of power, economic exclusion and her interpretation of the external as well as internal borders she documents.

The text seeks not just to include more points of reference into the discursive frame, but to question, contest, and advocate against its present exclusionary contours—thus “shattering” it. Bonnie Honig’s notion of “remainders,” the method of critical frame analysis and Jacques Rancière’s disidentifying “entre-deux” are central to Bassel’s conception of frame shattering, the ability of which she clearly locates in “other identities” (p. 6), “in between social positions and identities” (p. 29). Bassel makes this clear with the discussion of Somali refugee situations in Canada and France. Occasionally, though, this might leave her audience with the impression that it is only the intersection of being poor, excluded, repressed, not legally recognized and mixed up between cultures that is the only effective way for opposition and for agency.

Bassel’s fundamental critique of the frame “gender versus culture” aims to develop the autonomy of women refugees via democratic means. Essential to her concept of democracy is the value of equality. A second crucial, actor-centred meaning of democracy is connected to her critique of deliberative theories and their faith in state action and in consensus which is based on already existing debates. At this point, though, Bassel faces a contradiction which she unfortunately does not address. On the one hand, she asserts that equality is “the only political universal” (p. 35). On the other hand, referring to the concept of agonism, she insists that authentic frame shattering “should go all the way down to include the principles and procedures that are supposed to regulate political life”.¹ This approach undermines her universal notions of equality, autonomy, agency and democracy, since she does not grasp the categorical contradiction between the adherence to seemingly universal values and a shattering that goes “all the way down.”

By and large, Bassel makes her concern to shatter the “gender versus culture” frame redundantly clear. Whilst the selection of case studies appears rather arbitrary—without the basis of comparison explicitly provided—it is her detailed account of both that serves as the book’s most significant contribution. Although a systematic and method-driven interpretation of the interviews, revealing latent and multidimensional aspects instead of just selectively citing them in proper context, might have been even more productive, the case studies do achieve her aim of shattering the frame and recognizing suffering as well as agency beyond the frame gender versus culture. ■

Notes

¹ Andrew Schaap (2009): *Law and Agonistic Politics*, Farnham, p. 1. Cited by Bassel, p. 25.

Gill Allwood and Khursheed Wadia.

Refugee Women in Britain and France.

Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2010. 224 pp. £60 (hbk).

ISBN 9780719071225a.

RACHEL HUMPHRIS (Green Templeton College, University of Oxford)

In *Refugee women in Britain and France*, Gill Allwood and Khursheed Wadia provide a comprehensive overview of developments affecting refugee women in Britain and France—two states chosen for their democratic principles of equality and justice. The data examined is not based on new empirical research but does present an impressive synthesis of disparate sets of observations: it incorporates legal statutes, statistics, policies and smaller qualitative studies. The aim of the book—to emphasize the experience of refugee women in an account of migration practices in Britain and France—is ambitious, especially when the paucity of data on the topic is acknowledged. However the authors are well aware of limitations and by providing detailed citations make the book an invaluable reference point for literature on many related topics.

Structured in three parts, the book first places refugee women within the wider context of evolving legal, policy paradigms of migration. Chapter one examines international, European and national law regarding asylum and refugee protection generally, and the gendered experience more specifically. The authors take a neo-liberal view-point and provide a compelling summary of the various ways support and access to the state has been tightened and restricted from the 1990s. By focusing on how these changes have affected women and through comparative country analysis, the text successfully identifies significant gaps between policy and practice.

The book goes on to provide a detailed account of the historical, political and economic factors that contribute to the experience of contemporary refugees in Europe. The data is organized chronologically and thus makes key trends in policy debates, discourses and qualitative information highly persuasive. The second part provides a more detailed account of the situation for refugee women in Britain and then in France. It focuses on barriers faced by women through Refugee Status Determination (RSD), shelter, health care, education, employment and training. Although there is no stroke-by-stroke comparison between

the two countries it becomes clear that France has paid less attention in policy to the gender dimension of the refugee experience. However concerns are raised for both countries due to rising securitization discourse and weakening economies creating an atmosphere of increasing racism and restricted access to asylum procedures.

The third and most innovative part of the book explores the ways refugee women are engaged in social, economic and political participation. Echoing the recent turn in citizenship studies and the growing academic literature that refutes the characterization of refugees as “sediments of other people’s agency,” the authors successfully explore refugee women’s participation in political affairs. Involvement in NGOs and informal social participation is explored starting from the observation that many refugees are not involved in mainstream political activities due to language differences, cultural constraints and nationality laws. Despite their provocative findings in this chapter, it is the least developed section of the text, reflecting the need for more detailed research in this area.

Overall, the book maintains a balance between presenting a large amount of information and highlighting limitations based on the diversity of refugee women’s experiences and on the lack of relevant data. Further, the authors provide a comprehensive account of the barriers that many women face without falling into characterizations of helplessness and victimization. Firm conclusions are not the aim of the book and, from the authors’ perspective, neither should they be. Rather, the text successfully opens up a somewhat confined field to new lines of inquiry, and outlines an innovative research agenda on refugee women in general, and in France and Britain in particular. ■