GEOGRAPHIES OF DISPLACEMENT:
GENDER, CULTURE AND POWER IN UNHCR REFUGEE CAMPS,
KENYA

by
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Date Sept. 5/96
Abstract

The end of the Cold War marks a period of human displacement greater in scale than any other this century. The number of refugees in 1995 numbered over 16 million; a conservative estimate of internally displaced persons (IDPs) in the same year was 26 million. Approximately 36% of the world's refugees and half of all IDPs are located in continental Africa, suggesting an uneven world geography of forced migration. This research analyzes the 'safe spaces' where displaced people seek protection from threats of persecution and violence. In particular, it examines the major humanitarian organization providing assistance to involuntary migrants, the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), both at its headquarters in Geneva and in the context of refugee camps administered by the agency in Kenya. As resettlement targets in countries like Canada, the U.S., and Australia decline, many states hosting large numbers of refugees are less interested in allowing refugees to integrate or settle locally. In the case of Kenya, most refugees have the choice between returning home on a voluntary basis or staying in the camps. A few are resettled abroad and many more seek unofficial livelihoods beyond the borders of the camps.

Questions of legal status, social and spatial segregation, and camp management constitute the major themes of this study. The legal framework which defines refugee status and entitlements originated after the Second World War and has, with few exceptions, become increasingly irrelevant to crises of displacement in African locations. Ad hoc measures on the part of UNHCR to accommodate refugees who fall outside the 1951 definition have been flexible but insufficient. Camps have become more permanent, suspending refugees in 'safe spaces' without many political, social, cultural, and economic rights. The organization of the camps is scrutinized in detail for its relation to colonial administrations, the impact of its design and operations for refugee women and men, and the correspondence of UNHCR policy to practice in the field. The research contributes to the practice, politics, theory, and geography of humanitarian responses to human displacement.
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<tr>
<td>CARE</td>
<td>CARE International in Kenya (Canadian NGO)</td>
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<td>CIDA</td>
<td>Canadian International Development Agency</td>
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<tr>
<td>CMS</td>
<td>Career Management System</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CUSO</td>
<td>Canadian Universities Services Overseas</td>
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<td>DHA</td>
<td>Department of Humanitarian Affairs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DHRM</td>
<td>Division of Human Resource Management</td>
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<tr>
<td>GATT</td>
<td>General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade</td>
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<td>GOK</td>
<td>Government of Kenya</td>
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<td>ICRC</td>
<td>International Committee of the Red Cross</td>
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<td>IFRC</td>
<td>International Federation of the Red Cross</td>
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<td>ILO</td>
<td>International Labour Organization</td>
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<td>IWGRW</td>
<td>International Working Group on Refugee Women</td>
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<tr>
<td>JPO</td>
<td>Junior Professional Officer</td>
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<tr>
<td>KRC</td>
<td>Kenyan Red Cross</td>
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<tr>
<td>MSF</td>
<td>Médecins Sans Frontières (Doctors without Borders)</td>
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<tr>
<td>NATO</td>
<td>North Atlantic Treaty Organization</td>
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<tr>
<td>NGO</td>
<td>non-governmental organization</td>
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<tr>
<td>PCBS</td>
<td>Program Control and Budget Systems</td>
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<td>POP</td>
<td>People-Oriented Planning</td>
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<tr>
<td>SSEP</td>
<td>Social Services and Education Programme</td>
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<tr>
<td>UNDP</td>
<td>United Nations Development Programme</td>
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<tr>
<td>UNHCR</td>
<td>United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees</td>
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<td>UNV</td>
<td>United Nations Volunteer</td>
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<td>WHO</td>
<td>World Health Organization</td>
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<td>WIPO</td>
<td>World Intellectual Property Organization</td>
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<td>WTO</td>
<td>World Trade Organization</td>
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<td>WVV</td>
<td>Women Victims of Violence Project</td>
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To my parents, Mary and Lou
Introduction

Refugees are perhaps the most obvious subjects of geographical inquiry. Forced to move from their homes to another country, they embody a visceral human geography of dislocation. The involuntary migration of bodies across space, however, is not passive nor facile. Nor can it be charted on a map as undifferentiated mass movement. Rather, refugees and other displaced people are transnational subjects. The question of mobility — who moves where and why, under such circumstances — is inherently geographical. The relations of power which invoke displacement and shape the mobility of those affected operate at multiple spatial scales.

International responses to human displacement in the 1990s emphasize “managing migration.” Who counts as a refugee varies across world regions, but most definitions depend on crossing an international border. In crossing a border, recognized refugees trade the entitlements of citizenship in their own country for safety on terms decided by host governments and humanitarian agencies. Strategies of managing displaced people in refugee camps and the ensuing cultural politics constitute a principal focus of this work. I explore the notion of ‘culture’ at several scales and in a historical context, accentuating its multiple and contradictory meanings as well as the relevant geographies of Western influence and cultural contest. The research presented here examines displacement in the Horn of Africa and responses to it, in particular by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR). In this introduction, autobiographical ‘motives’ for the study are combined with anecdotes and finding of ‘exploratory research’ in Kenya and Somalia. Together, these point to a number of key questions and issues which are raised in the dissertation.
Getting Started

In February 1992, large numbers of Somalis fled across the border into Kenya. Seriously affected by famine related to the civil war in Somalia, approximately 400,000 Somali refugees sought safety, food, and medical attention. During this period, I visited a refugee camp for the first time. The camp - Ifo - became the main site of my doctoral research almost three years later. In order to access the camps, I affiliated myself with a Canadian relief organization for which I volunteered briefly. In March 1992 I took a job with CARE and was posted to Walda camp in Northern Kenya where I worked in response to a refugee emergency on the Kenya-Ethiopian border.

Walda was wild. In January 1992 the camp housed some three thousand refugees, most of whom had fled Ethiopia after the coup which ousted President Mengistu from power in May 1991. The refugee population consisted of ex-militia from his army, students, and some civilians. By April 1992, more than 30,000 refugees had flocked across the border into the camp. Most were in desperate physical condition having walked to the border from various parts of the Sidamo region of Southern Ethiopia. In stark contrast to the original urban-based, and mostly Christian inhabitants of the camp, these newcomers were a nomadic group of Muslims from Southern Ethiopia. Mortality rates soared as exhausted refugees arrived by the truckload and the rainy season began. Walda camp was officially declared an emergency by senior staff at UNHCR headquarters in Geneva, and a team of experts was sent into the camps to address the unacceptably high death rates caused by severe malnutrition and disease. Conditions were debilitating even among UNHCR’s own international staff in the camp, several of whom had to take sick leave after contracting hepatitis A. Deaths were counted by the number of shrouds — simple pieces of white cloth distributed on demand — and graveyards, marked only by adult and child-sized
bumps on the scorched desert floor at the foot of the Ethiopian Highlands, emerged at the edges of the camp. The corporeality of displacement was acutely clear.

Officially, my job was to survey the camp and create a profile of who lived there. I was to conduct a ‘needs assessment’ of refugee needs relevant to the social services sector for CARE. Unofficially, I was made temporary manager of the CARE operation in Walda. In conjunction with UNHCR staff, I developed a community-based network of refugee extension workers who were trained to identify, assist, and advise on certain problems and issues. Some refugees accustomed to a diet of predominantly milk and meat would mix wheat flour and suspect water together as a milk substitute. They fed it to their children whose dehydration was exacerbated by the uncooked dough. Identifying such problems and circulating information on ‘dietary translations’ of culturally foreign foodstuffs, as well as training workers in oral rehydration strategies, were part of my ‘flexible’ job description. In June of 1992, I returned to Canada to pursue the possibility of a more permanent position in the camp, stating my interest in person and on paper at UNHCR headquarters in Geneva and in a letter to CARE in Ottawa. My other serious interest at that time was the Ph.D. program in geography at UBC where I had been accepted in economic geography, with a research interest in labour market analysis. By the time a job offer from CARE came in late October of that year, I was enrolled and engaged at UBC, beginning to put together tools of cultural and feminist critique which were formative to my research.

In December of 1992, the Office of UNHCR called, asking if I would be interested and available to work in Somalia on a nascent repatriation and rehabilitation project. The program, which became known as the ‘Cross-Border Operation’, aimed to return Somali refugees from camps in Kenya to their home areas in South Somalia on a voluntary basis. After discussions with departmental faculty who were sympathetic to my displaced interests
in refugee work, it was decided that I should go and use this opportunity to conduct exploratory research.

I worked in Bardera, Somali from March until June 1993, opting not to renew my contract with UNHCR. The UN's peacekeeping mission in Somalia had already begun to go seriously awry. On June 5th, Mohammed Farah Aideed ambushed and murdered 24 Pakistani peacekeepers after provocation from UN forces that had entered his declared territory in Mogadishu. The US/UNOSOM II forces retaliated, acting under the authority of a UN Security Council resolution, to punish Aideed. The result was the death of many Somali civilians. The US would later lose 18 soldiers to the Somali cause, the greatest number of US servicemen killed on a peacekeeping mission ever, though this figure does not begin to approximate Somali deaths. Evidence of atrocities perpetrated by Canadian peacekeepers in Somalia continues to be uncovered. Members of the now disbanded Canadian Airborne Regiment have been charged with torturing a Somali teenager and shooting three civilians to death. The Canadian Government established an inquiry into the Somalia affair at which senior military officials continue to testify. The sustained violence of the peacekeeping mission in Somalia provoked me to consider my own position within the context of UN-sponsored humanitarian operations.

Despite the political and administrative separation of military and humanitarian operations within the United Nations, the collaboration of UNHCR and UN peacekeepers 'on the ground' and in full view of the local population rendered the distinction meaningless. US marines, sometimes in armoured personnel carriers, would accompany me on trips to deliver seeds, tools, and food to nearby villages. While I never felt comfortable with the ratio of military hardware to humanitarian 'goods', it was the policy and indeed the very mandate of Operation Restore Hope to escort and protect all food and other commodities.
This US-led intervention was intended to provide the entire Somali population with the necessary humanitarian assistance to stabilize and begin rebuilding the country. A white Nissan Patrol with big blue UNHCR letters on the door would roll along at the same pace as the US military vehicles and run-down trucks hauling the agricultural supplies. Security was always an issue. On one occasion, a convoy of returning refugees accompanied by UNHCR personnel and vehicles was attacked at night by bandits. Radio contact with staff in one UNHCR vehicle ceased while staff in another reported gunfire. As the person in charge, I tried to make a non-event of the incident, refusing to deploy the American helicopter crew on stand-by, but requesting the assistance of the Botswani commanders who had armed vehicles at their disposal. In the end, the UNHCR employee escaped, the vehicle was recovered, and no one was injured.¹

During this period I became cognizant of culturally specific notions of security in Bardera. Because I was outside the network of Somali clans and subclans, I was warned by locally-hired Somali staff working for UNHCR that I should not drive an agency vehicle alone. If it were stolen from me, there would be no means of retrieving it through clan-based authority structures. If, however, a UNHCR driver — all of whom were from the dominant Marehan subclan — were to lose a vehicle to theft, clan elders who were lead figures in this self-policing system could be counted upon to get it back.

At the time, comprehensive exams seemed a much more productive and less compromising prospect, so I decided to return to Canada. Despite this decision to leave Somalia and UNHCR, my exploratory research proved constructive in several ways. I lived as a UN

¹ The speed with which this news reached UNHCR headquarters in Geneva and the stir it created were impressive. Watchdog critics of the peace-keeping mission in Somalia were ready to jump on and publicize any error on the part of UN operations in Somalia, so senior staff at UNHCR in Geneva wanted 'full details.'
'international' staff member with relative privilege in what was considered a 'hardship' post. This meant that I could have crème caramel for dessert once a week while the locals served up postcolonial pasta at the local cafe, known as the Hotel Hilton Gedo. These perks were offset somewhat by sleeping in a tent too hot to occupy after 8 am and before 6 pm, located in a walled, barb-wired quasi-military compound. I learned international radio language and some of the 'UNese' lingo required to convey information within the organization. On one occasion, Somalia's two Marehan kings, a kindred pair, arrived at the UNHCR compound when I had been left in charge. They explained their importance, the territories they controlled, and how their people were still trying to recover a UNHCR vehicle that had been stolen some weeks before. Then they asked for two hundred litres of 'petrol', and in a gesture of amateur desert diplomacy, I gave them fifty and invited them to come again.

Other visitors to the 'outpost' in Bardera included General Morgan, head of the Marehan militia in the region, and Cevik Bir, the Turkish general in charge of the UNOSOM II peacekeeping mission. Journalists, geographers working as consultants, and human rights activists also passed through; some stayed for a day, others for longer. Media desire for a hard news 'scoop' or sensational story became manifestly apparent during this period. One journalist flew home in a quat plane when there were no scheduled flights on the day she wanted to leave, only to write about her dangerous adventure later in the feminist Ms. magazine! This kind of grandstanding and adventure-seeking were common in the 'culture' of refugee work.

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2 Marehan is the name of a subclan of the Darood clan. Former Somalian President Siad Barre is a Marehan; many subclans have their own militias, General Morgan being the head of the Marehan people in South Somalia.

3 Relief workers often distinguish between 'day-trippers' and 'the rest of us', a disparagingly reference to the parasitic economies of news and diplomacy that embrace the refugee 'industry.'

4 Quat planes are privately chartered from Nairobi to deliver a leafy green drug, also known as miraah. Because these aircraft carry cargo, they rarely have seats and belts installed for passengers.
Because the entire Kenya-Somalia border area was considered a security risk, I received US $20 per day in ‘danger pay’ during my contract. While it is undeniable that the border region has a long and complex history of conflict which I outline in chapter five, I felt safer in Bardera and the Kenyan refugee camps visited en route to and from this location than in Nairobi. The only exception was one stop in Liboi — a camp and town at the border itself— where my colleagues and I were stoned by youth as we disembarked. Incidents such as this one were, I think, random petty violence. Women, however, faced particular dangers in the camps. Early in 1992, a woman working for the French NGO, Médecins Sans Frontières (Doctors without Borders), was raped in one of the Somali refugee camps which later became the site of my research. This was the first rape among expatriates whose safety mattered more at an official level than that of the refugees. Rape was nothing new to refugee women in the area, and questions of protection — legal and physical — and of its gender focus in the camp context were raised. Eventually CIDA, in conjunction with other funders and UNHCR, initiated the Women Victims of Violence project which aimed to improve women’s security and assist refugees who had been affected by sexual violence. This issue is discussed in further detail and in the context of UNHCR policies pertaining to women in chapter three.

The assymetries of power and cultural politics of distributing food, seeds, and tools to Somali communities troubled me, both professionally and personally. In particular, I found myself faced with the conundrum of whether I was imposing my cultural (Western

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5 In Nairobi there is more violence than in the Northeast Province of Kenya, and it is more directed. At one level, it is an expression of the increasing economic apartheid in the city: luxury cars with red plates signifying UN or diplomatic status ply the streets of Nairobi with their windows closed. In September 1993 one UN employee, a Dane, was stopped on the road by thieves toting guns. He was asked to get out, and in refusing to hand over his keys to the vehicle was shot dead. A Cameroonian woman working for UNHCR, during my research visit, had a bracelet ripped off her wrist in broad daylight in a posh suburb of Nairobi. Nonetheless, a sizable and wealthy expatriate community supports everything from French bakeries and Kenyan-made brie to Danish feta and imported British jams.
feminist) values on Somali people. My job was to distribute fairly sorghum, sesame, and vegetable seeds as well as the tools and food needed for planting to villagers in the rural areas surrounding Bardera. This effort was part of a plan to get returning refugees and displaced people who had been reliant on free food aid during the peak of the civil war back to their home communities. The project was, admittedly, a bit of social engineering on the part of UNHCR, but one which aimed to restore normal life to these areas and give a kick start to local economies. My dilemma was often one of whether to give the seeds, tools, and food to the local elders, usually men, and trust them distribute the materials, or to give individual allotments to all adult women in the village. The rationale for the second option was that women planted the seeds and prepared the food, and that if a Somali man had more than one wife, this method would be fairest because every household would receive the materials. This option did, however, involve more work, and it often upset the male elders whose authority was not being respected.

Refugee camp census exercises, more commonly known as ‘headcounts’, also crystallized some of my concerns about management practices in the camps. Postcolonial theories and criticism from my academic milieu in the ‘Far West’ had startling applications to the supposedly postcolonial, post-independence spaces of the camps. In particular, record-keeping procedures, disciplinary techniques, and other modes of reporting the field appeared similar to the strategies of control initiated by colonial administrations. I read these critical analyses at the same time that I submitted similar records and statistics to

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6 The question of trust in places affected by human displacement and where powerful organizations were giving away valuable goods is different than in stable communities where social, political, and economic structures are more or less intact.

UNHCR as part of my job. My complicity in these practices, then, only complicates the multiple and contradictory locations and locutions that follow.

If any one thing characterizes the camps and relief work generally, it is the grinding and constant state of displacement: of self, of refugees, of local people, and of language. Not only do refugees unsettle local people, but they frustrate the local, national, and international relief staff of organizations like UNHCR, CARE, and Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF) that ostensibly work for them. The international agencies apply their own rules regarding access to services and supplies in the camps, exacting certain performances — not always very palatable — from the refugees.

In this opening section I have tried to weave myself into the sometimes surreal landscape of refugee camps and humanitarian operations there. In so doing, the antecedents of my research and my position in relation to the organizations and spaces I go on to study are made somewhat more explicit. This positioning shifted often over the course of my field work: I was allowed to be an insider at times, and asked to be a neutral outside observer on others. As a former employee of UNHCR many doors were opened to me. My imbrication in the relations of power which this dissertation critiques speaks as much about the researcher as about the researched. I made several friends at UNHCR as well as some enemies during the course of my work. On one occasion in Nairobi, a set of my field notes were plagiarized and made into an official UNHCR memo and policy directive before my eyes. At other times, I volunteered to assist in the drafting of memos and answering of phones in the UNHCR office, efforts which rendered me both insider and outsider at once.

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8 In Nairobi, I shared a house with a Finnish protection officer trained in international law who worked for UNHCR.
I rarely experienced hostility during my visits to and walks through the camps. On one occasion I was facetiously asked if I was a tourist by an elder Somali man, a comment I took to be incisive given Caren Kaplan's warnings “against a form of theoretical tourism on the part of the first world critic, where the margin becomes a linguistic or critical vacation, a new poetics of the exotic.” Another day, a young Somali man chewing quat grabbed me by the collar and angrily shouted something at me which the male interpreter, who was a camp elder, refused to translate. Among refugees, I was mostly met with curiosity: I was a foreigner who often walked within the camps, an odd habit given that most international staff and visitors move in white Nissan Patrols and Toyota Landcruisers.

The driver of one such vehicle imparted snippets of local knowledge to me, as I assured him that wearing my seatbelt was simply a cultural habit and no comment on his driving. He explained that the UNHCR rules also require that he wear a belt, but that in this region of bandits, known as shiftas, it is more dangerous to ‘buckle up’ than not. If he were to be stopped at gun point, a fairly common occurrence in the area, and asked to get out of the car, reaching down to release the belt buckle might be perceived as drawing a weapon and cost him his life at close range. Both in the Nairobi office and in the camps, I encountered vast networks of informal and local knowledges which shaped my thinking at least as much as the formal lines of inquiry outlined below.

Doing It

For writing, like a game that defies its own rules, is an on-going practice that may be said to be concerned, not with inserting a “me” into language, but with creating an opening where the “me” disappears while “I” endlessly come and go, as the nature of language requires.10

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...institutions are the more readily definable macro-objects, grosser instruments for the finer, more elemental workings of power. Power is the thin, inescapable film that covers all human interactions, whether inside institutions or out.... Institutions are the means that power uses, and not the other way around, not sources or origins of power.\textsuperscript{11}

This dissertation analyzes the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees at different locations. It addresses the geo-political context from which the agency emerged and examines some of the spaces in which it organizes human displacement. The proposals written to fund this research about UNHCR operations were another matter. One funder encouraged a focus on gender analysis in order to be eligible for grants. Another insisted that the project must produce policy applications for the field and implied that an empirical approach would be most acceptable. The culture of the department exacted a more theoretically informed performance. Incorporating these interests as well as my own into a preliminary approach, I submitted my methodology to the university ethics review panel which approved the research artifice. The proposal was literally \textit{produced} out of the organizational exigencies of funders, the sensibilities of faculty and other students, the demands of university protocol, and personal objectives. The editors’ remarks in one collection describe this process of preparation incisively:

If the term ‘institution’ applies to ‘all the field of the nondiscursive social’ (as Foucault contends), ‘the book’ may be the dominant institution of discourse. This volume, too, is of that institution.... all this belongs to the institution of the book.\textsuperscript{12}

While the research presented here examines one organization and its workings of power, it also addresses a range of subjectivities within these relations. The research proposals represented a compromise between funders’ notions of gendered agents of social change

and geographical perspectives on governance, postcolonial and feminist critiques. Similarly, the subject positions and conceptions of agency written here represent a sometimes contradictory composite of these constructions. The text does not pretend to be definitive; it defies one reading by analyzing power, policy, and practice in a number of locations and at different scales.

My research approach includes a simultaneously ascending (anti-foundational) and descending (tentatively foundational) analysis of power. It engages the cultures, commonalities and differences encountered through a number of interviews, meetings, informal discussions and observations. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak and bell hooks underscore the importance of ‘talking back’ and of dialogue — of speaking to, not of or for — in cross-cultural exchange.13 Donna Haraway insists that researchers must ‘situate’ their knowledge, and as James Clifford recognizes “there is no longer any place of overview... from which to map human ways of life, no Archimedian point from which to represent the world.”14 To enact research Lila Abu-Lughod advocates

‘ethnographies of the particular’, instruments of a tactical humanism. Particularity should not to be mistaken for a privileging of micro over macro processes, but rather the effects of extralocal and long-term processes are only manifested locally and specifically, produced in the actions of individuals living their particular lives, inscribed in their bodies and their words.15

My research took me to Geneva, Nairobi, and seven refugee camps. The emerging research and analyses purport to trace and interpret the translation of UNHCR policy into practice, across space and in a specific geo-political context.16

To the ‘Field’

The ‘field’ is a diffuse and problematic term for geographers. As Cindy Katz contends, “I am always, everywhere, in “the field.””17 Katz challenges the marking off of “the field” as a separate time and space by asking what constitutes it. She employs a “politics of engagement” to meet her objective:

The aim is not to bound a site of common culture and turn it into a museum/mausoleum, but to locate and pry apart some of the differences, not just between one site and elsewhere but within it as well.18

Heeding her analysis, I nonetheless employ the notion of ‘field’ inescapably, but with an awareness of its partiality. My fields are comprised of Geneva where I conducted interviews and research at UNHCR headquarters, and Kenya where I divided my time between UNHCR operations in Nairobi and the camps. UNHCR has its own fields; the term is used frequently by staff throughout the organization to refer to many things. A Finn leaving headquarters to work for UNHCR in Nairobi was presented with a farewell card wishing him well in ‘the field.’ Although Nairobi is large city with many amenities, it is nonetheless a satellite of Geneva. In the Nairobi Branch office, staff often visited from ‘the field’, meaning a sub-office servicing refugee camps or a UNHCR outpost within the regional jurisdiction of the branch office. At the UNHCR office in Dadaab, a central

18 Cindy Katz, 1994, op. cit., p. 68.
administration point serving three camps, field staff would often spend the day in 'the field', referring to the refugee camps. While Geneva is a 'field' for the purposes of my study, it is never 'the field' for UNHCR employees. Within the organization and depending on your post and location, 'field' has a multitude of meanings, most of which are predicated on geographical distance from a perceived centre. One can imagine series of linked maps: at once discontinuous, but connected as 'fields'.

In Geneva, days were spent pouring through UNHCR’s databases and library. This humanitarian capital, a city of refuge based on its political neutrality since 1815, was the site of interviews with seven senior managers at UNHCR, two junior UNHCR staff, an international NGO advocate, one Kenyan and one Canadian consular staff member. In Kenya, my time was split roughly in half between Nairobi (8 weeks) where UNHCR Branch Office provided a base and sometimes a desk, and the refugee camps (6 weeks).19 Of seven camps visited, five weeks were spent at the three Dadaab camps, located approximately 50 kilometres from the Kenya-Somalia border. The other four camps are located along the Kenyan coast near the cities of Mombasa and Malindi. They differ from the border camps in that the International Federation of the Red Cross (IFRC) rather than CARE is responsible for camp management, and UNHCR's role is much more 'hands-off' at these locations.

Time spent with UNHCR in Dadaab was particularly intense and productive because all staff and visitors are literally held 'captive' in a single compound.20 They take their meals in common dining hall, and generally work long hours given that there is little else to do. While not very rigorous as research methods go, probably the most productive way of

19 An appendectomy was the cause of an extra week spent in Nairobi.
20 The effects of restricted movement in this highly circumscribed space that I witnessed were rapid burnout, physical illness, and depression among UNHCR professional staff.
collecting information, obtaining interviews, and generating relevant questions was simply being there, available to listen, query, and watch what was going on. In Dadaab, this involved accompanying various UNHCR staff on their daily rounds when they went to the camps, sitting in on interagency staff meetings to which I was invited (because I was 'around'), and sipping a lot of coffee and tea despite the heat in order to extend lunch time conversations with visitors from the U.S. Embassy and State Department, media, and staff who felt like talking about various things.

This latter habit affected my subjectivity as researcher: I commenced as outsider collecting information, expert opinions and experience; before long I was making arguments of my own and taking positions that flatly opposed those of certain UNHCR employees. Aware that this was happening, personal and political convictions could not nonetheless be hidden in the name of fictitious objectivity. The opinions of one staff member who maintained that refugees can never be trusted, that guns are the only real way to demonstrate authority in the camps, and that the camps themselves are 'war zones', motivated me to engage as interlocutor. This battle intensified the more time I spent in the Dadaab camps. It was, interestingly, a very gendered disagreement: my position was roughly the same as one taken earlier by a then resigned female staff, while several of the male staff held convictions similar to those noted above. However, just prior to my arrival, one male staff member had left Dadaab, criticizing these and other approaches to camp management at both the regional and headquarters level.

My individual interviews with refugee women were organized in concert with regular UNHCR staff visits to the three camps, all of which are within a fifteen kilometre drive of Dadaab. During these regular visits, however, interviews were sometimes deferred if the opportunity to sit in on a UNHCR meeting with refugee elders arose. On one occasion, a
UNHCR field officer asked me to join a problem-solving session with a group of gudomiyas after a public demonstration among refugees had erupted in the camp.21 The issue related to religious expression in the camps, and refugees were angry with a sheik from the Saudi-based Muslim relief agency, Al-Haramein, for proselytizing unpopular Islamic beliefs in public when the refugees had mosques and their own sheiks with whom to worship in the camp. Insights into these more nuanced intra-camp issues were gleaned simply from being a warm body in the right place.

The period of my research was sufficiently long in duration to cover one of the two annual cycles of rainy and dry seasons. The rainy season tends to generate more disease and higher mortality among the refugee population. One of the camps experienced flooding in November 1994, displacing refugees there to higher ground. As well, banditry is more common in the area during the rainy season because movement of vehicles is more difficult, making them easier to ambush, and there is more foliage to hide bandits and their stolen goods.22 The rainy season also has economic impacts. Food trucks often get stuck in the mud, and when they finally deliver their commodities which are distributed to refugees, the market prices for staples in the camps usually plummet because there is no way to transport food to town markets nearby, generating a glut of supply in the camps. The hot season commences in January, coinciding with Ramadhan and fasting among many of the refugees in the camps. Consequently, activity levels during this period decline significantly. Many of the ethnic Somali Kenyan staff, including the woman who interpreted the interviews for this project, found the combination of a regular work day, fasting, and heat difficult.

21 Gudomiya is a Somali term for elder.
22 During my stay, only one vehicle was stolen; my own opinion is that a radio handset stolen from UNHCR a week before assisted bandits, also known as shiftas, in identifying the vehicle's movement and planning their attack. This view was not popular with the UNHCR officer in charge who had not known about the stolen handset, despite it being public knowledge, and was driving the vehicle at the time it was ambushed. Note: the language of ambush, bandits, attack used here is common parlance in the camps.
Troubled Translations

Translation and interpretation pose questions and raise issues of theory and politics that could well warrant an entire dissertation. Aware that translation is heavily invested with unequal power relations and a site for questions of representation, power, and historicity, my research nonetheless attempts to incorporate some two dozen interviews with refugee women, all of which were contingent upon the availability and skills of one translator. Sherene Razack tells of the “perils of storytelling for refugee women” in particular. She calls for an interrogation of the construction of subjectivity on the part of those who collect and use stories, as well as a more careful examination of how we come to know what we know given the relations of domination produced by white supremacy, capitalism and patriarchy. Interviews, as part of methodology, often serve to authenticate research findings by appropriating subjugated knowledges from essentialized ‘native informants.’ At least as problematic as cultural appropriation is the uncomfortable realization that the interview process reinscribes the power relations that I aimed to critique and contest from the outset. They exact the same kind of performances from refugees as do the relief agencies which organize access to food, medical services, and other needs. Consent becomes almost meaningless in the wholly unequal relationship between interviewer and interviewee. Conducting responsible fieldwork without reproducing these dangerously unequal relations of power was identified as an important, if unresolved, issue.

26 Helene Moussa, Storm and Sanctuary: The Journey of Ethiopian and Eritrean Refugee Women. (Dundas, Ontario: Artemis, 1993). Helene Moussa’s research with Eritrean and Ethiopian refugees addresses the “politics of research” and provided important background for my interviews with refugees. Her positioning as a researcher, however, differs significantly from my own. Her project of tracing the journeys of sixteen Eritrean and Ethiopian women from their homes in the Horn of Africa to Canada focuses on the experience of the women as refugees, rather than on UNHCR’s strategies to manage refugee populations.
Language translation poses other difficulties in the camps. Translation is a critical activity for UNHCR and all other international agencies’ daily operations. Almost all face-to-face interactions with refugees require a translator, and often discussions and disagreements occurred solely around the issue of whose translator, ‘ours’ or ‘theirs’, would interpret. On one occasion an incensed UNHCR local staff discovered that a rape incident had been translated to the police as ‘spousal assault’. As Norma Alarcón notes,

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

This example begins to illustrate the power relations and potential abuse of power inscribed in translations. In an effort to avoid obvious cultural disjuncture, if not epistemic violence, I ‘tested’ my proposed questions before commencing the interviews by having the translator review them to assess whether they were conceptually and culturally ‘translatable.’ Steeped in a few of the inherent problems of translation, Mikhail Bakhtin’s words were among the most salient:

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27 The exception to this may be Al-Haramein, the staff of whom speak Arabic from which many Somali words are derived. However, only a few (male) elders and educated Somalis are conversant in the language.


29 Many of the questions for refugees noted in Appendix B of my initial proposal were conveniently part of a comprehensive consultation process initiated by CARE at Dadaab. The findings of the subsequent “Report on Community Consultation”, by Mary Hope Schwoebel and Mohamed Hassan Haji Mary Hope Schwoebel & Mohamed Hassan Haji, (CARE International Refugee Assistance Project, October 1994) is analyzed in chapter 7. I first met Mary Hope Schwoebel when I worked in Bardera, Somalia where she was employed by the American-based International Rescue Committee (IRC).

30 The articles included in Scattered Hegemonies, (eds.) I. Grewal and C. Kaplan (Minneapolis: Minnesota University Press, 1994) were the primary source of provocation at that time. The work of Tejaswini Niranjana is also helpful here: Siting Translation: history, post-structuralism and the colonial context, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992).
Language is not a neutral medium that passes freely and easily into the private property of the speaker's intentions; it is populated — over populated with the intentions of others. Expropriating, forcing it to submit to one's own intentions and accents, is a difficult and complicated process.\(^{31}\)

Neither translation nor the differences in cultural and professional positions of the people involved were neutral, nor were the languages employed.

During the interviews with refugee women, the main source of slippage in translation concerned the concept of time. Two basic questions were posed to each woman interviewed; the first asked “what did you do yesterday, starting in the morning, and how long did each activity take?”\(^{32}\) It was the latter part of this query which proved problematic because it assumed a fairly precise awareness of ‘clock’ time. The translator often had to explain what was meant in more detail, and how exactly she did this remains uncertain.

By employing and working together over several months with one translator, my research approach revealed some of the problems and power differentials involved in our own relationship. The woman with whom I collaborated on this project is an ethnic Somali, Kenyan national from a town close to the Kenya-Somalia border. Unlike some of the other Somali staff hired in Kenya, she dressed in traditional attire, always wearing a scarf over her head and clothing down to her ankles. Her proximity to home and to ‘her people’, as she called them, affected her behavior and dress, as news of wrongdoing or exceptional activities could travel home quickly. In contrast to the cultural discipline to which she told me she felt subjected, one other Kenyan Somali woman on staff was from ‘up country’ and

\(^{31}\) Norma Alarcón, 1994, op. cit., p. 119.

\(^{32}\) The other related to the household economy and asked “what do you and other family members do when your ration runs out to earn extra income?”
exhibited all the trappings and *savoir vivre* of a Westernized Kenyan.\textsuperscript{33} She did not cover her head except with a safari hat, and although she wore clothes which covered her legs (we all did), they were stitched in more Western styles. At one point I asked her why she didn’t feel so restricted by the norms of Somali culture. She said it was a question of distance; no one in the proximate area knew anything about her, no one was monitoring her actions, so she could do as she pleased.

During the period of the research, the translator with whom I worked was also employed by UNHCR on a local contract. This complicated my status as a purportedly independent researcher because I was employing the skills of a woman who worked for the very organization I intended to study.\textsuperscript{34} One might criticize this decision as a means of drawing on the authority of UNHCR to solicit information, but practically speaking, this person was the only Somali woman available to do the work. In one sense, I chose a problematic institutional affiliation over a potentially more patriarchal one, given that more men were available as translators than women. Because the site of the interviews was the gendered space of refugees’ houses, I felt it was important to approach women and discuss their work with a female translator.

Nonetheless, serious concerns about the translator’s ‘choice’ in the matter remain. She was encouraged to assist with my research by her supervisor, an international staff member, when she had completed her job-related duties. Her supervisor was supportive of my research, and as a Kenyan whose contract was up for renewal, the translator had little room to refuse the wishes of her boss who would recommend her for subsequent

\textsuperscript{33} ‘Up country’ is a reference to Kenyans who live in or beyond (West) of Nairobi; the Kenyan coast seems to be the geographical referent here, although socially, ‘up country’ connotes a certain sophistication and higher levels of education. This particular woman’s family lived in Nairobi and came from an area near Lake Victoria, in Western Kenya.

\textsuperscript{34} For this reason none of my questions touched upon UNHCR operations or staff.
employment. Despite these power differentials, I established a healthy working relationship with both the translator and her boss. The various discursive locations and findings of the interviews will be analyzed further by introducing political status as the basis of distinguishing between supra-citizen, citizen, and sub-citizen.

An ironic aspect of my research which includes a critical gender analysis of UNHCR was my placement in a section of the organization conventionally coded as ‘female.’ In Nairobi, my main UNHCR contact was with the Social Services Division, the acting head of which was a Danish woman of considerable chutzpah who actively supported my work. In many ways, she was my intermediary and advocate in dealings with the big ‘boss’ at UNHCR in Nairobi, a man not terribly predisposed to the idea of researchers in ‘his’ office. In Dadaab, my assigned contact was the UNHCR Social Services Officer, a dynamic Canadian woman who was also extremely helpful. Thus, as an independent researcher addressing gender within this affiliated organization, my assigned locations in it were also gendered. As at UNHCR in Nairobi, my status as independent researcher at UNHCR in the Dadaab camps was not wholly acceptable to the officer in charge. He was prepared to include me in meetings and share information because of my position as a former employee (insider). But during our first meeting at which my purpose and project were explained, he said that other people didn’t need to know of my position as university researcher (outsider) and that he would rather introduce me as an ‘intern’ with UNHCR. My response to the proposed deception was simply that research ethics stipulate that one must identify one’s role and university affiliation. This attempt to hide my identity was never raised again.

35 More of the office politics relevant to my research will be discussed in the chapter two.
What’s the Problem?

The findings of my research appear a decade after Barbara Harrell-Bond’s landmark tome, *Imposing Aid: Emergency Assistance to Refugees*. Her study of Ugandan refugees in South Sudan was a “first attempt to make an independent study of an emergency assistance programme.” While the findings of her case study cannot be generalized to all refugee emergencies, she argues that “they do raise profound questions concerning the role of relief, its link with development, the role of voluntary agencies and international organizations, and the impact of outside interventions and funds on the capacity of host governments to manage their own affairs.” My own research focuses more specifically on the refugee operations of UNHCR and its partner agencies in one location, but also uses feminist and cultural theory in the context of refugee operations. The study takes place in a vastly altered geo-political landscape, yet in an adjacent state — Kenya — where Sudanese, Ethiopian, and Somali refugees have all sought asylum since the time of Harrell-Bond’s research. Central and East Africa, including the Horn, continue to host literally millions of refugees.

Within the discipline of geography, a number of scholars have published research pertaining to refugee displacement. Not surprisingly, much of this body of work relates to refugees in the Horn of Africa. Within the social sciences more generally, increasing attention is being paid to issues of displacement and migration. In particular, cultural analyses of displacement, diaspora, and subjectivity in the context of people’s movement across the globe have multiplied as the influence of postcolonial and feminist theory has

37 Ibid. pp. xv-xvi.
crossed disciplinary borders.\textsuperscript{39} While anthropologists and literary critics have employed poststructuralist, feminist, and postcolonial readings of refugee displacement,\textsuperscript{40} these approaches remain relatively underdeveloped in geography. Accordingly, the research presented here aims to make a modest contribution to refugee research within the discipline.

Geographers have not been well represented in the interdisciplinary pursuit of ‘refugee studies’, established some fifteen years ago. This seems surprising, given that the power relations which structure conditions in the home countries of refugees, their flight, and the camps into which they are received are material ‘productions of space’. My research engages with feminist and postcolonial literatures, but geographical frameworks are among the most relevant in analyzing relations of forced migration. Beyond the discipline, in the refugee camps of Kenya and the pockets of warring factions in Somalia, geography matters.


In the chapters that follow, I set out to address the ways that humanitarian organizations deal with crises of human displacement in the 1990s. As noted, I limit the scope of humanitarian responses mainly to the work of UNHCR. Thomas Weiss and Larry Minear pose policy-based questions which serve to focus the analyses which follow:

...many of the world's principal humanitarian organizations still employ a predominantly Western approach and constituency. What are the operational implications of a more universal approach to humanitarian action for the culture of today's aid institutions? How can existing institutions become more attuned to the cultures in which major humanitarian crises are set?  

Weiss and Minear seemingly overlook the possibility that a more universal approach to humanitarian action may be less attuned to the cultures in which major crises are set. How, for example, are crises of displacement in the 1990s different from those of World War II? What has been the impact of geo-political changes, in particular the end of the Cold War, on UNHCR operations? More specifically, what are the salient strategies of humanitarian assistance for refugees and other displaced people in the Horn of Africa? The Office of UNHCR was established after the Second World War to attend to the millions of people in Europe displaced by the war. Events of history, politics, and law have generated significant geographical change and different movements of refugees since that time. How does an organization established in 1951 respond to forced migration forty-five years later?

My research also concerns theoretical and political issues of mobility, citizenship, and the significance of borders. I contend that contemporary responses to forced migration involve the respatialization of refugee management. This involves an increasing geographical distance between donor and displaced because humanitarian assistance is provided in safe spaces near or at home, and a concomitant politics of distance. Increasingly, international bodies cross sovereign borders to assist displaced civilians. When people flee across

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borders and become refugees, they often wait for a solution to their situation in conditions of isolation and exclusion. These conditions pose the problem of how to rethink notions of temporary citizenship for people living outside of their nation-state.

Moving to a finer scale of analysis, I examine the significance of gender and cultural politics both within UNHCR and in Kenyan refugee camps administered by the organization. What does multiculturalism mean at UNHCR? How do women ‘fit’ within UNHCR structures and recruitment protocols as staff? How do Somali refugee women fair in camps established to meet their needs? How effectively do policies promoting refugee women work in the camp setting? The problem these questions underscore is this: has UNHCR ‘fit’ women and minority groups into its organizational structure, or has UNHCR significantly changed its current ‘unity in diversity’ approach in order to include fully the differences of these groups in more equitable ways?

This corpus of questions relating to the management of displaced people vis-à-vis UNHCR provides the basis for discussions which follow. The questions span a number of scales, locations, and academic literatures. Rather than present a single literature review for the entire work, relevant debates, references, and citations will be reviewed where appropriate.

**Ordering Disorder: An Outline**

To organize the tremendous volume of field notes, information, and interviews, this work is presented in two parts. Part one focuses on Geneva and looks at the ‘culture’ of UNHCR: its history, geography, policies, and priorities. Part two moves to one location expressive of these priorities and practices. It examines the ways in which UNHCR applies its policies developed in Geneva to conditions of human displacement outside of
Europe, specifically in the Horn of Africa. The case of Somali refugees in Kenya constitutes the focus of the study, though the geo-politics of the larger region are, I will argue, critical to understanding the cultural politics inside and outside the camps.

Chapter one introduces the object of inquiry: the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, its historical and political antecedents, and its mandate. It sets the stage for chapter two, a sketch of UNHCR’s institutional culture and an analysis of the contradictory notions of ‘culture’ it embodies. Chapter three traces historical constructions of gender and ‘race’ within a framework of ‘UN humanism’. Its focus is gender policy, and two specific UNHCR projects affecting women employees and refugees are examined within this context.

In chapter four, the geo-politics of the post-Cold War landscape are explored in the context of international law pertaining to refugees, human rights, and immigration. International responses increasingly attempt to deal with displacement through containment. A politics of distance suggests that refugees are best assisted ‘over there’ rather than ‘over here’; borders are fortified and gate-keeping is a major concern for most industrialized countries, particularly in Western Europe, where refugees from Eastern Europe are proximate. Emerging approaches to managing displacement on a global scale in the 1990s are elaborated.

In part two, the location and scale of analysis shift. UNHCR ‘culture’, policy, and personnel procedures are translated to a postcolonial, post-Cold War landscape in the Horn of Africa. Moving from Europe to Africa, an historical geography of geo-politics and economic influence in the Horn is sketched in chapter five. I argue that discrimination against and containment of Somalis has its roots in the drawing of colonial borders and in
subsequent Cold War alliances, both of which were shaped by a pan-Somali nationalism. I also contend that money crosses borders more easily than bodies do; humanitarian aid moves to crisis locations more quickly than displaced people move from these locations, giving rise to a ‘transnational geo-politics of mobility.’ This is especially evident in the case of displaced Somalis to whom aid is channelled in remote desert areas where refugee camps have been established. Chapter five sets up a detailed examination of UNHCR’s applications of humanitarian assistance in the camps.

Chapter six, entitled "‘F’ is for Field," presents the layout, rationale, and operations of the refugee camps. The very design of the camps centres on the security of staff rather than refugee needs or accessibility. How this defines the daily routines of refugee women in three camps is discussed in the context of disciplinary and discursive productions of power. Chapter seven addresses ‘the microphysics of power’ — everyday practices which produce desired behaviours in colonial and post-colonial subjects. Refuges and displaced people are individuals who “are always in the position of simultaneously undergoing and exercising power.” In refugee camps power is exercised through both coercion and discipline. Kenyan police guard the camps (one is never sure who is being protected from whom) while the ‘humanitarian international’ literally organizes the field: building camps in a grid style; generating systems to meet refugees’ basic needs in an

42 Timothy Mitchell, 1991, op. cit.; Michel Foucault, Discipline & Punish: The Birth of the Prison, (New York: Vintage Books, 1977), pp. 81-82; Donna Haraway, 1991, op. cit. I agree with Foucault when he says, “rather than worry about the central spirit, I believe we must attempt to study the myriad of bodies which are constituted as peripheral subjects as a result of the effects of power” (p. 98); however, exploring the domain and discourse of the ‘central spirit’, in the case the language of human rights and international law, informs the production and distribution of bodies. Foucault maintained that the very idea of power-as-right serves to conceal the fact of domination and all the effects of domination. Thus, a study of an institution both in the context of human rights and as a site of techniques and instruments 'on the ground' is potentially potent.

43 Michel Foucault, 1977, op. cit. p. 98.
orderly way; and checking refugee cards to ensure a match between family size and their
given rations. "To establish political authority over a population, there are two modes, one
of suppression and one of tutoring."45 In the camps both techniques are deployed.

Refugees are officially required to live in the camps, though not all of them do. “Never
mind the field, or Crossing Borders” is the title of chapter eight which alludes to some of
the experiences of Somali refugees who have avoided the destiny of the camps. It looks at
the ways Somalians have engaged in various unofficial livelihoods: as entrepreneurs,
gentrifiers, and nomads in search of improved status elsewhere. While difficult to trace,
the paths they have taken point to more than simply resistance to the confines of camp life.
Class position, economic means, and other variables suggest different patterns and
possibilities of mobility. Some refugees negotiate the structures and arrangements of the
camp, trading in identity documents and keeping one foot in the camps and the other in the
local Kenyan market. Others take up residence in Kenya’s two largest cities, ironically
displacing segments of the local population through gentrification. All of these
arrangements point to a micropolitics of mobility shaped by a more global geo-politics of
mobility. Evidence that the camps are porous, temporary cities whose assigned inhabitants
defy spatial containment and isolation is abundant.

In the final chapter, the idea of camps as a temporary solution to human displacement is
assessed. I pose the question, “at what point does a camp cease to be an acceptable
solution?” In a climate of fiscal restraint and prevailing antipathy toward refugees in the
industrialized countries of the global North, camps are one strategy of keeping
displacement at bay. I argue that the politics of ‘over there’ combined with the technologies
of control in the camps signal a shift from a humanist notion of humanitarianism based on

principles of universal rights and equality among nations to *neo-humanism* and a regime of international assistance which serves to deepen the divide between the West and the Rest. In the absence of the Cold War, the dismantling of the welfare state and the use of neo-colonial methods of managing displacement constitute a historically contingent geo-politics of mobility.

Laws, human rights instruments, and policies developed to manage involuntary migration have profound political and material implications for displaced subjects. At the finest scale of forced migration — that of individual refugee lives — questions about the operations of the international humanitarian regime have the utmost urgency and relevance. My study examines the relationships between theory, policies, and the material outcomes of this regime.

In shifting scales and sites of analysis, I present a multifarious human geography of displacement. The discrepant and sometimes contradictory findings of my research project emerge from this approach. The stories told and arguments made, however, do not produce a coherent whole. Rather, they speak to the ironic, dynamic, and sometimes surreal dystopia of refugee camps.

Humanist holism is the essential fiction of ethnography.... We would do well to remember Jean-Paul Dumont's declamation that "nothing seems more fictitious... than the classic monograph in which a human group is drawn and quartered along the traditional categories of social, economic, religious, and other so-called organizations, and everything holds together."46

The work presented below does not read as a single, continuous narrative; to construct such a text would be fictional. As West African novelist Chinua Achebe maintains,

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drawing from W.B. Yeats, things fall apart, the centre cannot hold. What follows is a series of spatialized sketches — political, cultural, and economic — which examine UNHCR and its modes of managing migration in the Horn of Africa.

PART ONE

Part one provides a background sketch of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, the geo-political context from which the office emerged after World War II, and the post-Cold War environment in which it now operates. On a finer scale, it examines the internal organization of UNHCR by analyzing some current trends, tensions, and policies which shape its direction. In presenting a critical analysis of the legal, historical, and theoretical foundations of UNHCR, part one sets the stage for the case study presented in part two.
Chapter One
The Formation of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees

Once geographers accept that space is not a backdrop to political and social action but is, instead, a product of such action, the role of law becomes central to the analysis of space.48

Winner of the Nobel Peace Prize on two occasions, in 1954 and 1981, UNHCR has a considerable international presence based on its historic role of responding to crises of human displacement. This chapter traces briefly the historical geography and geo-political antecedents of the international refugee regime as it emerged after World War II. It provides both a context for the inquiry into UNHCR operations which follows and a basis for a critique of these operations. Refugees in this century emerged from events associated with the Cold War, as did the Office of UNHCR which was granted an initial mandate to assist refugees in Europe generated during W.W.II. Precursor organizations to UNHCR had emerged as early as 1921 as a response to involuntary migrants created after the Bolshevik Revolution.49

In articles 1, 55, and 56 of the United Nations Charter, a framework for the provision of political and legal protection to refugees, displaced persons, and other vulnerable groups is outlined. UNHCR is one of the international organizations charged with this responsibility.50 Formally established after World War II in Europe, the Office of the UNHCR was a response to the many displaced and stateless people who required legal protection and material assistance. It replaced the International Refugee Organization (IRO) which had been established immediately after the war. The Office of UNHCR was to

complement international law protecting refugees, namely the 1951 Convention relating to the Status of Refugees.

Despite the fact that 125 states were party to the Convention in 1995, it remains both explicitly and implicitly Eurocentric. From its conception, the Convention clearly demarcated geographical and historical limits. It was designed to apply to refugees in Europe displaced by events that occurred prior to 1951. The Convention is characterized by its Eurocentric focus and strategic conceptualization. The Convention definition of refugee is spatially coded as European. Substantively, its emphasis on persecution based on civil and political status as grounds for refugee status expresses the particular ideological debates of post-war European politics, particularly the perceived threats of Communism and another Holocaust. In emphasizing civil and political rights, the Convention had the effect of minimizing the importance of socio-economic human rights. "Unlike the victims of civil and political oppression, ... persons denied even such basic rights as food, health care, or education are excluded from the international refugee regime (unless that deprivation stems from civil or political status.)" These features of the Convention, its European geographical focus and emphasis on civil and political rights, have generated an uneven geography of refugee asylum which, today, is the source of contentious debate.

The Convention mandate includes anyone who

... as a result of events occurring before 1 January 1951 and owing to well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion, is outside the country of his (sic) nationality and is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to avail himself of the protection of that country; or who, not having a nationality and being outside the country of his former habitual residence as a result of such events, is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to return to it.

52 Ibid., p. 8.
The definition implicitly promulgated a hierarchy of rights, privileging political and civil rights of protection from *persecution* over economic, cultural, and social rights and scales of violence broader than individual persecution.\(^{54}\) The definition was also an expression of a particular geo-politics. "The strategic dimension of the definition comes from successful efforts of Western states to give priority in protection matters to persons whose flight was motivated by pro-Western political values."\(^{55}\) The Convention refugee definition was based on an ideologically divided world, grounded in relational identities of East and West. The 1951 Convention was designed to facilitate the sharing of the European refugee burden:

Notwithstanding the vigorous objections of several delegates from developing countries faced with responsibility for their own refugee populations, the Eurocentric goal of the Western states was achieved by limiting the scope of mandatory international protection under the Convention to refugees whose flight was prompted by a pre-1951 event within Europe. While states might opt to extend protection to refugees from other parts of the world, the definition adopted was intended to distribute the European refugee burden without any binding obligation to reciprocate by way of the establishment of rights for, or the provision of assistance to, non-European refugees.\(^{56}\)

Assistance to non-European refugees was optional. Solutions to the displacement of Europeans after World War II were the focus of the Convention.

Complementing this emerging state-based regime of international law, the role of UNHCR is outlined legally in UNHCR’s Statute. The Statute defines UNHCR’s mandate as one of protecting refugees, as defined by the Convention, and of seeking permanent solutions for refugees in cooperation with governments through their voluntary repatriation or

\(^{54}\) Fifteen years later, in 1966, two legally-binding human rights instruments were created to protect, on the one hand, civil and political rights, and on the other, economic, social, and cultural rights. The International Covenant on Civil and Political rights most closely expresses the emphasis of the Convention. It ensures respect for citizens regardless of language, religion, sex, political opinion, etc. as well as "the right to liberty of movement and freedom"; *The State of the World’s Refugees: The Challenge of Protection*, (Toronto: Penguin, 1993), p. 164. The latter instrument, the Covenant on Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights include provisions which are more applicable to the so-called developing world than to Western countries, such as the right to food, shelter, and basic medical and educational services. While the first covenant applies to individuals, the second refers to particular groups of people.


assimilation within new national communities. As well, “the work of the High Commissioner shall be of an entirely non-political character....” In contrast to the Convention, the Statute emphasizes that the work of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees will “relate as a rule, to groups and categories of refugees,” not individuals. From the outset then, UNHCR faced the practical difficulty of a definition of refugee based on individual determination, yet the Statute outlined responsibilities for ‘groups and categories of refugees’. This disjuncture has been identified by international legal scholars, one of whom notes the increasing slippage between UNHCR and state responsibilities:

The disjuncture between the obligations of States and the institutional responsibilities of UNHCR is broadest and most clearly apparent in respect of refugees, other than those with a well-founded fear of persecution or falling within regional arrangements.

(It) was during this period (the early 1980s) that States’ reservations as to a general widening of the ‘refugee definition’ began to confirm the resulting disjuncture between the functional responsibilities of UNHCR and the legal obligations of States.

The vehicle used to bridge the discrepancy between the Statute and the Convention mandates was the ‘good offices’ of UNHCR, first employed in assisting Chinese people fleeing to Hong Kong in 1957 and then made applicable to all potential situations of displacement not envisaged at the time the original mandate was established. UNHCR’s ‘good offices’ were created by Resolution 1673 (XVI) of the UN General Assembly on 18 December 1961. The resolution provided a basis for action which aimed to be flexible, responsive, and meaningful in emerging refugee situations, and allowed the High Commissioner to define groups as *prima facie* refugees without normal determinations.

procedures. Prima facie refugees referred to a new category of displaced person which was subordinate to the Convention definition and more likely applicable to crises outside of Europe.

Historian Louise Holborn describes the deployment of UNHCR’s ‘good offices’ in Africa as a just-in-time measure qualified by three observations: (1) the good offices would provide only material assistance; legal protection was not seen to be required; (2) refugees on this continent were considered too numerous, dispersed, and poor to make individual assessments necessary for Convention refugee designation; (3) Europeans considered it too difficult to establish a well-founded fear of persecution in Africa, compared to Europe. Many of these qualifications are, of course, Eurocentric and Orientalist constructions of African people and point to the hierarchy of cultures and continents at the time. The drawback of the ‘good offices’ provision of material assistance is that it can only occur where and for as long as governments invite UNHCR to assist. As well, because of the poverty of many African countries, material needs have been provided to refugees, arguably at the expense of legal status and protection. This institutional framework speaks from and to a period when African states were beginning to advocate for and gain independence. It created the basis for a hierarchy of refugee definitions later in the century. The Convention amplified the legitimacy of asylum from persecution related to Nazism and Communism:

[T]he definition of the term ‘refugee’... was based on the assumption of a divided world.... The problem of refugees could not be considered in the abstract, but on the contrary, must be considered in light of historical facts. In laying down the definition of the term ‘refugee’, account had hitherto always been taken of the fact that the refugees involved had always been from a certain part of the world; thus, such a

64 Louise Holborn, 1975, op. cit., p. 837.
The Convention definition was never intended, despite claims to the contrary, to be universal in character. In making the definition of ‘refugee’ geographically exclusive, it underplayed violence and material deprivation related to colonialism and imperialism, including affected populations only with the discretionary, ad hoc efforts of UNHCR’s good offices.

The 1967 Protocol relating to the Status of Refugees amended the 1951 Convention. While it rescinded the spatial and temporal restrictions of the Convention by lifting the Europe-based, pre-1951 stipulations, it merely created equal access for all member nations to a legal instrument that remained substantively Eurocentric in focus. Emphasis on the abrogation of individual civil and political rights, based on the outcomes of the Second World War, remains central to the Convention definition of refugee that is employed today. Technically, the 1967 Protocol made the definition geographically inclusive, yet the imagined geo-political landscape on which the basic premises of asylum were founded remained geographically exclusive and Eurocentric.

Increasingly, a smaller and smaller proportion of refugees meet the formal Eurocentric post-World War II requirements. The legacy of this discrepancy between Convention and ‘other’ refugees is a distinctly unequal system of refugee protection and assistance. Hannah Arendt’s warns that universal rights fall prey to such divides and that protection is imperiled in the absence of a nation-state: “The danger is that a global, universally

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interrelated civilization may produce barbarians from its own midst by forcing millions of people into conditions which, despite all appearances, are the conditions of savages.”

Arendt, writing during the aftermath of the Second World War, maintains that the rights of citizens as nationals are far more important that those accorded as human rights on a global scale precisely because they are both applicable and enforceable. The Convention definition is increasingly irrelevant to the majority of refugees today who face violence on a broader scale and for different reasons than those of post-war Europe. For no legal reason, political and civil rights have been underscored at the expense of economic, social, and cultural rights: “those impacted by national calamities, weak economies, civil unrest, war and even generalized failure to adhere to basic standards of human rights are not, therefore, entitled to refugee status on that basis alone.”

The definition continues to emphasize the importance of civil and political rights based on “fear of persecution”, a concept based on ideological divisions of East and West in Europe, far more than the material, social, and political conditions in other world regions.

In Africa, the perceived inadequacy of this pair of legal instruments resulted in the drafting of a legally-binding regional policy by the Organization for African Unity (OAU). The 1969 OAU Convention Governing the Specific Aspects of Refugee Problems in Africa not only broadened but also reformulated the definition of refugee. It included the 1951 Convention definition, but added the provision that

the term refugee shall also apply to every person who, owing to external aggression, occupation, foreign domination or events seriously disturbing public order in either part or the whole of his (sic) country or origin or nationality, is compelled to leave his place of habitual residence in order to seek refuge in another place outside his country of origin or nationality (Article 1.2).

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68 Ibid., p. 93.
The OAU definition thus incorporated generalized violence associated with colonialism and other kinds of aggression, including flight resulting from the serious disruption of public order "in either part or the whole" in one's country of origin, as grounds for seeking asylum.69 James Hathaway explains the significance of this codification in the OAU Convention; his inherently geographical analysis is worth citing at length:

This... represents a departure from past practice in which it was generally assumed that a person compelled to flight should make reasonable efforts to seek protection within a safe part of her own country (if one exists) before looking for refuge abroad. There are at least three reasons why this shift is contextually sensible. First, issues of distance or the unavailability of escape routes may foreclose travel to a safe region of the refugee's own state. Underdeveloped infrastructure and inadequate personal financial resources may reinforce the choice of a more easily reachable foreign destination. Second, the political instability of many developing states may mean that what is a "safe" region today may be dangerous tomorrow. Finally, the artificiality of the colonially imposed boundaries in Africa has frequently meant that kinship and other natural ties stretch across national frontiers. Hence, persons in danger may see the natural safe haven to be with family or members of their own ethnic group in an adjacent state.70

The OAU definition translated the core meaning of refugee status to the economic and geopolitical realities of the 'Third World'. The definition also recognized in law the concept of group disenfranchisement and the legitimacy of flight in situations of generalized danger, not limited to individual persecution.

In 1984, the Cartagena Declaration on Refugees was adopted by ten Latin American states. Written to address the forced migration of people fleeing generalized violence and oppression in Central America, it too represents a regional approach to recognize and improve upon the inadequacy of the Convention definition. The definition derived from the Cartagena Declaration goes further than that of the Convention to include claims based on internal conflicts and massive violations of human rights, and the idea of group designation. It does not extend as far as the OAU Convention, however, to protect people fleeing disturbances of public order which affects only one part of a given country. While

69 Ibid., p. 18.
70 Ibid., p. 18-19; emphasis added.
the OAU Convention is legally binding, the Cartagena Declaration — on which the Organization of American States (OAS) definition is based — is not.\textsuperscript{71}

The establishment of regional instruments points to an uneven geography of refugee definitions in international law. The Convention and Protocol definition speaks to the experience and prevailing conflict in Europe after W.W.II. The OAU Convention broke new ground by extending refugee status to groups affected by less discriminate violence and public disorder in Africa. While not legally binding on member states, the Cartagena Declaration addressed the distinct regional politics and related human displacement in Central America. On a more modest scale, the Council of Europe has also extended the definition to include \textit{de facto} refugees, that is “persons who either have not been formally recognized as Convention refugees (although they meet the Convention’s criteria) or who are ‘unable or unwilling for ... other valid reasons to return to their countries of origin’.”\textsuperscript{72} The 1951 Convention and 1967 Protocol, together with these regional instruments, constitute the major bases of refugee protection in international law.\textsuperscript{73} Nonetheless, a sizeable class of refugees remains outside the scope of this legal codification. While most of these refugees are recognized as having legitimate protection needs, legal scholars have generated considerable debate over whether this international practice of granting protection has become part of customary international law or is simply an institutional practice of UNHCR which is not binding on states. The politics and funding of humanitarian activities provides the most compelling evidence that protection and assistance afforded those who fall outside the scope of international law is institutional and not part of

\textsuperscript{71} As international law, the OAU Convention is legally binding and applicable to all signatories states. The OAS definition is based on the Cartegena Declaration, which like the UN Declaration of Human Rights, is not binding. The ten states which signed the Cartegena declaration in 1984 basically agreed to a definition of refugee similar to that enacted by the OAU, though not quite as comprehensive in terms of protection.

\textsuperscript{72} Ibid., p. 21.

\textsuperscript{73} The Convention on the Rights of the Child, the Convention against Torture, as well as the Declaration of Human Rights and the two international covenants are also relevant instruments.
customary law. “Developing states have conditioned their willingness to protect humanitarian refugees on the agreement of the international community to underwrite the costs of temporary asylum and to relocate the refugees to states of permanent resettlement.”74 The current refugee crisis in Central Africa provides a clear example: the Zairian Government will not tolerate Rwandan refugees unless the UNHCR and its ‘First World’ donors are willing to pay for their support.75

To illustrate the regional geography of refugee determination in Africa, it is useful to distinguish between de jure and de facto status, and between prima facie and mandate refugees.76 There is no definitive application of these terms. They depend on the laws of individual countries, which countries are signatories to what conventions, and the policies of host government towards refugees. De jure refugees are those who are defined as refugees in law, either at national or international levels. National laws vary enormously: in some cases, countries may have no definition of refugees; in others, definitions may be wider than those outlined in the Convention. If there is no national legislation, but a country is party to the 1951 Convention and the 1969 OAU Convention, as in the case of Kenya, refugees in the camps — designated as prima facie — are de jure because they are recognized on the basis of the 1969 OAU Convention which is international law. De facto refugees are those “who are unable or unwilling to obtain recognition of Convention status, or who are unable or unwilling for valid reasons to return to their country of origin.”77 The term technically refers to people who have some kind of need for protection but do not strictly meet the eligibility criteria. De facto status can usually be withdrawn because it has no legal significance.

76 Convention refugees, as noted, are those defined in law under the 1951 Convention and 1967 Protocol.
77 The source of this information is an e-mail transcript in response to request for clarification of UNHCR’s interpretation of these terms in Kenya, June 12, 1996.
Mandate refugees are arguably *de jure*. They have their legal background in the UNHCR Statute which is not a legally binding instrument, but many legal experts argue that international customary law has developed in such a way that gives UNHCR mandate refugees legal significance. Others are of the opinion that this is not so, and that mandate refugees are *de facto*. In the case of *de facto* refugees, status is subject to change and interpretation at levels of national and international law. *Prima facie* refugees are defined in law by the OAU Convention, but may not be recognized as such by individual host states, such as Kenya, despite being signatories to this Convention.

UNHCR is often called upon to determine status as well as to protect and assist refugees who do not meet Convention or regional definitions. In Kenya, a few are designated ‘mandate’ refugees; most are *prima facie* refugees. Mandate refugees are assessed on an individual basis and granted temporary protection by UNHCR. *Prima facie* designation is usually made on a group basis. Individual assessment is the norm for determining Convention status. Outside of the provisions of some international refugee laws but not others, these displaced people can claim some support from UNHCR in terms of material assistance and legal protection. Somali refugees in Kenya have *prima facie* status because they are in an African country that is a signatory to the OAU Convention. As a ‘regional’ class of refugees, however, they have no special claim to protection under the laws of the 1951 Convention and 1967 Protocol.

As the preceding discussion suggests, there are several instruments, laws, statutes and bodies applicable to displaced persons in an international context. It is important to

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*Mandate refugees do not meet the eligibility criteria of the Convention definition, yet are designed as in need of protection by UNHCR on the basis of its mandate, as outlined in the Statute. Some countries may recognize their protection needs and designate their status as mandate refugees; some may not.*
distinguish between humanitarian law, refugee law, and human rights instruments. Humanitarian law consists of the four Geneva Conventions of 1949 and the two Additional Protocols of 1977 and is applicable to civilians within their own country during conflict. While it codifies standards of conduct during war which includes protection for internally displaced people, "this provision applies only to persons displaced because of armed conflict. It does not cover inter-communal violence or other cases of internal disturbances that create internal displacement."\(^79\) The existing law is currently under review precisely because it speaks to conditions of internal displacement in another time and place, rather than to the bases of conflict in African locations. International refugee law is comprised mainly of the 1951 Convention, the 1967 Protocol, and the 1969 OAU Convention in Africa. It institutionalizes and enforces the UN Declaration for Human Rights which declares that a person has "the right to leave", and return, to her or his own country, and "the right to asylum."\(^80\) Humanitarian and refugee law draw a clear distinction between the rights and entitlements of IDPs and refugees. These categories are, however, being challenged because they exclude significant numbers of internally displaced people, on the one hand, and because only marginal differences in time and space may distinguish a IDP from a refugee, on the other. Some policy-makers maintain that refugees and IDPs are often qualitatively part of the same group, divided artificially by a political border.\(^81\) The question of whether IDPs should be included or excluded from an operational definition of refugee remains an issue of contentious debate.

\(^80\) Articles 13.2 and 14 of the UN Declaration outline these rights. Article 15 states that (1) Everyone has the right to a nationality; (2) No one shall be arbitrarily deprived of his [sic] nationality nor denied the right to change his [sic] nationality. See Anex II.3 in UNHCR's The State of the World's Refugees: The Challenge of Protection, Penguin, New York, 1993.
\(^81\) Interview, Senior Manager, UNHCR, Geneva, October 18, 1994.
Stating Human Displacement

Themes of containment and exclusion with respect to migration are not new. Aristide Zolberg organizes economic and political migrations in three epochs: the first spanning the 16th to 18th centuries in Europe; the debut of the second corresponding to the industrial, democratic, and demographic revolutions of the late 18th century; and the last emerging in the final decades of the 19th century. "The emergence of powerful European states in the 15th century inaugurated a distinctive era in the history of human migrations: the conquest by the Europeans of the New World."\(^{82}\) While the French Huguenots are generally considered the first group of modern refugees, legal formulations of refugee status are a product of more recent Western history. "Prior to this century there was little concern about the precise definition of a refugee, since most of those who chose not to move to the 'New World' were readily received by rulers in Europe and elsewhere.... This freedom of international movement accorded to persons broadly defined as refugees was adversely impacted by the adoption of instrumentalist immigration policies in Western states during the early twentieth century."\(^{83}\) This final period, Zolberg notes, has been marked by the development of a gap between a small number of wealthy, technologically advanced, and militarily powerful countries and a larger number of poorer states. As well, improved communication has rendered information about world conditions more available, and human mobility has increased through various technological advances. According to Zolberg, this enhanced mobility has given rise to perceived threats of invasion by the multitudes of poor strangers, providing a strong impetus for exclusionary measures and strict border controls.\(^{84}\)


\(^{84}\) This impetus resonates with Canadian immigration law which only became exclusionary in the late 1870s and early 1880s.
Despite regional conventions and international protocols to protect refugees, the nation-state is the main unit of international law and the primary site of enforcement in relation to regional and international agreements, and civilian protection. Louise Holborn notes that “states are the subjects of international law; individuals are only its objects.”\(^8^5\) At end of the Cold War and of European empire-building, a complex balkanization of some states has emerged, on the one hand, and the formalization of borders and regional blocs, on the other. The porosity of borders is historically and geographically contingent: “[t]he reaction among the receiving nations of the North... has been... to attempt to contain or ‘regionalize’ refugee problems; that is, to keep those in need of protection and solutions with their regions of origin.”\(^8^6\)

The modern institution of asylum is rooted in political geographies of displaced populations during W.W.II. Denial of asylum and strategies to contain forced migrants were part and parcel of this institution. Camps were the rule, not the exception, for dislocated groups in Europe: “if the Nazis put a person in a concentration camp and if he [sic] made a successful escape, say, to Holland, the Dutch would put him in an internment camp... under the pretext of national security.”\(^8^7\) Arendt unwittingly anticipates the unequal outcomes of refugee law.

The stateless person, without right to residence and without the right to work, had of course to transgress the law.... neither physical safety — being fed by some state or private welfare agency — nor freedom of opinion changes in the least their [refugees] fundamental situation of rightlessness.\(^8^8\)

Arendt’s clairvoyant reasoning points to some of the problems and dilemmas of humanitarian assistance in the international refugee regime today. Most refugees in camps

\(^8^7\) Hannah Arendt, 1958, op. cit., p. 288.
\(^8^8\) Ibid., p. 286 & 296.
today are prohibited from seeking employment or establishing livelihoods independent of the international assistance provided in camps.

The mobility of refugees and displaced persons remains constrained by borders of the nation-state. Asylum requires, by definition, an international border crossing. If successful in their crossing, refugees become wards of an international refugee regime which relies on the endorsement and financial support of individual nation-states. The primacy of the nation-state, both as the subject of international law and as a context for citizenship, has as its corollary the imagined global community — the perceived relationship among states and peoples of the world.

**UNHCR Then & Now**

Twenty years ago, the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees consisted of some lawyers in Geneva revising and amending the international conventions concerning refugees. Now it is a global rapid-reaction force capable of putting fifty thousand tents into an airfield anywhere within twenty-four hours, or feeding a million refugees in Zaire.... The United Nations has become the West's mercy mission to the flotsam of failed states left behind by the ebb tide of empire.89 — Michael Ignatieff

Pastoral nomadism does not fit easily into either the traditional model of refugee resettlement or the traditional UNHCR definition of its responsibility.90 — Netherlands Development Corporation

The UNHCR operates today on a scale unimaginable at its conception. Its initial temporary mandate of three years, between 1951-54, has been extended repeatedly at five year intervals since that time. It is responsible for more refugees today than any other period since World War II.91 Annual expenditures of US$8 million in 1970 increased to almost US$1,167 million in 1994, signalling intense growth, much of which has occurred in the

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91 Estimates of the number of refugees after the war range from 1.5 to 2 million; Holborn, 1975, op. cit.; UNHCR, *The State of the World's Refugees: The Challenge of Protection*, (Toronto: Penguin, 1993). In 1970 the figure was 2.5 million; in 1983 the number was 11 million; in 1993, 18.2 refugees were counted.
Expressive of its Western origins and the colonial and superpower relations of power implied, the organization maintains an impressive global reach. As of October 1994, UNHCR employed over five thousand people both at its headquarters in Geneva and overseas in over one hundred countries. The advent of post-Cold War displacement and the responses it has generated have contributed to this transformation. The Office of United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees continues to manage crises using the protocol and practices of the international refugee regime as it emerged after the Second World War. Western governments demonstrate unprecedented generosity in funding UNHCR's efforts which occur on a more massive scale than ever before. Today, however, more than 90% of refugees live in host countries in the developing world.

Increasingly, UNHCR is faced with economic and political pressures to re-think its terms of reference and operational mandate. The US Government, in particular, has wielded its power as the UN's largest funder by refusing to pay its UN bills. It maintains that the UN is inefficient and over budget. Other commentators note the UN does not support US interests as fully as it might. The distinctive geo-political landscape of the post-Cold War period combined with the rise of fiscal restraint as the mainstay of economic policy in many industrialized nations signal shifts both within UNHCR as an organization and within the internationally funded realm of humanitarian assistance. While the Gulf War reminds governments that international conflict has not disappeared in absence of superpower rivalry, the vast majority of refugee-producing conflicts today are civil, or internal, in nature.

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Chapter 2
The Culture of UNHCR

Culture never stands alone but always participates in a conflictual economy acting out the tension between sameness and difference, comparison and differentiation, unity and diversity, cohesion and dispersion, containment and subversion.\(^\text{95}\) — Robert Young

The whole of public policy... is an attempt to reconstitute a culture, a social system, an economic order, that have in fact reached their end, reached their limits of viability. And then I sit here and look at this double inevitability: that this imperial, exporting and divided order is ending, and that all its residual social forces, all its political formations, will fight to the end to reconstruct it, to re-establish it, moving deeper all the time through crisis after crisis in an impossible attempt to regain a familiar world. So then a double inevitability: that they will fail, and that they will try nothing else.\(^\text{96}\) — Raymond Williams

Raymond Williams’ lament of public policy and its “double inevitability” foreshadows some of the dilemmas that United Nations organizations face some five decades after their establishment. The universal subject and international human rights were part of the discourse of humanism in the context of the aftermath of the Second World War. Still the basis of much international law and UN institutional practice almost fifty years later, the universal has always been qualified by the particular: the importance of distinctive cultures, national integrity and individuality, and most recently concern for gender equity. The particularities are, I argue, adding up to the extent that UNHCR has been forced to recognize and change its approaches to managing migration. In part, UNHCR has initiated changes which recognize formerly ignored issues of gender and cultural politics. The pervasive and, in some ways, persuasive discourse of human rights and universal standards of humanitarian assistance in the face of displacement remain, however, deeply


embedded in the structures, policy, and practice of the organization today. The challenge of equitable representation among member states of UNHCR is complicated by the size of donor government contributions, recognition of major refugee-receiving states in Third World countries, and the underrepresentation of women in professional ranks. There are no easy answers to the dilemmas posed by these questions of representation and accountability at UNHCR, nor to the major changes in the geo-political landscape and international context within which the agency operates.

This chapter focuses on UNHCR in a contemporary context and examines the organization’s donor base, recruitment practices, mandate, and clientele that effectively constitute its institutional ‘culture’. The term ‘culture’ has a broad range of meanings which warrant a brief discussion for the purpose of clarification and argument. Raymond Williams has argued that the word ‘culture’ is one of the two or three most complicated words in the English language. A recent discussion of transnationalism defines culture as:

all human practice, understood to include both thought and action, since all human action is symbolically structured and representation is part and parcel of all human behavior. However, in treating culture, the ‘empowering, authoritative dimensions’ must be specified. Hence our analytical framework must address the link between ‘culture and the relations of power and domination.’

Drawing from this definition and others, ‘culture’ refers to several things: a shared set of beliefs, practices, and language; the politics that these cultural relations invoke; and more specifically, a discourse which organizes large bureaucracies or firms and in which shared values and contested positions are embedded. This range of meanings embraces at least

two different orders of the term 'culture', one evidently more macro and anthropological in perspective; the other more sociological and finer in scale. ‘Cultural politics’, the idea that “whole ways of life ranked hierarchically in relations of domination and subordination,” retains a plural definition of ‘culture’ that focuses on both abstract ‘maps of meaning’ as well as concrete social practices and spaces.99 In using cultural politics as a frame of reference, the institutional culture of UNHCR — an agency comprised of staff from a variety of cultural backgrounds operating across borders and the cultures they demarcate—is examined. The cultural politics of the organization are complemented in later chapters by analyses of power among different cultural groups, including UNHCR staff, refugees, and locals ‘in the field.’

The Oxford English Dictionary cites 1764 as the date when the term ‘cultured’ was first used to denote ‘refined’, or civilized, a meaning that implies both cultural differences and the superiority of some cultural practices over others.100 Akhil Gupta and James Ferguson argue that space is a central organizing principle for cultural difference and that spaces of dominant and subordinate cultures have always been interconnected; “cultural and social change becomes not a matter of cultural contact... but one of rethinking difference through connection.”101 Thus, the mix of cultures in a refugee camp operating under the aegis of UNHCR suggests more than a venue of potentially conflicting interests; difference is articulated through cultural relations of power.102 Gupta and Ferguson avoid establishing a dialogical relationship between distinct, pre-given cultures, arguing instead that “the process of the production of cultural difference... occurs in continuous, connected space,

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100 Robert Young, 1995, op. cit., p. 31.
traversed by economic and political relations of inequality."\textsuperscript{103} A more concise description of the politics in a Kenyan refugee camp would be difficult to find.

Returning to the idea of organizational culture, John Law traces the ‘culture’ of scientists employed in a British laboratory and the processes of ‘ordering’ their workplace. His definition of culture is concerned with the ways in which people organize their work. Law uses the verb ‘ordering’ rather than the noun ‘order’ to accentuate its dynamic and multiple possibilities. He understands the relational ordering of power as “forms of strategic arranging that are intentional but do not necessarily have a subject.”\textsuperscript{104} While cultures, organizations, and philosophies are expressions of particular orderings, they are not permanent nor inexorable. Complementing his genealogical borrowings from Foucault, Law analyzes ‘orderings’ as particular configurations of history and geography, noting that they produce material effects, both positive and negative:

... it seems to me that we're balancing on a knife-edge. We want to order... But we don't want to do violence in our own ordering.\textsuperscript{105}

Law's words offer a depiction of the dilemmas UNHCR staff face in responding to human displacement and disorder, and a direction for refugee research as well. The organization has the mandate, the money, and the managers to organize refugees in emergency situations. Yet, it also risks invoking neo-colonial and/or coercive measures in an effort to achieve order. This then is the rationale for making UNHCR the object of my inquiry, rather than the refugees it assists. Following the lead of a number of other scholars, I aim to examine critically the ‘culture’, practices, and policies of one powerful humanitarian

\textsuperscript{103} Ibíd., p. 16.
\textsuperscript{105} Ibíd., p. 8.
organization, rather than focus simply on the people it serves. Refugee studies often focus on the specificity of places of asylum or particular refugee populations rather than on the central sites and relations of economic and political power, namely the well-endowed international agencies that organize refugees and camp operations.

This chapter focuses on the contemporary organizational culture of UNHCR. Geneva, the home of UNHCR headquarters, is examined in terms of its symbolic and strategic location. The city represents the metropole of UNHCR’s activities on a global scale. The chapter introduces the organization through interviews with senior managers based in Geneva. The research conducted provides the basis for a preliminary analysis of organizational pressures, dilemmas, and directions at UNHCR. The interviews identify current issues of strategic direction and leadership in a climate of rationalization and restructuring at UNHCR. Culture, as a concept, has always encompassed antagonism between culture as a universal and as a basis of difference. UNHCR embodies this and other tensions which shape its policies and fuel change within this dynamic organization.

**UNHCR Headquarters, Geneva: Core Control**

International humanitarian operations have a financial and administrative centre in Switzerland, a country which hosts a significant number of governmental and non-governmental organizations. Geneva, in particular, is both an international banking capital and a seat of power for the United Nations and other international agencies whose mandates include humanitarian and development assistance (see figure 2.1). An entire

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Figure 2.1
Geneva's Humanitarian City Centre

Legend
Canada Permanent mission to Office of UN
ICRC International Federation of the Red Cross
ILO International Labour Organization
Kenya Country Mission
Palais Office of United Nations
WCC World Council of Churches
WHO World Health Organization
WIPO World Intellectual Property Organization
WTO World Trade Organization

Not to Scale
neighbourhood of these organizations exists northwest of the commercial city centre in which the United Nations *Palais des Nations* forms a humanitarian city centre. The concentration of international organizations forms a kind of hub which serves as the financial district and administrative centre of humanitarian assistance. Various countries have permanent missions to the Office of the United Nations, most of which vie for a space close to the *Palais*. The World Health Organization, the International Labour Organization, the World Trade Organization, the World Intellectual Property Organization, and the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees — among others — share the neighbourhood with bilateral missions from individual governments and a range of international non-governmental organizations. The proximity and sociability of these organizations to one another, and especially to the Office of the UN, is critical to the politics of humanitarian funding which take place in Geneva.107 As an international financial centre for private and public capital, the city has both symbolic and practical value. It is the place of emerging news, expert views, and key meetings which determine the direction of financial decisions.

Among the humanitarian organizations in Geneva is the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), perhaps the most reputable non-political organization, whose location in Switzerland is deliberate. Until recently, only Swiss citizens could work for this humanitarian organization, visiting political prisoners and entering into discussions with governments holding such prisoners in efforts to secure their release. Since 1815, Switzerland has remained a politically neutral state (see figures 2.2 and 2.3). It does not belong to the European Union or NATO, nor has it signed many of the human rights instruments and international legal conventions which would oblige it to act according to external international standards. It is no accident that the Geneva Conventions of 1949,

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Figure 2.2
Gate to Geneva’s Old City: a reputation of neutrality

Figure 2.3
Geneva: City of Refuge
outlining minimum standards for the treatment of civilians in countries at war, were written in Switzerland.

Banking in Switzerland is also predicated on this reputation of neutrality. Geneva has a locational advantage over Luxembourg — where banking space is cheaper — because of Swiss neutrality. Bankers in Geneva are ‘discreet’. They carry two business cards: one with the standard name of the employee and bank, full telephone number, and address; the other with only the banker’s name and a local phone number without any country or area codes. The first is for people who aren’t crossing borders or have no need to be concerned about such crossings; the second is for investors and people who want to bring money into Switzerland without being ‘marked’. A French citizen, for example, can bring only 50,000 French francs (approximately US $10,000) into Switzerland after which s/he will be taxed. There is no information on the second card through which to trace the location of the person named. Bankers answer the phone at their offices with a familiar salutation, but no identifying information. Most banks offer named accounts and numbered accounts which, like the business cards, are used for different reasons, but both can be coded for increased privacy and can be ‘declared’ or ‘undeclared’ for tax purposes. All accounts are protected by the banking secrecy act, la loi Fédéral sur les Banques et les Caisses d’Epargne. Bank business cards and accounts disguise locations and identities in order to render the Swiss border fluid and friendly to incoming capital. For investors, borders are blurred by discreet business practices and Swiss laws which protect privacy: capital is welcome.

The situation for bodies wanting to locate in Switzerland is considerably more restricted. While Switzerland is one of only ten UN member states to announce annual resettlement quotas for refugees — quotas which are shrinking in the major resettlement countries — asylum-seekers who arrive at the airport in Geneva are required to stay in an ‘international
zone’ where they are not considered to have entered the country until officials assess the validity of their claims and accept or deport them accordingly. While Switzerland accepts comparatively few refugees for permanent resettlement, it offers temporary protection to some and provisional status to others in refugee-like circumstances through ‘special action programs’. In 1994, a bill was passed which gives the Swiss Federal Office for Refugees (FOR) the right to detain, for up to twelve months, any asylum seeker over the age of fifteen who does not have proof of identity or legal residence, regardless of whether she or he has committed a crime.\textsuperscript{108} A complex hierarchy of designations and entitlements exists, and these are available to some non-Swiss residents, though work permits and permission for long-term stays are difficult to obtain.

Two of Switzerland’s specialties — banking and humanitarianism — have recently come face to face, creating somewhat of a crisis in both sectors. The reputation of Switzerland as a place of refuge and humanitarian assistance has been tarnished by fresh evidence that, prior to and during the Holocaust, Jewish money was welcomed but Jewish refugees were not. Heirs of the Holocaust are demanding access to Swiss bank accounts set up by their ancestors, some of whom were refused entry into Switzerland and unable to escape the Nazi executions. “Swiss banks had insisted heirs produce account numbers and death certificates, which were never issued by the Nazis.”\textsuperscript{109} The Swiss Bankers Association has responded to pressure from Holocaust survivors and the World Jewish Congress by agreeing to set up a central registry to track dormant accounts. Archives in Eastern Europe, which were inaccessible during the Cold War, have come under recent scrutiny and point to transfers of money prior to World War II, including gold looted by the Nazis. Recent findings suggest that at least 10,000 Jewish refugees were turned away from the Swiss

\begin{itemize}
    \item \textsuperscript{109} Lila Sarick, “Swiss banks to assist Holocaust heirs”, \textit{The Globe & Mail}, December 30, 1995.
\end{itemize}
border; records of their exclusion were destroyed by the Swiss government just after the war. Fifty years later, the Swiss government has formally apologized for destroying the records of refugee applications.

Geneva is the ‘global locale’ and seat of power for many humanitarian and UN organizations, including UNHCR. In 1995, UNHCR headquarters moved house. The new UNHCR office complex, just across the street from the Palais, was not yet complete during my visit of October 1994. What was finished looked stunningly similar to a postmodern panopticon (see figures 2.4-2.6). An atrium and skylight provide abundant natural light to the building’s huge foyer. From the balconies and senior offices along one wall of the foyer, the inside of individual offices which are lit can be viewed through small windows. My surveillance reading of this design is perhaps an expression of how I view UNHCR practices outside Geneva, in ‘the field’. Some UNHCR staff, however, do concur with my impressions of the building; one employee called it "the prison." The building is a potent metaphor for the monitoring role that staff at headquarters exercise over branch and field offices. The registration field kits used to count and number refugees in camps and border sites are stored at UNHCR in Geneva.

The interviews cited in this chapter were initially sought over the telephone through former contacts with the organization and cold calls to people in posts relevant to my research. After meeting with particular staff members in Geneva, I was referred to others. Some more senior managers were approachable if referred by another UNHCR staff with whom they were familiar. On the whole, the staff I requested to interview were both willing to meet, despite busy schedules, and forthcoming in their answers to my questions. I found

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110 Staff names are not included and gendered pronouns have been reversed in some cases to protect confidentiality. While actual dates are noted, more than one interview was conducted on most days.
Figure 2.4
UNHCR Headquarters, Geneva
Architect: Carlo Stephen (Swiss)
Figure 2.5
New UNHCR HQ: Panoptic Postmodern

Figure 2.6
New UNHCR HQ: Surveillance from the Atrium?
their accessibility and candour rather exceptional, given my ‘outsider’ positioning as a researcher with academic affiliation.

I had visited UNHCR headquarters on three previous occasions: once as a prospective employee, and twice as a short-term staff person assigned to work in Somalia. In terms of recruitment, very little happens in the field without headquarters first authorizing it. Employment prospects, donor contributions, and logistics are discussed here; briefing and training when a job is approved occur here; and in a crunch, the UNHCR staff working in the field call Geneva for advice. On a weekly basis, Geneva receives situation reports (sitreps) from all its field offices and regional desks at headquarters are among the most senior positions in management. I could not seriously study UNHCR operations in the Horn of Africa without interviewing senior managers in Geneva and analyzing the briefs and discussion papers coming out of their offices. To ensure fair representation and correct interpretation, I have subsequently contacted several interviewees in both Geneva and Kenya — by letter, e-mail, telephone — for clarification.

Trends and targets at UNHCR: Preliminary Findings

Despite pressure on most UN agencies to downsize and become ‘leaner’, more efficient organizations, UNHCR has recently experienced rapid growth in both its budget and its staff size. “Since 1989, UNHCR has grown dramatically: expenditures have tripled; staff has doubled.... We are working for the first time in war zones.”111 Expenditures at UNHCR since 1992 have exceeded US$1 billion.112 This increase can be partially explained by a shift in UNHCR’s role in international relations. Much of this change is linked to emerging trends in managing large-scale human displacement since the end of the

111 Interview, UNHCR senior manager, October 27, 1994.
Cold War, the politics of which are analyzed in detail in the following chapter. "While the old rules of the game have evidently changed, the international community has found it extremely difficult to articulate a coherent set of principles and practices which are geared to contemporary circumstances."\textsuperscript{113} So has UNHCR. Considerable evidence points to an institutional culture in transition, one which is shaped by a donor environment of efficient management. In her opening statement to the Executive Committee (EXCOM) in October 1993, the High Commissioner for Refugees, Sadako Ogata, outlined one direction UNHCR is taking,

My ultimate goal is to create an institutional culture where effective performance, efficiency and accountability are prized objectives.... It is imperative that a new culture permeate the office, beginning with senior managers themselves. The aim of this intensive managerial training is to develop an institutional culture, with shared values on effective performance, efficient management and accountability.... Without the establishment of a shared management culture, all else will fail.\textsuperscript{114}

Such corporatism is nothing particularly new to large organizations, such as the World Bank and IMF, or private firms affected by policies of fiscal restraint that exact maximum efficiency and minimum management.\textsuperscript{115} At UNHCR, however, this discourse has only recently made its debut. Senior staff members in different sections of UNHCR headquarters noted that in terms of financial operations and attitudes towards women in the workplace, the organization was five years behind UNDP (the UN Development Program) and roughly twenty years behind CIDA.\textsuperscript{116}

"UNHCR in some ways is an overgrown NGO: loads of commitment, tremendous passion, an absolute abhorrence of doing anything in an organized, planned fashion. The adrenaline only comes when the crisis

\textsuperscript{116} Interviews, senior manager, October 27, 1994; senior manager, October 25, 1994.
comes.... If we are to survive, if we are to keep coping, we must put in place the proper management systems... and we must learn to plan. It used to be the theory you couldn't plan; these are crises, you can't plan for crises. The fact of the matter is that if crises are your business, you can plan.”\footnote{117}

This attitude toward emergency assistance is a far cry from the accepted wisdom within humanitarian circles even ten years ago. Barbara Harrell-Bond wrote then that “humanitarian assistance is governed by compassion and compassion has its own mode of reasoning.... Western notions of compassion tend to be inherently ethnocentric, paternalist, and non-professional.”\footnote{118} Today, UNHCR in Geneva is under pressure to change its role from that of provider in an international welfare supra-state to that of responsible corporate citizen accountable to its ‘clients’ and its budget. One senior manager made this point exceedingly clear:

“You know, we have two sets of clients. We have the donors who want us to do certain things, and we have the refugees. Now there are some people who think we only have the refugees....”\footnote{119}

“You have to know your clients in any business before you prepare services for them. And I felt the most palatable way of getting this issue (of gender analysis) across in this particular organization which is very emergency macho... oriented was to present it as an efficiency issue.”\footnote{120}

These insights suggest UNHCR’s strategic direction from a clumsy, if well-intentioned, refugee assistance agency to a more fiscally responsive, efficient, community-based and gender-sensitive organization. National governments are increasingly being taken to task by taxpayers and citizen lobby groups to rationalize their spending habits. On an

\footnote{117 Interview, UNHCR senior manager, October 27, 1994, Geneva.}
\footnote{119 Interview, senior manager, October 27, 1994, Geneva. In a previous interview, another senior manager noted that UNHCR, on the whole, is not as clear as the above cited quotation would suggest, but rather “UNHCR has been unable to define who are its clients.... many new layers (of bureaucracy) are being created rather than clarifying or defining the problem” (interview, October 25, 1994).}
\footnote{120 Interview, UNHCR senior manager, October 25, 1994, Geneva.}
international scale, refugees and displaced persons are not, however, the same taxpayers who are funding UN agencies. There is little, if any, constituency overlap between those funding humanitarian relief and those receiving: between the donors and the refugees. In this respect, UNHCR is the transfer point of considerable power: it solicits funds and provides humanitarian assistance and protection, but with little direct accountability to refugees and other recipients.

On one front, UNHCR is taking on a more corporate image, reflected in a management ethos called for by donors who, like the financiers of the World Bank and IMF, want increased 'transparency' and measurable, performance-based outcomes. TIME magazine has mimicked this thinking, noting that “by UN standards of bloat, the agency dealing with the displaced is relatively lean, perhaps even gaunt.”121 The article goes on to outline the hardship UNHCR employees face: separation from “family and spouse”, long hours on Sunday nights, and high divorce rates because of these. UNHCR donors, meanwhile, are also advocating the ‘streamlining’ of UN agencies so that duplication of mandates and services among different programs is avoided. At the same time, UN agencies try to maintain their functions and promote their role within the so-called ‘UN family’: “one thing about the UN family is that there is a lot of territoriality in it and there is a lot of publicity on the part of some UN agencies....”122 Under the leadership of its high commissioner, UNHCR has carved out a specialty niche for itself, declaring its indispensability based on its unique role.

On another front, UNHCR has been influenced by lobbying, and its own experience of emergencies to the extent that programming places a much stronger emphasis on particular

121 Time, October 23, 1995, p. 41.
122 Interview, UNHCR senior manager, October 25, 1994, Geneva.
refugee needs. Collaborative approaches to refugee camp management, accommodation of cultural specificity, and assessment of refugee needs and of the specificity of places in which UNHCR operates, all point to changes in the organization. UNHCR policies such as People-Oriented Planning (POP) and Guidelines for the Protection of Refugee Women were created in the early 1990s as a means of improving programming in this area. These changes have not simply been generated from within UNHCR; advocacy by the International NGO Working Group for Refugee Women (IRGRW) and CIDA — which funded and provided an appropriate staff secondment for the position of Senior Coordinator of Women Refugees at UNHCR — have inspired many of these initiatives. Pressure from donor countries like Canada combined with advocacy by non-governmental coalitions, such as the IRGRW, have challenged gender-blind approaches to providing refugee assistance.

Many senior staff at UNHCR have a large stake in the status quo, having spent most of their professional careers within the agency and knowing well the UNHCR manual, protocol, and rewards.124

“Senior managers here, with a few exceptions, have twenty-five years tenure on average with UNHCR; they have grown up inside the organization; they tend to be suspicious of people like me.... they know they need it (change).”

One senior manager in Geneva explained how she had started with UNHCR in 1972 as a math teacher with an NGO in Africa. Now, she pointed out, her office is just across the

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123 This is a euphemism for gender training which aims not to alienate staff nor to marginalize gender issues within the organization. Critics of UNHCR’s POP say it is ‘too basic’, but “you have to show people how to crawl before you can get them to walk or run” (Interview, UNHCR senior manager, October 25, 1994, Geneva). It should be noted that refugee consultation and planning as well as cultural sensitivity were also part of the UNHCR handbook in the early 1980s; see Barbara Harrell-Bond, 1986, op. cit.
124 Considered a bible of sorts to UNHCR staff, it is used as the ‘rule book’, particularly with respect to personnel matters.
125 Interview, UNHCR senior manager, October 27, 1994, Geneva.
corridor from that of the High Commissioner. This same manager spoke favorably of a senior UNHCR financial manager who was hired from "outside", saying that he had "modern ideas." His comment in response to this was, "yes, they’re modern in relation to this place." Obvious tensions between those trained in business and management practices and those whose experience and commitment to refugees qualify them for senior positions at UNHCR emerged from the interviews. Compassionate approaches to refugee assistance are being restructured to meet new accountability measures. Strategic direction, however, is not limited to financial matters.

Organizational image and leadership are largely the responsibility of the organization’s head. The High Commissioner for Refugees since 1991, Dr. Sadako Ogata, was re-elected in 1993 for another term. A diplomat by experience, Ogata is an interesting expression of UNHCR culture in her own right.126 She is 68 years old, has a doctorate in political science from the University of California at Berkeley and married relatively late in life to a influential banker in international financial circles. Her grandfather was Foreign Minister in Japan, her father a career diplomat. When asked about the leadership style and approach of the High Commissioner, staff made the following remarks:

"The High Commissioner is a tremendous person, but a diplomat and an academic, not a manager."

“One has to remember that she comes from a very special and highly connected family, and I mean the fact that her father pushed for her to get a strong education (in the U.S.), she didn't marry until she was well into her 30s... her family was the empire's son and stuff... she comes from a different world."

126 Before her position as High Commissioner, Dr. Ogata was Dean of the Faculty of Foreign Studies at Sophia University in Tokyo. She has also been Japan’s delegate to the U.N. General Assembly, Japan’s representative to the U.N. Commission on Human Rights. See Lawyers Committee for Human Rights, The UNHCR at 40: Refugee Protection at the Crossroads, (New York: Lawyers Committee for Human Rights, 1991). p. 16.
"Japan, a donor which has grown of course... the lady sitting down here just across the hall in the corner, Mrs. Ogata, is Japanese; and they could hardly have a Japanese High Commissioner and not be a donor... which is a point we never let them forget."

(Has Japan's contribution increased since Mme Ogata's arrival?)

"Yes, because of her arrival, yes."

"I'm a partisan of Mrs. Ogata's."

In an interview with one of these same staff at UNHCR, she noted that the stereotype of 'feminists' as man-hating radicals is still pervasive and that she as well as many other women are reluctant to associate themselves with this term "for fear of undermining our credibility, particularly in the conservative and multicultural climate of a UN organisation." She noted that the High Commissioner would not use the word feminist to describe her own position. Another senior manager also commented on the High Commissioner's approach to issues of 'women' and feminism.

"True, women managers have very different notions (of management), but don't fall into the trap of thinking that because the High Commissioner is a woman that she's particularly promoting women; she isn't.... My personal belief is that she is a feminist, but that her definition of what feminism is.... obviously in Japan there has been some strange...as there has in many countries.... But... because of her own rather special background, she's not very aware of the need to promote others...."

Generation, class privilege, cultural and diplomatic background no doubt shape the High Commissioner's, and others', position on feminism and issues of equality for women. More neutral, less overtly political approaches to women's well-being are couched within frameworks of gender equality, fair female representation among professional staff, and increased participation of refugee women in decision-making at the camp level. Officially, UNHCR aims to integrate women into the mainstream through gradual change. On a broad

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127 E-mail transcript interview, UNHCR senior manager Geneva, Oct. 20, 1995.
scale, this attitude expresses the prevailing liberalism of UNHCR culture. The High Commissioner, however, treats gender-specific policies aimed at promoting women's position as a temporary project. Lumped together with 'children' and 'the environment', short-term strategic staff positions have been created to address each of these areas as issues, rather than as relations of power embedded in historically-specific ways within the organization.128

Financing displacement management: new directions

The High Commissioner has been politically astute in her efforts to distinguish UNHCR from other UN agencies. She is the first high commissioner to have been invited to address the World Bank as a guest speaker, and is well-connected in both financial and diplomatic circles. At a time of organizational and financial ‘streamlining’ within the so-called ‘UN family’, UNHCR has managed to set itself apart: first, based on its unique mandate of protection (in both legal and humanitarian contexts); and second, because of its distinctive voluntary funding. In contrast to most other UN agencies which are funded by a kind of intergovernmental tax base created by ‘assessing contributions’ to be paid by each donor government, UNHCR receives only a tiny operational budget from this general fund. Instead, it actively solicits donations for specific projects in particular places at appropriate times. Donors contribute voluntarily and on an ad hoc, project-by-project, emergency-by-emergency basis.

When I expressed the opinion that voluntary funding would be more problematic than established revenues, particularly in planning, a senior manager corrected my erroneous assumption:

128 Interview, UNHCR senior manager October 25, 1994, Geneva.
“Voluntary funding in the UN is not a bad thing....look at the UN itself which is funded through assessed contributions, and look at how much difficulty they’re having getting their money.... do an analysis: the organizations that are doing better in the UN at the moment are those that are funded through voluntary funding. I think maybe it sets up a dynamic between the deliverers and the providers, which is a better one. You know, if I say to you I’m entitled — you owe me — because you’re a member of this club, you know, at some stage you’re going to say ‘what do I get back?’ Whereas if it’s on a negotiated basis, and there’s always that healthy dynamic of understanding that this is your funder.”

He pointed out that UNHCR and UNICEF are doing well through their voluntary contributions, while UN agencies dependent on assessed contributions — much the same as taxes — are less popular with donor states. This manager did argue that donors should make a ‘commitment in principle’; that is to say, they should state what their contributions for a given year will be in advance.

“We start the year with a commitment from our donors to less than one tenth of what we are going to spend in that year... and I’ve said this is nonsense. You can’t work like that. You’ve got to be able to project further in advance; you’ve got to plan; you’ve got to put contracts into place. I mean, there are savings that will come out of this because you can do better stockpiling etc., if you have a commitment in principle.... That will make a big difference.”

Increased efficiency, according to this manager, requires strategic planning; such planning requires accurate revenue projections. He went on to say that more vision and less bean-counting is needed at UNHCR. Detail tends to obscure the bigger picture and hinder effective operations.

“We’re far too much into the details and not enough into doing analysis, variance analysis, comparative analyses that give us some idea of whether we’re on track, off track, etc. And for an organization like this, you’re never in a static environment.... To spend a vast amount of time on detail ... is a waste of time.”

“That’s my frustration. I think we have a strategic direction: protection, prevention, durable solutions; we go straight from there to budget. One quick leap, and I say hey, whoa, we need some kind of strategic plan... a projection for 5 years... Something that says look we’ve taken a look, and on the basis of various knowledge and understanding and links with a strategic analysis... we have a sense that these are the hot
spots in the world and these situations that we currently have are likely to continue in a certain fashion. We have to be able to make some kind of projections... we can't just say look, we don't know... You have to project...."

He notes that in business detailed operation strategies are used to plan resource allocations two to three years in advance, and that UNHCR needs to do the same. One obstacle at UNHCR is the separation of budget and planning systems, a division that effectively precludes his influence on the way planning is done. A project staff working for UNHCR concurs:

"The UNHCR status quo lacks any management milieu; there is no delegation, too much hierarchy, it's so centralized — in essence, there's no control.... PCBS (program control and budget systems) parallels in structure exactly the divisions of the regional bureaus for surveillance purposes; PCBS doesn't trust the bureaus."129

This UNHCR staff member suggested Rosabeth Moss Kanter’s work as a useful analysis of organizational change and innovation of the kind he would like to see at UNHCR. Moss Kanter writes that:

[One] style of thought is anti-change-oriented and prevents innovation. I call it ‘segmentalism’ because it is concerned with compartmentalizing actions, events, and problems and keeping each piece isolated from the others.... Companies with segmentalist cultures are likely to have segmented structures: a large number of compartments walled off from one another — department from department, level above from level below, field office from headquarters, labor from management, or men from women.130

The project manager contends that UNHCR 'countermanages', a point complemented later by a senior UNHCR employee in the Kenyan camps who argued that the organization does too much 'micro-management.'131 The first of the managers introduced in this section also concurs and argues that UNHCR’s public image must convey an attitude of bullish

129 Interview, UNHCR Project staff, November 1994.
131 Interview, UNHCR staff member, Dadaab, Kenya, December 4, 1994.
confidence and strategic planning. This approach is an expression of the ‘common sense’ economics which also affect individual donor states. He put it this way:

"Our major donors are always going to be governments... (they) are going through their own economic difficulties, so they better be sure that we really do know what we want to achieve and that we have prioritized it... only when you get to that point do you move into the details of a budget... our systems at the moment require us to plan at a level of detail that is just ridiculous. There is very little value added to it." (emphasis in original)

The fiscal restraint and cutbacks affecting the public sector in many donor countries are translated to a more global level as funders prescribe conditions of accountability to UNHCR. UNHCR has two categories of expenditures: those funded through the annual general program budget and those funded by the specific program budget:

“Increasingly we find our donors want to give us money that is earmarked (for the specific program budget)... that’s a trend; governments more and more have to explain to their taxpayers what’s happening to their money (general things are not so popular; concrete things are).... Five years ago general programs comprised the majority of UNHCR’s budget; it is now less than a third. EXCOM reviews only the general programs.... You have a lot of people in this organization who wouldn't know a taxpayer if they fell over one."\(^{132}\)

This senior manager's sense of accountability to donors is clear evidence of a trend towards more fiscal considerations of funding humanitarian activities. I posed the question of whether the earmarking of funds could be viewed as donor hegemony. He commented that

“In a very subtle way, you've picked up what is an interesting point, that by earmarking and giving us funds only to operate in specific areas, they are shaping our strategic direction — yes. And is that valid?... At the end of the day, you shouldn't have a situation where a refugee over here doesn't get dealt with because this is not a sexy program. Someone in Yugoslavia does get dealt with because it's not a traditional refugee program, but these people would become bona fide refugees under the Convention if they

\(^{132}\) The Executive Committee of UNHCR is comprised of forty-six member states, most of which are either important asylum countries or major donors to UNHCR programs.
were to find themselves in Germany, Austria, etc. and therefore Europe is very happy to fund and keep funding.” (emphasis added)

The financial contributions of UNHCR's donors — the handful of governments that fund refugee assistance and protection activities — are critical to the agency's continued operations in the field. Yet two trends can be identified from the ethnographic and documentary evidence presented so far: donor demands on management at UNHCR affect financial operations by demanding increased efficiency and accountability. They also influence the delivery of humanitarian activities through the funding of specified projects in particular places. This latter trend risks replacing multilateralism — the very *raison d'être* of the UN system — with bilateralism.

By funding what donor governments demand, UNHCR risks introducing qualifying the provision of humanitarian assistance on the basis that it is politically popular. Such assistance is not based on explicit and consensual humanitarian principles, but on the politics of what might be thought of as *neo-humanism*. Neo-humanism, I argue, describes a political theory and sensibility whereby human well-being and development are qualified by the visibility and political popularity of people’s need. In cases where the popularity of certain needs is lacking, the economic viability of meeting needs may become an argument for not taking action. Human need becomes politicized, and donors create relations of charity rather than protection of international human rights. While voluntary contributions may be the most popular way of raising humanitarian funds, UNHCR requires agreed upon principles of assistance and a certain degree of autonomy from donors to ensure that an uneven, *ad hoc* pattern of delivering humanitarian aid — divorced from actual needs — does not emerge.
Players and Personae in UNHCR Culture

In introducing this research project, I outlined two main interests: the institutional culture of UNHCR, and refugee camp operations, including the management as well as politics among UNHCR and other cultural groups in the field. During my visit to UNHCR headquarters in Geneva, the first interest prevailed in terms of the questions I posed, but it also proved to be a cue and spontaneous source of personal theories from the staff I encountered. Several people offered typologies, continuums, and categorical descriptions of UNHCR employees which appear to have been clearly mapped out in their own minds prior to my interviews. These insights — somewhat incongruous ‘snapshots’ of professional approaches — are presented below and then woven through my own preliminary analysis.

"UNHCR is not a visioning organization; it's a 'now' organization.... limitations are emphasized more than possibilities."133

"There are three levels, or layers, of culture for humanitarian intervention.

1. beneficiaries (or refugees, target population) — the displacement of people into camps creates a unique situation and a new culture...
2. humanitarian and aid agencies ...
3. donor community — this culture is tied to the second... humanitarian concerns have never been devoid of political concerns...."134

While these comments say something of UNHCR as an agency, other staff shed light on the personalities that animate this large organization. Another staff member made the following lengthy but somewhat revealing analysis of UNHCR culture. Note that English is not her first language.

133 UNHCR staff member, Dadaab, Kenya, November 21, 1994.
"What I was saying is, you see, we have two extremes. One is very much hierarchical — bureaucrats who believe that everything has to follow rules and regulations, and they want to go through that process... by the book, and it matters; there are people of that type. They speak to people of the appropriate level first through vertically defined lines of power. And there are other people who don't care, who want to have a ... horizontal relationship with whoever there are, you know; they want to have direct access.

The latter type of leaders tend to create a group of people who can perform the job. So, then you informally form a team where you have like-minded people whom you know and with whom you have confidence, and you ask them to go [on mission to the field]. And that will completely destroy the hierarchy. These people have proven ability based on performance.

Among these people [the performers], there are a set of people who are extremely dynamic, let's say even hyper-dynamic, who want things to happen and they don't care about, uh, the cost or benefit of what happens. They are there; they believe our mandate is to prevent these people (refugees, internally displaced persons) from dying, so they want to do it in any way....

Those people, they do not necessarily look at the pros and cons of what happens... Their objective is to send the refugees lists in if it's a repatriation program, so let's send it... their objective is to create a camp, let's create it. Their objective is to distribute the food; let's distribute it. You see, my feeling is in UNHCR we need that kind of people who are like the generals in the aggression mode. You know when you are really pushing, then you need that kind of commander. But, this isn't military war.

And then, more and more, resources are getting scarce. Our budget is increasing, but the funds are [not].... We are living in the CNN revolution... wherever it focuses, we get the money, wherever it moves; the moment the camera moves or we are out of focus... we don't get the funds."

The primacy of (tele)vision in raising funds for humanitarian emergencies is fascinating. UNHCR devotes significant staff and resources into its public information activities for this very reason.\textsuperscript{135} The global reach of refugee and other crises vis-à-vis optic technologies operates in two directions. She continues,

"One year ago, two years ago, Somalia was a big deal. We had no problems; everyone was giving money to Somalia.... And then the events in Bosnia completely overshadowed Somalia... now events in Rwanda have completely overshadowed Bosnia.

\textsuperscript{135} UNHCR, 1993, op. cit.
In the West, you know, there is this trend, you know, [the] Margaret Thatcher and Ronald Reagan trend, you don't want to pay tax. The government who taxes least is the best government. No increase in taxes.... In that situation, the funds [here] are getting scarce. No matter how affluent the world is becoming, the funds are getting scarce. And we use that fund, do we have a right or privilege to pursue that? When you have this macho-ist [sic] style of management, the chances of misuse of funds — waste of funds — misuse is the wrong word, wastage of funds, are high.”

This staff member was careful to point out that her description was not a typology but a continuum, “a wide spectrum” of people within the organization; she also noted a “hierarchy of nationalities.” When asked who would be the best person to work with UNHCR today, she responded that the ideal person would talk about “effective ways of work, rather than the pleasure of helping people.”

A tension exists between the hierarchical ‘do-it-by-the-book’ dictum and the ‘let’s-get-the-job-done’ people at UNHCR. When I mentioned possible continuities between camp practices and colonial administrations to one manager, he nodded and noted the Deputy High Commissioner’s style as an example. He spoke also of the current UNHCR Representative (the most senior field posting) in Kenya as old school: As I was to meet this Rep within the next month, he offered advice:

“How make sure he knows that you know he is the most important person.... His ego is bit out of... he's old style.... Old style management, real concerned about status... but you have to learn to live with them. [The last Representative in Kenya] was a very different person.”

The last Rep(resentative) at Branch Office (BO) Nairobi in Kenya was a ‘performer’ — to employ the continuum described above. He was considered accessible and preferred direct access among professional staff. Many thought (and still think) he was effective.
The new Rep is more rule-conscious. He pays close attention to vertically-defined lines of
authority and is more 'correct' in his approach. The current Representative is addressed as
“Mr.”; the former Rep was usually called by his first name. These nuances in leadership
style illustrate how different personalities shape the structure and office cultures within
UNHCR. The new Rep is cautious with respect to the budget, and in my view, he was
chosen for the job because of this approach. Since his debut, several non-African UNHCR
staff members made me aware of what they considered an informal policy towards the
'Africanization' of the office. By this, they meant that there was a trend toward African
staff being hired to run UNHCR offices located in African countries — an approach many
support and of which others are critical. While I had not noticed this, it was true that the
top two managers in the Nairobi office were both Africans.

The politics of location within an international organization, such as UNHCR, are
important to this argument and to its operations.136 There is a case to be made that
Africans should oversee and execute refugee relief operations in Africa, if this can be
achieved without essentializing roles. While employees of the United Nations
technically give up their interests as nationals in their own country in order to serve
international humanitarian interests, this does not mean that all staff are equally well-
situated to work in all locations. Charges that ‘Africanization’ works against these
principles of universal service for human good regardless of nationality, ‘race’, and gender
operate in much the same way as conservatives criticize affirmative action because it
potentially undermines the merit of the best candidate. If UNHCR is to avoid reproducing

136 The term ‘politics of location’ was first coined in the 1980s by Adrienne Rich. She used the idea to
challenge racist and homophobic constructions of the word ‘woman’ through a series of essays. Caren
Kaplan traces the transformation of this term through processes of cultural translation and transformation:
“[a]t the present moment, it both functions as a marker of Western interest in other cultures and signals the
formation of diasporic identities.” This description applies to my use above. See C. Kaplan, “The
Politics of Location” in Scattered Hegemonies: Postmodernity and Transnational Feminist Practices, (eds.)
Eurocentric and potentially neo-colonial patterns of governance in non-European locations, however, hiring people with ample knowledge and experience of the people and places where humanitarian assistance is delivered demonstrates a certain political acumen. My concern is that the historically constituted hierarchical and quasi-military relations of power within the organization are not being challenged in this transition towards more African representation. By introducing senior managers of African nationalities, there is a potential and a capacity for changes in structure, operations, and direction. To the extent that staff uncritically accept existing UNHCR protocol and structure, this strategy risks reproducing the neo-colonial technologies of power, and accomplishing little more than a flawed European system staffed by Africans. This is not a question of either universal humanitarianism or essentialist Africanization. Rather, UNHCR is in a position to invoke a politics of location and to decide what variation will occur across space and how.

The chapter has outlined a number of the tensions, new directions, and changes occurring with UNHCR as an organization. Legacies of hierarchical authority structures and the mentality of compassion towards refugees within an international welfare state are being challenged from within the agency. Although rigid structure and hierarchy can impede effectiveness and ignore competency at junior ranks, these observations are not intended as idle criticism. Given the organization’s antecedents in the aftermath of war and its current status as an agency which assists refugees fleeing civil conflict in many cases, military structures are not so surprising. However, the example of most NGOs demonstrates that such a structure is not necessary to deliver humanitarian services. ‘Quasi-military’ is a designation used by a Dutch aid agency to describe UNHCR operations in Somalia. The host states, in which UNHCR locates and establishes camps, are responsible for maintaining law and order. One tension is clear: there is some antagonism between vertical

137 Netherlands Development Corporation, 1994, op. cit.
and more horizontal lines of authority, in terms of professional approach, within the organization.

Another important tension exists between the organization’s two sets of clients: government donors, who are increasingly calling for financial accountability and performance-based outcomes, and refugees, the agency’s traditional focus. The geography of this clientele is interesting: donors are generally located in the so-called ‘First World’ and refugees in the ‘Second’ and ‘Third Worlds’. The demands of both sets of clients are not always reconcilable and provide the basis for a politicized notion of need. Financial contributions are ‘tied’ to specific humanitarian projects in many cases, and this has increased donor hegemony at UNHCR.

Insofar as notions of ‘race’ have been replaced by concepts of ‘culture’, there remains a tension between culture as an expression of universal humanism and as the basis of difference. On the one hand, culture is singular and shared; on the other, cultures are plural and distinctive. The issue of the ‘Africanization’ of employees at UNHCR offices located in African countries raises questions of who should staff jobs in these places. While any kind of essentialism which dictates that only Africans are fit to work in Africa is both politically precarious and impractical given the current nationalities of staff, there is room for a politics of location that analyzes the relations of power UNHCR produces and is produced by. If increasing African staff in UNHCR offices situated in Africa might unsettle, change, and recover power and control where there are abuses and inequalities, this may well be a viable and important political strategy. However, to be effective such a strategy would have to address not only staff composition, but also the existing structures of power within the organization which are heirarchical, authoritative, and based in UNHCR’s metropole, Geneva.
Chapter 3

‘Race’, Gendered Culture, and United Nations Humanism

Feminism, for me, is the struggle for the equality of women. But this should not be understood as a struggle for realizing the equality of a definable empirical group with a common essence and identity, women, but rather as a struggle against the multiple forms in which the category ‘woman’ is constructed in subordination.138 — Chantal Mouffe

This chapter focuses on UNHCR policies and projects that are aimed at promoting gender analysis and equity. Following Chantal Mouffe’s concern with the constructions of ‘women’ in subordination, Doreen Indra has invoked a feminist critique of the ways that liberal democratic politics have contained women, particularly in the context of refugee studies. Indra makes “a plea for greater cross-fertilization between feminist social analysis and refugee studies.”139 My aim is to contribute to this cross-fertilization by grounding feminist analysis of UNCHR policy and of UNHCR operations in the camps.

The chapter begins by examining some of the ways in which the categories of ‘race’ and ‘woman’ have been constructed in subordination within a discourse of ‘UN humanism’. I note that historically racial equality preceded concerns for gender equality within the UN framework emerging after World War II. The advent of gender equity policies at UNHCR did not occur until the late 1980s. Since then a reasonably comprehensive set of policies and guidelines has been established. A cursory overview of UNHCR’s gender policy on paper is followed by two case studies of UNHCR projects aimed at promoting women in practice. The close readings of these two projects illustrate some of the contradictions and

The first addresses the gender and geographical implications of one recent UNHCR recruitment policy. The second introduces the Women Victims of Violence Project, an initiative to protect refugees from sexual violence which raises questions of gender policy and practice in UNHCR-sponsored refugee camps.

In development circles, feminists have long challenged many of the assumptions aid organizations make with respect to gender and the roles of women in development. Using postmodern theory, several feminists scholars have pointed out that the approaches of 'women' and 'gender' in development are predicated upon assumptions which subsume, segregate, and essentialize the locations of women. In some cases, development projects aim to treat gender as relational; women are considered partners in decision-making and are integrated fully into existing political, economic, and social structures. In others, women are cast as poor and vulnerable mothers with distinctive needs which must be recognized by humanitarian organizations. Women are explicitly included, but their agency is limited. Some projects are conceived by women for women and bypass the circuits of power and authority that the other two approaches rely upon. All represent what Mitu Hirshman calls "the be-all and the end-all of the humanist project: the improvement of the human condition." She does not simply dismiss these approaches because of their humanist assumptions, but aims to expose some of the problems these assumptions pose.

Somewhere between Chantal Mouffe's poststructuralist feminist politics and the essentialist concepts of the 'Third World Woman', that Chandra Mohanty criticizes are the feminist policy makers and practitioners whose job is to invoke positive change and to persuade

others of their projects. Given the sophisticated analysis and warranted criticism of ‘aid’ by feminist scholars and others, the delivery of emergency aid with a gender equity focus poses a seemingly insurmountable challenge. The discussion presented here raises these issues in the specific context of humanitarian assistance to refugees.

Siting the Social

I begin with a brief discussion of the gendered assumptions of public/private divides, drawing from humanist and poststructuralist viewpoints. While challenging the public/private dichotomy, I contend that what counts as ‘public’ and therefore as political is geographically and historically contingent. Assumptions that women belong to the private domain of the home have contributed to the depoliticization of their needs and their spatial separation from the public, or ‘social’ domain. “Distance... was to be the prime instrument used in isolating women not only from jobs but also from power and involvement in the body politic.” Nancy Fraser claims that subordination is constructed through contested discourses among various groups at the ‘site of the social’, or civic forum. Issues of ‘race’ and then gender were incorporated into UN discourse beginning in the middle part of this century, attesting to their location outside the ‘site of the social’ prior to that time. Fraser, who writes from an arguably post-humanist perspective, borrows the notion of the ‘social’ from Hannah Arendt’s humanist work. Fraser is careful to distinguish her use of the term from that of the original author.

Arendt and I both understand the social as a historically emergent societal space specific to modernity. And we both understand the emergence of the social as tending to undercut or blur an earlier, more distinct separation of public and private spheres. But she treats the emergence of the social as a fall or lapse, and

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she valorizes the earlier separation of public and private as a preferred state of affairs appropriate to “the human condition.” I, on the other hand, make no assumptions about the human condition; nor do I regret the passing of the private/public separation.... Arendt and I agree that one salient defining feature of the social is the emergence of heretofore “private” needs into public view. Arendt, however, treats this as a violation of the proper order of things: she assumes that needs are wholly natural and are forever doomed to be things of brute compulsion. Thus she supposes that needs can have no genuinely political dimension and that their emergence from the private sphere into the social spells the death of authentic politics.144

Fraser, writing three decades after Arendt, refuses the idea of “the human condition” and views the emergence of a needs discourse from the private to the social as a positive development. Fraser’s work is relevant here as a postmodern foil to humanism and its historical antecedents — in particular, the US Declaration of Independence and the French Declaration of the Rights of Man which emerged at the end of the eighteenth century.

In the section which follows, I trace one expression of humanist thinking within international politics. Within academic circles, humanism has a long history as a project which gives human agency and awareness a central place, and as a general critique of positivist, structuralist, and Marxist perspectives.145 In geography, humanist theory has played a major role in the development of the discipline and its debates. I recognize that many academics, geographers in particular, eschew the ‘vulgar’ strand of humanism broached here for “it is now widely accepted that autonomous, neutered and sovereign subject at its core was a fiction, implicated in an ideology of humanism which suppressed the multiple ways in which subjects were constructed in order to promote a white, masculine, bourgeois subject as the norm, from which others were to be seen as departures

or deviants.”*146* ‘UN humanism’ might be considered an ideological construct which is past its prime.

**'The Birth of the UN Family'**

The legal and organizational protocols of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees are an expression of the larger liberal discourse of UN humanism. This brief account of the ‘birth’ of UN humanism elucidates constructions of ‘race’ and gender within United Nations discourse. Robert Young chronicles debates over ‘race’ in the nineteenth century and suggests that ‘culture’ has replaced ‘race’ in twentieth century debates, but remains otherwise much the same: “Culture has always marked cultural difference by producing the other; it has always been comparative, and racism has always been an integral part of it.... Race has always been culturally constructed. Culture has always been racially constructed.”*147* Young documents arguments about racial difference and superiority between monogenists, who believe that all human beings belong to one ‘race’ because they are the creation of a divine god, and the polygenists, who maintain that there are distinct ‘races’ hierarchically positioned in relation to one another.*148* Throughout the nineteenth century, ‘whites’ — the interlocutors in these debates — were considered the superior race by the polygenists. Young briefly chronicles some of the intelligence tests of this period, including the size of the human cranium as an indicator of cleverness. In *Colonial Desire*, he concludes that “for two hundred years culture has carried within it an antagonism between culture as a universal and as cultural difference, forming a resistance

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*148* The word miscegenation first appeared in the Oxford English Dictionary in 1864, alluding to the polygenist position of distinct ‘races’ and the value of racial purity in contrast to ‘mixed race’; see Robert Young, 1995, op. cit.
to Western culture within Western culture itself."\textsuperscript{149} UNHCR embodies this antagonism and embraces both humanism's universal subject and the concept of cultural difference as a means of accommodating difference.

In 1948 the Universal Declaration of Human Rights was proclaimed, a declaration in which 'universal man' replaced 'international man' in a final amendment. René Cassin, who lobbied for this change, argued that "'universal' man is more easily extracted from the complications of history."\textsuperscript{150} He did not consider the ramifications of these "complications", namely the importance of cultural and political geographies among nation-states and implications of gender for 'universal man'. Before long, the abstract, 'race'-neutral, gender-blind concept of humanity soon encountered its own limitations. In 1950 and 1951, the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) published statements on the (scientific) nature of 'race' and racial differences. Donna Haraway spells out the connections between these statements and the construction of 'universal man' after the Second World War:

...the authority of the architects of the modern evolutionary syntheses was crucial to the birth of post-W.W.II universal man, biologically certified for equality and rights to full citizenship. Before W.W.II, versions of Darwinism, as well as other doctrines in evolutionary biology, had been deeply implicated in producing racist science as normal, authoritative practice. It was therefore not sufficient for social science, set across an ideological and disciplinary border from nature and natural science, to produce anti- or non-racist doctrines of human equality and environmental causation. The body itself had to be reinscribed, reauthorized, by the chief discipline historically empowered to produce the potent marks of race — Darwinian evolutionary biology. For this task, 'behavior' would be the mediating instrument.\textsuperscript{151}

\textsuperscript{149} Robert Young, 1995, op. cit., p. 54.
\textsuperscript{151} Donna Haraway, 1989, op. cit., p. 199.
Authorized by science, the ‘birth’ of a universal subject was timely. Poised between the victory over fascism and the horror of the Holocaust, the politically significant emergence of the ‘united family of man’ was legitimized by evolutionary biology and physical anthropology. Although differences among ethnic and cultural groups could not be denied, they were considered gradations among populations whereas human beings shared a single species status, that of homo sapiens:

From the biological standpoint, the species Homo sapiens is made up of a number of populations, each one of which differs from the others in the frequency of one or more genes. A race, from the biological standpoint, may therefore be defined as one of the group of populations constituting the species Homo sapiens.  

The rallying point for humanists was that the scientific differences among individuals of the same so-called ‘race’ were greater than those among different ‘races’, the corollary of which was the ‘birth of UN humanism.’ A notable critic of this construct at the time was Roland Barthes, whose essay, “The Great Family of Man,” describes a photo exhibit promulgating the “ambiguous myth of the human ‘community’, which serves as an alibi to a large part of our humanism.” Barthes goes on to take apart this unity myth in a passage worth citing in its entirety:

This myth functions in two stages: first the difference between human morphologies is asserted, exoticism is insistently stressed, the infinite variations of the species, the diversity in skins, skulls and customs are made manifest, the image of the Babel is complacently projected over that of the world. Then, from this pluralism, a type of unity is magically produced: man [sic] is born, works, laughs and dies everywhere in the same way; and if there still remains in these actions some ethnic peculiarity, at least one hints that there is underlying each one an identical ‘nature’, that their diversity is only formal and does not belie the existence of a common mould. Of course this means postulating a human essence, and here is God reintroduced into our Exhibition: the diversity of men proclaims his power, his richness; the unity of their gestures demonstrates his will.

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This unity was moralized and sentimentalized, argued Barthes, suppressing the differences and resulting injustices of history.

Science was also used as a key legitimation device in creating ‘UN humanism.’ Ironically, UN discourse often reinforced that which it attempted to criticize: arguing against the concept of separate ‘races’, the term ‘populations’ or ‘cultures’ came to mean much the same thing.\(^\text{155}\) Furthermore, this discourse was implicitly and explicitly gendered. The statements of the 1950s spoke of ‘universal brotherhood’, a language of exclusion and androcentrism. Haraway also points to the sexism of UN humanism, citing the ‘Man-the-Hunter’ image which was produced and institutionalized in part by scientific meetings such as the 1955 Pan-African Congress in physical anthropology held in Nairobi. Discussion of racial politics and of natural tendencies to cooperate was itself gendered, she argues: “Man the Hunter’s and UNESCO man’s unmarked gender were part of the solution to one kind of racism at the inherited cost of unexaminable, unintentional, and therefore particularly powerful, scientific sexism.”\(^\text{156}\) In addition to the displaced notion of difference ushered in by the UNESCO Statement on Race, the cost of this solution was a kind of scientific sexism.

The gendered dimension of these ‘race’ politics was perhaps less obvious to UN humanists than the exclusion of ‘Woman’ from the ranks of universal brotherhood. Women’s questions, issues, and actions inspired the UN Decade for Women between 1975 and 1985; the decade was punctuated by the 1985 UN Conference on Women in Nairobi. “The UN had to respond to the manifestations of the revolution in gender that is occurring all

\(^{156}\) Donna Haraway, 1989, op. cit., p. 201.
over the planet in very homogeneous, contradictory, and internally contentious ways.”

The 1995 World Conference on Women in Beijing and the NGO Forum held in Hairou, China mark another decade of UN humanism that has incorporated a gender analysis. Espousing a human rights approach, the Beijing and Hairou forums did accomplish a number of objectives. The concerns of women refugees, Tibetan exiles, and lesbians were heard and their human rights issues documented on a public stage. The conferences challenged assumptions of a ‘universal brotherhood’ at several levels.

Despite these gains, the implementation of UNHCR policies and projects aimed at promoting women in the 1990s remains problematic. The next section briefly outlines these policies, including some of the assumptions and attitudes which serve as obstacles to implementation in refugee camps.

**Dual/Duel Feminisms and Gendered Cultures at UNHCR**

[the question of women refugees]: “this should be an integral part of any management decision ever made... UNHCR is, like many bureaucracies... I mean all the big bosses are men... there is a very traditional very male-oriented thinking....”

Since the late 1980s, a number of different equity initiatives and gender analyses have been developed as part of UNHCR’s policy on refugee women. Drawing on the tenets of humanism and universality, most, but not all, draw from the paradigm of liberal feminism — emphasizing equality, integration, and ‘mainstreaming’. The underlying principles of policy include “the integration of the resources and needs of refugee women into all aspects of programming, rather than creating special women’s projects.”

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158 Interview, Consulate staff member, Permanent Mission of Canada to Office of the UN, Geneva, October 27, 1994.
“becoming a refugee affects men and women differently and ... effective programming must recognize these differences” in a culturally appropriate manner.\textsuperscript{160}

Such gender analyses remain intact as policy, but implementation and conflicting professional approaches introduce some serious dilemmas. If women are underrepresented within the organization, how can UNHCR increase their numbers? In the camps, are women in refugee situations equal partners in decision-making, or do they have ‘special’ needs which they cannot meet alone? Can women’s needs be addressed by assisting the entire refugee population in a camp, or are designated programs and services targeted for women required? While these questions simplify the issues at hand, they point to selected dilemmas which I will explore in the course of this chapter. In an effort to illustrate these dilemmas more fully, each is situated within the relevant UNHCR policy and theoretical literature. I begin with the example of UNHCR recruitment strategies aimed at improving the representation of women among staff. The last part of the chapter analyzes one initiative, the Women Victims of Violence project, which addresses gender-based violence in the camps. It is prefaced by a brief survey of the development literature pertaining to women and gender which provides a context for understanding UNHCR policies to promote women.

**Gender Policy at UNHCR**

Promoted by the office of the UNHCR Senior Coordinator for Women Refugees, the ‘People-Oriented Planning Process’, or POP as it is called, is a euphemistic title referring to gender analysis integrated with culturally-sensitive community planning.\textsuperscript{161} Both POP and

\textsuperscript{160} Ibid., p. 5.

the 'Guidelines on the Protection of Refugee Women' identify the physical spaces in which refugee women live as important for reasons of safety as well as to ensure equitable access to basic services and supplies. UNHCR recognizes that women refugees are often more vulnerable in camp situations because family protection and traditional authority structures break down and economic support is less available. Camp layout and location are acknowledged as important factors at a general level. Historical context, geo-political factors, and cultural differences are left for field workers to 'fill in' once placed in the refugee camps. The UNHCR guidelines and POP processes are, then, generic tools which, in theory, are universally applicable to all refugee situations. This liberal sensibility, which acknowledges but incorporates cultural diversity and local conditions into a planning framework, remains part of a Western-based system of knowledge. The POP framework advocates a three-step approach to camp planning: preparation of a refugee population profile to analyze context; analysis of previous and existing patterns of activities among refugees, such as the gender divisions of social and economic responsibilities; and a comparative analysis of what resources refugees controlled and used before they arrived and what they control and use in the current context. These analyses are to be applied to the organization of food distribution, physical layout of camps, and medical assistance for refugees. The POP framework has much in common with 'gender and development' approaches to planning. It is a tool for planning which emphasizes gender without naming it.

A more radical sensibility might mitigate the purported universality of this particular humanitarian approach with analyses of social, political, economic, and cultural locations where people have been displaced. UNHCR has taken steps in this direction by offering POP training to African women who are community workers and encouraging them to

‘interpret’ the planning framework within an appropriate cultural context. While this is a positive development, it nonetheless attests to a liberal idea of accommodating difference. A more radical approach might also recognize that, in practice, human rights do not have the same meaning in all places, nor do they include all groups nor have equal outcomes, despite the universal application of such rights in principle. The POP initiative does attempt to include the specific features of people and place, but conditions and relations such as intercultural politics, host government sentiments towards refugees, and the geo-politics giving rise to displacement cannot simply be added to such a framework.

Expressive of UN humanism, UNHCR policies pertaining to refugee women and to refugees of other cultures do not recognize the ways in which ‘women’ and ‘culture’ are constructed in subordination. In an examination of gendered culture, Tani Barlow notes that the term ‘woman’ was not part of terminology in China until after Western influence and that it came into use partly as an instrument of control on the part of the state.163 Inderpal Grewal has argued that international institutions like the World Bank and the IMF contribute to the interpellation of female subjects in varied ways in many parts of the world:

... while the term ‘woman,’ as a political category, cannot be dismissed so easily, what needs to be remembered is not only Simone de Beauvoir’s notion that ‘woman’ is a social construct, but that first, women are constructed differently within different social categories such as class, caste, and so on.... even while it is important to critique an ahistorical category of ‘woman,’ it is just as problematic to seek authentic versions of women’s locations within societies.164

Faced with crises of displacement which require practical responses to assist refugees regardless of gender or culture, UNHCR is also confronted with the need for a transnational, or transcultural, as opposed to multicultural analysis. A multicultural framework incorporates differences of gender and culture as expressions of diversity. It includes differences but does not allow them to alter the master plan or narrative of which it is a part. The deconstruction of the master narratives of power and reconstruction of subject locations comprise a strategy by which UNHCR can resist inserting ‘woman’ and ‘culture’ within a Western economy of difference. Transnational practices break down authoritative power relations by making connections across cultural and gender differences, not within planning frameworks based on Western notions of community development. At a practical level, transnational practices involve discussions with refugees, not discussions of refugee planning and management. Refugees have to become part of the ‘we’ in the ‘us’-‘them’ equation in order to take apart the paternalist narratives, frameworks, and planning policies which organize their difference.

On paper, UNHCR’s gender-based initiatives are an impressive collation of feminist analyses and recommended action. They include liberal and other feminist sensibilities which address issues of discrimination, violence, and systemic material inequality affecting women. The lack of attention paid to cultural differences and to the hierarchical positioning of cultures in the camps is one shortcoming in UNHCR’s programming. On one hand, the frequent use of the category ‘woman’ by UNHCR as a primary

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organizing concept essentializes and reinforces the primacy of female difference over ethnic, clan, and other axes of identification. On the other, this usage seems contrary to the basic liberal principle articulated in UNHCR policy, namely “mainstreaming and integration.” While certain groups of women refugees are listed as ‘vulnerable’ and requiring special assistance in the camps, other planning documents insist that women be equal partners in decision-making processes and that they have equitable access to services and resources. The two are not mutually exclusive, although they begin to illustrate some of the contradictions and complications of refugee programming at UNHCR with respect to gender and cultural differences.

UNHCR’s approach to women refugees cannot be viewed as coherent, unitary, or internally consistent. Nor should it. The main purpose of UNHCR policies to promote women is to guide and encourage change within the organization. Given the substantial differences among and within the various constituencies of displaced people UNHCR assists, it is unlikely that any one UNHCR policy would have the same outcome. As well as differences among constituencies, however, professional standards differ dramatically within the organization. This was confirmed in interviews with UNHCR staff in Geneva. One senior staff member underlined the obstacles to introducing an ‘empowerment approach’ in delivering programs for refugee women in an environment which had been dominated for decades by a traditional social welfare approach, focusing on vulnerability, private need, and the legitimacy of ‘traditional’ culture as a rationale for particular practices.

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168 In 1993 the UN Relief and Rehabilitation Programme for Somalia outlined specific objectives as well as “funding requests by sector” to finance the initiative. The sectors requiring funding noted in Table II of the document include — among others— civil administration, food security, logistics, potable water, education, health & nutrition, and Somali women. While it is true that the document was partly designed to appeal to potential funders, the separation of women from the other activities noted here also contradicts UNHCR’s ‘mainstreaming’ policy. See “United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Programme for Somalia — Covering the Period 1 March - 31 December 1993”, United Nations, 11 March 1993.


of violence towards women, in contrast to the promotion and protection of universal human rights. He confided to me that

"[UNHCR] policy is clear that women are not considered vulnerable except vulnerable to exploitation... more vulnerable than others."\(^{171}\)

The line drawn here is fine. Women are to be empowered as equals, but may require special protection given their susceptibility to economic, sexual, and possibly cultural exploitation. Is genital mutilation gender-based persecution, or is female circumcision a legitimate cultural tradition?

Some critics maintain that UNHCR’s policies to promote women are weak. Training modules, such as the POP framework, avoid the use of the term ‘gender’ \(\textit{per se}\) and aim to invoke attitudinal changes that are too basic. In a submission to the Executive Committee of UNHCR on October 12, 1995, the International NGO Working Group on Refugee Women in conjunction with the NGO Refugee Caucus in Beijing noted problems of implementation with respect to gender policy: “According to our membership, despite the introduction of People Oriented Planning (POP) training, the gender perspective continues to be largely ignored by UNHCR and their implementing partners.” A senior UNHCR staff member notes that

“Bilateral development agencies such as CIDA have many years of experience in developing and implementing women in development and gender policies and programmes. Humanitarian organisations such as UNHCR which have a need to focus immediately on life saving activities, neither have the organisational culture nor historical experience in such activities, so that introducing this type of programming in 1990 was similar to the beginnings of gender programming in the early 70s in CIDA.”\(^{172}\)

\(^{171}\) Interview, UNHCR senior staff, Geneva, October 25, 1994.

\(^{172}\) Ibid. As a matter of fair representation, I sent a draft of our interview transcript to this interviewee and discussed it over the telephone. This excerpt is drawn in part from a ‘revised’ transcript received by fax, dated October 20, 1995.
The implementation of such policies and guidelines, which require attitudinal and organizational change as well as professional competence, is a much more complex, longer term project. This same senior staff member added that

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

UNHCR’s commitment to gender analysis and planning processes on paper is clear, but in the field it is less certain. “One of the key issues ... is implementation of policy. We have a policy, but we have no way of ensuring that people respond to that policy. [We] have no way of holding people accountable for not implementing the policy.... That's a major barrier... and one which is acknowledged.” The barriers to organizational change which promotes gender equity are significant. One NGO representative based in Geneva suggested some organizational obstacles to developing gender policy expressive of a feminist politics at UNHCR:

“You have to look at many feminisms. I think the UNHCR approach will not use feminism as its terminology... Like for instance, their training program, they call it people-oriented training.... Though if you follow the different stages of the resolution, after the Vienna Conference you see that the statement that it's 'sexual violence' against women; now never before was there that... that it is a power issue.

...[those promoting gender equity at UNHCR don't] want to use feminism or these terms.... the culture just refuses to deal with anything of the sort.

... and even though [UNHCR’s] calling it ‘people-oriented’, [it's] getting the backlash....it's not easy. It's easy to critique a person's efforts, but once you're in it's not easy. Like here, I haven't yet said openly that

173 Ibid.
I'm a feminist — I have with the women and certain groups, but there is an image of feminism, people don't recognize that there are feminisms.... ”174

Taking gender equity and the provision of refugee assistance grounded in a sustained analysis of gender to mean ‘feminist’ at UNHCR, the struggles to integrate feminist policies are complicated by the challenge of preventing alienation or dismissal on the part of other less receptive staff.175

In refugee camps, one of the most difficult challenges to overcome for UNHCR staff — who are professionally trained and assigned to implement policies attentive to gender relations and cultural politics — is their junior status in relation to older, often more conservative senior staff. During the period of my research, I observed that new staff often faced insurmountable barriers to change within the organization if their immediate superiors resisted or were indifferent to the idea. I witnessed several junior rank UNHCR staff become depressed, get sick, lose hair, and — in two cases — leave the organization. Most, but not all, of these employees were women. Many employees attributed their dissatisfaction to their immediate supervisor, though many cited the containment and isolation of living on a guarded compound as a contributing factor. In this study, there was no way to assess systematically the effects of hierarchical chains of command at all UNHCR field locations. However, the often gender-blind, authoritative, status quo

174 Interview, senior NGO staff member, Geneva, October 28, 1994.
175 My own understanding of feminism focuses on the unequal relations of power across lines of culture, sexuality, nationality, class, and other differences as well as gender, and emphasizes the construction of subordinate categories and identities. It also includes a politics of difference attentive to cultural location and gender relations similar to those advocated by UNHCR. The difference between my position and that of UNHCR is that UNHCR policy applies across cultures unproblematically. Cultural difference is subsumed within a single framework of emergency planning. My position, drawing from concepts developed in Caren Kaplan’s work, promulgates a linking of these locations across cultures and other social/political locations within specific contexts of displacement. The connections and affinities would still be based on common goals, namely the safety of involuntary migrants.
operation at my research location was one of the most salient sources of personal and professional stress.

The section which follows illustrates some of the recruitment considerations for professional staff at UNHCR. In particular, it analyzes the implications of one hiring strategy aimed at increasing the representation of women on staff. The strategy also proposes a distinctive geography of employment in which some staff rotate through time while others rotate through space.

**The Perils of Perfect Pluralism**

We have to transform the field of social institutions into a vast experimental field, in such a way as to decide which taps need turning, which bolts need to be loosened here or there, to get the desired change; bearing in mind that a whole institutional complex, at present very fragile, will probably have to undergo a restructuring from top to bottom. — Michel Foucault

United Nations agencies have the unsavoury challenge of trying to represent all their members states without discrimination, to meet donor demands, and to select a competent staff to run the various organizations. UNHCR, in particular, has to embrace change without compromising the needs of those whom it serves. The organization maintains that its mandate is a preventive one: “to manage ethnic diversity in a way that promotes tolerance within and beyond national borders.” Likewise, its recruitment philosophy aims to select and manage a workforce which promotes tolerance within the agency and in external relationships with others, most obviously refugees.

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But whose tolerance defines the norm and what is an acceptable degree of deviation? While feminist and postcolonial subjectivities seek to deconstruct and recover voiceless refugees, the still univeral humanist subjects of a multicultural United Nations remain intact.

The UN ‘family of man’, ‘family of nations’, and ‘international community’ are weak concepts for feminist, postcolonial, and poststructuralist theorists concerned with deconstructing the universal subject. Each is an expression of the overarching narratives of nationalism and humanism. As Caren Kaplan has also noted in different contexts, “debates about ‘tradition’ and the role of national culture in liberation struggles are often invested with contested notions of gender.” Liisa Malkki explains how ritualized evocations of common humanity are constructed and celebrated as an egalitarian diversity among peoples and nations. In particular, she identifies the ‘family of nations’ and the ‘international community’ as discursive practices which serve “to reproduce, naturalize, legitimate and even generate ‘the nation form’ all over the world.” Her main point is that terms like ‘international community’ obfuscate the unequal power relations among states, especially the hegemony of European nations. Differences among countries are constructed as plural and are valued as a part of a diverse whole. In Malkki’s analysis, difference is domesticated and contained within a liberal-humanist discourse of ‘cultural diversity’. UNHCR recruitment practices are a clear expression of this discourse. Two processes often occur together: “a creation of cultural diversity and a containment of cultural difference.”

178 See Akhil Gupta & James Ferguson, 1992, op. cit., pp. 6-23. They also note that ‘sub-culture’ is a weak concept because it too is subsumed under an implicit cultural dominant.
181 Homi Bhabha cited in L. Malkki, 1992, op. cit., p. 60.
among states are distributed within a contained order, so too are differences within large organizations such as the UN. Like criticisms of multiculturalism, Malkki’s argument challenges the idea of cultural containment within a hegemonic, overarching framework of power in which ‘the North’ dominates ‘the South’.

The tension between culture as a basis for universal human experience and culture as a set of criteria of difference forms a resistance to Western culture within Western culture itself. UNHCR as an organizational culture is an expression of this tension today, embodying an antagonism between the tolerance of plural cultures and universal human rights. In one of UNHCR’s most recent public relations posters, issued ostensibly to promote tolerance of refugees, dozens of different toy LEGO® people are pictured — conveniently all in yellow; the text states

You see, refugees are just like you and me. Except for one thing. Everything they once had has been left behind.... we are asking that you keep an open mind. And a smile of welcome.

This plea for acceptance and understanding of difference on the basis of a shared humanity is constructed as part of a European cultural dominant. While its intentions are laudable, its politics are predicated on minimizing differences. UNHCR buttresses this effort to promote sameness with some of the t-shirts it sells which read, “Einstein was a refugee.” bell hooks makes a parallel argument:

Their (white people’s) amazement that black people watch white people with a critical “ethnographic” gaze, is itself an expression of racism. Often their rage erupts because they believe that all ways of looking that highlight difference subvert the liberal conviction that it is the assertion of universal subjectivity (we are all just people) that will make racism disappear. They have a deep emotional investment in the myth of “sameness.”

UNHCR’s approach to ‘managing diversity’ falls prey to the same critiques as liberal humanism in general and multiculturalism in particular. Multiculturalism acknowledges difference in relation to a cultural dominant. It implies that cultures co-exist, but minimizes the importance of relations of power among cultures. A number of theorists have argued against these positions, offering alternative politics and subjectivities of their own. Chantal Mouffe argues for an anti-essentialist politics of nomadic hybrid identity as the basis for radical pluralist democracy. While she does not _a priori_ specify the values or structures which would govern people of different cultures and contends that these would be historically contingent, her Eurocentric recipe for identity in radical politics remains problematic.\(^{183}\) Mouffe claims a poststructuralist position, and yet retains one of the most conventional structures of politics: the nation-state. As the assumed venue of her radical politics, she employs an essentialist notion of ‘nation.’\(^{184}\) This move effectively precludes transnational political practices and the possibility of reconstituting public for political struggles across borders. The conflict, debate, and politics of difference are geographically circumscribed within the national public sphere. However radical, Mouffe’s arguably poststructuralist politics reinscribes the nation-state as the site of power and reduces the idea of difference to diversity.

Another proposal for radical multiculturalism is that of Ella Shohat and Robert Stam who call for “a profound restructuring and reconceptualization of the power relations between cultural communities” in which minority communities are linked in an effort to challenge

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\(^{184}\) Matthew Sparke, “Rethinking Radical Democracy in the Public Spaces of Transnational Neoliberalism”, presentation to the American Association of Geographers, Charlotte, N.C., April 13, 1996.
the existing hierarchy of cultural communities.185 They call their project ‘polycentric multiculturalism’, and suggest that no single community or part of the world, whatever, its economic or political power, should be epistemologically privileged. Ironically, Shohat and Stam acknowledge the dominant epistemological position from which multiculturalism is constructed, yet they simply pronounce that ‘polycentric multiculturalism’ will bring this privileged domain to an end by granting epistemological privilege to those who have been historically marginalized. Little evidence as to why or how this might be accomplished at the end of the twentieth century is offered, yet the authors do analyze cultural history in relation to social power and link the transformation of subordinate institutions and discourses to its redistribution. Angelika Bammer criticizes what she calls the “postmodernistically hip version of the universal subject” as part of an approach that appropriates the historical experience of difference based on socially constructed categories of discrimination such as race, class, gender, sexuality, religious, ethnic or cultural affiliation.186 She implicitly raises the question: can there be a radical politics of multiculturalism or universalism?

This question introduces a more transnational approach to understanding difference. If one approaches relationships among cultural groups and the spaces they occupy not as harmonized ‘us’ and ‘thems’ living together, but as a series of unequal and uneven links between different subjects, then the question itself changes. Difference is not a question of accommodation but of connection. In North America, transnational feminist and labour lobbies make connections across borders, languages, and industrial sectors based on shared political goals.187 Transnational economic connections have been forged where

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shared interests are identified. In a more cultural context, the diffusion of cultural diasporas in various geographical directions generates the possibility of shared interests across cultures at a given location, as well as connections across space and culture where people have similar political objectives. Caren Kaplan points out that one danger of blurring the divisions between different groups is that identity politics can be undermined.\textsuperscript{188} Nonetheless, it will become clear from the discussion which follows that the status quo at UNHCR is even more problematic.

Recruitment practices which groom and select staff at UNHCR continue to operate within a framework of liberal humanism, immune to many of the critiques of multiculturalism noted above but hyper-attentive to gender and nationality breakdowns of the workforce. Emphasis on the representation of historically and geographically excluded or underrepresented groups and on the reformulation of job descriptions to allow inclusive positions which were formerly inaccessible to certain groups is part of the organization’s image.

\textbf{United Colours and Genders: Staffing the stats and status quo at UNHCR}

UNHCR is under considerable pressure to meet a number of different interests and targets, including the hiring of a staff of competent professionals that represent the agency’s donor base and major asylum countries (see tables 3.1 and 3.2). Fortunately, both UNHCR’s donor and asylum countries are among the forty-six member states of UNHCR’s Executive Committee: a strategic overlap of interests which is reflected in a breakdown of staff numbers by nationality. Qualifications and appropriate experience are

\textsuperscript{188} Caren Kaplan, 1995, op. cit.
Table 3.1
UNHCR Staff by Nationality (permanent & short term)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>% of total staff</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>USA</td>
<td>10.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>France</td>
<td>7.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UK</td>
<td>5.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Italy</td>
<td>3.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Netherlands</td>
<td>3.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Canada</td>
<td>3.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Germany</td>
<td>3.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sweden</td>
<td>3.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Switzerland</td>
<td>2.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Japan</td>
<td>2.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Australia</td>
<td>2.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Belgium</td>
<td>2.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pakistan</td>
<td>2.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

N.B. Countries with staff representation between 1% & 2% of the total include: Sudan, Ethiopia, Somalia, Spain, Denmark, Ghana, Thailand, Bangladesh, Philippines, Norway, Uganda, Sri Lanka, and Austria.

Source: “Nationality Breakdown: Regular and Project Personnel Staff”, UNHCR, 03.10.94.
Table 3.2
Major Donors to UNHCR, 1994

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Donor</th>
<th>US$ million</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>USA</td>
<td>232</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>European Commission</td>
<td>225</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Japan</td>
<td>121</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sweden</td>
<td>81</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>United Kingdom</td>
<td>68</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Netherlands</td>
<td>60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Norway</td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Denmark</td>
<td>38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Canada</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Switzerland</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Germany</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Italy</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>France</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Australia</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Finland</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other governments</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NGOs, UN and private sector</td>
<td>38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total contributions</strong></td>
<td><strong>1,065</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

scrupulously assessed by an influential board which meets regularly in Geneva to check applications, review candidate dossiers, and select recruits. How the qualified candidate is ranked has much to do with geography. Most evident is UNHCR's tendency to hire employees who reflect the donor base. In 1993, the US provided $299 million to UNHCR, almost one third of its budget. As of October 1994, UNHCR employed more US citizens than those of any other single country, followed by staff from France and the UK. Of all regular UNHCR staff, 54% come from European and North American countries, an indicator that the donor base is concentrated among a few industrialized states.189 “We have basically a fairly narrow donor base, unfortunately.”190 In 1993, all but US$91 million of $1,129 million donated to UNHCR was provided by thirteen countries and the European Union (EU).191 At the end of 1994, 95% of total contributions to UNHCR were received from fourteen states and the EU.

Staff from countries of first asylum, which host significant refugee populations, are also represented among agency personnel. For example, Pakistan's hosting of Afghan refugees over the past fifteen years has 'earned' it 2% of the 1994 staff total — almost as many staff members as Belgium or Australia on the UNHCR payroll. Ethiopia, Ghana, and Thailand are other examples of refugee host countries represented by a noticeable percentage of UNHCR employees.

Two sets of UNHCR's donors are represented: those who fund refugee assistance and those who provide the land and consent to host them. UNHCR is a predominantly Western-funded organization with a prevalence of staff from these same countries. All but

189 For short term staff, the proportion is 58%.
190 Interview, senior manager, October 24, 1994.
191 Several European nations gave directly to UNHCR as well as through the EU contribution (fundraising document, 05/94, HO. 10).
one of my interviews were with staff of Scandinavian, European, and North American nationality. The one staff member who did not hold these passports, provided insightful comments on her positioning within the organization. She maintains that UNHCR doesn't discriminate on the basis of nationality if one is good at one's work: “I have always believed in this theory of the marginal value of productivity of labour: as long as you justify your ways, you are employed.... whether you are born in Canada or Katmandu.” Nonetheless, she situates herself as “weak” and “little”, working in a “den of tigers” (she didn't say which nationalities counted as tigers), and argues that a graduate of a non-Western education system does not have the same chance to succeed professionally as one from a Western school.

She explained the lack of critical pedagogy taught in schools in her country, even after colonialism ended: “I knew the mathematics [by rote memory] but I couldn’t do [derivations from] them.... the education which we receive ... is an education system which the British had introduced ... to produce clerks to work under them.” One legacy of colonialism is raised here by a person of considerable privilege about her own country.

“Once I came to this jungle (UNHCR Geneva), I cannot afford to say my educational background was poor. I have to compete with you and prove that I am equally good.... for us coming from [the] Third World, it should be much more difficult because all the standards set for the UN are the standards set according to Western values and Western systems.”

While anecdotal as evidence, this testimony suggests that staff of non-Western nationalities have to meet Western standards and pass through Western institutions before working at

193 See also Nanda Shrestha, “Becoming a Development Category” in Power of Development, (NY/London: Routledge, 1995), pp. 266-277. Shrestha argues that the South Asian mind was colonized through the introduction of ‘development’ discourse, beginning in the 1950s.
UNHCR. As an umbrella organization, the UN may all be inclusive of all the ‘united nations’ which comprise its membership, but the links between them are unequal and uneven. Access to education in one of the wealthier, more powerful nations — defined by privileged social class in most less developed countries — is much less inclusive.

When asked if UNHCR is a multicultural organization in terms of recruitment, one senior manager replied that

“We’re certainly multinational, we’re multicultural but not completely.... The whole basic administrative structure of the United Nations is based upon certain Western concepts. Now these tend be rather universal, I mean most cultures embrace these concepts to some degree or another.... But it is a fact that many of the administrative structures, practices of the UN are based on Western concepts.”194

He continued candidly: “I'm not saying that one set of values is better than the other.... But you see this type of thing happening in international organizations, where often people are talking past each other because they’re ... coming at problems from entirely different ways.” Another UNHCR staff commented upon the difficulties of running an organization that encompassed a plethora of cultures: “in CIDA the group is relatively homogenous; UN agencies are huge challenges.”195 When asked how gender and nationality are figured into the recruitment equation, the first of these two managers remarked that

“gender is important. Traditionally UNHCR has been a male domain; it reflects the world around it.... [but there is] a slogan you’ll hear over and over again ‘most refugees are women and children’ (80%); why? because they're 80% of the refugee population — a truism which no one analyzes.”

194 Interview, senior manager, October 25, 1994.
195 Interview, senior manager, October 25, 1994.
The second of the two managers acknowledged that it was a problem and defended it only insofar as “it was a technique to wake up the people working here.” The adage, “80% of refugees are women and children”, plays on and reinforces the paternalist notion that women and children are relatively helpless. It is a statistic which blends the categories of women and children together; it can serve to reproduce a particular gender division of labour, namely that child care is women’s work. This construction of women, in fact, has the potential to contradict some of UNHCR’s own policies of ‘mainstreaming’ refugee women.

Continuing his gender analysis, the first manager stated that there is a move to put women in charge of food distribution in the camps.

“Dominant males grab more than their fair share.... But at the same time... you must be careful about social engineering.... there are societal structures here. Are you going to challenge the leadership role of [indigenous] leaders... by saying, ‘you’re not allowed to distribute the food; you do at home and you will when you go back home, but right here you can’t; we’re going to empower the women... that’s a terrible word, empower.’

He resumed his gender analysis:

“This is what worries me a bit, now...there is a valid point that we need female staff to deal with female refugees in certain societies, for example Muslim societies — women spend their entire lives behind a set of walls, from family’s home to husband’s home, so you need female staff to have contact with these people. Equally, male leaders in a camp often won’t work with female UNHCR staff. So, you have to balance gender to ensure access to the camp population and influence politically on the other.”

His concern “to balance gender” here is explained in terms which fall prey to a narrowly essentialist pragmatism: women help women; men deal with men. While practical at one level, his analysis does not speak to power relations constructed across gender and culture within the organization.
Despite the practical demands of refugee operations, UNHCR policy still tries to sculpt perfect pluralism. A new proposal for staff recruitment is presently being reviewed, one which highlights gender, nationality, age, and qualification. I asked the same manager, “who would get recruited in this new system?”

“Oh the intake we have two considerations: gender and geography — preference for women; our target is at least 35% women; so recruitment target is 45%; recruit from widest possible geographical base.... a female French logistics officer will have a hard time, even though she’s a woman, because France is heavily overrepresented; a male logistics officer from Mongolia would probably have a better chance; qualifications are still very important... a female candidate from Mongolia is golden, and if that female candidate from Mongolia speaks fluent English and French and has had two years of study at Exeter University, so has an international experience — terrific — that’s the kind of person we should grab, so the geography of gender comes into this.” (emphasis added)

“A female candidate from Mongolia is golden,” but does she exist? And if she does, how did she learn to speak fluent English and French? Is she not the product of Western imagination, of a perfect pluralism in which the statistically significant former subaltern speaks? As a culturally distinct female with the qualifications of a universal subject, she embodies the multicultural tension between difference amid sameness. When pressed further about selection criteria, he argued that “the best recruits will be those with experience, ideally with NGOs.” I asked whether the children of diplomats would meet the mark for recruitment:

“Frankly, I’m skeptical about recruiting the offspring of diplomats... we probably need to recruit the children of the diplomat’s drivers.... They [the offspring of diplomats] bring sophistication and language skills...but they may not have had the focus on the nitty gritty of life....”

Meritocracy rather than aristocracy should be the basis of UNHCR recruiting, I was told, a philosophy that supports the UNHCR strategy paper on staff recruitment elaborated upon
later in this section. "How important is Western education?", I asked. "Do most people working here have a Western education?"

"I don't know [about the education of those working here]; probably.... It's not a Western education, it could be Eastern, but an international experience [that matters]. The question of East and West is less important than that of provincial versus international. It's not a question of being Mongolian, but being exposed."

Questions of class, gender, and geography remain unanswered: "is the child of the diplomat’s driver likely to have an international experience?" and "where does the golden Mongolian have to go to get an ‘international’ experience and fluency in English and French?" The interview, as others later would, made clear that ‘Third World’ institutions do not produce the same subjects, or employees, as Western-based ones.

In a “Note on Human Resource Management” prepared by UNHCR, several critical observations pertaining to gender distribution within the organization are made.196 Some of these are worth reviewing briefly.

1. As a member of the UN system, UNHCR needs to conform to system-wide norms.... For example, there are requirements for appropriate staff representation by gender and nationality.197

2. ...Much remains to be done to reach the present UNHCR goal of women representing 35 per cent of the Professional staff. At 30 June 1993, 29 per cent of the Professional staff were women. As of 5 May 1994, the percentage had increased to 29.8 per cent, a figure that rises to 30 per cent in the field. During 1992, 34.2 per cent of the Professional staff recruited were women. During 1993, the figure had reached 37.8 per cent.... In addition, DHRM adopted two strategies in April 1994, in order to reach the overall United Nations goal of 50 per cent female staff by the year 2000:

(i) whenever DHRM is asked to identify external candidates for recruitment, DHRM review qualified applicants and presents three candidates, two of whom must be women;

197 Ibid., p. 20.
(ii) DHRM set a target for women to represent 40 per cent of all qualified candidates on the roster. (There are difficulties in some fields such as logistics, where there are limited numbers of qualified female candidates).\textsuperscript{198}

3. In order to improve the representation of women in senior grades... [1993] guidelines had been prepared... and include, \textit{inter alia}, modified seniority requirements for eligibility for promotion by taking into account the time a woman has spent at a previous level. Women are thus able to move higher on seniority lists, thus enhancing promotion opportunities. In addition, percentage targets for the promotion of women were set.

While these measures are positive, they have not yet produced the desired result: the 1993 exercise found it impossible to meet the targets for the percentage of women to be promoted as there were insufficient women eligible even under the revised seniority guidelines.\textsuperscript{199}

The percentages have been meticulously calculated, and yet the document implies that female staff at UNHCR have somehow not cooperated. This approach implicitly pitches female employees at organizational targets, rather than promoting and fully including them as productive contributors to the organization. In so doing, it produces a subtle form of sexism. Without minimizing the gains of affirmative action nor contesting its objectives, this new sexism is a product of equity policies and practices. It implies questions such as, "why, with all the extra measures and special allowances for female employees, don’t women meet the mark? What is their problem?" This reasoning exists outside the binary opposition of liberal versus conservative arguments and points to what Mark Yount calls a "new sexism."\textsuperscript{200} Yount contends that old sexism rested on essentialized notions of women workers as inferior to their male counterparts. These notions of sexism were actively challenged by affirmative action programs which gave women and underrepresented minorities greater access to jobs from which they were excluded, but for which they were qualified. New sexism and its corollary, "new racism", are effects of

\textsuperscript{198} Ibid., p. 11. \\
\textsuperscript{199} Ibid., p. 12; emphasis added. \\
\textsuperscript{200} Mark Yount, 1993, op. cit.
affirmative action initiatives targeted, literally, at women and other groups. The new sexism speaks from the view that women were given the chance to prove themselves vis-à-vis such equity initiatives, and yet they have still not succeeded in increasing their representation. If women and minority groups don't meet the mark when given the 'extra' chance, the blame falls on them. These arguably new kinds of prejudice stem from good intentions of liberal equity policies which aim to include underrepresented groups, but often end up in a quagmire of statistical distributions and bureaucracy. Recent arguments against affirmative action, particularly in the US, can be read as expressions of these new versions of sexism and racism, couched within a rhetoric of 'political correctness.'

With respect to UNHCR my concern is not so much with new forms of sexism and/or racism, though the implications of these are important, but rather the agency's emphasis on the 'perfect distribution' in terms of recruitment. Historically, politically constructed notions of purity have proven fiercely violent. Today ethnic nationalisms remain a major source of conflict and displacement. Could more nuanced violence result from aspirations toward a nuanced liberal perfect pluralism? Ironically, UNHCR and its antecedent organizational incarnations have largely been responsible for assisting and protecting people fleeing political regimes which purge 'others'. Nonetheless, there are potential dangers in an nominally inclusive 'perfect pluralism' at UNHCR.

Perfect pluralism is the basis of an internationalist discourse which incorporates 'otherness' under a Western cultural dominant, machinery, and distribution. This is the apotheosis of multiculturalism. Trinh Minh-ha argues from an anti-humanist and non-Western vantage point that

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201 Arguments against affirmative action are also expressed as traditional liberalism, i.e. equality for everyone. The irony that traditional liberalism was created at a time when 'universal' equality applied only to white men is lost in this characterization.
Maintaining the intuitive, emotional Other under the scientific tutelage of the rational, all-knowing Western Subject is an everlasting aim of the dominant which keeps on renewing itself through a wide range of humanistic discourses. It is difficult for her, she who partakes in theoretical production — albeit as a foreign worker — not to realize the continuing interested desire of the West to conserve itself as sovereign Subject in most of its radical criticism today.202

The 'golden Mongolian' is the “intuitive, emotional Other” tutored in the rational, all-knowing ways of the West. She is a projection of ‘bean-counting’ whose employment in the organization is desirable precisely because she represents the organization’s target. UNHCR is a rational institution, uniting colours and genders, and at the same time renewing itself through a wide range of humanistic discourses. The privileging of the category ‘women’, as one example, eclipses other more critical considerations. As Judith Butler notes,

As much as identity terms must be used... these same notions must become subject to a critique of their own production...203

Regardless of numerical gender and nationality targets, the organization of work and eligibility criteria for employment posts are the key issues of access and inclusion. Without their consideration, targets are unlikely to be met and the point of the exercise missed altogether. “Genealogy exposes lines of conflict that traverse all relationships; it disrupts both liberal and conservative optimisms and makes us wary of facile solutions and facile surrenders.”204 In the case of UNHCR, assumptions about employees’ geographic mobility, household composition, and willingness to conform to UNHCR norms that are

often exclusivist and problematic. The limits of its perfect pluralism, however, are exposed below.

Consider the UNHCR rotation system. This system refers to the standard practice among professional staff whereby everyone must geographically shift locations (and posts) every three to five years. "I call it the 'share the pain system'.... Promotions will increasingly be attached to willingness to be placed in the field."205 According to one senior manager, this considered a fair policy because it applies to everyone and rewards staff for taking remote field positions, but does it apply to all employees in the same way? A “share the pain system” implies a kind of macho martyrdom on the one hand, but more importantly, is such a system not gender-blind? If promotions are based on ‘willingness’ to be posted at non-family duty stations in the field, does this note assume an availability based either on ‘single’ status or someone who can look after the kids? Hardship posts, as these field positions are often called, are not necessarily gender-neutral. If an employed couple shares parental responsibilities, job and geographical considerations of both partners is important. There was no evidence of such coordination at UNHCR during my fieldwork. Only married couples are eligible for support and benefits. Common law relationships and same-sex households are nowhere mentioned in UNHCR’s human resource policy, according to two UNHCR staff in administration and personnel.

A UNHCR personnel policy outlines “family considerations in the rotation system”:

The conflict between family responsibilities and UNHCR’s demands affects many staff members. This is especially true of women, who often find family responsibilities incompatible with the rotational requirements of their careers. Resignations by women who have acquired the skills and experience for promotion to senior levels represent a serious loss of essential expertise, and also impede the progress

205 Interview, October 25, 1994. Within this system, there are some exceptions for specialist and semi-specialist posts, as well as special consideration given to families with children in secondary education.
towards UNHCR's goal of increasing the percentage of women both in the Professional category and at senior levels.\textsuperscript{206}

This commentary does not analyze \textit{why} women find rotational requirements incompatible with their careers. Moreover, it couches female staff's choices as a "loss" of expertise and one which impedes its progress towards perfect pluralism. Agency loss might be instead replaced with the idea of women employees' displacement; "displacement is that which is excluded or marginalized by the construction of a subject position," argues Butler.\textsuperscript{207} Little consideration is given to families in which \textit{two} professionals are working. The notion of 'family' at UNHCR is still very much based on a single income earner whose family, if s/he has one, can simply follow her or him (usually) to the next duty station. It is unlikely that UNHCR's assumptions reflect household composition in the 1990s, yet there is little formal recognition of this in human resource policy. According to UNHCR staff, there is no UNHCR policy which actively attempts to place two qualified staff who are married in the same location. While reasonable restrictions on the placement of married staff at the same duty station prevent direct lines of supervision between them, no proactive policy of placing couples together exists. What is more interesting is the family support for UNHCR staff working in remote locations. There are several measures to ensure that immediate family members are not too far away, if it is a non-family duty station staff who have sole responsibility for children.\textsuperscript{208}

There are means for women to maintain a UNHCR career while raising children, but they involve costs of a personal and/or professional nature. One African woman working for UNHCR in Dadaab is a single mother with a daughter whom she supports financially but

\textsuperscript{206} UNHCR, 7 June 1994, op. cit., pp. 7-8.  
\textsuperscript{208} Spouses who are not employed are eligible for a dependant's allowance. Education allowances for children and travel grants for their visits home are also available.
who lives with her sister in London. Because UNHCR Dadaab is a non-family duty station, she was hired on a contract that precludes support for dependents. She finds the separation and the general social dislocation of Dadaab extremely trying. Her European boss, on the other hand, works at a more senior level, and as a married man with two daughters, is entitled to house his family in Nairobi at UNHCR's expense. Another strategy, employed by a female field officer who is a single mother of four children at UNHCR in Mombasa, is to apply only for posts in family duty station locations (i.e. safe places with access to appropriate schools). However, this involves professional costs in the long term, given that promotions are attached to service in difficult, "share the pain," non-family duty stations.

A major feature of UNHCR's work in the field in recent years has been the growth in the number of non-family duty stations. This has placed additional strains on the rotation system and staff members for whom there is a conflict between personal and professional obligations.209

This singles out, in particular, female staff members for whom there is more likely to be a conflict between personal and professional obligations. While these employees may be men who would rather not be separated from their families and/or who require international schools for their children once they reach a certain age, they are more probably women who have child care responsibilities and who may have their partners' jobs to consider as well as their own.

I encountered no debate of the UNHCR rotation system nor of its conception of 'family'. The category of 'family', the gender bias of the rotation system, and the multicultural distributions of 'women' and 'country' are all critical sites for potential policy changes, if UNHCR is serious about including women within its ranks. Incorporating women's

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socially and culturally constructed subject positions is a more difficult task than hiring large numbers of young professional women on short term contracts to improve the staff distribution.

**Rotating Through Space and Time**

UNHCR has proposed serious changes in its training and recruitment procedures.

“Our staff is aging, and this is a reality which has to be faced by the organization. What happened is that the organization grew very quickly in the 1970s, early 80s, and as a result they recruited people of the same age.....The aging of the staff contradicts directly the concept of the rotation of staff....”

Accordingly, proposed changes in staffing focus upon age and family/household criteria. There are no obvious changes that would affect the sizable baby-boom bulge of middle managers which UNHCR currently employs. Upon closer examination, the proposed reforms will likely serve to maintain existing jobs at UNHCR and create a generation of less attractive and less permanent jobs.

Under the direction of the Division of Human Resource Management, its Career Management System (CMS) is defined as “a participatory and continuous process, involving a shared responsibility between the staff member and the organization, and is designed to achieve an alignment of employees’ abilities, competencies and interests with the needs of the Office.”

The functionalism of this definition — that alignment will occur in accordance with the needs of the Office — becomes plainly evident in the new proposed human resources management system, one which follows the familiar strategies of the flexible firm or ‘flexible specialization’ in terms of its labour supply. Fairly

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211 UNHCR, Geneva, 7 June 1994, op. cit., p. 3.
extensive consultations were held with UNHCR staff of various ranks in Kenya and elsewhere as part of the CMS process, after the “Broad Outline of a Revised and Expanded Human Resources Management System” was prepared in June 1994 by the Director of DHRM. It provides the basis for the following discussion.

The outline suggests that UNHCR professional staff will consist of two categories: career staff and field operations staff. Career staff, it would seem, are those already permanently employed by the organization. Field operations staff, on the other hand, would fill posts in “difficult, remote and non-family duty stations.” They would be appointed on three to four year contracts, but told “that they have no long-term career prospects with UNHCR.”

The advantage to such staff will be the acquisition of 3 or 4 years of professional experience in a rewarding job with challenges not available in most entry-level positions, and a chance for some travel and “adventure”. Individuals will be motivated to take such posts for the same reasons that people accept JPO and UNV contracts.

This professional approach may be well-intended, but it is naive and arguably masculinist to assume that younger staff are simply looking for “adventure” and a few years of experience. More importantly, there is a distinct geography to this strategy: young people who are qualified, willing, and mobile enough to pursue short-term work prospects are more likely to come from industrialized countries than from the ‘Second’ or ‘Third’ Worlds. If NGO experience is considered the most appropriate background for potential UNHCR field staff, as noted earlier, such candidates are far more likely to be nationals of a Western country that hosts and funds such NGOs, thus excluding candidates from places

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212 Ibid., p. 44.
213 JPO (Junior Professional Officer) and UNV (United Nations Volunteer) posts are not necessarily filled for the reasons cited here; rather, they are viewed by many as a ‘foot in the door’ for chances at a more permanent job at UN agencies, as they have traditionally been. At the present time short-term staff, JPOs and UNVs are employed as a type of temporary labour force; the proposed formalization of this labour force as explicitly temporary represents more a change in professional structure and organizational direction than a change in practice.
— such as Mongolia — where such qualifications are more difficult to access. UNHCR risks, then, reinscribing the historical dominance of ‘First World’ employee representation in its proposed personnel policy. Excerpts from the outline are worth quoting at length because they pull together many of the arguments made in this chapter, in particular the privileging of senior UNHCR staff, especially male employees in single income families, at the expense of women and younger workers. The same “Broad Outline of a Revised and Expanded Human Resources Management System” explains that:

44. In this new scheme, UNHCR Career Staff will rotate through space, moving from duty station to duty station in senior roles. Many of these duty stations will be capital cities, where schools, etc. are generally available, making it easier for older staff members with family responsibilities to rotate.... At the same time, the requirement that staff serve in hardship or non-family duty stations for a period before promotion to the P.5 level will encourage staff to rotate such posts and provide their experience to the Field Operations Staff assigned under their supervision.

45. UNHCR Field Operations Staff will rotate through time, with some departing each year as their 3 or 4 year period on 300 series appointments expire, and with others joining each year to replace those leaving.

46. This two-tier staffing pattern is for the future, but can be started now....

48. Recruitment by DHRM to the non-career Field Operations Staff will take fully into account UNHCR policies, guidelines and targets concerning the recruitment of women until the target of 35% of all professional staff is achieved or surpassed, and the recruitment of staff on an equitable geographical basis, including weight given both to donor countries and countries of asylum with large refugee populations.

51. In must be emphasized that the 300 series of appointments, as described above, would not apply to any staff member currently holding a 100 series or 200 series appointment. There is no question of giving 300 series appointments to anyone already holding a fixed-term or intermediate term appointment, nor — obviously — to anyone with an indefinite appointment.... (original emphasis).

Permanent and semi-permanent employees are guaranteed job security under this scheme. Young recruits on 300 series contracts are assured none. Female staff, preferably those from Mongolia and with NGO experience, will be hired in accordance with UNHCR.
targets. Senior staff, who “rotate through space” will be assured international schools for their children. Such a transparently self-serving flexible labour strategy is hardly innovative or change-oriented, and inconsistent with the management culture outlined earlier in this chapter. UNHCR maintains that this two-tiered system of permanent and temporary staff will make it adaptable to an unpredictable external environment, which is one of the organization’s main challenges, but it also aims to preserve the status quo for those who have jobs, rotating them through space, while hiring a temporary and ultimately disposable staff who are euphemistically “rotated through time.”

The gendered outcomes of such policy are also worth noting. Implications for female professional staff at UNHCR, who are overrepresented at junior levels as compared to their female peers at senior levels, are likely to be negative. While women represented 17.2% of professional staff at the most senior levels as of May 1994, they comprised over 25% at the next, more junior rank. Given that the organization’s overall proportion of women professionals is 30%, they are most highly represented in the lower ranks, including clerical and support staff. In some cases, female staff are more likely to work in the field, as compared to Headquarters, than their male counterparts.

An examination of the posts of Protection Officer and Legal Officer at Headquarters and in the field... shows that... 66% are occupied my males, and 34% are occupied by females. A closer examination... reveals that 83% of the female Protection/Legal Officers occupy posts in the field whilst only 50 per cent of the male staff in this group are outside Headquarters.

215 The table presented on page 12 of the Note on Human Resource Management, UNHCR, Geneva, 7 June 1994, EC/1994/SC.2/CRP.20 strategically omits the most junior ranks which would highlight the highest representation of women at the lowest professional grades.
UNHCR efforts to increase female protection staff in the field are motivated by gender-specific problems, such as rape among women refugees. Nonetheless, any policy which discriminates against young field staff will have a disproportionately greater effect on women than men at UNHCR because female staff are more likely to be represented among junior ranks and in the field. This trend will only be augmented by gender recruitment targets and the organizational goal of 35% women employees.

This section has illustrated some of the dangers of recruiting staff according to standards of ‘perfect pluralism’. The outdated assumptions of household structure and the organization of jobs at UNHCR are pressing issues, if women and younger employees are to be included, and not simply represented, in the organization. UNHCR’s new proposal to employ a temporary (young and female) labour force to work in isolated areas clearly contradicts the professional participation of women and people from less developed countries. Given that these groups represent the truly ideal type of employee at UNHCR, the policy is bitterly ironic. According to plan, only qualified and outstanding candidates will be selected according to ‘objective and transparent’ criteria, but those select recruits who do get temporary jobs will, after five years, be left ‘out standing in their field.’ As temporary workers, they are less likely to enter permanent professional ranks at UNHCR.

A close reading of recruitment policy within the agency, however, reveals less a move towards innovative change than a straightforward strategy to preserve the status quo. Feminist, postcolonial, and organizational theory have been deployed to expose the masculinist assumptions in UNHCR’s organization of work, its Western bias in terms of education and cultural capital, and the fictions of perfect pluralism — in particular, the postmodernistically hip ‘golden Mongolian’.
The final section of this chapter moves from personnel policies within the organization to a project in the camps aimed at addressing sexual violence towards women refugees. The project was chosen as a case study because it illustrates well some of the dilemmas of coordinating policy and practice. The Women Victims of Violence Project was also a subject of controversy, discussion, and assessment during the period of my field work.

Women Victims of Violence (WVV): Combatting Sexual Violence

Sexual coercion, torture, and rape are relatively common occurrences among women in conflict zones. Despite being recognized places of asylum for people fleeing persecution, refugee camps can also be unstable environments where residents are susceptible to sexual and physical violence. In the Northeast Province of Kenya, where a history of systematic economic marginalization includes banditry, poor security has only been exacerbated by the arrival and temporary settlement of tens of thousands of refugees. Those who leave the camps for hours at a time in search of firewood with which to cook — predominantly women and girls — are vulnerable to bandit attacks. After nightfall, unarmed households — especially those known to be headed by women — have been the easy targets of bandits from within the camp itself. During my stay, several attacks of rape, defilement, and 'spouse assault' were reported and documented.

From its inception, the Women Victims of Violence Project was an immensely 'fundable' contradiction in UNHCR policy. In October 1992, the U.S.-based human rights monitoring group, *Africa Watch*, documented sexual violence against Somali refugee women in the Dadaab camps. Given that the safety of international staff, as compared to local staff or the refugees, is of the highest priority in the camps, this incident fuelled

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217 Interview, UNHCR junior staff member, Geneva, October 25, 1994.
concern about rape in the area. In the same month, UNHCR hired a consultant to investigate the allegations further. Seven months in the making, her report documented 192 specific cases of rape among Somali women, noting that these were “only the tip of the iceberg.”

She proposed a comprehensive response to this sexual violence which became the “Refugee Women Victims of Violence” special project. The project outlined four specific objectives, including 1) the provision of counselling, therapy, and medical services for those affected by sexual violence; 2) improved physical security in and around the refugee camps to prevent future violence; 3) material assistance and skills training to enhance the livelihood of ‘victims’; and 4) increased awareness of the problem among law enforcement personnel, as well as staff and the general public.

Based on these objectives, WVV was a special project. It focused initially on ‘women’ refugees rather than all refugees affected by physical assault and sexual violence in and near the camps, and it aimed to assist those affected by rape but not by other types of trauma. By focusing on vulnerable women, a senior manager in Geneva admitted that WVV contravened UNHCR’s own integrationist policy on refugee women. The project fell prey to some of the same critiques made of development literature relating to women:

Much of the WID [Women In Development] and Gender and Development (GAD) literature represents Third World women as benighted, overburdened beasts, helplessly entangled in the tentacles of regressive Third World patriarchy.


\[219\] Interview, UNHCR senior staff member, October 25, 1994; UNHCR, 1990, op. cit.

In the case of WVV, the Western funders of the project could ‘save’, or at least redeem, vulnerable Somali women from the chaos and calamity of the camps.

In terms of organization, the project was separate from general social services sector programming, with no accountability nor coordination required between the two. Both the head of social services and the WVV project coordinator reported separately to the same senior manager, creating a palpable tension between both sides, a veritable ‘two solitudes’ in the office where I squatted for several months.

The WVV project provided specified services and potential material assistance to those refugees who could demonstrate that they were raped, creating a dilemma for many women. The problematic denotation of women as ‘victims’ in the project’s title was a minor issue next to the inscription of shame and of violence on the bodies of the Somali women who were ‘found out’ and often disowned by their family. Nonetheless, naming practices matter, and the project’s designation ‘victims of violence’ introduced yet another layer of problematic power relations to the incident of rape.

Through travelling to other people’s ‘worlds’ we discover that there are ‘worlds’ in which those who are the victims of arrogant perception are really subjects... even though in the mainstream construction they are animated only by the arrogant perceiver and are pliable, foldable, file-awayable, classifiable.

221 I borrow here from Teresa de Lauretis’ notion of the body as the site of material inscription of power. In the case of rape, a woman’s body can be thought of as the site of a double inscription: of sexual violence, and of institutionalized therapies to treat the affected body. See Teresa de Lauretis, “Eccentric Subjects: Feminist Theory and Historical Consciousness” in Feminist Studies 16, 1, pp. 115-150.

The Women Victims of Violence Project posed a number of related problems from the start. On the one hand, if a refugee woman sought assistance through a WVV counsellor, she could easily become stigmatized as a rape victim and ostracized by her family and/or community. On the other hand, if a woman could access the resources or opportunities available through the UNHCR-sponsored WVV project — such as a transfer to one of the coastal refugee camps, or even a chance at resettlement abroad through the Canadian or Australian ‘Women-at-Risk’ programs — she might maintain family approval. Needless to say, this kind of speculation led to a number of what were thought to be false claims of rape on the part of Somali women refugees.223

In order to prosecute, incidents of rape in Kenya must be reported to police within twenty-four hours of their occurrence. A medical certificate, based on a physical examination conducted by a physician to verify clinically that rape occurred, is also required. These legal and medical procedures at once legitimize and invariably publicize acts of rape. They seek to institutionalize the women’s assaulted bodies at a number of levels. Legal testimony, medical examinations, and the provision of therapy for ‘women victims of violence’ are all constitutive of power relations which tend to create institutionalized subjects. Whereas the rule of law and the enforcement of human rights are usually the articulated reasons for projects such as WVV, the microphysics of power that manage the politics of the body occur on a more local scale. The legal, medical, and therapeutic practices which name, authorize, and organize the treatment of sexual violence are the transfer points of power in the camps.

The stigma of rape for a women within Somali culture is extremely severe. A system of blood money — or diya — is often invoked when accepted codes of behavior among

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223 Interview, UNHCR junior staff member, Geneva, October 25, 1994.
Somalis are violated, as in the case of rape. The family of a woman who is raped, for example, might seek compensation from the family of the culprit in the form of cash or other assets, such as livestock. Although such agreements are often negotiated in the camps, all efforts are made by UNHCR staff and the Kenyan legal counsel provided by the International Federation of Women Lawyers to utilize official channels so that prosecution in court remains possible. Universal codes of human rights and national provisions in criminal law come face to face with Somali codes of justice. Depending on the extent to which women refugees and their families perceive that they can gain material benefits from the project as compensation for being raped, they may approach UNHCR and report the crime. Conflicts between the human rights/international law approach of UNHCR and the socially accepted, culturally-based laws of the Somali refugees in the camps continues be a problem for the Women Victims of Violence Project.

While the lawyers and medical staff working in the camps have the authority to define rape in official terms, Somali refugees often circumvent these legal and institutional circuits of power and invoke their own system of justice, including material exchange. Nancy Fraser’s analysis of the politics of needs interpretation suggests that contests among discourses occur at the ‘site of the social’; proponents of the UN, legal, medical, and Somali discourses seek discursive hegemony. International and Kenyan law indicates public punishment for rape. Evidence suggests, however, that many of the Somalis affected would prefer to settle these matters out of public purview, through more discreet agreements of compensation, usually and ironically between the men in the families affected by the woman’s rape.\(^{224}\) WVV staff publicize the laws against sexual violence and seek prosecution in cases of rape and related crimes.

\(^{224}\) Interview, lawyer from FIDA (Federacion Internacional De Abogadas), Dadaab, November 22, 1994.
Employing Nancy Fraser's approach, UNHCR and the WVV project work together with the legal and medical authorities in place as oppositional and expert discourses in a struggle for rights-based relations of power and justice. For Fraser, oppositional discourses force relations of power that have been sequestered in the realm of the private to become public and, in turn, more politicized. While Fraser does not purport to analyze power relations among cultures and nations outside 'the West', her poststructuralist approach can be transposed to a transnational, intercultural scale. Her 'site of the social' — the public location for politics and contests among discourses — is also the site of a powerful lobby to 'reprivatize' notions of punishment and compensation back to the more private 'family' realm in this case. Expert discourses add weight to either side; in the context of UN-sponsored refugee camps, legal, medical, and other experts tend to back those who pay their salaries and whose culture they share.

During my field work in the camps, the aftermath of sexual violence posed other questions of discursive politics imbued with conflicting markings of gender and culture. Genital mutilation, or female circumcision — depending on the discourse one employs — became the focus of complex cultural politics after a young refugee woman was raped in Dagahaley camp. While accompanying the WVV counsellor during a follow-up visit, I met the girl who had been raped and her mother. Her mother wouldn’t allow the girl to stay in the hospital after the attack. A local UNHCR employee, a Somali herself, explained the situation: “she has to be stitched up; the wound is healing. They will do it the traditional way; it is more dangerous.” The act of rape tore the flesh sewn together during circumcision/genital mutilation. Her family and community discouraged her from becoming involved with UNHCR and other agencies unless she could get some personal, material benefit. Accordingly, the genital wound was to be treated by a woman trained in

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225 This UNHCR employee added that “the world has changed so much.... it’s because of the war”. She was referring to the protection women used to get from their male family members... “now it’s different.”

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circumcision, rather than an MSF doctor. While MSF flatly opposes the practice of genital mutilation — as does UNHCR — its staff are usually prepared to perform the surgery required for women who are raped. Nonetheless, the lines are fine between complicity in circumcision/genital mutilation, medical ethics, and human rights standards. One’s choice of words is intensely political: a discourse of cultural difference or universal human rights? Is this decision a bid for justice or a morally coded cultural imperialism? In a Geneva interview, one senior UNHCR staff member noted that one of her colleagues “avoids issues like genital mutilation because they are too culturally sensitive.” If UNHCR’s position on genital mutilation lacks consensus within the organization, it is not surprising that any agreement on the issue across cultures in refugee camps is elusive. The tension between culture as universal and culture as particular is clear.

The financing of the Women Victims of Violence Project raises other political questions. The initial estimated cost for WVV as a three month project, was US$1,119,401, of which more than 50% was to be spent on improving the security of the camps through proposed police escorts during firewood collection and extensive fencing around residential sections of the camp to prevent bandit access, and on assisting the police by providing communication equipment and vehicle maintenance. The objectives were considered laudable and fundable, but by the time CIDA, a major funder of the project, issued a mission report assessing the project’s achievements late in 1994, the WVV budget had grown considerably. Canada alone had contributed $3.25 million which represented 36% of project funds. While the project was assessed as having “an important impact”, the mission report observed that its funds were used to fill major gaps in general program budgets. The project, which was eminently popular with funders, was used to finance less

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attractive aspects of relief operations. Instead of paying for police vehicle maintenance, the WVV budget was used to provide the actual vehicles and communication equipment. The CIDA report noted that major project expenditures did not appear to be specific to women, even though the organization of the project was inconsistent with the ‘mainstreaming’ principles of UNHCR’s gender policy because of its specific focus on women.

One of the main WVV budget items was the construction of ‘live fencing’. Live fencing combines improved security with environmental sensitivity — a pet interest of the UNHCR officer in charge in the camps at the time. Live thorn bushes are transplanted around the perimeter of camp compounds as a means of keeping bandits and potential assailants out.\(^{228}\) For refugees who are required by the Kenyan Government to stay in the unfenced camps through a “discipline without frontiers”,\(^{229}\) the idea of refugees fencing themselves in seems most ironic. Yet, in interview after interview most agreed that live fencing improved security. Mike Davis’ analysis of Fortress Los Angeles is a far cry from the refugee camps at the Kenya-Somalia border, yet residents in both places choose to erect walls between their homes and the outside world to increase their safety. Whereas the affluence of Los Angeles homeowners’ puts them at risk, the conditions of political instability and relative poverty in Northeast Kenya shape motivation towards “enclosed communities.”\(^{230}\) As of September 1994, forty-three kilometres of fencing had been completed while another fifty-four kilometres remained to be done.\(^{231}\) The construction of live fencing has also created a boom for refugees hired to work on the project and for local

\(^{228}\) Fences are constructed around compounds within the camp which are shared by a number of families. Compounds are usually defined by the sections of a grid planned and designated by UNHCR. There is usually a gate, also made of thorns, that is opened during the day.


entrepreneurs who sell materials to UNHCR at a healthy profit. Economically, the WVV project has had a number of positive ‘spin off’ effects for construction workers, traders, and police officers. Findings suggest that some WVV funds have been misdirected and used to pay for items which are not part of the project’s mandate. Based on the CIDA audit and its criticisms, it is unlikely that as many women as men have directly benefited from the Women Victims of Violence Project.

Perfecting Practice

Rather than condemn UNHCR’s personnel policy aimed at gender equity and the Women Victims of Violence Project as imperfect approaches to solving the problems of unequal power relations, I have analyzed them as responses predicated upon certain assumptions and constructed within a framework of ‘UN humanism’. UN humanism and its themes of multiculturalism and ‘managing ethnic diversity’ emphasize integration within a ‘family of nations’. Violence against refugee women in and around the Dadaab camps has historical and political meanings which exceed the policies and practical efforts made to protect refugee women. The institutional containment of displaced people in remote camps also poses problems of security.

UNHCR is a humanitarian organization which responds to the practical needs of displaced people. The theoretical problems of multiculturalism and UN humanism, I have argued, are relevant to these practical needs. Differences in culture and gender cannot simply be included in an overarching framework of humanitarian assistance. Axes of difference involve distinct locations of geography and subjectivity. The construction of ‘others’ in subordination — whether they be women, people from Third World locations, or refugees — is not simply ‘corrected’ by increasing their numbers, incorporating their differences

into existing structures, or introducing special frameworks which analyze their difference. Transnational practices refer to strategies which engage with people of different locations — social, sexual, cultural, or otherwise. Within UNHCR, such practices might include the recruitment of fewer statisticians to count the number of ‘different’ people, as well as a more critical analysis of job descriptions and prescriptions which categorically exclude women from professional ranks. In the camps, transnational practices involve discussions with refugees, not of them. A single policy or approach rarely produces identical outcomes for all those to whom it is applied. These uneven results point to unequal locations among people, cultures, and countries on a global scale. The politics of these locations constitutes an important debate for UNHCR whose mandate is to treat all people — regardless of colour, creed, sex, or nationality — in a fair and equitable manner. The next chapter adds another dimension to the politics of location by examining the geo-political landscape in which UNHCR operates at a global level.
Chapter 4
Displacement, Protection, & the International Refugee Regime

This chapter addresses the respatialization of responses to crises of human displacement. Since the end of the Cold War, distinctive strategies of providing humanitarian assistance — including the use of ‘safe spaces’ — have emerged. The waning of superpower rivalry has changed the meaning and value of the term ‘refugee’. The ideological conflicts between East and West have framed refugees both as political subjects and political statements. At the same time as the geo-political landscape and humanitarian responses to it are changing, so too are ways of conceiving ‘the refugee problem.’ UN interventions have begun to enter nations at war to protect and prevent endangered groups from becoming refugees. If certain human rights of a group of civilians within a country at war are being violated, is the transgression of sovereign borders by international humanitarian forces warranted? In the 1990s, the answer to the question has been yes. Borders are being renegotiated by the creation of international ‘safe areas’ within conflict zones. While refugee camps remain the standard ‘safe spaces’ for involuntary migrants, the conventional categories of ‘border’ and ‘refugee’ are being challenged in new ways.

A senior UNHCR staff member suggests that a renegotiation of the fixed category ‘refugee’ is underway. He grounds displacement in a geographical context rather than in a legal or political definition.

“[It is] not whether you are a refugee but where you are.... it's all a question of space and distance.”

Interview, senior UNHCR manager, October 18, 1994.

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This approach aims to be more inclusive in terms of who UNHCR assists, but it also has strategic value for the organization which must justify expanded emergency operations and maintain unique competencies in a climate of UN cutbacks. Perhaps more importantly, UNHCR is responding to its donor governments who wish to maintain “space and distance” from the massive numbers of displaced persons. Since the end of the Cold War, governments have shown a preference for interventions which provide assistance to dislocated groups before they cross a border.

In terms of human displacement, space is not empty and distance not simply linear; both are geo-politically and discursively strategic. Following Angelika Bammer, my aim in this chapter is to put the ‘place’ back into displacement but to do so without essentializing place nor reducing arguments about ‘containment’ to a purely geo-political context. Global trends towards managing displacement must be rooted in both the geo-political specificity of forced migration and the discursive strategies that often inform these politics.

In the mid-1990s, displacement has become commonplace. With the melting of Cold War tensions, many countries are mired in civil conflicts, forcing segments of their population to move en masse to safer terrain, within or beyond national borders. In circles of cultural and feminist theory, the displacement of transnational diaspora, migrants, and exiles has generated significant interest in current debates. This chapter foregrounds the corporeal displacement of refugees and other displaced persons, while drawing from and making

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connections with analyses in postcolonial, feminist, and cultural studies. I connect different scales of 'ordering disorder' in the cultural contexts of nomadism and migrancy. Selected trends and strategies related to displacement in the post-Cold War context are identified, and shifts in specific UN operations since 1990 are examined.

**Managing Transnational Displacement: new directions**

Whereas the older paradigm can be described as reactive, exile-oriented and refugee-specific, the one which has started to emerge over the past few years can be characterized as pro-active, homeland-oriented and holistic.... in contrast to the traditional paradigm, which placed primary emphasis on the right to leave one's own country and to seek asylum elsewhere, the newer perspective focuses equal attention on the right to return to one's homeland and on a notion which has become known as the 'right to remain'....

UNHCR has been transformed from a refugee organization into a more broadly-based humanitarian agency.236

The “older paradigm” of refugee assistance was embedded in the geo-politics of the Cold War. Astri Suhrke contends that refugee flows were linked to the Cold War in two major ways: first, superpower intervention increased violence and displacement in places, like Afghanistan and the Horn of Africa; and second, in providing support for refugees, it enabled them to move on a large scale.237 Refugees were both expressions of Cold War conflict and wards of the superpowers in a geo-political chess game. While the metanarratives of empire and communism dissolve, local narratives of internal strife, previously ordered and subordinated by Cold War interests, are amplified. Declining support for refugees, such as the Afghans in Pakistan, from communist-backed regimes is evident despite renewed fighting in Afghanistan. The right to leave one’s country in the


face of danger may still exist, but funding for refugee support and repatriation activities has declined dramatically.\footnote{238}

Current geo-political disinterest in countries that were former proxies for rival superpowers, has changed the balance of power between ‘the West’ and ‘the Rest’. Margaret Atwood’s science fiction novel depicting the nightmarish, if unlikely, prospect of the extreme political right in the United States taking over Canada provides an apt analogy.\footnote{239} Displaced by patriarchal structures in their society, infertile women — among others — are exiled to the colonies, environmental wastelands amassed through social and political mistakes. The colonies are unfit for normal human habitation just as their inhabitants are deemed unfit for and by the society from which they are banished. This feminist and arguably postcolonial sci-fi scenario of ‘colony’ elucidates exclusivist gender divisions of power and corresponding marginal places. The reality of refugees in the ‘Third World’ raises related concerns about divisions of power in the post-Cold War period.

Using the historical and contemporary frameworks developed in earlier chapters, I outline selected UN responses to displacement since the Cold War. This period is also characterized by the rise of fiscal austerity and social authoritarianism under the umbrella of New Right politics in many industrialized countries. Increasingly, the security of displaced persons is enforced by UN peacekeeping troops operating within sovereign countries. Potential refugees are protected by UN forces and assisted by UNHCR at home before they

\footnote{239 Margaret Atwood, The Handmaid's Tale, (Toronto: Seal Books, 1985). Atwood creates a particular space ‘over there’ for people who don’t subscribe to or fit in Gilead society. Prescribed spaces and surveillance in her patriarchal ‘First World’ society are contrasted with the disorder of people (women) and the residue of social mistakes found in the apocalyptic colonies. The chaotic colonies which host the displaced outcasts is the ‘Third World’ connotation I refer to here.}
become wards of the international refugee regime and its sponsors. Since 1991, the Kurds in Iraq, Tamils in Sri Lanka, Bosnian Muslims in the Former Yugoslavia, and Somalis in Somalia and Kenya have all fallen under the rubric of ‘preventive protection.’ Geographically speaking, this shift is significant because it signals a strategy which maintains displaced persons at a physical distance and employs a particular set of discursive practices which legitimize these efforts. Interventions which cross international borders to protect human rights and assist displaced people are not inherently problematic. However, if the strategy is not employed consistently across all countries, it risks deepening divides between the West and the rest. The discourse of ‘preventive protection’ combined with the provision of humanitarian assistance to displaced people within countries at war produces perceived and actual distance between the donor countries and the forced migrants they assist.

The Predicament of Protection at UNHCR

“What’s happening, and it is an interesting question, there’s two camps... two angles of thinking. On the one hand there are people who feel that the definition of refugee contained in the 1951 Convention/1967 Protocol is sufficient and is a strong instrument as a basis for deciding who is or is not a refugee. On the other hand, there are others who feel that UNHCR is now in the field dealing with, in many cases, internally displaced people, that perhaps the mandate should now be broadened so that UNHCR would have a mandate also automatically to deal with those people. And for the moment, it’s certainly moving towards more flexibility, shall we say....

Our position is... that first of all UNHCR doesn't have the resources to possibly... I mean they can hardly deal with, they can't deal with all the problems that are taking place already with refugees who fall under the Convention definition. If they had an automatic mandate to cover all internally displaced people, for example, ... you would not only run into the problem of resources which are already inadequate, you would also run into all kinds of very difficult questions of national sovereignty, when do you intervene... danger for your personnel... It’s a real can of worms.”

240 Interview, consulate staff member, Permanent Mission of Canada to Office of the UN, Geneva, October 27, 1994.
The refugee definition outlined in the 1951 Convention remains the central tool of status determination employed by states. Donor governments that fund displaced persons have increasingly sponsored efforts by United Nations and other international bodies to assist them 'at home' or in a first country of asylum nearby. Strategies such as 'preventive protection' and the use of 'safe havens' have been added to the menu of temporary solutions to displacement—a menu which has traditionally included refugee camps. This strategic shift points to changing geo-politics and to different kinds of conflict which generate displacement.

The global geo-political landscape of today differs from that of the immediate post-World War II period in a multitude of ways, but in particular it can be distinguished by the nature of conflict. There has been a marked shift from wars between or among nations to fighting within single states. In 1995 virtually all refugee-producing conflicts were internal. As illustrated in chapter one, international law pertaining to internally displaced people "does not cover inter-communal violence or other cases of internal disturbances that create internal displacement." If almost all human displacement is being generated by internal conflicts which often involve inter-communal violence, as appears to be the case, there is a major lacuna in international law with respect to the protection of internally displaced persons. At the same time as conflict has become increasingly bound by national borders, the economies of nations have become more globally integrated and interdependent. Assistance to displaced persons in countries at war is usually a matter of

241 The Gulf War serves as a reminder that international conflict is not a relic of the modern past. Nonetheless, the basis of that war was arguably economic in nature, underscoring the globalization of trade and its attendant politics.
242 UNHCR, 1995, op. cit.
244 A new UN Declaration on the Rights of Internally Displaced Persons was being discussed by various parties, with no published results, during the period of this research.
international politics and interventions within a sizeable global economy of humanitarian assistance.

International responses to displacement have been political as well as humanitarian: "[i]t has proven much easier to prevent the flow of refugees than to prevent the abuses, violence, and social inequities that cause them to flee."\textsuperscript{245} UNHCR acknowledges that refugee assistance and ‘preventive protection’ often serve to contain the problems of developing countries in the interest of developed ones.\textsuperscript{246}

In general, the concern today is less with the refugee community, or for that matter with the host countries, which in the case of 90% of the world’s refugees is the developing world, but with the need to ensure that refugees do not disturb the peace of the developed world, or invite financial allocations which, we are told, they can ill afford.\textsuperscript{247}

"With an economic recession in the West, there is xenophobia towards refugees and immigrants."\textsuperscript{248}

In the absence of international law to protect people at home displaced by internal conflict, political expediency does shape humanitarian assistance and interventions.

Peacekeeping in the 1990s has taken place in failed or failing states where conflict creates human displacement usually within the borders of nation-states and public pressure to act is great. In addition to peacekeeping in the strictest sense — as the monitoring of peace agreements — peacekeeping missions are now charged with additional responsibilities such as the safe delivery of humanitarian relief supplies, the protection of refugees and internally

\textsuperscript{246} UNHCR, 1995, op. cit.
\textsuperscript{248} Interview, UNHCR senior manager, Geneva, October 25, 1994.
displaced persons, the disarmament of local militias, and sometimes nation-building in the absence of a government. But more important than the extended duties of peacekeepers is the change in kind and frequency of intervention — especially in relation to their roles in assisting displaced persons — since the Cold War. In the first four decades of its operations, the United Nations launched thirteen peacekeeping missions; since 1988 it has authorized twenty-five. From 1945 to 1989, US$3.6 billion was spent on UN peacekeeping operations; between 1990 and 1995 the cost was US$12 billion. Late in 1995 the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) began sending the 60,000 troops its members pledged to replace UN peacekeepers in Bosnia-Herzegovina and to oversee the peace accord signed in Paris in December 1995. The multilateral contributions to such operations by member states are far greater than ever before and are matched by exponential growth in the budget of UNHCR. From an annual expenditure of US$8 million in 1970, UNHCR has grown rapidly over the past two decades; in 1984 the organization spent US$444.2 million, and in 1994 US$1,166.8 million to assist refugees and others ‘persons of concern’. A startling statistic is the number of people who are neither refugees nor internally displaced persons, but are considered ‘persons of concern’ to UNHCR. In 1995 this number was greater than 3.5 million, the vast majority of whom were assisted in Europe. Together, these trends point to an expansion of both UNHCR’s mandate and the responsibilities of UN peacekeepers. These expansions are related: increasingly UNHCR works together with peacekeepers in various locations. “The humanitarian, political, and military elements of the UN system have been brought into a new and very intensive relationship.” A new and proximate relationship between soldiers and humanitarian workers has been forged in the post-Cold War period.

249 UNHCR, 1995, op. cit.
250 Ibid. Money stated in constant dollars.
251 Ibid., p. 117.
Preventing protection, negotiating borders

The word 'protection' has become something of a term of art.... The word 'refugee' is also a term of art in international law.... 252

Just as conflict occurs increasingly within individual states, UNHCR has recently become involved in operations within countries in which people are displaced, often working in conflict zones. 'Preventive protection' is part of a shift in refugee policy which occurred in the early 1990s. 253 It belongs to a language that emphasizes the 'right to remain' in one's home country over the former dominant discourse of the 'right to leave'. The 'right to remain' was endorsed by the UN High Commissioner, Sadako Ogata, in speeches made in the early 1990s:

today displacement is as much a problem within borders as across them.... the political and strategic value of granting asylum diminishes.... The cost of processing asylum applications has skyrocketed, while public acceptance of refugees has plummeted.... At the heart of ... a preventive and solution-oriented strategy must be the clear recognition of the right of people to remain in safety in their homes.... 'the right to remain'... the basic right of the individual not to be forced into exile.... I am convinced that preventive activities can help to contain the dimensions of human catastrophe by creating time and space for the political process. 254

James Hathaway, a professor of refugee law has called the 'right to remain' "the right to be toast." 255 Nonetheless, UNHCR has fully endorsed this approach. Bill Frelick, a refugee advocate and policy critic, adds that this shift in managing displacement may curb forced migration, but its solutions are more likely suited to the needs of governments than to the

protection of displaced people.\textsuperscript{256} He notes that concept of 'preventive assistance' — also
used by UNHCR and donor governments — is even more minimalist than 'preventive
protection'. The establishment of 'safe corridors' in the case of Bosnia is an example of
this strategy:

We must also funnel humanitarian assistance to hundreds of thousands more who are besieged inside
Bosnia, so that they do not become the next wave of refugees. It will require the opening of safe corridors
to accomplish this goal.

— U.S. Secretary of State, Lawrence Eagleburger, August 26, 1992\textsuperscript{257}

The virtues and vices of preventive protection provide the basis of a political debate which
elides the more geo-political and cultural machinations of power. Which groups are being
protected by peacekeepers and assisted by UNHCR 'at home'? Which groups have
developed the language and funded the interventions of preventive protection?

In more recent statements, the High Commissioner has spoken less of the right to remain
and has focused instead on inclusive approaches to displacement which blur the concept of
sovereign borders.\textsuperscript{258} Following the lead of the UN Secretary-General who asserts that
"the time of absolute and exclusive sovereignty" has passed, humanitarian interventions
which assist potential refugees 'at home' have both strategic value and local effect.
Preventive protection as a concept is now defunct in the Protection Division of UNHCR,
though it is still deployed under a different guise. The agency originally defined
'preventive protection' as

\textsuperscript{256} Bill Frelick, 1993, op. cit., p. 7.
\textsuperscript{257} Cited in Frelick, ibid., p. 9.
\textsuperscript{258} Sadako Ogata, UNHCR High Commissioner for Refugees, speech to the Centre for the Study of
Global Governance, London School of Economics, May 1993; speech to the New School of Social
Research, New York, November 1992. It is worth reiterating that in the case of Africa many borders were
imposed by colonial administrations, establishing sovereignty that in many cases became unstable after
independence.
the establishment or undertaking of specific activities inside the country of origin so that people no longer feel compelled to cross borders in search of protection and assistance. In this sense, for instance, action on behalf of the internally displaced can be defined as preventive protection, although the primary motive may be to address a genuine gap in protection rather than to avert outflow. Preventive protection in this sense may also include the establishment of 'safety zones' or 'safe areas' inside the country of origin where protection may be sought. It relates therefore to the protection of nationals in their own country. This subject is of such importance today to UNHCR that we have decided to devote an entire, separate chapter to it.259

By the end of 1994, the Division of International Protection at UNHCR had changed its stance. During an interview with a senior staff member, I was told that the term preventive protection is no longer used and was “an abuse of the language” in the first place. He noted that prevention is an antecedent action whereas protection comes into play after a crisis exists. UNHCR had created a teleological term difficult to defend in the face of criticism from refugee advocates and policy analysts.260 Moving from the more abstract concept of protection to its more material subject, the term ‘refugee’ at UNHCR has come to mean all those under UNHCR’s care, whether or not they cross an international border. This, of course, presents another teleology: who is a refugee is determined de facto on the basis of whether UNHCR assists them.

A politicized discourse of safe areas has replaced the term ‘preventive protection’ but not the basic concept. Discussion of blurred borders and safety zones is accompanied by other expressions such as ‘in-country assistance’, ‘country-of-origin responsibility’, monitoring, ‘early warning systems’, and ‘preventive development’ — all of which are designed to prevent or reverse refugee flows and to assist and protect displaced people within their own countries. This discourse effaces the dangers of proposed safe spaces. It is interesting

because it gives rise to a new set of political spaces and management practices for forcibly displaced people.\footnote{At the other end of the geographical spectrum, ‘stateless’ spaces of in-betweenness have been created in Western countries that are increasingly hostile towards asylum seekers. Airports in France, Spain, and Switzerland have all established ‘international zones’ where people wait in limbo while government officials determine the status of their claims. During the recent Rwandan crisis, the Kenyan Government demonstrated its own hostility towards Rwandan asylum seekers who landed at a Nairobi airport. They were denied status determination and access to the country, forcing UNHCR to set up tents at the airstrip until a suitable plan for their transport elsewhere could be arranged (telephone conversation with senior manager at UNHCR in Nairobi, May 16, 1994).} ‘Safe havens’ for Iraqi Kurds, ‘zones of tranquillity’ for returning Afghan refugees, ‘open relief centres’ for would-be Sri Lankan refugees, and ‘safe corridors’ to Muslim enclaves in Bosnia are all examples of this current trend as well as expressions of a post-Cold War rhetoric. One distinctive feature of operations in locations such as Bosnia and Somalia is the contemporaneous deployment of humanitarian staff and peacekeeping forces in the same place. This debut of UN refugee staff and military forces working together is another part of the transformation at UNHCR that coincides with the demise of Cold War tensions. A more startling aspect of this transformation is the significant amount of money targeted for military peacekeeping operations compared to the relatively paltry funds for humanitarian assistance or social and economic development.\footnote{By January of 1994, Canada had spent nearly $1 billion on military operations in the Former Yugoslavia alone. This amounted to twenty times the funds allocated for humanitarian assistance. See Paul Koring, “Price of Peacekeeping dwarfs aid”, \textit{The Globe and Mail}, January 4, 1994. In September 1993, Harper’s Index reported that the ratio of UN monies spend in 1992 on peacekeeping as compared to economic development was 5:2.}

In 1991, the Kurds in Northern Iraq would not formally have been UNHCR’s responsibility, but the agency was called upon because of its ‘response ability’: “The Iraqi Kurds were internally displaced but not refugees; UNHCR could do the job so we were given the go ahead.”\footnote{Senior manager, UNHCR, Geneva, interview, October 24, 1994.} Many consider this intervention the turning point in the management of displaced persons. This new development has continued within UNHCR with respect to its role in the Former Yugoslavia: “look at the mix of people... nobody really sat down to say ‘refugees’, ‘displaced persons’, ‘war victims’; it doesn't matter...
they need protection and assistance. UNHCR is there; they're equipped to do it.”

The definition of refugee at UNHCR is no longer predicated on the crossing of an international border. Increasingly, it’s job has become to assist people in order to avoid such crossings.

To justify its involvement in war zones, UNHCR has adopted a seemingly practical approach which emphasizes action and downplays the importance of its formal mandate as well as the political meaning of borders. In reference to the Former Yugoslavia, one senior staff member at UNHCR commented on Croatian borders and the confusion that recognition of such borders bred:

“there were a lot of people displaced within these borders, and then persons displaced across borders that nobody recognized; and then you had persons displaced within borders that nobody recognized; and then you had persons who weren't displaced at all, but were sitting being shelled to death in Sarajevo, and all of these people fell under the action of UNHCR, and nobody really cared. It’s a big change from these years of the 1980s.”

Thus, one rationale — albeit functionalist — which justifies UNHCR’s role in assisting during emergency situations is that it is able to do so.

A more cynical rationale is that UNHCR responds if donor governments are willing to pay. Most of UNHCR’s budget is generated through voluntary contributions on a project-by-project, or crisis-by-crisis, basis. As chapter two illustrated, donor hegemony occurs when funds are earmarked for particular refugee relief efforts. UNHCR has extended its scope to operate within countries at war because funders are willing to pay the organization ready to do the work. In the face of cuts and calls for rationalization within all United

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266 This presents a third teleology; UNHCR assists because it can; it can because it’s an assistance organization.
Nations agencies, UNHCR has so far been successful in customizing its competencies — emergency and protection roles in particular — to ensure continued financial viability.

The legitimacy of international borders is a related and current question among organizations managing displacement. In the foreword to a recent UNHCR document addressing the plight of internally displaced persons, the former Director of International Protection notes that people who are internally displaced on the ‘other’ side of the border have been called ‘refugees in all but name’.... Because they have not crossed an international boundary, the internally displaced have no access to the international protection mechanisms designed for refugees.... UNHCR finds it operationally untenable — as well as morally objectionable — to consider only the more visible facet of a situation of coerced displacement.... No two humanitarian crises are ever the same, and a global approach to such complex situations requires, if anything, finer tools of analysis and a larger arsenal of flexible responses.267

This is a compelling, sympathetic plea for inclusion on the part of the former head of the protection division. Senior legal staff at UNHCR’s protection division retain the legitimacy of the international border, yet challenge it at the same time: “The concept of the border is important.... We are a borderline agency.... The border is still a valid concept.... the space of humanitarian intervention or operation sits on the border.”268 The post-Cold War displacement of bodies within and across borders in concert with international humanitarian responses to the displacement has begun to transform the meaning and matter of these borders.

268 Senior manager, UNHCR, Geneva, interview, October 24, 1994. With respect to the last phrase, the UNHCR senior staff member added that the best example of this border space is the Cross-Border Operation in Somalia which is discussed later in this chapter and in chapter 5.
UNHCR has admitted that crossing an international border to assist displaced people in their own country repeatedly — for instance in Iraq — may have unintended political and human consequences. Such a strategy may undermine the concept of the state, its authority, and most alarmingly, the obligation of the state itself to provide protection if an international agency will do it instead. Providing protection and assistance in safe spaces may also prove ineffective, as fatal attacks on UN protected areas in Bosnia-Herzegovina during the summer months of 1995 illustrated. Thousands of defenceless civilians lost their lives while UN peacekeepers helplessly looked on.

While UNHCR recognizes these risks, it continues to expand its definition of ‘refugee’ to include internally displaced people in selected cases. While space, distance, and context may be increasingly important to UNHCR interventions, they are also part of discourse which legitimizes strategies which are flexible, financially viable, and politically popular with donors. Interventions dependent on the popularity of the cause and are predicated on the humanitarian interest of donors risk politicizing need. This kind of assistance is based less on consensual humanitarian principles than on the politics of neo-humanism, as described in chapter two.

Human displacement does not occur in neutral spaces, reducible to particular places and void of these political considerations. Histories of conflict and antagonistic but spatially contingent relations of power are often what force people to move from their homes in the first place. Equally, histories of domination and uneven geographies of power and influence shape the directions in which displaced people move. The example of Iraq after its defeat in the Gulf War provides a telling example: the UN was in an advantageous

position to demand from President Hussein's government the required 'consent' to intervene in order to assist the Kurds.

By framing human displacement within specific geographical contexts, however, UNHCR does question the utility of its own abstract, admittedly outdated operational definitions and proposes a potentially more situated and inclusive approach. It views displacement as an expression of a political relationship:

coerced displacement, whether within or across national borders, should be seen as the consequence and symptom of a broader problem involving the absence or failure of national protection, a problem which should be addressed globally rather than piecemeal.... Where called upon to provide assistance and protection to groups... it accordingly seeks to respond to the relevant needs of all members of the community, making distinctions, where appropriate, on the basis of actual need rather than status.

The preference to employ need rather than status as the basis for protection echoes the functionalism alluded to earlier with respect to who is a refugee. Nonetheless, it suggests that status is less important than the entitlement to protection it normally invokes. For an organization steeped in liberal humanism and rights-based discourse, this is a progressive step in at least one sense. A human right has little value if the delivery of its entitlements is

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270 In the late 1980s, the legitimacy of changes proposed in UNHCR's mandate was challenged by donor governments. Jean-Pierre Hocké became High Commissioner for Refugees in January 1986; during his tenure he repositioned the agency to exploit the end of the Cold War and openly challenged the conventional approach to protection. Hocké argued that the 1951 mandate was outdated and that the vast majority of contemporary refugees do not correspond to the Convention definition. Instead, he maintained that these displaced persons were 'victims of violence', belonging to wider categories of people affected by armed conflict or other more generalized forms of violence or danger. Hocké contended that protection was not a "legalistic, doctrinaire or static approach", that it required comprehensive approaches and solutions to refugee crises, the best of which was voluntary repatriation. In making this claim, he was accused of 'downgrading' protection and gambling with the protection of refugees: "It was definitely not a gamble with the protection function of the UNHCR. I can understand, even if I disagree, that some feel that way — those who look statically at the mandate, convention and definition. I came in and said that, if we do that, we become a museum. There were risks in moving people back, but those risks were carefully identified and taken into account." Hocké was forced to resign in 1989. See Lawyers Committee for Human Rights, The UNHCR at 40: Refugee Protection at the Crossroads, (New York, Lawyers Committee for Human Rights, 1991), pp. 90, 54.

not forthcoming. Perhaps the best summary of UNHCR’s involvement with displaced persons — refugees or otherwise — is this: “you cannot make a blanket statement (with respect to emergency responses).... Realpolitik dictates the art of the possible.”

A final example, the case of Somalia, illustrates the idea of ‘preventive protection’ in Africa. In Southern Somalia, UNHCR created a safe space which it called a ‘preventive zone’ along the Kenyan border in order to slow the flow of potential refugees into Kenya and to encourage Somali refugees in Kenyan camps to return home. The Cross-Border Operation, as the initiative was called, was also a strategy to empty the Kenyan camps after the Government of Kenya issued an ultimatum in January 1993 that all Somali refugees would be forcibly sent home. At the time, U.S. forces were in selected parts of Somalia as part of the Operation Restore Hope mission to assist the starving civilian population. It was thought that the presence of these forces would also represent security to refugees living in Kenya and attract them back to Somalia. Some refugees did return home, but other Somali nationals left their war-torn country for Kenya during the same period. In the end, the Cross-Border Operation did not meet its objectives, despite generous initial funding from donors. UNHCR designated the preventive zone as a safe space, but the people and politics on the ground imagined something else.

‘Safe havens’ and ‘preventive zones’ are expressions of an emerging post-Cold War discourse and are used as strategic safe spaces to both protect and contain would-be refugees in their home countries. This strategy is endorsed by Western governments which fund UNHCR to execute the necessary emergency relief operations. UNHCR is revising its own traditional category of ‘refugee’, recasting its protection mandate, and extending its reach inside the borders of countries at war where displaced people require assistance and

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272 Interview, UNHCR senior staff, October 18, 1994.
safe-keeping. In so doing, they prevent, preclude, or at least decrease the likelihood of refugees entering nearby safe countries.

The purpose of a preventive zone in Somalia is not much different from that of a buffer zone. Both aim to prevent influxes of refugees across political borders. While I have argued that an emerging discourse of displacement points to strategies of humanitarian assistance ‘at home’ within countries of conflict, buffer zones which exclude displaced persons also have considerable geo-political value. The U.S. has recently spent a great deal of time and resources focusing on its border with Mexico, one made particularly problematic by the fact that Mexico is not a signatory to the 1951 Convention nor to the 1967 Protocol. If Mexico were to sign these instruments of international law, the U.S. would have the right to return asylum seekers, including bona fide refugees, to Mexico because Mexico would be the first safe country of asylum. In this scenario, Mexico would, in effect, act as a buffer zone against asylum seekers trying to get to the U.S. or, in some cases, to Canada.

Political borders can generate marginalization, racism, and other unequal relations of power. Borderlands and boundaries have been widely discussed by geographers, feminists, and cultural theorists in many contexts. While a number of these authors draw on autobiographical experiences and politically-motivated movements across borders as the basis of analysis, most do not examine the geographical dimension of displacement. In this chapter, I have tried to illustrate how the hegemony of Western political culture has

repositioned the geographical locations and political positions of displaced persons on a global scale. The movement of displaced people, whether they are in ‘safe havens’ or refugee camps, is highly restricted and their safety spatially circumscribed. The ‘placement’ in displacement matters. Mobility is political.

For more than forty years the Cold War shaped political conflict in much of the world. In the mid-1980s, five explosive areas were generating refugees based on East-West conflict: the Horn of Africa, Southern Africa, Indo-China, Afghanistan, and Central America. By the mid-1990s, at least five interventions to assist internally displaced persons had been initiated in Europe, Africa, South, Central, and West Asia. As a response to the demise of the Cold War and the concurrent rise in human displacement, UNHCR crossed international borders and began operating in war zones for the first time. Increasingly, refugee crises are being averted through preventive measures and ‘safe havens’ in situ. This pattern suggests a shift in responsibility for displaced people from individual states to international organizations such as the UN. It also points to a major gap in contemporary international law pertaining to internally displaced people. Conceived after World War II, existing humanitarian law applies only to persons displaced because of armed war and not those displaced by inter-communal and internal conflict. Most displacement is caused by internal conflict, and strategic safe spaces are being used as stopgap measure in the absence of legal codes. There is surprisingly little public discussion about the efficacy of these ‘safe haven’ measures. Individual states have gone global in their management of forced migrants, while the displaced subjects of these strategies are increasingly encouraged to remain at home by providing protection to them there.

PART TWO

In part two, a case study of human displacement in the Horn of Africa is presented. Historical and contemporary geographies of conflict, displacement, and foreign interventions in the Horn contextualize the study. In Somalia, sustained civil conflict forced several million people to evacuate their homes in 1992-93. Several hundred thousand of those who fled the country sought refuge in Kenya. Part two analyzes the application of selected UNHCR policies and the implications of the agency’s role by focusing on Somali refugee camps in Kenya. Analysis of camp operations, in turn, provides a basis for theoretical discussions of gender, culture, and other power relations pertinent to geographies of displacement in the region.
Chapter 5
Border Crossings

Theorizing mobility begins with people’s stories and histories of migration. In this chapter, I begin to theorize mobility by examining two kinds of ‘border crossings’ in the Horn of Africa. In the first case, the Horn has been a strategic space subject to foreign influence during colonial, Cold War, and postcolonial periods. European powers staked their claims in the Horn of Africa beginning in the latter part of the nineteenth century. They have not only crossed borders to enter African territory, but have had a hand in the very creation of modern state boundaries. In the second case, members of different cultural groups in the Horn have been dislocated and forced across borders in the region. The ways in which certain borders were drawn have, in some instances, been the cause of human displacement.

I introduce the notion of a ‘geo-politics of mobility’ to argue that international borders are more porous to external influence and capital than to displaced bodies. Individual states have increasingly opted for multilateral solutions to human dislocation. Displaced subjects of international interventions are increasingly encouraged to remain at home by providing ‘safe spaces’ for them there. The mobility of international humanitarian aid is juxtaposed here with the relative immobility of involuntary migrants, generating two distinct but related geographies. The significantly large global economy in refugee relief activities and humanitarian interventions tends to operate in a localized manner, usually in close proximity to sources of human displacement and crisis. This economy, I maintain, is also tied to historical investments of colonial power and Cold War interests.
Figure 5.1

Horn of Africa

Legend

- Political Border
- Limits of Somalian state
- National Capitals
- Contested border area

credit: Nadine Schuurman

Approximate scale: 1 to 10,000,000
Lila Abu-Lughod makes the case for 'studying up', for analyzing networks and brokers of power rather than the powerless. She argues that local conditions are expressions of global relations of power and to ignore the organizations that embody this power is to mistake the object of inquiry. This chapter draws attention to the work of UNHCR which makes the status of 'refugee' practically possible; it makes the argument that the tensions which humanitarian assistance aims to ease are historically and spatially specific.

As illustrated in chapter two, Switzerland hosts international centres for banks and humanitarian organizations operating at a global scale. Geneva is a major site of funding and administration for humanitarian operations. In the following section, I discuss selected postmodern theories of mobility and identity and argue that most of these inadequately address the politics of mobility outlined above. While theories of migrant subjectivity and cultural politics are important, they are not sufficient in accounting for the global movements of money and migrants. The hegemony of certain countries in circles of humanitarian service delivery and the hypermobility of capital in relation to the markedly restricted movement of displaced persons are important considerations. Theoretical approaches attentive to these relationships pose a stark materialist challenge to some poststructuralist, cultural analyses. The mobility of forced migrants from 'Third World' countries is juxtaposed with that of 'First World' sponsors of colonial, Cold War, and now humanitarian projects. Some of the positions cultural theorists have taken and issues raised with respect to mobility and displacement are critically surveyed. In the remainder of the chapter, I then introduce a historical and contemporary case study from the Horn of Africa to illustrate this juxtaposition.

The Politics of mobility

We can redraw borders; we recognize that different types of boundaries operate at different scales.277
— G. Pratt

How human displacement is defined and managed depends on historically-specific configurations of geo-politics, as well as cultural and economic relations. The ‘politics of mobility’ is a useful tool for analyzing migration, specifically because it recognizes the variable movement of refugees and other disenfranchised groups. With reference to the relations of power and resources which bear on people’s movement, Doreen Massey has raised the idea of a ‘politics of mobility and access’, arguing that different groups of people have distinct relationships to mobility:

some are more in charge of it than others; some initiate flows and movement, others don’t; some are more on the receiving end of it than others; some are effectively imprisoned by it.278

While Massey’s ‘power geometry’ notes differential mobility among distinct groups of people, she does not delve far enough into the economies of power which regulate and facilitate their movement. In the case of refugees and other displaced persons, the “geo-politics of money” is as important as the geo-politics of the crisis which precipitates forced migration.279 In humanitarian circles, Geneva is a key site of both financial and geo-political power. Without international funding, few refugee camps would exist, expensive international interventions in Somalia and the Former Yugoslavia would not take place, nor would adjacent countries host as many asylum seekers as they currently do. I maintain that a transnational geo-politics of mobility attentive to money, power, and space which incorporates elements of cultural criticism provides a more effective tool for analyzing migration and the historical sites of struggle it involves. Just as “feminists need detailed,

historicized maps of the circuits of power," geographers require better analytical tools to examine critically relations among geo-politics, economic need and resources, and their combined human impact across space and culture.

In the case of refugees and other displaced peoples, the ‘geo-politics of mobility’ is informed not only by global geo-politics and economic power, but also by more local and social conditions of wealth and opportunity. Forced migration today constitutes a significant force as part of transnational movements. In 1995, over 27 million refugees and other ‘persons of concern’ were counted by the Office of UNHCR. Diasporic distributions are not, however, based on an equality of mobility and access among all groups. Opportunities to cross borders and move within a country, whether voluntary or involuntary, depend on economic resources, gendered access to jobs, and other key resources. At one level, the ‘geo-politics of mobility’ serves as a materialist corrective to the unimpeded ‘travelling cultures’ and diasporic populations heralded by some theorists.

Arjun Appadurai introduces the idea of ‘ethnoscape’ as a “landscape of persons who make up the shifting world in which we live.” These include tourists, business executives, exiles, immigrants, guest workers, refugees and other mobile groups. He argues that any analysis of ‘ethno’ without a spatial referent, or ‘scape’, is aspatial. While ‘ethnoscape’

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may spatialize the cultural relations and ethnicity of migrant subjects, the concept does not account for the differential power and resources which enable or force migration. It also excludes an examination of politics based on location or ethno-nationalism for people who do not move. Economies of money, space, and power shape the movement of people unevenly, migrant possibilities being expressions of the geo-politics of mobility.

In calling for reflexive ethnographic practices, ostensibly in Third World locations, James Clifford maintains that “(t)here is no longer any place of overview (mountain top) from which to map human ways of life, no Archimedian point from which to represent the world.” Rather, “(h)uman ways of life increasingly influence, dominate, parody, translate, and subvert one another.” While the end of the omniscient universal subject or narrator has no doubt given way to partial truths and more limited ways of seeing and, at the same time, interconnections among cultures have multiplied, the relations of domination hinted at by Clifford remain undeveloped. By textualizing the ethnographic experience, ‘culture’ is constructively problematized, but the cultural encounter nonetheless appears to occur in a vacuum with respect to the political economy which enables ‘travelling culture’ to occur.

The appeal of ‘travelling theorists’ may be seen as part of the seductive postmodern celebration of diaspora and hypermobility, or as a vision of more equitable relations. What many of these theorists do not register is that the accelerated movement of people across the globe parallels that of money: those with it can take advantage of ‘postmodern’ time-space compression Those who are uprooted from their homes and forced to flee their country with few resources experience migration in a very different way.

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The feminist postcolonial criticism of Trinh Minh-ha engages with the politics of mobility, albeit in a different register. She focuses on subjectivity in the context of inequitable power relations and traces movement as a basis of identity formation. Her writing, like her films, at once subverts linear (Western) representations of spaces and ideas and engages in a politicized critique of their material effects. An excerpt from her recent work illustrates this strategy:

To travel can consist in operating a profoundly unsettling inversion of one’s identity: I become me via an other…. Travelling allows one to see things differently from what they are, differently from how one has seen them, and differently from what one is. These three supplementary identities gained via alterity are in fact still (undeveloped or unrealized) gestures of the “self” - the energy system that defines (albeit in a shifting and contingent mode) what and who each seer is. The voyage out of the (known) self and back into the (unknown) self sometimes takes the wanderer far away to a motley place where everything is safe and sound seems to waver while the essence of language is placed in doubt and profoundly destabilized. Travelling can thus turn out to be a process whereby the self loses its fixed boundaries - a disturbing yet potentially empowering practice of difference.286

Trinh Minh-ha displaces the Western gaze, the universal subject, and the pretense of order in the world by theorizing the unsettling experience of travel constitutive of migrant subjectivity. In contrast to Appadurai, she qualifies her comments about travelling theory: “(d)ispossessed not only of their material belongings but also of the social heritage, refugees lead a provisional life, drifting from camp to camp, disturbing local people’s habits, and destabilizing the latter’s lifestyle…. On the one hand, migrant settlements can turn out to be ‘centres of hopelessness’ which soon become ‘centres of discontent’.”287

While Trinh Minh-ha contributes a postcolonial body of feminist critical theory to investigations of human mobility, she does not account for the systems of power which govern the movement of international capital and refugees. At the expense of money and geo-political considerations, she focuses on the cultural and poststructuralist expressions of mobility. If “(t)he war of borders is a war waged by the West on a global scale to preserve

287 Ibid., p. 12.
its values,” as she contends, any theoretical and political framework which aims to address these relations of power must incorporate the Western funders of this war which operates between the ‘First’ and ‘Third’ worlds, across borders, cultures, and historical contexts.

In addition to the cultural and political readings of migration, a transnational geo-politics of mobility calls for a integrated analyses of political systems — especially, in this case, the international refugee regime — and the financial centres within the global economy which both direct and fund the geo-political decisions taken. Heeding Lata Mani’s call for a revised politics of location in which “the relation between experience and knowledge is now seen to be not one of correspondence but one fraught with history, contingency, and struggle,” my focus moves to the Horn of Africa, a region in which Europe invested heavily during colonial rule and in which Soviet and American superpowers exerted control through alliances for strategic purposes during the Cold War. Civil conflict and human displacement today characterize the current geo-political landscape and the politics of mobility in this region. The intersections among colonial histories, Cold War geo-politics, ethnic nationalisms, and their respective financing in the Horn of Africa point to relations of power that have divided the Somali nation through the drawing and maintenance of particular borders. Violence in and adjacent to refugee camps in Kenya’s Northeast Province today remains a chronic problem related to this history of nation-building and border contests.


The people at whom humanitarian assistance is targeted are largely found in poorer, formerly colonized countries of the so-called ‘Third World’. Of the 27.4 million refugees and other persons of concern in 1995, 11.8 million live in Africa alone. The huge flow of humanitarian capital into Africa — in the form of peacekeeping and refugee relief — is far more impressive than the number of refugees and displaced persons who are allowed to leave. The next section examines relevant colonial, Cold War, and post-Cold War investments in the Horn of Africa. It highlights the relationship of colonizer to colony as this was superimposed upon nationalist claims for an ethnic state during the period of independence, followed by flows of money and arms from superpowers to countries in the Horn during the Cold War. An analysis of these relationships on a finer scale provides a context for one humanitarian crisis that besets this region today and the ‘refugee industry’ that has grown up around it. The formal resettlement routes ‘out of Africa’ prove to be few, and together with refugee confinement to camps located in marginal border areas, there is a strong correlation between money and movement.

The borders which produce refugees and circumscribe their movement in the Horn of Africa today are predicated on colonial and Cold War political geographies. The formation of borders during the colonial partition was reinscribed by infusions of arms and other investments during the period of superpower rivalry. Today these borders continue to be reinforced by the large, and no less political, flows of humanitarian assistance. The flow of ‘First World’ resources to the Horn continues today, albeit to serve ostensibly humanitarian rather than colonial or superpower interests. The relative immobility of refugees in the region is contrasted with the hypermobility of capital to the region, both of which have historical antecedents.

291 UNHCR, 1995, op. cit.
Somalia and its Region: Reinscribing Borders

In Africa the Cold War legacy came on top of a debilitating colonial legacy, thereby creating a double burden. — Astri Suhrke

My analysis principally concerns the Somali nation in the Horn of Africa and the displacement of many Somali people across and within borders which were drawn and redrawn during colonialism and at the time of independence. By nation I mean a cultural community of people who share some solidarity based in an historic attachment to territory, and by a consciousness of being distinct from other nations. A nation usually has a corresponding territory which, in the case of Somalia, is larger than the nation-state (see figure 5.2). The cultural emphasis of nation in this case is distinct from the modern Somalian nation-state. The territorial difference between the Somali nation and the Somalian nation-state has been a major source of geo-political conflict in the region throughout colonial, Cold War, and contemporary periods. Each period is marked by global influences of a political and economic nature, as well as regional tensions, which have together shaped Somali displacement.

For the purpose of distinguishing between nationality and ethnicity, I refer to nationals of the (former) nation-state of Somalia as Somalians and to people of Somali ethnicity constituting the Somali nation, as simply Somalis. Somalians are a remarkably homogeneous population by conventional measures; they are 99% Somali in terms of ethnicity, and almost all Somalians speak a dialect of the common Somali language. The vast majority of Somalians are Sunni Muslims, but despite these bases of commonality,

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293 Graham Smith, The Dictionary of Human Geography, third edition, (eds.) R.J. Johnston, D. Gregory, & D.M. Smith, (Blackwell, Oxford: Blackwell, 1994). I recognize that few nation-states are comprised of a single nation. The ideas of an ethnically pure or culturally homogenous state are potentially dangerous, as historical experience in Germany, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Rwanda, and elsewhere has demonstrated.
Figure 5.2
Territory of ethnic Somali concentration

Legend
- Political Border
- Limits of territory where ethnic Somalis are found
- National Capitals
- Rivers


credit: Nadine Schuurman
historical clan and subclan affiliations and antagonisms organize the political field. Six major clan families comprise the Somali nation. Four of these are predominantly nomadic: the Dir, Darood, Isaaq, and Hawiye. The other two, the Digil and Rahanwayn, are agriculturally based and situated between the Juba and Shabeelle rivers in Somalia. In Somalia the clan has been the basis of social and political organization for generations. Clans have traditionally served two apparently contradictory roles, as both centripetal and centrifugal forces. In the case of an external threat, there has been solidarity among clans whereas there has been antagonism among the same clans and subclans in the absence of such threats. Clans are associated with specific territories, normally determined by the circuit of nomadic migration. This spatial coding of clans into territorial units does not specify physical political borders, which means that the territories of neighboring clans may overlap. A significant number of Somalis also live in the Ogaden area of Ethiopia. In Kenya, between two and three per cent of the population is of Somali ethnicity. Most Somalis live in the country’s Northeastern Province, along the Kenyan-Somalia border, a region formerly known as the Northern Frontier District (NFD).

In underscoring the mobility of capital versus the relative immobility of Somali people over three historical periods, I argue that a former colonialism of derision along this border has been reinscribed in the current context as a colonialism of compassion.

**Drawing the Line, Dividing the Nation: Kenya and Somalia**

The Government of Kenya (GOK) has not hidden its disdain for Somali refugees living in Kenya, nor for its own Kenyan nationals of Somali ethnicity. Racism and discrimination

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295 IRBD (Immigration and Refugee Board Documentation Centre). Ottawa; response to information request no. KEN 3679, February 1, 1990.
against Somalis are practiced today just as they were during the colonial period in which Britain ruled Kenya and Northern Somalia, France controlled Djibouti, and Italy occupied Southern Somalia. While the first colonial powers in the Horn exercised only a maritime presence, the ‘scramble for empire’ among European nations in the late nineteenth century accelerated the process of colonial partition. Unsurprisingly, many borders in Africa were drawn with European interests rather than indigenous settlement patterns or local politics in mind. Conflict over the Kenya-Somalia border, in particular, can be traced back to colonial occupation at the turn of the century when Britain extended control over the semi-arid region now known as the Northeast Province of Kenya. The British colonial administration wanted to establish a ‘buffer zone’ between its borders with Ethiopia and Italian Somaliland (now Somalia) on one side and its railway and white settler population on the other.\footnote{296 Ogenga Otunnu, “Factors Affecting the Treatment of Kenyan-Somalis and Somali Refugees in Kenya: A Historical Overview” in \emph{Refuge}, vol. 12, no. 5, (North York, Ontario: York Lanes Press, 1992), pp. 21-25.} Accordingly, administrative boundaries were redrawn within Kenya, creating the Northern Frontier District (see figure 5.3). The ‘frontier’ in the district’s name was elucidated in 1909 when Somalis living in Kenya were prohibited from crossing the Somali-Galla line which divided the NFD from the rest of Kenya. This early effort to contain Somalis in Northeast Kenya led to strategies by subsequent governments to curtail the mobility of Somali Kenyans in relation to other Kenyan nationals.

The 1909 policy generated significant resistance to colonial rule on the part of Somalis. In response, the British administration – by means of legal ordinance – declared the NFD a closed district in 1926, a move which afforded it broad powers to sweep the Somali problem behind the line, as it were, using whatever force was necessary. A subsequent legal ordinance designated the NFD a ‘Special District’ which required its Somali inhabitants to carry passes or seek approval from authorities to enter other districts.
Figure 5.3
Provinces of Kenya

Legend
- Railways
- International Borders
- Provincial Borders
- Water
- Capital Cities

credit: Nadine Schuurman
Approximate Scale 1:5,000,000
Predictably, little attempt was made by the colonial administration to promote social or economic activities in the district nor to integrate it politically with the rest of Kenya. This geographical and socio-economic segregation was a practice continued after Kenya achieved independence. Even today, this ‘Special District’ remains distinctly poorer and less politically powerful compared to the rest of Kenya.

In 1960 British Somaliland, located in the northern part of the emerging country, united with Italian Somaliland in the South to form the independent Somalian Republic. Despite the formation of this new state, many Somalis remained outside its borders in the Ogaden region of Ethiopia and in the Northern Frontier District of Kenya. Ethnic nationalism and the quest for the unification of the pan-Somali nation under the leadership of the new government of the Republic of Somalia intensified the struggle for self-determination among Somalis in Kenya whose persistent political efforts succeeded in pushing the British Colonial Secretary to call for a commission that would determine the public opinion of the NFD. A United Nations Commission was then appointed to consult residents of the area and to make recommendations accordingly. The Commission found that ethnic Somalis in Kenya overwhelmingly preferred unification with the Somalia Republic to their political status as part of Kenya. The British colonial administration was, however, also in the process of negotiating Kenyan independence at the time with president-to-be, Jomo Kenyatta. During these talks, Kenyatta made it clear that he refused to cede Kenyan Somaliland to its neighboring republic. The British administration decided to placate Kenyatta by quickly writing its own Report of the Regional Boundaries Commission which recommended its preferred course of action, and reneged on its promise to follow through with the UN Commission's recommendations.

When this decision was announced, the Somalian Republic severed its diplomatic ties with Britain and mounted an insurrection in Northeast Kenya which became known as the 'Shifta War.' Shiftas were, and still are, defined as bandits. Bandit activity is related to the systematic economic marginalization of ethnic Somalis living in this region of Kenya, the Northeast Province of Kenya being one of the poorest regions in the country. By relegating resistance in the area to mere regional 'banditry', the British administration tried to undermine the political legitimacy of Somali actions. In efforts to counter resistance, the colonial administration of the day declared a ‘state-of-emergency’ in the district in March 1963. Immediately after Kenya’s independence in December 1963, the newly independent Kenyan Government also declared a state-of-emergency in the Northeastern Province and held the Somalian government responsible for rebel activity in the region. Somali surveillance continued despite the change in government. Once again, mobility was curtailed and due legal process suspended. In the case of the Somalia-Kenya border, the colonial partitioning late in the nineteenth century was reinscribed at the moment of Kenyan independence with the help of the British administration.

After Kenyan independence, the political struggle for the unification of a Somali nation continued at regional and continental levels. Somalia looked for support from the Organization of African Unity (OAU), founded in 1963, but found none. While the OAU admitted that the borders of post-independent African states were artificial, it was committed to territorial integrity and the survival of these borders as a practical compromise to achieve peace among African states. Between 1964 and 1967, reports suggest that some

299 IRBD, 1990, op. cit.
2,000 Somalis were killed by Kenyan security forces.\textsuperscript{300} The pressure for unification continued, however, and at the OAU Summit in Mogadishu in 1974, a memorandum was circulated to delegates demanding the return of the disputed territory to Somalia. The attorney general of Kenya who was attending the summit declared that “Kenya could never agree to surrender part of her territory. Kenyans, be they Borans or Somalis, who did not support Kenya ‘should pack their camels and go to Somalia’.”\textsuperscript{301} The position of the Government of Kenya, which vowed not to cede any ground to Somalia, had very material implications for Kenyan Somalis. In the struggle to gain independence from colonialism, the new Kenyan Government was complicit and reinscribed the colonization of the Northern Frontier District. Soon after, expelling inhabitants of the area became a means of addressing Somali resistance and rectifying the ‘Somali problem’. Although the Republic of Somalia formally renounced its claim on the Northeast Province in 1967, the state-of-emergency policy remained in effect in the region until 1991, and the surveillance and expulsion of Somalis – of Kenyan or Somalian nationality – by the Kenyan Government remains current practice.

\textbf{Cold War Proxies and Refugees}

During the Cold War, Somalia’s strategic location near the oil-rich Middle East was perceived to be of great value to U.S. and Soviet superpowers. The border tensions generated by the pan-Somali project shifted in the late 1970s because of Cold War rivalries in which Somalia and Ethiopia both became proxies in the periphery. Ethiopia had benefited from huge amounts of U.S. military assistance since the 1950s, and the U.S. had a well-established base in what is present-day Eritrea. When Somalia signed a friendship treaty with the Soviet Union in 1974, the tension between superpowers in the region

\textsuperscript{300} Ogenga Otunnu, 1992, op. cit.
\textsuperscript{301} Njonjo cited in ibid.
intensified and the Somalian Government used this alliance as leverage for obtaining substantial economic and military assistance. By 1976, the U.S.S.R. had almost four thousand military and civilian advisors in Somalia. Superpower influence, however, could not be separated from regional tensions in the Horn, particularly between Somalia and Ethiopia over the Somali-occupied Ethiopian Ogaden territory. While Ethiopia struggled with internal crises, Somalian forces prepared to attack the country against Moscow's advice. In September 1977 they invaded the Ogaden region of Ethiopia in a move to annex it. In a complicated changing of client states during the same year, the U.S. withdrew from Ethiopia; Ethiopia then invited Soviet assistance which it received. The Somalia government, angered by the Soviet betrayal, forced the U.S.S.R. to leave its military base at Berbera in Northern Somalia; the base was taken over by the U.S. which was still keen to retain an influence in the region. With the assistance of the Soviet Union, the Ethiopian Government spent at least $1.5 million per day on war efforts between 1977 and 1979. Where colonial interests had shaped geo-politics in the Horn of Africa only a decade earlier, superpower rivalries in these strategic postcolonial proxy states became the major external influence both politically and economically in the region by the late 1970s.

Somalia lost its bid to take over the Ogaden from Ethiopia. With one of the largest armament airlifts in African history, the Soviet Union and Cuba enabled Ethiopia to defeat the Somalian military by March 1978. After the Ogaden war ended that year, the avowedly anticommunist President Moi of Kenya sided with ardent Marxist Ethiopian President Mengistu against the perceived threat that Somalia posed. Cold War ideological bases of opposition were subsumed by regional geopolitics and a common enemy, testimony to the tenacity of the pan-Somali project of unification despite colonial and superpower influence.

302 Ibid.
While Ethiopian and Kenyan governments gladly accepted investments of ‘aid’ from opposing First World superpowers, they exercised direct control where possible over the ambitions of the Somalian state and Somalis outside its borders. Both global and regional in terms of political scope, “(t)his long history of conflict and tension has created a distorted and hostile image of the Somalis as ‘enemies’ of the Kenyan state.”

The legacies of Cold War rivalry in the Horn were basically two-fold: large quantities of armaments were transferred to the region, on the one hand, and a significant number of refugees were generated along the Somalia-Ethiopia border, on the other. In 1976, Somalia had one of the largest and best-equipped armed forces in sub-Saharan Africa. Then President Siad Barre sought arms to increase control on the domestic front and “in pursuit of expansionist goals, with a view to annexing part of Ethiopia and Kenya.”

The presence of internationally recognized refugees inside Somalia also proved profitable. The Office of UNHCR — in conjunction with other international aid organizations — supplied large quantities of food to Somalia throughout the 1980s, though not all of it went to feed the hundreds of thousands of refugees. In 1988, UNHCR officials were denied access to refugee camps in Northern Somalia by Somalian Government officials. One census revealed that the population in a given camp was 39,000 — less than half the Somalian claim of 82,000. The presence of large numbers of refugees in Somalia nonetheless precipitated infusions of First World capital to support the anticommunist cause. While Cold War strategies treated Somalia as little more than surface for superpower influence, the economic and military gains from such alliances provided ammunition for pan-Somali nationalism and Somalia’s regional ambitions.

After the Cold War: Global Disinterest and Kenyan ‘Crack-downs’

Postcolonial, or post-independence, geo-politics along the Kenya-Somalia border are historically contingent expressions of colonial and Cold War investments combined with regional ambitions of a pan-Somali state. While anti-colonial conflict led to Kenyan independence in 1963, the new government then waged war on particular groups within its borders. By the 1980s border confrontations and general insecurity had provoked severe military repression and many civilian deaths in the former Northern Frontier District. Arguing that Somalians were infiltrating the country, the government began screening all ethnic Somalis in Kenya in 1989. At the same time, it forcibly removed some 3,000 Somalis to Somalia.307 Some Kenyan nationals were among the five hundred Somalis sent across the border to Somalia in December 1989.308 Kenyan Somalis who had never been to Somalia were ‘returned’ to Mogadishu if they did not have proper identification when stopped by police. The politics of mobility for Kenyan Somali citizens remains precarious. One test used by Kenyan authorities to distinguish ‘authentic’ Kenyan Somalis from Somalians relates to language skills: if an ethnic Somali can speak English and Kiswahili, Kenya’s two national languages — one being a legacy of colonialism — s/he is more likely to be Kenyan, despite the fact that Somali is spoken on both sides of the official political border.

The program of the Kenyan Government in the late 1980s made life grim for Somalis from either side of the border. State-of-emergency laws in the area allowed for up to fifty-six days detention without trial, and harassment, beatings, and torture of Somalis were reported.

The Kenyan authorities are also using the influx of Somalis seeking sanctuary to impose a discriminatory and repressive screening process on its own ethnic Somali community, which has suffered a history of persecution. The arrival of the refugees is being used as an opportunity to impose compulsory screening on all Kenyan-Somalis, in order to identify 'illegal aliens.'

Ogenga Otunnu adds that the screening process, combined with the strategy of keeping Somalians in camps and involuntary repatriation, forms an unstated policy of 'refugee deterrence.' On June 16, 1991, hundreds of Somalis were rounded up by Kenyan authorities for screening; a subsequent report noted that on the weekend of August 15/16, the police burst into the temporary homes of 2,000 Somali and Ethiopian refugees in Nairobi and Mombasa, rounded them up, forced them to board lorries at gun point after which they were driven to refugee camps. Families were separated and many small children left abandoned. The police were apparently in search of any 'Somali-looking person' in areas with large groups, such as Eastleigh (a Nairobi suburb), South C and Koma Rock.

It is ironic, given this situation, that the word ‘asylum’ — which is derived from the Greek asylon — means “something not subject to seizure” or “freedom from seizure.” Many Somali asylum seekers did not find sanctuary in Kenya. Instead they were the targets of racist raids and random removal to a country to which some had never been. Again in August 1992 and in August 1993, Kenyan authorities rounded up refugees living in urban areas and purposefully transferred them to remote camps and border sites located in the Northeastern Province. The Government refused to allow UNHCR to house any refugees in Central Kenya, protecting this area — as the British administration before it had — from a Somali ‘invasion.’

310 Ogenga Otunnu, 1992, op. cit.
Despite deterrence measures and government ‘round-ups’, several hundred thousand refugees from Somalia began pouring over the border into Kenya as civil conflict in Southern Somalia mounted early in 1992. Widespread famine and the collapse of the Somalian state exacerbated this situation in which an estimated 500,000 Somali citizens died. Well over a million Somalis were internally displaced and some 600,000 fled the country, many of them seeking asylum in nearby Kenya. While they were not warmly welcomed, the Kenyan Government was obliged to tolerate them, partly because of its commitment in international law to the UN Convention and Protocol relating to the Status of Refugees as well as the OAU Convention, and partly because it needed the continued support through foreign aid of donor countries – many of which had suspended funds to Kenya at that time. While donor countries awaited a satisfactory outcome of the country’s first multi-party elections before reconsidering their aid commitment to Kenya, President Daniel Arap Moi grudgingly allowed Somali refugees into Kenya on the condition that they reside in the border camps. Continued capital flows of development aid from Europe and North America to Kenya were conditional upon a proven commitment to democratic process and the country’s acceptance of Somalis in need of humanitarian assistance, some of which would no doubt benefit Kenya. In 1992 and 1993, UNHCR spent US$40 million to establish refugee camps and border sites in Kenya.

Less than a week after President Moi won the Kenyan election in December 1992, he announced that refugees would be sent back to Somalia immediately. Having expressed this sentiment earlier, in August 1992, he now had the diplomatic and political power to withdraw some of his support for Somali refugees in the country. Meanwhile, on the request of the UN Secretary-General, UNHCR initiated the Cross Border Operation (CBO) inside Somalia in order to stem the flow of refugees from Somalia to Kenya and to entice those refugees already in Kenya to come home. Without President Moi’s support, UNHCR could not operate on the same scale within Kenya and so sustained efforts to fund
CBO ensued. The idea was to invest in community rehabilitation in Southern Somalia to encourage refugee repatriation to Somalia and thus resolve the problem. UNHCR headquarters established the Special Emergency Fund for the Horn of Africa (SEFHA) and began a major fundraising effort in Geneva among donor countries to finance the Cross Border initiative. To cover the anticipated costs of repatriation, US$5.5 million was requested. UNHCR appealed for another US$13 million for CBO.

UNHCR established four outposts in Southern Somalia as part of the Cross Border Operation. The distance between the Kenya-Somalia border and the outposts located a few hundred kilometres inland along the Juba River circumscribed the ‘preventive zone’, the strategic safe area discussed in the last chapter. The buffer zones of the colonial and post-independence periods were effectively transposed to the Somalian side of the border where prevention, rather than containment in Kenya’s Northeastern Province, was thought to be an effective means of managing the mobility of Somalis. Considerable sums of money were required to orchestrate the preventive zone. More than twenty NGOs were hired by UNHCR as partners in the CBO initiative, which included ‘quick impact projects’ (QIPs) to regenerate local towns and villages. These projects, which aimed to help communities resume a normal life after the devastation of war, normally had a funding ceiling of US$50,000 per project. In 1993, the total number of QIPs recorded as part of Cross Border Operations was three hundred and twenty.314

By June 1993 some 30,000 Somali refugees had returned home — 12,000 of these with the help of UNHCR.315 Unfortunately, the material incentives to return to Somalia were sufficiently lucrative — usually a three month food supply for each person — to encourage

314 Ibid.
some refugees to return more than once. The 285,000 refugees remaining in the camps at that time were considered potential returnees until peacekeeping operations in Somalia, also in the name of humanitarian assistance, went seriously awry.

As civil war continued to ravage large parts of Somalia in 1992, observers outside the country watched the politically-induced famine take its toll on much of the civilian population and declared Somalia a country in anarchy, unable to rule its own affairs. This thinking gave rise to UN Security Council resolution 794 which authorized a Unified Task Force (UNITAF) of thousands of peacekeeping troops to enter Somalia to ensure the delivery of relief supplies. ‘Operation Restore Hope’, as the mission was called, was the first peacekeeping operation which intervened in a sovereign member state when that state did not present a military threat to its neighbors.\(^{316}\) Reports that more journalists than soldiers took part in the amphibious landing of U.S. Marines just before Christmas in 1992 speak to the popularity of the Somalian cause and international awareness of the humanitarian tragedy it represented. Operation Restore Hope was an experiment in post-Cold War humanitarian intervention on a global scale (see figure 5.4). “It (the West)
Playing Cop or Playing God?

Figure 5.4
Guardian Weekly, August 22, 1993
denounces Somalia as unfit to govern itself, but says nothing of superpower rivalries in
nourishing armed conflict there,"^{317} nor does "it" like to account for the investments during
its own colonial occupations.

The U.S. Marines were replaced by a UN peacekeeping force — UNOSOM II — in May
of 1993. The UNOSOM II operation cost sponsoring governments US$1.5 billion during
its first year of operation. On the non-military side of humanitarian intervention, UN
agencies proposed a ten month budget for relief and rehabilitation in 1993 to the tune of
US$166 million. More than fifty international NGOs funded principally by UN operated in
Somalia during that year. However, in June 1993 the popularity of Somalia as the
destination for millions of dollars in humanitarian assistance began to decline. The ambush
and murder and fourteen Pakistani UN peacekeepers was considered retaliation by faction
leader, Mohammed Farah Aideed, for a UNOSOM II weapons sweep in the Mogadishu
neighbourhood he controlled. A UNOSOM II air attack in Mogadishu was launched to
bring Aideed to justice. Unfortunately it also targeted a number of Somali civilians who
were killed, an event which severely damaged UNOSOM II's reputation in Somalia as a
humanitarian peacekeeping force. The death of eighteen American soldiers later in 1993
adversely affected the popularity of the Somali cause abroad. TIME magazine ran a
photograph of one dead American soldier being paraded around the streets of Mogadishu
by anti-UN Somalian protesters. Before long, funding for humanitarian projects in
Somalia began to drop dramatically, and in March 1995 UNOSOM II withdrew from
Somalia altogether.

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^{317} Ella Shohat & Robert Stam, *Unthinking Eurocentrism: Multiculturalism and the Media*, (NY/London:
Civil conflict in Somalia continues, fueled in part by the huge transfer of arms provided to Somalia when it was being courted by both superpowers during the Cold War. On the other side of the border, in Kenya's Northeastern Province, economic and social underdevelopment are abated only by the relative economic boom provided by refugee camps and relief operations in the area (see figure 5.5). Foodstuffs are distributed every fifteen days in the camps, and international NGOs provide social, health, and other community services. After the Ogaden War, the large number of Ethiopian Somali refugees remaining in Somalia provided an important source of foreign capital to the economy. President Barre used them to obtain external aid easily. Now the Kenyan Government profits from its tolerance of refugees. Not only does it receive financial 'incentives' from UNHCR and other international organizations, but in a back-handed and perhaps ironic way, the refugee situation in Kenya's Northeastern Province has stimulated economic and social development in the form of jobs and the increased availability of commodities, primary education, and medical services offered in the camps.

Refugee Resettlement "Out of Africa"

Next to the unfettered flows of humanitarian assistance flowing into the Horn of Africa, refugee movement in the opposite direction is unremarkable. Refugee resettlement abroad is one permanent solution for refugees living in temporary camps, but access to resettlement opportunities is becoming increasingly difficult as the number of government-sponsored refugees in some of the major host countries declines. At the same time as general resettlement targets are decreasing, the allotment of refugee places for Africa remains a small proportion of the declining total. During 1992-93, Canada and the U.S. had overall targets of 13,000 and 142,000 government-sponsored refugees respectively. Projections for government-sponsored refugees to be resettled in the 1995-96 fiscal year
Figure 5.5
Refugee Camps in Kenya

Locator map

Refugee camp site
Other camps
Urban Areas
Refugee entry point

Not to Scale
Source: CARE International in Kenya

credit: Nadine Schuurman
have dropped in both countries, to 7,300 in Canada and 90,000 in the U.S.\textsuperscript{318} African refugees comprise 36% of the world refugee population, yet no refugee-receiving countries set aside the same proportion of their places for refugees from Africa (see table 5.1). During 1994-95, Australia offered 800 of 13,000 places for refugees from Africa. Canada offered 1520 spots of its 7,300 total for African refugees, and the U.S. had a ceiling for Africa of 7000 places of its 110,000 total for this same fiscal year. While opportunities for resettlement “out of Africa” are increasingly slim, UNHCR in Geneva pays for more NGO partnerships to deliver humanitarian assistance in Africa than in any other continental region. In 1992, one hundred and twenty five NGOs were hired by UNHCR to work in Africa; this represents 35% of the NGO total.\textsuperscript{319} In the same year, UNHCR spent 27% (US$298 million) of its total budget on refugee relief operations in African countries, down from 34% in 1991.

Screening activities for refugee resettlement in Africa are also geographically concentrated. Most of this activity was and is based in Nairobi where the U.S. Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS) has its only office in sub-Saharan Africa. Other governments that actively process refugee resettlement applications \textit{in situ}, namely the Australians and Canadians, also have their largest offices here. In addition to these immigration services, UNHCR maintains a high profile and large international staff for both Kenyan and regional operations in Nairobi. This concentration of resettlement services is somewhat surprising, given that refugees are officially required to remain in the rural camps. The United States’ INS set up its Nairobi office in 1987, initially to deal with refugees coming out of Ethiopia and the Sudan.\textsuperscript{320} It contracts a U.S. church-based organization, the Joint Voluntary

\textsuperscript{318} U.S. Department of State, Department of Justice, & Department of Health & Human Services. “Report to the Congress on Proposed Refugee Admissions for Fiscal Year 1996”, July 1995. Pre-publication copy. Canadian totals are announced by the Canadian Immigration Minister every November 1st.

\textsuperscript{319} UNHCR, 1993, op. cit.

\textsuperscript{320} Interview, INS Officer, US Embassy, Nairobi, January 11, 1995.
Table 5.1

Annual Resettlement Ceilings for Government-Sponsored Refugees

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<td>142,000</td>
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<td>90,000</td>
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321 Sources: U.S. Department of State, Department of Justice, & Department of Health & Human Services. "Report to the Congress on Proposed Refugee Admissions for Fiscal Year 1996", July 1995. Pre-publication copy; "Report to the Congress on Proposed Refugee Admissions for Fiscal Year 1995", September 1994. Canadian totals are announced every November 1st; they come from Citizenship and Immigration Canada and were confirmed for the purpose of this table by the Immigrant Services Society of B.C.

322 Canada's refugee numbers have actually fallen in comparison to 1994/95 targets. In 1994/95, special programs for a category of '3-9' refugees from the Former Yugoslavia and Afghanistan were counted separately from the CR-1 (government-sponsored) refugees listed above. For the year 1995/96, these 3-9 refugees have been reclassified as CR-1 refugees and included in the 7,300 total. While this decrease is invisible in official statistics, the total number of refugees other than members of these particular groups has dropped.

In 1995, the Canadian Council for Refugees (CCR) provided statistics showing that the number of refugee landings had decreased annually, both as a percentage of total immigration and in absolute numbers, each year since 1989. The CCR said that the reduction in government-sponsored refugees could be partly explained by the reduction in resources allocated to overseas resettlement.
Agency (JVA), to travel to refugee locations where staff assess refugee eligibility for resettlement. This approach is unique among resettlement countries screening applicants in Kenya, and Africa generally. Only the U.S. has its own screening agency, and in Kenya JVA staff work in the camps where refugees are required to stay. Nonetheless, resettlement places remain few. In March 1995, JVA significantly reduced its screening of Somali refugees for resettlement to the U.S.

The relative containment and immobility of Somali refugees could not provide a more vivid contrast to the hypermobility of humanitarian dollars from donor countries abroad. Responsibility for refugees is expressed in two geographically distinct ways: on a minor scale as an issue of resettlement among a few individual states; and on a major scale as an issue of funding relief activities in countries which both create and receive refugees. On the one hand, refugees are a concern of international politics; on the other, they are the basis of a huge global economy in humanitarian relief. In 1994, more than 95% of UNHCR’s donations for humanitarian assistance came from fourteen governments of industrialized countries and the European Commission. Despite the huge flow of humanitarian dollars to African countries at present, one staff member at JVA contends that

"the donors are willing to pay them [UN agencies] off.... Africa is a 'sinkhole'. 'You [UN agencies] take care of it; here's the money' will eventually turn to 'you [UN agencies] take care of it; we're not paying anymore.' Now we are in a grazing period where there is big money to be made [working in the aid industry]."324

Whether a financial crisis is looming in the global economy which funds humanitarian crises remains to be seen. What is clear is that the availability and mobility of money corresponds inversely to the relative poverty and confinement of refugees in Kenya. Those

323 UNHCR, 1995, op. cit. See also the data presented in Table 3.2.
324 Interview, JVA staff, Nairobi, January 11, 1995.
without money, in fact, become less mobile as humanitarian aid is able to cross borders more quickly. The geo-politics of mobility points to the importance of the international humanitarian machinery which has the power to mobilize vast amount of money on a global scale. The effects of these power relations are felt by refugees and other displaced persons whose own mobility is shaped by this economy of assistance.

Towards a Transnational Geo-politics of Mobility

During the colonial period, Somalis were divided by borders demarcating Kenyan, Ethiopian, and Somalian territories. In what became Kenya's Northeast Province, the will of the majority of Somali people to join the Somalian Republic was disregarded by the ruling British colonial administration, and the existing border was reinscribed by the nascent Kenyan government. Somalia mounted the Shifta War to take over the Northeast Province from Kenya, but succeeded only in reinforcing the marginal economic and social location of Somalis within Kenya. During the period of superpower influence and investment in the Horn, Somalia attempted to extend control over Somalis living in the Ogaden region of Eastern Ethiopia. Again, the effort was unsuccessful, though indirectly Somalia profited by harboring large numbers of refugees. This, in turn, provided funds from the coffers of First World international humanitarian assistance to this Third World proxy and ally. Somalia became one of the most highly armed countries in sub-Saharan Africa. Despite ambiguous Cold War posturing, superpower interests were often used as leverage to finance regional geo-political strategies.

The coup d'état in Somalia in 1991 and the ensuing famine generated human displacement on a massive scale. This forced migration combined with severe malnutrition precipitated the arrival of hundreds of millions of dollars which flowed freely into Somalia and Kenya to fund rehabilitation and refugee relief activities. The two distinct geographies of mobility
presented here point to the variable porosity of borders at regional and international scales. They testify to the fact that humanitarian capital crosses borders much more easily than refugees can traverse the same frontiers. By legally requiring that all Somali refugees in Kenya live in one of three camps located in the Northeast Province, the contemporary geopolitics of mobility for Somalis has been linked to the same politics in earlier periods, especially to strategies of containment practiced by the British colonial administration and the Kenyan Government which maintained the province’s designated ‘state-of-emergency’ status until 1991.

The treatment of Somalis during each of these periods is distinctive and indicative of a particular geo-politics of mobility underscored by a First World-Third World geography of ‘managing’ Somali people. In the first instance, colonial partition divided the Somali nation, an act which was reinscribed at Kenyan independence. Somalis were not allowed to leave the newly forming Kenyan state, though they remained marginal along the Kenya-Somalia border. Later, many were literally ‘sent home’ to Somalia, a country to which some had never been. Finally, Somalians fleeing internal strife crossed the border into Kenya where, due to international obligations and the need for international aid on the part of the Kenyan Government, they were accepted with reticence. The transnational politics analyzed here point to historically contingent sites of contest, geopolitics, and related international investments in the Horn of Africa. The geo-politics of mobility is a tool for analyzing the economic and corporeal power invested in managing migration.

Given the failure of the international intervention in Somalia, the implementation of humanitarian programs in war zones is perhaps a ‘predicament of culture.’ The refugees who flee such violence, however, are not part of a travelling culture but of a relatively immobile institutionalized culture of containment in camps. By introducing the geo-politics
of mobility as well as an analysis of differential access to the power and resources which shape migration, I have attempted to politicize Appadurai's notion of 'ethnoscapes' and to draw critical distinctions between voluntary and involuntary migrants. Equally, I have placed 'travelling cultures' within the context of a globalized economy of geo-political interests. While the loci of foreign influence in the Horn of Africa have shifted historically, responses to forced migration are governed by the geo-politics of international relations and financed by the brokers of humanitarian assistance, many of whom are based far away in neutral Switzerland. With respect to humanitarian operations, evidence presented in chapter two established that Geneva is major site of political power for determining responses to crises of displacement. It is a global site of international finance and UN administration where the geo-politics of money and mobility are negotiated and humanitarian dollars are solicited. The managers and funders of the international refugee regime — in Switzerland and elsewhere — have their own priorities. Increasingly, opportunities for refugee resettlement in industrialized countries are declining. The decline in political will to accept large numbers of refugees is, arguably, an expression of neo-conservative and neo-liberal politics in many European and North American countries combined with the absence of Cold War rivalries.325

In this chapter, I have argued for a transnational geo-politics of mobility that is attentive to material and historical locations of struggle. Borders are more porous to humanitarian aid flowing from First World to Third than to the displaced people in the latter location for whom such aid is intended. The Horn of Africa is the site of several geographies of mobility marked by historical layers of overlapping tension, conflict, and investment. While Somalia and Kenya remain nominally postcolonial states, the geo-politics of mobility

for Somali refugees today is informed by a colonialism of compassion — spatial relations of economic and political power which are negotiated, funded, and implemented across borders and among cultural groups.
Chapter 6
F is For Field

In 1995, more than 5.8 million people in continental Africa were refugees, a number which represents 36% of the world's total refugee population. Refugee camps are one temporary solution to the plight of the dramatic number of displaced people in the region. At the end of 1994, Kenya alone sheltered more than 250,000 refugees in camps located, for the most part, at the geographical and economic margins of the country. They exchange the rights and entitlements of citizenship for safety in camps administered by the UNHCR and supported by donations from countries in Europe, North America, as well as Japan. As prima facie refugees, they are spatially segregated in border camps and excluded from participating in Kenyan society. This chapter focuses on the negotiation of space in three camps and its relation to gender and political status. I weave a partial picture of the spaces in which refugees move and live. At the same time, the chapter emphasize the organization and demarcation of spaces for refugees, Kenyan citizens, and international staff, forging connections between the discursive and material sites of power in and around the refugee camps.

In 1994, "[a]s in past years, Kenyan authorities threatened to arrest any refugees living outside of designated camps and occasionally conducted sweeps in urban areas to find Somali refugees." The Kenyan Government insists that all prima facie refugees — whose status is designated by international refugee law and not by the Kenyan Government — live in camps where they are prohibited from seeking employment or moving around the country. Instead, they are provided with bi-monthly foodstuffs, basic medical services,

327 The Kenyan Government maintains a hostile policy towards almost all refugees who are required to live in camps and thus prohibited from living in urban areas. The location of the camps in border areas is decided by the Kenyan Government, not UNHCR.
primary schooling, and some housing materials, most of which are paid for by donor
governments in Europe and North America. John Rogge has described these constructions
as “bleak and insecure holding camps along the Kenyan-Somali border”, noting a trend in
much of the global South towards restricting and confining refugees to camps where
minimal services are available.\textsuperscript{329} He observes that UNHCR is careful not to make the
camps too attractive to potential refugees and other migrants by maintaining only the
minimum educational and medical services required by international human rights
instruments, and providing basic food and shelter, an approach which has been called
“humane deterrence.” Nonetheless, the findings of one evaluation suggest that camps and
border sites in Kenya had attracted both Kenyan Somalis and Somalis in 1993 because of
the relative wealth of these locations.\textsuperscript{330} This observation alludes to the strategic use of the
camps by refugees and others, and to the relative poverty of the Northeast Province in
comparison to other Kenyan provinces.

As political spaces of economic dependency and activity, refugee camps embody a tension
between discourses of universality and particularity. They are material expressions of
international human rights and refugee law, on the one hand, and segregated spaces of
political ‘otherness’ on the other. In these spaces, Somali cultural practices meet UN
protocols on Kenyan soil. These encounters are not simply a matter of cultural contact but
are constitutive of hierarchical political, economic, and social relations of power.\textsuperscript{331}
Henrietta Moore notes that “households are situated in a system of redistribution which is
materially and discursively structured according to local and supra-local understandings of

\textsuperscript{329} John Rogge, “The Challenges of Changing Dimensions among the South's Refugees: Illustrations
\textsuperscript{331} See Akhil Gupta and James Ferguson, "Beyond 'Culture': Space, Identity, and the Politics of
the rights and needs of particular sorts of persons." The spaces of refugee camps are *in policy and in practice* (though these are not necessarily the same) structured according to 'supra-local' understandings of 'local' needs. That is to say, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees organizes camps, ostensibly with the shelter, provision, and protection needs of refugees in mind, but on the ground their organization looks quite different. Once inside the camps, it appears that they meet the security and logistical needs of the humanitarian organizations at least as much as those of refugees. Refugees living in the camps are both incorporated by and incorporate this supra-local geography through their own cultural frameworks, which include specific gender divisions of labour and social organization.

Before moving into the camps, this chapter begins by exploring some existing analyses of feminist subjectivities within the discipline of geography which provide relevant reference points for this research. I situate myself in relation to these fields of power and introduce different spatial, cultural, and political relations in the camps as a context for the subsequent discussion of refugee landscapes.

**Interrogating Geography: Inside and Outside the Project**

Feminist geographers have analyzed their often contradictory positions within the discipline of geography as being simultaneously inside and outside the project. They are at once purveyors of geographical knowledge and methods based on the traditions of the discipline in which they have been steeped and critical of the production and content of knowledge

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claims in geography as feminists. They are positioned simultaneously within what can be viewed as irreconcilable intellectual and/or political projects.

As a feminist and a geographer, I conducted field work in Kenya where the survival strategies of refugee women living in camps constituted a central focus of my research. The vast majority of Somali refugees — both men and women — who arrived in Kenya in 1992 were not warmly welcomed by the Kenyan government, but were tolerated in camps located along the Kenyan coast and near the border with Somalia. As earlier chapters document, my own research focused on the border camps located in the sparsely populated, semi-arid area of Kenya’s Northeast Province.

I was first employed as a relief worker in an adjacent area during the height of the refugee influx and emergency in 1992. I then took a job on the other side of the border in Somalia with UNHCR in 1993, and returned as a doctoral researcher to the Dadaab camps late in 1994. This history of working for an NGO, CARE, and UNHCR positioned me as an ‘insider’ of sorts within the relief network in the region. At the same time, my main motivation to conduct research stemmed from observations of and reservations about refugee operations that I encountered while employed in the field. I was and remain concerned that the means by which refugees are ‘managed’ by humanitarian agencies reinscribe neo-colonial relations of power predicated on a hierarchy of cultures in the camp and major asymmetries of power in terms of gender and political status. While I was an ‘insider’ to refugee operations having worked for two agencies, I was also critical of these operations. I was both inside and outside the project of providing humanitarian assistance.

In the camps, I found that the everyday experience and struggles of refugee women were often invisible, inaudible, and secondary to other issues and actors in the camps. While
there were (and are) a number of UNHCR policies and programming guidelines aimed at
supporting and promoting refugee women, I found that camp operations were generally
inattentive to the conditions of work and home for these women. They were less likely
than men to speak English, enjoy access to camp jobs, or have time to be involved in camp
decision-making and consultations with relief organizations. Many of these refugee
women were, in a sense, both inside and outside the humanitarian project of the refugee
camp.

While these “paradoxical” positionings help to organize and problematize subjectivities, I
want to develop a more nuanced, less dichotomous, way to talk about connections amid
differences without homogenizing or appropriating subjects — in this case, refugee
women.334 An approach which forges links between locations and among subjects is
integral to this project. While feminist geographers claim locations both inside and outside
the project, I argue that the affinities between geographical and discursive locations are
more multifarious, transnational, and postmodern (that is, not limited to the subject
positions offered by various narratives of modernity) in their implications for feminist
practice.335

I now introduce several refugee landscapes: an imaginary one based on UNHCR’s policy
of protection for refugee women; another which minds the security of UNHCR expatriates
and efficient logistics; and one which traces refugee women’s movements within and
beyond the social and physical infrastructure provided by UNHCR and other NGOs.

334 Caren Kaplan, ""A World without Boundaries": The Body Shop’s Trans/national Geographies” in
Social Text 43, Fall 1995, pp. 45-66.
335 Henrietta Moore, 1995, op. cit. Henrietta Moore’s distinction between local and supra-local is useful
in drawing out some of these different locations from which connections can be made. At the same time, it
risks reinscribing the binary logic of inside/outside positioning. As long as local and supra-local discourses
are multiple in their connections and contexts, the global-local opposition can be avoided.
Refugee routines in the camp are shaped by clan affiliation and culturally-informed divisions of labour which are highly gendered, but are also defined by the superimposed layout of the camps, the supplies provided for subsistence, and the political status of refugees which circumscribes their spatial separation. UNHCR’s planning policy aimed at protecting women in refugee camps is, I maintain, stronger on paper than on the ground. How refugee work is organized, tasks distributed, and strategies of maintaining refugee households enacted within this context constitutes a substantive part of this chapter. I aim to multiply the dichotomous positions of “inside/outside” and to unsettle the anatomical categories of gender, class, and ‘race’ by invoking connections among multiply-situated subjects. Yes, gender matters; citizenship and political status also matter, as does the built space of refugee camps. But how, if at all, can they be linked by a feminist geography?

**Whose geography?**

The vast majority of refugees in Kenya have *prima facie* status. This has two main implications. First, refugees are spatially segregated from Kenyan society by having to live in border camps designated by the GOK. Second, this sub-legal status restricts not only their mobility, but also access to employment and ability to generate an independent livelihood. One might say they exchange the rights of citizenship for safety in camps:

To put it bluntly, few of us can live without a passport or an identity card of some sort and fewer of us can manage without employment. Our access to these signs and practices is deeply uneven and hardly carnivalesque.\(^{336}\)

Nowhere are Kaplan’s observations more fitting than in Kenyan refugee camps (see figure 6.1). Without a Somalian government to safeguard the entitlements of citizenship in their own country, Somali refugees flee to Kenya where they are relegated to isolated camps financed by donor countries thousands of miles away. Mobility and access to

Figure 6.1
Refugees arriving at Dagahaley Camp
Credit: UNHCR, Panos Moutsis
employment are officially unavailable to *prima facie* refugees. Within the context of the camps, UNHCR attempts to make the best of the situation.

In some situations, when a large influx of refugees cross a border unexpectedly, camps are established without the luxury of planning (see figure 6.2). Liboi camp, very close to the Somalia border on the Kenyan side, grew exponentially and haphazardly as Ifo, Hagadera, and Dagahaley camps were under construction. Problems of crowding, poor sanitation, and related disease plagued the camp in 1992. Mortality rates soared while relief staff scrambled to improve conditions in the camp and, in turn, stabilize the health of the refugee population.

UNHCR has established general guidelines for organizing camps where planning is possible. Some of these guidelines emphasize the safety of refugee women:

The physical circumstances in which refugees are housed affect their safety. Too often refugee women face dangers stemming from poor design of camps: for example, communal housing that provides no privacy for women; location of basic services and facilities such as latrines at an unsafe distance from where refugee women are housed...construction of barriers and even the minding of the perimeters of camps even when refugees must go beyond those borders to obtain firewood or other items.\(^{337}\)

Awareness of the importance of built space is evident in UNHCR’s Guidelines on the Protection of Refugee Women which enumerate several questions that planners and administrators should consider in establishing camps. Possible program interventions the guidelines list include

Figure 6.2
An Unplanned Camp:
Dense refugee housing at Liboi camp (now closed)
Credit: UNHCR, Panos Mountzis
• Conserve to the extent possible the original community from the country of origin within the new site.
• Consult with the refugees as to the preferred physical and social organization of the camp. Ensure that women are consulted during this process, and when possible, have female staff talk with community workers.
• Ensure that basic services/facilities at the site are located in such a manner that refugee women do not become vulnerable to attack when they need to avail themselves of these services/facilities.  

How to conserve local community in the context of pervasive supra-local planning exigencies is not explicated here. A checklist of questions to consider in assessing physical layout is included in the Guidelines. Site planners are asked to consider, "(h)ow is the camp or other place of settlement physically organized? Is the camp organized in a manner similar to what the refugees are accustomed to in their villages and townships? Have refugees been consulted?" Consultation with refugees about camp design is difficult if they are absent from the Nairobi offices and proposed camp sites where layout is conceived and debated. "Back in the putative “center,” metropolitans have the luxury of manipulating the images of links and disjunctures, fantasizing contact with difference while maintaining a comfortable distance."  

Despite good intentions, the considerations noted above suggest that only lip service is paid to refugee input.

The Guidelines are ironically overshadowed by an approach that addresses the security and logistical concerns of expatriate workers and relief agencies in the Dadaab camps. The maps included in figures 6.3 - 6.5 illustrate the centralization of services at one edge of each of the camps, easily accessible by road but less accessible by refugees on foot. These maps are adapted directly from the blueprints of UNHCR plans of the three camps. Staff offices are located close to roads and near Kenyan police to ensure safety during the day. In the evenings, staff who work in the camps return to the main UNHCR

338 Ibid., p. 48.
339 Ibid., p. 19.
341 A description of each of the three camps, defining characteristics and location, is presented in appendix 1.
342 Interview, UNHCR staff member, Nairobi, November 16, 1994.
Figure 6.3

Dagahaley Refugee Camp

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Bantu-Somalia section

disability centre
market
Police post
to Ifo
UNHCR

1600m x 1350 m Not to scale

Adapted from blue prints of UNHCR Physical Planner, Nairobi

credit: Nadine Schuurman
Figure 6.4
Hagadera Refugee Camp

Adapted from blue prints of UNHCR Physical Planner, Nairobi

credit: Nadine Schuurman
Figure 6.5

Ifo Refugee Camp

Adapted from blue prints of UNHCR Physical Planner, Nairobi

credit: Nadine Schuurman
compound located in the town of Dadaab. The rationale for such socio-spatial organization is security for staff and protection of supplies. This border area has a history of insecurity based on geo-politics and 'shifia' banditry, and refugees living in camps situated in this region have not been immune to theft and assaults. Equipment and cash stores maintained by UNHCR and other agencies represent an inviting target. In the event of an uprising or violent protest, staff can be more easily evacuated from a location connected to roads and near a Kenyan police post than from offices and services centrally situated in the camps.

Most of the residences and catering facilities for humanitarian workers are separate from the camps. Each organization has its own central compound in Dadaab. UNHCR's main compound used to be a collection of tented sleeping and eating quarters. The new compound, completed in 1994, features permanent buildings which include both a central office and a residential section (see figures 6.6 and 6.7).\textsuperscript{343} It is fortified with two security fences made of acacia bushes, which have sharp spikes that easily break skin and have a remarkable tenacity once caught on clothing. A large staff of guards are stationed at the entrance gates to various sections of the compound. At night, a number of armed guards provide extra security. Like the UNHCR day offices located in the camps, the compound can be evacuated quickly if necessary.\textsuperscript{344} The main UNHCR office is located within yet another fence inside the compound. The office of the most senior UNHCR staff member has two doors, yet no direct access from the office foyer. In the event of an incident, one of these doors provides an escape, in addition to the main entrance/exit. To the extent that violent confrontation is anticipated, the design represents a 'geography of fear'.

\textsuperscript{343} The implication of permanent buildings is that these camps will be administered at this location for some time to come.
\textsuperscript{344} Interview, UNHCR staff member, Nairobi, November 16, 1994.
Figure 6.6
Shared housing for expatriates, UNHCR compound, Dadaab, Kenya

Figure 6.7
Dining hall, UNHCR compound, Dadaab, Kenya
Access into and out of the camps is also important for logistical reasons. Transportation and delivery to the camps is admittedly a major consideration. Food commodities, for examples, are trucked from the Kenyan port of Mombasa to the camps, off-loaded, and stored in large secure tents known as Rubb Halls. These food storage areas tend to be close to roads on the perimeter of camps rather than central in location to the refugee population for whom the food is intended. Situating the storage areas in close proximity to the police post would seemingly minimize the potential of theft. The question remains, however, security, convenience, and service for whom? More crudely put, whose geography is this? CARE reported that 41% of households in the Dadaab camps are headed by women.\(^{345}\) Yet, planning on the basis of strategic evacuations and logistical considerations points to an arguably disembodied and masculinist mode of operation. The security of refugee women in the camps is not of the same order, nor optic, as that of relief workers whose safety is organized on the basis of a confrontational, quasi-military model.\(^{346}\)

Moving to a finer scale, I suggest that the spatial organization and segregation of the camps shape the social routines and income-earning strategies of refugees, women in particular. Access to health care, food rations, police protection, and other services is concentrated in a single area in each of the camps. This arrangement is secure for UN, NGO, and other refugee relief staff, but extremely inconvenient for many refugees. Moreover, the organization of the camp exacerbates the workload of refugee women.\(^{347}\) Somali women


\(^{346}\) Systems of security are also culturally coded, as earlier examples have attempted to illustrate. Nonetheless, UNHCR with the support of the Kenya police in the camps has the authority to practice security with more force than the refugees. One UNHCR Field Officer, known to wear military garb on the days he works in the refugee camps, said, “I have to strike a balance between planning and nomadisme sauvage.”\(^{346}\)

\(^{347}\) As noted, more than 2/5 of families in the camps were recorded as ‘female-headed’. This designation is potentially misleading because one man may have more than one wife and support more than one household
are largely responsible for maintaining the household. This includes child care, searching for firewood, collecting water, cooking, and queuing for food rations on a bi-weekly basis. Children often assist their mothers with these tasks. Girls, in particular, assume some of these jobs independently of their mothers as part of the household work. This arrangement helps to explain the three-to-one ratio of school attendance rates between refugee boys and girls in camps. Simultaneous demands on women refugees necessitate this kind of time-space coordination. Because firewood is required to cook the staples donated and distributed by international bodies, women have to leave the camps, often for hours at a time, to collect wood. This, in turn, raises questions about the local suitability of foodstuffs provided by international donors, but also about the physical safety of refugee women as they forage for foliage in remote areas beyond the perimeters of the camp. The layout of the camps, with a concentrated but decentralized delivery of major services, also figures in the daily routines of refugee women.

The discrepancy between the planning guidelines outlined by UNHCR and the practical measures to organize and secure the camp is glaring in the Kenyan context. I now illustrate this third geography: that of refugee women negotiating these supra-local designs at a local level. I employ selected responses from twenty-five interviews with refugee women in the three Dadaab camps of Ifo, Hagadera, and Dagahaley. Through a translator, I asked women who were randomly selected from all three camps what they had done the previous day and for what duration. I also asked about the economy of the household, the adequacy of food rations distributed by CARE, and the means by which the family covered any deficits. I contend that space is produced, both by the constraints of supra-local planning and provisions and by the demands of refugee households. Patterns of mobility are

without always being present. My interviews and meetings with refugees in the camps were largely held at their homes. Rarely did I encounter men at home during the day.

constituted through gender relations defined by social organization, access to resources, and political status. While the brief geographies offered here are imperfect transnational 'sketches' of refugee women's routines, feminist geographers have adapted these as tools which document time-space constraints and strategies which women employ.349

The texts presented are based on the verbatim translations of the interpreter, and as such are presented in the third person. This strategy of representation — one which inserts both the interpreter and my own cultural distance from the interviewee — is a deliberate effort to render visible, transparent, and problematic the process of translation and the power relations interviews involve (see figure 6.8). I heed Trinh Minh-ha's questions about "writing woman":

How do you inscribe difference without bursting into a series of euphoric narcissistic accounts of yourself and your own kind? Without indulging in a marketable romanticism or in a naive whining about your condition? In other words, how do you forget without annihilating? Between the twin chasms of navel-gazing and navel-erasing, the ground is narrow and slippery.350

In making connections across vast differences, the ground was indeed slippery. Analysis of the "perils of storytelling for refugee women" and the implications of my role shaped the course of the interviews.351

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Figure 6.8
Rendering interpretation visible:
the interpreter
The selection of responses presented here serves to illustrate how space is negotiated during a given day and some of the staple activities and income-earning strategies employed. The ‘addresses’ of the women interviewed are based on section location and are noted so that the distances to markets, food distribution tents, and hospitals can be ascertained with reference to the camp maps (see again figures 6.3 - 6.5). I avoided asking questions that UNHCR and NGOs often posed, such as household size and composition, so that I might distinguish my research from the surveillance roles of administering agencies. While one cost of this approach is the absence of biographical detail with respect to refugee families, the purpose of my study was not to develop a description of their households but to understand the influence of the humanitarian agencies on their lives. My questions focused on the ways that UNHCR and NGOs affected the routines of refugee women, in terms of camp layout, organization, and supplies provided to them (see appendices 2 & 3). All of the refugee women interviewed were at home — the hub of household activities — when approached by the interpreter and myself.

Interview #1

(Ifo Camp, Section A6, young Somali woman with baby) She rises at five to prepare tea and breakfast, tea alone yesterday because there was no wheat flour in the last food distribution. After an hour washing clothes and children, she grinds and mills sorghum for lunch. While lunch is cooking, she goes to look for firewood which takes about three hours. She eats lunch with the family and relaxes until 3:30 when she goes to look for water. She returns two hours later and starts supper which is eaten between seven and 7:30. Then they visit as a family and go to sleep between 8:30 and nine (see figures 6.9 & 6.10).

Interview #2

(Hagadera Camp, Section D3, young Somali woman with baby; the woman is grinding sorghum into flour upon our arrival) She wakes up at six. Until nine she is
Figure 6.9
Refugee woman with firewood - no fuel is provided for cooking

Figure 6.10
Waiting for water: refugees put their containers in a queue to mark their place
preparing breakfast, washing utensils, and cleaning the compound — sweeping and such. Between nine and ten she goes for water. From ten to twelve, she grinds sorghum (as she is now). From twelve to two, she prepares, cooks, and eats lunch. Then she goes for firewood until four. At four she goes back home to prepare tea and sorghum again until six. By 7:30 supper is eaten and finished. She is sleeping by nine.

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

Interview #3

(Dagahaley Camp, Section F0, young Somali woman with baby) She awakens at six and has her prayers first. She then prepares tea for the children, washes the utensils, cleans the house and bathes the children until about nine. She collects water, and at about 9:30 starts the process of preparing sorghum for the noon meal. At noon she begins cooking for about an hour; everyone eats at two and then rests. After three, the same grinding of sorghum for the evening meal begins. More water is fetched, and she cooks dinner. The children are fed by eight. She then visits with the neighbours for a while and goes to sleep by nine.

Sometimes her husband collects firewood to sell, but it is dangerous because bandits rob and sometimes attack people collecting firewood. This woman is part of a group
of other women that formed in order to meet additional income needs. In a group of about five, each woman contributes an equal portion of her ration after a distribution. The total sum is sold at the market and the money is given to one of the women. The system rotates so that each woman eventually benefits by having access to credit.\textsuperscript{352}

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

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

It's not the same for all groups of men. The Somali men are different from the Sudanese, and so on. As far as the Dadaab camps go, a lot of men are just wandering around meeting other men. They talk politics and what have you in the shade under the tree or they go to the local cafe to rest for a coffee and to play some games (chess, cards, and local games). Some men have jobs with CARE and other NGOs.\textsuperscript{353}

\textsuperscript{352} To calculate the amount of credit made available on a rotating basis, one might make the following assumptions: each of the five women has a family size of five. Each person is allotted 0.5 kg of grain per day, so that a 15 day distribution would include 7.5 kg per person and 37.5 kg per family. If each woman contributed one fifth of her total grain allocation (7.5 kg), the collective amount would equal 37.5 kg. The price wheat flour, the most common grain staple, ranged from 3 to 5 Kenyan shillings (KSh) per kilo. This represents a total credit each time of between 112.5 KSh and 187.5 KSh, the equivalent of US$2-$3.40.

\textsuperscript{353} E-mail transcript from UNHCR in Nairobi, June 7, 1996.
Men's absence from the homes at which the interviews took place was evident. Their daily activities were, as this transcript suggests, more difficult to trace. The following interviews illustrate the geographies of refugee women who did not appear to have much active male support in their households.

**Interview #4**

(Ifo Camp, Section A6, a young Somali woman) She is awake by five, lights the fire, and makes tea and food for the family. By seven she leaves to look for firewood — which takes about three hours — and then takes the wood to the market to sell. She returns home by noon, prepares lunch, and takes a bit of rest until three when she goes to fetch water. This also takes three hours because there is a queue. Supper is prepared and the family eats by seven. Up until about nine she talks with her neighbours who lived within the same fenced compound. Then, she is ready for sleeping.

The official ration is not enough. She sells firewood to buy extra food.

**Interview #5**

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

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

Interview #6

(Dagahaley Camp, Section D4, young woman with baby) She rises at six; she has a maid who cooks in the kitchen. Yesterday someone — the husband of pregnant woman — came to her house and asked her to come to Section C5 where the pregnant woman lived. (She has a job with the French medical NGO as a traditional birth attendant, or TBA). She stayed there until nine after which she went for help. A vehicle was called to take the woman to the hospital where she gave birth. The traditional birth attendant stayed with her until eleven when she returned to the house. She rested, had lunch, and at three began to build a new tukul (hut) which took about an hour. She built another one today, the one in which we're sitting. They are for the coming hot season and for Ramadhan. At four she returned to work, stayed until six, and then came home. She bathed herself and her kids while the maid cooked. The family ate supper and stayed around the house. At eight they slept.

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

Interview #7

(Dagahaley Camp, Section D5, a Bantu-Somalian woman) She woke up a 6 am, made breakfast and cleaned house until 8:30. Then she went for water which took two hours, until 10:30. Afterwards she went to the market to buy wheat flour in order to make a local bread which she sells. Returning at noon, she made lunch and finished eating. Then she went back for water, which took from 2 pm to 6 pm, but
she came back empty-handed. (I asked why the water problem; she said the population is dense there, and the water pressure very low). She made supper for the family, arranged the beds for the children, and afterwards slept.

The considerable time and effort required to collect water and firewood is exacerbated by population concentration in the camps. Decentralized water taps are located within the camp perimeter at a distance not usually more than 500m from any given refugee tukul (hut). Nonetheless, lines can be long and pressure poor at some distribution points. Firewood is often sold in the local refugee camp markets, but must otherwise be collected well beyond the boundaries of the camps. Refugee women cover up to fifteen kilometres on a single journey to gather firewood.\(^{354}\)

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

\(^{354}\) UNHCR, 1995, op. cit.
questions. Because each of these commodities requires considerable amounts of water and wood to prepare, their paucity is exacerbated and the daily collection of these resources becomes increasingly difficult for refugee women. 355

Interview #8

(Hagadera Camp, Section E2, a Bantu-Somalian woman with a newborn baby: the woman is standing pounding sorghum as we arrive) She wakes up at seven. From seven to eight she prepares breakfast and the family eats it. Between eight and nine she goes for water; from nine to twelve she prepares sorghum; crushing it, making it into powder. Between twelve and two she cooks and eats lunch. From two to three she went (sic) back for water; from four o’clock is supper preparation and bathing of children until five. By six supper is ready and she makes sure the little ones are fed because they go to sleep earlier. Up until 7:30 the elder people have supper. From 7:30 until eight she chats with the children and her people (I didn’t clarify the possessive adjective here but assume it means other Bantu-Somalians with whom she shares a fenced compound). She goes to sleep between eight and nine.

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

355 In Malawi, the wood consumed by refugees was considerable: some 20,000 hectares of forest per year. In Nepal, Bhutanese refugees used 400 kilos per capita of fuelwood per year. UNHCR provided kerosene stoves and fuel in this case; see UNHCR, 1995, op. cit. While relatively expensive fuel alternatives have been employed, major changes in the refugee food basket — as a major source of the problem — have not been entertained. UNHCR has a number of nutritionists on staff to ensure that foodstuffs provide sufficient nourishment, but the agency relies on the UN World Food Program (WFP) to collect donations for the camps.
This elaborate income-generating arrangement suggests spatial constraints and possibly security considerations. Rather than stray far from the camp to collect her own firewood, before sunrise and with children in tow, this woman hauls water closer to home to earn the seed money required to buy bulk firewood. The tiny amounts of money accrued in each exchange are part of an informal economy which is constituted through the spatially circumscribed and artificially-endowed formal economy of the camp. The sale of refugee labour and of donated commodities provide the basis for trade in the camps. Based on the collection of water and wood and the selling of food aid, _ad hoc_ markets which carry a range of provisions — cigarettes, spices, tea, candies, and camels' milk among them — have been established in all of the camps. Refugee women’s work is not simply a struggle to meet multiple household and income demands. While work is convoluted by the spatial segregation and organization of the camps, refugee women employ elaborate strategies to make ends meet. Credit schemes and labour-intensive entrepreneurial activities of various kinds are evidence of a vital informal economy.

Somali cultural practices code household work as a women’s responsibility, but women’s work cannot simply be reduced to the gendered division of labour. One can describe the temporary urban spaces of the desert camps as expressions of ‘imperial order’, characterized by foreign foodstuffs and a design that suits the administrators and suppliers at least as much as the refugees. It at once exacerbates the burden of work that women do and reinscribes their routines.

These representations of Somalian refugees try to avoid dissecting the daily routines of women refugees or incorporating them into imperial geographies in the same way that other researchers have drawn and quartered ‘other’ cultures. At one time, my intention was to...

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represent the lives of these women in such a way that the repetition and duress of their work could be felt in the repetition of lean, prosaic prose. Such a strategy, however, risks textualizing a very corporeal set of routines shaped by social stature, subordinate legal status in relation to Kenyans and corresponding spatial containment.

What becomes clear from these selected geographies of refugee work is that a significant amount of time is spent performing tasks that allow for basic subsistence and survival in the camps. The design of the temporary urban spaces of the desert camps contribute to this work. Characterized by foreign foodstuffs, a corresponding high demand for wood and water, and a concentrated population, the camps are anything but an attempt to “conserve to the extent possible the original community from the country of origin within the new site.” The nomadic practices of many Somalis, including their reliance on meat and milk which requires less wood and water, are not incorporated into the organization of the camps. Rather, the refugees who seek asylum are incorporated into a geography of humanitarian assistance. “The body repeats the landscape. They are the source of each other and create each other.”357 A supra-local order prevails.

There are at least two geographies to consider here: a grid of control defined by the supra-local humanitarian organizations operating in the area, UNHCR in particular, and multiple movements of refugees informed by locations of gender and culture negotiated within this design. These geographies, I suggest, are complicated by the political status of refugees and the hierarchy of cultures which characterizes the camps.

Supra-citizen and Sub-citizen: Border Subjects

Once an individual, a human being, becomes a refugee, it is as though he [sic] has become a member of another race, some other sub-human group. You talk of rights of refugees as though human rights did not exist which are broader and more important.... One individual’s protection is as important as making a camp for ten thousand people.358

The importance of citizenship and legal status or non-status, as it were, has been underscored. In the first part of the chapter, I illustrated how refugee camps are organized, by whom, and ultimately for whom. I have sought to represent, albeit partially, the movements and economic activities of refugee women, many of whom fall ‘outside the project’ of camp planning and operations. Refugee sub-citizens, as I will call them, are administered through a supra-state institutional framework by the supra-citizens who work ostensibly for them. These concepts introduce a politics of citizenship and illustrate the point that people are not positioned equally under the banner of ‘UN humanism’. Refugees, Kenyans, and international staff are ranked hierarchically in part because of their relation to citizenship. The cadre of international professional supra-citizens who assist refugees in the camps is comprised of employees from around the world, many of whom carry the coveted light blue laissez passer UN passport. In contrast, the mobility of forced migrants is highly circumscribed by legal, geographical, and administrative parameters. As refugees, they are required to abide by the stipulations of the Kenya Government and the isolation of camp life these invoke. Supra- and sub-citizens are not simply descriptions of two distinct groups found in the camps; they are linked but unequal identities.

In a very different way, the staff who work in these camps are also displaced. They are not forced, but voluntary migrants. Accordingly, their position is much more privileged. They are — for the most part — professionals being remunerated for difficult jobs. To compare these distinct groups of displaced people at all is to risk blurring the acute differences.

between them. Nonetheless, the expatriate stories warrant telling. They too are symptomatic of the spatial organization of camps in isolated border regions.

Over breakfast one morning at the UNHCR compound in Dadaab, a serious comparison of long distance phone call charges and longing for 'home' consumed the four women employees with whom I sat. Some had children; others had partners. They moved on to recite from memory a litany of airfares — imagined getaways — to desirable destinations: Addis US$542; Bombay $480; the Seychelles, Dubai.... Unlike the phone calls, these imagined geographies excluded 'home.' Isolation and hardship in the desert camps seemed to require compensating trips to available destinations. These women had endured much: they told of their experiences of malaria, reactions to medication, and other physical ailments symptomatic of Dadaab. At a professional level, initiative was sometimes obstructed, innovations resisted, and hierarchical discipline maintained. While these employees were extremely privileged next to the refugees they assisted, they were also close to the bottom of the professional organization chart at UNHCR. While both groups co-exist in one location, they have different political status and cultural backgrounds which separate them socially and geographically.

The range these extreme migrant positions represent introduces a larger debate among critical scholars, between those who want to align themselves with the subaltern postcolonial subject, in this case with refugees, and those who insist that such an attempt becomes only a refined version of the very discourse it seeks to displace.\(^{359}\) My project falls somewhere in between. I contend that certain refugee subject positions — particularly those of women — are under erasure. Rather than align myself with refugees against the

\(^{359}\) This debate is introduced by Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths, and Helen Tiffin (eds.), *The post-colonial studies reader*. (London/New York: Routledge, 1995), p. 9.
humanitarian corps which aims to assist them, however, my objective is to expose the
different geographies that each of these 'sides' produces and analyze the common space of
refugee camps in relation to social and political status. In concentrating on politically
unequal and arguably neo-colonial encounters between 'un-stated' refugees and 'ex-
patriate' relief workers, I introduce the cultural politics these entail and stake some
ambivalent claims about the significance and signification of names and bodies.

A cultural politics of negotiation, subversion, and indifference mark the spaces of text and
territory in the camps: "although there may be surveillance, fixity is not achieved."360
How humanitarian discourses organize the space of these camps, as well as who they
include and exclude are my principal concerns in the section that follows.

How humanitarian discourses serve to organize the space of these camps is also relevant to
the geographies of the camps. Who are the actors and interlocutors and who are excluded
from these subject positions? Separate from but serving the camps are a number of
humanitarian agencies assisting refugees — medical, social, legal — all of which
communicate by hand-held radios. Each organization is named according to the
alphabetical 'vocabulary' of international radio code. Each name corresponds to a space,
usually a compound or base camp. Thus staff working for the High Commissioner for
Refugees are referred to on the walkie-talkie handsets as the 'hotels', most of whom live at
the UNHCR compound. CARE employees who distribute food and provide social
services are the 'charlies', the Kenyan police are the 'tangos', and so forth. Each employee
authorized to carry a handset is assigned a 'call sign': a combination of the organization's
radio name as well as numbers and sometimes letters designating a particular person. The

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more elaborate and lengthy the call sign, the less important one’s rank. All refugee agencies use one common channel for calling others; when a connection is made, employees switch to another shared channel to discuss particular matters. These conversations are by no means private, as other workers can ‘move’ to the same channel and listen in, although they are limited to the few people working in the camps who have handsets.361 In addition, UNHCR has its own discursive space, an exclusive channel on the handsets, to convey information on private or internal matters. This radio network is the most vital communication link in the camps and is so pervasive among relief workers that many people are referred to by their call sign rather than their names.

The greater irony of this international radio language, which literally and figuratively maps an intensely local field, is that there is no call sign or designated name for the refugees themselves whose existence is the very raison d'être of this humanitarian exercise. Edward Said notes of outcast populations that “their existence always counts, though their names and identities do not, they are profitable without fully being there.”362 Trinh Minh-ha adds that “naming is part of the human rituals of incorporation, and the unnamed remains less human than the inhuman or sub-human.”363 This erasure points to the unstated condition of refugees in more than a political sense. As technology and language, the radio is constitutive of subject positions.

361 Handsets do fall into the hands of bandits and other unauthorized users. One UNHCR handset was stolen during my stay, and was used — I believe — to track a UNHCR vehicle which was then hijacked and stolen early one morning. UNHCR vehicles are especially valuable as they contain two sets of radios: one to communicate with people in close proximity on handsets (10 km is roughly their limit), and another to communicate over longer distances on established radio frequencies between Nairobi and other camps.


363 Trinh T. Minh-ha, 1989, op. cit., p. 54. Here I have not named the women I have interviewed. For reasons of confidentiality and trust, I did not ask them to disclose their names.
Supra-citizens, citizens, and sub-citizens have differential access to mobility and to the power relations which shape the geography of refugee camps. Refugee sub-citizens have forcibly migrated across borders to safety and sustenance. International supra-citizens have flown across borders to well-remunerated jobs attached to often harsh conditions. Kenyan citizens find work where refugees and relief agencies have moved in. The power to move is shaped on a broader scale by the mobility of money and information, the colour of one's passport and skin. To those without identity documents and citizenship, entitlements are few and mobility restricted. They are likely to cross the Kenyan border on foot and be escorted by UNHCR in the back of a truck to a nearby camp close. The minimal status of prima facie refugees is differentiated by gendered routines of work, by nationality, and as noted in chapter five, by ethnicity.

Despite the language of international human rights and universal entitlement, subject positions in the camps are discursively and geographically 'spaced-out'. These locations are material expressions of international law and transnational subjectivities, marked also by the segregation of cultural, political, and gender difference. The routines of refugee women are circumscribed by supra-local camp organization, positions of unequal political status, and gendered divisions of labour. They are at once relegated to the camps by Kenyan Government rules and left with little choice but to leave the camps regularly in search of firewood in order to cook foods distributed by the relief agencies. Camp design is expressive of the logistical and security considerations of international staff, despite the lip service paid to policies aimed at promoting and safeguarding refugee women. These women perform gendered routines of household work exacerbated by camp layout and mediated by their own survival strategies.
The daily routines of refugee women presented in this chapter cannot simply be reduced to the economy of women’s work and culturally-defined divisions of labour. Rather, the built space and organization of the camps organize refugee women’s work. I’d like to conclude this chapter by proposing a direction for feminist geographers, one that works through difference rather than on either side of it. In analyzing UNHCR operations, it invites engagement with ‘others’ rather than simply accepting, accommodating, or managing ‘otherness’ (i.e. diversity). Drawing on Caren Kaplan’s work, A notion of links between locations and subjects deconstructs the long-standing marxist cultural hegemony model by demonstrating the impossibility of finding a pure position or site or subjectivity outside the economic and cultural dynamics that structure modernity. It is through transnationality that feminists can resist the practices of modernity — i.e. nationalism, modernism, imperialism, etc. — that have been so repressive to women.364

As a feminist geographer and researcher, I am neither inside nor outside the project because there is no “pure position or site or subjectivity outside” the power relations which structure the ‘field’. Rather, I am complicit, subversive, accepting, and critical, but always connected to the ‘field’ that the camps represent. My complicity lies in my privileged position in relation to the refugee women who clean my room and wash my clothes during my stay in the camps. My criticism of camp operations is evinced in the pointed but even-handed discussion papers I circulate to UNHCR staff and in the debates which reveal my feminist sensibilities as a researcher. In this context, I am part of the camps’ construction and reconstruction through the arguments, actions, and affinities in which I engage.

UNHCR’s policies concerned with refugee women’s welfare represent the organization’s best intentions towards achieving participatory structures, gender equity, and camp designs conducive to refugee needs. It is committed to these ideas on paper. In practice, camp design and organization emphasize supra-citizen control and management of sub-citizen difference from a distance. The space of the camps is divided between refugees and non-

refugees. While this separation may be a practical response to security concerns on the part of international staff, it is cause for critical reflection: if the camps are not safe enough for expatriates, are they sufficiently secure for the refugees who live in them? Transnational feminist practices demand this kind of comparative work, rather than the management of others' (i.e. refugees') differences.

I have analyzed the relationship of gender to the international humanitarian corps' hegemony to shape the design of refugee camps in Northeast Kenya. Patriarchal cultural norms, such as the gendered division of labour, and locally-derived relations of domination also influence the lives of women living in the camps. This chapter has touched upon the political and material gulf which separates refugees from the staff hired to assist them. One response to this segregated construction of the camps is to annihilate the space that separates sub- and supra-citizens — both in the material sense by creating proximity, and in the political sense by engaging refugees as subjects and interlocutors rather than helpless, hapless 'others'.

The myth of one world, one people will remain just that — a myth. There will always be borders and distinctions drawn: "[b]oundaries are drawn by mapping practices; 'objects' do not pre-exist as such. Objects are boundary projects." To examine a border or boundary between supra- and sub-citizens is to expose its 'mapping practices.' The boundaries and distance between refugees and humanitarian expatriates have been reified and entrenched over time. The mapping practices of the Kenyan camps are predicated on this distance and the gulf between Somali refugees, Kenyan locals, and international relief staff. "Objectivity is not about dis-engagement, but about mutual and usually unequal

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Having identified a gulf which separates refugees from humanitarian staff, the next chapter documents mapping practices and some examples of the unequal structuring which preclude engagement in the refugee camps.

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\[366\] Ibid.
Chapter 7
Reporting the Field

Colonial discourse, with its emphasis on Third World inferiority, has re-emerged in the language of the international development agencies.\textsuperscript{367}

\textit{[D]iscipline was never more important or more valorized than at the moment when it became important to manage a population... we need to see things not in terms of the replacement of a society of sovereignty by a disciplinary society and the subsequent replacement of a disciplinary society by a society of government; in reality one has a triangle, sovereignty-discipline-government, which has as its primary target the population and as its essential mechanism the apparatuses of security.}\textsuperscript{368}

The previous chapter sought to illustrate the cultural hierarchies and spatialized politics evident in the camps among local Kenyans, refugee subjects, and the relatively elite international staff that assists refugees. Following that analysis of camp layout and cultural politics, this chapter addresses some of the ways that refugee operations in the field are organized and reported. Citing 'on the ground' practices and the findings of selected reports, I first outline ways in which the calculation of refugee numbers in postcolonial Africa is connected to constellations of colonial power. The production of maps, statistics, and assessments by professionals at UNHCR are, I believe, performed with the welfare of refugees in mind. Nonetheless, they often exercise power among refugees in controversial ways and employ strategies which represent the ‘field’ of refugee camps as orderly and comparable to other ‘fields’ managed in various parts of the globe. Other reports of refugee welfare and camp operations utilize a therapeutic language of ‘care and maintenance.’ Barbara Harrell-Bond has observed that “[o]utsiders view African refugees as helpless; as needing outsiders to plan for them and to take care of them. This assumption is the cornerstone of nearly all appeals for funds.”\textsuperscript{369}

rationale for this image of helplessness, but other relations of power operating in the camps are also predicated on this paternalism.

More critical approaches to organizing the camps belie questions of power among the different social, political, and cultural groups in these spaces. A consultants’ report, contracted by CARE, takes the side of Somali refugees who are seen to be inappropriately served by UNHCR and the NGOs operating in the camps. CARE is also responsible for a community-based initiative in the Dadaab camps known as ‘Refugee Self-Management.’370 The proposal, in which refugees would be given more decision-making power in the camps, is juxtaposed with externally imposed and sometimes coercive controls placed on refugees by relief agencies. Excerpts from my own field notes attest to the multiple layers of authority and the conflict these varying approaches sometimes generate. Expressions of compassion, frustration, and contradiction are also included as a means of unsettling the carefully produced ‘order’ of UNHCR records, on the one hand, and as a way of identifying issues of concern to refugees in the camps, on the other.

The chapter is organized into three main parts: first, a discussion of institutionalized reporting strategies and counting procedures used by the lead agencies in the camps; second, an analysis of refugee camps as ‘communities’ and of approaches to assisting refugees that are consistent with the idea; and finally, a comparison of these two sensibilities, exposing the contradictions and tensions they generate. The chapter focuses on exercises of power within the camps, including the management, discipline, and details they entail. One specific objective is to analyze the production of official refugee reports

370 CARE distributes food to refugees, assists all vulnerable groups including disabled and orphaned refugees, provides basic education for adults and children, and is responsible for social services and camp management generally. These services are subcontracted to CARE by UNHCR who is the main funder of CARE in these camps.
and to examine their content as ways of knowing about a subject population. I argue that the most powerful if not persuasive technologies of recording and reporting the field are exercised by UNHCR and its partner agencies. These modalities of representation are predicated on control, vision, and distance. But I also contend that the techniques of surveillance and control employed in the camps do not constitute a closed system of discipline and management. Coerced containment — whether political, economic, or social in basis— is tenuous at best, and the chapter which follows highlights the porosity of the camps, the work and movement in locations outside these temporary desert cities.

**Ordering Disorder**

The onset of a humanitarian crisis — such as civil war, famine, and human displacement in Somalia — can provide a political rationale for external intervention or assistance. In Kenya, the official job of 'ordering disorder', of organizing and assisting Somali refugees, belongs to UNHCR. It is a difficult job characterized by the basic task of matching refugee needs with appropriate resources, but one mired in more diffuse political relations at different scales. UNHCR responds to crises and solicits resources to support its operations. Despite the involvement of various governments, NGOs, vendors, and UN partner agencies in most major crises of displacement, UNHCR is the main transfer point of assistance to refugees. The organization is, therefore, responsible to those contributors as well as to the refugees whom it has the mandate to assist. This is admittedly a tall order. UNHCR has to perform multiple tasks under often difficult conditions and is held accountable for its performance. Performance in this context involves not only the achievement of ends but also the use of suitable means.

The expansive network of government donors in the humanitarian sector effectively hires UNHCR's as its agent in emergency situations. One outcome of this arrangement is an established and ongoing interest in the number of refugees or displaced persons for whom
UNHCR is responsible. While UNHCR is by far the most visible agency in most refugee emergencies, the visibility of the displaced people it assists is also a primary concern. Refugee statistics are the basis for funding proposals, allocation, and planning. Refugee operations embody languages of arithmetical calculation and therapy that transpose particular events and activities in the field into standardized reports, statistics, and community development projects suitable for consumption at UNHCR Branch Office in Nairobi and headquarters in Geneva. Information from a particular location and context is standardized and made comparable to reports from other places.

The tension between cultural particularity and universality introduced in part one is evident in the tension between distinctive cultural and political practices in the camps and standard UNHCR reporting procedures. Standard information — in the sense of being both usual and comparable — is collected. These procedures are part of the organization's institutional culture. Some examples include headcounts, situation reports ('sitreps'), and refugee ‘biodata’ — personal information pertaining to one’s claim to asylum, usually collected for purposes of determining legal status. Biodata is solicited by protection officers who interview asylum seekers on an individual basis and is used in the assessment of their claims. Both headcounts and sitreps apply to more aggregate populations of displaced persons, and each will be discussed within the framework of ‘reporting the field.’

Transposing the field into text or image is concerned with the two tasks of a politics of life: micropolitical analysis and micropolitical intervention.  

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371 Patricia Stamp, “Pastoral Power: Foucault and the New Imperial Order,” *Arena*, no. 3, 1994, p. 20. Academics are by no means immune to these processes of transposing the field into text and image. Only their analyses and interventions differ.
The observer, or observing colonizer, commands a knowledge of groups such as institutional inmates, welfare recipients, and the colonized, that is intimately linked with a classification and diagnosis of the inferiority or inadequacy of the latter, that establishes the need for management.372

Indeed governmentality inquires by means of management, whereby things that are to be governed are coded as information — “written reports, drawings, pictures, numbers, charts, statistics. This information must be of a particular form — stable, mobile, combinable and comparable.”373 The information presented in the excerpt below follows such a format and is the first paragraph of the UNHCR Country Operations Plan for 1995. It alludes to some of the technologies of surveillance, control, and management of refugees in post-independence Kenya:

The reconciliation of data on the refugee population in Kenya has become a priority exercise of the Kenya programme during 1994. The Branch Office has addressed the intractable problem of discrepancies between feeding figures, registered numbers, and total populations, by camp site as well as by overall caseload and nationality, through physical headcounts and registration of refugees in the camps. These discrepancies are due to acts of refugee sabotage; double registration within camps and between camps; and inflation of the number of dependants on ration cards in a bid to maximize their entitlements to food and other relief assistance distributed in the camps.374

UNHCR meticulously orders the field through exercises of counting, calculating, and coding refugees. While the report above is by no means definitive, refugees are represented here as statistical and moral deviations. The report speaks directly to Foucault’s tripartite concern with ‘security, territory, and population’ in his analysis of ‘governmentality.’

By this word I mean three things:

1. The ensemble formed by the institutions, procedures, analyses and reflections, the calculations and tactics that allow the exercise of this very specific albeit complex form of power, which has as its target population, as its principal form of knowledge political economy, and as its essential technical means apparatuses of security.

373 Miller and Rose cited in Nicholas Thomas, 1994, op. cit., p. 61.
2. The tendency which... has steadily led towards the pre-eminence over all other forms (sovereignty, discipline, etc.) of this type of power which may be termed government, resulting, on the one hand, in the formation of a whole series of specific governmental apparatuses, and on the other, in the development of a whole complex of savoirs.

3. The process, or rather the result of the process, through which the state of justice of the Middle Ages, transformed into the administrative state during the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, gradually becomes 'governmentalized.'

While refugees and the camps in which they live are ‘un-stated’, both are managed by an international ‘governmental apparatus,’ namely the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. Given UNHCR’s job as executor of humanitarian relief, it is at the centre of refugee emergencies: “a centre of ordering is a place which monitors a periphery, represents that periphery, and makes calculations.”

Benedict Anderson contends that the census, map, and museum constituted the ‘grammar’ of the colonial state, and were instruments for coding and controlling the colonized. Like Timothy Mitchell, he underscores the importance of visibility. Anderson cites the example of Indonesian novelist Pramoedya Ananta Toer’s *Glass House*, comparing it to Jeremy Bentham’s Panopticon:

For the colonial state did not merely aspire to create, under its control, a human landscape of perfect visibility; the condition of this ‘visibility’ was that everyone, everything, had as it were a serial number.

In recording the field, an emphasis on vision is not misplaced. Technologies of vision are used to calculate refugee populations and map the grid design of the camps onto the desert floor (see figures 7.1 - 7.3). Aerial photos provide a basis for counting refugee huts.

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379 Pramoedya Ananta Toer cited in Benedict Anderson, 1991, op. cit., pp. 184-85. The irony of Toer’s depiction of ex-prisoners is that this census process was perfected only *after* independence in Indonesia. Today all adult citizens in that country must carry their number.
The largest white building is the UNHCR office; the two rows of units along the left side house international staff & visitors; Kenyan professional staff have smaller quarters to the right of the international staff; Kenyan drivers and technicians have even smaller rooms in the three rows of buildings in the far right hand corner. The scattering of tents along the edge of the compound house the refugees who work for UNHCR.
and subsequently estimating the population, one of several methods used to report the field. From the sky, order is attempted through neat rows of refugee shelters.

‘Headcounts’

There is ample evidence that refugees are contained and counted according to codes they resent and resist. ‘Headcounts’, which serve as census-taking exercises, provide an excellent example. The following counting exercise was recounted to me in Nairobi just after it occurred by an Italian field officer at UNHCR who had been part of the headcount process.

In June 1993 at Mandera refugee camp in Northern Kenya, a headcount of Somali refugees was discretely organized by UNHCR. The purpose of the exercise was to determine the actual size of the population and thus to reduce the inflated number of false ration cards circulating in the camp. The plan was devised secretly, so that refugees would not subvert the counting process.

At five in the morning approximately two hundred Kenyan police and army personnel surrounded the camp. Six counting centres had been set up. All refugees were awakened and instructed to move to the nearest centre, each of which was fenced and guarded. UNHCR staff, many of whom had been flown in from other locations to assist, communicated by walkie talkie between the centres. Their first objective was to get all refugees inside any one of the six fenced sites. Refugees then filed through narrow corridors through which only one person at a time could pass. Here, they were counted —

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380 Aerial photos offered to me by UNHCR’s Physical Planner/Regional Registration Coordinator later became unavailable. They were to be used as a resource tool for a registration workshop in which participants would count the number of huts within a particular area and estimate the refugee population accordingly.
their hands marked with ink to signify this — and moved to the next area cordoned off within the fenced centre. Registration numbers were allocated, ration cards issued, and refugees released back into the camp. The exercise was complete by early morning.

This scenario has been enacted repeatedly in Kenyan refugee camps up to as recently as December 1994. According to senior UNHCR staff in Nairobi, headcounts are standard practice.\textsuperscript{381} UNHCR has also recently published a registration guide outlining the planning and practice of a refugee census.\textsuperscript{382} It illustrates ways of structuring the processing centres (see figures 7.4 and 7.5).

Historically, headcounts have been problematic for UNHCR and other administering agencies.\textsuperscript{383} While accurate refugee numbers are important for procuring funds, food rations, and for planning purposes, refugees have not willingly subjected themselves to the methods these counts employ. In Kakuma camp — the temporary refuge for predominantly Christian Sudanese fleeing the El-Bashir regime — refugees subverted the census process on two occasions, in April and June 1994. On one occasion they tore apart the enclosures built for the exercise, and on the other they kidnapped staff participating in the ‘headcount’. Refugees argued that the rounding up of people into fenced lots did not respect basic human dignity and reminded them of the slavery of their people under Arab rule.\textsuperscript{384} The Sudanese refugees vehemently resisted UNHCR’s efforts to subjugate them to what they considered demoralizing ‘headcounts.’ At Kakuma, UNHCR officials finally had to consort with leaders of the Sudanese People’s Liberation Army (SPLA) after the two failed attempts at a camp census. Meeting with political groups contravenes UNHCR

\textsuperscript{381} Interview, UNHCR senior manager, Nairobi, 10 November 1994.
\textsuperscript{382} UNHCR, “Registration — a practical guide for field staff”, Geneva, May 1994.
\textsuperscript{383} There are parallels between counting practices in refugee camps and those used to calculate welfare recipients in Canada. The aim of administrators in both situations is to prevent ‘double dipping’ or overpayment to recipients.
\textsuperscript{384} Interview, UNHCR senior manager, Nairobi, 10 November 1994.
Sample Plan of a Registration Enclosure (1)

Figure 7.4
Drawing of refugee enclosure to be used during headcounts

Sample Plan of a Registration Enclosure (2)

Figure 7.5
Drawing of another type of enclosure to be built in order to count refugees

official policy, but given the SPLA’s significant influence in the camp, UNHCR staff felt they had little choice.  

The SPLA representatives refused to agree to the use of enclosures. Instead, they suggested that churches in the camp be fenced and used for the registration process. The churches are powerful political symbols in the war between the Islamic fundamentalist El-Bashir government forces and Christian and indigenous beliefs of the South Sudanese. In the end, separate arrangements had to be made for registration of Muslim refugees in the camp, but the churches were used as counting centres, and the exercise was completed quickly and uneventfully on December 15, 1994. The Sudanese refugees’ analysis-in-action is perhaps the strongest critique of UNHCR operations in the field to date, and yet their responses did nothing to change the basic procedures used for conducting headcounts.

UNHCR’s registration guide outlines how to manage ‘difficult populations’ during camp census exercises through the use of ‘enclosures’ into which refugees are herded in order to be counted. Both Somali and Sudanese refugees have been classified as ‘difficult’ populations by UNHCR. The registration guide explains the role of ‘shepherds’ who act as ushers to move refugees in the proper direction. ‘Banders’ are those who attach wristbands to refugees inside the enclosures. Other terms defined in the registration guide include

• Fixing  A rapid, and approximate, means of defining and limiting a target population so that persons of concern can be more readily identified for further registration.

• Fixing token  A pre printed card issued to individual refugees in order to define their entitlement to registration. No information is collected during a distribution of fixing tokens. Annex C(1)

• Registration  The process of identifying and documenting individuals and families of concern to UNHCR by which systematic information is obtained to facilitate protection, programme planning and verification.

• Registration Card  Card issued to a refugee Head of Household giving individual identification number, indicating number of persons in family and also used as a beneficiary card for

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385 Interview, UNHCR staff member, Nairobi, Dec. 7, 1994.
386 UNHCR, 1994, op. cit.. See page 4.9 and annex D (2) in particular.
ration and other distribution. The identification number is linked to a registration form, which contains fuller information on the household. Annex C (4)

- Shepherd/Usher
  A refugee, respected within the community, who is responsible for ensuring that refugees know what to do during a registration exercise.

The language of ‘fixing’ seems odd, given that people displaced from their homes are being literally attached to the space of the temporary camps through this process. On a more practical level, it becomes clear that headcounts are a coercive exercise conducted by humanitarian staff on the bodies of refugees. The ‘us’-’them’ distinction is clearly drawn.

Headcounts are common to UNHCR refugee operations in the region, though practices do vary. The excerpt which follows is taken from my field notes and is based on an interview with a UNHCR staff member in Nairobi. It illustrates some of the politics of counting among Rwandan refugees in Tanzania.

In Benaco, Tanzania UNHCR conducted a headcount among Rwandan refugees. Wristbands were used to count 300,000 people, mostly Hutu refugees. An information campaign was launched [by UNHCR], but the Hutu translators of UNHCR’s information interpreted wristband as ‘dogtag.’ The negative connotation thus created resistance among the refugee population. This was exacerbated by the [enemy] Rwanda Patriotic Front (RPF), whose Tutsi-led rebel group’s radio broadcast announced that the wrist tags would leave permanent marks on refugees’ wrists. When and if they returned to Rwanda, they would be hunted down on this basis. The whole exercise collapsed with 300 expats in place for the exercise. The coordination team met with the ‘commune leaders’ (big shot politicos from the former Rwandan government, the ones who were responsible for the dogtag translations) and had a long meeting in a Rubb hall full of people.

Both the former government and the RPF [enemies of each other] were undermining UNHCR’s efforts. UNHCR maintained that “if there is no registration, there will be no food distribution. Donors will not give food.” Still, little progress was made until finally two of the ‘troublemakers’/leaders were allowed to speak (as a last resort, co-opt the enemy). UNHCR was given the go-ahead.... The next day the [counting] exercise went well.

Refugee groups on both sides castigated the counting process for different reasons. While UNHCR usually conducts an ‘information campaign’ to announce and explain the rationale for headcounts, the populations to be counted often insist on the negotiation of this process to incorporate some of their terms.

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387 Interview, UNHCR staff member, Nairobi, December 7, 1994.
Standardizing the Situated: ‘Sitreps’

Another technology of representing refugee operations in the field is the situation report, or ‘sitrep.’ These weekly information reports are filed by UNHCR staff in various field offices to Nairobi branch office where they are compiled into a single summary and forwarded to headquarters in Geneva.388 They provide a picture of the refugee population through statistics and descriptions of camp conditions and activities which promote the work being done by UNHCR staff at each location. Reporting formats are standardized across fields and consistent in terms of their content. Measurement is usually quantitative and aggregate. A major characteristic of sitreps is their apparent precision: project details, plentiful statistics, and specific dates. As such, they at once simulate and assimilate particular experiences at very different refugee camps in a variety of locations into a more universal narrative, both in terms of consumption and coherence. Yet, in Kenya, nationality, class, and material conditions vary enormously between the coastal and border camps for specific refugee groups.

Below is a typical excerpt from a 1994 regional sitrep filed by the UNHCR office in Nairobi to Geneva. Statistics are a standard part of any sitrep.

TERTIO. STATISTICS: REFUGEE/RETURNEE/DISPLACED PERSONS:

AAA. MOVEMENT OF REFUGEES INTO KENYA DURING PERIOD

• 613 NEW ARRIVALS IN KAKUMA FROM SUDAN
• 4 NEW ARRIVALS IN KAKUMA FROM ETHIOPIA
• 17 NEW ARRIVALS IN KAKUMA FROM UGANDA
• 3 NEW ARRIVALS IN KAKUMA FROM ZAIRE
637 NEW ARRIVALS INTO KENYA DURING THE PERIOD 18 - 3 MARCH

388 The mail pouch from UNHCR in Nairobi travels first to the UN headquarters in New York and then to UNHCR headquarters in Geneva, a process that generally takes two weeks. This seemingly imperial circulation of information respects organizational hierarchy more than efficiency.
BBB. REPATRIATION. A TOTAL OF 11,491 REFUGEES VOLUNTARILY LEFT MANDERA FOR VARIOUS DESTINATIONS. A TOTAL OF 9,398 REPATRIATED SPONTANEously WITH UNHCR ASSISTANCE WHILE 489 REPATRIATED VOLUNTARILY IN ORGANISED CONVOYS TO LUUQ, 92 TO BURHACHIE, 637 TO BARDERA, 207 TO GARBA HARE, 575 TO BURDOBO AND 93 MOYALE.

CCC. INTERCAMP TRANSFER.

ON 18 FEB A CONVOY OF 25 TRUCKS LEFT FOR DADAAB WITH 1049 REFUGEES ABOARD. ON 24 FEB ANOTHER CONVOY OF 1133 LEFT MANDERA AND ARRIVED DADAAB ON 27 FEB.

DDD. TOTAL NUMBER OF REFUGEES IN KENYA:

A) ASSISTED IN CAMPS:

NORTH, NORTHEAST AND NORTHWEST:

LIBOI 44,840 (MAINLY SOMALIS)
IFO 29,900 (MAINLY SOMALIS) (NEW FIGURE FOLLOWING HEADCOUNT)
DAGAHALEY 24,000 (MAINLY SOMALIS) (NEW FIGURE FOLLOWING HEADCOUNT)
HAGADERA 31,200 (MAINLY SOMALIS) (NEW FIGURE FOLLOWING HEADCOUNT)
KAKUMA 37,542 (MAINLY SUDANESE)
RUJIRU 1,723 (MIXED)

COAST: --

UTANGE 44,112 (SOMALIS AND ETHIOPIANS)
MARAFIA 29,348 (SOMALIS AND NON-SOMALIS)
MOMBASA 6,149 (BARAWAS AND OTHER SOMALIS)
HATIMY 3,058 (SOMALIS -- BARAWAS)
JOMVU 4,773 (BAJUNIS)
SWALEH NGURU 4,542 (BENADIR)
MAJENGO 1,547 (SOMALIS)

B) ASSISTED IN BORDER SITES

MANDERA 8,500 (MAINLY SOMALIS)

C) NON-ASSISTED: NAIROBI AND MOMBASA (KNOWN TO UNHCR)—

20,000 (THE GOK ESTIMATES THIS FIGURE TO BE BETWEEN 100,000 - 150,000 "FREELIVERS" IN NAIROBI AND MOMBASA

GRAND TOTAL: 291,999 REFUGEES IN KENYA

Sitrep statistics such as these suggest a preoccupation with numbers. They are nonetheless formulated on the basis of headcounts, and come to have both political meaning and
importance in refugee planning. Having committed a grand total of 291,999 refugees to paper in the example cited above, this number can later be used as a measure of UNHCR’s ‘progress’ towards reducing the refugee population in Kenya when subsequent counts report other totals. As with the ‘targets’ of affirmative action at UNHCR, numbering can have highly political objectives that relate more to organizational aspirations than staff or ‘client’ welfare.

Other Orders: The Search for ‘Community’ among Refugees

Having analyzed UNHCR’s rationale for and processes of coding the camps, I now turn to other ‘community-based’ approaches to assisting refugees. ‘Community’ is a term with multiple meanings and strategic uses. Meanings of community have been debated for even longer than the effects of place.\textsuperscript{389} Marlee Kline has analyzed ways in which ‘New Right’ governments tactically employ notions of community.\textsuperscript{390} Strategies to privatize and off-load social service delivery at lower cost are predicated on the idea that the community can do it better and should have a say in such matters. Such tactics often rely on the volunteer or unpaid labour of community members, particularly women. Community development is often distinguished by participatory approaches and ‘grassroots’ projects organized by members of a given community. In contrast to hierarchical ‘top-down’ approaches, community-based development claims to include and represent the people — in this case, refugees — affected. In Kenyan refugee camps, UNHCR is the lead agency which organizes and subcontracts service delivery to NGOs. Its reputation among NGOs varies,

but as the organization with the mandate and money to spend, it tends to be viewed as the hegemon and bureaucrat of refugee assistance.

As introduced in part one, CARE is a major NGO player in most of the Kenyan refugee camps. The Kenya-based office became involved in refugee assistance only in 1991. Lucrative transportation and refugee camp management contracts from UNHCR since that time have resulted in more than a two-fold increase in its operating budget. More money now circulates in the refugee assistance program (RAP) than in all of CARE’s other development programs in Kenya combined. As an implementing partner for UNHCR, CARE managers are obliged, to a large extent, to do what UNHCR’s asks. Because of this, CARE tends to employ some of the same reporting procedures and ways of representing the field. Below is an excerpt from CARE’s publicity on the Refugee Assistance Program:

From mid-1991 to late 1992, the refugee population increased from 21,000 in two border camps to over 425,000 in fourteen camps spread across Kenya.... By early 1994, CARE was serving a population of around 200,000.391

CARE is responsible for the transport and distribution of refugee food, the provision of essential social services, and for adequate water and sanitation in all camps except those located on the Kenyan coast. Its stated objective in the social services sector is “(t)o assure that all refugees are administered humanely and efficiently and equipped with vital skills and knowledge for repatriation.”392 This sounds very much like UNHCR’s role in providing “a full-fledged care and maintenance programme” to refugees in established camps.393 Anthropologist Liisa Malkki has argued that refugees are designated as liminal in the categorical order of nation-states. As an aberration of this order, they become the

392 Ibid., p. 5.
object of therapeutic interventions. Accordingly, refugees are organized in camps where a technology of "care and control" are employed in what is the "management of space and movement for 'peoples out of place.'"\textsuperscript{394} Both CARE and UNHCR employ therapeutic language of care in their efforts to help refugees.

Given its well-established mandate for community development work, CARE does incorporate some community-based approaches to refugee assistance. In particular, the agency contracted a pair of consultants in 1994 to conduct a community consultation with refugees in the Dadaab camps to examine "the appropriateness and effectiveness of SSEP [CARE's Social Services and Education Programmes] in meeting the needs of the refugee community."\textsuperscript{395} The questions the consultants ask overlapped with many of those I had initially posed in my research proposal. The consultants, however, had the advantage of speaking fluent Somali, enabling them to communicate directly with the majority of refugees. Their positioning was further enhanced by the politics of their locations: one was an American married to a Somali with whom she had several children and the other was a Somali himself. As independent and in some respects 'inside' commentators, they present quite different 'pictures' of the field in their final report. Their community focus emphasizes quality over quantity and is critical of the statistical focus of both UNHCR and CARE. They indicate a preference for community-based research methods:

... it is recommended that future investigations should utilize the techniques of action research and of participatory research, and should emphasize the collection of qualitative rather than quantitative data.\textsuperscript{396}

While they challenge others' quantitative approaches to data collection, the consultants note that refugees also demonstrated a lack of support for their own survey techniques:

\textsuperscript{395} Mary Hope Schwoebel & Mohamed Hassan Haji, "Report on Community Consultation", CARE International Refugee Assistance Project, October 1994, p. 2.
\textsuperscript{396} Ibid., p. 50.
...questionnaires appeared to alienate participants. Participants expressed exasperation at the eternal round of interviewers filling out forms, while tangible results benefiting the respondents themselves were negligible, or non-existent. Some expressed a feeling of exploitation....

However, the major areas of concern raised by refugees during the consultation revolved around fuel, sexual violence, and safety:

The issues of energy, sexual assault and security are so interrelated that they were normally presented together. As land surrounding the camps becomes more and more denuded, women must go further and further to collect firewood. This increases their chances of encountering “shiftas” who threaten them, beat them, sexually assault and sometimes abduct them. Men who collect firewood in place of their female family members are beaten, threatened and sometimes killed.

The refugees find themselves in an almost impossible situation in attempting to meet their requirement for energy. Neither HCR [UNHCR] nor CARE provide any kind of cookstove or any kind of fuel. The refugees understand that they have been told that they are no longer allowed to collect firewood from the areas surrounding the camps. When refugees are attacked, the “shiftas” tell them it is because they are collecting firewood which is prohibited. When sexual assaults are reported to the [Kenyan] security forces, the response is often, “You are raping our trees, so you got what you deserved.”

The assault and rape of refugees who are living on Kenyan soil are seemingly warranted by refugee ‘violence’ towards the Kenyan environment: “you are raping our trees, and so we are raping your women.” This tension, however, goes beyond a simple ‘us’—‘them’ division. The isolated and segregated location of camps exacerbates these relationships by defining refugees as ‘others’ and restricting them to the lands officially designated for refugee use. Beyond the perimeters of the camps, refugees are seen to be trespassing. The provision of foreign foodstuffs which require firewood for cooking in a semi-arid area with few trees to speak of is not figured into the equation. The refugees are not considered a legitimate part of the human landscape outside the camps.

The consultants’ report reiterates some of the problems presented in the individual refugee testimony discussed in the previous chapter. It extends the question, “whose geography?”,
in terms of camp organization to the politics of land and resource utilization, a question of entitlement. Refugees in the context of Kenyan camps clearly breed competition and resentment on the part of some locals with whom they share scarce resources. The excerpt above places the blame on CARE and UNHCR for not providing fuel or a method by which to cook food in a self-sufficient manner. The implication is not that the food supply is necessarily inappropriate but that those who provide it are obliged to provide the means to prepare it. The report goes on to make some interesting connections between refugee safety, the household requirement of firewood, and fencing as a means of ensuring some security:

"Shiftas" also attack inside the camps, especially at night. These attacks generally include robbing and looting, as well as sexual assaults, beatings and killings. Blocks/sections well inside the camp and with adequate fencing appear to have less of a security problem inside the camp than blocks/sections on the edges of the camp and with inadequate fencing. Some of the newer areas reported having not yet received fencing. Others said that having repeatedly been thwarted in their attempts to collect firewood, they had been forced to use their fencing for firewood.398

The report clearly advocates for Somali refugees. On the one hand, it criticizes the quantitative methods and control over programs that the relief agencies employ and argues that they do not provide sufficient resources (i.e. fuel) to support refugee households.399 On the other, the consultants perceive the perils of too much dependency given the long history of foreign aid to Somalia:

The collective self-esteem of the Somali community has been undermined by decades of aid dependency, and the national humiliation experienced on account of the civil war and the ensuing international intervention. The humiliations of refugee life have further contributed to undermining self-confidence. In addition, the traditional aid approach has generally encouraged its recipients to represent themselves as helpless victims of circumstance. Some Somalis have representing themselves in this way for so long that, along with convincing the donors of its reality, they've also convinced themselves. This has eventually led to a diminution of their individual and collective capacities and human potential, as their energy and intelligence are increasingly directed towards manipulating donors for "freebies".400

398 Ibid., p. 12.
399 Ibid., p. 44.
400 Ibid., p. 42-43.
This is a damning critique of both the donors and the recipients, in this case the refugee relief agencies and the Somalis they serve. The way out of this apparent conundrum is, according to the authors, through “community-managed programmes.” What this proposed solution fails to account for is that a refugee camp is not a self-identified community. It is an institution generated by the discourses of international human rights and refugee law in which its subjects are recognized in international law, but have no political status in the country which hosts them. Iris Marion Young contends that the ideal of community privileges unity over difference. She defines community in her own terms as “the unoppressive city” defined by “openness to unassimilated otherness.” Recognizing that ideal notions of community can be exclusionary, a refugee camp is a ‘non-community of the excluded.’ Refugees are legally subordinated and spatially segregated in ways that preclude their participation in the local economy, polity, and society.

Simulating Community: Refugee Self-Management

One initiative to redress ‘top-down’ management and to create a more accountable relationship between donors, relief agencies, and refugees in the camps is a project proposed by CARE, called ‘Refugee (or Community) Self-Management.’ It represents a bold, if imperfect, initiative that aims to forge a direct link between donors who fund refugee camps and the refugees who live in them. Refugee Self-Management aims to redistribute decision-making power by increasing refugee participation and decreasing the role of agencies in determining priorities and projects in the camps. It assumes that a

401 Ibid., p. 43.
refugee camp can, or does, operate as a village or civil society, and employs community
development principles — such as self-governance and democratic decision-making.

The gist of the proposal is the promotion of refugee self-determination through democratic
process. Decision-making power related to refugee camp affairs would be transferred to a
democratically-elected groups of representatives from among the refugee ‘community’. The
proposal outlines a sharing of responsibilities whereby refugee representatives could decide
how to spend available funds for social, economic, and infrastructural development of the
camps. The aid agencies which are responsible to both donors and refugees, would then
provide these goods and services as decided upon by the refugees. Under the plan,
refugees would participate in decision-making, but material resources and funds to enact or
follow through on decisions would remain under the control of the international
agencies. In this case CARE, would ultimately have a veto power which could block
any decisions that the NGO deemed unacceptable.

The proposal of Refugee Self-Management has been met with some resistance. Much
debate as well as disagreement took place among UNHCR staff at the administering sub-
office in Dadaab based on its proposed redistribution of power. UNHCR responses to
CARE’s proposal were mixed and measured. One UNHCR officer in Dadaab argued that

“We have a triangle of responsibility; there is UNHCR which looks after the political decisions and
operations; it is responsible for peacekeeping and controlling the political games in the camps. NGOs
provide resources and services, and the Government of Kenya simply provides security. We have succeeded
in breaking up the traditional structures of power (in the camps).”

403 In a discussion about the viability of Refugee Self-Management with a UNHCR Kenyan Somali staff
member, he said that the project would not work for cultural reasons. “Somalis are individuals; they do not
think communally.” He was convinced that it would not work because whatever structures might be
established, Somalis will still only follow the elders of their own clan (conversation, 27 November 1994, Dadaab).
404 Interview, senior UNHCR officer, Dadaab, November 23, 1994.
In his mind, UNHCR is effectively the governing body of the three camps. Refugee self-management is viewed by staff member as dangerous because it poses the possibility of redirecting this power and reinstating elders’ enclaves of supposedly autocratic power.

A field officer working for UNHCR in Dadaab echoed this sentiment. In his view, CARE’s idea of refugee self-management “may be possible in five to six years. Now deals are made to ‘get’ what they [refugees] want. People are only a ‘community’ for one meeting, purely for exigency. [The CARE staff person responsible for the initiative] is in a grey zone where there is room for hijacking....”

He views refugees with suspicion and considers the camps “a war zone.”

Another UNHCR officer in Dadaab was more positive about the idea: “refugees are part of a culture that has learned to be dependent, and we taught them that.” She hints at the idea that refugee camps produce refugee behaviors. Her argument echoes that of other critics of dependency among refugees, namely that there is nothing intrinsically dependent or impoverished about refugees’ culture at the ‘pre-refugee’ stage.405

During my field work in the camps, I developed my own analysis of the power relations and gendered outcomes of this initiative which raises three main criticisms: first, a refugee camp is not a community; second, the transfer of camp governance from organizations to refugee leaders cannot exclude control of economic resources; and third, the proposed structures of Refugee Self-Management would not represent the interests of some segments of the camp population, notably women. In the first instance, refugee camps in Kenya are

not self-identified communities. In the camps, I noted evidence of communal interests and refugee cooperation — organized for example among refugees of common nationality, subclan affiliation, or proximate physical location. But a refugee camp is an institution organized as a temporary solution to displacement. In a recent publication, UNHCR admits this fact: "[r]efugee camps and settlements are not, of course, ‘normal’ places, particularly in situations where the population has little or no access to land or wage labour, and must therefore rely on external assistance."406 Camps are, arguably, part of a strategy to contain refugee ‘foreigners’ enforced by the Kenyan Government and administered by UNHCR and its implementing partners. UNHCR has a mandate to provide material assistance and legal protection in conjunction with the Government of Kenya (GOK). The GOK insists that refugees reside in the camps. They are the subjects of a tacit and unsatisfactory policy of containment by which camps are enforced ‘colonies’, not communities defined by voluntary association. Communities do not usually have, by definition, greater or lesser legal status and entitlement than other groups. In Kenya, citizens live in communities; refugees live in camps. Citizens move without restriction; they have political and economic relationships to the place in which they live, and access to land, jobs, and resources whereby they often generate a self-sufficient, if interdependent, livelihood.

In the case of Somali refugees in Kenyan camps, none of these criteria apply. In exchange for temporary asylum and the provision of basic needs, refugees forfeit a number of entitlements. Cultural politics among the refugee, local, and humanitarian groups which share and negotiate the space of the camps only complicate any power-sharing agreement or notion of a unified community. Young warns that “the desire for unity or wholeness in

discourse generates borders, dichotomies, and exclusions.\textsuperscript{407} While UNHCR and CARE desire such unity on occasion, the cultural groups present are hierarchically positioned and partitioned. Sometimes staff at CARE and UNHCR maintain that a refugee camp can be treated as a trustworthy community. On other occasions, they treat refugees as institutional subjects who cannot be trusted. The inconsistency of refugee treatment by the international humanitarian groups does nothing to engender trust on the part of the refugees. One moment they are asked to become leaders and decision-makers in the camp; the next they are herded behind barricades at gun point in order to be counted for a UNHCR census.

‘Headcounts’ in the camps provide a clear example of how one administrative practice contradicts another, namely any sense of ‘camp-as-community’. In civic societies, community leaders do not conduct a census of their population by coercing, containing, and then counting their members. As Trinh T. Minh-ha succinctly says, “participate or perish.”\textsuperscript{408} Refugees may oblige those who organize them, but the relationship is hardly one based on accepted leadership or participant-oriented decision-making. While a refugee camp is not a ‘war zone’, refugees do participate in the exercises tied to goods offered to them by relief agencies in their own self-interest. Headcounts are the basis for issuing ration cards which entitle refugees to food and non-food items. It thus makes sense that they would maximize this entitlement by resisting counting procedures which might reduce the number of extra ration cards circulating in the camps. Equally, NGOs depend on donor support and supplies which must be judiciously distributed. Their objective of obtaining an accurate refugee census is also reasonable, though the means of achieving this could be

\textsuperscript{407} Iris Marion Young, 1990, op. cit.
negotiated in other ways. The strategies of both parties, however, allude to the politics of institutions, not communities.

My second criticism of the Refugee Self-Management initiative relates to the separation of political power from economic resources. Anthony Giddens distinguishes between authoritative and allocative resources as dual structures of domination in his theory of structuration. Dominion over the social world and dominion over the material world are two sets of resources which combine differently across societies, but they occur together — according to Giddens — during different historical periods and modes of production. His analysis of power implies that responsibility for meaningful decision-making cannot be separated from the resources necessary to carry out decisions taken. John Tomlinson notes that the experience of many African states during the 1960s was that they gained nominal national independence but inherited the colonial economic structures of former European administrations. Similarly, if CARE and UNHCR are unwilling to relinquish any of the economic means which would enable refugee self-management to occur, they will defeat the proposed objectives of refugee self-governance and democratic process, and potentially (re)produce a neo-colonial power structure. This is not to say that constructive change is not useful and important in a milieu characterized by refugee dependency and disciplinary techniques on the part of humanitarian agencies. To succeed, however, a thorough self-examination and reformation of the institutions that manage refugees needs to happen before externalized power-sharing agreements, such as Refugee Self-Management, are introduced.

409 The UNHCR registration guide outlines options for census-taking that do not involve coercion but only refugee cooperation. Door to door surveys of individual households constitute one suggested strategy; see UNHCR, "Registration — a practical guide for field staff", Geneva, May 1994.
My final criticism Refugee Self-Management concerns structures of refugee representation. Broadly-based participation in camp decision-making and projects — particularly by and for women — cannot be limited to the ‘democratic structure’ of elected committees. The Refugee Self-Management Project proposes various committees of democratically-elected members from the refugee population. During my research in the three camps, I found that much discussion revolved around “who will represent whom?” and “what will the relationship among committees be?” The majority of refugees, especially women, do not generally attend these consultations. Refugee men are more likely to have the time, the language skills necessary to converse with NGOs and participate in political process, and the social authority to attend. The community development structures of ‘opportunity’, ‘participation’, and access are distorted by the institutional setting of the camps and the gender relations of Somali culture within.

As outlined in the interviews with refugee women presented in the previous chapter, informal, collaborative ‘self-management’ initiatives were already evident in the camps. These included collective rotating credit schemes, small solo shops set up in the camp markets, individual collection and sale of firewood, and assistance to neighbours or family who are pregnant, infirm, or elderly. Refugee women have created their own community-based arrangements, outside the official discourse of Refugee Self-Management and allotted circuits of refugee participation. They nonetheless remain largely excluded from so-called democratic process by their gendered cultural positioning. The vast majority of Somali refugee women in these border camps are unlikely to ever be part of the official self-management scheme proposed by CARE. One might argue that the refugees furthest from the these centres of institutionalized power, namely women, are quite capable of self-management. Certainly no one is helping them at the moment. This is not to say,
however, that they receive equitable treatment and material assistance relative to other refugees in the camp.

The ‘democratic’ election of leaders is likely to reproduce and reinscribe the power of those refugees already in positions of authority and relative privilege in the camps. The refugee elite in the camps do not see a need for elections. I attended one meeting between refugee agencies and camp elders where the latter group submitted a list of those refugees they unilaterally decided should be representatives to CARE. Most of those on the list were the same male elders. They also noted the remuneration expected. Agency staff members were naively perturbed with the elders’ self-appointment and expectation of pay. CARE had assumed that the work would be done for the welfare of the community, and thus on a volunteer basis. Agency staff were paid for their work in the camps, but the proposal did not include refugee remuneration. Where the community took over governance responsibilities, the terms were ultimately determined by the agency.

While partial to the idea of refugee self-governance based on my own background in community organization and planning, I harbour skepticism about the willingness of the aid agencies to give away any meaningful decision-making power to refugees, particularly with respect to the allocation of resources. No formal link of accountability to the refugees on the part of agencies would exist to ensure that power is shared on an on-going basis. Unlike donors who provide the resources to run the camps and attach certain conditions to those resources, refugees remain recipients who get what they are perceived to need. I am also concerned that such changes might reinscribe women’s subordination in the camps. To assume that principles of community development and organization are directly transferable to refugee camps is problematic. While ‘camps-as-communities’ may be desirable, this notion of community is not viable. While CARE’s initiative does recognize
that the relations of power which characterize the status quo are problematic, it does not address the differences in political status and affiliation which produce these relations of power.

Contradictions and Tensions in the Field

Practices of institutional control of camps by donors and agencies sometimes contradict the principles of community self-management and refugee participation. How can UNHCR credibly conduct headcounts one week and discuss the sharing of decision-making with refugee leaders another? One paragraph in the Country Operation's Manual for Kenya illustrates this contradiction perfectly:

Sanitation

Maintenance of sanitary facilities and camp cleanliness will continue to play an important role in the overall welfare and health of the refugees during 1995. Sanitation activities will focus on greater community participation in maintaining the camps in as sanitary a condition as can be expected. Refugees have already started to keep latrines on a family/compound basis, significantly reducing the incidence of looting [theft] of superstructures. This trend will be encouraged during 1995.

Surveys will be conducted on a regular basis to assess the need for rehabilitation/construction of latrines in the camps to maintain a ratio of 16 persons per latrine.413

The logic of the first paragraph contradicts the second. Responsibility for maintaining facilities on the basis of social organization proves more effective than allocation based on ratios per segment of population. Yet, there is a constant revisiting of this language and logic in UNHCR operations. Encouraged by UNHCR staff members with whom I became friends, I wrote the following commentary, both to submit as a memo to the UNHCR Rep and for my field notes. The excerpt below speaks to some of these contradictions and the tensions they raise in the context of the camps.

To focus on headcounts and refugee statistics one moment and refugee participation and community approaches the next poses a contradiction for UNHCR. Headcounts and statistics infer a monitoring role mainly concerned with technical information, control, and surveillance. On the other hand, participatory planning methods suggest a collaborative approach to camp operations with space for negotiation and discussion among UNHCR, NGOs, and refugees. This contradiction must be acknowledged and addressed if UNHCR wants to meet its existing mandate and incorporate the changes introduced by new UNHCR policies and training programs. The two approaches are not mutually exclusive... each does, however, operate according to a different type of logic and subsequently each distributes power through different structures....

The contradiction should not be viewed as a context between ‘counting’ (for reasons of control) versus ‘cultivating’ (in order to elicit refugee input), or quantity (statistics) versus quality (effectiveness); both systems are part of UNHCR culture. Nonetheless, this contradiction has proven extremely divisive among staff working in the field, and is a drain to already scarce staff resources available. Change which incorporates both approaches needs to be developed; defending one approach against the other is counterproductive to field operations.

This conciliatory tone of this text speaks to two very distinct ‘camps’ among UNHCR staff in the Dadaab camps. There are those who guard the importance of control and security concerns at UNHCR and those concerned principally with refugee welfare who employ community-based approaches in the camps: government for the refugees versus government by the refugees. The commentary from my field notes continues

One myth that needs to be clarified is that a refugee camp is not a community. A refugee camp is an institution created specifically for the purpose of providing protection and assistance to a group of people who are not citizens of the country in which they are living....

The second myth that requires critical examination is the claim of refugee dependency and idleness. Household interviews conducted so far in the three Dadaab camps suggest that women working at home grinding sorghum, collecting water, searching for firewood, cooking and cleaning are anything but idle. This is, of course, a gendered routine, and it may be true that refugee men are often not gainfully occupied.
The dependency, where it exists, should not be blamed on the refugees. Rather, the institution of the refugee camp produces refugee subjects and behaviors. Mobility for prima facie refugees is severely curtailed; they are legally required to stay in the camps. They live on marginally productive land in a semi-arid region of Kenya which is also geographically marginal — far from the educational, medical, and consular services of Nairobi and the coast. Unlike refugee camps in, for example, Northern Uganda where Sudanese refugees have been allocated farmland by the government, refugees in Kenya cannot produce food for their own needs. Access to productive land is critical to long-term self-sufficiency, but camps in Kenya are only temporary measures to provide safety and assistance to refugees. These conditions of containment and marginalization highlight some of the artificially imposed constraints which shape camp planning and refugee participation.

... Refugees are not citizens who have the right to work and freedom to move within the country. They do not have access to land to provide for their own needs.

Nor are they criminals or prisoners who need to be controlled through coercion. A refugee camp is not a war zone. Field staff must be careful to balance the organizational needs for information with respect for refugees and their participation in programme development...

This argument against coercion in the camps exposes my own point of view with respect to refugee operations. Senior UNHCR officials are concerned about refugee dependency in the camps. What they sometimes refuse to take responsibility for are the structural and legal reasons for this reliance. The Government of Kenya effectively exiles refugees to remote border regions and prohibits them from living outside of the camps. As displaced people without permanent legal status in the country, refugees are given few options. They either accept the terms UNHCR offers — which includes dependence on foreign foodstuffs and spatial segregation in the camps — or ‘go underground’ to create an unofficial livelihood elsewhere. While I did discuss my motivations for writing this memo with a senior UNHCR official in Nairobi, no reaction or formal response was forthcoming.

Final Remarks

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414 Interview, UNHCR senior manager, Nairobi, November 8, 1994.
This chapter has explored some of the ways in which the space of refugee camps is coded and represented. On the one hand, technologies of vision serve surveillance functions, particularly in calculating refugee populations. Comparable and frequent statistical reports are also part of attempt to ‘order disorder’. These strategies characterize the salient mode of reporting the field. On the other hand, community-based consultations and refugee self-management are promoted by CARE. The report prepared by the consultants is critical of quantitative assessments of refugee operations and wary of refugee research in general. A review of the Refugee Self-Management initiative exposes competing assumptions of ‘community’. This and other CARE initiatives contrast vividly with the more coercive control and quantitative measure of refugees. My own field notes analyze the relationship between UNHCR and the CARE consultants, by juxtaposing the former’s emphasis on monitoring from above with the latter’s emphasis on grassroots community work. Movement between the universal practices of UNHCR and the particularities of Somali culture and society are posited as either/or approaches. My own analysis calls for some conciliation between the two. The conciliation is a necessary, but not sufficient, measure. Given the intensely uneven relations of power within the camps and the cultural politics they generate, the subversion of unity myths — such as a refugee ‘community’ — is a strategic departure point towards forging links across differences.

UNHCR’s registration guide outlines a counting process (fixing) followed by a subsequent collection of refugee information. The counting process is important and political, precisely because it determines food and other entitlements. UNHCR positions itself precariously by treating the refugees as partners in community decision-making, on the one hand, and as prisoners of the camps in which they live, on the other. This fundamental contradiction in the ways in which power is deployed poses, in my mind, the major dilemma for humanitarian organizations. At what point do charitable acts of humanitarian assistance become neo-colonial technologies of control? The line is fine.
The demands on UNHCR are greater than those on most UN agencies. It must respond quickly and effectively to humanitarian emergencies, solicit support and funding to pay for these operations, and conduct itself in an effective, accountable manner. Based on these criteria, it achieves many of its objectives. But the criteria fail to ensure that the modes and means of delivering assistance — how operations are carried out — are in keeping with the spirit of the ultimate objectives.

In the next chapter, I challenge the efficacy and relevance of camps by leaving 'the field' behind. The movement and activities of Somali refugees outside the legal and institutional structures of the formal camp setting accentuate their efforts to establish normal, as opposed to normalized, lives outside their country and beyond the camps to which they are assigned.
Chapter 8
Never mind the Field, or Crossing Borders

This chapter is an attempt to think outside the logic of camps, counting, and control, and to examine some of the ways that refugees deal with their displacement. Many of the findings presented are based on serendipitous encounters that occurred during the course of the research. As such, they represent the edges of my research rather than its central focus. While I make no huge claims based on the anecdotal evidence amassed, these encounters are nonetheless suggestive of the unofficial movements of refugees. The geography of refugees' lived experience stands in stark contrast to the order of the camps, and the neat categories of assistance, destitute populations, and research concerned with refugee mobility. Somali refugee movements in Kenya challenge the notion that boundaries of the camps are impermeable. The containment and order attempted by UNHCR and the Kenyan Government are anything but complete. Having established that a refugee camp is not a community, I present findings which suggest that Somali refugees make communal connections beyond the perimeter of the camps, and in some cases, overseas. My research illustrates that the livelihoods they establish outside the camps also have the effect of disordering some of the Kenyan communities and cities to which they move.

Kenya shares borders with Somalia, Ethiopia, Sudan, Uganda, and Tanzania. As such, it serves as a 'catchment area' and potential country of asylum for displaced persons from all of these countries. Nairobi is the consulate capital of the region, where high commissions and embassies station their immigration officers to screen refugee applicants for resettlement. These locational factors make Kenya in general and Nairobi in particular attractive places for refugees. The Kenyan Government, however, has attempted to maintain strict control of refugees by containing them in camps, but the reality is that not all
refugees live in them. Despite efforts to ‘order disorder’ within the camps, their borders remain porous to refugee movements. While some use the camps as a residence, many refugees opt for other arrangements. In recognizing some of the paths and patterns of Somali refugee activity outside the camps, I chronicle stories of transplanted Somalis within and beyond Kenya’s borders.

Somalians fleeing the perils of civil war have crossed a political border which designates them as refugees, but not all of them live in the camps to which they are technically confined. By working and living outside the camps in Kenyan society, many refugees cross less clearly defined cultural and material borders in intensely local ways. Concentrations of Somalian refugees in urban areas of Kenya illustrate attempts to establish homes beyond the confines of the camps. While UNHCR maintains that camps are intended only as ‘temporary solutions’, camps in Kenya have become an entrenched stop-gap measure in the absence of viable permanent solutions for most refugees. The ambitious, often risky, journeys of refugees beyond established borders illustrates that the conceptual-political-material space of the camp is untenable as anything more than an immediate response to crises of human displacement.

In the absence of Cold War funding and superpower support for refugee populations, increased humanitarian intervention across sovereign international borders has attempted to contain potential refugees by protecting them ‘at home.’ The dismal record of UNHCR’s Cross-Border Operation in which a ‘preventive zone’ was created to discourage further refugee flows into Kenya and encourage refugee repatriation from Kenya, provides convincing evidence that such measures have limited purchase. Both sets of ‘safe spaces’ — camps and UN safe areas — may serve a geo-political purpose by isolating the problem, but neither approximates a solution. While “[r]efugees and displaced people are the human
barometer of political stability, of justice and order in much of the world," they are not simply passive indicators of geo-political conflict. Diasporas resulting from displacement remake places. This is particularly evident in urban areas of Kenya where some Somali refugees have relocated. In crossing the borders between camp and city, they unsettle the order, containment, and administration of displaced persons by the Kenyan government and UN authorities. Not only have government authorities demonstrated their intolerance of Somali refugees, but Kenyans living in proximate areas have also expressed their resentment, particularly with respect to issues of housing, business practices, and land.

The State of Somalia

Once the flow of displaced persons across an international border is deemed legitimate by authorized organizations, the path is accessible not only to those fleeing the direct threats and consequences of conflict. This ‘window of opportunity’ to move is also made available to those looking for stability, jobs, and a better life. Somalia remains without a government and basic public services, as fighting continues and clan-based militias vie for control of key areas in the capital and along the coast. While such conflict precludes the possibility of repatriation for many Somali refugees currently in Kenya, the political economy of the country is not particularly attractive to prospective returnees, nor indeed, to people living there. In August 1996 self-declared President General Mohammed Farah Aideed was shot dead in Mogadishu. His death only exacerbates instability in the Somalian capital, as control of the city is renegotiated among warring factions.

416 The Globe & Mail, “Somali fighting escalates”, April 6, 1996. Reuters reported that 75 people were dead after two consecutive days of fighting in Mogadishu. See also Mark Dodd, “Mogadishu’s Kesaney hospital — solace for all Somalis”, 25 May 1996, Reuters, e.news@clarinet, who reports that daily casualties are being admitted to the hospital as a result of fighting in South Mogadishu.
Five years of civil war in Somalia, coupled with the loss of the country’s strategic importance to and resources from its former superpower patrons, have contributed to the demise of its infrastructure:

Following the end of the Cold War, Somalia has become an international commodity — an object of compassion — but has no means of exercising diplomatic leverage.\footnote{Samuel Makinda, {\it Seeking Peace From Chaos: Humanitarian Intervention in Somalia}, (Boulder/London: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 1993), p. 13.}

In the late 1980s, almost half of Somalia’s gross domestic product consisted of official development assistance. It also received emergency food, refugee, and military assistance.\footnote{Aristide Zolberg & Agnes Callamard, “Displacement-generating conflicts and international assistance in the Horn of Africa”, {\it Aid in Place of Migration?}, (Geneva: International Labour Organization, 1994).} In 1990 the per capita GDP was US $120, making it one of the poorest countries in the world.\footnote{Samuel Makinda, 1993, op. cit.} External assistance from donor countries is expected to decrease now that UN forces have withdrawn. While selected NGOs continue to work in the country, budgets and projects since the withdrawal of the UN in March 1995 are expected to be comparatively small in scale.

Continued fighting over control of the airport and shipping port in Mogadishu both before and since the UN withdrawal have made the Somalian capital and its vicinity unsafe for repatriation.\footnote{The Daily Nation, “Five killed as Somali clan war resumes”, Nairobi, January 30, 1995, p. 8. Also The Globe & Mail, “Clans clash in Somalia”, Vancouver, May 6, 1995, p. A9.} In more stable areas, UNHCR has transported refugees for repatriation from the coastal camps in Kenya to Northwest Somalia and to the Kismayo region of South Somalia early in 1995 (see figure 8.1). With the closing of Utange camp (population 49,000) on the Kenyan coast, refugees must either repatriate or move to one of the Dadaab camps. Refugees on the coast, the GOK declares, adversely affect tourism and the environment.\footnote{Interview with senior UNHCR manager, Nairobi, November 10, 1994.} Most Somali refugees living in coastal camps have refused UNHCR
Figure 8.1
Somali refugees at Utange Camp:
Going home
invitations to repatriate to Somalia or to relocate in the remote border camps. In fact, significant numbers of refugees — between 30,000 and 40,000 Somalis — moved from the Dadaab camps to the coastal camps in 1993. A UNHCR staff member in Mombasa explained that this movement was partly the result of refugee perception that resettlement opportunities to the US were better in the camps. He also noted that many refugees living in and near Mombasa are funded by relatives and contacts abroad and are not dependent on humanitarian assistance. 422 Given the collapse of public telecommunications, postal services and banking operations in Somalia, Mombasa offers a reasonably secure and well-connected location for the transfer of money and information from these global contacts to refugees. Recent reports suggest that some Somalis are travelling to South Africa, Yemen, Malawi, and Ethiopia. 423 The Australian High Commission in Pretoria writes that it expects a 250% increase in refugee claims at its office this year, and that 70% of this would come from the Horn of Africa. 424 These numbers should not raise alarm on the part of South African authorities nor the High Commission’s staff, as the actual numbers for refugee resettlement selection in Pretoria for Australia are small. Nonetheless, they mark movement. Unauthorized migrations across camp and other borders signal refugee strategies to locate themselves favorably for a chance at citizenship or to gain Convention refugee status. Given the options of repatriation to Somalia or camp living, many Somali refugees are choosing neither and moving unofficially in other directions.

The forced migration of a segment of the Somalian population, and the uncertain ‘piggyback’ flow of other Somalis in search of a viable livelihood, has shifted the boundaries of the Somali nation — in the sense of a cultural group — southward into

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422 Interview with UNHCR staff, Mombasa, January 17, 1995.
423 Because ethnic Somalis from the Ogadeni clan comprise a large percentage of the Ethiopian population, many Somalis are seeking citizenship there. Since November 1994, 50,000 Somalis have reportedly sought asylum in Ethiopia; UNHCR, Informal EXCOM, January 17, 1995.
424 Interview and correspondence, senior staff member, Australian High Commission, Nairobi, January 24, 1995.
Kenya and somewhat westward into Ethiopia. In addition to the camps, evidence also suggests the informal settlement of many Somalians in Kenya and others in Ethiopia.\footnote{Conversation, UNHCR staff member at Branch Office, Nairobi, January 26, 1995.} The relatively new government in Ethiopia, led by President Zenawi, apparently does not have the administrative machinery in place to be discerning in such instances. The movement of Somalians southward is more significant in size and has important implications for Kenyan housing markets, local business, and cultural politics in urban areas.

\textbf{Border Crossings and Clashes}

Although segregation can be temporarily imposed as a sociopolitical arrangement, it can never be absolute, especially on the level of culture. All utterances inescapably take place against the background of the possible responses of other social and ethnic points of view.\footnote{Ella Shohat & Robert Stam, \textit{Unthinking Eurocentrism: Multiculturalism and the Media}. (New York/London: Routledge, 1994), p. 48.}

The line between refugee camps and local, Kenyan-held property is fine. In a country of more than forty distinct ethnic groups, cultural difference is the rule not the exception, but when refugees proceed too far across the camp boundary, there can be trouble. Tensions between Somalian refugees and local Kenyans along the coast have mounted, as more refugees have arrived at Utange camp just North of Mombasa. Many are not registered with UNHCR at this location and do not have ration cards. The arrival of additional refugees into the already overcrowded Utange camp generated an overflow population, some of whom — at the time of my visit — had constructed houses at the perimeter of the camp, just outside the official camp boundary. On two occasions local citizens literally burned these borders back into stark view by setting fire to refugee houses situated on Kenyan land.\footnote{Interview with UNHCR field staff, January 17, 1995.} The state land adjacent to the camp belongs to a Kenyan prison. Close by, in a tiny camp called Swaleh Nguru which was built to accommodate Benadir refugees of Somalian nationality, two fires were set within one week during my visit in January.
1995. The materiality of borders between cultures and subjects becomes evident. They are reinscribed through violent acts of 'clarification'.

Barbara Harlow notes that prisons, factories, and buses are often the primary sites of cultural confrontation which "delineate a liminal geopolitical space, created by historical circumstances and contested by multiple parties with divergent political agendas."428 Her points of cultural interface and tension suggest corresponding interstitial spaces between the cultures of refugees and locals along the Kenyan coast. Bus stops, or 'matatu stages' as they are called in Kenya, are the places where contact between refugees and locals occurs most regularly. Refugees commute back and forth into Mombasa, often to trade and earn income by selling in the market.

In Kenya, the marketplace replaces the factory as a central site of cultural and economic confrontation. Somalian refugees usually undercut the prices of Kenyan vendors. One Red Cross delegate noted that goods sold by Somalis are one third to one half less expensive than those sold in the shops.429 In part, this can be explained by lower overhead, as Somali refugees usually sell their goods in the outdoor public market, offering everything from bed sheets and blenders to radio cassette decks. Their low prices are also an expression of the fact that many of the goods Somalis sell have come to Kenya through Somalia, avoiding the import duties that Kenyan vendors must pay at the port. In the Northeast Province where the Liboi border crossing was officially closed, police reported that several commodities were being illegally smuggled across the border by women with camels and men leading donkey carts. The UNHCR office in Mombasa

429 Interview with International Federation of the Red Cross (IFRC) delegate, Mombasa, January 20, 1995.

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receives daily complaints from Kenyan shopkeepers about Somalian sellers intensifying competition and capturing their trade.\textsuperscript{430} While formal businesses in Mombasa are undercut by informal trade, other informal self-employment initiatives in and near the camps flourish. Local Kenyans find work selling services to Somali refugees (see figure 8.2). Prison land, matatus (buses), and the Mombasa marketplace are all sites of confrontation and cooperation between refugees and local Kenyans. Where refugees impinge on Kenyan land, boundaries are ‘clarified’ by setting fire to refugee housing. Cultures clash, official boundaries are transgressed, borders are contested by Somali refugees and reaffirmed by Kenyan residents.

Within the camps, cultural difference and confrontation emerges at even more nuanced levels. In Utange camp near Mombasa, the Kenyan Red Cross’ camp manager hired ten Masai guards to provide security for the camp, admittedly more for Kenyan staff working in the camp than for the refugees.\textsuperscript{431} Masai people constitute one of the many Kenyan ethnic groups, and are historically renowned for their skills as warriors. Their nomadic background and fierce independence during British rule proved to be effective resistance to colonization. Many non-Masai Kenyans fear those Masai who still hunt with spears, shields, and other weaponry. In this particular case, the hiring of Masai guards in full warrior costume pitted one set of fears against another. While many urban-based Kenyans were fearful of Masai Kenyans, the Somali refugees were seen to be an even greater threat.\textsuperscript{432} The camp management was not interested in cooperation despite differences, or affiliation, as Edward Said advocates, but in safety from difference at a distance.\textsuperscript{433}

\textsuperscript{430} Interview with UNHCR field staff, Mombasa, January 17, 1995.
\textsuperscript{431} Interview with IFRC delegate, Mombasa, January 20, 1995.
\textsuperscript{432} Masai men can also be seen working along the coast in the tourist trade. In full costume and beadwork, they sell jewelry and charge for taking their photograph. Along with the Rendille tribe of Kenya, the Masai people are subjected most to orientalist representation in East Africa and appear in a number of coffee table books.
Figure 8.2
Kenyan worker off-duty,
Utange camp
Refugees who remain in the camps do not accept uncritically the authority of the aid relationship. In order to receive their basic entitlements of food and non-food items, refugees have to meet certain terms of the humanitarian organizations whose mandate is to assist them. As one Red Cross worker put it bluntly: "the Somalis are hated by every delegate [international staff member]." The feeling may well be mutual. Nonetheless, expatriate relief workers and administrators generally view work with Somali refugees as difficult. Such jobs are seen as hardship posts which may earn them 'credit' in terms of future opportunities or serve as a punitive posting for past mistakes. Somalis have a reputation of 'talking back' to relief workers, rejecting the charity script of the needy and grateful. Trinh Minh-ha contends that "[t]he 'needy' cannot always afford to refuse, so they persist in accepting ungratefully." The actions of Somalian refugees towards humanitarian staff unsettle the charitable, hierarchical relationship of power between the Western donors and Somali refugees.

Across the border, evidence of political resistance to the US/UN intervention in Somalia has been expressed in the public demonstrations held in Mogadishu (see figure 8.3). Somali women in particular displayed their support for General Mohammed Aideed and disdain for the UN presence in the Somali capital in 1993. This geography of protest, however, was uneven as Somali women in Bardera demonstrated in support of UN activities in the country. Their region of Southern Somalia was subject to attack and pillage by Aideed and his troops in September 1992. Compared to the capital, UN operations in the Gedo and Bai areas of Southern Somalia were popular with civilian beneficiaries.

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434 Interview with IFRC delegate, Mombasa, January 20, 1995.
Figure 8.3
Somali women in Mogadishu rally in support of General Mohammed Farah Aideed and against the US/UN intervention in Somalia.
Source: Globe & Mail

Figure 8.4
Somali women in Bardera protest in support of the US/UN intervention. Their sign reads, "we are supporting any action taken by the UN or US military...."

Refugees on the Move: Somalis in the City

Displacing is a way of surviving. It is an impossible, truthful story of living in-between regimens of truth.  

Early in 1995, UNHCR estimated that 110,000 Somali refugees live in the three Dadaab camps located in the Northeast Province. Some 75,000 refugees lived in the coastal camps while others had homes in Mombasa and Nairobi. Despite Government of Kenya regulations that refugees live in border camps, estimates of these ‘illegal’ urban refugees ranged from 20,000 to 100,000. Many Kenyans and Somalis buy and sell identity papers which are used to ‘prove’ nationality. For Kenyans, a refugee ration card represents an opportunity to collect basic foodstuffs and to access services otherwise unavailable to them. They can purchase ration cards which are sold discreetly at the markets set up in the camps. One UNHCR field officer estimated that roughly 40% of the Somalis in camps along the Kenya-Somalia border are actually Kenyan nationals from surrounding areas. According to refugee sources in the Dadaab camps, a ration card to feed a family of five cost 2000 Kenyan shillings (KSh) (approximately US$45) in November 1994. Prior to the government announcement in August 1994 that Utange camp near Mombasa would definitively close, a ration card to feed a family of seven sold for 7500 KSh (US$170). After the announcement which signalled the finite life of the ration cards, the price of the same card plummeted to 1500 KSh (US$35).

Identity cards are sold or traded to refugees for other reasons. Somalian refugees buy Kenyan identity cards for their political value. A Kenyan identity card can facilitate greater mobility, and in some cases, the opportunity to work, given no legal basis for Somali

437 This figure is a general estimate — taken from an interview with a UNHCR field staff in Dadaab, February, 5, 1995 - among many, all of which are difficult to substantiate empirically. Some refugee advocates argue that those being served who are not refugees need assistance anyway, given recent drought and the relative poverty of the area.
438 Discussion with two Somali refugee leaders at Utange camp, January 18, 1995.
refugees to do so. When travelling outside the camps, refugees are less likely to be harassed by authorities if they hold some kind of Kenyan identity documents. A number of Somalis from both sides of the border have ‘dual status’ whereby they hold both Kenyan and Somalian identifications at once. The material and political entitlements of these various identity cards have given rise to a thriving economy of falsified documents. In Nairobi, false UNHCR protection letters, which give individual refugees the right to stay in Kenya, are bought and sold.\textsuperscript{439} 

Evidence of the commuting habits of refugees points to regular movements between camp and city on the Kenyan coast. At Utange camp, two refugee leaders described the difference between Marafa camp, some 40 kilometres from Malindi, and Utange camp, located just outside of Mombasa, in this way: “Marafa is a real camp, not a suburb like Utange.” At Utange, I met with one refugee woman who explained her typical day to me.\textsuperscript{440} After cleaning and preparing breakfast, she leaves home at 8 am and travels to Mombasa. There she buys vegetables wholesale and then sells them retail in the city market. She spends three to four hours in Mombasa selling her produce. When everything is sold, she then returns to the camp and prepares lunch for herself and her children. She spends the remainder of the day looking after the children and preparing dinner.

In January 1995 after visiting Marafa camp, forty kilometers from the Kenyan coast, I stopped in the tourist town of Malindi. Just outside the fenced property of a garage, where I waited for my lift with a Red Cross employee, was a small shop where I purchased a ginger soda and struck up a conversation with a young Somali man. I told him of my trip to Marafa that day. He explained that he commuted daily from Marafa camp to work in the

\textsuperscript{439} Discussion with two UNHCR staff, Nairobi, January 15, 1995. 
\textsuperscript{440} Interview, refugee woman, zone G, Utange camp, January 18, 1995.
shop owned by his brother. His brother, meanwhile, operated another small business in Malindi. While not officially 'allowed' to hold employment in Kenya, these young men were part of a burgeoning informal economy which involved regular commuting. Like the woman from Utange, the economy of home in the camps was tied to jobs in adjacent urban areas.

Not all Somali refugees commute between city and camp. Rather, they find homes in neighbourhoods of Mombasa and Nairobi. Socio-economic status, gender, and class are factors determining who remains in the camps and who sets up independent households in urban centres. As one Red Cross official commented on whom he saw as the privileged refugees living near Mombasa, "these are the distressed gentlefolk" of the refugee population. Access to basic services, such as education or job training, can be used to justify a person's presence in the city as long as she is able to pay for herself and her family to stay there. This special allowance is based on an agreement between the Kenyan Government and UNHCR, a result of some cajoling on the part of the latter in conjunction with a local refugee service organization. Although the Government initially refused any exceptions to refugee camp residence, the agreement reached authorizes temporary stays in the city under certain conditions. These conditions include the need for access to medical treatment, education, or training; reasons related to resettlement; court appearances; family reunification; security; inter-camp transfer; or employment as an interpreter with a refugee organization. While creating a better life for a few individuals and their families, the agreement creates privileged spaces for refugees with money. Families who have sufficient funds to maintain a household and pay school fees for their children or enroll in employment-related training themselves have a good chance of being authorized by UNHCR to stay in the city.

441 Interview, IFRC delegate, Mombasa, January 20, 1995.
In Kenya, refugee access to the city vis-à-vis this agreement is also gendered. Just as refugee women are less likely to access resettlement programs because of their lower level of skills or because small children accompany them, the resources and mobility required to take advantage of this agreement limit its application. As James Hathaway points out, “[a]ll but a very small minority of refugees — predominantly young, male, and mobile — either find protection in states adjoining their own, or are able to escape at all.” With a significant proportion (41%) of female-headed households in the Dadaab camps, this is an even more important consideration. Given the social and political organization of daily routine in the camps, men’s mobility tends to be greater than that of women.

An unexpected outcome of this policy has been that many refugees who want to live in the city but are without the funds to finance the conditions of the agreement have convinced health practitioners in the camps that they require urban-based medical services for mental illness. Medical personnel in the camps are usually trained in emergency response and primary health care and are often not well-positioned to assess these cases. In an interview with a psychiatrist to whom many refugee patients are referred in Nairobi via UNHCR, he noted that at least 50% of the refugee patients he saw were not legitimate cases. Opportunities to live in the city on a temporary basis with international humanitarian support are clearly desirable to many refugees. Access to them, however, remains very uneven and is based almost exclusively on socio-economic status.

During the course of my research, a number of people commented on the effect the arrival of Somalians has had in terms of housing in Kenyan urban areas.\textsuperscript{445} The Standard on Sunday, a local Kenyan newspaper, perhaps best summarizes the perceived impact of their settlement:

Soaring housing rents have condemned about 40\% of Nairobi residents to a life in the slums.... An influx of foreigners, especially Somali refugees, into Nairobi has worsened the situation. A one-bedroom flat in Eastleigh, for example, which had been renting at Shs (Kenyan shillings) 1,000 a month, now goes for 7,500 because of the high demand for houses by Somalis.... As a result, most \textit{residents displaced by the Somali refugees} are progressively joining shanty life in the neighboring Mathare Valley or Kitui Village.\textsuperscript{446}

The great irony of this account is that Somali refugees, themselves displaced from their country of origin, are believed to have, in turn, displaced Kenyans of a lower socio-economic status. Somali refugees have begun to gentrify the lower class Nairobi suburb of Eastleigh. In Mombasa, UNHCR recorded a rise in housing prices, and as noted, intense competition from Somalian entrepreneurs in the local market. Utange camp near Mombasa has become a diasporic suburb of the Somali nation in which relatives from abroad provide support, as information and foreign exchange are sent to Somali settled in Kenya vis-à-vis fax machines, telephones, and cables to Kenyan banks. Both Nairobi and Mombasa serve as satellite financial centers for the transfer of moneys from abroad. In a related example, Somali refugees living in Uganda refused to be transferred to a camp outside Kampala because it “had no telephones or basic communications which were important to the Somalis since most lived off handouts sent to them by their relatives in Europe, Canada and the United States.”\textsuperscript{447} Their decisions to integrate locally, at least in the short term, are shaped and financed by access to resources at a more global level.

\textsuperscript{445} Interviews, UNHCR field staff, Mombasa, January 17, 1995.
This brief chapter has drawn out what were the unexpected findings at the edges of my research. It illustrates that the containment of the refugee camps is by no means complete. There is a significant gap between official programs and places for refugees and the locations of everyday living. Somali refugees have links outside the Kenyan camps and, in certain cases, outside the country. Some actively seek to live in cities, establishing homes and finding jobs. UNHCR has done its best to implement ad hoc measures which make education and job training in the cities possible, but only for a select few. Others commute from camp to city on a regular basis, highlighting the porosity of the officially sanctioned safe spaces of the camps. These attempts to create livelihoods independent from the camps have been met with some hostility by Kenyans who perceive Somali refugees as a threat to their businesses, housing markets, and land. Evidence that they are circumnavigating Kenya altogether, opting out of the camps and for other destinations, points — in part — to the camps’ gross ineffectiveness in meeting people’s needs. UNHCR camps are not intended to be long-term settlements, but in the absence of other alternatives, they have become well-established band-aid solutions which ‘leak’. Ethiopian citizenship, asylum in South Africa, and potential resettlement abroad look better than life in Kenya for many Somalis. In the face of a crumbled state structure, a precarious economy at home, and continued fighting in certain areas, Somali refugees are on the move: abandoning the camps and seeking alternate arrangements elsewhere.
Chapter 9
Conclusions

Existing international law pertaining to refugees emerged from the political context and conditions of displacement in Europe after World War II. Since then, the locations and kinds of conflict which generate displacement have changed, as has the geopolitical landscape. In keeping with these changes, particularly the nature and scale of forced migration in the ‘Third World’, various ad hoc measures have been introduced to accommodate displaced persons who do not ‘fit’ the conditions and criteria outlined in the 1951 Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees and its 1967 Protocol. The Convention definition of refugee remains the international standard used by states in determining eligibility, but it is becoming increasingly irrelevant to the crisis and characteristics of refugees they produce.

The end of the Cold War has marked a shift in responses to forced migration. The Office of UNHCR has been called upon to extend its formal mandate and expand its operations to assist displaced people who are not technically refugees. International humanitarian interventions inside the borders of sovereign countries at war are examples of ‘preventive protection’ and are part of a strategy to reduce refugee numbers. At the same time, prevailing political problems — including civil war, related famine and widespread fear of violence — increase the magnitude of need for humanitarian assistance across borders.

The existing international refugee regime has been likened to a 1950s car still running, but not very well, in the 1990s. In this final chapter, I combine the analysis of organizational culture at UNHCR with the case study of UNHCR operations to assist

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Somali refugees in Kenya. I argue that *ad hoc* discretionary measures to assist refugees are too fickle and politically-driven to ensure any consistency in humanitarian provisions and human rights enforcement. Fairness and consistency are predicated on benchmarks of entitlement determined by consenting parties, or states. Human rights conventions and international law pertaining to displaced persons change at a glacial pace in response to new social, economic, and political conditions. Nonetheless, the importance of both humanitarian and human rights instruments must be revived to avoid impromptu, piecemeal provision of assistance to displaced persons in the post-Cold War period. They remain useful, if insufficient tools because they are historically contingent and geographically inclusive. What is crucial, however, is that these transnational tools not be hailed as universal values for all of humankind, but serve as a means of connection and cooperation across difference, and as objects of debate, contest, and change.

This objective requires a continued and critical contribution on the part of UNHCR which is well positioned to engage in a ‘politics of location’ in keeping with these transnational tools aimed at protecting human life. Not only can UNHCR enhance its present role by engaging in a politics of location and providing assistance appropriate to specific sites of human displacement, but the organization — in cooperation with other UN agencies, such as the Department of Humanitarian Affairs and the UN Commissioner for Human Rights — is in a position to advocate changes to pertinent international conventions and laws and to introduce new measures where necessary. UNHCR has already begun this work, for example, in conjunction with the Special Representative of the UN Secretary-General on Internally Displaced Persons, by addressing ways to assist internally displaced people.449

The claims of universal values and universal subjects, in contrast, are the salient symptoms of ‘UN humanism.’ These claims embody a European geography which doesn’t apply to most humanitarian emergencies in the 1990s. Crises of human displacement at the end of the twentieth century are more likely to occur outside Europe, creating refugees and other involuntary migrants who fall outside the Convention definition of refugee. The evidence presented has illustrated that the European case after World War II was not the template crisis from which all subsequent emergencies and responses could be derived. While international humanitarian and refugee laws enshrine ‘universal’ rights for all based on the European experience, the kinds of crises and the variegated responses to them have rendered this idea fictional.

The object of inquiry in this dissertation has been the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. Part one examined the context from which the agency emerged, its organizational culture and selected policies, as well as the post-Cold War environment in which it now operates. It presented a critical analysis of some of the legal, historical, and theoretical foundations of UNHCR. Part two has addressed the practical, everyday operations of UNHCR in one location. It analyzes the application of UNHCR policies and the implications of the agency’s role by focusing on Somali refugee camps in Kenya. Historical and contemporary geographies of conflict and foreign interventions in the Horn of Africa contextualize these analyses and point to an on-going crisis in the region. In Somalia, sustained civil conflict forced several million people to evacuate their homes. The majority of those who fled the country sought refuge in Kenya. Of Somalia’s total pre-war population, fully one-tenth lives outside of its borders.\textsuperscript{450} The effects of war are still being felt in Somalia. In June 1996, some 2,300 new Somali refugees arrived at

Liboi, near the Kenya-Somalia border. 451 “The international community and international human rights monitors have repeatedly reported that the situation in Somalia continues to deteriorate and thousands of Somalis continue to be killed and displaced.” 452

In this concluding chapter, I reiterate the salient ‘lessons learned’ from the research findings presented. This final section attempts to stitch together arguments made about UNHCR’s organization and operations in specific camps, border politics, and international geo-politics across relations of nationality, gender, culture, and ‘race’. Rather than imposing closure on issues that are far from being resolved, I pose questions raised by the research and iterate constructive ways of re-imagining international humanitarian operations. These questions and ideas speak from an on-going commitment to the theoretical, political, and practical issues of humanitarian assistance for displaced people.

**Stating Status**

In the late 1990s, the incongruent relationship between the geopolitics which generate involuntary migrants and the existing international laws to assist them is acutely apparent. UNHCR itself acknowledges that “[w]hile the old rules of the game have evidently changed, the international community has found it extremely difficult to articulate a coherent set of principles and practices which are geared to contemporary circumstances.” 453 While UNHCR’s ‘response-ability’ and performance can be both applauded and criticized, it continues to operate without a ‘toolbox’ of agreed upon criteria. “UNHCR’s founding statute makes it clear that the organization’s work is humanitarian

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451 E-mail correspondence, UNHCR Branch Office Nairobi, June 7, 1996.
and entirely non-political." In order to maintain this status, it cannot continue to operate on a discretionary basis. UNHCR has also recognized that "so long as reform continues in an ad hoc manner, it will remain prey to the limitations and contradictions of piecemeal change." This conundrum is perhaps the greatest structural challenge to effective humanitarian operations.

In the African context, refugee eligibility involves a geographically circumscribed process of status determination. Individual case determination, based on the 1951 Convention and 1967 Protocol, has largely been superceded by group status designations based on the regionally-specific refugee definition outlined in the 1969 Organization of African Unity Convention. *Prima facie* refugee status was established by the Organization of African Unity Convention of 1969 as a protection measure to complement the refugee determination procedures of individual states. The status was never intended to be used alone because it does not stipulate conclusive action nor solutions for refugees designated as such.

In the Horn of Africa, recognized groups of displaced persons outside their home country are generally accorded *prima facie* refugee status and are administered and assisted by UNHCR and partner NGOs. This analysis has demonstrated that *prima facie* status offers few, if any, political solutions to refugees. Somali refugees in Kenya with *prima facie* status are spatially segregated and isolated in remote border camps. In the absence of the kind of legal status accorded to Convention refugees, or some other regional alternative, their mobility is restricted. While all refugees are subject to the laws and responsibilities of

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the state in which they reside, they are not criminals, nor prisoners simply because they have been forced to move.

Women refugees are less mobile than their male counterparts and are subsequently more disaffected by the camp arrangement. In order to cook, women must forage for wood beyond the perimeters of the desert-based camps where they risk assault and rape on an ongoing basis. In the face of such violence, Kenyan authorities have been dismissive, blaming the refugees for taking wood which belongs to Kenyans, not to them. Refugees are not officially allowed to leave the camps, nor to seek employment nearby. In the language of UN agencies, the camps preclude any possibility of ‘capacity-building’. That is, virtually no social or economic infrastructure is developed in the camp context to enhance the lives of people living there nor to improve conditions and build suitable organizations or institutions in the host country. Spatial segregation of and material assistance to refugees in camps provides no medium nor long-term solution to their sublegal status. With the financial support of international donors and the reluctant cooperation of the Kenyan Government, Somali refugees are objects of the discursive and material ‘politics of over there.’

I have been critical of camp operations under the aegis of UNHCR. In the Kenyan camps, modes of ‘ordering disorder’ — such as headcounts — resurrect colonial methods of managing ‘others’. Incidents of coercion are not consistent with UNHCR’s mandate nor the community-based policies espoused at the organization’s headquarters. The contradictory techniques of governing refugees through coercion, on the one hand, and cooperative schemes, like Refugee Self-Management, on the other, further complicate the situation. While I endorse the importance of UNHCR’s role in protecting and assisting displaced persons in the post-Cold War period, the means by which such assistance is
provided is problematic. Taking this analysis a step further, the problem is less with methods of counting in the camps than with establishment of these strange temporary ‘cities’ on the desert in the first place.

The most important criticism of the camps, then, is not their design nor their management, but their very conception as potentially long-term segregated safe spaces for refugees. As anything more than an immediate, emergency response to an unexpected influx of displaced people, camps are not satisfactory solutions. They can provide short-term safety, but they also institutionalize long-term exclusion, marginalization, and waste of both human and financial resources. Many refugees have been living in Kenyan camps for several years. Only a tiny proportion of refugees — less than 1% — are permanently resettled in countries like the U.S., Canada, and Australia. The reality of the resettlement experience rarely conforms to refugee expectations (see epilogue). Some alternative responses to refugee displacement are raised at the end of the following section.

UN Humanism or Postmodern Ethics?

The humankind-wide moral unity is thinkable, if at all, not as the end-product of globalizing the domain of political powers with ethical pretensions, but as the utopian horizon of deconstructing the ‘without us the deluge’ claims of nation-states, nations-in-search-of-the-state, traditional communities and communities-in-search-of-a-tradition, tribes and neo-tribes, as well as their appointed and self-appointed spokesmen [sic] and prophets...

— Zygmunt Bauman

What might the prognosis for UN humanism and its humanitarian practices be? Lila Abu-Lughod argues that humanism in the West continues to be the language of human equality with the most moral force: “we cannot abandon it yet, if only as a convention of writing.” I maintain that the political purchase of human rights instruments and

international refugee law, traditionally as expressions of humanist thinking, are more than conventions of writing. United Nations interventions and assistance still command support and political legitimacy among Western governments — measured in part by the financial resources UN agencies are able to solicit from them. International human rights and provisions for refugee asylum remain compelling, if imperfect, political instruments to which states consent. Although their initial formation is rooted in modern notions of the universal subject and global progress based on human development, they can be viewed and used as historically contingent, changeable ‘standards of human conduct.’ Political action takes culturally, historically, and geographically-specific forms, but it is predicated upon some kind of shared dialogue.\(^{458}\) Just as conditions and standards change, so too will the language of and players in this dialogue. The renewal and use of international laws and human rights instruments applicable to forced migrants is a necessary, if not sufficient, part of a critical post-Cold War response to human displacement. In the absence of other geographically-inclusive measures, these tools have the potential to minimize \textit{ad hoc} status determinations. They can arguably be reconstituted as expressions of ‘postmodern ethics’ — borrowing the title of Zygmunt Bauman’s book — insofar as they enact changes over time, and engage rather than deepen differences across locations. My understanding of postmodern ethics, however, departs somewhat from Bauman’s project and includes a key role for UNHCR.

In order to engage difference, the application of international laws and human rights instruments cannot be subject to the popularity of a cause nor to a predisposition towards a particular place. These laws and instruments have the potential to be relevant tools of change if they apply to all contemporary refugees and internally displaced persons — not

only to those who meet the criteria of the outdated Convention definition of refugee or those whose conditions win the sympathy of donor countries.

Engaging difference requires not only human rights and legal instruments, but organizations and staff to activate appropriate responses. Stretched in every direction, UNHCR is a precariously balanced but vital agency in meeting humanitarian needs at the present time. As an organization undergoing changes in mandate, approach, and financial management, it is perhaps normal that its activities are defined on an *ad hoc* basis. Without established priorities and criteria for humanitarian intervention, however, UNHCR becomes a contractor of sorts to projects defined by donors or other UN bodies. Where the agency works best, I would argue, is in bridging the differences between the abstract, aspatial, and often outdated codes of legal and human rights and the particular exigencies of a given humanitarian crisis.

This ‗in-between‘ location is also a basis for further enhancing its role. As noted, reinvigorating international instruments of law and human rights as political directives for action is a partial measure, but UNHCR’s potential role as the link between these instruments and the varied political situations to which they might apply is the most significant. UNHCR has already proven its ability to adapt with projects customized to the place and conditions in which they are implemented, such as Quick Impact Projects (QIPs). UNHCR can move between established criteria of humanitarian assistance and intervention, on the one hand, and specific places, people, and geo-politics on the other. In a more nuanced fashion, the UNHCR’s Division of International Protection has recently supported a politics of location while retaining certain categories and mandates:

Legal categories and institutional mandates retain all their relevance.... A comprehensive approach to coerced human displacement does not mean, however, that we should employ broad generalizations and
undifferentiated treatment. No two humanitarian crises are ever the same, and a global approach to such complex situations requires, if anything, finer tools of analysis and a larger arsenal of flexible responses.\textsuperscript{459}

While I object to the militaristic notion of “arsenal” and the idea that flexible responses can be known \textit{a priori}, this citation begins to acknowledge the importance of context and differentiation at UNHCR. To a significant extent, this division has renegotiated its own categories, admitted its limitations, and taken a closer look at the politics in and of place in relation to existing humanitarian codes. Caren Kaplan notes that a politics of location is most useful when it is used to deconstruct any dominant hierarchy or hegemonic use of specific terms, in this case the idea that all refugees and their conditions of displacement basically require the same response.\textsuperscript{460} A transnational politics of location provides finer tools of analysis which, at the same time, forges connections across space and differences. As noted by a UNHCR senior staff member in chapter four, it is “not whether you are a refugee but where you are.... it's all a question of space and distance.”

At the present time, the formal mandate of UNHCR appears sorely outdated, yet the agency is well-equipped to deal with a vast array of humanitarian emergencies on an \textit{ad hoc basis}. The international refugee regime in some ways mirrors trends occurring at a national level today in a number of Western countries. As the welfare state is restructured, the idea of equal provision for all citizens is also dismantled. State support for minimum standards and common provisions is increasingly replaced by ‘user-pay’ models of service delivery as well as an emphasis on individual choice and responsibility. This shift from standard treatment to special needs has “institutionalized the diversity of fate....”\textsuperscript{461} Likewise, increasingly piecemeal approaches and responses to human displacement deepen the divide

\textsuperscript{459} UNHCR, “UNHCR’s Operational Experience with Internally Displaced Persons”, Geneva, September 1994, excerpt from the foreword by former director of the Division of International Protection.
\textsuperscript{461} Ibid., p. 243.
between those who donate and those who require assistance. Such approaches accentuate the politics of need, the questions of who is deserving, and who has the power to decide.

In the realm of humanitarian assistance, the divide between ‘us’ and ‘them’ involves a geographical and discursive distance. To assist displaced people ‘at home’ by employing the language of ‘preventive protection’ and the safe spaces it designates is to maintain a safe distance between ‘us’ and ‘them’. The ad hoc measures of humanitarian response, including prima facie status and UN-protected safe areas, are examples of the institutionalization of this ‘diversity of fate.’ UN interventions occur in some places, usually politically defeated or less developed states, but not others. Legal status is accorded differentially to groups of displaced people over time and space. The project of ‘UN humanism’ and the distributions it espouses may be theoretically problematic and politically Eurocentric, but neo-humanism, which is characteristic of many neoliberal, post-welfare states, is more dangerous. I have used the idea of neo-humanism to describe the current trend whereby human well-being and development are qualified by the visibility and political popularity of people’s need, as well as the economic viability of measures employed to assist them. It breeds ambivalence to and distance from the politics and privations of ‘others’ in spite of connections among geographical and discursive locations in a shrinking world.

Many of the universal rights and entitlements iterated under the rubric of humanism simply don’t fit current political and economic conditions. Instead, humanitarian and development assistance are provided on a more discretionary politicized basis. The decline in funding for official development assistance and the increase in money for humanitarian emergencies since the end of the Cold War is one expression of this trend. Funding humanitarian crises is in; funding development is out. ‘Development’ belongs to the discourse of the welfare
state whereas humanitarian assistance suits the crisis-management strategies of post-welfare governments. Beginning in the 1980s, structural adjustment programs (SAPs), which applied stringent conditions of public sector reduction to loans for poorer countries needing to borrow money, offer another example. Development programs were put on hold if they were not in line with fiscal 'realities'.

Neo-liberalism, which calls for the defense of free markets and the maintenance of a minimal state apparatus, embodies a narrower concept of the public good — limited to the state, law, and money — than the conventional welfare state. Neo-humanism is symptomatic of the international refugee regime and its related agencies today. Responses to human displacement and assistance to forced migrants speak the language of humanitarianism: the protection of rights for all people. But the Kenyan case study of UNHCR camps presented here illustrates that, on the ground, practices stray far from this ideal. Counting methods and neo-colonial controls over the refugee population in the camps are exacerbated by conditions of geographical isolation and social segregation based on subordinate legal status. Ironically, these camps which are intended to provide asylum and uphold certain human rights suspend other basic entitlements such as the right to work, move freely, and establish an independent livelihood. The discrepancy between a language of rights and the conditions of the camps is untenable. The camps embody an irresolvable contradiction predicated on neo-humanism.


Beginning in 1991 with UN assistance to the Kurds in Northern Iraq, there have been significant changes in the delivery of humanitarian assistance. UNHCR increasingly crosses international borders to assist displaced people at home, often in conflict zones. There has also been a shift in responsibility for refugees away from state governments to multilateral organizations, such as UNHCR, as indicated by huge increases in UN refugee relief and peacekeeping budgets and a decline in both the numbers of refugees being resettled in host countries and in official development assistance. UNHCR has become the main multilateral organization responsible for forced migrants, both refugees who cross the boundaries of nation-states and, in many cases, IDPs within countries at war. These conditions raise the following questions:

• Given that refugee camps are only temporary solutions, as UNHCR maintains, what is a reasonable time limit on the residence of *prima facie* refugees in camps, and on the designation of such status itself? At what point should UNHCR and its member countries be required to find a medium-term alternative, in keeping with basic human rights instruments, which would not preclude access to employment, mobility, and independent livelihood?

• Recognizing the broader definition of refugee in Africa, how might the existing option of temporary protection (TP) abroad or the possibility of temporary citizenship in another African country, if preferable, be arranged so that a refugee could enjoy some basic rights of citizenship or nationality until residence in her/his own state becomes viable? Under such a plan, no one country could be expected to absorb all the refugees created by a given conflict. The proposal of burden-sharing, raised by some legal scholars, could apply so

464 UNHCR, 1995, op. cit.
that all signatory states to the OAU Convention are made responsible for either hosting a
certain proportion of refugees or paying to establish and support them on a temporary basis
in a host country. A mechanism whereby both refugees and states have some say in who
goes where would enhance the availability of support from other members of the same
exiled group.

• While the nation-state remains an important venue and body for granting legal status to
refugees and displaced persons, UNHCR has been the active agency addressing the needs
of refugees in the 1990s. Could a transnational temporary status, determined by
UNHCR, authorize the presence of bona fide refugees and other persons of concern in
countries that are already signatories to the 1951 Convention and/or 1967 Protocol?
UNHCR already uses the designation, ‘persons of concern’, as an ad hoc status which
applies to people assisted by the organization who fall outside the categories of ‘refugee’ or
‘IDP’.466 The Government of Thailand, for example, recognizes forced migrants from
Burma as legitimate subjects of the international refugee regime once they are registered by
UNHCR in Bangkok, granted legitimate ‘persons of concern’ status, and transferred to a
designated ‘safe area’. Without such status, displaced Burmese are treated as illegal
migrants and subject to harassment by Thai police as they make their way from the Thai-
Burmese border to Bangkok.467 The Thai Government is not a signatory to the 1951
Convention nor the 1967 Protocol and does not recognize Burmese refugees for economic
and political reasons. Could this discretionary, UNHCR designation ‘persons of concern’
be incorporated into a transnational system of temporary protection?

466 In 1995, UNHCR counted more than 3.5 million ‘persons of concern’, excluding those assisted as
The above set of questions is predicated on the idea of a transnational politics of mobility conceived in-between the categories of nation-state and of international legal and human rights instruments. Global geographies of finance, geo-politics, and human displacement also challenge the categories of ‘refugee’ and ‘international borders’ as they were originally conceived. These questions admittedly provide possibilities rather than answers. They are, however, an attempt to ‘think outside the box.’ Legal scholars agree that the present political climate is not conducive to expanding the Convention definition. If anything, signatory states would be likely to restrict eligibility for refugees. The principle of refugee burden-sharing among countries is not new, but it could be re-introduced as a transnational response to displacement orchestrated by UNHCR and NGO partners rather than states alone.

UNHCR: Dealing with Difference

UNHCR is an organization undergoing immense transition. Moving from welfare supra-state to a more fiscally responsible organization, its increased emphasis on efficient management is instilled by donor governments who pay the bills. The difference between the demands of donors and the needs of refugees produces a distinct tension. As an agency responsible to both sides, UNHCR is caught in the middle. Given the claim that both government donors and refugee recipients are UNHCR’s ‘clients’, balancing and meeting both sets of needs is crucial to the agency’s political survival and its effectiveness. If the demands of donors are met at the expense of assistance to refugees or other displaced people, UNHCR risks operating within a framework whereby the economic viability and political popularity of a particular humanitarian emergency qualify efforts to improve the well-being of people at risk. On the other hand, if UNHCR engages in full-scale development work in cooperation with refugees, donor support is likely to wane because the organization will be viewed as exceeding its emergency and humanitarian mandates.
With the popularity of the welfare state and its international corollary, ‘development assistance’, at an all-time low since the Second World War, UNHCR has to navigate a precarious path between the excesses of social spending and the immediate needs of refugees.

UNHCR has traditionally focused its efforts on refugee welfare. While assistance to refugees and displaced people remains the basis of its mandate, this perspective is changing dramatically. The demands of donors to become more efficient are increasing, and they are being heard by UNHCR. The transition to more financial accountability at UNHCR mirrors current neo-liberal and neo-conservative economic trends within many industrialized countries. Taxpayer expectations of governments to account for spending are high. Governments need proof that money has been wisely spent. Yet on an international scale, refugees and displaced persons are not the same taxpayers who are funding UN agencies. I have argued that there is little, if any, constituency overlap between donors and refugees. UNHCR solicits funds and provides humanitarian assistance and protection, with full accountability to its donors, but with few such links to refugees and other recipients. It is this slippage, I argue, that open up spaces for variable applications of UNHCR policies in refugee camps.

Because of this slippage in accountability between the organization and its recipients, UNHCR can employ occasional coercive measures and unsavory administrative practices in the camps. While policies developed at headquarters may meet the standards of both donors and refugees in theory, only donors and senior UNHCR staff have the political power to ensure that specific policies are put into practice. Despite UNHCR’s sustained efforts to enact relevant policies, hire experienced staff, and take concrete steps to make the organization more responsive to donors and refugees alike, there is no formal mechanism
which links refugee recipient needs or demands to UNHCR operations. Government donors are UNHCR clients; refugees and displaced people are its recipients.

Professional styles mix within the organization: hierarchical, quasi-military directors are bound to clash with their peers and staff who emphasize organizational effectiveness at the expense of traditional lines of authority, or who employ community-based, rather than authoritative, approaches to assisting refugees. Nonetheless, the impact of such differences on junior employees is noteworthy. Intransigent senior staff who resist organizational and policy changes pose a major challenge to UNHCR operations in the field. Survival among staff at UNHCR is predicated upon a protean capacity to adjust to ever-changing conditions.

The organization’s tendency to domesticate gender and cultural differences under the twin policies of integration and multiculturalism is evident. The ‘UN Family of Man’ is premised upon the idea that cultural and national difference is simply diversity and can be tolerated and managed because ‘we are all human beings’ — a single ‘race’. Equality between the sexes has become as important as equality between cultures, but UNHCR’s recruitment targets and policies have taken on a life of their own in the quest for ‘perfect pluralism’. The agency would do well to revisit its affirmative action targets and its images of the ‘perfect candidate’. Job expectations which assume complete mobility and imply a single breadwinner in every family exhibit gender bias. Evidence that women managers and other professionals at UNHCR tend to quit the organization and ‘upset’ female staff quotas points to potentially masculinist job descriptions which do not fully incorporate women.
Some changes to outdated categories are under way at UNHCR headquarters. Rethinking the concept of ‘refugee’ across international borders is a positive development insofar as it assists displaced people who would otherwise be excluded. UNHCR has taken steps to adopting a politics of location by including a more responsive set of humanitarian tools. One of the dangers of UNHCR’s ‘response ability’ is that it can be asked to intervene and assist displaced people in conflict zones where their protection might be compromised. The civilian deaths that occurred in the so-called ‘safe haven’ of Srebrenica and other UN protected areas illustrate vividly this danger.

In the Kenyan camps, differences between refugees, locals, and international humanitarian staff are institutionalized and accentuated through administrative practices which mark and distinguish refugees. Camp organization breaks down any notion of a ‘common humanity’, as political, material, and cultural differences between citizens and non-citizens are magnified rather than minimized. Equality among nations, ideal types, and the perfect pluralism sought at UNHCR headquarters fall apart in the field where spatially and socially distinct notions of ‘us’ and ‘them’ are generated by administrative practices in the camps. How ironic, and yet predictable, it is that the refugees should serve meals to the staff and visitors from abroad at the UNHCR compound; that the former compound UNHCR had occupied was a tented camp catered to by a Nairobi-based safari company, and that the planes used to transport supplies, such as fresh fruits and vegetables for staff, were the same ones hired by tour companies for weekend safaris to Kenya’s Masai Mara Reserve. One British-born pilot I met had been the District Officer in colonial Kenya’s Northern Frontier District thirty years earlier. He later turned to flying tourists on safari around Kenya, but given the decrease in tourism and the increase in UNHCR and NGO contracts he was now transporting humanitarian staff among various camps and outposts back in his old stomping ground. The overlap between humanitarian practices and colonial practices in Kenya was stunning, yet their purposes were quite different. The fictional unity of a
‘common humanity’ under the banner of UN humanism becomes clear as one group of people flies to and from Kenyan refugee camps occupied by another group of people. Acknowledging these unequal power relations and the axes of difference on which they are based is critical. Only then can the administrators and field staff working in the camps comprehend the full import of their actions as part of a transnational project.

With respect to contemporary humanitarian operations, the ‘unity in diversity’ approach of UNHCR is not only untenable, but it is increasingly irrelevant to the crises the organization faces. At the same time, refugee camps which feed, house, and provide some protection to involuntary migrants as dependents provide no solution to the problem of forced migration. Neo-colonial and institutional practices of refugee management in the camps seemingly contradict UNHCR’s humanitarian role.

Moving Ahead

To analyze the conditions and subjects of displacement in a more comprehensive framework, I have introduced the concept of a transnational politics of mobility. Uneven access to mobility is shaped not only by sub-legal refugee status, but also relations of gender, socio-economic status, and location. The geo-politics of mobility outlined in chapter five attempt to move beyond the binary geo-political division of North and South, and the outdated categories of First, Second, and Third Worlds to theorize unequal power relations in a transnational context. The politics of mobility apply not only individual refugees but also to the positioning of hegemonic countries and regional blocks in relation to poorer, refugee-receiving countries.
Borders are being renegotiated at several levels. On the one hand, new states emerge in the wake of a post-Cold War climate. On the other, international bodies like the UN challenge and transform meanings of sovereignty in new ways by crossing existing state boundaries in order to assist people in peril. Given that 80% of the world’s refugees live in the ‘Third World’, these interventions represent a deepening divide in the relations of power between the hegemonic countries of the North, which decide to finance these endeavours, and the poorer countries which ‘host’ them. International interventions are ultimately intended as acts of solidarity motivated by human rights considerations, but unless there are specified criteria for international humanitarian intervention, they are open to political abuse and manoeuvering on the part of lobbies within the UN, especially donor governments. The monies donated for humanitarian works by wealthier countries provide critical resources and increased capacity to assist refugees locally in most of the recipient countries. The activities and operations they fund, however, need to be in keeping with agreed upon codes of appropriate assistance to displaced persons. Otherwise, as Bauman warns, superior morality will continue to be the morality of the superior. Worse, many refugees in the Horn of African will simply stay in camps.

This dissertation has attempted to sketch some of the theoretical, structural, and geopolitical problems of forced migration. Despite my criticisms of humanitarian responses to displacement, I retain an intellectual, political, and professional commitment to the project of safeguarding human life. My efforts have been directed at identifying some legal and organizational problems which inhibit UNHCR’s effectiveness and the fair treatment of refugees, particularly women. The intensity of the humanitarian work derives, in part, from the contradictions and politics which shape responses to crises of displacement. As people, organizations, and countries becomes increasingly integrated into transnational networks of power, it becomes even more important that those josted out of these circuits not simply be left in exclusion and isolation. Refugee camps in Kenya do just that: they
remove evidence of human displacement from view and contain ‘the problem’ without resolution.

My objective has not been to condemn neo-colonial vestiges of expatriate life in a technically postcolonial desert, but to illustrate the differences between authoritarian practices of organizing refugees in camps and the ideals of a UN humanism. The problem is not one of reconciliation between camp practice and humanitarian principle, but of how to move beyond this opposition by employing a historically contingent, geographically inclusive framework of transnational politics. Where culture and gender are simply variations subsumed and ‘managed’ under a humanist narrative of human development, I have attempted to illustrate the shortcomings and contradictions of such strategies. Colonialism, UN humanism, and even liberal notions of feminism are modern discourses whose practices have been repressive to women and other displaced subjects. A transnational politics of mobility is grounded in material subjectivities and locations. It involves making connections across asymmetries in status and challenging the (re)production of unequal relations of power. A transnational politics of mobility involves the on-going crossing of borders — political, cultural, sexual, and social.

There is no single project of human development nor of emancipation from oppressions brought on by poverty, displacement, colonialism, or conflict. Rather, the affinities and contests these unequal power relations generate are historically and geographically contingent. They cross borders — both geographical and discursive — to demonstrate affinity or to unsettle hegemonic socio-spatial arrangements. “The global and the universal are not pre-existing empirical qualities; they are deeply fraught, dangerous, and inescapable
inventions.” While arguably inescapable, the global and the universal are negotiable, just as the dichotomies of North-South, modern-traditional can be contested by forging affinities across these lines. Transnational feminist practices which attend to the mobility of bodies, of money, of power as well as the colours, flags, and performances that mark them provide tools for challenging existing “inventions.” Such a transnational politics generates strategic constellations of power to trouble the existing operations of humanitarian assistance in the Horn of Africa.

Epilogue

There is no such thing as love of the human race, only the love of this person for that, in this time and not in any other.... The problem is not to defend universality, but to give these abstract individuals the chance to become real, historical individuals again, with the social relations and the power to protect themselves.... The people who have no homeland must be given one; they cannot depend on the uncertain and fitful protection of a world conscience defending them as examples of the universal abstraction Man [sic].

— Michael Ignatieff

Fantu is a friend of mine. We met in Kenya at the UNHCR compound in Dadaab late in 1994. As a refugee, he worked and lived there seven days per week on an ‘incentive’ basis. In discussions with Fantu and some of his colleagues who also worked for UNHCR I listened to their resignation to the ‘in-between’ life of the camps. Feelings of frustration stemmed from having no control or say over their destiny. Their sentiments echoed those of other long-stay refugees in the camps, one of whom said, “[w]e are at the age when we should be working, building our lives, preparing our futures. Instead we are sitting here doing nothing. What kind of future will we have if we can’t work for it now?”

Many of them have lived in Kenyan refugee camps for up to five years. These Ethiopian refugees working for UNHCR waited for the day that an immigration officer from some other country would come and grant them an interview for resettlement.

UNHCR staff, NGO employees, and visitors to the compound took an interest in the situation of this group of refugees, not because they were more deserving than others living in the camps, but because they shared the same space of the fenced compound. As affinities formed, the commitment to ‘getting an answer’ from immigration authorities at the Australian and Canadian High Commissions, as well as the US Embassy, on behalf of the group grew. Questions about resettlement ‘processing priorities’ were asked, letters were

Figure 10.1
Fantu Tadesse at the UNHCR compound in Dadaab, Kenya
February 1995

Figure 10.2
Fantu in Vancouver, B.C.
July 1996
written requesting that some action be taken, and a list of the refugees working on the UNHCR compound was composed as an attachment.

Efforts of this nature both preceded my time in the camps and continued after my stay, so I have no way of knowing exactly how Fantu ended up living in Burnaby, B.C. One of Fantu’s friends from the camps has settled in Edmonton, another in Ottawa. Several others were accepted by the Government of Australia.

Permanent resettlement to a new country for a refugee is an intense experience in dislocation as well as relocation. The move to Canada has not been easy for Fantu. Accustomed to working every day, he has yet to find a job. The friends and familiarity of the compound are gone, as well as his job as storekeeper and compound manager. In the final days before submitting this manuscript, I requested an interview with Fantu in Vancouver. He agreed and selected excerpts from our meeting are provided below.471

**J. Before you arrived in Canada, what were your expectations of it?**

**F.** That’s the biggest problem, not just for me, for all immigrants to Canada and the United States. We have big expectations.... Everything is better than Africa. (Fantu explains the imagined wealth of North America shared by everyone in the camps.)

So, we have big expectations when leaving from Africa, but when we reach here things are different, absolutely different....

(Fantu compares the experience of two Ethiopian friends who settled in Australia with his Canadian experience. They both started working the day after they arrived in Australia).

In Canada it’s different; you have to have Canadian experience to find a job, even as a dishwasher, or just cleaning. In our country [Ethiopia] we learn in English

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471 The interview took place June 25, 1996 at my apartment in Kitsilano. ‘F’ represents Fantu and ‘J’ is for Jennifer in the transcript presented.
from grade 3; only the pronunciation is different. Certificates and diplomas from home are valueless.

You come here; you get a small [training] course. You still have to wait for job because you are fresh.

J. Any other expectations?

F. Everybody living in Africa, they don't know what the outside means. They think that you get work as soon as you arrive [in Canada]. They are expecting us to send them money back home. ... Even if they are rich, they want something from you.... my mother [living in Ethiopia], when I spoke on the phone with her I told her I have no money. She didn't believe me; she wondered if I was drinking or spending all my money. I write to her often now [explaining how things work]. She sends me letters, but she is illiterate. She has to get someone to read my letters and someone to write back.

Everybody who knows me expects something.... Since I have been in Canada, I didn't write one letter to Dadaab, to my friends. I'm afraid of what they want from me. I used to help them there [in the camps]. They will be upset with me.

I have written no letters [to Kenya ] for eight months.

(Fantu explains how he used to give many of the other refugees money for things they needed from his pay packet in the camps; this is, he notes, the source of the expectation).

Our expectations when we are in Africa are the same. They think you come here and you have everything: house, car, money. Even I thought this way. A friend of mine went to America. I wrote to him, but he didn't respond. I thought he had forgotten me.

Until I get a job, I won't give them my address. Only my mother and my friend in America have my address and telephone number.

Fantu's unemployed status creates a social distance, on top of the geographical distance and cultural dislocation, from his friends abroad. Employment affirms personal worth and identity. His lack of a job is the basis of a self-imposed incommunicado strategy which exacerbates his isolation in BC. Unemployment is the source of his exile not only from
Canadian society, but also from the transnational social networks of the UNHCR compound.

J. What has been the hardest part of coming to Canada?
F. Like me, for four years I worked, it was hot; I was tired. I came here; it was cool and peaceful. I needed a rest for one or two months. But now I’m fed up. I’ve been here 8 months and I want to find a job.

Most people are depressed; they sit without work for two years. The Federal Government is paying you, but you are paid to be idle. Everyone should be able to pay for themselves.

I don’t go out for a walk unless I’m with my roommate [an Ethiopian]. I just sleep and read. I’m not happy, you see. Sometimes I become jealous of those who are working. When they get their cheque, they can buy whatever they want. They can save their money to buy a car.

Q. What has been the best part of coming to Canada?
A. I wrote a lot of letters [to friends in the US and Australia]. I prefer Canada even if I don’t have work.

They have a lot of problems. They are making money but they don’t know when they’re going to die — there are murders, ...people are armed. They’re spending all their money on medical [in the US]. ... Everything is risky for them. That is the compensation for not finding work and living here.

We discussed finances. Fantu has a $1,250 loan to repay for his flight to Canada from Nairobi. He receives $325 per month for rent and utilities, $175 for everything else. To be eligible for a bus pass, he must be attending school full-time or looking for work. In order to prove that he is looking for work, he has to submit the names of eighty prospective employers to whom he has applied in the previous month. He is making ends meet, but can afford no new clothing and saves nothing.
J. What do you think should be done to help the other refugees in the camps?

F. They won't believe you that it's difficult [to settle here] until they see it with their own eyes.

It's too difficult to bring them all here.

I don't have any idea what I can say for them. I wish that they could come here; it's peaceful, better.

J. Have you ever looked back on your decision to come to Canada?

F. Still, I am preferring Canada.

[In the camps] nobody can see me as a man because I am a refugee. But here I have the full rights of Canadians. I can speak, I can write, I can say whatever I like.

In August 1996 Fantu began work at a distribution warehouse in Burnaby. He likes his colleagues and the work which involves driving a forklift. Fantu has deferred his acceptance into a two year diploma program at a local technical college, as he is anxious to pay off his debt before incurring more in order to study. He does, however, have his eye on a second-hand computer.
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Appendix 1
Background on the Dadaab Camps

Dagahaley Camp

Dagahaley has a reputation among relief workers as the most difficult camp to manage. Its population has a significantly higher proportion of nomadic refugees than the other two camps — roughly 80%. As the CARE camp manager at Dagahaley said to me, "we have powerful elders here, but not necessarily educated ones." Nomadic Somalis are apparently less adaptable to the temporary urban life of the camp.

There have been police interventions to quell conflict and to maintain public order in Dagahaley. Security issues revolve around religious politics: tension emerged during my visit between the Saudi-backed Muslim organization, Al-Haramein, operating in the camp on the one hand, and local sheiks, including those from the refugee population, on the other.

Dagahaley is a classic case of high density close to the 'city centre' at which a core of services is provided by CARE, MSF-France, the Canadian Baptists, and UNHCR. Even the unplanned market which supports a considerable informal economy is located in this centre. The concentration of refugees living in sections F, for example, is very light while A, B, and C are extremely dense. There is considerable room for expansion if refugees are eventually transferred here from other camps or if there is a new influx of refugees from Somalia. Refugees interviewed in section F noted that they have difficulty at times transporting their food rations back to their section. Sometimes they rent donkey carts for this purpose.

The vast majority of Somalian refugees are of Somali ethnicity, but a few belong to a minority originating in Tanzania. These refugees are known in the camps by ethnic Somalis as ‘Bantu-Somalis’, an appellation which relief workers have uncritically adopted. While there is this degree of formal segregation, there are also some Bantu families integrated within the camp.

Hagadera Camp

Hagadera was the last of the three remaining camps to be established. It is distinguished from the other camps by its abundant vegetation and its two sections which are divided by wet lowlands (during the rainy season, there is a lake). The vegetation provides more hiding places for bandits, and the camp is on an access road which connects it directly with the Somali border. Both of these factors contribute to security problems.
Sections F, A, B, and C are poorly fenced and the latter three areas have recently been particularly prone to bandit attacks. Many of the new arrivals from the recently closed Liboi camp have settled on the outskirts in section F; there is no advantage to 'suburban' living given the concentration of services in one section of the camp. There is a road around the camp’s perimeter, but the area adjacent to Sections A-F 10 and along section J is very bushy. ‘Haga’ is a bushy type of tree common to the area after which the camp is named.

Ifo Camp

Ifo was a planner’s dream and a refugee’s nightmare. It is the only camp with semi-permanent housing structures: wooden frames with metal sheeting as roofing. Walls were to be installed by refugees using local materials: mud or light branches. Before construction began in 1991, someone had the ill-informed idea to level the entire surface of what would be the camp and remove the vegetation, scarce as it is in this desert area. Consequently, acute dust storms are frequent.

Ifo is likely to outlive the other camps because of its proximity to Dadaab town, the airstrip, and connecting roads. Refugees can easily walk to Dadaab town, but the camp ironically provides many services to Dadaab residents who are not refugees, but Kenyan nationals of Somali ethnicity. Ifo also hosts the major police station for all three camps and is considered most secure for this reason. Finally, Ifo is the most heterogeneous of the three camp populations. It hosts Somalian, Ethiopian, and Sudanese refugees; given that all three nationalities are unlikely to have problems at home resolved at the same time, Ifo is likely to be the most permanent of these temporary solutions to human displacement.

Ifo has experienced repeated floods in sections A and C, problems which are most acute during the rainy season. Ifo also experienced notable increases in death rates, particularly among children under 5, during the two rainy seasons in 1994. Correlations between flooded areas and incidence of sickness and death have been made by the NGO responsible for health in the camp, MSF-France. In Ifo, as in Dagahale and Hagadera, services for refugees are concentrated in one area: close to the road and far from the centre of the camp population. Aside from health posts, water taps, latrines, schools and religious buildings, most food, medical, protection and administrative operations are concentrated in this single section. Density is highest in Section C despite its distance from these services, perhaps because it was the last area of the camp planned during a period of high demand for refugee accommodation.
Appendix 2
Interview Format with Refugee Women

Twenty-five individual interviews were conducted with refugee women from Somalia in the Dadaab camps. Twelve took place during November and December 1994 — the long rainy season — and thirteen more were completed in February 1995, during the heat of the dry season. The sample of women interviewed was selected randomly, with approximately equal representation from each of the three camps. In every case, the translator and I were accompanied by a community worker known to refugees living in a particular camp. Requests for interviews were prefaced by introductions in which we identified ourselves and my affiliation with the university; this was accompanied by an explanation of the project and the notion that participation was voluntary. On one occasion, we were refused an interview. Interviewees in different areas of each camp were sought, and an effort was made to include Bantu-Somali women who represent a minority ethnic group among refugees from Somalia. To protect confidentiality, no names were recorded; however, background information related to the eight individual interviews cited in chapter six is provided in Appendix 3.

The findings of the CARE Community Consultation, which posed many of the questions outlined in my original interview format, were published the month before my arrival in the camps. This influenced revisions in my interview format in two ways. On the one hand, many of the salient issues in the camps and assessments of NGO/UNHCR performance I was after had already been gleaned in an effective manner. It was not necessary, nor possible, to conduct the exercise again, and I have used this secondary source extensively. On the other, the findings pointed to refugees’ frustration at being ‘studied to death.’ Heeding these observations, I shortened my format to address the questions not touched upon in the CARE consultation. The interviews lasted fifteen to forty-five minutes in duration. The basic format is outlined below:
1. What exactly did you do yesterday? (which activities and for what duration?)
2. How do you use your rations? Do you sell some? How long do they last? What other ways do you earn income if they run out?
3. How did you get to the camp? At which border crossing did you cross? On foot or by truck?¹

Towards the end of the interviews, each woman was asked if there was anything else she would like to add or discuss. The open-endedness of the format allowed women to identify issues and observations unrelated to the questions. It also led to cups of tea, the raising of concerns about personal health and of questions about the operations of UNHCR and the NGOs. Excerpts from these interviews are presented in chapter six.

¹ Excerpt from field notes, November 28, 1994.
Appendix 3
Background on Interviewees from Camps

As noted in chapter six, relatively few biographical facts and figures were collected in order to avoid adopting a surveillance role. Nonetheless, time, place, and the context of the interviews were noted. These are presented below:

Interview #1 November 28, 1994
The interviewee is a young Somali woman with a baby. She travelled from Somalia on a UNOSOM (UN humanitarian mission to Somalia) flight from her home area to Doble, on the Somalia side of the Kenya-Somalia border. She crossed into Kenya on foot to Liboi where she says she was not registered by UNHCR. In 1994, when Liboi camp closed, she came to Ifo by truck. She is still not registered.

When asked how she feeds her family with ration cards (only registered refugees are entitled to ration cards), she says she receives help from “good Samaritans.” She earns no other income. This claim is problematic because she states earlier in the interview that there was no wheat flour in the last food distribution (dependent upon having a ration card) to cook for breakfast.

Interview #2 December 3, 1994
We meet a woman grinding sorghum as we approach the tukul (hut). She invites us inside the tukul where there are flies everywhere. Because the tukul covering is a UNHCR heavy canvas tent wrapped around a homemade frame, the temperature is very hot. A newborn baby lies alone in the corner of the tukul, covered with a porous black head scarf to protect it from the flies and mosquitoes.

There are eight people in this woman’s family, though her ration card recognizes only seven. She informs us that after delivering a baby it is customary to stay at her house for forty days. Before giving birth, she used to sell things in the market to make the extra money she needs to buy items such as tea. At the time of the interview, she relied on good Samaritans for such items. Otherwise she would go without.

This woman travelled on foot from Kismayo to Doble. From the border she came by UNHCR truck to Liboi camp. She was moved to Hagadera in June 1994 when Liboi closed. When asked if she had anything else to add, the interviewee said that she faced many problems, but that as a student who could not address them, she was not prepared to discuss them: “it won’t pay” to mention them.

Interview #3 November 28, 1994
This woman’s neighbour, a male community health worker, came by upon our arrival and stayed for the duration of the interview. His presence unsettled the interviewee somewhat.

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2 The use of “good Samaritans” here is the direct translation of the interpreter, a Kenyan Somali woman of Muslim faith. It is somewhat ironic that the term should arise on more than one occasion, given its Christian connotation. While UNHCR and the majority of NGOs operating in the camps are secular in orientation, they nonetheless originate from non-Muslim countries.

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This young, Somali woman with a baby comes from Sakow, or Saco Wen, in the Gedo region of South Somalia. She crossed the border from Somalia into Kenya, at Doble to Liboi, where she boarded a UNHCR truck to Ifo camp.

As a relatively recent arrival to Dagahaley camp from Liboi, the interviewee lives in one of the most remote areas of the camp. I ask if this raises any issues for her. She notes that the family always sleeps in fear, though the live (thorn bush) fencing has really helped. They feel cut off and have little access to camp services. The most difficult thing is carrying their rations from the distribution centre; sometimes they have to hire a wheelbarrow or share the cost of a donkey cart with neighbours, but these are costly, so most of the time they carry them on their backs.

Interview #4 November 28, 1994
This young, Somali woman was lying in her tukul with her baby when we arrived. She came to Ifo camp with her husband on a circuitous route which involved two international border crossings. First, they travelled from South Somalia to Ethiopia, which was not a safe place (especially early in 1992). Then they went to Mandera, a Kenya border crossing, where they were met by UNHCR and transported by truck to Ifo.

Interview #5 November 28, 1994
This woman was by far the eldest interviewed. She was, in fact, the grandmother of two boys who are orphans. Although they are three, she has a ration card for five people. This allows her to sell some sorghum, though the price is very low. She doesn’t go to the market and relies on her neighbours for help and occasional contributions to the household.

She is from Kulbio, Somalia. Her route to Kenya took her on foot to Hulugo where she was transferred to Ifo by truck.

Interview #6 November 28, 1994
The relative wealth of this Somali woman, who works for MSF as a traditional birth attendant, was evident as we approached. She a tukul for cooking, another for sleeping, and had just built a third, less weatherproof structure in anticipation of the coming hot season. As the interview proceeds, we learn that the girl working on the compound is not one of her children, but a ‘maid’ who does most of the cooking. Because she has a job and is paid monthly, she can afford to buy milk and clothing and to pay for the education of her children.

We were served sweet tea after the interview and learned more about her family of six; she has four children. She comes from Marery, Somalia. The family came to Ifo in stages: First, two of the children left home. Then, she and the two remaining children met the first two in Afmadu (Somalia). They travelled to Doble by truck. Her husband travelled alone. She also explained why her area of the camp had spaces where tukuls had formerly been. She explained that many refugees in her area had moved to other sections to be with relatives.

Interview #7 February 2, 1995
The woman interviewed was a Bantu-Somali; that is, she is not of Somali ethnicity but of Somalian nationality. While used widely in the camps, ‘Bantu’ is not a particularly useful term, as it does not identify ethnicity, but social stratification within Somalian society. The Bantu-Somalies have a reputation for hard work and innovative entrepreneurial projects.
This woman made bread to sell in the market. Others wove straw mats, and a few had collaborated with NGOs to establish pasta production.

The interviewee was from Buale in South Somalia. She intends to stay in the camp. There is no peace in Somalia.

**Interview #8 December 3, 1994**
This Bantu-Somali woman was standing, pounding sorghum when we arrived. We enter her house which, the translator remarks, is much cleaner than the last (see interview #2). Another newborn baby lies inside; he screams when we enter, apparently in response to my pale face. Like the other Bantu-Somali woman interviewed, this woman and her family are from Buale. They travelled from their home to Doble on foot, and from the border to Hagadera on a UNHCR truck.

She has a ration card for a family size of five, but this lasts her only eight of the fifteen days for which it is intended. The remainder of the time, she sells firewood. As the interview transcript describes, she hauls water for other families in order to earn the seed money to buy firewood.