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# ASKING “WHY” AND “HOW”: A HISTORICAL TURN IN REFUGEE EDUCATION RESEARCH

CHRISTINE MONAGHAN

## ABSTRACT

*History has much to offer education in emergencies scholars and practitioners. Most research in this field comprises qualitative case studies and, to a lesser extent, quantitative experimental studies, both of which tend to focus on either the impact of interventions or whether education processes or structures are a cause or effect of conflict. I argue that historical approaches enable researchers to ask different questions, to construct a narrative that establishes why specific policies and programs for refugee education were developed by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees or in particular refugee camps or settlements, and to determine why and how the field has changed over time. This enables the researcher to consider why and how policy and programmatic changes often have not brought lasting change to the challenges of refugee education, and to critically consider what future changes might be possible. In this article, I make the case for a turn to historical approaches in refugee education research by providing an example of how I used historical methods to reconstruct the education narrative of Kenya’s Dadaab and Kakuma refugee camps.*

## INTRODUCTION

There is a growing amount of research on education in countries affected by armed conflict, but few studies focus specifically on refugee education. Most of the existing refugee education literature is comprised of qualitative case studies conducted by scholars or analytic reports commissioned by United Nations (UN) agencies or international nongovernmental organizations (INGOs). These studies

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and reports predominately explore “what” rather than “why” or “how” questions, as they describe a range of education interventions (e.g., peace education, non-formal vocational education); the number of refugees enrolled in schools in camps, settlements, or urban areas; student-teacher ratios; annual per-pupil expenditures; and opportunities for refugees to access secondary or higher education. They then situate these issues within certain practical or conceptual constraints.

“What” questions of course are important, as they can help policy-makers determine whether certain education policies or programs work. This knowledge is critical in determining how to direct the scarce resources available in refugee contexts most effectively, as need almost always exceeds supply. However, I suggest that “why” and “how” questions are of equal, if not greater, significance to this same agenda. Asking why and how as well as what enables researchers to reconstruct a historical narrative that establishes why specific policies and programs were implemented in particular refugee camps or settlements and why some were not, why and how the field has changed over time and what forces were behind these changes, and why and how policy and programmatic changes often have not brought lasting change to the challenges of refugee education.

In this article, I make a case for a turn to historical approaches in refugee education research by providing an example of how I used historical methods to reconstruct the education narrative of Kenya’s Dadaab and Kakuma refugee camps. I argue that taking such a turn could shed light on three interrelated areas in ways other methods fail to do. First, these methods use deep contextual and contemporaneous data that help to explain persistent challenges in education in and across refugee contexts, including low enrollment rates, high rates of student attrition, high student-teacher ratios, and consistently low education funding from the wider pool of humanitarian aid.<sup>1</sup> They also can increase our knowledge of why an array of policies and programs for refugee education have not effectively addressed these challenges and help to reveal what broader changes might be necessary to ensure better outcomes. Lastly, historical narratives can reveal puzzles inherent in refugee education that continually confront UN agencies, primarily the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), the agency mandated to protect and assist refugees, and the community services and education officers in its employ.

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1 That is, 39 percent of primary school aged refugees remain out of school worldwide; United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), “Turn the Tide: Refugee Education in Crisis,” Division of International Protection, 2018, 13, <http://www.unhcr.org/5b852f8e4.pdf>.

I historicize and contextualize refugee education in the post-Cold War era by reviewing and integrating education in emergencies (EiE), international development studies on education, and the UNHCR literature, and initiate a mutually beneficial cross-disciplinary dialogue among them. Most of the studies included point to the many practical and conceptual constraints of refugee education. In reviewing these distinct literatures, I aim to identify some of the remaining gaps, particularly how broad ideas about global education policy and EiE were shaped from “above” (i.e., by UN agencies and INGOs) and “below” (i.e., by refugees). I suggest that narrative reconstruction can help to address these gaps, and I discuss specific historical methods, including oral history, archival research, and narrative, that I used to this end in a separate historical study.<sup>2</sup> I demonstrate the application of these methods by reconstructing the education histories of Kenya’s Dadaab and Kakuma refugee camps, from their founding in 1992 up to 1997. Reconstructing the history of these refugee camps beyond education is important, as so few such studies exist. Despite the rise of global and transnational histories, the discipline of history, like the institution of education, is a state-centric enterprise.<sup>3</sup> As such, transnational spaces such as refugee camps are without documented history, despite some of them having hosted refugees for decades.<sup>4</sup> For example, there is no dedicated archive for the Dadaab or the Kakuma camp, only ad-hoc records kept at the UNHCR archive in Geneva, Switzerland.

I conclude this article by discussing why and how education policies were developed, implemented, and changed over this five-year period in both camps and at UNHCR headquarters, and why and how, despite these changes, challenges in refugee education have persisted.

## BRIDGING THE GAP

### EDUCATION IN EMERGENCIES

Although refugee education is foundational to the EiE field, historical methods have rarely been used to understand it. In 1999 and 2000, a handful of practitioners who had worked in refugee camps throughout the world gathered with practitioners

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2 Christine Monaghan, *Educating for Durable Solutions? Histories of Schooling in Kenya’s Dadaab and Kakuma Refugee Camps* (London: Bloomsbury Press, forthcoming).

3 See Andreas Wimmer and Nina Glick Schiller, “Methodological Nationalism and Beyond: Nation-State Building, Migration and the Social Sciences,” *Global Networks* 2, no. 4 (2002): 301-34, <https://doi.org/10.1111/1471-0374.00043>.

4 Amy K. Levin, ed., *Global Mobilities: Refugees, Exiles, and Immigrants in Museums and Archives* (New York: Routledge, 2016).

who had worked in conflict and postconflict settings to establish what would become the Inter-agency Network for Education in Emergencies. Also in 2000, at a strategy session held at the second Education For All (EFA) Forum in Dakar, Senegal, participants concluded that multiple emergencies occurring throughout the 1990s (e.g., intrastate wars throughout sub-Saharan Africa, the Balkans, and Central and Southeast Asia) had significantly impeded the realization of universal basic education for all—a global policy priority set forth ten years earlier at the first World Conference on Education For All in Jomtien, Thailand. EiE thus became central to achieving EFA—a claim that education and community services officers employed by UNHCR, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), and the United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF) (the three UN agencies providing education in emergency situations) could and did call on when advocating for education to be included in emergency responses.<sup>5</sup> However, to justify their requests, these officers sought out studies that focused narrowly on education policies or programs, rather than studies that critiqued the agencies developing policy or implementing programs, or that explored the challenges of refugee education programming.<sup>6</sup> A subsequent wave of critical and empirical research offered different understandings of education, including the fact that it was far from protective and in many cases had contributed to or exacerbated conflicts.<sup>7</sup> Although it was apparent that new theoretical and

5 See Pilar Aguilar and Gonzalo Retamal, “Rapid Educational Response in Complex Emergencies: A Discussion Document,” UNICEF, 1998; see also Mary Joy Pigozzi, “Education in Emergencies and for Reconstruction: A Developmental Approach,” UNICEF, 1999.

6 See Susan Nicolai and Carl Triplehorn, “The Role of Education in Protecting Children in Conflict,” Network Paper, Humanitarian Practice Network 42, 2003, 1-36; Margaret Sinclair, *Planning Education in and after Emergencies* (Paris: UNESCO International Institute for Educational Planning, 2002); Marc Sommers, *The Education Imperative: Supporting Education in Emergencies* (Washington, DC: Academy for Educational Development, and New York: Women’s Commission for Refugee Women and Children, 2003)

7 See Kenneth Bush and Diana Saltarelli, “The Two Faces of Education in Ethnic Conflict: Towards a Peace-Building Approach to Education,” UNICEF Innocenti Center, 2000; see also Dana Burde, *Schools for Conflict or for Peace in Afghanistan* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2014); Lynn Davies, *Education and Conflict: Complexity and Chaos* (New York: Routledge, 2003); Lynn Davies, “Schools and War: Urgent Agendas for Comparative and International Education,” *Compare* 35, no. 4 (2005): 357-71, <https://doi.org/10.1080/03057920500331561>; Lynn Davies, “Educating against Extremism: Towards a Critical Politicisation of Young People,” *International Review of Education* 55, nos. 2-3 (2009): 183-203, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11159-008-9126-8>; Lynn Davies, and Christopher Talbot, “Learning in Conflict and Postconflict Contexts,” *Comparative Education Review* 52, no. 4 (2008): 509-18, <https://doi.org/10.1086/591295>; Tony Gallagher, *Education in Divided Societies* (Basingstoke, UK: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004); Elisabeth King, *From Classrooms to Conflict in Rwanda* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2014); Jackie Kirk, “Education and Fragile States,” *Globalisation, Societies and Education* 5, no. 2 (2007): 181-200, <https://doi.org/10.1080/14767720701425776>; Mieke T. A. Lopes Cardozo, “Sri Lanka: In Peace or in Pieces? A Critical Approach to Peace Education in Sri Lanka,” *Research in Comparative and International Education* 3, no. 1 (2008): 19-35, <https://doi.org/10.2304/rcie.2008.3.1.19>; Tejendra J. Pherali, “Education and Conflict in Nepal: Possibilities for Reconstruction,” *Globalisation, Societies and Education* 9, no. 1 (2011): 135-54, <https://doi.org/10.1080/14767724.2010.513590>; Ritesh Shah, “Goodbye Conflict, Hello Development? Curriculum Reform in Timor-Leste,” *International Journal of Educational Development* 32, no. 1 (2012): 31-38, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijedudev.2011.04.005>; Alan Smith, “Education in the Twenty-First Century: Conflict, Reconstruction and Reconciliation 1,” *Compare* 35, no. 4 (2005): 373-91, <https://doi.org/10.1080/03057920500331397>; Alan Smith, and Tony Vaux, “Education, Conflict and International Development,” UK Department for International Development, 2003.

methodological approaches were needed to explain the complex and dynamic relationship between education and conflict, the resultant research focused little on refugee education.<sup>8</sup>

However, a few studies did describe and analyze specific challenges in the content, structure, and provisioning of education in refugee camps. They highlighted, for example, the fact that non-state actors (i.e., UNHCR) face challenges in selecting curricula and pedagogical approaches, particularly because the traditional purposes of schooling, such as the cultivation of citizenship and economic development, simply do not exist in refugee camps.<sup>9</sup> Waters and LeBlanc, commenting on the statelessness of refugees, note that refugees are by definition “outside both the modern economy and modern society.” As a result, “creating education systems for refugees is always embedded in this paradox, which is the root cause of why it is difficult to implement or . . . to ‘imagine’ such programs.”<sup>10</sup>

Drawing from ethnographic research conducted in refugee camps in Thailand, Banki clearly articulates one of the central challenges of refugee education:

In the context of education the lack of incentives stems from the uncertainty of the resolution of protracted refugee situations, making it difficult to develop original and creative ways to think about what students should learn and how they might put it to use in the future. Simply put, neither external education planners nor refugees themselves (as students or planners) know where they will be in the future, making systemic and curriculum design very difficult.<sup>11</sup>

Banki’s ethnographic approach, which is similar to the descriptive case studies widely used in EiE scholarship, asks and answers “what” questions through detailed descriptive analysis. For example, Banki concludes her analysis by stating that, “over the course of protracted refugee situations, education is shaped

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8 See Mario Novelli and Mieke T. A. Lopes Cardozo, “Conflict, Education and the Global South: New Critical Directions,” *International Journal of Educational Development* 28, no. 4 (2008): 473-88, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijedudev.2008.01.004>; see also Dana Burde, “Assessing Impact and Bridging Methodological Divides: Randomized Trials in Countries Affected by Conflict,” *Comparative Education Review* 56, no. 3 (2012): 448-73, <https://doi.org/10.1086/664991>.

9 Tony Waters and Kim LeBlanc, “Refugees and Education: Mass Public Schooling without a Nation-State,” *Comparative Education Review* 49, no. 2 (2005): 129-47, <https://doi.org/10.2307/3542160>.

10 Waters and LeBlanc, “Refugees and Education,” 140.

11 Susan Banki, “Refugee Camp Education: Populations Left Behind,” in *Refugees, Immigrants, and Education in the Global South: Lives in Motion*, eds. Lesley Bartlett and Ameena Ghaffar-Kucher (New York: Routledge, 2013), 133-48.

by negotiations among camp administrators, humanitarian agencies, the host country, the international refugee regime, and refugees.”<sup>12</sup> Yet, her ethnography does not reveal what those negotiations were, why and how they took shape, and what changes did (or did not) occur in refugee education as a result.

Finally, an in-depth case study of the education programming provided to refugees in seven camps along the Thai-Burmese border, including the challenges, notes that UNHCR and its partner INGOs made fraught policy choices about the curriculum and language of instruction, which facilitated the inclusion or caused the exclusion of a large number of school-aged children in the camps.<sup>13</sup> For example, the Burmese curriculum they chose was taught in a particular dialect of the Karen language that many refugees didn’t know. They also did not provide special education programming for disabled refugee children, which left many of them without access to formal schooling. While this study illustrates some of the nuances and complexities of refugee education in camp settings, it sheds no light on why or how UNHCR and its partner INGOs made these particular decisions. A brief study conducted by the same scholars at the same sites examined changes in the education provided over the 20 years since the camps were founded.<sup>14</sup> They concluded that, “after years of trial, error, and practice, educational services are now provided in a relatively effective and efficient manner.”<sup>15</sup> However, they did not examine what those changes were or how and why they came about, thus the mechanisms and processes that accounted for these changes remain unknown.

In contrast to the work described above, Dryden-Peterson periodizes key shifts in the purposes and provision of refugee education from World War II to 2016. Using her research in the UNHCR archives and key informant interviews she conducted with UNHCR and UNICEF policy-makers, Dryden-Peterson examines “the tension between the global right to education for refugees and the local implementation of this right.”<sup>16</sup> She concludes that, despite discursive and normative change over time, there is continuing tension because refugees “are both within and outside nation states.”<sup>17</sup> Dryden-Peterson’s use of archival research helps to demonstrate the promise of using a historical approach to refugee

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12 Banki, “Populations Left Behind,” 139.

13 Su-Ann Oh and Marc van der Stouwe, “Education, Diversity, and Inclusion in Burmese Refugee Camps in Thailand,” *Comparative Education Review* 52, no. 4 (2008): 589-617, <https://doi.org/10.1086/591299>.

14 Marc van der Stouwe and Su-Ann Oh, “Educational Change in a Protracted Refugee Context,” *Forced Migration Review* 30 (2008): 47-49.

15 Van der Stouwe and Oh, “Educational Change,” 47-48.

16 Sarah Dryden-Peterson, “Refugee Education: The Crossroads of Globalization,” *Educational Researcher* 45, no. 9 (2016): 473-82, 476, <https://doi.org/10.3102/0013189x16683398>.

17 Dryden-Peterson, “Refugee Education,” 479.

education research. This approach includes identifying persistent institutional and ideational tensions and areas of further inquiry that would provide contemporary historical examples of when and how UN agencies and national governments negotiated “age-old tensions between the sovereignty of the nation-state and global responsibility (e.g., banning of chemical weapons, the landmine treaty).”<sup>18</sup> In the section below, I employ similar historical methods to illuminate new dimensions of social phenomena that previously have been hidden from view.

## UNHCR

Almost three decades ago, at the end of the Cold War, many refugee camps were rapidly established throughout the world in response to a large influx of new refugees. The quest to find answers to questions about what to teach, to whom, and for how long was contentious and contingent, and it differed from one camp to the next, due to community services officers’ and refugees’ particular interests and initiatives, and to the ways policy-makers capitalized on opportunities to establish or reshape education policy in humanitarian contexts at key moments (e.g., The World Education Forum in 2000). Understanding and explaining how these questions were answered in specific camps over time, in this case Dadaab and Kakuma, and why documents, tools, and frameworks were developed in particular ways can help clarify the inherent institutional and ideational challenges that continue to confound UNHCR’s education programming in refugee contexts. In this article, I focus on UNHCR rather than on other UN agencies such as UNICEF or the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) because UNHCR was the primary developer of refugee education policy during the period surveyed (1992-1997).<sup>19</sup> Moreover, UNHCR and its INGO partners implemented education programming for refugees in most camps and informal settlements throughout the world.<sup>20</sup>

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18 Dryden-Peterson, “Refugee Education,” 479.

19 For additional detail, see Monaghan, *Educating for Durable Solutions?*

20 UNRWA also has a long history of developing and implementing education for Palestinian refugees. See Husein Abdul-Hamid, Harry Patrinos, Joel Reyes et al., “Learning in the Face of Adversity: The UNRWA Education Program for Palestine Refugees,” The World Bank, 2015; Ghassan Shabaneh, “Education and Identity: The Role of UNRWA’s Education Programmes in the Reconstruction of Palestinian Nationalism,” *Journal of Refugee Studies* 25, no. 4 (2012): 491-513, <https://doi.org/10.1093/jrs/fer055>; Saba Arafat, “Formal Education in UNRWA,” *Journal of Refugee Studies* 2, no. 1 (1989): 108-12; Jalal Al-Husseini, “UNRWA and the Palestinian Nation-Building Process,” *Journal of Palestine Studies* 29, no. 2 (2000): 51-64, <https://doi.org/10.1525/jps.2000.29.2.02p0030x>; Maya Rosenfeld, “From Emergency Relief Assistance to Human Development and Back: UNRWA and the Palestinian Refugees, 1950-2009,” *Refugee Survey Quarterly* 28, nos. 2-3 (2009): 286-317, <https://doi.org/10.1093/rsq/hdp038>.

UNHCR's founding statute stipulates that all of its operational costs, which are 98 percent of its total budget, must be funded by bilateral organizations or the private sector (e.g., corporations, philanthropic organizations, or individuals) for discrete, one-year funding cycles.<sup>21</sup> Thus, funding for refugee education is dependent on donor states (e.g., the United States, Norway, Sweden) or private organizations, which historically have tended to view refugee education as a non-essential need. Additionally, under UNHCR's founding mandate, three durable solutions are available to refugees: third country resettlement, local integration, or repatriation to their country of origin.<sup>22</sup> Yet, for almost 30 years, while protracted conflicts have become the norm, third-country resettlement and local integration into host countries have been significantly restricted.

Throughout the 1990s, chronic or recurrent intrastate conflicts resulted in the establishment of long-term refugee camps. In these protracted refugee situations, UNHCR came to operate as a surrogate state with minimal or no oversight or assistance provided by host states.<sup>23</sup> The average length of stay in a camp is now 17 years; during this time, most refugees are restricted from seeking wage-earning employment or moving freely outside the camps.<sup>24</sup> As a result, the three durable solutions have limited viability. Nevertheless, UNHCR continues to frame education as both a durable solution and critical to achieving durable solutions.<sup>25</sup> Critically engaging with why and how this is so could reveal what broader changes might be needed to ensure better education outcomes.

In the 2000s, faced with a growing number of responsibilities, a large increase in the number of refugees under its care and protection, and challenges in funding its operations, UNHCR began to reframe the significance and scope of its work. Protracted refugee situations were increasingly presented as urgent matters of international peace and security, and UNHCR successfully situated refugee movements as central elements of numerous UN Security Council resolutions.<sup>26</sup> "Education for repatriation" and "education for durable solutions" were terms devised by a handful of UNHCR program officers in response to host states'

21 See Gil Loescher, Alexander Betts, and James Milner, *UNHCR: The Politics and Practice of Refugee Protection into the 21st Century* (New York: Routledge, 2008).

22 See Gil Loescher, "The UNHCR and World Politics: State Interests vs. Institutional Autonomy," *International Migration Review* 35, no. 1 (2001): 33-56, <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1747-7379.2001.tb00003.x>.

23 Amy Slaughter and Jeff Crisp, "A Surrogate State? The Role of UNHCR in Protracted Refugee Situations," UNHCR, Policy Development and Evaluation Service, 2009.

24 See Slaughter and Crisp, "A Surrogate State?"

25 UNHCR, "Education Strategy 2012-2016," Division of International Protection, 2012, 7, <http://www.unhcr.org/5149ba349.html>.

26 See Alexander Betts, Gil Loescher, and James Milner, *UNHCR: The Politics and Practice of Refugee Protection* (New York: Routledge, 2013).

increasingly restrictive asylum policies and threats of refoulement.<sup>27</sup> On the one hand, framing education in these ways highlighted its role as a protective, life-saving service and thus progressively aligned the provision of education services with UNHCR’s core mandate. On the other hand, the education policies and programs implemented in camps under the guise of “education for repatriation” have seldom aligned with the needs of refugees trapped in protracted situations, particularly those (numbering in the millions) for whom “the end of their exile is nowhere in sight.”<sup>28</sup>

UNHCR scholarship provides a historical context for why and how the agency has come to operate as a surrogate state. It also describes the constraints it faces in doing so because of the ways states continue to control the scope of UNHCR’s work as a non-state actor in transnational spaces. These constraints are particularly evident when considering the conceptual and practical challenges of providing education to refugees in protracted crisis situations. They include a one-year funding cycle, while the provision of education services requires multi-year commitments; sustained questions at UNHCR of whether and how education aligns with the institution’s mandate; and answers from those endeavoring to show the ways it does so, such as “education for repatriation,” that have lasting implications for the education services provided in camps. The fact that historical analyses of UNHCR have been reconstructed primarily using UNHCR archival documents and have not included the lived experiences of those residing in the camps it manages is a notable gap this paper seeks to address.

When considered collectively, descriptive case studies, ethnographies, and institutional histories reveal the numerous interrelated challenges of providing refugee education in protracted situations. These include the ways states constrain UNHCR from functioning effectively as a surrogate state; how attempts to loosen these constraints (e.g., reframing the scope of its work to focus on repatriation and security) have in turn shaped and constrained UNHCR’s provision of education services in camps (e.g., education for repatriation); how, via EFA, basic education became a global policy priority considered central to state- and nation-building in the concomitant eras of globalization and the post-Cold War; and the fact that education is necessary for wholly different purposes in the transnational spaces of refugee camps. What these accounts do not reveal but historical reconstruction can make known is how different actors at different moments in time endeavored to navigate and change some of these challenges, why they were successful in some

27 See Betts et al., *Politics and Practice*.

28 Gil Loescher and James Milner, “Understanding the Challenge,” *Forced Migration Review* 33 (2009): 9-11, 37.

cases, how changes to global refugee education policies did or did not impact education programming in camps, and vice versa. Such knowledge is significant for current and future policy-makers and program officers as they consider how to develop and implement policies and programs for refugee education that will be beset by fewer challenges and better able to serve refugees' educational needs.

## FROM EMERGENCY EDUCATION TO EDUCATION IN EMERGENCIES

### METHODS

In the work presented below and the study this article is based on, I asked and answered three interrelated questions: (1) Why and how were education policies and programs developed, implemented, and changed in Kenya's Dadaab and Kakuma camps? (2) What drove changes when they occurred? (3) How were the lived educational experiences of refugee students, their families, and teachers impacted by the range of education policies and programs implemented during the period from 1992 to 1997? Embedded in the above are additional questions about concrete schooling policies for refugees: (a) What curriculum and language of instruction should be used? (b) Who should teach? (c) How many grade levels should be offered? (d) How much funding should be allocated to education, relative to other services? (e) How might that funding be secured? I answered these questions by collecting oral histories from refugee teachers and students in Kakuma and Dadaab, conducting research at the UNHCR archives in Geneva, and interviewing current and former UNHCR policy-makers.

Oral history and archival research are particularly well-suited to making a historical turn in refugee education research. So, too, is the use of narrative to present data or findings, to document what happened over time, and to explain how and why. Of the historian's tools, it is narrative that "reveals [*sic*] the meaning, coherence, or significance of events."<sup>29</sup> To historicize refugee education—that is, to interpret events as a product of historical development—is to contextualize these events as part of wider phenomena. This requires integrating separate literatures, including the EiE literature and international development studies in education, as well as the literature on UNHCR.

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<sup>29</sup> Hayden White, "The Question of Narrative in Contemporary Historical Theory," *History and Theory* 23, no. 1 (1984): 1-33, 30.

## ORAL HISTORIES

Oral history is “an in-depth account of personal experience and reflections.”<sup>30</sup> Recording traditional oral histories that focus on participants’ life experiences often takes several hours. My questions focused only on participants’ educational experiences in the camps, thus many of the interviews were significantly shorter; however, some participants did recount stories from their lives before Dadaab or Kakuma. I spent approximately one month in Kakuma, but only one week in Dadaab, due to security concerns.<sup>31</sup> The interviews varied from fifteen minutes to more than four hours; the length depended on a variety of factors, including security at the interview site, the length of time participants had spent in the camps (generally, the longer the tenure, the longer the interview), and the amount of time participants were able to allocate for the interview (many were conducted during the school day).

In Kakuma, I conducted oral histories with teachers, administrators, and students at all twenty-six primary schools, six secondary schools, the vocational school, and the higher education learning center. I conducted approximately eighty interviews with individuals and ten with groups of three to six people. I also conducted oral histories with the current education officers of UNHCR and the implementing partner for education, Lutheran World Federation. In Dadaab, I conducted oral histories with teachers, students, and administrators at primary and secondary schools and in vocational and higher education programs in each of the five sub-camps, and with education officers at all implementing partners involved in education service provision. In total, I gathered oral histories from 67 teachers, students, administrators, and education officers in Dadaab.

In Kakuma, I conducted four to six interviews per day at schools that were within a 10- to 15-minute ride by motorbike taxi, as the month I spent in the camp allowed for a leisurely pace and in some cases time for follow-up interviews. In Dadaab, given the limited time I had in the camp, I conducted about 15 interviews per day, beginning at 7 AM and concluding after 7 PM. It took about 20 minutes to drive between sub-camps, but the schools I visited within the sub-camps were typically separated by less than one mile. In both camps, I generally began by

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30 “Principles and Best Practices,” Oral History Association, 2009, <https://www.oralhistory.org/about/principles-and-practices-revised-2009/>.

31 In 2011, the group Al-Shabaab infiltrated Dadaab and has maintained a steady presence there since, detonating a number of bombs in heavily trafficked marketplaces and kidnapping or killing several aid workers. As a result, researchers, INGO staff members, and journalists are advised to limit the time they spend in the camp.

asking participants to describe their educational experiences in the camp schools as a student, teacher, or administrator. I also asked questions about changes to the curriculum, or to education programming more broadly, that they had witnessed over time. I tried to hone in on the precise dates of changes and on what and who caused them. I also asked participants about their educational aspirations.

Finally, I conducted 20 oral histories, in person or by Skype, with current and former senior and mid-level UNHCR community service, education, protection, and program officers. These interviews lasted between one and six hours. I asked participants to describe significant moments they had witnessed or experienced that impacted or changed refugee education policies or programs, both in Kakuma or Dadaab and globally, as well as policies or programs that had been proposed and discussed but never implemented, and why they had not.

### ARCHIVAL RESEARCH

I spent three weeks in the UNHCR archives in Geneva reviewing approximately one thousand memorandums, policy briefings, mission reports, white papers, curricular materials, and meeting minutes. The majority of these had been drafted and circulated in the UNHCR Education Unit. However, more than two hundred documents came from the UNHCR Finance, Fundraising, and Executive Management Committee units, which offered insights into the internal workings of the UNHCR Headquarters (HQ), particularly where the Education Unit is situated relative to other units. In short, units are prioritized according to their relative relation to UNHCR's core mandate: to protect. Between 1992 and 2012, the Education Unit was located within various units (e.g., Division of Program Support and Management; Division of Emergency, Security, and Supply; Division of International Protection); each move impacted UNHCR's education policies and programs, particularly in terms of the financial and human resources devoted to education.

### NARRATIVE

With hundreds of hours of interviews and thousands of pages of documents in hand, I proceeded to reconstruct the educational histories of both camps. I did so by chronologically ordering the events described in these documents and transcripts, reviewing and analyzing this chronology for emergent themes, and further coding and ordering the events within each year by one of seven emergent

themes (e.g., idea-development in EiE, institutional change in UNHCR).<sup>32</sup> Narrative strands quickly appeared as I considered developments at the UNHCR HQ in Geneva alongside those occurring at the same time in the Dadaab and Kakuma camps. For example, the publication in 1996 of Graça Machel’s seminal report, “The Impact of Armed Conflict on Children,” also known as “The Machel Report,” led to a stream of funding for UNHCR that officers at UNHCR HQ used to pilot peace education programming in Dadaab and Kakuma.<sup>33</sup> I determined whether to include or exclude particular events or to draw connections between them based on careful, critical sensitivity to the information gathered. It is the purview of historians to frame and reframe understandings of the past, and another historian might have made different interpretive choices that put a different relative onus on events or people.<sup>34</sup>

In the following section, I reconstruct the education histories of Dadaab and Kakuma over the five-year period from 1992 to 1997.

## **FINDINGS OF “EDUCATING FOR DURABLE SOLUTIONS?” 1992-1997**

### **1992: THE FOUNDING OF KAKUMA AND DADAAB**

“I was not that big when I was in the army—I was still small,” Samuel recalled.<sup>35</sup> “In Sudan I had been an army officer with an SPLA [Sudan People’s Liberation Army] faction. Then I had a problem with my eyes because of operating a machine gun. So I was released for treatment with all of the minors who came here. That

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32 Historical analysis and narrative reconstruction are akin to mapping plot points in a story and connecting those points with exposition. Each historian or narrator will make sense of events differently. In reviewing and analyzing my master chronology comprised of data from archival research and oral interviews, I identified seven emergent themes that to me made sense in organizing my data and reconstructing a coherent narrative across place and time. The unit levels are as follows: (1) a broad idea related to state and non-state actors in the post-Cold War era; (2) a broad idea related to EiE; (3) an institutional feature related to UNHCR; (4) an institutional feature related to UNHCR’s Education Unit; (5) an institutional feature related to the UNHCR Nairobi Branch Office; (6) an institutional feature related to Dadaab camp; and (7) an institutional feature of Kakuma camp. I had a master chronology of events that was not organized by theme, and a chronology of events within each theme. Doing so allowed me to look across institution, idea, and time to see, for example, how ideational developments in the field of EiE corresponded with institutional developments at UNHCR HQ and in Dadaab or Kakuma camp.

33 Graça Machel, “The Impact of Armed Conflict on Children,” United Nations, 1996; UNHCR, Global Community Services/Education Workshop, October 26-November 1, 1997, 33.

34 Carlo Ginzburg, “Checking the Evidence: The Judge and the Historian,” *Critical Inquiry* 18, no. 1 (1991): 79-92, <https://doi.org/10.1086/448624>.

35 Here and throughout the narrative, names and identifying details have been changed to protect the privacy of individuals.

was until February 17<sup>th</sup>, 1992. There was nothing when we came here. It was bare without people. Without anything.” Samuel was one of 12,000 unaccompanied minors, mostly boys, transported by UNHCR from hastily established makeshift camps in the small town of Lokichogio, Kenya, to Kakuma refugee camp 90 kilometers to the southeast, in Kenya’s Great Rift Valley. “Kakuma means ‘nowhere’ in Swahili,” a UNHCR program officer remarked. “And it was not so much a camp then, more a long, narrow expanse of land” between forks of the Tarach River. Some of the children had been orphaned during the Second Sudanese Civil War, an ongoing internecine conflict between the central government and the Sudan People’s Liberation Army—a rebel group seeking to establish an autonomous Southern Sudan.<sup>36</sup> Others had been child soldiers who were forced or voluntarily conscripted into the SPLA. They had first walked more than one thousand miles east to refugee camps in Ethiopia in 1991, most of them fleeing conflict or escaping induction into the SPLA. When war broke out in Ethiopia later that same year, they walked another five hundred miles southwestward to Kenya, arriving in Lokichogio in early 1992. A few, like Samuel, had been released by the SPLA to seek medical treatment for injuries sustained while fighting.

UNHCR was overwhelmed in 1992 with the arrival of an average of nine hundred refugees daily in Kenya.<sup>37</sup> In a report submitted to UNHCR HQ in February, a UNHCR social services officer wrote the following:

While the number of refugees has increased tenfold, [UNHCR] staff and facilities have not increased with corresponding rapidity . . . Influxes into camps and the lack of food and water as well as other facilities have caused malnutrition and innumerable deaths. Lack of staff to coordinate and put things in place has compounded the problems. Inexperienced staff have been deployed with very few senior staff to supervise and give direction. Forgery of documents, alleged bribery, and corruption have increased difficulties.<sup>38</sup>

By December of that year, more than 427,000 refugees were being hosted in twelve camps and four border sites, mainly in the semi-arid desert regions of Rift Valley, which borders Sudan, and the North Eastern Province, which borders Somalia.

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36 See J. Millard Burr, “Quantifying Genocide in Southern Sudan and the Nuba Mountains, 1983-1998,” in *Conflict in the Nuba Mountains: From Genocide-by-Attrition to the Contemporary Crisis in Sudan*, eds. Samuel Totten and Amanda Grzyb (New York: Routledge, 2015), 89-111.

37 UNHCR, “Kenya Information Bulletin,” UNHCR, 1993.

38 Marie Lobo, “Kenya Social Services Mission January 20-February 16, 1992,” UNHCR, 1992, 4, 7.

The UNHCR officer’s report was primarily referring to Liboi and Ifo camps; both were established in 1991, and by the beginning of 1992 they were providing asylum to more than 50,000 Somali refugees, the majority of them women and children.<sup>39</sup> Because of the comparative security offered further inland, UNHCR established two additional camps adjacent to Ifo in 1992—Hagadera in March and Dagahely in June.<sup>40</sup> These three sub-camps comprised the Dadaab camp complex, which was designed to host approximately 90,000 people—just half the number of refugees UNHCR had registered by the end of the year.<sup>41</sup> “It was ad hoc as more and more people came across and there was no thought given to the layout of the camp,” a former UNHCR community services officer recalled. “I think there was a failure reading the context . . . there was no indication that Somalia was a political situation that would be solved. There was every indication that this would be long term. And yet the planning was ‘let’s see what happens tomorrow.’”

By mid-1992, it became clear to senior staff at the UNHCR Branch Office in Nairobi that the refugee situation in Kenya would require the mobilization of implementing partners to assist with camp management and the provision of basic services. In Dadaab, UNHCR contracted with Cooperative for Assistance and Relief Everywhere (CARE) to serve as the implementing partner for all services, and it partnered with a number of INGOs in Kakuma, including the International Rescue Committee, Médecins Sans Frontières, and Rädä Barnen, the Swedish section of Save the Children International.<sup>42</sup>

More than 50 percent of the refugee population in Dadaab and 70 percent in Kakuma were school-aged children.<sup>43</sup> However, as a former UNHCR community services officer explained, “initially it was very much a focus on water, sanitation, and health . . . at that point there was very little attention to the education sector. It was much more ‘if there is time.’” Many within UNHCR viewed the provision of education services as a potential “pull factor”—that is, a service highly valued by refugees that was not widely accessible in Somalia or Sudan and thus might “pull” people into Kenya to seek asylum, even if there was no imminent threat to their life in their home countries.

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39 Nyrovia Whande, “Kenya: An Assessment of the Situation of Women and Children, August 8-September 7, 1991,” UNHCR, 1991.

40 UNHCR, “Kenya Information Bulletin,” 1993.

41 UNHCR, “Kenya Information Bulletin,” 1993.

42 CARE, International Rescue Committee, Médecins Sans Frontières, and Save the Children International are humanitarian aid agencies that deliver a broad range of emergency and long-term relief international development projects in more than 90 countries throughout the world.

43 Lobo, “Kenya Social Services Mission.”

Meanwhile, others argued that refugees in the camps were demanding education and that educational activities “should be initiated as soon as possible.”<sup>44</sup> This debate played out in a series of reports published by officers from the UNHCR Protection and Community Services units. One report recommended that “educational programs should be organized in the camps,” and noted that “the Branch Office [in Nairobi] is developing a comprehensive education system for the new caseload.”<sup>45</sup> However, another report circulated three months later indicated that the Branch Office was supposedly “no longer contemplating the development of a comprehensive education program as had been stated in the cabled clearance of the program, but only to support those educational activities which had already been started.”<sup>46</sup> These activities included a limited number of scholarships awarded to refugees so they could complete vocational higher ed training through the DAFI Program, which had been established earlier that year, and the distribution of reading materials in the camps.<sup>47</sup>

### 1992: FORMAL EDUCATION PROGRAMMING

The matter of education in the camps was not officially settled, but by May, CARE had begun converting a former UNHCR compound in Dadaab into a school; by July, International Relief and Rehabilitation Services (IRRES) was officially contracted to be the implementing partner for education in Kakuma.<sup>48</sup> In both camps, refugees had already organized classes for school-aged children and were holding lessons each morning under acacia trees. The teachers were the refugees who had attained the highest level of education in their home countries. Al Nuur, one of the first teachers in Dadaab, recalled that “at the beginning it was one teacher to two hundred students—it was emergency education.”

### 1992: CHOOSING THE CURRICULUM AND LANGUAGE OF INSTRUCTION

When CARE and IRRES began to formalize education programming in the camps, questions of language of instruction and which curriculum to implement were discussed at length in a series of consultations with the refugee communities

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44 Lobo, “Kenya Social Services Mission,” 17.

45 Kenneth Lutato, “Kenya Education Mission,” UNHCR, 1992, 14.

46 Nyrovia Whande, “Registration and Needs Assessment of Southern Sudanese Minors,” UNHCR, Program and Technical Support Section, 1992, 7.

47 The Albert Einstein German Academic Refugee Initiative Fund (DAFI) provides a limited number of scholarships that enable refugees to attend universities and polytechnic institutions. DAFI has distributed approximately 30 scholarships per year to refugees residing in Kenya since 1992.

48 Whande, “Registration and Needs Assessment.”

in Dadaab and Kakuma. UNHCR’s “1992 Guidelines for Educational Assistance to Refugees,” developed and issued following the 1990 World Conference on Education For All, offered no clear answers.<sup>49</sup> UNHCR’s previous policy guidelines for education, issued in 1988, focused heavily on post-primary education and outlined selection criteria for awarding scholarships to refugees to attend universities in countries of asylum.<sup>50</sup> However, the “1992 Guidelines” departed significantly from the previous policy and emphasized implementing primary education. They noted further that, if the situation was thought to be temporary, the refugees’ home curriculum and language of instruction should be used to help facilitate repatriation. If the duration of asylum was expected to be longer, then a “mixed curriculum that faces both ways and incorporates lessons from refugees’ home and host countries should be utilized.” Finally, the “1992 Guidelines” recommended that, if the situation was long term, the host country’s national curriculum should be implemented.<sup>51</sup> Thus, from a policy standpoint, the choice of curriculum and anticipated duration of exile were closely linked.

Of course, no one knew for sure how long refugees would remain in the Dadaab and Kakuma camps and speculation varied. In Dadaab, leaders from the refugee community indicated to CARE that schools should follow a Somali curriculum and that the language of instruction should be a combination of Somali and English. In Kakuma, refugees advocated strongly for the Kenyan curriculum with English as the language of instruction. UNHCR consulted with the Kenyan ministry of education, but beyond stating that it would be easiest to acquire the Kenyan curriculum and that UNHCR would have to register the schools in Kenya if students were to receive certification of primary and secondary school completion, the ministry remained uninvolved. While community services officers considered possibilities for vocational education programming and accelerated learning courses in both camps, they were not widely supported in the Nairobi Branch Office, as these programs were not included in the “1992 Guidelines.” And so it was that CARE took up the task of acquiring curricular materials from Somalia, while IRRES ordered copies of the Kenyan curriculum. Ultimately, CARE was unable to get hold of the Somali curriculum and UNESCO was contracted to write a mixed curriculum, which covered grades one to four, using a handful of rescued Somali textbooks and inputs from Somali teachers.

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49 UNHCR, “1992 Guidelines for Educational Assistance to Refugees,” UNHCR, Program and Technical Support Section, 1992.

50 UNHCR, “1988 Guidelines for Educational Assistance to Refugees,” UNHCR, Program and Technical Support Section, 1988.

51 UNHCR, “1992 Guidelines,” 18.

**1992: INCENTIVE WAGES**

An education mission conducted in Dadaab and Kakuma by an officer from UNHCR HQ in May 1992, prior to the start of formal schooling activities, recommended that “the structures constructed to house schools be simple, temporary ones; that the teaching force for the camp schools be recruited from the refugee communities; and that ‘incentive wages’ rather than ‘salaries’ should be offered to encourage refugees to teach.”<sup>52</sup> Regardless of their qualifications, all refugee teachers received the same “incentive” of 500 Ksh per month. Equivalent to US\$15, incentive wages were the source of “a lot of conflict between the implementing partners and the refugees,” according to Abdulahi, a former refugee teacher in Dadaab. The “1992 Guidelines” stipulated that refugee teachers should be given “incentives” (in cash or in kind), not formal salaries, “since they receive relief assistance for helping their communities . . . also because of the constraints of humanitarian funding.”<sup>53</sup> These twin rationales—that refugee teachers were not “real” teachers because they lacked formal certification and that they were not in need of “salaries” because their needs were met by UNHCR—were used time and again by UNHCR and implementing partner staff members when negotiating with refugees who regularly advocated for increases in pay. Reports indicating that low wages led to substantial teacher turnover also maintained that “the concept of salary should [nevertheless] be avoided since this leads to comparisons with home or host country levels . . . which is simply not sustainable.”<sup>54</sup>

In July and August, CARE and IRRES began five-day teacher-training courses that covered basic content, lesson planning, and behavior management. Formal schooling commenced in both camps in September in split-shift sessions—morning and afternoon—to accommodate more learners; classes were still held under trees. In Dadaab, reports indicated that about a quarter of school-aged children residing in the camp enrolled in school, while in Kakuma the number was closer to half.<sup>55</sup> Boys outnumbered girls in the schools in both camps “at least ten to one,” recalled Abdulahi. “Girls were generally prohibited from attending by parents who wanted them to remain in the home—there was a lot of cultural interference back then.”

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52 Lutato, “Kenya Education Mission,” 16.

53 UNHCR, “1992 Guidelines,” 43.

54 Margaret Sinclair, “Education Mission to Tanzania and Kenya July 4-30,” UNHCR, Program and Technical Support Section, 1994, 8.

55 Sinclair, “Education Mission,” 22.

**1992: EFA AND PRIMARY SCHOOLING**

In Kakuma, many of the unaccompanied boys remained out of school to seek work, earning a couple of shillings for collecting firewood or transporting bags of food from distribution centers to refugees’ homes. “It was also a challenge because we had to support ourselves—we had no parents to cook meals or do any of the work of taking care of a household. We were just living together in groups of ten or so,” explained Samuel, the Sudanese refugee who had migrated to Kakuma seeking medical treatment for his eyes. While the majority of students were going to school for the first time, those who had previous access to education in their home countries had to decide whether to start over in lower primary school (grades 1-4) or forego schooling altogether, as upper primary (grades 5-8) and secondary school were not offered. Many chose not to enroll.

That the schooling consisted solely of lower primary classes reflected “EFA goals, which emphasized basic primary education. So that’s what UNHCR offered—the absolute minimum,” a UNHCR community services officer explained. “Education was a box to check off on the form submitted to HQ. Primary education—available? Tick. Yes. That’s it. And because it was an add-on, there were no UNHCR education officers. It fell to community services to liaise with the implementing partners. I fought for education, but I wasn’t an educationist.” CARE and IRRES also had limited experience with the provision and management of education services, “though CARE had an education officer looking after the running of education activities and there was some structure,” the same officer stated. Al Alrahman, an Islamic organization, also provided structured schooling in the form of *madrassas* (alternately called *doksis*) in Dadaab. Abdulahi explained that “they [doksis] had very good foundations—every student had school books and they offered a midday meal. This alone was enough to attract many children.”

**1993: TEACHER STRIKES**

In early 1993, CARE and IRRES had begun to distribute textbooks and notebooks to students, as well as construction materials, primarily wood posts and chicken wire, to parents who were taking charge of building the schools. “Early on the agencies asked parents to form parent teacher associations [PTAs] in Dadaab and school management committees in Kakuma to assist with building, maintenance, and other management issues,” explained Al Nuur. Abdulahi recalled that “these parent groups became very influential—they were the go-between from agencies to the community.” In Dadaab, parents held weekly meetings with teachers to review students’ progress and any issues teachers might be having. Incentive

wages were frequently discussed. In February, with parents' support, teachers met with CARE to demand an increase in wages. When wages were not increased, the teachers went on strike. "This lasted for months—all schools closed down," Abdulahi explained. "It completely paralyzed the school system. Most teachers and parents supported it, though as weeks turned into a month and then two, people started saying, 'We have to get the kids back in school.' And then the incentive wage was raised to 1500 Ksh."

#### **1994: REFUGEE EDUCATION WORKING GROUP AND CHANGE IN IMPLEMENTING PARTNERS**

In January 1994, UNHCR's Education Unit—comprised of the senior education officer and two assistants, as well as a DAFI scholarship officer—participated in a series of meetings over the course of four days with education officers from UNESCO. Given the number of conflicts and subsequent refugee crises that had occurred in the preceding years, it was decided that these two organizations, along with UNICEF, would revise a previously established UN/NGO Working Group on Refugee Education. Education officers from UNESCO and UNICEF were to meet every two months in Geneva with UNHCR's senior education officer and make arrangements for joint activities in the field. In Dadaab, UNESCO assisted CARE with teacher training and continued printing and distributing copies of the mixed Somali curriculum they had previously written.

UNESCO did not undertake similar operations in Kakuma, where reports indicated growing challenges with IRRES as the implementing partner for education. According to a UNHCR report,

[IRRES] have refused to share records with the Nairobi Branch Office that account for how education funds are being spent. They are running a program where there is a shortage of textbooks and blackboards, classes are being held only between 8 AM and 11 AM, and new teachers are not receiving training. Finally, while [only] alleged, there are indications that IRRES has purposely burned down the warehouse storing textbooks and other supplies to cover up theft of materials that presumably were sold for profit in Loki or Lodwar.<sup>56</sup>

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56 Sinclair, "Education Mission," 10.

In May of that year, IRRES was asked to cease its work in Kakuma and the Branch Office began considering possibilities for a new implementing partner for education.<sup>57</sup> They decided on Rädä Barnen, Save the Children Sweden.

**1994-1995: BUILDING EDUCATION INFRASTRUCTURE AND DEVISING  
MINIMUM STANDARDS**

Under the new management of Rädä Barnen, the fall school term began in Kakuma with the distribution of new textbooks and the addition of teacher aides, and classes took place under newly constructed *makutti* structures—four poles arranged in a rectangle connected by plastic sheeting, with a roof made of palm fronds. Arrangements were made for students enrolled in the recently established Don Bosco vocational program to build desks and benches, and to assist with the construction of new classrooms. Meanwhile, PTAs in Dadaab had undertaken the construction of the more permanent makutti buildings, “even pouring cement floors in all the new schools for foundation and updating the schools previously built,” Al Nuur recalled. A handful of Kenyan national teachers were also hired in Kakuma to teach newly added upper primary (grades 5-8) courses, particularly Swahili, Kenya’s national language. “Swahili was disastrous for us,” Samuel recalled. “We had grown up speaking Arabic, had been studying in the camp in English, and now we had to learn Swahili, which was a real challenge.”

Despite incremental improvements across both camps in terms of education infrastructure, teacher training, and distribution of school materials, education funding remained precarious. Problems releasing funds from the Branch Office to the sub-offices in Dadaab and Kakuma were the result of a shortfall in funding that stemmed from “donor fatigue for Somalia as well as the shifting of funding priorities towards Central Africa to more than one million Rwandese refugees,” detailed an end-of-year review of Kenya’s operations.<sup>58</sup> “The Rwandan genocide and resulting refugee crisis in Zaire changed the whole humanitarian field, including emergency education,” remarked an implementing partner program officer. “Inside the UNHCR, there was serious dialogue about what emergency operations were and were not doing; 40,000 people had died of cholera in the camps for Rwandese refugees in the first month. There was a real push for minimum standards in all sectors.”

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57 Sinclair, “Education Mission,” 11.

58 UNHCR, “Kenya Information Bulletin,” UNHCR, 1995, 6.

In the education sector, a handful of unofficial minimum standards were introduced in early 1995 as the “Revised Guidelines for Educational Assistance to Refugees,” which replaced the “1992 Guidelines.”<sup>59</sup> In the “1995 Guidelines,” a class size of no more than 40 was recommended, as was offering refugee teachers a basic incentive wage that would help to ensure the sustainability of programming.<sup>60</sup> Additionally, all education programs were to receive at the minimum a temporary shelter, writing materials, and blackboards. Increasing importance was also placed on using refugee education to meet “psychosocial needs after trauma and to convey life-saving skills for survival, including landmine awareness, peace education, and environmental awareness.”<sup>61</sup> Like the “1992 Guidelines,” the updated version recommended that the curricula offered in camp schools match the “durable solution” deemed most viable (i.e., curriculum of the home country for temporary asylum, mixed curriculum for medium term, and curriculum of the host country for long-term situations).<sup>62</sup>

#### **1995-1996: CHANGES TO THE CURRICULUM AND INCLUDING EDUCATION IN COMMUNITY SERVICES**

In Dadaab, refugees as well as UNHCR and partner staff members were increasingly coming to view the situation as long term. “PTAs had begun discussing the implementation of the Kenyan curriculum in the camp schools,” Al Nuur explained. “Some parents said their children would never go home and they needed to be able to sit for the Kenyan national exams that might lead to opportunities for secondary schooling. Other parents argued that Somali history and culture would be lost.” In a series of subsequent meetings with CARE, it was decided that children in lower primary grades would still use the UNESCO mixed curriculum and receive instruction in Somali, while those in upper primary would use the Kenyan curriculum taught in English and Swahili. Implementation was gradual; it began with the hiring of a handful of Kenyan national teachers and in-service training provided by CARE and UNESCO for current teachers.

A regional education workshop held in Nairobi in March had recommended that, “in large education programs [such as Dadaab and Kakuma], the job description for community services officers should clearly outline education functions and in

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59 UNHCR, “Revised Guidelines for Educational Assistance to Refugees,” UNHCR, Program and Technical Support Section, 1995.

60 UNHCR, “Revised Guidelines,” 1995, 8.

61 UNHCR, “Revised Guidelines,” 1995, 11.

62 UNHCR, “Revised Guidelines,” 1995, 15.

addition the position title should be ‘Community Services/Education Officer.’”<sup>63</sup> As a former UNHCR program officer explained, “while education had fallen to Community Services for a long time, there was no real incentive for Community Services to focus on education in addition to all of the other things they were tasked with. So education had to become part of what people were hired to do and what they were held accountable for.” While this recommendation was not incorporated by the Branch Office that year, a CARE community services officer took up a post as education officer in Dadaab in 1996, “which forged a strong link between community services and education,” stated Matthew, a former teacher writing his own history of education in Dadaab camp. He explained that

the “can schools” are an example of why this link was important. We needed more schools built but we didn’t have the materials. However, there was a community services officer who had a stock of USAID tins and told the education officer he could use them if he wanted. So the education officer met with parents and they came up with a plan to cut the tins and hammer them flat so they could be used as sheeting for school walls. CARE provided some timber, so all the new schools were made of USAID cans and many of the mukatti schools were eventually replaced by the can schools as well.

### **1996-1997: CHILD PROTECTION AND PEACE EDUCATION**

In July 1996, at a global representatives meeting held at UNHCR HQ, participants from UNHCR, UNESCO, UNICEF, and a number of other INGOs reflected on the nature of humanitarian work in the post-Cold War era. The resulting report signaled a decisive shift from the early 1990s regarding the scope of UNHCR’s operations, concluding that “the initial euphoria generated by the end of the Cold War has dissipated and given way to a more sober appreciation of constraints imposed upon multilateral action: a lack of consensus regarding the protection of civilians in countries affected by armed conflict and the limited capacity of UNHCR in relation to the responsibilities it has been asked to assume.”<sup>64</sup> One month later, UNICEF published “The Machel Report.”<sup>65</sup> Examining the ways children and youth had been mobilized, sensitized, and traumatized across multiple conflicts in the five years since the end of the Cold War (e.g., the Bosnia and Yugoslav wars, Rwanda), the report concluded that international organizations must undertake

63 Dominique Rabiller, “Revised Guidelines,” UNCHR, Regional Education Workshop, 1995, 12.

64 UNHCR, “Global Representatives Meeting Report,” UNHCR, 1996, 3.

65 Machel, “Impact of Armed Conflict.”

activities that strengthen the protection of children and youth. The report also identified education as a primary protective activity in conflict-affected states and in refugee camps, and “advanced the notion that child protection was a core responsibility of the UNHCR,” an education officer explained.

In the first months of 1997, in response to “The Machel Report,” UNHCR set up a Children’s Trust Fund administered by the senior coordinator for refugee children. “The coordinator, who saw education as a fundamental right for children, suddenly had more of an impact because there was funding behind the post,” a former UNHCR program officer explained. A report summarizing outcomes from a global community services/education workshop held later that year detailed that, “in response to an internal follow-up strategy to the ‘Machel Report,’ the UNHCR has established a Trust Fund to strategically reorient protection and programming for children and adolescents. For the first two years, this fund will support pilot projects to address critical protection concerns and promote peace.”<sup>66</sup> Dadaab and Kakuma were to serve as the pilot sites for UNHCR’s Peace Education Program.

In May of that year, two peace education officers were initially hired in the Branch Office to develop the program. “One was an education specialist, the other was a peace specialist,” a former UNHCR program officer recalled. “From the UNHCR’s standpoint, put the two together, you have ‘peace education.’ But the peace specialist had absolutely no field experience—didn’t last more than a month.” The peace education officer who remained spent several weeks in each camp, holding focus group interviews with a range of groups within the refugee community (e.g., women, elders, different clans and tribes) to discuss whether or not a peace education program should be implemented and, if so, how it might be structured:

Over the course of those meetings, refugees would say that it’s not enough that our kids just learn this . . . we need to learn this for ourselves. In Kakuma, they would refer to the eight refugees who had died the previous year in clashes between Nuer and Dinka, and in Dadaab to the large number of women who reported being raped in the camp. So we developed a community program as well.

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66 UNHCR, “Global Community Services/Education Workshop,” 33.

It initially was thought that the school program would be implemented in the regular curriculum as part of civics or social studies. “However, we decided we needed to be able to call it PE [peace education] so kids knew what they were learning,” explained the peace education officer. “There was a subject called pastoral care and it was a single period once a week where kids did absolutely nothing. And so we said, ‘well, this is the best substitute for pastoral care you could get.’ And that’s where we wound up putting it.”

The school-based peace education program was comprised of a series of activities covering 14 concept areas arranged in a “spiral” curriculum, where new lessons built on those of the previous weeks. In each camp, 40 peace education teachers were hired and trained in “pedagogy that was really student-centered and experiential,” remarked a former program officer. “It didn’t require reading or writing but rather facilitation skills. Like the environmental education teacher training had done, this helped to improve the quality of instruction in the camp because teachers utilized these approaches in the other classes they taught.” In Dadaab, CARE placed peace education in the mid-morning on Thursday where pastoral care had previously been slotted. However, in Kakuma, Lutheran World Federation, the new implementing partner for education, relocated pastoral care to Monday morning during the first period. The peace education officer remarked that “it would seem as though [Lutheran World Federation] made a conscious effort to put peace education where it would be least effective. That was often when school assembly was held, so students would miss first period.” Nevertheless, 42,000 students across the two camps participated in the program in the pilot year.<sup>67</sup>

## DISCUSSION

Since the founding of the Dadaab and Kakuma refugee camps, several events have shaped the development and implementation of refugee education policy and programming. Many of these changes are described in the EiE and UNHCR literature as a means of explaining the myriad conceptual and practical constraints of refugee education. Asking why and how questions and representing the answers in narrative form fills an important gap in these literatures by revealing how, over time, UNHCR and INGO staff members and refugees navigated certain ideational and institutional constraints—or, rather, how they exercised agency to make positive changes to refugee education policies and programming within certain structural challenges.

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<sup>67</sup> Margaret Sinclair, “Education Mission to Kenya March 8-15,” UNHCR, Program and Technical Support Section, 1997, 20.

The narrative snapshot above offers several examples of why and how, between 1992 and 1997, certain education policies and programs, rather than others, were developed and implemented. In those five years, staff members at UNHCR HQ developed and strengthened policy frameworks, strategies, and standards for refugee education in response to the expanse and protraction of armed conflict; revised job descriptions to include refugee education specifically; and further aligned education with UNHCR's core mandate to "provide international protection to refugees"—all of this at the global level. UN and INGO staff members leveraged EFA to advocate for the inclusion of primary schooling in camps; at the same time, this constrained education programming, leaving large populations of refugee youth without access to secondary, vocational, or higher education. In Dadaab and Kakuma, students who were initially taught under trees by other refugees without any curriculum were eventually taught the Kenyan national curriculum in semi-permanent and, later, permanent school buildings. PTAs and school management committees made decisions regarding the curriculum and language of instruction and built school infrastructure. In Dadaab, refugee teachers went on strike, successfully, to increase their incentive wages. Supplemental education programming (i.e., peace education) was piloted in both camps because, following a report that helped make the case for education as protection in emergency situations, a UNHCR coordinator was able to access additional funds. Similar changes have continued to the present day. For example, by the late 1990s, secondary schools were established in both camps, largely due to refugees' advocacy efforts, and many Kenyan national teachers were employed in camp schools (however, there is a considerable degree of tension between refugee teachers and Kenyan national teachers). Many current refugee teachers in Dadaab and Kakuma were former students who completed K-12 and even higher ed in the camp schools.

Nevertheless, the challenges of refugee education have continued, in Dadaab and Kakuma and worldwide. These challenges include the limited number of personnel who are tasked with overseeing education programming at UNHCR or its implementing partners, the high number of children and youth who are out of school, a lack of textbooks, overcrowded classrooms, and high rates of attrition from lower primary to upper primary and from upper primary to secondary. Persistent questions remain regarding the purposes of refugee education and its relationship to durable solutions, including choices about curriculum and language of instruction. We might well ask why, beyond resource constraints, changes to refugee education policies and programs haven't brought more significant change to these challenges. History allows us to ask and answer this question literally, rather than rhetorically. It might not seem surprising that there are persistent

challenges to refugee education despite multiple changes, but these challenges were not and are not inevitable. Indeed, this is one of the central revelations of history—that nothing is predetermined, that there are contingencies.<sup>68</sup>

## CONCLUSION

Making a historical turn in refugee education research allows scholars and practitioners to help map the car’s route while driving it. Little has been documented about the development and implementation of refugee education; it lives primarily in the memories of those who were part of it. Dadaab and Kakuma have rich education histories, as do countless other camps around the world. The more narratives we have of the history of education in different camps, the more we can understand why and how actors made the choices they did in moments of contingency, whether about curriculum or supplemental education programming, or in framing the purposes of education to justify its provisioning; why and how different actors in different camps made similar or different choices; and what different choices could lead to more substantive changes. Camps have and will continue to be established throughout the world and choices will be made about providing education services. While historical narratives cannot provide comprehensive answers to what choices should be made, they can show how individuals—community services and education officers and refugees—previously made decisions that were shaped by institutional and ideational constraints, used agency to loosen these constraints, and capitalized on opportunities for change. Stated differently, narratives can help us understand the present by focusing a more holistic lens on the past, and in so doing make it possible to go in a new or different direction in the future—something akin to driving forward with the help of the rearview mirror.

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68    Isaiah Berlin, *Historical Inevitability* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 1954).