Governing Refugees through Gender Equality
Care, Control, Emancipation

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To Sonja Edblom (1961-2012) and Ebba Olivius
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List of papers

This thesis builds on the studies undertaken in the following four appended papers, which are referred to by the corresponding Roman numerals in the text:


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Abstract

In recent decades, international feminist activism and research has had significant success in pushing gender issues onto the international agenda and into global governance institutions and processes. The goal of gender equality is now widely accepted and codified in international legal instruments. While this appears to be a remarkable global success for feminism, widespread gender inequalities persist around the globe. This paradox has led scholars to question the extent to which feminist concepts and goals can retain their transformative potential when they are institutionalized in global governance institutions and processes. This thesis examines the institutionalization of feminist ideas in global governance through an analysis of how, and with what effects, gender equality norms are constructed, interpreted and applied in the global governance of refugees: a field that has thus far received little attention in the growing literature on feminism, gender and global governance. This aim is pursued through a case study of humanitarian aid practices in refugee camps in Bangladesh and Thailand. The study is based on interviews with humanitarian workers in these two contexts, and its theoretical framework is informed by postcolonial feminist theory and Foucauldian thought on power and governing. These analytical perspectives allows the thesis to capture how gender equality norms operate as governing tools, and situate the politics of gender equality in refugee camps in the context of global relations of power and marginalization. The findings of this thesis show that in the global governance of refugees, gender equality is rarely treated as a goal in its own right. The construction, interpretation and application of gender equality norms is mediated and shaped by the dominant governing projects in this field. Gender equality norms are either advocated on the basis of their usefulness as means for the efficient management of refugee situations, or as necessary components of a process of modernization and development of the regions from which refugees originate. These governing projects significantly limit the forms of social change and the forms of agency that are enabled. Nevertheless, gender equality norms do contribute to opening up new opportunities for refugee women and destabilizing local gendered relations of power, and they are appropriated and used by refugees in ways that challenge and go beyond humanitarian agendas.

Keywords
Global governance, feminism, gender equality, refugees, refugee camps, humanitarian aid, Bangladesh, Thailand, governmentality, postcolonial feminist theory
Svensk sammanfattning


Nyckelord
Global styrning, feminism, jämställdhet, flyktingar, flyktingläger, humanitärt bistånd, Bangladesh, Thailand, governmentality, postkolonial feministisk teori
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Elisabeth Olivius
Umeå, October 2014
## Acronyms and abbreviations

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<th>Description</th>
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<tr>
<td>AGDM</td>
<td>Age, gender and diversity mainstreaming</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CBO</td>
<td>Community-based organization</td>
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<tr>
<td>IASC</td>
<td>Inter-Agency Standing Committee for Humanitarian Coordination</td>
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<tr>
<td>KNU</td>
<td>Karen National Union</td>
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<tr>
<td>KRC</td>
<td>Karen Refugee Committee</td>
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<tr>
<td>KWO</td>
<td>Karen Women’s Organization</td>
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<tr>
<td>NGO</td>
<td>Non-governmental organization</td>
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<tr>
<td>NLD</td>
<td>National League for Democracy</td>
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<tr>
<td>SGBV</td>
<td>Sexual and gender based violence</td>
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<tr>
<td>UN</td>
<td>United Nations</td>
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<tr>
<td>UNHCR</td>
<td>United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees</td>
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<td>WFP</td>
<td>World Food Programme</td>
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Introduction

Although debates have begun on what feminists should make of
global governance, there is less focus on what global governance is
making of feminism (Runyan 1999:210).

In recent decades, international feminist activism and research has had
significant success in pushing gender issues onto the international agenda
and into global governance institutions and processes. Gender issues have
entered mainstream international policymaking to a degree previously
unimagined, and the goal of gender equality is widely accepted and codified
in international legal instruments (Caglar et al. 2013, Lombardo et al. 2009).
Words and concepts originating in feminist theory are now found in
international laws and policies, and the strategy of gender mainstreaming
has been adopted by nearly every major international organization (True
2003, Hafner-Burton and Pollack 2002). It has even been argued that a
global gender equality regime, consisting of norms, principles, legal
instruments and compliance mechanisms, has emerged (Kardam 2004). The
transnational networking of women’s organizations around forums such as
United Nations (UN) conferences has been crucial in providing the political
momentum for these developments (True and Mintrom 2001, Keck and

However, commentators differ in their assessments of what appears to be
a remarkable global success for feminism. Some argue that feminism is now
an influential force in global governance, to the extent that there are “plenty
of places where feminism, far from operating from underground, is running
things” (Halley 2008:20). The rise of feminism to such a position of power is
celebrated as having “the potential to better the lives of women”, but, as any
powerful force, feminism also has the potential to cause harm to those it
governs (Halley et al. 2006:360, 394). Other observers argue that feminist
ideas are frequently co-opted and instrumentalized for other purposes, and
diluted and stripped of critical content when they are institutionalized in
global governance, thus limiting their transformative potential (Moser and
Moser 2005, Lombardo and Meier 2006, Woehl 2011, True and Parisi 2013,
Charlesworth 2005). Further, despite the widespread adoption of feminist
goals, concepts and strategies in global governance, pervasive gender
inequalities still persist around the globe (Caglar et al. 2013, Desai 2005).

Moreover, transnational feminist activism has been dominated by
Western feminists who have often failed to recognize that their issues, needs,
and agendas do not resonate with the realities of most women’s lives.
Consequently, global campaigns have been framed in terms of individual
rights rather than resistance to oppressive structures, and issues of poverty and redistribution have generally been neglected (Fraser 2009, Desai 2005). The UN environment can be described as characterized by liberal internationalism, and international conventions codifying gender equality norms, such as the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women, CEDAW, are informed by liberal core values such as the priority given to individual rights and legal paths to equality (Prügl 2013a). Speaking from this liberal internationalist position, Western feminist activists have sometimes been highly insensitive to the realities of women in the South, reinforcing an image of them as backward, disempowered, passive and helpless (Kapur 2002, Shell-Duncan 2008). Given this, Grewal and Kaplan raise the question of whether “global feminism” participates in sustaining global power hierarchies that contribute to the subordination of many women, or whether it can present a challenge to global inequalities as well as gender inequalities (Grewal and Kaplan 1994).

Against this backdrop, the overarching issue addressed in this thesis is what happens when feminist ideas are institutionalized in global governance institutions and processes. How is feminism implicated in contemporary global governance, and what are the effects? Or, in the words of Runyan, what is global governance making of feminism? The salience of this question is undoubtedly even greater today than when it was posed by Runyan in 1999, as the adoption and institutionalization of policies, strategies and methods that endorse the goal of gender equality and seek to integrate gender issues in the work of international organizations have increased significantly since then. Thus, as Prügl suggests, there is a critical need to examine “the power effects that are generated as feminism moves into the mainstream” (Prügl 2011a:114).

In this thesis, I examine the institutionalization and application of feminist ideas in the global governance of refugees. This particular area of global governance became the target of feminist activism and research in the 1980s, when an international campaign for the rights of refugee women gained force. Prior to the mid-1980s, little attention was paid to gender issues in refugee policy, practice and research (Martin 2010:104). Humanitarian aid was generally considered a gender-neutral enterprise, and as such as equally satisfying the needs for protection and assistance of refugee men and women. As a result of this supposed gender-neutrality, refugee women remained invisible to many humanitarian practitioners; they were seldom consulted and their needs and interests were rarely identified or taken into account (Edwards 2010:21-22, Buscher 2010:4-5).

The situation of refugee women and the gender inequalities inherent in humanitarian aid practices surfaced on the international agenda at a time when issues of women’s rights were gaining momentum in international
politics. The UN Decade for Women 1975-1985 was an important catalyst for a movement of advocacy for refugee women, and contributed to collection and dissemination of information on the special protection needs of refugee women, and of the abuses they endured (Hajdukowski-Ahmed et al. 2008:2-5, Baines 2004:24-27). During the 1980’s, non-governmental organizations (NGOs) such as the International Working Group on Refugee Women and the Canadian Working Group on Refugee Women were established, taking on a pivotal role in the campaign on the rights of refugee women as centres for information-sharing and networking (Hajdukowski-Ahmed et al. 2008:5). Western donors were lobbied by and often joined with advocates for refugee women in their demand for changed humanitarian practices (Baines 2004:19,24). Criticism focused on gender-blind delivery of assistance that in effect excluded refugee women; failure to take seriously the sexual violence directed towards refugee women and girls; and exclusion of women from refugee camp management and asylum procedures (Baines 2004:19).

The advocacy campaign of the 1980’s achieved notable success and contributed to significant changes within the UN organization mandated to manage refugee issues, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR). A Policy on Refugee Women was adopted in 1990 (Buscher 2010), and a high-level position as Senior Coordinator for Refugee Women was established in the organization (Baines 2004:44). Since then, humanitarian gender policies have evolved significantly. Today, all UN actors, many government donors and many larger humanitarian NGOs have policies that explicitly advocate for gender equality and endorse the importance of a gender perspective in humanitarian aid to refugees. During the last decade, there has been a proliferation of humanitarian gender policies, guidelines and handbooks, and there is a widely expressed commitment to gender equality and to the strategy of gender mainstreaming among humanitarian organizations. This in itself constitutes a significant change compared to the situation twenty years ago (Buscher 2010, Edwards 2010).

However, the meaning of gender equality remains contested in the humanitarian field, particularly in relation to debates about whether humanitarian aid should aspire to change cultural practices or not (Baines 2004:63). What gender equality means in practice is further complicated in the encounter between the diverse refugee groups, NGOs, UN agencies, and host state authorities which interact in the everyday management of refugee situations. These various actors all have their own motivations, mandates and agendas, and their own ideas about what gender policies should achieve. Additionally, as Hyndman points out, when humanitarian organizations seek to conceptualize issues of gender that differ widely across refugee situations, they risk privileging organizationally defined notions of what gender equality
means over other notions that may more accurately reflect the power relations, issues and needs in particular local contexts (Hyndman 2004:193-195). Thus, the ongoing construction and interpretation of the meaning of gender equality in humanitarian aid, and the application of gender equality programmes and practices in the local dynamics of specific refugee situations, must be examined to understand how gender equality norms are implicated in the global governance of refugees, and what their effects are.

**Aim and research questions**

The overall aim of this thesis is to *analyse how, and with what effects, gender equality norms are constructed, interpreted and applied in the global governance of refugees*. This aim is pursued through a case study of humanitarian aid practices in refugee camps in Bangladesh and Thailand. In order to understand how gender equality norms operate in the governance of refugees, I suggest it is essential to explore how they come into play in the encounter between the structures and norms of global governance and the people they are meant to govern. Through a case study of these two refugee situations, it is possible to examine how gender equality norms are constructed, interpreted and applied in relation to the specific institutional arrangements and power dynamics of each of these contexts.

The overall aim of the thesis is divided into three research questions:

1. *How is the meaning of gender equality constructed and interpreted in humanitarian policy and practice?*

The first research question focuses on the ideas, knowledges and assumptions that underpin and enable different governing practices that are employed in the promotion of gender equality. It draws attention to the ongoing construction and interpretation of gender equality norms in the global governance of refugees. This research question captures how gender (in)equality is constructed as a policy problem in the context of humanitarian aid to refugees: what kind of problem is it, how should it be governed, by whom, and to what ends? The emphasis in this thesis is undoubtedly on humanitarian field practices in the refugee camps in Bangladesh and Thailand, but the analysis also links these practices to dominant ideas and representations in international humanitarian policy.

2. *What methods, programmes, strategies and procedures are used to promote gender equality in humanitarian aid to refugees?*

The second research question focuses on how gender equality norms are translated into practice in the context of humanitarian aid to refugees. This question seeks to capture how gender equality norms come into play in the
governance of refugees. How are gender equality norms made operational, how are they applied, and what do they do? What kind of governing tools do they become in the context of refugee camps? Thus, in very practical terms this research question focuses on what humanitarian organizations do in the name of gender equality.

3. How are relations of power being (re)shaped by humanitarian gender equality policy and practice?

The third question is concerned with the power effects that are generated when gender equality is constructed, interpreted and applied in particular ways. The term effects refer to the opportunities and constraints that are created in such processes. For example, what forms of change can be imagined and pursued on the basis of a particular understanding of gender equality and through existing ways of organizing its promotion? What forms of agency can be exercised, and by whom? This question seeks to grasp the dynamic and contextualized impact of humanitarian gender equality policy and practice in refugee camps, a key institutional context in the global governance of refugees.

Key concepts
At an overarching level, the focus of this thesis is to examine what happens when feminism is institutionalized in global governance institutions and processes. Feminism, as Fraser usefully argues, features prominently in today’s world in two different senses: first, feminism is a diverse social movement for gender justice, a movement which has had significant success in inserting its issues, goals, concepts and strategies into global governance institutions and processes. Second, as a consequence, feminism also operates as “a general discursive construct which feminists in the first sense no longer own and do not control” (Fraser 2009:114). When feminist concepts and goals are “[u]nleashed from the intentions of agents, they gain a life of their own” (Prügl 2013a:333).

Examining how feminism in this second, discursive sense operates in global governance, it is useful to think about gender equality norms not as “things” with a fixed content or meaning, but as sites of ongoing construction, negotiation, and contestation (Zwingel 2012). An understanding of gender equality norms as constantly in the making directs analytical attention to processes of meaning-making where gender equality norms become functional. What kind of governing tools do they become in particular contexts? How are they used, by whom, and what are the implications? To think of gender equality norms as “tools” underlines that although feminists may have fought hard to have these norms recognized and codified in conventions or policies in order to combat gender injustice,
they can be used in different ways and invoked to legitimate a variety of different political agendas, not all of which may empower women or lead to increased social justice.

The term *global governance* is, in this thesis, used in quite a broad sense to denote structures of governance and authority in international politics. This goes beyond the study of international organizations to consider the relations between UN agencies and other actors such as NGOs as well as the norms, rules and processes that shape the exercise of power and authority in spaces above, beyond, and across nation states (Prügl and Meyer 1999:5, Larner and Walters 2004a:2). The *global governance of refugees* thus denotes the structures, institutions, processes and practices that are put in place to address refugee issues at the international level. Here, the institutional architecture known as the *international refugee regime* is central. The international refugee regime in its current form, with the UNHCR and the Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees (the Refugee Convention) at its centre, was created in 1951 to deal with the situation of refugees who remained displaced in Europe after World War Two. However, it has gradually expanded its mandate and the scope of its activities since then (Martin 2010). Today, the international refugee regime is a complex assemblage of international legal agreements, inter-state and non-governmental humanitarian organizations, refugee policies, field handbooks, refugee camps and transit centres, humanitarian aid programmes, and so forth. As such, it is a composite of institutionalized knowledges and practices that regulate international responses to refugee situations.

In the Refugee Convention, a *refugee* is defined as a person who

> Owing to a well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion, is outside the country of his nationality and is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to avail himself of the protection of that country (Refugee Convention Article 1. A (2)).

This definition limits the legitimate reasons for flight to violations of civil and political rights, and thereby excludes people fleeing from generalized violence or due to environmental degradation, acute poverty, or starvation. In addition, in order to be defined as a refugee in legal terms one has to be recognized as such by the host government or by the UNCHR. Therefore, there are many people who have been forced to flee from their country of origin who do not fit the legal criteria for refugee status, or who have simply not been given a chance to be recognized and registered as refugees even if they do fit the Convention definition. Consequently, the term refugee is also frequently used to describe a broader spectrum of people who have been forced to leave their home and who seeks protection in another country. In
this thesis, I use the term refugee in this wider sense rather than as a legal term.

The global governance of refugees is, in practice, a lot about the provision of humanitarian aid. In emergency situations, it involves tasks such as setting up reception centres and food distribution stations, ensuring access to water and establishing sanitation facilities, and building shelters. As refugee situations turn protracted, as they often do, humanitarian aid organizations also manage refugee camps, administer justice, and organize skills training and income-generating activities; in effect, they govern societies of refugees, peculiarly situated as “international” enclaves on the territory of host states. Therefore, humanitarian aid practices in refugee camps constitute the empirical focus and the analytical entry point in this thesis.

**Contributions of the thesis**

Showing how gender equality norms are constructed, interpreted and applied in the global governance of refugees, this thesis contributes with new insights about how feminist concepts, ideas and goals are institutionalized, utilized, and transformed in global governance, and what their effects are. How feminism is employed in global governance cannot be controlled, and it is neither possible nor desirable for feminist activists and scholars to disassociate themselves from global governance organizations. Rather, as True argues, continued engagement and critical scrutiny of the ways feminist ideas are employed in global governance is an imperative task for feminist scholarship (True 2003:387).

This thesis contributes to the task of critical analysis through focusing on the global governance of refugees: an area that has thus far received little attention in the growing literature on the encounter between feminism and global governance. This literature is further discussed in the fourth section, *Gender equality norms as governing tools*. Conversely, as I discuss in the third section, *The refugee camp and the politics of gender equality*, in the fields of refugee and forced migration studies there are a growing number of studies showing how gender relations are reshaped through processes of flight and displacement, but these themes are more rarely linked to issues of power, policy, and governance.

Theoretically and methodologically, the thesis makes a contribution through operationalizing and developing tools drawn from Foucauldian thought on power and governing to analyse gender equality norms as governing tools. While it has been argued that a governmentality perspective provides useful tools for analyses of gender, power and governance, it has rarely been used in this field (Prügl 2011b, Macleod and Durrheim 2002). However, some notable exceptions exist (Reeves 2012, Prügl 2013b, Woehl 2011), and this thesis adds to this emerging strand of feminist research.
Further, drawing on postcolonial feminist theory enables this thesis to theorize and capture the politics and the power effects, but also the potential, of humanitarian gender equality policies and practices. Thus, it takes global inequalities into account when analysing how gender equality norms operate as governing tools in the refugee camp context. Thereby the thesis captures how neoliberal governing strategies, pervasive in contemporary global governance, intersect with governing strategies that uphold global power imbalances rooted in colonial relationships. To what extent feminism can destabilize these hegemonic orders from within, or to what extent it is mobilized for their preservation through its implication in global governance is a question of critical importance which this thesis can only begin to address.

Moreover, while previous studies of the global governance of refugees tend to approach this subject from a macro-perspective and focus on global institutions and structures such as the international refugee regime and the nation state system, they do not show how these regimes of governance operate at the micro level; how they affect individuals and how power operates in particular localized ways in different contexts (Hindess 2000, Haddad 2008, Soguk 1999, Lui 2004, Lippert 1999). This thesis thereby makes an important contribution through analysing the global governance of refugees through a case study of how gender equality norms come into play in the governance of two specific refugee camp situations. This local focus makes it possible to grasp how gender equality norms operate as governing tools in relation to the specific power dynamics of each refugee situation, and to be sensitive to how they are negotiated, contested and resisted in the encounter with local realities. Grounding the study in the refugee camp context also enables it to provide new insights about the refugee camp as a site of governance characterized by specific institutional arrangements, logics, and relationships. In particular, this thesis also contributes to increase knowledge about the refugee situations in Bangladesh and Thailand, especially with regards to how they are governed and how gender equality norms are implicated in governing these refugee camps.

Outline of the thesis
This thesis consists of an introductory chapter and four appended papers, each of which can stand alone. The introductory chapter consists of seven sections. The first section has presented the focus, aim and contributions of the thesis. The second section presents and contextualizes the refugee situations in Bangladesh and Thailand, focusing on how the delivery of humanitarian aid and the governance of refugee camps is organized in these two contexts. The third section discusses the refugee camp as a context for the implementation of gender equality policies and programmes, and provides a postcolonial feminist reading of the politics of gender equality in
the refugee camp context. The fourth section theorizes gender equality norms as governing tools, and presents the central analytical concepts used in the thesis. The fifth section describes the research design of the thesis, and presents the methods and materials that have been used. The sixth section provides an overview of the focus and main results of each of the four appended papers, and the final section synthesizes the results of the four papers and discusses the main findings of the thesis. The second part of the thesis consists of the four appended papers, each contributing to shed new light on the construction, interpretation and application of gender equality norms in the global governance of refugees.
Refugees and humanitarian aid in Bangladesh and Thailand

In this section I describe and contextualize the refugee situations in Bangladesh and Thailand. In particular, I focus on how the delivery of humanitarian aid to the refugee camps in these contexts is organized, providing a broad map of the humanitarian landscape in each case. I describe the type of humanitarian actors who are present in each case, and their divisions of responsibilities in managing the refugee camps. Firstly however, it is useful with a brief introduction to the conflict in Burma that has given rise to both of these refugee situations. ¹

Conflict and displacement in Burma
Throughout the 19th century, the Kingdom of Burma was gradually annexed by British colonial rule and administrated as a province of British India. Subsequently, much of what is now known as Burma was created; its borders were fixed, constituting Burma as a political entity on the world map, and its political geography and topography was defined and recorded (Charney 2009:5, Myint-U 2001:220).

The British colonial administration divided Burma into the central lowlands of Burma Proper, and the remote, mountainous Frontier Areas. Burma Proper was primarily inhabited by the Burman majority population, and was governed by direct rule in a strongly coercive manner. The Frontier Areas were mainly populated by ethnic minorities and governed by indirect rule through local traditional rulers in a manner characterized by South as “benign neglect”. Crucially, lowland Burma and the frontier areas were never administratively integrated (South 2008:10-11, Callahan 2003:24). This division of colonial Burma contributed to shape ethnic identities, as it prevented the emergence of a pan-Burmese anti-colonial resistance movement and sense of identity. Instead, separation between the formerly loosely defined Burman majority and ethnic minority populations was reinforced. In the frontier areas, colonial indirect rule tended to “freeze” loosely structured socio-political arrangements and foster a stronger sense of ethnic group identity. Accordingly, from broad and often overlapping ethnic categories, British colonial rule created ethnic groups as bounded and

¹ In this thesis I use the term “Burma” rather than the official name “Myanmar”. In 1989, the military junta renamed the state Myanmar Naing-nyan, but “Burma” remains widely used. The use of “Burma” generally signifies a rejection of the (now former) military government’s legitimacy, and is preferred among most ethnic minority communities (South 2008:xv). This holds true for the refugees from ethnic minorities (as well as many humanitarian workers acting to support them) that I have encountered throughout my study. In recognition of the persecution and injustice that they have suffered at the hands of the military government, I adopt their usage.
mutually exclusive, and politicized ethnicity as the most salient identity marker in Burma (South 2008:8-9). Practices such as censuses further contributed to classify and define ethnic identities in colonial Burma (Charney 2009). Thus, colonial rule set the stage for ethnic divisions and conflicts after independence.

To international audiences, post-independence Burma is primarily known as a context of military dictatorship with an active pro-democracy movement. The ethnic politics in Burma is less well understood, although conflicts along ethnic lines already existed before the onset of military rule (McConnachie 2012). Burma was granted independence from the British in 1948, after a period of Japanese occupation during World War II. Initial attempts at federal arrangements for autonomous administration of ethnic minority areas were made after independence, but the new government was quickly challenged by multiple armed self-determination movements. Large swathes of the country were soon controlled by insurgent forces, who began to organize their own administrative structures parallel to the state-building efforts of the government (Charney 2009, South 2008, Smith 2007). The most long-standing armed struggle for ethnic self-determination has been led by the Karen National Union (KNU) and its military wing the Karen National Liberation Army (McConnachie 2012).

The definite turn to military rule in Burma came in 1962, when General Ne Win took power in a coup. The military takeover was partly a response to renewed discussions about federalism in Burma. Ne Win and the military believed federalism would destroy Burma, and perceived themselves as patriots and defenders of a unitary, independent state (Smith 2007). Aiming to protect the “national unity” the military government pursued an aggressive policy of “Burmanization” of language, culture and history, attempting to unite the country through the suppression of diversity (South 2008:28). Further, Ne Win’s counterinsurgency tactic was guided by the notorious “4 cuts strategy”, aiming to undermine the civilian support base of the insurgencies by looting, burning, raping, killing and extensive use of forced labour and confiscation of crops and resources in insurgent-controlled areas, causing massive displacement (South 2008:28-34; Lang 2002:37-38).

The civil war escalated in the 1960’s, but reached a stalemate in the late 1970’s. By then armed insurgent forces had largely retreated to the mountainous border areas. The government’s counterinsurgency tactics proved less effective in the borderlands, where insurgent armies controlled territory to which they could retreat. In addition, Burma’s socio-economic situation declined towards collapse. A vast conflict economy had been institutionalized, fuelling further conflict and enabling armed groups and warlords to enrich themselves through black-market trade in drugs and natural resources and taxation and extraction of the civilian population. While many rebel groups grew in strength, the general population lived in
poverty and insecurity with few available strategies for survival (Smith 2007:35-38; South 2008:35-36).

In 1988, popular discontent with the military government culminated in protests that became a watershed in Burmese recent history. Street protests by students, monks and ordinary citizens grew quickly to an unprecedented size and eventually led General Ne Win to resign in July. The following months protests continued, gaining symbolic strength and political vision through the return of Aung San Suu Kyi, daughter of independence hero Aung San (South 2008:43-44). Two new military governments did make important concessions to the protesters during their brief time in office, such as increased freedom for the media (Charney 2009:153). For a while, it seemed that the growing new democracy movement might bring military rule to an end. However, in September the military, under its new commander Saw Maung, violently struck down the protests, killing and injuring large numbers of civilians. A new military junta was established, which in 1990 surprised observers by organizing general elections. The party of Aung San Suu Kyi, National League for Democracy (NLD), won a landslide victory which the military government subsequently refused to recognize. Instead of transferring power to the NLD, the government released a new wave of terror against political dissidents (South 2008:45-46).

In the years following the 1988 uprising and the 1990 elections, insurgent forces continued to gradually lose territory and the “liberated areas” in the border zones shrank. As a consequence, the number of Burmese refugees fleeing to neighboring countries increased. Militarily and politically, the pro-democracy movement and the ethnic forces were never strong enough to initiate agendas for change and seriously challenge the government (Smith 2007:39-40; South 2008:55-56). The government now employed a new strategy, seeking to broker ceasefire agreements with individual insurgent groups. Between 1989 and 1995, some 25 insurgent organizations entered ceasefire agreements with the government. The ceasefires brought some relief in some areas, while others were sites of continued conflict and few results in terms of economic development. Other groups, such as the KNU, staunchly continued armed struggle against the government (South 2008:117-119).

During the last two decades, militarization and conflict in ethnic minority areas has continued alongside with some steps towards reform. In 2007, a new wave of popular protests similar to the uprising in 1988 broke out. However, the “Saffron Revolution”, as it has been called after the color of the monk’s robes, was violently suppressed, marking a serious setback for prospects of gradual democratization (Charney 2009:197). Elections, marred by fraud and manipulation, were further held in 2010 and resulted in a landslide victory for the military governments own civilian political party, the Union Solidarity and Development Party (ICG 2011b). While the state
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thus remains controlled by the military, albeit in new civilian guise, the
elections did mark the start of a process of political and economic reforms,
and Burma has continued to take steps towards democratization (ICG 2011a,
ICG 2014, ICG 2012). Observers argue that the increasingly severe
consequences of economic and political isolation, as well as a generational
shift within the military, have created a willingness to relinquish military
control to an unprecedented degree (ICG 2014).

The political reforms since 2011 has been accompanied by a peace process
which has managed to halt fighting in much of the country. However,
communal violence against Rohingya Muslims in Western Burma has
increased, and violence between the government and armed insurgencies
still occurs. The KNU has entered into a ceasefire agreement with the
military, and continued talks are ongoing. By contrast, in the Kachin and
Shan States, deadly fighting has continued in the past years (ICG 2014).
However, despite promising developments, conditions are still not deemed
to be conducive for refugees to return to Burma. Further, internal
displacement remains high with an estimated 230,000 internally displaced
persons in South-Eastern Burma and 140,000 in Arakan State in Western
Burma, where a total of 800,000 persons are estimated to lack Burmese
citizenship. Nearly 500,000 refugees from Burma have fled their country,
most of them to neighbouring countries (UNHCR 2014a). 2 Bangladesh and
Thailand are the two main host countries for Burmese refugees, and the
refugee situations in Bangladesh and Thailand are two of the most
protracted in the world.

The refugee situation in Bangladesh
The border between Arakan State in Western Burma, home of the Rohingya
Muslim minority, and Eastern Bangladesh has historically been fluid. Labour
migration across the border was encouraged during British colonization
when both Burma and Bangladesh were administered as parts of British
India. When the Japanese occupied Burma during World War Two, the
Rohingyas stayed loyal to the British in exchange for a promise of an
autonomous Muslim state in northern Arakan. At the end of the war the
British promise was not kept, and Rohingya aspirations to independence
were not well seen by the leaders of newly independent Burma (Lewa 2004,
Pittaway 2008). After the onset of military rule in 1962, repression and
discrimination of the Rohingyas increased. All military governments have
since consistently denied the Rohingyas Burmese citizenship. They have
been barred from military and civil service, and subject to persecution,
violence, and confiscation of property. In 1977, the military conducted a

2 In addition, an estimated two million Burmese are in Thailand as "illegal immigrants", many of which have
also fled political oppression and economic deprivation (South 2008:81).
registration exercise in preparation for a national census, aiming to screen out individuals considered “foreign”. This was accompanied by extreme violence; killings, rape, and destruction of mosques. More than 200,000 Rohingyas fled to Bangladesh as a result. Bangladesh was unwilling to accept the refugees, and was forced to request assistance from the UN to handle the influx. The refugees were eventually forced to return to Burma through a repatriation exercise characterized by tactics of violence and coercion, leaving about 10,000 Rohingya dead (Barnett and Finnemore 2004, Pittaway 2008).

Map 1. The Bangladeshi-Burmese border areas.
Map design: Magnus Strömgren

A decade later, during the unrest following the government’s refusal to recognize the 1990 election results, the military turned to the Rohingyas as a scapegoat and the level of repression increased again. This caused a new mass exodus: by March 1992 nearly 270,000 refugees had fled to Bangladesh, making this one of the largest refugee flights in history. Again, the majority of refugees were eventually repatriated. Despite the involvement of the UNHCR the repatriation exercise was far from voluntary and has
Approximately 20,000 refugees managed to remain in Bangladesh after the 1994/1995 repatriation, and these now make up the majority of the 32,000 refugees living in two official refugee camps, Kutupalong and Nayapara (UNHCR 2014b). These camps are managed by the Bangladeshi government. The government is responsible for refugee shelters, camp offices and law and order in the camps, and carries out the daily administration of the camps and coordinates delivery of services (UNHCR 2010:57). In addition, the government provides the bulk of health care services to the camps.

In addition to the government, the UNHCR is the main humanitarian actor in the camps, and coordinates and funds a large share of the humanitarian aid programmes implemented by partner agencies in the camps. Humanitarian aid is also provided by other UN organizations such as the World Food Program (WFP), and a number of international and national NGOs. However, education and health services are limited, and experiences of persecution in Burma, repeated forced repatriation movements, and lack of security and opportunities in Bangladesh have created a camp environment pervaded by fear and insecurity (Pittaway 2008, UNHCR 2013a). In 2013, the government of Bangladesh allowed Grade Six education to be provided in the camps for the first time. Previously, only primary education had been allowed (UNHCR 2013a).

The government retains strict control over all activities in the camps, and only authorizes selected NGOs to work in the official camps. Further, authorization is required for every specific program activity and the authorization process can take considerable time, making timely delivery of humanitarian aid seriously difficult (Refugees International 2011). Refugees have been prohibited from organizing in any way, and previous attempts among the refugees to organize themselves have been actively repressed by the government.3 However, in recent years UNHCR and WFP have established Camp Management Committees, Block Management Committees, and Food Management Committees with the intention of providing representative refugee leadership and forums for refugee participation in camp governance. However, while these committees provide institutionalized forums for consultation with refugees, they are not decision-making forums with any real authority over the allocation of resources or the content of humanitarian programmes (Paper III).

Although large-scale repatriation has not resumed after 1995, there has been continued pressure from Bangladeshi authorities to coerce refugees to

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3 For example interviews 33, UN worker Bangladesh, Cox’s Bazar 6 March 2011; 35, UN worker Bangladesh, Cox’s Bazar 7 March 2011; 51, UN worker Bangladesh, telephone interview 31 May 2011.
go back, involving abuses such as false accusations and imprisonment, beatings, and confiscation of belongings and ration books. The government has persistently stated that the refugees will not be allowed to stay and must go back, and repeatedly used coercion and violence to return refugees to conditions of insecurity, abuse and persecution in Burma. While the Burmese government argues that the Rohingya are Bangladeshi, not Burmese, the government of Bangladesh refuses to grant them citizenship or to allow local integration in Bangladesh. In effect, the Rohingya are stateless, not considered as nationals by any state (Pittaway 2008:95, 99). A small-scale repatriation program was initiated in 2007, giving rise to renewed hopes for a durable solution for at least some Rohingya refugees. However, the resettlement program was halted by the government in 2010 (Refugees International 2011, UNHCR 2013a).

Despite the conditions in the camps, due to continued violence and persecution in Arakan State Rohingya people have continued to flee to Bangladesh, but later arrivals have been denied refugee status and access to the two official camps. As a result, it is estimated that 200,000-500,000 unregistered Rohingya live in villages in Eastern Bangladesh and in camp-like settlements in the vicinity of the official refugee camps (Lewa 2003, UNHCR 2014b). The Bangladeshi government does not authorize provision of humanitarian aid to unregistered refugees outside the official camps (Refugees International 2011). Furthermore, several thousands of the refugees in the official camps are unregistered and do not receive food rations. Thus, only a minority of Rohingya refugees are actually recognized as such and eligible for humanitarian assistance.

Outbreaks of anti-Muslim violence in Western Burma since 2012 have displaced an estimated 140,000 people, mostly Rohingya, inside Burma (UNHCR 2014a). Thousands who have tried to cross the border to Bangladesh have been pushed back by the Bangladeshi government due to national security concerns, host fatigue and fear of a new mass influx of refugees (UNHCR 2013a).

The refugee situation in Thailand
Throughout Burma’s civil war, Thailand has been a main destination for political exiles, refugees from Burmese ethnic minorities, as well as ethnic insurgent armed forces. The first refugee camps on the Thai side of the Thai-Burmese border were established in 1984 when Karen refugees fled across the border following advances in the counterinsurgency campaign of the Burmese military against the KNU (Lang 2002). The KNU was formed in 1947 to fight for an independent Karen nation, and has since been engaged in armed struggle against the government. Pervasive human rights abuses committed as part of the government’s counterinsurgency campaign have
forced people in the border regions of Eastern Burma to live in constant fear, displacing many people several times during 60 years of war (South 2008).

Throughout the first decade after their establishment, the refugee camps in Thailand were relatively self-reliant as refugees could grow crops across the border, complemented by only minimal assistance by international NGOs already present in Thailand. Refugees organized and governed the camps modeled after the villages they left behind, and the Thai government accepted their “temporary” presence without much interference (Thompson 2008). When the first NGOs arrived, they were impressed by what they found to be well-organized Karen communities, and took an approach of working in partnership with the refugee governance structures (TBBC 2004:19).

With the gradual loss of territory controlled by the KNU and other minority forces, the stream of refugees into Thailand intensified in the 1990’s and the size of the refugee camps increased. In addition, between 1995 and 1998, 12 refugee camps were attacked and burnt by the Burmese military in cross-border operations. These changes resulted in a shift in Thai policy. The camps were consolidated into fewer, larger camps to be able to guarantee security and control the movements of the refugees, who were no longer allowed to travel or work outside of the camps. The UNHCR was also invited to provide protection and monitoring, and the international humanitarian presence in the camps increased significantly (Lang 2002; Thompson 2008). Links between the refugee populations and the Karen armed insurgency in Burma have remained strong, and the camps have provided important bases for Karen nationalism and various forms of political activism (South 2007:62-63).

Currently there are 120,000 refugees in nine camps along the border. However, only about 80,000 are officially registered as such, as registration has not been carried out after 2005. The majority of the refugees are Karen, but there are also refugees from minority groups such as Karenni, Shan, and Mon, as well as some Burman refugees (TBC 2014b).4 This study primarily focuses on humanitarian programmes in the three camps surrounding the border town of Mae Sot: Mae La, Umpiem Mai, and Nu Po. These camps are primarily inhabited by Karen refugees. Humanitarian aid and services are mainly provided by a network of about 20 national and international NGOs. The Thai government has historically taken a comparatively hands-off position, although military police are present in the camps to maintain law and order and monitor the movement of refugees. The UNHCR did not begin operations on the Thai-Burmese border until 1998, 14 years after the establishment of the camps, and have an unusually marginal role compared to many other camp contexts (Thompson 2008, Lang 2002). The landscape

4 “Burman” is the Burmese majority ethnic group.
of humanitarian actors on the Thai-Burma border is quite complex and diverse. The number of actors involved is high, and the makeup of actors and their division of responsibility varies from camp to camp and is subject to frequent changes.

Map 2. The Thai-Burmese border areas. Map design: Magnus Strömgren
Further, aid and services are coordinated and partly implemented by the refugees themselves through a system for community-based camp management. This model gives the refugees a considerable degree of self-governance and is significantly different from the way humanitarian assistance is usually administered (McConnachie 2012, Thompson 2008). The camps are governed by elected refugee committees; the Karen Refugee Committee (KRC) in seven camps, including the camps in the Mae Sot area, and the Karenni Refugee Committee, KnRC, in the two northernmost camps. A camp committee is responsible for the day to day running of each camp and coordinates services such as education, health, and justice (Banki and Lang 2008).

The KRC and its camp committees coordinate with the Thai authorities, who are responsible for camp security and has the ultimate authority over the camps, and with humanitarian organizations providing assistance and funds to the camps. While the agency and autonomy of the refugee governance structures are restrained by the power of the Thai government to dictate the conditions of their presence and by the ability of humanitarian organizations and donors to grant or deny funding, their role is nonetheless remarkable. The coordinating function performed by the Karen Refugee Committee is usually the responsibility of the host government, the UNHCR, or an agency designated lead agency by the UNHCR (Harrell-Bond and Voutira, 1995: 209–218).

While this model has enabled the camps to be run with relative efficiency and success (Banki and Lang 2008:66), it has also been criticized by donors and international organizations in recent years (McConnachie 2012). The model has been accused of contributing to “politization” of aid due to the KRC association with the Karen armed insurgency, and increased control and an increased role for the UNHCR is called for. Early NGO assistance often tended to uncritically support the refugee leadership and romanticize the Karen struggle, failing to consider the impacts of aid on the armed conflict or the representativeness of a primarily male and Christian refugee leadership (South 2008:93–95). In recent years, there has been increased pressure from donors and the UNHCR on the KRC and its NGO partners to improve representation, transparency and accountability (South 2008:94; Thompson 2008). While efforts to improve the quality of refugee self-governance are supported by NGOs and refugee leaders, there is a fear that donors and international agencies seek to dismantle the community-based camp management model entirely and remove ownership and decision-making power from the refugee community.5

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5 For example interviews 9, NGO worker Thailand, Bangkok 10 May 2010; 14, NGO worker Thailand, Mae Sot 29 October 2010; 15, CBO workers Thailand, Mae Sot 1 November 2010; 17, NGO worker Thailand, Mae Sot 1 November 2010.
In addition to the KRC and its subcommittees, there are also a number of other community-based organizations (CBOs), for example women’s organizations, youth organizations, and student organizations. Many of these CBOs are included in the governance structures, but are also involved in political activism relating to the situation in the camps and in Karen State in Burma. The most prominent of these is the Karen Women’s Organization (KWO), an organization founded in Burma in 1949 with a membership exceeding 49,000 women in Burma and in the Thai border camps (KWO 2014). The KWO is running a large number of programmes in the camps, which range from education, leadership training and capacity-building for women, community awareness-raising programmes, for example on women’s rights and violence against women, social welfare programmes for children and the elderly, income-generating activities, and sexual and gender based violence (SGBV) case management. In addition, KWO activities for peacebuilding and social welfare in Burma have recently increased (KWO 2013).

Since 2005 a large-scale resettlement programme has been ongoing, and to date more than 80,000 refugees have left the camps to be resettled in a Western country. However, people have continued to seek safety in the camps, so the total camp population has not decreased significantly. Recently, developments in Burma have raised hopes that political reforms and the still fragile peace in Eastern Burma may eventually create conditions where repatriation is possible (UNHCR 2013b).
The refugee camp and the politics of gender equality

This thesis focuses on how humanitarian organizations construct, interpret and apply gender equality norms in the particular context of refugee camps. In this section, I discuss the function of refugee camps in governing people categorized as “refugees”. I thereby seek to provide an understanding of the refugee camp as a context for the implementation of gender equality policies and programmes. Further, I introduce postcolonial feminist theory as a perspective which, in this thesis, is essential to understanding the politics and the power effects of gender equality interventions in the context of refugee camps. Drawing on postcolonial feminism, I highlight three central themes and analytical points of departure.

First, I make clear that the promotion of gender equality in refugee camps intervenes not only in gendered relations of power, but in a situation of multiple and interlinked power relations and forms of oppression. Inquiring into the effects of humanitarian gender equality policies and practices, this wider context of power, privilege and marginalization must be taken into account.

Second, I argue that humanitarian gender equality projects are sites where images of humanitarian selves as well as refugee others are constructed. Constructing gender equality as a policy goal in humanitarian aid both entails the construction of a story about the “problem” of gender inequality in refugee camps and a story about the role and purpose of humanitarian aid in the contemporary world. Self-representation is therefore one important aspect of humanitarian gender equality policies and programmes that I seek to capture in my analysis.

Third, I contend that even in the refugee camp context, characterized by highly asymmetrical power relations, the meaning and impact of gender equality norms and projects is not predetermined or self-evident. Whether a practice has oppressive or emancipatory effects depends on context and must be analysed in relation to contextually specific configurations of power and governance. In addition, despite the obvious inequalities between refugees and humanitarian organizations, refugees are not merely passive recipients of gender equality norms, but appropriate, negotiate and modify them for their own uses, further complicating issues of agency, ownership and the effects of humanitarian gender equality interventions.
The refugee camp: a technology of care and control

The refugee camp emerged as a standardized model for the management of mass displacement by the end of World War Two. By this time, the management of refugees was primarily framed as a military problem rather than a social or humanitarian one: the establishment of refugee camps took place as part of a concern to maintain order and control the movement of refugees. Camps were often modeled on military barracks, and many work and concentration camps in Germany were repurposed as refugee camps when the war ended. Thus, refugee camps were institutionally and spatially built on existing technologies and spaces for mass control. The evolution of the modern international refugee regime, marked by the founding of the UNHCR and the adoption of the Refugee Convention in 1951, contributed to reframe the “problem” of refugees as a social and humanitarian issue. From this perspective, the refugee camp enabled interventions on behalf of the health and welfare of refugees (Malkki 1995:498-500). The refugee camp thus evolved as a “technology of care and control”, enabling both provision of life-saving relief and spatial containment of “people out of place” (Malkki 1992:34).

Today, refugee camps remain a preferred model for the provision of humanitarian aid to refugees. Humanitarian organizations perceive refugee camps as facilitating efficient delivery of aid by enabling spatial concentration and control of refugees (Verdirame and Harrell-Bond 2005:288). The global majority of refugees, however, do not actually live in camps, as many instead “self-settle” outside of camps in urban or rural areas where they remain largely unassisted by the humanitarian aid community (Bakewell 2008). In 2012, the UNHCR estimated that over three million refugees, constituting about one third of all refugees under the agency’s mandate, lived in camps (UNHCR 2013c:7). In addition, significant shares of internally displaced persons under the mandate of the UNHCR also live in camps. 6 Out of the five million Palestinian refugees that are assisted by the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestinian Refugees, about one third (1.5 million) live in camps (UNRWA 2014). The advocacy forum Urban Refugees argues that 58 per cent of all refugees now live in cities (urban-refugees.org 2014). Nevertheless, encampment remains a key global strategy to make refugees governable.

The governance of refugee camps involves complex relations of authority and divisions of labour. Formally, camps are under the jurisdiction of the host state, whose authority is enforced by the presence of police or paramilitary personnel, typically focusing on controlling the movement of refugees and punishing offences committed by refugees. However, refugees rarely have access to the proper legal system of the host state. The day-to-day

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6 33.3 million people were internally displaced by end-2013. See UNHCR 2014c:2.
running of camps and the distribution of material assistance is carried out by UN humanitarian organizations and humanitarian NGOs, usually coordinated by the UNHCR (Harrell-Bond and Voutira 1995:210). As a result, the refugee camp is an enclave ambiguously situated outside of the social and political systems of the host state, governed by a constellation of international humanitarian organizations. As the Bangladeshi and Thai camp contexts exemplify, the composition of these constellations varies considerably between different camps, as do their specific divisions of responsibility and relations of authority. The involvement and role of refugees themselves in the provision of aid and the governance of the camps also differ. Thus, the social world of the refugee camp is populated by a variety of actors and characterized by complex and unequal relations of power. As Harrell-Bond and Voutira has noted, “[a]lthough aid is the unifying principle that brings these diverse groups together, the administration of aid requires a whole machinery of power, the struggle and exercise of which defines the social reality of each refugee camp” (Harrell-Bond and Voutira 1995:211). Although the power relations that shape the camp as a social space are clearly not uniform across different camp contexts, the refugee camp is nonetheless a central global technology for the governance of refugees.

As Hindess has demonstrated, the portioning of the human population into discrete territorial entities is a precondition to make it governable (Hindess 2000, 2002). Accordingly, refugees, as “residual” populations who have been excluded from citizenship in a nation state, must be governed through other mechanisms. The international refugee regime constitutes such complementary mechanisms, relying on technologies such as refugee camps to govern the “misfits” who have been pushed into the gaps of the nation-state system but are still an inevitable part of it (Haddad 2008:7). Refugees are anomalies that simultaneously threaten the order of nation states and, by being its constitutive other, reaffirms the normality of territorial citizenship (Lui 2004, Soguk 1999).

Indeed, the possibility of being a refugee is inevitably bound up with a world order of territorial nation states, where spatializing and nationalizing political belonging and community constitutes the twin strategy upon which modern political rule depends (Lui 2004, Hindess 2000, Hindess 2002). Through this system of governance, territorial belonging, an understanding of people as sedentary and a right for states to control immigration and distinguish between those who belong and those who do not is made to appear natural. Malkki (1992) compellingly describes how this “national order of things” is made to appear natural and necessary through metaphors linking land, nation, culture and identity. Images of the nation or the people as a tree, expressions such as “national soil”, “motherland” or “fatherland”, and practices such as bringing a can of soil into exile or kissing the ground.
when returning all exemplify the strong links between territory, people and identity. Nations and cultures are perceived as “rooted” in particular territories.

The naturalized link between people and place makes refugees an aberration; people out of place, people who have been “uprooted”. The common description of refugees as uprooted conjures up images of violent rupture and constructs an image of refugees as broken people who have had their natural and necessary connection to the soil or territory severed. “In the national order of things, the rooting of peoples is not only normal; it is also perceived as a moral and spiritual need” (Malkki 1992:30). “Uprootedness” thus becomes a pathological, unnatural state, where people have lost their cultural, moral and spiritual rooting. Consequently, Malkki shows how refugees have often been problematized as amoral, dangerous, and prone to terrorism and crime (1992:32). In this context, the refugee camp does not only operate as a technology of control, but also as a technology of care, making refugees available to a range of therapeutic interventions seeking to rehabilitate, reform, and develop them. Not considered to possess the capabilities of self-regulation, responsibility and autonomy required for liberal citizenship, humanitarian interventions in sites such as refugee camps seek to foster these capabilities and make refugees fit to re-enter the national order of things (Lippert 1999, Lui 2004).

While the figure of the modern refugee was born in Europe, the end of the Cold War brought fundamental changes in the focus of humanitarian aid organizations. The prototypical image of the refugee as white, male political dissident fleeing communist states faded, and research and policy attention turned towards the “increased” flow of refugees from the South to the North, and towards the phenomenon of “complex political emergencies” (Chimni 1998, Duffield 2001a:12). Human displacement was increasingly perceived as a problem of underdevelopment, weak states and governance failures in the South that should be addressed through development, rather than a problem of individual persecution that should be addressed through asylum (Chimni 2009, Chimni 1999, Lui 2004, Duffield 2008).

This “new humanitarianism” (Duffield 2001a) has been criticized for being implicated in a system of global governance working to contain migration from the South and legitimate increasing intervention into Southern states (Chimni 1999; Duffield 2008). The move to link humanitarian relief and

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7 In this thesis I use the terms “North” and “South” to describe and distinguish between economically and politically privileged and marginalized states and communities. While the terms loosely refer to the northern and southern hemispheres, privileged and marginalized global positions obviously do not neatly correspond to this geographical division. North/South is therefore not used strictly as geographical terms but rather as political designations that attempts to distinguish between the “haves” and the “have-nots” in the global order. While the term “West” overlaps with the term North to a significant extent it is slightly more narrow, roughly denoting Western Europe and North America. The term West is used when I discuss states, actors and cultural expressions originating in these regions. See Mohanty 2003: 226-227 for further discussion.
long-term development is supported by a re-problematization of security where underdevelopment is seen as dangerous, and development aid (in humanitarian or more traditionally developmental forms) provides ways to govern the dangerous global “borderlands” (Duffield 2001a:98-100, 2001b). Following the end the Cold War, the focus of humanitarianism shifted from assistance to refugees to a civilizing project of reform of states in the South seen to cause displacement, disorder and insecurity. In this “post-colonial imperial order”, humanitarianism constitutes the “caring arm of imperialism” (Chimni 2009:13, 23).

Thus, in the contemporary world the refugee camp is not only a temporary arrangement for the management of emergencies. Rather, it has evolved into a technology for the indefinite containment of large numbers of people. After the end of the Cold War in particular, refugee camps have increasingly become semi-permanent, closed villages and cities where refugees in some cases live their entire lives. The average duration of a refugee situation before a solution is found is now 17 years – far from temporary (Adelman 2008:8). Indeed, a regime of governance heavily relying on encampment of refugees, “the humanitarian apparatus has been transformed into a custodial regime for innocent people” (Verdirame and Harrell-Bond 2005: back cover).

Further, today over 80 per cent of refugees globally are hosted in the South (UNHCR 2013c:6), where also virtually all refugee camps are located. The shift towards promoting repatriation as the preferable solution to refugee situations has reinforced and legitimated the continued reliance on encampment; when “asylum is regarded as temporary, camps become ‘acceptable’ as intermediate holding grounds until repatriation is effected” (Verdirame and Harrell-Bond 2005:288). Together with measures such as the externalization of asylum in the North, refugee camps serve the purpose of keeping refugees in the South (Hyndman and Giles 2011). From the perspective of host states in the South, refugee camps are perceived as necessary to cope with the influx of refugees in poor and resource-constrained societies, as camps makes it possible to shift the responsibility for the refugees to international humanitarian organizations. However, encampment is unlikely to benefit the host society in the long term, as it prevents the refugees from being part of society and contributing to its development, creates a parallel aid-infused economy, and undermines local institutions (Verdirame and Harrell-Bond 2005:271).

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8 This securitization of development echoes back to a colonial era, argues Duffield (2005), and is only new when compared to the Cold War focus on state security.

The term “the global borderlands” is in this thesis used to denote states and regions in the South that are perceived as sources of instability and threat by actors in the North. As such, the global borderlands are described as sites of emergencies, conflicts, state failures, and complex political emergencies. See Duffield 2000b.
Thus, the existence of refugee camps is intertwined with global relations of power and inequality. Encampment of refugees is a strategy that seeks to contain human displacement far from the wealthy North, underpinned by a representation of displacement as a problem caused by states and societies in the South. This representation obscures that the causes behind poverty, conflicts and crises that force people to flee are often rooted in colonial legacies and histories of exploitation and marginalization in the global economy. As Calhoun notes, the global causes of displacement are obscured by an “emergency imaginary” that has come to dominate modern humanitarianism. Representations using the term emergency suggest a deviation from normalcy and, crucially, imply that refugee situations and other “humanitarian emergencies” are exceptions from a usually well-working and legitimate normal order rather than a part of this order:

*They represent as sudden, unpredictable, and short term what are commonly gradually developing, predictable and enduring clusters of events and interactions. And they simultaneously locate in particular settings what are in fact crises produced at least partially by global forces and dislocate the standpoint of observation from the wealthy global North to a view from nowhere* (Calhoun 2008:86).

Refugees and refugee camps are not simply accidental features of the contemporary world, but they are produced by processes and practices such as nationalism, colonialism and racism, immigration policies and state violence, war, climate change, and economic “development” (Malkki 1995:496).

Refugees in camps are typically not allowed to work or to move freely outside of the camp. In Thailand as well as in Bangladesh, refugees are denied freedom of movement and prohibited from working outside of the camps. When they do so anyway in order to make a living, supplementing often insufficient aid rations, they put themselves in a legally precarious position where violence and exploitation is frequent (Brees 2008, UNHCR 2007a). In the case of Thailand, restrictions on the movement of refugees have been more strictly enforced since the military coup in 2014, eliminating informal openings for refugee self-reliance that previously existed (TBC 2014a:5). As Hyndman and Giles observe, “[w]hile refugees are nominally covered by human rights covenants and refugee law, ‘temporary’ camps have become extra-legal spaces of liminality where rights are optional”. Humanitarian assistance is given to refugees out of philanthropy because they cannot help themselves – not because they are entitled to enjoy their basic rights (Hyndman and Giles 2011:367).

These aspects of the conditions in refugee camps are pointedly captured by Agamben’s conceptualization of the camp as a space of exception, a space where regular laws cease to apply and where people are reduced to “bare life”
Agamben (1998). Further, Agamben argues that humanitarian organizations are unable to perceive the people they help as anything but bare life (1998:133). Thus, refugees in camps are seen as lives to be saved, but not as people with a political voice. They are “expected to be passive recipients of aid, and the camp is the location where that passivity is expected to be played out” (Edkins 2000:14). Due to these expectations, humanitarian agencies and host governments often neglect, bypass or even repress the political activities and self-governance structures that nonetheless exist in refugee camps (Turner 2004, Kaiser 2004, McConnachie 2012). As Malkki notes, refugees “stop being specific persons and become pure victims in general…Humanitarian practices tend to silence refugees” (Malkki 1996:378).

Yet, refugees are not only governed as lives to be saved, but also as people who need to be developed, modernized, and improved. As Dillon and Reid argue, contemporary global governance is a hybrid order where marginalized groups, such as refugees, are targeted both as “bare life” to be saved but kept in check, and “adaptive life” to be reformed and improved to fit in a liberal world order (Dillon and Reid 2000). The site of the refugee camp is a case in point where such hybrid practices of governance are enacted. The containment and the development of refugees are interlinked, both serving the purpose of preventing the dangerous effects of “underdevelopment” from spreading beyond the global borderlands (Duffield 2010). The refugee camp is a technology which enables exclusion as well as reform: it encompasses “mechanisms of power which, even today, are disposed around the abnormal individual, to brand him and to alter him” (Foucault 1991a:199-200).

However, having said all this it is also important to emphasize that refugee camps are not simply spaces of complete misery. They are also spaces where everyday life goes on much like in other contexts. Refugee camps are places where people marry, have children, and build homes, where children play and go to school, and where people seek to make ends meet and create a life for themselves to the best of their ability. As McConnachie argues in her study of competing forms of law and justice in the refugee camps on the Thai-Burma border, it is essential to recognize that the camp is

an exceptional space, but not a unique one; an unusually bounded and controlled community, but a community nevertheless and one subject to many of the same stresses and strains as other subaltern communities, including the influence of historical, political, and cultural forces that extend far beyond the community boundaries (McConnachie 2011:35).9

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9 For further discussion see also McConnachie 2013.
While it is important to recognize that camps are sites where the human rights of refugees are suspended and where they are often dehumanized and depoliticized, it is equally important to question a generalized image of refugee camps as aberrant spaces of chaos and social breakdown. Such a representation of refugee camps fails to recognize the historical and political circumstances within which they exist, and it also fails to recognize that refugees in camps, just as other people, are not mere victims but people who do what they can to forge a living in the midst of the constraining circumstances in which they find themselves.

As Turner notes, refugee camps are sites where familiar processes of urbanization and modernity take place, albeit often over a shorter period of time than in many other contexts (Turner 2004:2004). In addition, refugee camps are highly internationalized contexts, where refugees interact with a myriad of UN agencies, NGOs, and officials from host and donor countries. In these interactions, refugees are in a subordinated position of dependency towards actors who control resources and opportunities which they desperately need. None of this is unique to the refugee camp context, but many of the same patterns and relationships can be found in countless contexts in the South where development aid plays a significant role. However, the high degree of internationalization and the intensity of the encounter between people in globally privileged and marginalized positions, coupled with the spatial containment of the camp population, are some defining features of the refugee camp context.

The politics of gender equality in refugee camps: A postcolonial feminist reading

How, then, do humanitarian gender equality policies and programmes play out in the context of the refugee camp? What do humanitarian efforts to promote gender equality in refugee camps represent, and how can they be understood and theorized? In this thesis, I draw on postcolonial feminist theory in order to approach the construction, interpretation and application of gender equality norms in refugee camps. Doing so allows me to take account of the multiple, overlapping relations of power that characterizes the refugee camp and shapes how gender equality comes to operate as a governing tool in this context. Building on the above discussion, I argue that the refugee camp can usefully be conceptualized as a “contact zone”. Contact zones are social spaces where disparate cultures meet, clash, and grapple with each other, often in highly asymmetrical relations of domination and subordination – like colonialism, slavery, or their aftermaths as they are lived out across the globe today (Pratt 1992:4).
Conceptualizing the refugee camp as a contact zone pointedly captures the encounter between refugee groups and humanitarian aid organizations: the unequal relations of power that characterizes this encounter; and the refugee camp’s embeddedness in colonial legacies and global inequalities. In addition, as I will expand on further below, thinking of the refugee camp as a contact zone also allows me to highlight that despite its asymmetrical relations of power it is a space where negotiation, contestation and resistance takes place.

Below, I outline three central themes and analytical points of departure that I suggest are especially pertinent to a critical examination of the politics of gender equality in the refugee camp context. I argue that it is important to understand the refugee camp as a context shaped by multiple global and local inequalities; to be sensitive to processes of representation and self-representation; and to analyse the meaning and effects of gender equality projects in relation to the local contexts where they take place.

**Recognizing multiple inequalities**

First, to understand the gender politics in the refugee camp context, I find it essential to stress that gendered positions and identities are always constituted in relation to other hierarchies, such as race and class. Thus, women’s position in a given local context simply cannot be understood in isolation from the effects of these other hierarchies and forms of oppression (Hurtado 1989, Mohanty 2003). A singular focus on gender as the basis for struggle, typical of liberal, Western feminism, universalizes the experiences of white, middle-class women and obscures the impact of racial and economic marginalization in the lives of countless women globally:

*What is problematical about this kind of use of “women” as a group, as a stable category of analysis, is that it assumes an ahistorical, universal unity between women based on a generalized notion of their subordination. Instead of analytically demonstrating the production of women as socioeconomic political groups within particular local contexts, this analytical move limits the definition of the female subject to gender identity, completely bypassing social class and ethnic identities (Mohanty 2003:31).*

In contrast, postcolonial and Southern feminisms focus on gender in relation to global and local hierarchies of race and class, as a part of a broader liberation struggle (Mohanty 2003:54, Bacigalupo 2003, Spurlin 2010, McFadden 2005). The marginalized position of refugee women in camps is not only, or even primarily, constituted by their gender. Their exclusion from national citizenship, their race and their location in the South, their marginal position in the global economy, and their spatial confinement in a refugee camp all mediate what it means to be a refugee woman (as well as a refugee
man) in a particular context. Yet, many policies on gender/women and refugees as well as many analyses of the situation of refugee women use the category of “woman” as a primary organizing concept, a move which “essentializes and reinforces the primacy of female difference over ethnic, class, caste, and other dimensions of difference” (Hyndman 2004:200). An understanding of the dynamics of gender in refugee camps is bound to be seriously incomplete if one “assumes men and women are already constituted as sexual-political subjects prior to their entry into the arena of social relations” instead of recognizing how “women are produced through these very relations” (Mohanty 1988:68).

“Global” feminist movements have often failed to understand the intersecting forms of marginalization that structure women’s lives differently in different locations. Thereby they have failed to respond to the majority of women’s needs and interests and “elided the diversity of women’s agency in favour of a universalized Western model of women’s liberation that celebrates individuality and modernity” (Grewal and Kaplan 1994). This has led to critique of feminism as a form of Western cultural imperialism (Mohanty 1988). Nevertheless, transnational and cross-cultural feminist activism and analysis that avoids this universalizing tendency is crucial to understand and address the “scattered hegemonies” that shape global landscapes of inequality and marginalization:

Yet we know that there is an imperative need to address the concerns of women around the world in the historicized particularity of their relationship to multiple patriarchies as well as to international economic hegemonies...We need to articulate the relationship of gender to scattered hegemonies such as global economic structures, patriarchal nationalisms, “authentic” forms of tradition, local structures of domination, and legal-juridical oppression of multiple levels. Transnational feminist practices require this kind of comparative work rather than the relativistic linking of “differences” undertaken by proponents of “global feminism”; that is, to compare multiple, overlapping, and discrete oppressions rather than to construct a theory of hegemonic oppression under a unified category of gender (Grewal and Kaplan 1994:17-18).

If gender cannot be separated from the multiple other axes of inequality that structure the refugee camp context, it is clear that the meaning and effects of humanitarian gender equality projects must be analysed in relation not only to gender but also in relation other relations of power based on race, location, and global socio-economic positions. Whether this is intended by humanitarian policymakers and organizations or not, gender equality policies and programmes does not only intervene in gendered relations of power, but are produced by, and contributes to produce, hierarchical relations between refugees and humanitarians, and the South and the North. With Mohanty, I contend that “cross-cultural feminist work must be
attentive to the micropolitics of context, subjectivity, and struggle, as well as
to the macropolitics of global economic and political systems and processes”
(Mohanty 2003:223). The relevant question is therefore not how and to what
extent humanitarian gender equality policy and practice impacts gender
relations in refugee camps, but how it (re)shapes a broader situation of
overlapping global and local power relations.

Examining representations of selves and others
Furthermore, I suggest that gender equality projects, in refugee camps as in
other locations, are arenas where representations of selves and others are
constructed. As postcolonial feminist studies have shown, ideas about gender
roles and gender equality have frequently been mobilized in imperial
governing projects and used as markers of national or ethnic identity
In the construction of the nation or the ethnic or cultural group, women are
assigned the role as transmitters of cultural values and tradition and
constructed as cultural and biological reproducers of the collectivity (Yuval-
Davis 1996, Yuval-Davis 1997b, Yuval-Davis 1997a, Anthias and Yuval-Davis
2005). The construction of women and women’s roles as cultural boundary
markers has been central to the making of difference between colonizers and
colonized, and to the legitimation of colonialism:

Many of these “cultural” conflicts between Western colonizing cultures and colonized
indigenous cultures involved issues pertaining to women’s roles and female sexuality,
rendering the figure of the colonized woman and important site of struggle between
“Western Culture” and the “Culture” of the colony...In these conflicts, Western colonial
powers often depicted indigenous practices as symptoms of the “backwardness and
barbarity” of Third-World cultures in contrast to the “progressiveness of Western
culture”. The figure of the colonized woman became a representation of the
oppressiveness of the entire “cultural tradition” of the colony (Narayan 1997:17).

Colonial discourses frequently used women’s situation in “other” cultures to
create an image of the superiority of Western culture and legitimate colonial
rule. Accordingly, Spivak has argued that “white men saving brown women
from brown men” is a fundamental logic underpinning colonial projects
(Spivak 1994:93). In addition, I suggest that representing “other” women as
in need of “saving” can also be a useful strategy to make a population
governable. As Fanon shows in his analysis of the meaning of the veil in the
context of colonial rule and resistance struggles in Algeria, colonial
authorities sought to undermine resistance to their rule through the
“liberation” of Algerian women:
“If we want to destroy the structure of Algerian society, its capacity for resistance, we must first of all conquer the women; we must go and find them behind the veil where they hide themselves and in the houses where the men keep them out of sight.” It is the situation of woman that was accordingly taken as the theme of action. The dominant administration solemnly undertook to defend this woman, pictured as humiliated, sequestered, cloistered...it described the immense possibilities of woman, unfortunately transformed by the Algerian man into an inert, demonetized, indeed dehumanized object. The behavior of the Algerian was very firmly denounced and described as medieval and barbaric (Fanon 1970:23-24).

Thus, representations of Algerian women’s subordination were used to demonize Algerian culture and legitimate colonial rule. It was imagined that the Algerian woman would willingly be “liberated” from her situation and thereby enable greater colonial control over Algerian society. “Converting the woman, winning her over to foreign values, wrenching her free from her status, was at the same time achieving a real power over the man and attaining a practical, effective means of destructuring Algerian culture” (Fanon 1970:24-25).

Notions of women’s situation or roles as an indicator of cultural advancement, and a basis for making distinctions between “backward” and “modern” cultures, appear in a number of contemporary incarnations as well. For example, discourses and practices of liberal peacekeeping uses norms of gender equality to legitimize interventions that frequently continues to silence and marginalize “other” women (and men) (Hudson 2012, Väyrynen 2004). The existence of violence and discrimination against women in sites where peacebuilding operations are deployed is taken as evidence of the inability of these communities to govern themselves and of their need to be reformed and improved through external interventions (Reeves 2012). Violence and discrimination against women is framed as an expression of underdevelopment, and gender equality is constructed as one aspect of a liberal norm package which prescribes the correct path towards development, stability and security. Further, the US military intervention in Afghanistan was represented as morally legitimate and necessary in order to free Afghan women from the repressive rule of the Taliban (Cole 2008, Shepherd 2006). A “tradition-modernity split”, where the West is represented as a site of “freedom” and democratic choice” while other parts of the world are represented as “backward” and characterized by oppression, underpin many approaches to issues of gender and sexuality in contemporary global politics and governance (Grewal and Kaplan 2001:669).

Representations of women in the South as oppressed and victimized do not only obfuscate their agency and the heterogeneity of their realities, but it also serves as the implicit basis for a Western feminist self-representation as liberated, independent and modern. In Western feminist discourses, “Third
World women” are constructed “as a homogeneous, ‘powerless’ group often located as implicit victims of particular cultural and socio-economic systems” (Mohanty 1988:66). As Spivak has demonstrated, these representations effectively silence women in the South; a position as helpless victims in need of salvation is no place from where one can easily speak and be heard (Spivak 1994). While these representations of women in the South can be traced back to colonial discourses and governing practices, they have gained renewed salience in global governance through the adoption and institutionalization of feminist concepts and goals in recent decades.

In the global governance of refugees, notions of gender inequality and violence have frequently been mobilized to construct societies and regions from where refugees originate as dysfunctional, underdeveloped and in need of intervention. In contrast, states that receive or provide aid to refugees can play the part of the morally superior, modern, and gender-equal savior (Macklin 1995). In media campaigns in the West, refugee women have often been portrayed as “exotic, vulnerable other” and graphic tales of sexual violence, female genital mutilation and gender discrimination have been deployed to remind donors and decision-makers why these “other” women need their aid and protection (Parpart 1993:36, Macklin 1995, Baines 2004). Moreover, research has demonstrated that when refugee women present themselves as “particularly vulnerable and helpless” when applying for asylum in Northern states, they have a higher rate of acceptance (Razack 1996, Razack 1995). As Oswin argues, in such asylum processes a “trajectory from backward Third World culture to evolved First World culture is constructed whereby the refugee woman (as universal female subject) wants to become the liberal, rational, autonomous subject by gaining entry to Western countries” (Oswin 2001:352). The portrayal of refugee women as victims of barbaric underdeveloped cultures sustains a binary between “refugee-producers” and “refugee-receivers” that allows Western states to appear as superior and reaffirms global relations of power. In addition, it obscures the fact that violence and discrimination against women goes on within refugee receiving states as well (Macklin 1995:264).

In humanitarian aid to refugees in sites such as refugee camps, attempts to promote gender equality are frequently represented as efforts to develop and modernize the refugee population. Gender equality programmes, Grabska argues, are part of an “accelerated modernity project” that aims to teach refugees how to be “modern” (Grabska 2011:88). This project is further linked to the rebuilding of better, more developed societies when refugees return. This is pointedly expressed by an NGO representative in Kakuma refugee camp in Kenya, explaining the role of workshops that provide training on topics such as gender equality, human rights and peacebuilding: “[t]hrough these workshops, we can educate them [refugees] and make them a bit more civilized, modern. They will be ready to go back to their countries.
and re-build them” (Grabska 2011:86). Further, Turner demonstrates how refugees in a camp in Tanzania perceived humanitarian gender equality policies as an assault on traditional forms of authority and social order in favor of high-speed modernization. This project challenged not only male authority but also the authority of elders, as they were less able to navigate the new “modern” order (Turner 2004). In a study of approaches to domestic violence in Dzaleka refugee camp in Malawi, Carlson observes that attempts to address violence against refugee women often takes the form of a preoccupation with changing and developing the “other”, based on a view of African societies as flawed (Carlson 2005).

However, refugee women do not remain passive in the face of disempowering representations. Just as women seeking asylum, women in refugee camps may portray themselves as “victims” in accordance with humanitarian expectations in order to facilitate their own survival and improve their situation. While these images of refugee women do perpetuate their marginalization, actively using them to navigate a situation marked by severe constraints is a particular form of agency that is made available to refugee women through humanitarian representations of them as victims of barbaric cultures (Freedman 2010:600-601).

**Contextualizing agency, meaning and effects**

I have argued above that it is important to be sensitive to how gender equality has been, and continues to be, intertwined in global hierarchies and mobilized in colonial, developmental, and geopolitical governing projects. This claim, however, does not imply that the promotion of gender equality in refugee camps can be dismissed simply as a form of imperialism. While recognizing that the promotion of gender equality is always shaped by existing relations of power, it is also important to acknowledge that the meanings and effects of particular ideas or practices cannot be assumed to be universal. Moreover, despite the obvious inequalities between refugees and humanitarian organizations, refugees are not merely passive recipients of gender equality norms, but appropriate, negotiate and modify them for their own uses. Whether humanitarian gender equality policies have oppressive or emancipatory effects can therefore not be determined or theorized in any generalized way, but must be analysed in context.

Illustrating this point, Mohanty argues that the fact that women mother in a variety of societies is not in itself more than a descriptive generalization that does not tell us anything about women’s status or the relations of power that shapes these various societies. Accordingly, it is the meaning and value that is attached to mothering in these societies that is important. What it means that women mother can thus be different in different contexts although the activities of mothering are similar. “The distinction between the act of mothering and the status attached to it is a very important one – one
that needs to be stated and analysed contextually” (Mohanty 1988:68). Likewise, the specific meanings attached to practices such as women wearing a veil or working in service occupations varies, and these practices cannot be assumed to constitute universal indicators of women’s subordination (Mohanty 1988:75-76).

Thus, even in the context of the refugee camp with its highly asymmetrical power relations, the meaning or impact of gender equality projects cannot be taken for granted. Effects can be contradictory, multifaceted, and vary across contexts. For example, practices such as privileging women as recipients of food rations for their families, intended to increase women’s control over vital resources, have been shown to increase women’s domestic labour because the context of their everyday lives in relation to factors such as the spatial layout of the camps and the composition of food rations have been poorly understood (Hyndman 2000, El-Bushra 2000). Efforts to increase women’s participation in income-generating activities can both reproduce assumptions about appropriate femininity, and contribute to expand such norms. Local gender norms and power relations must therefore be understood in order to understand how humanitarian programmes might affect them (Hyndman and de Alwis 2008).

The literature on gender and forced displacement has also demonstrated that despite the oppressive effects of confinement in camps, the camp context can also provide opportunities for new forms of community, political organization and new roles for women (Rajasingham-Senanayake 2004, Schrivers 1999, Szcepanikova 2005, Indra 1999). Such processes can be facilitated by humanitarian gender equality interventions. Among Guatemalan refugee women in Mexico, Baines concludes that UNHCR programmes strengthened the role of already existing women’s organizations, provided forums where women could meet and learn about their rights, and contributed to challenge violence against women. Thereby humanitarian gender equality programmes contributed to open up new political spaces to refugee women that other Guatemalan refugee women did not have. Humanitarian organizations gave refugees access to a language of rights and a transnational political arena that they appropriated and used in their struggle to return, and in women’s struggle to sustain changes achieved in exile upon return (Baines 1999). However, previous studies has also shown that supporting groups of organized refugee women cannot be assumed to benefit all refugee women, as refugee communities are not homogeneous with regards to factors such as religion, literacy, and class (Fiddian-Qasmiyeh 2010).

As Baines’ study cited above exemplifies, refugee women actively appropriate and use ideas about gender equality and human rights introduced by humanitarian organizations. This is an example of “transculturalization”: a term used to describe
how subordinated and marginal groups select and invent from materials transmitted
to them by a dominant or metropolitan culture. While subjugated peoples cannot
readily control what emanates from the dominant culture, they do determine to
varying extents what they absorb into their own, and what they use it for.
Transculturataion is a phenomenon of the contact zone (Pratt 1992:6).

Transculturataion is one form of hybridization, the construction of new ideas,
identities and practices in the contact zone, drawing both on influences from
dominant and subordinated cultures. However, as Shohat, points out, it is
important to “discriminate between the diverse modalities of hybridity, for
example, forced assimilation, internalized self-rejection, political cooptation,
social conformism, cultural mimicry, and creative transcendence” (Shohat
1992:110). Thus, in the refugee camp, both changes in behavior that result
from the need to adapt to the functioning of the humanitarian aid machinery
in order to survive, and changes resulting from the creative appropriation of
rights language in order to pursue the interests and political agendas of the
refugees are forms of hybridization, but their power effects are very different.

However, it is also important to note that ideas about gender equality are
not necessarily absent in refugee communities before the arrival of
humanitarian organizations. Refugees come from societies with varying
gender norms and gender relations, and obviously this remains the case in
refugee camps. In the Thai camps, refugee women’s organizations had an
influential role before the arrival of aid agencies. Despite this, humanitarian
organizations in this context tend to assume that gender equality norms are
by default “foreign” to the refugee camp communities. Such assumptions
prevent humanitarian organizations from listening to and learning from
refugee women, and in effect removes agency from refugees (Olivius 2011).
Clearly, assumptions of a one-way direction, top-down global-to-local flow of
norms, ideas and influence are not only Eurocentric but inaccurate (Grewal
and Kaplan 1994:12). Thus, there are no purely “global” or “Western” ideas
about gender equality, or any purely “local” or “Southern” ones. The
interaction between international humanitarian organizations and refugee
women does not take place on equal terms, but strict dichotomies does not
capture the dynamic and productive nature of the encounter and the
hybridity and complexity of gender struggles in this context. Despite the
obvious inequalities present in the encounter between humanitarians and
refugees, it is not simply a unilateral relation of dominance. As Reilly (2007)
observes, human rights discourse can be a tool for Western dominance and
false universalism reproducing global inequality, but it can also be a tool for
emancipation and social change from within diverse local contexts. Just as
gender equality norms can be mobilized for the reproduction of hierarchies
in the context of the refugee camp, they can also be used to disrupt them.
Gender equality norms as governing tools

As discussed in the previous section, this thesis draws on postcolonial feminist perspectives which highlights that the promotion of gender equality in sites such as refugee camps is an endeavor that is permeated by historic and contemporary relations of power, marginalization and exclusion. Gender equality policies and programmes do therefore not only reshape gender relations (in one way or another), but they intervene on other power relations and forms of oppression and inequality as well. Their effects may therefore be unstable, ambiguous and contradictory, and the meaning of gender equality norms is subject to negotiation and contestation in the encounter between humanitarian organizations and the refugee communities they work to help.

In this section I expand the discussion about how feminist ideas, such as gender equality, can be taken up and made useful for a variety of different governing projects, with different outcomes in different sites of governance. I draw on the concept of “governance feminism” to discuss how the remarkable adoption and institutionalization of feminist ideas in global governance in recent decades can be understood and approached analytically. I then present my conceptualization of gender equality norms as governing tools, and explain what it means to analyse them as such. Here, a Foucauldian understanding of power and governance, particularly the concept of governmentality, is presented as an analytical perspective well suited to this task. This perspective enables the analysis to capture a central paradox emphasized by postcolonial feminism; while gender equality norms can be tools of emancipation, they can also be employed as tools of domination. To examine how gender equality norms are taken up and applied in governance processes, and what the effects are with regards to the (re)production of power relations, is therefore a pressing task for feminist analysis. In the end of this section I outline my analytical framework and specify how I use key concepts drawn from the “analytical toolbox” of governmentality to address this analytical task in this thesis.

Feminism in governance mode

As ideas, concepts and strategies originating in women’s movements and feminist theorizing have increasingly become part of the processes and institutions of global governance, feminist analysts have struggled with how to make sense of and normatively assess this situation. How far have feminists succeeded in changing the agenda and the practices of global governance, and what happens when feminist ideas and strategies are taken
up in these institutional contexts? On one hand, research on transnational women’s networks has showed that feminists have been quite successful in shaping policy agendas and opening new discursive spaces in global forums such as UN conferences (Moghadam 2005, Antrobus 2004). Such networks have been argued to constitute powerful motors of transnational normative change (Keck and Sikkink 1998). Further, the impact of gender mainstreaming as a strategy to integrate gender and achieve gender equality in global governance has been far-reaching: almost all major international organizations have adopted the strategy (Hafner-Burton and Pollack 2002). The emergence of an international cadre of “gender experts” has also been considered as a potential feminist strategy and a channel for the institutionalization of feminist knowledge in global governance (Prügl 2013b). Indeed, feminists’ success in installing themselves in global governance has led Halley to claim that they “now walk the halls of power” (2008:21).

However, despite the widespread acceptance of feminist ideas in policymaking and governance, gender inequalities are still pervasive across the globe (Caglar et al. 2013:1). As Desai remarks, “the ironic state of the women’s movement post Beijing, I argue, is that (some) women’s agency is visible everywhere even as (most) women’s lives remain mired in multiple inequalities” (Desai 2005:320). The impact of transnational feminist activism has also been argued to be limited to changes in language and policy while results in terms of redistribution of material resources, affecting the lives of women, are lacking (Desai 2005). Fraser argues that this is in part due to a shift in recent decades, where feminist movements have come to privilege issues of recognition and cultural change before issues of material redistribution and economic justice (Fraser 2009). In this context, the dominance of Western, middle-class women in transnational women’s movements and the “NGOization” of feminist movements has been criticized (Desai 2002, Alvarez 2000, Basu 1995). These patterns and power hierarchies within transnational women’s movements, Grewal and Kaplan argues, prevents feminism from recognizing and resisting hegemonic formations such as nationalism, colonialism and capitalism that contribute to the oppression of many women (Grewal and Kaplan 1994:2). Other studies emphasize the limits to transformative feminist politics that are imposed by the standard operating procedures of international organizations, and by the hegemony of neoliberal frameworks in international politics (True 2003, Hawkesworth 2006).

The paradox of widespread uptake of feminist concepts and strategies in global governance but seemingly limited results in women’s lives in many contexts has led some observers to conclude that feminism in general, and gender mainstreaming in particular, is co-opted, turned into a technocratic tool and stripped of its critical content and transformative potential when it
is institutionalized in global governance processes and international organizations (Whitworth 2004:17, Squires 2005:347, Charlesworth 2005). Furthermore, critical assessments of gender mainstreaming has argued that it is often based on a static conception of gender that reinforces gender stereotypes (Eveline and Bacchi 2005), and that it is frequently co-opted as a means to various other institutional goals, such as economic growth, operational effectiveness or state security (True and Parisi 2013, Reeves 2012). While debates on the potentials and pitfalls of bringing feminist ideas into global governance institutions have been particularly vibrant in the literature on gender mainstreaming, these critiques are arguably valid in relation to the institutionalization of feminist concepts and ideas in a wider sense as well. Moreover, McRobbie argues that the institutionalization of elements of feminism in national and international bureaucracies represents the undoing of feminism; feminist movements, and feminism as a mode of resistance and critique, are replaced and rendered obsolete by institutionalized versions of “faux-feminism” such as gender mainstreaming (McRobbie 2009:1). In effect, McRobbie argues, feminism’s critical potential is neutralized and it is instead claimed and co-opted for the re-drafting of gender hierarchies (2009:7).

How can the simultaneous success and co-optation of feminism in global governance be understood? With Reeves, I suggest that this situation can be fruitfully conceptualized as “a product of the merging of feminist knowledge with ‘mainstream’ rationalities of government”, a process that gives rise to hybrid forms of gender knowledge that comes to inform policies and programmes (Reeves 2012:349). Thus, feminist ideas and concepts are inevitably transformed when they are taken up in new institutional contexts, but so are the practices and rationalities of global governance. To posit a binary distinction of feminist success versus co-optation is therefore unhelpful. Instead, there is a need for feminist scrutiny of how these hybrid gender knowledges operate within broader patterns of power and governance, and how their application in global governance is having political effects in the many contexts where feminist-inspired policies and programmes are implemented (Prügl 2011b, True 2003).

To enable such a critical analysis of the power effects that result when feminism is taken up by institutions of governance, Halley, Kotiswaran, Shamir and Thomas has coined the term governance feminism. Governance feminism refers to “the incremental but now quite noticeable installation of feminists and feminist ideas in actual legal-institutional power” (Halley et al. 2006). Feminism’s engagement with global governance has now become sufficiently institutionalized to describe feminism as an integral part of contemporary global governance rather than an outsider critic or activist. However, as Thomas points out, this account of governance feminism entails a celebration of feminist social movements and advocacy networks:
“[a]gainst very steep odds of governmental indifference and patriarchal hostility, feminism is succeeding in achieving recognition of and response to social justice claims on behalf of women everywhere” (Halley et al. 2006:347). Feminist organizations and networks have been quite successful in utilizing the network style and the openness to civil society organizations of what is often called the “new governance”, not least in UN forums (Halley et al. 2006:341). Moving from advocacy and movement activism to participation in the processes and organizations of global governance, feminism “seeks not only to analyse and critique the problem, but to devise, pursue and achieve reform to address the problem in the real world” (Halley et al. 2006:348 emphasis in original). This is feminism in governance mode (Halley et al. 2006:360).

To govern, according to Foucault, is to engage in the “conduct of conduct” (1982:789-790): to seek to manage, shape, and direct the behaviour of individuals and groups (Gordon 1991:2). In this sense, to the extent that feminism seeks to influence and change behaviour it is always implicated in governing projects, whether it is institutionalized in global governance or not. From a Foucauldian perspective, the question of whether feminism is co-opted when it engages with global governance institutions therefore loses its meaning. There is no pure feminism untainted by the workings of power (Prügl 2011b:85). The rise of governance feminism should thereby not be seen as a distortion of feminism, but as a repositioning of feminism within the multiple, non-egalitarian and mobile relations within which power operates (Foucault 1990:94). In governance mode, feminism has the potential to better the lives of women and contribute to greater social justice, but it also has the potential to cause unintended and harmful effects (Halley et al. 2006). Power, Foucault argues, is not only repressive but productive, enabling as well as restricting the agency of subjects. Power makes things happen, but it also has effects of domination (Foucault 1990). Therefore, the concept of governance feminism should be treated as normatively empty. It does not describe the victory of feminism, but neither does it signal its undoing. Rather the term governance feminism “signifies a certain form of power – which in itself is not necessarily bad, but the fact that it is feminist does not make it necessarily good either” (Halley et al. 2006:360, emphasis in original).

Further, in order to account for the impact of governance feminism, particular attention to its effects in non-Western contexts is needed. What happens when governance feminism “emanates from Western feminism, moves globally via international legal regimes of various kinds, and arrives in locales where Western power is feared and resented?” (Halley et al. 2006:422). This question is indeed relevant for the context of humanitarian aid in refugee camps, permeated as it is by global inequalities and
hierarchies that unavoidably come to shape the deployment and reception of gender equality norms.

Understanding the uptake of feminism in global governance through the concept of governance feminism directs analytical attention to how governing projects infused by feminism seeks to manage conduct, and what their effects are. Recognizing that feminism is never positioned outside power, this approach rejects charges that engagement with mainstream governance institutions corrupts or co-opts feminism. Accusations of co-optation “carry with them assumptions that feminism should thwart its own will to power or stay its hand until it can act in a politically purified world” – assumptions that rest on the idea that a pure and intrinsically “good” feminism located outside of power does exist and should be protected from contamination (Halley et al. 2006:422). Governing “works through practices of freedom and states of domination...without either coercion or consent being its essential form” (Dean 2010:46, emphasis in original). Governing is neither intrinsically oppressive nor liberatory, but some forms of the “conduct of conduct” are required for all organized social existence. Thus, there is no intrinsic problem with feminism’s will to govern and exercise power, but feminist or feminist-inspired forms of power and governance must be critically examined just as any other form of power (Halley et al. 2006:361).

Analyzing gender equality norms as governing tools
In this thesis, the institutionalization of feminist ideas, or, in other words, the emergence of governance feminism, is studied through a focus on how gender equality norms become utilized as governing tools in humanitarian aid to refugees. A conceptualization of gender equality norms as governing tools acknowledges their potential as tools for emancipation, opposition and resistance, but also their potential to be used in ways that reinforce or create new forms of dominance and oppression. As concepts such as gender equality travel across institutional and geographic contexts, they can become politically useful for a variety of agendas. Given that gender equality has no pure, unmediated or authentic meaning, what is analytically interesting is how it is ascribed meaning and made useful in governing practices in multiple sites (Grewal and Kaplan 1994:2). As Fraser points out, no concept or vocabulary is intrinsically immune to be used for purposes of domination, or intrinsically empty of emancipatory potential. A concept’s capacity to generate critical leverage is entirely relative to its circumstances (Fraser 1989:63). Thus, rather than to critique the ways in which gender equality is mobilized in humanitarian aid to refugees for deviating from an ideal meaning of the term, the focus in this thesis is on the effects that are generated by different ways of constructing, interpreting and applying gender equality norms in specific institutional and geographic contexts.
within the international refugee regime. The important question in relation to the deployment of gender equality norms as governing tools, then, is “who is mobilizing what...deploying what identities, identifications and representations, and in the name of what political visions and goals?” (Shohat 1992:110).

This thesis responds to the calls of feminist scholars to deconstruct the meaning and the contextualized politics and effects of gender equality norms. Feminists have criticized a tendency in some of the literature on norms and norm diffusion to treat the content of norms as static, and instead argued for a view of norms as continuously under construction in local as well as global contexts (Krook and True 2012, Zwingel 2012, Kardam 2004). Such an approach acknowledges that norms originating in feminist theorizing and movements are not unequivocal global measuring sticks with a fixed meaning, but instruments which impact depend on local interpretations and contextualized agency. Gender equality norms can be appropriated for a variety of purposes; they can be interpreted and filled with meaning in a variety of ways; and lead to a variety of outcomes. At the same time, global norms codified in international conventions and agreements must undergo processes of localization and contextualization in order to have real effects in women’s lives.

In order to study gender equality norms not as “things” with intrinsic meaning or as normative ideals, but as tools that are mobilized in governing processes, this thesis draws on the analytical framework of governmentality. The term governmentality was coined by Foucault (Foucault 1991b, Foucault 2007, Foucault 2008) and has since been developed by a number of social science scholars (Burchell et al. 1991, Rose and Miller 1992, Barry et al. 1996, Rose 1999, Larner and Walters 2004b, Rose et al. 2006, Dean 2010, Bröckling et al. 2011, Walters 2012). In Foucault’s work and in the later governmentality literature, the concept is used in several, partly overlapping, ways. In its broadest sense, governmentality is a style of analysis that examines the exercise of power in terms of the conduct of conduct, focusing on the techniques and knowledges that underpin attempts to govern conduct in diverse settings (Walters 2012:11-12). In other words, the analytical focus of governmentality studies are mentalities of government: conceptions about what it is that should be governed, how, by whom, and to what ends (Haahr and Walters 2004:5, Dean 2010:24-28, Rose and Miller 1992). Thus, a governmentality analysis directs attention to the relationship between knowledge and power, or between forms of representation and forms of rule (Foucault 1991b:99, Rojas 2004). Governance is approached as a very widespread phenomenon, something that goes on wherever individuals and groups seek to shape and direct their own conduct or the conduct of others based on more or less formalized techniques and bodies of knowledge (Walters 2012:11-12).
A governmentality analysis does not read governing practices as expressions of the values that are claimed to underlie them (Dean 2010:45). Thus, a governmentality analysis does not take for granted that humanitarian gender policies and programmes are expressions of a pursuit of gender equality, social justice and the dismantling of gender hierarchies. Instead, it investigates the variety of ways in which gender equality norms are utilized as governing tools in empirical settings:

Thus rather than viewing regimes of practices as expressions of values it is important to question how “values” function in various governmental rationalities, what consequences they have in forms of political argument, how they get attached to different techniques and so on (Dean 2010:46).

I suggest that this perspective lends itself well to an analysis of how gender equality norms operate in global governance, or in other words, “what global governance is making of feminism” (Runyan 1999:210). A Foucauldian understanding of governing provides theoretical tools for feminist analyses of the complexities of oppressive relations of power in their diverse and multiple forms, and can enable more nuanced accounts of how inequality and subordination is reproduced (Bordo 1993, Ramazanoglu 1993, Macleod and Durrheim 2002). In particular, it can inspire more self-critical feminist activism and scholarship by directing attention to feminism’s implication in the exercise of power, and to the potential of any utopian movement to cause harm and new effects of domination and exclusion (Grimshaw 1993:56, Prügl 2011b). While the remarkable adoption of feminist concepts and ideas is an important achievement, the contextualized meaning and effects of feminism itself must be submitted to continued critical scrutiny in order to detect and challenge unintended and possibly harmful effects and new forms of exclusion and oppression (Halley et al. 2006). All normative projects create certain avenues for agency and change, but they may also benefit some at the expense of others, support existing unequal social relationships, or create new injustices (Bacchi 2009:44-46). In the ambition of resisting power, movements such as feminism risk contributing to the marginalization and silencing of new groups (Spivak 1993:3-4). Therefore, as Foucault pointed out, critical analysis and politics must always keep asking what new forms of domination an agenda for change may lead to:

My point is not that everything is bad, but that everything is dangerous, which is not exactly the same as bad. If everything is dangerous, then we always have something to do. So my position leads not to apathy, but to a hyper- and pessimistic activism (Foucault 1984:343).
With Shepherd, I contend that such a position does in no way deny the importance or potential of struggles for social justice. Projects of social change need to be examined, problematized and critiqued precisely because they are important:

_The pursuit of gender equality is problematized precisely because of what it represents: not the question of whether women should enjoy equal privilege with men – of course they should – but the question of how these differences are (re)produced and entrenched through even the most well-intentioned policy_ (Shepherd 2008:131).

However, feminist critics of Foucault have argued that his writings lack a normative or political position from which to determine what forms of power and governance is better or worse, and what effects of power that should be regarded as desirable or problematic (Fraser 1989:ch. 1, McNay 1992, Grimshaw 1993, Ramazanoğlu 1993). Nevertheless, Foucault's writings are clearly political, and he “calls in no uncertain terms for resistance to domination” (Fraser 1989:29). But, Fraser asks, why should domination be resisted, and what is the political vision towards which such struggle should aim? As McNay puts it: “there is an unresolved tension between his [Foucault's] commitment to emancipatory social change and his refusal to outline the normative assumptions upon which such change should be based” (McNay 1992:8). While a critical feminist analysis should take Foucault’s insight that every political proposition may give rise to new forms of domination seriously, this position in itself does not offer much guidance for the feminist pursuit of progressive change (Grimshaw 1993). In addition, while prescribing totalizing political recommendations should be avoided, a feminist, critical analysis nevertheless needs to specify a basic normative position from which to name and challenge injustice and oppression.

In this thesis, the Foucauldian analytical tools of governmentality are used to submit the construction, interpretation and application of gender equality norms to critical scrutiny, denaturalize existing ways of thinking and acting, and thereby point to alternative possibilities and open up opportunities for change. But in order to normatively and politically assess how gender equality norms are used as governing tools, and in order to specify the direction of desirable change, postcolonial feminist theory constitutes a necessary point of departure. For example, the way in which Mohanty outlines her feminist vision for the world constitutes such a basic normative and political position called for by feminist critics of Foucault, and from where it is possible to normatively assess the political effects of particular ways of deploying gender equality norms as governing tools. This is a vision for a world
where women and men are free to live creative lives, in security and with bodily health and integrity, where they are free to choose whom they love, and whom they set up house with, and whether they want to have or not have children; a world where pleasure rather than just duty and drudgery determine our choices, where free and imaginative exploration of the mind is a fundamental right; a vision in which economic stability, ecological sustainability, racial equality, and the redistribution of wealth form the material basis for people’s well-being. Finally, my vision is one in which democratic and socialist practices and institutions provide the conditions for public participation and decision-making for people regardless of economic and social location (Mohanty 2003:3).

With Mohanty, I contend that feminist research entails a commitment to an emancipatory agenda that, in its most basic form, strives to expand the possibilities for people in subordinated positions to be safe, healthy, and able to affect the conditions and decisions that shape their lives.

Further, Walters has advanced the view that governmentality should be regarded as an analytical toolbox consisting of a rather loose set of concepts rather than a self-contained theoretical system (See also Macleod 2006, Macleod and Durrheim 2002). This toolbox can, perhaps should, fruitfully be used in combination with other theories and concepts. In line with Walter’s argument, I argue that postcolonial feminist theory and the analytical tools of governmentality together provide a useful framework for the analysis of how gender equality norms operate in the global governance of refugees.

**Governmentality: an analytical toolbox**

As mentioned above, Foucault has likened his books to “a kind of toolbox in which others could dig around to find a tool that they can use however they wish in their own area” (Foucault 1994, translated and cited in Walters 2012:103). As Larner and Walters (2004a:3-4) has pointed out, one of the foremost accomplishments of governmentality as an analytical approach is to foster research that treats power and governance as practical, technical, and always local and provisional. Rather than constructing grand theories, governmentality studies relies on a series of mid-range analytical concepts that can be used to interrogate specific configurations of power (Barry et al 1996:4). In the words of Walters,

>This toolbox equips us to do something important and quite novel: to understand governance not as a set of institutions, nor in terms of certain ideologies, but as an eminently practical activity that can be studied, historicized and specified at the level of the rationalities, programmes, techniques and subjectivities which underpin it and give it form and effect (Walters 2012:2)
Governmentality provides analytical tools that can be used to examine the uptake of feminist ideas and concepts in global governance at the level of governing practices and the rationalities that underpin them, moving away from debates about the co-optation of feminism as well as from attempts to measure its success. In particular, in line with Macleod and Durrheim (2002) I argue that governmentality provides important tools for feminist analyses of the myriad of ways in which gendered power operates in everyday practices and interactions in specific contexts. Below, I present the analytical concepts which, drawing on governmentality as an “analytical toolbox” (Rose et al 2006:18), are used in this thesis to explore how gender equality norms are constructed, interpreted and applied in the global governance of refugees.

A governmentality perspective directs attention to the relationship between knowledge and power, or between forms of representation and forms of rule (Foucault 1991b, Rojas 2004:99). As such, it shows how practices of government rely on conceptions about what it is that should be governed, by whom, and to what ends. Rose and Miller suggest that a governmentality analysis can be approached through two interrelated dimensions. They use the term rationalities to denote the particular forms of representation, thought and knowledge that render reality thinkable and governable, while the term technologies denote the practical techniques, methods, instruments and institutions that enable authorities to act upon the conduct of individuals and groups so as to transform it. The analysis thus links the practical things that authorities of various kinds do with the underlying systematic thinking and ideas about what it is that should be governed, the problems to be addressed, and the aims and objectives of government. “Rationalities and technologies, thought and intervention”, according to Rose and Miller, can be thought of as “two indissociable dimensions through which one might characterize and analyse governmentalities and begin to open them up to critical judgment” (Rose and Miller 2008:16).

A third dimension of a governmentality analysis that is not always made explicit is a concern with the political implications or effects of particular governmental technologies and the rationalities they embody. While not always explicitly acknowledged, the constitutive effects of governing with regards to power relations and the production of subjectivities are core concerns in governmentality studies (Dean 2010:43-44). In order to make this dimension explicit and place the effects of how gender equality norms are constructed, interpreted and applied at the centre of analytical attention, I make use of Bacchi’s conceptualization of effects. Arguing that merely identifying rationalities is inadequate, Bacchi suggests an examination of three overlapping kinds of effects: discursive effects, subjectification effects, and lived effects (Bacchi 2009:40). Through attention to these kinds of
effects, which will be further explained below, rationalities and the technologies through which they are deployed can be critically assessed. However, the assessment referred to here is not a conventional policy evaluation of “outcomes” or “success”; rather it is a consideration of implications for complex and interconnected relations of power. Bacchi uses a quote from McHoul and Grace (1993, cited in Bacchi 2009:40) to explain what is meant by an assessment of effects:

*If discourses don't merely represent “the real”, and if in fact they are parts of its production, then which discourse is “best” can't be decided by comparing it to any real object...instead discourses (forms of representation) might be tested in terms of how they can actually intervene in real struggles.*

However, as discussed above, the governmentality toolbox does not have tools capable of determining what effects are better or worse, and what struggles and political visions that are more or less desirable. In this thesis, postcolonial feminism provides the basis for such assessments.

With recognition of the power effects that are generated through processes of governing, Prügl usefully summarizes the research scope of a governmentality approach in the following way:

*The art of governing involves the deployment of a variety of technologies and apparatuses. The study of governmentality seeks to elicit the rationality behind these techniques and apparatuses and the sometimes unpredictable effects they generate* (2011b:75, my emphasis).

In order to analyse how, and with what effects, gender equality norms are constructed, interpreted and applied in the global governance of refugees, the governmentality perspective is operationalized using the three key analytical concepts technologies, rationalities, and effects. These analytical tools are further described below.

**Technologies**

Governmental technologies are the various means, strategies and procedures that are used to govern. It is through these technologies that governmental thought is effected and deployed (Rose and Miller 1992:183). In the words of Rose (1999:51), “thought becomes governmental to the extent it becomes technical, it attaches itself to a technology for its realization”. Thus, concrete practices are important windows to mentalities of government. Therefore, a governmentality approach aims to “investigate specific practices and techniques of government as an empirical phenomenon” (Sending and Neumann 2006:656-657).
In this study, technologies denote what various humanitarian actors do to promote gender equality, effect changes in the situation of women or men, or in gender relations and behaviors. This includes organizational strategies such as gender mainstreaming or non-discrimination; educational campaigns in refugee camps; programmes aiming to promote women’s participation or prevent sexual and gender based violence; and many other possible practices. The practices that I have focused on in my analysis are those that humanitarian policymakers and practitioners themselves link to notions of gender equality. Thus, programmes and practices that are somehow linked to ideas about gender equality in humanitarian aid to refugees are included in the analysis regardless of whether these practices “actually” do promote gender equality, or whether this is “really” their primary objective. Such questions however, are obviously central to my analysis of how and for what purposes gender equality norms are mobilized as governing tools, and what their effects are.

Technologies constitute the analytical entry point in my analysis. I take the concrete programmes that are being implemented in Thailand and Bangladesh as the starting point to identify the rationalities inherent in humanitarian gender equality programmes and consider their possible effects. In analyzing the interviews, I first ask what methods, programmes, strategies and procedures are used to promote gender equality in these refugee camp contexts. After this mapping of practices, I can go on to ask how these practices are motivated, what their objectives are, and how the problems they are designed to address are constructed. In the analysis of policy texts, I look for strategies and proposals for action that indicates how policies are envisioned to become realized. However, I primarily use the concept of technologies to describe practices and strategies that are employed to promote gender equality in the local contexts of the cases.

**Rationalities**

The term rationalities signifies the forms of thought and knowledge that make complex realities appear intelligible and governable. Rationalities are modes of systematic thinking about a particular issue, problem, or group of people as something to be governed:

...a way or system of thinking about the nature and practice of government (who can govern; what governing is; what or who is governed), capable of making some form of this activity thinkable and practicable (Gordon 1991:3).

Rationalities are articulated based on particular forms of knowledge about the objects, spaces or persons to be governed; they elaborate on the responsibilities of governing authorities; and they express visions and objectives that governing practices should realize (Rose and Miller 1992:179,
Kalm 2010:89-90). Thus, processes of problematization are central to the construction and reconstruction of governing rationalities. Problematization signifies the construction of an aspect of reality as a particular type of issue or problem and thereby renders reality intelligible, manageable and amenable to governmental interventions (Soguk 1999:50). In this sense, problematization is central to all governing practices and processes:

*Government is a problematizing activity: it poses the obligations of rulers in terms of the problems they seek to address. The ideals of government are intrinsically linked to the problems around which it circulates, the failings it seeks to rectify, the ills it seeks to cure. Indeed, the history of government may well be written as a history of problematizations, in which politicians, intellectuals, philosophers, medics, military men, feminists and philanthropists have measured the real against the ideal and found it wanting (Rose and Miller 1992:181).*

While the concept of problematization denotes more general processes of meaning making, constituting various aspects of reality as objects of knowledge and governance, Bacchi uses the concept problem representation to denote a more specific construction of a problem in a particular text or context (Bacchi 2009:32). The identification of problem representations is a key aspect of the identification of the rationalities that underpin and enable governing practices. Indeed, according to Rose, to conduct a governmentality analysis “is to start by asking what authorities of various sorts wanted to happen, in relation to problems defined how, in pursuit of what objectives, through what strategies and techniques” (Rose 1999:20).

The word rationality should not be misinterpreted as indicating reason or intentionality. Rationalities are not intentionally constructed and strategically deployed by various authorities (Bacchi 2009:30). Rather, rationalities can be understood as “broader discourses” consisting of a shared vocabulary, generally accepted facts, and agreement on certain understandings of the problems to be solved (Rose 1999:28). These broader discourses construct “truths” about the nature and objectives of governing in a particular area. However, rationalities are not necessarily uniform in the sense that there is agreement on everything (Kalm 2010:88). Nevertheless, despite inconsistencies and differences rationalities are characterized by certain regularities (Rose 1999:26-28). When tracing rationalities, one engages in a level of generalization to be able to identify such key regularities (Kalm 2010:88).

To be able to identify rationalities in my material, I look for representations of problems, solutions and goals in relation to gender equality. I examine the forms of knowledge about gender as an object and instrument of governance that are constructed in interviews and policy texts. I explore what it means to address gender in humanitarian aid, and how
gender equality is given meaning as a policy goal in this field, and I examine how humanitarian workers represent problems and goals when they motivate and explain programmes and activities that they are involved in. Further, I look for ideas about the roles and responsibilities of different actors in causing and responding to “problems”. I look for regularities and recurring ideas and statements that can point to patterns in how gender equality is problematized and how humanitarian gender policy is conceptualized as a governing project. However, I also look for disagreement on fundamental issues such as the ultimate purpose and nature of humanitarian gender policy and programmes, or the meaning of gender equality, that may indicate that there are competing rationalities at work.

**Effects**
Technologies and rationalities of government are productive of effects that shape how the world can be known and acted upon, how people understand themselves and their lives and act accordingly. Thus they shape possibilities for political action and change as well as the material realities of people’s lives. Bacchi (2009:40-43, 69-71) discusses three types of power effects: discursive effects, subjectification effects, and lived effects.

Discursive effects are the limits on what is possible to think and say that are created by particular rationalities. If an issue is represented and governed as a particular kind of issue it makes it difficult to understand the issue in other ways. Thus, important aspects of the issue may well be obscured, and problematizations that may harm some groups are perceived as the only and natural way of understanding or addressing the issue. Discursive effects are those that make it possible to devote attention to some issues while obscuring others, opening up some possibilities for change while precluding others. This builds on an understanding of discourse as “practices that systematically form the objects of which they speak” (Foucault 2002:54). Discourses are systems of meaning and knowledge that sets limits to what it is possible to say, write or think about an issue or object in a particular social context (Bacchi 2009:35).

Subjectification effects are those that affect the identities of people. Different ways of problematizing and governing an issue cast different groups in different “roles”; as victims, rights-holders, community builders or helpers, as needy, dangerous, trustworthy or capable. In this way, problem representations attribute responsibility for problems and for how they should be addressed. The subject positions made available by problems representations shape the identities and opportunities for different groups of people, but they can also provide avenues for action and resistance.

Lived effects are the material impact of the thinking and practices of government. This concept draws attention to the material effects of discourses; how a problem is understood, how the scope of desirable change
is defined and how particular subject positions made available to people have effects on the lived materiality of their everyday lives. For example, if refugee women are primarily represented as victims of violence and abuse who needs to be protected, it may make it more difficult for them to articulate and draw attention to their needs and interests in other areas, and to claim a position as agent rather than victim. Further, if violence against women is represented as an issue rooted in refugee “culture” which needs to be solved through changed attitudes and beliefs, it may lead to a focus on awareness-raising programmes while measures for ensuring women’s physical security such as safe houses are neglected. In this way, rationalities and the technologies they enable have highly material effects on the constraints and opportunities that refugees experience in their everyday lives. However, in this thesis no empirical study of the everyday realities and lived experiences of refugees have been undertaken. Therefore, the consideration of lived effects is an assessment of how life conditions of refugees are likely to be shaped by different ways of problematizing and governing through gender equality. Through the narratives of humanitarian practitioners in the field it is possible to gain insights into how ways of thinking about gender equality is expressed in concrete programmes, and thereby better understand their material effects.

To sum up, the three central analytical tools used in this thesis are the concepts of technologies, rationalities, and effects. These analytical tools direct attention to the practices, ideas and consequences of humanitarian gender equality policies and programmes. Practices, concrete programmes and strategies for action, are used as the point of entry to identify and understand the rationalities and effects of humanitarian gender policies and programmes. Starting from what humanitarian organizations do I move on to examine the underlying rationalities through how concrete practices and actions are motivated, understood and explained. Finally, based on the ways in which issues surrounding gender and gender equality are problematized and governed I consider the power effects with regards to the discursive construction of reality, the subject positions made available, and the conditions and constraints imposed on the lives of refugees. This analytical framework, I argue, enables a detailed and contextualized analysis of how gender equality norms are constructed, interpreted and applied in the global governance of refugees. Thus it can show how gender equality norms operate as governing tools in specific ways in different institutional and geographic contexts. Moreover, by emphasizing the power effects that are generated by technologies and rationalities of governance, this framework gives a critical assessment of how governance (re)shapes relations of power a prominent position in the governmentality toolbox. It is therefore well suited to a critical feminist analysis of how gender equality norms have effects when
they gain a life of their own in the institutions and processes of global governance.

The analytical framework is summarized in table 1, where the three analytical concepts discussed above are concretized though examples of analysis questions that are used to identify technologies, rationalities and effects in the empirical material.

**Table 1: Summary of analytical framework**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Analytical tools</th>
<th>Examples of analysis questions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>TECHNOLOGIES</td>
<td>What methods, programmes, strategies and procedures are used to promote gender equality?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RATIONALITIES</td>
<td>What is gender equality taken to mean?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>How are problems in relation to gender equality represented?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>How are roles and responsibilities allocated in relation to the causes of and solutions to problems?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>How are the goals of humanitarian gender policy and practice represented?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Are there competing representations of gender equality?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EFFECTS</td>
<td>Discursive Effects</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>What limits to what can be said and thought are created?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>What visions for social change are enabled and precluded?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Subjectification Effects</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>What subject positions are made available?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>What forms of agency are enabled and precluded for different subjects?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Lived Effects</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>How may life conditions and opportunities be affected?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Who is likely to benefit or be harmed?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Research design, methods and material

As outlined above, the overarching aim of this thesis is to analyse how, and with what effects, gender equality norms are constructed, interpreted and applied in the global governance of refugees. In this section I discuss the methodological choices I have made in order to address this research task. First, I discuss my choice to study the global governance of refugees through a case study of how humanitarian workers represent the meaning of gender equality and how they apply it in practical humanitarian aid work in two different refugee camp contexts. The focus on governance as practice in governmentality studies draws attention to how governance is realized through practices and strategies that are inevitably local and contextual. In this sense, global governance comes into existence when it is enacted through practices and interactions that take places in specific, identifiable sites. Moreover, as postcolonial feminism emphasizes, the effects of gender equality projects must be analysed and assessed in the particular context of the power relations and social realities on which they intervene.

Further, in this section I present the material used in this thesis, consisting primarily of interviews with humanitarian workers, complemented by a variety of documentary materials. I explain how I conducted the interviews and how documentary sources were selected and used. In addition, I reflect on my own position as a researcher entering the world of humanitarian aid organizations in Thailand and Bangladesh, and discuss some of the challenges and opportunities that it presented in the encounter with my interviewees.

Approaching global governance as local practices
This thesis uses a case study design to explore how gender equality norms are constructed, interpreted and applied in practical humanitarian aid work in two refugee camp contexts, in Bangladesh and Thailand. This choice is due to the conviction that in order to understand how gender equality norms operate in the global governance of refugees, it is necessary to examine how they come into play in the locally specific contexts where the structures and norms of the international refugee regime encounter the people it is meant to govern. Thus, rather than to approach global governance “from above” through a focus on international institutional arrangements, policies and decision-making procedures, I follow Foucault’s suggestion to conduct an

“ascending analysis of power, starting...from its infinitesimal mechanisms...and then seeing how these mechanisms of power have been – and continue to be – invested, colonized, utilized, involuted, transformed, displaced, extended etc., by ever more general mechanisms and by forms of global domination” (Foucault 1980:99).
Thus, in Foucault’s view, power and governance can only be observed and analysed “from below”, through its practical, complex, diverse, and locally specific manifestations. Global governance cannot be studied as an abstract, universal phenomenon, only as a myriad of local practices. Indeed, “[t]here is no governance in general; only specific practices and their particular rationalities, each with their own complex lines of emergence” (Walters 2012:58). Governmentality studies therefore start with careful analysis of the specificities of local governing practices to gain insights into more general relations of power. The strength of this perspective lies in its ability to decentralize, diversify and destabilize totalizing accounts of global governance and global power, and be sensitive to the intricacies of how global power and governance is manifested through complex, contradictory and locally specific practices at particular sites (Rosenow 2009:497).

However, the focus on specific, local practices of governance does not mean that the existence of more general global relations of power, oppression and inequality is overlooked. A governmentality analysis does not deny the pervasiveness of patriarchal domination, colonial relations or capitalist exploitation. Rather, it seeks to carefully examine how these forms of oppression are manifested, and contested, in particular sites (Macleod and Durrheim 2002). Likewise, postcolonial and transnational feminist perspectives emphasize how these multiple and overlapping forms of global oppression should be approached as “scattered hegemonies” (Grewal and Kaplan 1994:17) that are manifested and experienced differently in different locations. Thus, rather than to posit unitary definitions of gender oppression, colonialism or capitalism, it is important to study how these forms of oppression take shape in particular contexts, with their specific histories and power dynamics. Notably though, as Mohanty emphasizes, such an analysis does not stop at detailing how power, oppression and governance operates in locally specific ways, but by doing so it enables a better, more nuanced understanding of global patterns and relations of power:

In knowing differences and particularities, we can better see the connections and commonalities because no border or boundary is ever complete or rigidly determining. The challenge is to see how differences allow us to explain the connections and border crossings better and more accurately, how specifying difference allows us to theorize universal concerns more fully (Mohanty 2003:226).

In line with Mohanty’s argument I suggest that an analysis of the specific ways in which gender equality norms operate as governing tools in refugee camps in Thailand and Bangladesh does not only shed light on conditions specific to these cases, but contributes to a better understanding of how gender equality is made useful for the governance of refugees as a global project.
The study of the cases can be conceptualized as a collective case study. A collective case study is a study of several cases where the purpose is to gain insights into a phenomenon or issue through an examination of its manifestations in some of the settings where it operates (Stake 2000:437, Stake 2006). The different situations that are studied can be described as cases of the broader phenomenon that they study seek to understand. In this case, humanitarian discourses and practices in Bangladesh and Thailand are studied in order to gain a better understanding of how gender equality norms are implicated in the global governance of refugees. The particular context of the individual cases, their differences and similarities contribute to shed light on the phenomenon and advance our understanding of it. Thus, like other case studies, a collective case study devotes keen attention to the situational uniqueness of each individual case, but it does so in order to better understand the phenomenon that the cases are examples of (Stake 2006:6-8).

Moreover, the ambition to learn from the particularities, similarities and differences in how the phenomenon under study manifest itself in more than one case context indicates that there is also a comparative element. However, comparison in this study does not fix analytical attention to a few predetermined variables. Doing so, Stake argues, can obscure the situationality of each case and the complex interactions between the case contexts and the phenomenon under study (Stake 2006:83). In addition, fixing the categories or variables to be compared the analysis risks to reify established ways of seeing instead of opening them up to critical examination (Rönnblom 2012). For example, comparing the number of women who participate in income-generating programmes or are represented in camp management as indicators of gender equality would only reproduce established perceptions of what gender equality means and how it is measured. In addition, such a comparison really says nothing about the position of women or the extent to which there is gender equality unless the meaning attached to women’s participation in each specific context is carefully analysed (Mohanty 2003:34). Instead, Rönnblom suggests a form of poststructuralist feminist comparative analysis that focuses on comparing and contrasting problem representations rather than predetermined categories and variables:

This way of doing comparison is similar to conversation or dialogue where the comparative element creates space for distance from and reflection on the different cases. It also de-stabilizes instead of fixes a specific normative representation of gender equality and in that way opens up dominant problem representations for critique as well as enabling the generation of alternatives (Rönnblom 2012:134).
To contrast the ways in which gender equality is given meaning and applied in each case can contribute to destabilize established problem representations and ways of working in one case, to illustrate possible alternatives, and to make it possible to see absences and silences that would otherwise have gone unnoticed (Bacchi 2009:44, Verloo and Lombardo 2007:40). Analyzing two refugee camp contexts rather than one is useful to destabilize and open up that which is taken for granted in each case to critical scrutiny. Through an examination of what humanitarian organizations do and how they understand and represent problems and objectives relating to gender equality in two different refugee situations, it is possible to reflect on how issues could have been understood and acted upon differently in each case, and better be able to discern the political role and effects of gender equality policies and programmes in each case. Conceptualized in this way, comparison is an analytical tool that makes it possible to learn from both the commonalities and the differences in how gender equality norms are constructed, interpreted and applied across the cases (Stake 2006:40). Such an analysis is well suited to inquire into how governing takes place, identify similarities in modes of governance across different sites of governance, and learn from how contextual factors make a difference (Bacchi 2009:44).

In selecting cases for a collective case study, Stake suggest that cases that seem to offer good opportunities to learn about the general problematique of the study should be preferred. As a general rule, cases should all be relevant examples of the studied phenomenon, but also preferably exhibit some diversity that provides opportunities to learn from how the phenomenon appears in different contexts (Stake 2006:23-25). Relevant cases that offer good opportunities to learn may be typical or atypical examples, and all cases in a collective case study need not share the same relationship with the phenomenon in focus (Stake 2000).

The two cases of humanitarian aid operations selected for this study are very different in many ways, despite similarities in the roots and nature of these two refugee situations. Both refugee situations are protracted, having lasted for decades, and the refugees in both cases have fled ethnic discrimination, repression and conflict in Burma. The differences that caught my interest in these two cases relate to how the refugees and the refugee camps are governed and assisted by a variety of actors. The models and practices for camp governance in Thailand and in Bangladesh can be said to constitute two extremes on a continuum of the ways in which humanitarian aid operations are organized. The Thai camps are characterized by strong refugee self-governance, with refugees responsible for most of the day-to-day running of the camps including coordination of services, distribution and supply management of goods, and the administration of justice. A network of NGOs are providing most of the services and due to its late arrival in 1998,
the UNHCR has an unusually marginal role. The host government in Thailand has taken a relatively hands-off approach, allowing refugee self-governance to function. In contrast to this bottom-up model of camp governance, the Bangladesh camps are run in a very top-down manner where the host government and the major UN agencies are the main actors. NGOs are primarily subcontractors to UN agencies, and refugee organizations are non-existent except for committees and groups recently initiated by the UNHCR. The Bangladeshi government is highly controlling and present in camp life.

These marked differences with regards to the set of actors present, their division of responsibility and authority, the agency of refugees and the organization of camp life raises intriguing questions about how humanitarian gender equality policies and programmes might intervene in two local contexts with so different political dynamics and relations of power. Could global policies possibly be interpreted, represented and implemented in the same way in these two contexts? How would gender policies be institutionalized in a top-down camp governance structure in contrast to one of refugee self-governance? How would the meaning of gender equality as a humanitarian policy goal be understood and reconstructed by humanitarian workers facing very different challenges and conditions to do their work? What kind of governing tools would gender equality norms become in relation to the specific power relations in each case, and how would they shape the nature of humanitarian aid and the lives of refugees?

This type of questions raised by the sharp differences between these two cases caught my curiosity and led me to select them for the study. However, as discussed above, comparison between two cases with different characteristics is a tool for contrast, destabilizing what is taken for granted in one case and opening it up for critical examination. There is no ambition in this study to establish causal relations between, say, the way gender equality in conceptualized and the degree of refugee involvement in camp governance, or between the type of gender programmes implemented and the division of responsibility between different humanitarian actors. The inclusion of two cases can stimulate attention to how power operates in locally specific ways through the possibility to contrast and compare, but there is no claim that contextual differences between the cases “led to” different “outcomes” of gender policies. However, in line with Stake’s argument, I suggest that together these cases can offer more insights into the complexities of how gender equality norms operate as governing tools in humanitarian aid to refugees than they can separately (Stake 2006:40).
Methods and materials
Below, I discuss the collection and selection of materials analysed in this thesis, consisting primarily of interviews but also a variety of documentary sources.

Interviews
As mentioned above, the analysis presented in this thesis is predominantly based on semi-structured qualitative interviews. In 2010 and 2011, I conducted a total of 58 interviews with humanitarian workers in Bangladesh and Thailand. With regards to the Bangladeshi case, I conducted 20 interviews during fieldwork in Cox's Bazar and Dhaka, and five telephone interviews. In the case of Thailand, I conducted 32 interviews in the Mae Sot area and in Bangkok as well as one telephone interview. Through these interviews, I have been able to get insight into how humanitarian workers and organizations in these two sites construct and interpret gender equality norms, and how they work to put gender policies to practice and promote gender equality in the refugee camps they assist.

The interviewees consisted of a mix of women and men of various ages, and of international and national staff members. In the case of Thailand, a few interviews were group interviews where several representatives from the same organization participated. The selection of interviewees in each case reflects the makeup of the humanitarian landscape. In Bangladesh, humanitarian workers employed by UN agencies and NGOs respectively represent around half of the interviewees. In the Thai case, NGO workers are the dominant category of interviewees while UN employees make up a smaller share. This is due to the fact that NGOs are the dominant humanitarian actors in Thailand, while UN agencies have a more prominent role in Bangladesh. Further, in Thailand I conducted a number of interviews with refugees working for community-based organizations (CBOs) involved in camp governance and delivery of humanitarian aid and services. The model of refugee self-government in the Thai camps blurs the line between humanitarians as service providers and implementers of programmes and refugees as beneficiaries and recipients; therefore I have considered it important to speak to refugee organizations as they occupy a unique position as both refugees and parts of the humanitarian aid machinery. In Bangladesh, there are no refugee governance structures of this kind. In addition, in Bangladesh I conducted one interview with a government official working with the delivery of healthcare services in the

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10 Telephone interviews were conducted in cases when attempts to arrange an interview during fieldwork failed and in some cases when I was put in contact with interviewees who no longer worked in Bangladesh or Thailand.

11 When several interviewees participated this was because the interviewee I had originally scheduled the interview with chose to bring one or several colleagues with him or her to the interview.
camp. The differences between the set of interviewees included in the material from Thailand and the set of interviewees included in the material from Bangladesh is a result of my attempts to cover the range of actors that are relevant in each case, and as such a result of the significant differences in the humanitarian landscape and the organization of humanitarian aid in these two cases. Moreover, the higher number of interviews from the Thai case reflects the higher number of humanitarian organizations and workers involved in humanitarian aid to refugees in this context. The number of interviews conducted with each category of interviewees in each case is presented in table 2.12

Table 2: Number of interviews

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Thailand</th>
<th>Bangladesh</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>UN</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NGO</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CBO</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Government</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>33</strong></td>
<td><strong>25</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Before arrival in each case study context, a first set of interviewees from humanitarian organizations working in the refugee camps were contacted by email and interviews were scheduled. Once in Bangladesh and Thailand, I contacted additional interviewees by phone. Further, I also employed a “snowballing” strategy, asking the interviewees I met if they had suggestions for other persons that might be relevant to speak to (Ritchie et al. 2003:94). In general, interviewees were helpful in providing contact information to other suggested interviewees.

In Bangladesh, the town Cox’s Bazar in the eastern part of the country is the hub from where humanitarian aid to the two official refugee camps is organized. All humanitarian organizations who work in the camps have their offices here, so therefore Cox’s Bazar was the most convenient location for my fieldwork and where I spent most of my time. In addition, I conducted some interviews in Dhaka with humanitarians on management positions at country level in their organizations. The setting in Thailand was similar. The border town of Mae Sot, the largest humanitarian hub along the border, was where most humanitarian organizations were based, and where I conducted the majority of the interviews. A few interviews were also conducted in the refugee camp Mae La. Because I chose to stay based in Mae Sot rather than

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12 A list of interviews showing the date and place of each interview is included in the appendix.
to try to cover the entire border, this study primarily focuses on humanitarian programmes in the three camps closest to Mae Sot: Mae La, Umpiem Mai, and Nu Po. While many aspects of my analysis may be relevant in all nine camps along the border, my material primarily covers humanitarian programmes implemented in the three Mae Sot camps. In Bangkok, as in Dhaka, I conducted some interviews with humanitarians at country level in their organizations. Interviews mostly took place in the office of the interviewee, and in some cases at restaurants or cafés.

With the exception of the small number of interviews in Thailand mentioned above, I have not conducted fieldwork in the actual refugee camps. There are several reasons for this. First, the focus of the study is how humanitarian organizations construct, interpret and apply gender equality norms. Thus, first and foremost it was important to be able to interview humanitarian workers, a task that was most conveniently accomplished in Cox’s Bazar and Mae Sot where almost all of the relevant organizations, including refugee CBOs, had their offices. Second, to be granted an official permission to visit the refugee camps is, in both Bangladesh and Thailand, nearly impossible due to the political sensitivities and bureaucratic obstacles surrounding the refugee situations. Therefore I considered extensive fieldwork in the camps to be neither essential to fulfil the purpose of the thesis, nor a feasible strategy given the political and practical obstacles.

All interviews were conducted in English. Language was not a major barrier in most cases, but in a few interviews I felt that much more could have been said if we had been able to communicate more fluently. In a few group interviews some of the participants partly translated for other participants. The quality of translation in these cases was probably not ideal, but the non-English speakers who participated may nonetheless have contributed to the discussion, although only parts of this contribution may have been communicated to me. Despite the challenges of communication and understanding in some interviews, I believe that the sum of all interviews provides a good corrective to possible misunderstandings in individual interviews.

In the beginning of each interview, I introduced the research project. Before proceeding with the interview I also explained how I would use the interviews. Here, I especially emphasized that the name and organizational affiliation of the interviewees would remain confidential and asked if they would agree to be recorded. Most interviewees did agree to be recorded, but not all. National and local organizations in particular were often more fearful of government reprisals and control than international ones, and were more careful for this reason. Indeed, caution is not without reason. Criticism of other organizations or of the host government may put strain on the cooperation between actors, or in the worst case, lead the government to withdraw permission for an organization to work in the camps. Karen CBOs
in Thailand are especially vulnerable as they are operating outside of the camps illegally and are watched by both Thai and Burmese authorities due to their links to the Karen insurgency.

The political sensitivity of the refugee situation both in Thailand and in Bangladesh and the very real risk that careless handling of information on my part may harm my interviewees or their organizations made it important to carefully consider how I use my interview material. For this reason, in the appended papers interviews are coded as belonging to one of three groups of organizations; UN agencies, NGOs, or CBOs. However, in some cases even providing this information may make it possible to identify the interviewee. In cases where I considered this to be so, I have omitted information about the interviewee altogether in the text.13 Where it is not apparent, it is specified whether the cited interview refers to Bangladesh or Thailand. While this may lead the analysis to lose some detail, it is necessary in order not to put my interviewees at risk or betray assurances of confidentiality given in the interview situation. In addition, I am not primarily looking for differences between organizations but for broad patterns in how gender equality is constructed and applied in a broader context of humanitarian aid to refugees.

The interviews focused on three themes: *the concept of gender equality*; *the role of the interviewee’s organization in promoting gender equality*; and *the role of other organizations in promoting gender equality and the relations between various actors* in this issue area. However, these themes did not always follow in the same order or were neatly separated. Under the theme *the concept of gender equality*, interviewees discussed how they would define gender equality, what a commitment to gender equality meant in their specific work context, what problems they sought to address and what kind of change they thought was needed. Discussing *the role of their specific organization* I asked about specific programmes that the organization was involved in, and we discussed the objectives, methods and challenges of these programmes. Finally, we discussed *the role of other organizations* in promoting gender equality, including questions about the relations between different actors in this issue area, ownership and responsibility for gender programmes and gender equality promotion, and whether different actors shared a common understanding of problems and goals in this area or whether there were points of conflicting ideas and goals.14

Interviews lasted between 25 and 90 minutes, with most around one hour. During interviews that were not recorded I took as much notes as possible,

13 For this reason the list of interviews in the appendix does not include information about the type of organization the interviewees belong to.
14 An interview guide is included in the appendix.
and typed out and complemented my notes as soon as possible after the
interview, always the same day. With a few exceptions, recorded interviews
were transcribed by me or by a research assistant.

All of the interview notes and transcripts were then analysed using the
analytical framework above, with the concepts of technologies, rationalities,
and effects at the centre of my reading. I have read the interview notes and
transcripts looking for concrete practices in the promotion of gender
equality; for problem representations and ideas about what it is that should
be governed, how, and to what ends that were expressed when discussing
concrete practices, problems, and programmes; and I have considered the
discursive, subjectification and lived effects of the practices and ideas that
was described and related to me by my interviewees.

Documents
To a varying extent in the four appended papers, I have complemented the
analysis of the interview material with different types of documentary
materials. In paper II-IV, I have where relevant and possible included
documentation from humanitarian organizations, such as project reports
and evaluations, as well as international humanitarian policy texts in the
analysis. These types of documentary sources were mostly used to provide
information about specific programmes or events that were relevant to the
contextual description or analysis in each paper.

In paper I, documentary sources have a more central place in the analysis.
In this paper, I analyse the interviews together with two key international
policy texts on gender in order to discern broader patterns in how gender
equality is represented as a policy goal in humanitarian aid to refugees, and
how these representations produce subject positions that shape the
possibilities for agency of refugees as well as humanitarians. The two policy
documents selected for analysis in this paper are the UNHCR Handbook for
the Protection of Women and Girls (UNHCR 2008) and the Inter-Agency
Standing Committee (IASC) Gender Handbook in Humanitarian Action,
subtitled Women, Girls, Boys and Men: Different Needs – Equal
Opportunities (IASC 2006). These documents were selected because they are
written for a target audience of humanitarian workers engaged in the
planning and practical field work of humanitarian operations. The
handbooks have the character of comprehensive training manuals, but are
also central policy statements of their respective organizations. Their style
can be described as practice-oriented and pedagogical, written with the
intent of explaining to humanitarian workers how gender is relevant to their
work and how they should act to address gender issues. The handbooks
educate and socialize humanitarian workers to adopt particular forms of
gender knowledge and apply it in the delivery of humanitarian aid
programmes. The function of these handbooks as modes for the
dissemination of gender knowledge makes them very useful in an analysis seeking to grasp how the meaning of gender equality in humanitarian aid work is constructed, and how these constructions become implicated in the governing of refugees.

The UNHCR handbook is a comprehensive document that consolidates humanitarian gender policy and practice as it has taken shape over the past two decades. In addition, the UNHCR is the central organization of the international refugee regime and a major humanitarian UN agency, and its policies and ways of working are widely influential among NGOs working with refugees and other emergency-affected populations. The IASC was formed in 1992 to improve coordination of humanitarian operations within the UN, and have been a major source of humanitarian gender policymaking in the last decade. Comprised of all UN agencies wholly or partly engaged in humanitarian aid and a number of NGOs, the IASC represents a broad spectrum of humanitarian actors. Thus, policies adopted by the IASC have a broad support and can be expected to represent widely endorsed principles and positions. The IASC Gender Handbook is therefore widely known and used by a variety of humanitarian organizations working in refugee situations.

Together, these two handbooks provide a comprehensive collection of the current state of humanitarian gender policy and practice and occupy a central position in the construction and dissemination of knowledge about gender in the humanitarian field. They represent the current global normative framework with regards to gender equality in humanitarian aid to refugees. Thus, to understand how gender equality norms are implicated in the global governance of refugees, these texts are central.

In the analysis of the policy texts in paper I, my interest is not whether these policies are implemented in the way they were intended to or whether they “worked” well or not. My interest is the rationalities they express: that is, the ideas and assumptions about problems, goals, and governmental responsibilities in relation to gender equality that underpin the gender handbooks. The texts were analysed using the analytical framework described in the previous section. I read them looking for concrete proposals for action and changed practices; for problem representations and ideas about what it is that should be governed, how, and to what ends; and I consider the discursive, subjectification and lived effects of these prescriptions and their underlying ideas.

**Entering the humanitarian field**

When I first arrived in Thailand to conduct interviews for this thesis, I was struck by the complex and conflictual character of the relationships between the various actors involved in humanitarian aid to the refugee camps. To navigate the tensions, power asymmetries and power struggles between
these actors was certainly not easy, and I was first concerned about how I would manage to successfully collect the material I needed in this sensitive context. However, the more I learned about the specific local contexts of the humanitarian aid operations in Thailand and in Bangladesh, I became less concerned about the difficulties they presented for my research, and more attuned to what my personal experiences of tensions and conflicts between different actors could tell me about the power relations of the humanitarian aid encounter, and about how these power relations might shape the implementation of gender equality programmes in the camps.

My position as a researcher entering the world of humanitarian aid was perceived differently by different actors. In the interaction with Western interviewees working for UN agencies and NGOs, I was primarily seen as a student, and many expressed their motivation for participating in the interview in terms of their willingness to “help” with my research. In addition, I was always dependent on the goodwill of the interviewee for access to their thoughts, to information, to project documentation and to other interviewees. My position of dependence on the goodwill of interviewees was sometimes a source of frustration. However, the position on the part of the interviewee as the person in control, merely helping a student out a little, may have been an advantage to the extent that interviewees have felt comfortable in the interview situation.

However, an aspect of my positioning as researcher that was not always helpful is my Swedishness; several times I have experienced that interviewees have referred to Sweden as a country that is “good at” gender equality and appeared to assume that I thought their work for gender equality was not good enough. In this sense, my Swedishness sometimes put my interviewees on the defense. This was especially salient in interviews with non-Western humanitarian workers, who seemed to be more prone to regard me as a person with a superior knowledge of gender equality – or at least a person who might believe herself to possess such superior knowledge. In these cases, I felt that my research agenda was incorrectly interpreted as an evaluation aiming to measure the work of humanitarian organizations in these local contexts against an “international” ideal of “best practice”. When I felt that this might be the case, I tried to explain that such an evaluation of their work was not my purpose.

In relation to CBOs in Thailand, for reasons explained above, I was often initially seen as a stranger whom it might be dangerous to trust. These interviews were most often arranged through a CBO or NGO intermediary contact, and it generally took more time to establish the degree of trust required for the interviewee to share his or her opinions and experiences with me. In these interactions, I found it important to clarify that I was a researcher representing a university, and not a part of the humanitarian aid
establishment that CBOs were dependent on and cooperated with, but also sometimes felt neglected and marginalized by.

It is my conviction that the absolute majority of humanitarian workers have chosen their occupation out of a desire to do good and to help people in need. Thus, although humanitarian aid to refugees is implicated in the reproduction of global hierarchies and injustices in ways that I have discussed above, I find it important to emphasize that this does in no way deny that on the individual level, humanitarian aid does help people and it does relieve suffering. While it does not change world order, it alleviates some of the consequences of the way the world is currently working. Therefore I find it important to emphasize that none of my lines of inquiry or my arguments in this thesis implies that individual humanitarian workers would be motivated by malign agendas. Particularly when discussing my interactions with interviewees, I think it is vital to clarify that an assumption that we all share a basic wish to make the world better has been the starting point from where I have approached UN employees, NGO workers as well as refugee representatives. For ethical as well as practical reasons, I believe this is important. This approach has made it possible to overcome suspicions and defensiveness based on various concerns on the part of the interviewees. It would have been difficult, not to mention deeply unfair, to approach the interviewees and ask them to share their time and their experiences without an attitude of basic respect and sympathy for them and their work.

Further, in the beginning of each interview when I introduced my research project I emphasized that it is far from self-evident what gender equality really means in the context of humanitarian aid; what it should mean; and how it should be pursued in practice. This assertion often seemed to resonate with the interviewees’ own experiences, and prompted many spontaneous reflections and anecdotes about professional confusion, misunderstandings and miscommunication between agencies seeking to coordinate their work, gaps between policy rhetoric and field realities, and tension and conflicts in relation to other humanitarian actors as well as in relation to the refugee communities. Thus, it became clear to me that from the perspective of humanitarian workers, a critical analysis of gender equality policy has a lot to offer in very practical terms. By making the ideas and assumptions that currently inform humanitarian gender equality policy and programmes explicit, it can facilitate reflection and dialogue on the rationales and objectives of gender equality work; whether current programmes achieve what they are meant to or if there are unintended effects; and whether there are more fruitful ways to think about and work with gender equality in humanitarian aid to refugees. My experiences of the interviews clearly

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15 See Olivius 2014 for more discussion of the usefulness of this project to humanitarian organizations and practitioners.
convinced me that humanitarian workers do feel the need for such reflection on their work, and many appreciated to be given a reason to think about these issues in the interview. Although time and institutional incentives for such reflection are often scarce in the working environment of the field, it is my hope that this thesis might provide some inspiration to those humanitarian workers who, despite the constraints of their work situation, take the time to reflect and seek to improve their ways of responding to inequality and injustice.
Overview of appended papers

In this section I will summarize the four appended papers, highlighting the main findings of each paper. I will then return to these findings in the concluding discussion.

From different angles, each of the papers contribute to address the overall aim of the thesis: to analyse how, and with what effects, gender equality norms are constructed, interpreted and applied in the global governance of refugees. Paper I examines how gender equality is given meaning as a policy goal in humanitarian aid to refugees, and what the implications are with regards to the production of subjectivities and their positioning in global relations of power. Paper II, III, and IV further explores how gender equality comes into play in humanitarian field practices in refugee camps in Bangladesh and Thailand. These three papers each take up one theme that proved to be salient in my analysis of the interview material, and investigate this theme further. Paper II probes the hegemony of neo-liberal forms of governing in humanitarian gender equality programming, and explores how neoliberal technologies of government shape the meaning of gender equality and the organization of its promotion in refugee camps. Paper III departs from the observation that gender equality is highly intertwined with notions of participation in humanitarian aid to refugees. Through an examination of participatory practices in Bangladesh and Thailand, it explores the meaning, limits and purposes of refugee participation in the promotion of gender equality. Paper IV expands the analysis of the specific meaning and purposes of refugee women’s participation in the governance of refugees and refugee camps.

I. Constructing Humanitarian Selves and Refugee Others: Gender Equality and the Global Governance of Refugees

The first paper analyses how gender equality is constructed as a policy goal in humanitarian aid to refugees. In particular, it examines the power relations that are (re)produced through humanitarian gender equality policy and practice through a focus on the subject positions that are constituted by the representations of gender equality that currently inform the global governance of refugees. Drawing on postcolonial feminist and Foucauldian perspectives, the analysis approaches gender equality projects as sites where images of refugee others and humanitarian selves are constructed. These images both enable and constrain the agency of humanitarian workers as well as refugees, and position these subjects differently in global hierarchies of power.
Based on an analysis of international humanitarian policy texts as well as interviews with humanitarians working in refugee camps in Thailand and Bangladesh, I identify two main representations of the meaning of gender equality in humanitarian aid to refugees. The first representation conceives of gender equality as synonymous with women’s participation. Refugee women are represented as strategic partners in the delivery of humanitarian aid by virtue of the reproductive roles they are assumed to perform, and harnessing refugee women’s specific contributions through increasing their participation is represented as essential to humanitarian aid effectiveness. By contrast, refugee men are represented as unreliable subjects who constitute problems, not resources, for the work of humanitarian organizations. Humanitarian workers are constructed as administrators with expertise in the rational management of gender difference.

Moreover, gender equality is also represented as a project of development, involving the transformation of “traditional” refugee communities into modern societies. Gender inequality is constructed as an expression of underdevelopment, to be remedied by the introduction of international human rights norms. The promotion of gender equality is not only seen as essential to the immediate delivery of aid but also as an aspect of the reconstruction of more developed, peaceful and stable societies in the long term. Refugee women are represented as victims of “backward” cultures in need of protection from humanitarian workers, cast as saviors and liberal reformers, while refugee men are represented as perpetrators of ‘uncivilized’ masculinities in need of reform.

These findings show that in humanitarian policy and practice, the promotion of gender equality is categorically constructed as something that is done for refugees by humanitarian organizations. Humanitarian workers are constructed as the active party in this encounter; the administrator as well as the liberal reformer is characterized in masculinized terms of rationality, modernity, progress, and expertise. In contrast, stereotypes of refugees as feminized, passive recipients of aid are reproduced; refugees need to be rescued, protected, assisted, activated, controlled and reformed through humanitarian interventions. Even in descriptions of refugee women as key actors and important participants, they must be made to act as such by humanitarian workers.

Further, representations of gender equality in humanitarian policy and practice do not only sustain power asymmetries in the encounter between refugees and humanitarian workers, they also feed into, and reproduce, more general global relations of power. The portrayal of refugee women as victims of barbaric, underdeveloped cultures sustains a binary between dysfunctional, illegitimate and persecutory non-Western states and well-functioning, legitimate and human rights-abiding Western states that allows
Western states to appear as superior. Gender inequality in refugee communities is constructed as a symbol of the inferiority of “less developed” societies. In effect, gender equality is used to reproduce cultural hierarchies and racist images of non-Western peoples, and legitimates top-down interventions to “develop” their societies.

However, this claim does not imply that attempts to promote gender equality in refugee situations are not relevant or desirable: rather, precisely because the promotion of gender equality is important and holds potential to destabilize unequal relations of power, it is essential to critically scrutinize the ways in which gender equality projects may entrench or reproduce forms of domination and marginalization. Further, refugees do appropriate and modify gender equality norms and practices imposed from above to further their own political struggles, and the top-down manner in which gender equality is promoted by humanitarian organizations does not exclude the possibility that it can contribute to expand the political spaces and economic opportunities available to at least some refugee women. Nonetheless, gender equality currently operates not only as a tool of emancipation, but to a troubling extent also as a tool of domination, in the global governance of refugees.

II. Gender Equality and Neo-liberal Governmentality in Refugee Camps

The second paper examines the implications of the neo-liberalization of the international refugee regime for humanitarian aspirations to promote gender equality. In recent decades, humanitarian aid to refugees has increasingly employed neo-liberal forms of governing that are characterized by an emphasis on accountability, measurement of performance, and decentralization of responsibility for welfare. In this paper I show that neo-liberal strategies and governing practices fundamentally shape the meaning of gender equality and the organization of its promotion in humanitarian aid to refugees. Taking the field practices of humanitarian aid as the analytical point of departure, the paper contributes to a better understanding of the impact of humanitarian gender policies as well as the dynamics of the neo-liberalization of the international refugee regime.

The analysis demonstrates how neo-liberal technologies of government are employed in gender equality programmes in refugee camps in Thailand and Bangladesh. While there are significant contextual differences between the refugee camps in Bangladesh and in Thailand, the analysis nonetheless identifies four technologies of government that constitute dominant features in how gender equality is conceptualized and how its promotion is organized in both camp contexts. By focusing on these similarities, the analysis highlights patterns in the meaning and use of gender equality as a governing tool in humanitarian aid to refugees.
The first technology of government is the production of “measurable outcomes”. In practical programming, gender equality is often synonymous with gender balance in terms of the numbers of men and women who participate in programmes and benefit from services. The analysis shows that reducing gender equality to an issue of numbers precludes a deeper analysis of gendered power relations, as everything that cannot easily be measured becomes invisible. While this technology seeks to render the results of gender equality promotion measurable, they simultaneously limit the forms of social change that can be envisioned.

The logic of the second technology of government, the construction of self-managing “communities”, is to activate refugees and encourage them to perceive themselves as a community which can take responsibility for its own problems. This technology is exemplified by the establishment of groups for refugee women who have been victims of, or are considered “at risk” of, sexual and gender based violence (SGBV). In these groups, the “community” of vulnerable women are trained and “empowered” by humanitarian organizations to be able to support each other, raise awareness about SGBV in the camps, identify other women who have been victims of violence, and refer them to service providers. However, this form of “outsourcing” of program implementation to refugees does not constitute a transfer of ownership. Rather, these groups are targeted by mechanisms for control and regulation that ensures that their activities stay in line with the operational objectives of humanitarian organizations.

The third technology of government is the mobilization of women as humanitarian partners. Programmes and strategies that specifically target women and seek to strengthen their role in camp life are an important part of humanitarian gender programming in the refugee camps in Thailand and in Bangladesh. However, the rationale behind efforts to promote women’s inclusion and participation is not so much the pursuit of equality, but rather that of efficiency. Refugee women, assumed to be vital to the health and nutritional status of refugee families, are therefore encouraged to be active subjects who claim a voice in their families and communities, and who simultaneously facilitate the achievement of humanitarian goals. By virtue of their reproductive roles, women are seen as providing strategic inroads into the refugee populations if they can be mobilized as humanitarian partners. While these programmes claim to empower women in their current reproductive roles, they do nothing to change gendered divisions of labour. Existing gender relations are analysed in order to maximize the efficiency of humanitarian programmes, not in order to change them.

The fourth technology of government identified in the paper is the use of “international standards” as a governing tool. The basis of this technology is a conception of gender equality as an issue of adherence to international standards. Gender equality is constructed as originating in “the
international”, and as the opposite of “traditional” refugee culture. A generalized representation of refugee culture as an obstacle to gender equality obscures differences within refugee communities, and does not acknowledge the possibility of change towards gender equality that is driven by refugees. Moreover, it serves to legitimize international humanitarian control over gender equality programming, and effectively disqualify the work of refugee advocates for gender equality.

The strategies employed to promote gender equality in the refugee camps in Thailand and Bangladesh illustrate how neo-liberal technologies of government operate in the specific context of humanitarian aid work in refugee camps. The results pointedly illustrate the interplay between technologies of agency and technologies of performance characteristic of neo-liberal governance. While technologies of agency are used from below to foster particular forms of subjectivity, technologies of performance are deployed from above to regulate and control. In particular, the analysis presented in this paper draws out the implications of neo-liberalism for the implementation of humanitarian gender equality policies. In conclusion, I argue that neo-liberal forms of gender equality promotion have a number of problematic effects. The meaning of gender equality becomes superficial and instrumental, and international “expertise” is privileged at the expense of refugee ownership when gender equality is constructed as a technical, administrative issue rather than an issue of power and politics.

III. (Un)Governable Subjects: The Limits of Refugee Participation in the Promotion of Gender Equality in Humanitarian Aid.

The third paper explores how participatory and community-based approaches are used in efforts to promote gender equality in humanitarian aid to Burmese refugees in Thailand and Bangladesh. In humanitarian aid to refugees, participatory and community-based approaches are today strongly emphasized as the path towards more efficient protection and assistance. In particular, participation and community mobilization are constructed as a vehicle for the promotion of gender equality. Drawing on the interviews with humanitarian workers in Thailand and in Bangladesh, the analysis presented in this paper explores the meaning, limits and purposes of refugee participation as it is constructed in humanitarian aid work in the field. The radically different ways in which refugee participation was discussed and problematized in these two contexts constitutes the point of departure for this paper. Refugees, especially women, in Bangladesh are problematized as passive and dependent due to their alleged lack of ‘community spirit’ and participation. In contrast, the political activism of refugee leaders and women’s organizations in Thailand is represented as problematic, illegitimate and unruly. Contrasting the narratives of humanitarian workers
in Bangladesh and in Thailand presents a paradox: in Bangladesh, refugees do not participate enough, and in Thailand they participate too much. What can this tell us about the meanings attributed to participation in humanitarian aid to refugees? What forms of participation are desirable, by whom, and for what purposes?

In this paper I examine this paradox, drawing out the meanings attached to the concept of participation in humanitarian policy and practice and showing how participation is employed in the governance of refugees. I identify and examine three examples of refugee participation that are employed in each of the case study contexts. In the case of Bangladesh, I examine efforts to establish committees for refugee participation in camp management with gender equal representation; programmes targeting women in areas such as food, water, hygiene and childcare; and participatory assessments under the UNHCR age, gender and diversity mainstreaming (AGDM) strategy. The analysis highlights how participation in this context is employed as a means to combat refugee “dependency” and facilitate the effective implementation of humanitarian programmes. To this end, involving women is seen as particularly important. However, the examined forms of refugee participation do not give refugees access to decision-making power or any real opportunities to influence humanitarian goals and priorities.

In the case of Thailand, I examine refugee participation in camp management and in programmes addressing violence against women, showing how humanitarian workers react to and represent the more extensive forms of refugee participation present in this case, and how gender equality is used as a tool to delegitimize refugee ownership. The implementation of the AGDM strategy in Thailand, initiated and designed by the UNHCR rather than the refugee community, is examined as an effort to introduce alternative forms of refugee participation. The examples illustrate the difficulties facing refugees who claim the right to define priorities and control the implementation of programmes, not merely to be consulted and solicited to carry out programmes designed by others. Despite the existence of influential refugee advocates for gender equality, many humanitarians assume refugee self-governance to be an obstacle to gender equality. Consequently, humanitarian organizations’ lack of recognition for the work of refugee organizations has led to considerable conflict and tension. In contrast, the AGDM strategy encourages refugees to participate by sharing their opinions and experiences when asked to do so, but they are not invited to influence the shape of the AGDM process or the follow-up of recommendations given by consulted refugees.

I conclude that the forms of refugee participation called for in humanitarian policy discourses and institutionalized in humanitarian aid practice are very limited. To have refugees “participate” means to encourage
them to perceive themselves as active subjects responsible for their own lives and communities; mobilize them to facilitate the effective implementation of humanitarian programmes; and to solicit their opinions and experiences as resources for humanitarian planning and evaluation. Thus, participation serves two main purposes; to create active refugees who will govern themselves in accordance with norms and rules disseminated by humanitarian organizations, and to make refugees feel involved and responsible for matters of camp life and in them foster the capabilities of self-regulation, activity and responsibility, countering the “dependency syndrome”. As a technology of government, the rationality of refugee participation is not to change relations of power or redistribute decision-making power, but to alter the subjectivities and the psychological state of refugees. Further, the Thai case shows that forms of refugee participation initiated by refugees, where refugees set the agenda or control the implementation of programmes, do not easily fit within the global humanitarian system.

Moreover, the analysis shows that when refugees do not comply with desired forms of participation, notions of gender equality are often used to construct an image of international normative superiority and to legitimate ownership and control by humanitarian organizations. Humanitarians in Bangladesh represent refugee “dependency” and lack of “community spirit” as closely intertwined with repression of women and lack of gender equality. International interventions in the Thai camps are often represented as a precondition for gender equality despite the presence of strong refugee advocates for gender equality. Thus, while the promotion of gender equality is often associated with efforts to activate refugees and have them participate, it can also be used to legitimate their exclusion when they are not considered capable of self-management. Further, the refugee subjectivities that are fostered through desirable forms of participation have a strongly gendered dimension. The promotion of women’s agency and participation is intertwined with the rejection of “dependency” and “politicization” through a representation of women as altruistic and family oriented, embodying a true community spirit, in contrast to men who are represented as more politicized, corrupt, and self-interested. While programmes underpinned by these representations may strengthen the role of refugee women in some cases, they simultaneously constrain the possible ways in which refugee women can participate. Women’s active participation as welfare providers and partners in humanitarian reform efforts is indispensable to the creation of self-regulating, governable refugee communities, so when women act politically in other ways and for other purposes than those envisioned by humanitarian agencies, as the Thai case illustrates, they are seen as especially problematic, unruly and illegitimate.
IV. Displacing Equality? Women’s Participation and Humanitarian Aid Effectiveness in Refugee Camps

The fourth paper expands the analysis of the meaning and purposes of refugee women’s participation. In humanitarian aid policy and practice, the importance of women’s participation is strongly emphasized. However, in this paper I argue that women’s participation has become an instrument for optimizing the efficiency and effectiveness of humanitarian operations rather than a tool for the promotion of gender equality. While the utility of women’s participation as a means to a variety of humanitarian goals is frequently emphasized, the question of whether current participatory practices actually improve refugee women’s lives or contribute to greater gender equality receives far less attention. This study analyses how women’s participation is represented and employed as a means to improve the effectiveness and efficiency of humanitarian aid in refugee camps in Bangladesh and Thailand, and asks how such strategies affect the gendered relations of power that shape women’s lives in the camps.

The paper situates the construction of women’s participation as a resource for humanitarian aid effectiveness in the context of a shift towards neo-liberal governmentalities in the humanitarian field. Neo-liberal governance does not only presuppose the existence of a generic, self-regulating subject but is reliant on particular gendered subjectivities that must be fostered through governing practices that shape the conduct of men and women in different ways. The particular emphasis on women’s participation in humanitarian aid provides an opportunity to explore the dynamics of this theme, which has thus far been relatively neglected in the governmentality literature.

The analysis focuses on two specific areas of humanitarian work: programmes addressing child nutrition in Bangladesh, and distribution of food in Thailand. These areas were selected because they constitute areas where women’s participation was very commonly discussed as a key resource for successful humanitarian programmes in the interviews. However, they are not unique in this regards but can be seen as illustrative of broader rationalities and practices in the Bangladeshi and Thai refugee camps. Thus, a close examination of the rationalities behind, and the effects of, efforts to increase women’s participation in these areas provides insights into more general patterns in how women’s participation operates as a governing strategy in humanitarian aid.

In Bangladesh, humanitarian agencies working to address child malnutrition represent “community mobilization” as the key to prevent malnutrition. In particular, refugee mothers are targeted by a variety of programmes that seek to activate, educate and counsel them to make them better, more engaged mothers and caretakers. The way in which mothers perform their reproductive responsibilities is constructed both as a cause of
malnutrition and as its potential remedy. The issue of child malnutrition is thus constructed as closely intertwined with the psychological state and the behavior of mothers. To convince women, in their capacities as mothers and caretakers, to participate in the right way is therefore seen as crucial to address child malnutrition.

However, there is no conscious effort to alter unequal relations of power or change women’s subordinated status. Rather, women’s performance of traditional reproductive roles is utilized as a vehicle for the implementation of humanitarian programmes. Despite the fact that many interviewees describe Rohingya women as extremely vulnerable, oppressed and largely confined to the home, nutritional programmes tend to reify existing gender relations rather than to question them. In addition, the construction of women’s participation as a resource against child malnutrition makes refugee women with extremely limited access to resources and space of maneuver responsible for solving a very complex problem. When efforts to address malnutrition focus on engaging mothers in improving their childcare practices it obscures structural causes of malnutrition that lie far beyond the reach of refugee women. Thus, refugee women are left with new responsibilities that they have no real leverage to fulfill.

In Thailand, increasing women’s participation has been employed as a key means to improve the capacity, transparency and efficiency of the management and distribution of food and other supplies. Through different forms of targeted recruiting of women distribution staff, women’s representation was significantly increased over the course of a few years. These efforts were informed by assumptions that women are less corrupt and more family-oriented, reliable, orderly and cooperative than men. Therefore, increasing women’s participation was expected to reduce corruption, misuse and wastage of food, ensure that food was used for household consumption, and prevent sexual abuse related to food distribution. In this case, essentialist images of women have been paradoxically employed to legitimate women’s inclusion in previously male spheres. By virtue of their women-specific qualities, perspectives and experiences women are represented as able to improve the quality of camp governance. Interestingly, a neo-liberal discourse of women-as-resources in this case contributed to open up space to challenge and destabilize gendered relations of power even though this was not the primary objective. One important explanation for this is the role of refugee women activists, who have benefitted from the instrumental legitimation of women’s participation and leadership but also challenged the neoliberal “business case” perspective on women’s participation through a focus on equality, justice and rights. Thus, this case illustrates that the potential for resistance and re-problematization is always inherent in any governing project, and the relations of power it produces can be modified and destabilized from within.
In conclusion, these results show that programmes that promote women’s participation as a means for the achievement of other goals can reinforce existing gender inequalities, but also, despite their constraining effects, contribute to open up new opportunities for women. However, equality is treated as a side effect, not a goal in its own right. In conclusion, I suggest that renewed engagement with the political project of feminism is needed to counter the de-politization and instrumentalization of gender in humanitarian aid; salvage its potential as an analytical lens that draws attention to structures of power, inequality, privilege and disadvantage; and bring the goals of equality and justice back in.
Gender equality norms as governing tools: care, control, emancipation

This thesis set out to analyse how, and with what effects, gender equality norms are constructed, interpreted and applied in the global governance of refugees. The overall aim of the thesis was divided into three research questions, which guides the analyses in the four appended papers: (1) how is the meaning of gender equality constructed and interpreted in humanitarian policy and practice? (2) What methods, programmes, strategies and procedures are used to promote gender equality in humanitarian aid to refugees? And (3) how are relations of power being (re)shaped by humanitarian gender equality policy and practice?

In this concluding section, I synthesize and discuss the findings of the appended papers in order to address the overall aim of the thesis. I argue that in the global governance of refugees, gender equality norms are primarily given meaning and made useful in relation to two dominant governing projects. First, gender equality norms are represented and applied as tools for the efficient management of human displacement. In a technocratic project of managing, administrating and ordering people out of place, gender equality norms provides ways of making the delivery of aid and the governance of camps more efficient and effective. Constructions of refugee women as useful subjects, and aid practices that seek to marshal women's agency and participation towards the efficient management of displacement are central here.

Second, gender equality norms are also taken up in a project of reforming and normalizing regions of the world that are seen as sources of insecurity and instability. Refugee situations are seen as expressions of governance failures and underdevelopment in the global “borderlands” (Duffield 2001b), and as potentially global threats. In addition, refugee situations are also represented as “windows of opportunity” to reconstruct more developed, peaceful and secure societies after conflicts and crises. As symbols of modernity and progress, gender equality norms have become intrinsic components of a liberal peacebuilding package and present legitimate entry points for critique of and intervention into “other” societies.

These two dominant governing projects differ primarily in that the project of efficient management of displacement is concerned with governing the refugee situation as such, while the normalization of the global borderlands is a project fuelled by more far-reaching and long-term visions for global order and for the reconstruction and reform of societies affected by displacement. There are however also significant points of convergence and overlap between these governing projects.
Below, I expand on how gender equality norms are mobilized as governing tools in these two dominant governing projects, and on what the effects are in the context of humanitarian aid in refugee camps. I argue that the logic of care and control that Malkki has suggested characterizes the refugee camp (Malkki 1992, 1995) also pointedly captures how gender equality norms operate as governing tools in this context. However, while gender equality norms are used as tools of care and tools of control, they nevertheless also function as tools of emancipation despite the constraints presented by the power dynamics of the humanitarian aid encounter and the refugee camp context.

**Gender equality and the efficient management of displacement**

The evolution of the current system for the global governance of refugees has been driven both by a desire to relieve suffering and save lives and by “a technocratic approach to the ‘disposal’ of refugees” (Saunders 2014:69). At its core, it is intended to substitute the protection of an unwilling or unable sovereign state with the protection of international humanitarian organizations (Martin 2010). The objective of safeguarding the protection of individuals reflects humanitarianism’s roots in ideas of charity and philanthropy (Calhoun 2008). In addition, however, the primary rationale has always been to protect the “international system of states that is threatened when states fail to fulfil their proper roles” (Keely 1996:1057).

Drawing on the analyses in the four appended papers, I argue that a dominant rationality in the global governance of refugees is to efficiently manage human displacement: to provide sufficient care to sustain refugee lives and reduce suffering, and to control the spatial disposition and movement of refugees. People out of place constitute disorderly threats to the international system of states, and to manage displacement is thereby largely a matter of ordering refugee bodies. Confinement in refugee camps is an effective strategy to this end, enabling both spatial control and efficient delivery of food aid, health care services, and other interventions vital to the care of refugees.

Further, the findings of this thesis demonstrate that gender equality norms have gained significant traction as ways of making the management of displacement more efficient and effective. Below, I show how gender equality is closely linked to notions and practices of participation: participation, particularly women’s participation, is widely represented as essential to make refugee camps governable and to administer aid efficiently. Moreover, I discuss the effects of mobilizing gender equality norms for the efficient management of displacement in this way. In particular, I discuss the implications of the strong focus on refugee women’s usefulness in humanitarian aid to refugees.
**Governing through (women’s) participation**

A prominent feature of how gender equality is constructed, interpreted and applied in humanitarian aid to refugees is its close intertwining with notions and practices of participation. In policy texts as well as in interviews, the pursuit of gender equality is constantly associated with various practices that seek to encourage the active participation of refugees in general and of refugee women in particular. Participatory practices are linked to the promotion of gender equality in several ways.

First, encouraging refugee participation and community mobilization in general, for example through involving refugees in camp management or through consultative processes such as AGDM, is frequently assumed to foster or lead to more gender equality. Participation is seen as a remedy for refugee “dependency”: by activating passive, dependent refugees participatory practices are assumed to create self-managing subjects who can take responsibility for their situation. The link between refugee participation in general and gender equality thus lies in the development of dependent refugees into self-managing, responsible, and active subjects. This modernization process involves fostering “modern” values such as democracy and gender equality (Paper III).

Further, the assumption that more refugee participation will automatically lead to more gender equality reflects a liberal, individualist conception of equality. The problem of refugee women’s subordination is implied to be their lack of active participation in the public sphere, represented as a feature of “traditional” gender roles and social structures. Accordingly, if all refugees are made to participate actively, so will refugee women, and the basis of their subordination will be removed. Equality in this sense thus presupposes active, autonomous and self-managing individual subjects. Moreover, a refugee population of actively participating individuals is a governable refugee population where humanitarian operations can run smoothly and where programmes can be implemented in an efficient manner.

However, as demonstrated in paper III, refugees can also become ungovernable subjects through their participation in camp life if it does not conform to humanitarian agendas and goals. The rationality of refugee participation is not to redistribute decision-making power and ownership, but to alter the psychological state and the subjectivities of refugees. Forms of refugee participation that are promoted by humanitarian organizations are often coupled with mechanisms that regulate, monitor and control the activities of participating refugees. Practices that involve refugees in the implementation of humanitarian aid programmes rarely give refugees any opportunity to shape these programmes or influence goals and priorities. Rather, refugees are included to carry out tasks defined by humanitarian organizations, and mechanisms are in place to ensure that the participation
of refugees stay in line with the objectives of humanitarian organizations. As the case of Bangladesh shows, resistance to requirements to participate in ways defined by humanitarian organizations can sometimes take the form of non-compliance. While such resistance is clearly an active choice, it is nonetheless interpreted as passivity and dependency by humanitarian organizations (Paper III).

Second, refugee women’s participation is represented as particularly important to the project of managing displacement situations efficiently. Women are promoted as models for the governable, active but compliant refugee subject. To promote women’s participation is thereby a way to bypass or sideline less governable subjects, such as refugee men, assumed to be more “politicized”, corrupt, and self-interested, or traditional elites such as religious leaders (Paper III). Moreover, women’s participation is seen as an important source of information and as a useful vehicle for programme implementation. Women’s participation in consultative processes, such as AGDM, and in the implementation of programmes is thought to provide more accurate information about the needs of the refugee population and the context for the humanitarian operation. Tapping into women’s gender-specific knowledge and experiences thus enables the humanitarian operation to run more smoothly and meet the needs of the refugee population in a more effective manner (Paper I-IV).

Furthermore, the responsibilities for the welfare of their families and communities that women shoulder are used to “outsource” the achievement of humanitarian goals and make humanitarian operations more efficient. This is exemplified by efforts to mobilize women as humanitarian partners, particularly in areas where they are expected to already perform a traditionally female role. In effect, women’s assumed gender-specific qualities and responsibilities are made useful for the purposes of humanitarian organizations. This entails “an optimization of systems of difference” (Foucault 2008:259) where the aim is not to counteract gender difference, but to make it productive. As elaborated in Paper II and IV, this logic is integral to neoliberal forms of governing that has become very pronounced in the international refugee regime. Further, as True points out, increasing women’s participation as a proxy for gender equality has gained considerable traction in global governance because it is so amenable to measuring, monitoring, and evaluation, practices that are central to neoliberal governance (True 2013:352; Paper II). However, strategies seeking to govern a population more effectively through “winning over” the women can also be traced back to colonial practices (Fanon 1970).

In effect, in humanitarian aid policy and practice women’s participation – that women are active or present – is in and of itself seen as constituting gender equality. However, the nature, purposes and outcomes of women’s participation is rarely discussed. Thus, in effect this amounts to a very
procedural conception of what gender equality means: if women participate, there is gender equality. This procedural conception tends to replace or crowd out a conception of gender equality as a normative and political goal related to outcomes in terms of power, privilege, and disadvantage. In addition, limiting the meaning of gender equality to the mere fact that women participate makes the substantive aspects of women's participation available for other purposes than the pursuit of gender equality. Specifically, the when, how, and why of women's participation is in policy texts as well as interviews overwhelmingly linked to goals of operational effectiveness and efficiency.

Refugee women in the spotlight: blessing and curse?
If refugee women only two decades ago remained largely invisible to humanitarian organizations (Edwards 2010, Buscher 2010), this is certainly no longer the case. While images of refugee women's vulnerability and victimhood are still rife in humanitarian policy and practice, women's agency is also emphasized and their active participation is desired and encouraged by humanitarian organizations. Refugee women are frequently represented as key actors and strategic partners in the provision of humanitarian aid and in the governance of refugee camps.

However, being placed at the centre of attention can be a blessing and a curse (Prins and Saharso 2008). Refugee women are now called upon, indeed required, to actively participate and to speak up and share their experiences and perspectives. While this has given refugee women opportunities to speak and to act, the ways in which they are able to do so are simultaneously limited (Carbin 2014, Minh-Ha 1987). Representations of refugee women's agency disproportionally cast them in the roles of mothers and caregivers, and it is from these positions they are called upon to speak, share their experiences, and participate in ways that are useful for humanitarian organizations (Paper I-IV). Accordingly, when refugee women exercise their agency in ways that do not conform to humanitarian expectations and agendas, they are represented as unruly and problematic (Paper III). When women are included because of their expected usefulness for efficient programme implementation, the needs and interests of humanitarian organizations, not refugee women themselves, are in focus. Thus, the question is not what humanitarian organizations can do for refugee women, but what refugee women can do for humanitarian organizations.

Moreover, the emphasis on women's participation is not often accompanied by an ambition to change unequal gender relations. For example, in policy texts and interviews it is frequently acknowledged that women are responsible for the bulk of the burden of keeping refugee families and homes up and running and alive and healthy in extremely limiting circumstances. However, such inequalities are rarely represented as
structures that should be changed. Instead, gender difference, or specifically women’s difference, should be better known so that it can be utilized to make humanitarian operations more effective. Women’s performance of reproductive roles is of particular interest, as it provides opportunities to “outsource” responsibilities for refugee welfare to “partners” who constitute a source of free or very inexpensive labour (Papers I-IV). In effect, humanitarian gender policy and practice reproduce and utilize existing gender relations rather than seeking to challenge and transform them.

Further, when gender equality norms are mobilized as means to the efficient management of displacement there is a strong tendency to de-politicize and instrumentalize gender equality. Its meaning is often reduced to an issue of numbers or of women simply being involved or present in a programme. This construction renders the promotion of gender equality measurable, but simultaneously limits the forms of change that can be envisioned. Emptied of power and politics, gender equality becomes a technical, administrative issue of good, efficient, and well-targeted programming (Paper I and II). This sidelines concerns over the substance and outcomes of women’s participation, and obscures gender equality as an issue of justice, privilege and disadvantage.

Nevertheless, the emphasis on women’s participation in the Thai and Bangladeshi refugee camps has contributed to opening up some new opportunities for women. In Thailand, efforts to increase women’s representation in camp management and food distribution were largely motivated by women’s assumed ability to improve efficiency and reduce corruption. These efforts did nonetheless contribute to opening up new employment opportunities for women, increasing women’s influence in camp governance, and to challenging previous notions of men’s and women’s work. Further, refugee women’s organizations explain that international endorsement of the importance of women’s participation has enabled them to strengthen their positions within the refugee communities. Accordingly, refugee women have been able to capitalize on the construction of women’s usefulness to put weight behind their own claims for influence. Thus, the avenues opened up by humanitarian organizations’ promotion of women’s participation are also used by refugee women to pursue their own agendas, exercising their agency in ways not envisioned by humanitarian organizations (Paper IV). Notably, refugee women have challenged the idea that the purpose of their participation is to facilitate the work of humanitarian organizations; instead they have represented women’s participation as an issue of justice and rights within a broader struggle for Karen self-determination (Paper III, IV, Olivius 2011).

In Bangladesh, there are numerous variants of training workshops and counselling sessions targeting women in order to educate them on issues such as child care, hygiene, nutrition and health. These practices are
motivated by women’s assumed key roles in managing households and caring for their families. Instead of challenging such gendered divisions of labour, the logic of these practices is to utilize women’s reproductive labour as vehicles of programme implementation. Yet, training workshops and counselling sessions do create social spaces where women meet outside of their homes, providing rare opportunities to talk and share their experiences with no men present. Such spaces may well hold transformative potential, even though this is not the aim of these programmes (Paper III, IV). Further, while the actual possibility of the women representatives in the Camp Management Committees, Block Management Committees and Food Management Committees to have any real influence is questionable, the fact that women are represented could arguably constitute a first step towards increased acceptance of women in public roles and leadership roles (Paper III).

Improvements in the situation of refugee women that result from efforts to have women participate are often treated simply as side effects in relation to the dominant goal of operational effectiveness and efficiency (Paper IV). Nevertheless, despite its constraining effects the instrumental promotion of women’s participation does open up for other effects than those pursued by humanitarian organizations, and can in some cases contribute to destabilize and challenge gendered relations of power. While refugee women are called upon to act and speak in certain limited ways, they do not conform to these expectations but creatively negotiate, resist and expand these positions.

**Gender equality and the normalization of the global borderlands**

In recent decades, the global governance of refugees has become increasingly concerned with addressing the “root causes” of displacement rather than just managing displacement situations when they arise. That is, humanitarian organizations increasingly aspire to not only patch up the victims of conflicts and crises, but to prevent conflicts and crises from occurring in the first place (Calhoun 2008). The root causes of displacement are described as underdevelopment, governance failures, and instability in the states and regions from where refugees flee. To prevent refugee flows, humanitarian organizations have therefore joined a broader liberal peacebuilding agenda which aspires to spread development, democracy, and human rights, and build stable, effective and legitimate states in the global borderlands (Barnett 2005, Barnett and Weiss 2008, Barnett 2001, Duffield 2001b).

Thus, a second dominant rationality in the global governance of refugees is to normalize the global borderlands from where the majority of refugees originate in order to prevent threats to global stability and security. As I demonstrate in Paper I, refugee situations are seen as windows of opportunity for interventions promoting development, democracy and
human rights with the purpose of rebuilding better societies after conflicts and crises. Gender equality, I argue, has achieved a prominent status as a symbol of development, modernity and progress in this context. A powerful rationality underlying humanitarian gender equality policies and programs is thereby the idea that aid interventions in refugee situations can contribute to the long-term development and improvement of refugee communities and, when they eventually return “home”, of their states of origin.

Below, I elaborate on how gender equality norms are used to construct a hierarchy between humanitarians and refugees. In humanitarian policy and practice, gender equality norms are frequently represented as “international standards” and contrasted with representations of the “traditional” character of refugee cultures and societies. Further, I discuss the effects of this way of mobilizing gender equality norms in a project of normalizing the global borderlands. In particular, I emphasize how it contributes to silence and exclude refugee actors from defining and working for gender equality in their own communities, removing ownership from refugees in favor of international “expertise”.

**International standards vs. traditional culture**

Humanitarian gender policy and practice is permeated by the assumption that refugee communities are traditional cultures where gender equality norms are unfamiliar. By contrast, humanitarian organizations are assumed to be carriers of modernity and progress, bringing gender equality into new and possibly hostile territory (Paper I, II, III). Thus, a very sharp dichotomy is constructed between traditional refugee communities which subordinate and oppress women, and humanitarian organizations which promote the international standards of gender equality. Through this dichotomy, boundaries between humanitarian selves and refugee others are constructed, and “refugee-producing” states and region in the South are constructed as morally inferior to the wealthy states in the North who provide the funds for humanitarian aid. Gender equality is used as the basis for an imagined ladder of cultural development, reinforcing hierarchies between refugees and humanitarians, and between the South and the North (Paper I). In ways familiar from colonial, nationalist and developmental discourses, gender is used as a boundary marker that separates the superior self from the inferior other (Narayan 1997, Narayan 2000, Yuval-Davis 1996, Yuval-Davis 1997a, Anthias and Yuval-Davis 2005).

The construction of refugee communities as traditional, backward and underdeveloped is central to the legitimation of the self-perceived right and responsibility of humanitarian organizations to define the meaning of gender equality and control its promotion in refugee camps, even in a case such as Thailand where strong advocates for gender equality exist among the refugees. Because the culture of refugees is generally assumed to be an
obstacle to gender equality, programmes or activities initiated or driven by refugees are also frequently assumed to constitute obstacles to gender equality by default. While humanitarian organizations want refugees to participate in ways that facilitates programme implementation, they cannot easily accommodate refugees who strive to govern themselves in accordance with their own priorities, goals, and political visions (Paper III). As McConnachie observes, “the problem is not simply a failure to recognize that refugee self-governance exists, but a perception that where it does exist it is in competition with or even threatening international ideals and norms” (McConnachie 2012:7). In order to ensure adherence to international standards, refugees’ participation in gender equality programming is regulated and monitored, and refugee initiatives are sometimes bypassed and duplicated (Paper II). Fostering active refugee participation aims to cultivate modern subjectivities and make the camps governable, but because refugees are not yet considered capable of responsible freedom and autonomy, their agency is constrained and shaped to ensure it is exercised in the right way (Paper III).

Moreover, the juxtaposition of gender equality and refugee culture reflects a conception of culture as a barrier that has to be removed through education in order for social progress and development to take place (Merry 2006). Implicitly, this juxtaposition also constructs international standards as beyond culture. Culture is imagined as a feature of traditional societies, which must be overcome in order to become part of the modern world. Accordingly, educational interventions occupy a prominent place in humanitarian gender equality policy and practice, echoing humanitarianism’s roots in philanthropic movements seeking to enlighten society’s poor and unfortunate in order to address social problems (Calhoun 2008).

In the Bangladeshi and Thai refugee camps, the emphasis on education as the solution to gender inequality is particularly prominent in relation to violence against women, or SGBV as it is termed in humanitarian lingo. SGBV is predominantly represented as a problem originating in the cultural practices and beliefs of the refugees which needs to be addressed through changing refugee attitudes and behaviours (Paper I). In order to do so, various forms of awareness-raising and education on gender issues and human rights are the main strategies to address violence against women. Workshop sessions on issues such as domestic violence or early marriage target different groups of refugees such as women, men, youth, or religious leaders. Social workers offer individual and family counseling in cases of domestic violence, and billboards throughout the camps display messages promoting women’s rights and condemning violence against women. Campaigns and events such as the celebration of International Women’s Day and 16 Days of Activism against Gender Violence also contribute to the
dissemination of messages encouraging changed beliefs and practices in the refugee population with regards to issues of family, marriage, education and decision-making.\textsuperscript{16}

While the attitudes and behaviours of refugee men are constructed as particularly problematic (Paper I), women are nonetheless the targets of the majority of educational interventions to promote gender equality. Some forms of education, frequently labelled “capacity-building”, train women to participate in ways encouraged by humanitarian organizations, such as being a member of a women’s support group or SGBV committee (Paper II). Others aim to train women to carry out their reproductive responsibilities in more effective ways, for example by teaching them how to improve their “care practices” and prevent child malnutrition (Paper IV). As I have discussed above, refugee women are widely represented as potential humanitarian partners. In this position, women can not only facilitate the management of displacement situations, but also provide strategic inroads for changing and developing refugee communities (Paper I-IV). Education is essential to recruiting refugee women as humanitarian partners and agents of development: it is expected that they will pass the modern values they are taught on to their families and thus have a civilizing influence on their communities (Paper III, Prins and Saharso 2008).

\textit{Agency, ownership and the transformation of “other” societies}

The construction, interpretation and application of gender equality norms as tools for the normalization of the global borderlands has a number of effects with regards to agency, ownership and possibilities for social transformation. Simply put, humanitarian organizations and workers are positioned as the agents of change, and refugees are positioned as objects to be changed. When gender equality is represented as international standards alien to the refugee communities, humanitarian organizations consequently achieve a status as experts on gender equality, and as the only legitimate interpreters and promoters of gender equality in the refugee camp context. Humanitarian actors are constructed as morally superior and able to reform, enlighten and modernize underdeveloped and traditional refugee communities. This simultaneously neglects and de-legitimizes the role of refugee actors, and denies the possibility of change towards gender equality that is driven by refugees. In effect, making gender equality the basis of a cultural/developmental hierarchy legitimates international humanitarian control over gender equality programming, and denies refugees a role as

\textsuperscript{16} The 16 Days of Activism Against Gender Violence is an international campaign originating from the first Women’s Global Leadership Institute sponsored by the Center for Women’s Global Leadership in 1991. 16 days of Activism against Gender Violence has been recognized in UNHCR programming since 2007. The 16 days begin with November 25, International Day against Violence Against Women and end with December 10, International Human Rights Day, in order to symbolically link violence against women and human rights and to emphasize that such violence is a violation of human rights. UNHCR 2007b.
political actors in the transformation of their own communities (Paper I, II, III).

In Thailand, where strong refugee advocates for gender equality exists, such attitudes and assumptions have resulted in considerable tension and conflict between humanitarian organizations and CBOs. Conflicts over ownership between international humanitarian organizations and refugee community actors have in recent years been especially manifest with regards to the SGBV committees. By the time of the establishment of the SGBV committees in the early 2000s, refugee women’s organizations, notably KWO, had already been running their own programmes for years. With time, the role of the UNHCR-initiated SGBV committees expanded and came to increasingly overlap and duplicate the work of refugee CBOs. This was not accidental, but motivated by a belief that international standards would not be met if international humanitarian organizations did not establish and control their own SGBV programmes. In response, CBOs protested against what they saw as international arrogance, unwillingness to recognize the work of CBOs and failure to consult and coordinate with them. The conflict around the SGBV committees has left the relationships between refugee CBOs and international organizations involved in SGBV programming severely strained (Paper II, III).

This episode is especially illustrative of how the construction of gender equality as international standards limits the forms of refugee agency that are perceived as acceptable by humanitarian organizations. In particular, there is not much space for refugee women to be recognized as political actors. Refugee women are seen as victims of oppressive cultures (Paper I) or as accomplices involved in upholding oppressive cultures, who can therefore not be seen as legitimate actors in the promotion of gender equality (Paper I, III). When women are recruited to participate in the implementation of humanitarian programmes, they are ascribed a role as cultural brokers who can contribute to the modernization of their communities. By contrast, when they act on their own initiative, their participation in camp life is seen as problematic and illegitimate. This reflects a widespread de-politization of refugee women, either as victims in need of protection or as selfless, family-oriented natural partners in the pursuit of humanitarian goals.

Further, contrasting gender equality with refugee culture can be seriously counterproductive for efforts to change unequal gender relations. In Bangladesh, humanitarian workers clearly express that promoting gender equality means to educate refugees to abandon the traditional beliefs and practices of Rohingya culture (Paper I). In the context of the Bangladeshi camps, this is deeply unhelpful to any effort to actually improve the situation of Rohingya women. Rohingya refugees has experienced discrimination and persecution on the basis of their claims to ethnic, religious and cultural specificity in Burma and in exile, and many refugees are therefore sensitive
to “attacks” on their culture and consider it important to preserve what they perceive as traditional features of group identity. As Narayan has argued, when gender equality is mobilized as a weapon of cultural conflict it effectively eliminates the space for feminist politics from within the refugee community and makes any proposition for change in women’s roles and opportunities deeply sensitive (Narayan 1997, 2000). In this context, it is perhaps not surprising that some refugees oppose the activities of humanitarian organizations due to fear that they are “turning our women into westerners”.17

However, resistance to humanitarian gender equality programmes has also taken the form of creative appropriation and negotiation. In Thailand, CBOs have challenged the construction of gender equality as external to the refugee communities by representing humanitarian gender equality programmes as a recent complement to their own long-standing struggle (Paper IV). Further, they also challenge humanitarian organizations’ claims to gender equality expertise by turning the language of international norms and standards back at them and using it to support their own agendas. For example, questioning the competence of an international organization, a refugee woman activist notes that “sometimes their staff does not know about international norms like Security Council Resolution 1325. I guess they think that refugees know nothing”.18

Moreover, in contrast to the rejection of gender equality due to its association with Western culture in Bangladesh, CBOs in Thailand have appropriated the notion of gender equality as an indicator of development to support the struggle for Karen self-determination. The idea that more gender equal representation in camp governance means to “move forward” (Paper I) has provided legitimacy to refugee women’s long-standing struggle for representation and influence within their communities. In addition, the promotion of gender equality has become one avenue where the Karen refugee leadership seeks to prove worthy and capable of governing their own community by demonstrating their adherence to international standards. Thereby the construction of gender equality as an indicator of development is made useful for a political project far beyond the goals and intentions of humanitarian organizations.

Concluding remarks
The findings of this thesis suggest that in the global governance of refugees, gender equality is rarely treated as a goal in its own right. Gender equality norms are either advocated on the basis of their usefulness as means for the efficient management of refugee situations, or as necessary components of a

17 Interview 33, UN worker Bangladesh, Cox’s Bazar, 6 March 2011.
18 Interview 15, CBO worker Thailand, Mae Sot 1 November 2010.
process of modernization and development of the regions from which refugees originate. This is perhaps not surprising; just as gender inequalities do not exist in isolation from a broader social context, it is difficult to imagine or define gender equality outside of broader visions for social change and social order. Accordingly, in the global governance of refugees, the construction, interpretation and application of gender equality norms is mediated and shaped by the overarching governing projects of this field. The important question, then, is whether the governing projects in which gender equality is taken up reproduce or challenge dominant hierarchical orders and forms of oppression and marginalization.

The efficient management of displacement and the normalization of the global borderlands are not governing projects that question or challenge the status quo. They do not draw attention to the unequal global histories and relations of power that have created specific refugee situations, and they do not question whether the existence of refugees, or their confinement in camps, is an unavoidable feature of world order. Indeed, at the level of world order and world politics, humanitarian aid is a conservative endeavor that does not challenge existing global relations of power, but mitigates some of their effects. The global governance of refugees is not about solving the problems that refugees experience, but rather about solving the problems that refugees pose to a world order of nation states (Saunders 2014). Considering this, it is perhaps to be expected that an interpretation of gender equality as a goal focused on improving refugee women’s lives is easily sidelined in favor of constructions that makes gender equality useful for the dominant governing projects in this field.

Nevertheless, this thesis demonstrates that in local refugee camp contexts, gender equality norms do open up new opportunities for refugee women (and sometimes men), create new avenues for refugee women’s organization and activism, and destabilize local gendered relations of power. Gender equality norms are also appropriated and used by refugees in pursuit of political projects that challenge and go beyond humanitarian agendas. Thus, while the mobilization of gender equality norms for governing projects that sustain or reproduce inequality and marginalization must be uncovered and critiqued, it is also important to acknowledge that gender equality norms are nonetheless also made useful as tools of emancipation from within diverse local contexts. In future research, the diversity of local practices of resistance, appropriation and negotiation could usefully be further explored through more ethnographic approaches than the one taken in this thesis. Such studies could nuance and complement the image of how gender equality norms operate in the global governance of refugees through further revealing how they are received and made useful by refugees themselves.
References


Olivius, E., 2014. Three Approaches to Gender in Humanitarian Aid. Findings from a Study of Humanitarian Aid to Refugees in Thailand and Bangladesh. Umeå: Department of Political Science & Umeå Centre for Gender Studies, Umeå University.


Appendix

List of interviews

1. 26 April 2010, Bangkok, Thailand
2. 28 April 2010, group interview Mae Sot, Thailand
3. 28 April 2010, Mae Sot, Thailand
4. 30 April 2010, Mae Sot, Thailand
5. 4 May 2010, Mae Sot, Thailand
6. 4 May 2010, group interview Mae Sot, Thailand
7. 7 May 2010, Mae Sot, Thailand
8. 8 May 2010, group interview Mae Sot, Thailand
9. 10 May 2010, Bangkok, Thailand
10. 22 October 2010, Mae Sot, Thailand
11. 26 October 2010, Mae Sot, Thailand
12. 26 October 2010, Mae Sot, Thailand
13. 27 October 2010, Mae Sot, Thailand
14. 29 October 2010, Mae Sot, Thailand
15. 1 November 2010, group interview Mae Sot, Thailand
16. 1 November 2010, Mae Sot, Thailand
17. 1 November 2010, Mae Sot, Thailand
18. 2 November 2010, Mae Sot, Thailand
19. 4 November 2010, Mae La, Thailand
20. 4 November 2010, Mae La, Thailand
21. 5 November 2010, Mae Sot, Thailand
22. 7 November 2010, Mae Sot, Thailand
23. 8 November 2010, group interview Mae Sot, Thailand
24. 19 November 2010, Mae Sot, Thailand
25. 19 November 2010, Mae Sot, Thailand
26. 29 November 2010, Bangkok, Thailand
27. 30 November 2010, Bangkok, Thailand
28. 24 February 2011, telephone interview, Thailand
29. 24 February 2011, telephone interview, Bangladesh
30. 3 March 2011, Cox’s Bazar, Bangladesh
31. 3 March 2011, Cox’s Bazar, Bangladesh
32. 3 March 2011, Cox’s Bazar, Bangladesh
33. 6 March 2011, Cox’s Bazar, Bangladesh
34. 7 March 2011, Cox’s Bazar, Bangladesh
35. 7 March 2011, Cox’s Bazar, Bangladesh
36. 7 March 2011, Cox’s Bazar, Bangladesh
37. 8 March 2011, Cox’s Bazar, Bangladesh

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Interview guide

Introduce project
   Research focus and context
   Use of interviews and recording
Role of interviewee
   Position, area of responsibility, tasks
   Time on current position

THEMES DISCUSSED

The concept of gender equality in the camp context
   What is gender equality?
   What does a commitment to gender equality in humanitarian work mean in practice?
   To what extent is there gender equality in the camps? Why/ why not?
   What are the symptoms of gender inequality/problems/issues?
   What are the causes of gender inequality (or specific problems mentioned) in general and in the camps?
What needs to change? In what way?
What is the solution to gender inequality (or specific problems mentioned) in general and in the camps?

Gender (equality) as a humanitarian concern
(Why) is gender equality a humanitarian concern? (Why) should it be?
How should humanitarian organizations react to gender inequality in refugee camps? Mandate, appropriate role, responsibility of different types of actors?
Who can/should contribute to increased gender equality in the camps?

Role of specific organization in gender equality policy and programmes
Describe the organization’s strategy with regards to gender equality?
What does gender mainstreaming mean in practice? (if discussed)
Does the organization have a gender policy? Content? Are global policies (examples) applicable and useful? Why or why not? How are they used or referred to?
Specific programmes of organization: objectives, approach, challenges, outcomes, stakeholders, etc.

Role of other organizations/actors in gender equality policy and programmes
How do you cooperate with other actors: UN, NGOs, CBOs/refugees?
Cooperation and coordination between organizations/strategies?
Other organization’s strategies/activities to promote gender equality: who and what?
Relative influence/role of different organizations?
Differences in approaches and ideas about gender equality?
Common understanding or conflicting ideas/goals?

What else should be done if enough resources, time, etc.? Needs?

Other issues/themes?