

Tribute to

Barbara Harrell-Bond, OBE 1932–2018



Barbara Harrell-Bond, founder of the Refugee Studies Centre and Forced Migration Review, died in July 2018.

Barbara fought throughout her life for refugee rights, to keep refugees at the centre of humanitarian interventions, and to give refugees voice and agency. These are issues which resonate even more deeply now, in an age in which safe havens for refugees are increasingly being eroded and violations of human rights are on the rise.

In a special collection of articles, authors discuss her legacy – the impact she had and its relevance for our work today.

The articles about Barbara and her work are published here and in Forced Migration Review issue 61, in English and Arabic. FMR 61, this tribute collection and all articles are online at www.fmreview.org/ethics.

For print copies of FMR 61, please email the Editors at fmr@qeh.ox.ac.uk. Please note that this tribute collection is not available in print but you are welcome to print it off yourself.

Forced Migration Review issue 61 is published in grateful tribute to Barbara.

A Life Not Ordinary: our colleague Barbara Harrell-Bond

Matthew Gibney, Dawn Chatty and Roger Zetter
(University of Oxford)

A lifelong commitment to justice

HRH Prince El Hassan bin Talal of Jordan

A refugee-centred perspective

Anita H Fábos (Clark University)

Building expert witness reports: Barbara's legacy

Maja Grundler (Queen Mary University of London)

The helpfulness of *Imposing Aid*: a tribute from the Refugee Law Project

Chris Dolan (Refugee Law Project)

Barbara's ethics of antagonism

Joshua Craze (writer)

AMERA: delivering a refugee-centred approach to protection

Sarah Elliott and Megan Denise Smith (UNHCR / IOM)

From a critique of camps to better forms of aid

Alyoscia D'Onofrio (International Rescue Committee)

Resist injustice

Olivier Rukundo



A Life Not Ordinary: our colleague Barbara Harrell-Bond

Matthew Gibney, Dawn Chatty and Roger Zetter

During Refugee Week 2018, the Refugee Studies Centre showed a new film entitled *A Life Not Ordinary*. The film illustrates the life of a woman born in a remote town in South Dakota, US, during the Great Depression. It traces her career from her initial engagement with the civil rights movement in the late 1950s to her move to the UK in the '60s where she studied social anthropology at the University of Oxford – and then to her travels in Africa where she carried out much of her academic research. Her first-hand experience of the Saharawi refugee camps in Algeria in 1980 and the humanitarian crisis in Sudan in 1982 led her to establish the Refugee Studies Centre (RSC) in Oxford.

That woman is of course Barbara Harrell-Bond, OBE, Emeritus Professor, founder of the RSC, and our colleague.

She pioneered the field of refugee studies as an important area of academic concern but only in so far as rigorous scholarship and research served to empower refugees by providing a critically constructive engagement with policy and practice. The RSC's independence from humanitarian organisations, alongside the stature of the university, added significantly to the force of her analysis. Far from limiting her horizons to academia, Barbara fought throughout her life for refugee rights, to keep refugees at the centre of humanitarian interventions and to give refugees voice and thus agency. These are issues which resonate even more deeply

now, in an age in which safe havens for refugees are increasingly being eroded and violations of human rights are on the rise.

We have each had the privilege of serving as Director of the RSC – although it's hard to follow in the footsteps of a woman like Barbara. Colleagues still talk of her relentless energy and her expectation that everyone would work the hours she did, of her conviction that nothing should stand in the way of securing funds for both the academic research and the dissemination channels – such as FMR – needed to support understanding around refugee rights, and of her forthright confrontations with institutions and individuals in positions of power. The articles that follow in this tribute section reflect on these and many other aspects of Barbara's life and work. We hope they will inspire understanding, respect and a determination to continue to work for the rights of refugees – and perhaps raise a few wry smiles as well.

Barbara attended the film screening in June 2018, despite her growing frailty. She died three weeks later. We are proud to have directed the Centre she established.

Matthew Gibney (Elizabeth Colson Professor of Politics and Forced Migration and current RSC director), Dawn Chatty (Emeritus Professor of Anthropology and Forced Migration) and Roger Zetter (Emeritus Professor in Refugee Studies).

See also www.theguardian.com/world/2018/jul/30/barbara-harrell-bond-obituary



This documentary explores the achievements of Barbara Harrell-Bond – academic, refugee activist and life-long advocate of refugee rights.

<https://vimeo.com/260901002>

Enrico Falzetti (writer and director); Katarzyna Grabska (researcher, writer and producer). Produced in collaboration with AMERA International.

Our grateful thanks to Barbara's family for their assistance and to those who have provided financial support for this special tribute to Barbara: Carolyn Makinson, the Martin James Foundation, Mary E McClymont, the Refugee Studies Centre and a donor in Belgium.

A lifelong commitment to justice

HRH Prince El Hassan bin Talal of Jordan

Barbara Harrell-Bond's work had a radical impact on the lives of the uprooted and on people's attitudes towards them.

The study of displacement has a long history, yet it was not until the publication of Barbara Harrell-Bond's seminal work *Imposing Aid – Emergency Assistance to Refugees* in 1986 that the entire system of international humanitarian assistance was submitted to an historical, comparative and critical appraisal. She subjected the 'humanitarian industry', as she called it, to unrelenting scrutiny, demanding change from those who had previously been untouchable.

Her formidable intellect, alongside her rigorous academic and field research, made her a pioneer in her field. Once described as a "human bulldozer"¹ she was not afraid to criticise aspects of refugee assistance that not only did not work but were all too often counter-productive. She saw the relationships between various actors and agencies – humanitarian agencies, international supporters, local governments and host communities – as often controlling and disempowering. She abhorred the opacity of complex relief systems and bureaucratic pettifoggery which descended into welfarism, stripping recipients of all agency and with it their human dignity and their hope for the future. Not surprisingly, this endeared her to no-one, apart from the uprooted themselves.

She had seen with her own eyes the traumatising impact of the horrifying experiences that large numbers of refugees in southern Sudan had suffered but this only intensified her determination not to be a 'voice for the voiceless' but instead to give the voiceless a voice of their own.

The past year has seen as many negative developments as positive in both my country – Jordan – and the wider world. Barbara would be enraged to know that the war in Yemen – which in early 2019 entered its fifth year – has led to the worst humanitarian crisis on record. She would have been outraged to hear of the withdrawal of US funding for the

UN Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) in 2018 and the moves to potentially dismantle the organisation altogether, but would have been heartened to see the response from elsewhere, particularly from parts of the Arab world in supporting the vital services it provides.

Despite the overwhelming pressures, Barbara refused to see refugees solely as victims, their identity subsumed into a category or classification, removed from all individuality and agency. Instead she recognised that an individual's professional skills and other knowledge can be of huge benefit to a host country and she sought the inclusion of the uprooted in host countries' socio-economic development plans.

Nor did she shy away from the harsh realities of the refugee experience for both refugee and relief worker. She understood that being crowded into close proximity with a bunch of strangers or, worse, people one may fear does not necessarily inspire friendship and community; nor do the deprivation and disorientation involved in becoming uprooted and resettled or the stripping of dignity and hope encourage generosity. Meanwhile, the relief worker may become disillusioned and hurt by the absence of gratitude and all too frequent hostility they encounter.

Not everything is doom and gloom, however. Barbara would have given her full support to those who are trying to do good things in bad times. I refer, for example, to the work done by Lloyd Axworthy² to counter the globalism of indifference facing refugees, to counter the 'narrative of fear' and to produce practical proposals to hold governments accountable and to raise revenue for development for the benefit of refugees.

Speaking truth to power

Feisty and sharp-tongued, Barbara was never afraid to speak truth to power. She challenged

all assumptions but was no armchair critic. Just as she 'walked the walk' in making her home a haven of welcome to numerous uprooted people, demonstrating a huge warmth and generosity, so she teased out the alternatives to current approaches. Fuelled by coffee and cigarettes, she and I would talk long into the night about the crucial importance of ensuring appropriate deployment of international aid if it is to benefit both refugees and their local hosts. She believed in placing more confidence in local structures, both governmental and non-governmental, rather than in international personnel, and in creating job opportunities for both refugee and host workers, thereby strengthening host economies to the benefit of all.

Barbara believed in the over-riding importance of self-determination irrespective of status. International refugee law is perhaps the oldest form of law that attempts to recognise the inherent need not only to protect people but to grant them a degree of self-determination. Barbara was an unflinching advocate of legal aid programmes and refugee rights throughout her life. She founded the Refugee Studies Programme (now Centre) in Oxford in 1982 and went on to establish several other programmes in the Global South. Later she established and ran the Rights in Exile programme which provides refugee legal aid information and promotes legal assistance for refugees wherever they may be.

Access to justice, for which Barbara fought all her life, is not only a human right but is fundamental to the promotion of all other rights: political, economic, social, cultural and civil. It was in the belief that "the opposite of poverty is not wealth... in too many places, the opposite of poverty is justice"³ that in 2005 I joined forces with Madeleine Albright, Gordon Brown, Hernando de Soto and others to found the Commission on Legal Empowerment of the Poor, focusing on the link between exclusion, poverty and the law. Without justice, poverty, inequality and marginalisation cannot be reduced, let alone eradicated.

The Islamic world has a strong heritage of indigenous political thought which draws on intrinsically Islamic thought, values and ethics, and offers ethical alternatives. Barbara was well aware that 80% of today's refugees are Muslim and are hosted in predominantly Muslim countries. It was only common sense, therefore, to look for culturally appropriate solutions to the challenges faced by both. Together we would rail against the short-sightedness of curtailing – particularly after 9/11 – the ability of indigenous resources, such as *Zakat* funds, to be used to assist the uprooted and their host countries. The fear then was that such funds might be channelled into terrorist hands but we asked ourselves whether leaving a vacuum would be worse.

Crucially, as Barbara appreciated, Islam both encourages charitable giving and actively discourages the creation of dependency which is seen as undermining human dignity. Similarly, the importance of justice in terms not only of equitable distribution of wealth but also of the protection of the weak against exploitation by the strong, and advocacy on behalf of those facing injustice, is a fundamental element of Islamic belief.

Rather than leaving us diminished, the loss of Barbara must instead make us even more determined to continue her work. Passionate and compassionate, her commitment to all aspects of the life of the uprooted knew no bounds. Her honesty in all things struck at the heart of corrosive, paternalistic and self-justifying institutions and practices, and it is up to each and every one of us to continue her legacy.

HRH Prince El Hassan bin Talal of Jordan

For more information, please contact Dr Omar Rifai orifai@majliselhassan.org.

1. www.thenation.com/article/remembering-barbara-harrell-bond-a-fierce-advocate-for-refugees/
2. Chair, World Refugee Council; formerly Canada's minister of Foreign Affairs and minister of Employment and Immigration.
3. Bryan Stevenson, founder and executive director of the Equal Justice Initiative, TED Talks 2012 and 2013.

FMR podcasts

<https://podcasts.ox.ac.uk/series>
(search for 'forced migration review').



A refugee-centred perspective

Anita H Fábos

Part of Barbara Harrell-Bond's legacy is the example she set of a refugee-centred approach to forced migration and refugee studies.

On a Wednesday evening in early 2001, the large lecture hall at the American University in Cairo (AUC) was packed. The audience was largely made up of representatives of Cairo's growing numbers of Sudanese, Somali, Eritrean, Ethiopian and Sierra Leonean refugees, with a sprinkling of academics and refugee service professionals, who had come to hear a representative from UNHCR, the UN Refugee Agency, talk about its protection work in Egypt. This seminar series included presentations by each of the major agencies in Cairo who worked with refugees and was the brainchild of Barbara Harrell-Bond, who had joined AUC's interdisciplinary Forced Migration and Refugee Studies (FMRS) programme the previous summer as Distinguished Visiting Professor.

Barbara felt strongly that refugees ought to be front and centre of any initiative to produce or communicate information about their lives and experiences. Quite often, their questions and perspectives presented complex challenges to the humanitarians who addressed the weekly seminar audiences. "Why won't UNHCR help us? Why don't they make a camp for us here?", asked one desperate young man from Somalia. Week after week, refugees participated in our collective attempt to understand their displacement and the response of the humanitarian community in Cairo.

I was appointed as director of FMRS a few months after Barbara arrived. Although I was a young anthropologist in my first job, Barbara treated me as a key ally in bringing together research, education and outreach in a way that unsettled the status quo. I quickly learned that this meant asking hard questions of the international (mainly European and North American) helpers who, prior to Barbara's arrival in Cairo, were the knowledge-brokers in managing the needs of refugees. We set interns to

work taking stock of the disorganised networks of humanitarian agencies and workers, produced reports, wrote grants for research, recruited government officials from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs to take our graduate diploma programme, convened the aforementioned weekly seminars and – as everywhere in Barbara's universe – started legal aid for refugees.

The pace of work over the first couple of years was extraordinary, and fraught with concerns about the Egyptian political environment, the university bureaucracy and Barbara's larger-than-life persona. When AUC renewed my contract, the provost told me that he considered me a 'firewall' between the university and its distinguished Oxford visitor. But it was only after I left to join the Refugee Studies Programme at the University of East London that I understood the impact of Barbara's vision of a refugee-centred agenda that prioritised refugee voices.

FMRS was set up along refugee-centred lines according to the tripartite model of education, research and outreach established by Barbara and colleagues at the Refugee Studies Programme (now Centre) at the University of Oxford. The three areas influenced and nourished each other, with FMRS researchers teaching classes and designing outreach programmes, students engaging with outreach and producing research, and refugees participating as learners, researchers and educators.

We found creative and sometimes bold ways to incorporate people from refugee backgrounds into our programmes and projects. With a mix of scholarships and work-study opportunities, the first class of graduate diploma students included four from refugee backgrounds, including the scholar-practitioner Leben Nelson Moro and the anthropologist Amira Ahmed, a former programme officer for the International

Organisation for Migration. Any qualified person from a refugee background was accepted onto the short courses we ran for professionals, for a nominal fee. Several research projects led to important interventions, such as a nutrition support and safe sex education programme. As security concerns in Cairo grew, AUC required identification through passports or identity cards, which prevented people without documents or whose passports had expired in exile from attending seminars or workshops on campus. Arguing that FMRS's activities pressing for greater understanding of forced migration and refugee issues were unthinkable without including refugees, we found ways to negotiate their access with the university's Security Office.

Reshaping and recentring

So many of us who have worked with Barbara or been influenced by her stance have found ways to incorporate refugee perspectives into our programmes and projects, such as participatory planning, 'action research' with refugee communities (that is, collaboratively exploring community-identified problems), and scholarships for people from refugee backgrounds. However, while making room for 'refugee voices' in our research, teaching and practice is commendable, I worry that we are repeating the missteps of our well-meaning predecessors in women and gender studies. Critics of their attempts to redress male-dominated institutions by incorporating more women participants – the 'add women and stir' approach – did little to challenge persistent gender inequities.

Experiences of displacement and movement radically restructure a person's concept of home, place and belonging. Adding more refugee voices to institutions designed



Barbara teaching, circa 1980s.

for settled people, while more inclusive, does not fully address this new state. For a truly 'refugee-centred approach', we need to reshape our sedentary policies in order to accommodate 'movers' – those who have experienced displacement. Much research has been done with people whose diaspora networks and transnational livelihoods have given rise to altered perspectives that no longer tick our current identity boxes. Furthermore, policy analysis has made an important contribution to our understanding that national citizenship models offer fewer and fewer durable solutions for people displaced for decades. We will be unable to produce meaningful shared spaces for people on the move until we see human mobility – forced or otherwise – as an unexceptional state. Like the belated recognition that tackling women's needs and concerns through 'gender-neutral' programmes ended up reproducing solutions for men, we would do well to recognise how our norms and values in refugee studies must go beyond including refugees in structures that reproduce expectations of static settlement.

Recentring our work with refugees requires a paradigm shift but we can also take pragmatic actions in our teaching, research and practice. Refugee studies as a discipline needs many more scholars and researchers

from refugee backgrounds to help us rethink history and policy from the perspective of movers, and to incorporate transnational and translocal narratives alongside the more common refugee integration stories.

Professors devising reading lists could foreground studies presenting histories and experiences of movers. Practitioners working towards social integration could help both movers and 'local people' in communities learn to feel comfortable in a changing society that includes movers as equal partners. Donors could overcome their fear of mobile refugee researchers and community development practitioners in order to fund projects designed by and

for people from refugee backgrounds. Lastly, institutions that contribute to the field could do much more to recruit professionals from refugee backgrounds. This is not a question of lack of supply; the number of people with professional training and expertise as well as first-hand experience of forced migration continues to grow. Barbara Harrell-Bond would have applauded a shift in this direction.

Anita H Fábos afabos@clarku.edu

Professor of International Development, Community, and Environment, and Coordinator, Refugees, Forced Migration, and Belonging programme, Clark University

bit.ly/ClarkUni-RefugeesForcedMigration

Building expert witness reports: Barbara's legacy

Maja Grudler

The importance of rigour and detail in preparing expert witness reports cannot be overstated.

Having lived and conducted research in a number of African countries, Barbara often acted as an expert witness in asylum cases. These related most frequently to the risk of female genital mutilation/cutting (FGM/C) but occasionally also to other topics, such as the cessation clause for Rwandans in Uganda or the risk of persecution for stateless Palestinians in Egypt. For Barbara, a well-drafted testimony was key to a successful asylum claim. She would frequently complain that "interviewers are lazy" and was often furious both with legal representatives who failed to produce a good testimony in collaboration with their clients and with decision makers who disbelieved asylum seekers due to 'inconsistencies' in their stories.

Barbara would work tirelessly to produce a good testimony and was interested in details. Barbara knew how to gently but firmly guide the interviewee to tell her what she needed to know. By 'details' she did not mean things such as exact dates (an inability to recall these can lead decision-makers to deem an applicant not credible) but details regarding a woman's beliefs and education, her family and community, and

the dynamics of social life in her country of origin. Barbara was particularly interested in a woman's ethnic group and the customs surrounding coming of age and marriage in her community, all of which can affect the risk of undergoing FGM/C. Barbara concentrated not only on the experiences and attitudes of a woman's family members to FGM/C, especially female family members, but also on the attitudes of a woman's husband and his family. She would note names and complex family relationships, building an understanding of the power dynamics at play.

Interviews were often conducted over the course of several days at Barbara's Oxford flat with an intern typing up the transcript. Barbara knew how to put a person at ease, offering plenty of breaks, food, drink and light conversation in between rounds of interviewing, but she would also emphasise the importance of the testimony and how crucial it is to be as truthful and detailed as possible while making it clear that it is better to admit to not remembering or knowing certain facts than to invent details.

One of the strengths of Barbara's approach was that, where possible, she



Fran Monks

This image of Barbara was displayed on a billboard near Oxford train station as part of the Oxford Festival of the Arts. Written across the image were these words: *Thank you for helping me escape FGM in Nigeria.*

would also interview the asylum seeker's family or other community members, in person or by phone, hiring an interpreter where necessary. She did not shy away from difficult conversations, including with family members who disapproved or were unwilling to help; her line of questioning would usually extract useful information to support the asylum seeker's case.

She also drew on her own knowledge of and research on FGM/C, on secondary sources, and on the knowledge of other experts and practitioners in her network. The resulting expert witness report that Barbara would submit as evidence during asylum appeal proceedings could be quite lengthy – usually around 20 pages – and constituted a piece of research in its own right: country-of-origin information tailored to the individual applicant. Barbara would begin by outlining her impressive credentials and experience before giving background to the topic and explaining the social, cultural, political and economic context of FGM/C in the country of origin in question. She would then evaluate

the situation of the individual asylum seeker, with a particular focus on issues relevant to refugee status determination such as risk of persecution, the ability of the State of origin to protect and the existence or not of an internal protection alternative. Barbara was careful to admit to any uncertainties; she wanted to help the asylum seeker as much as possible but knew that this would be best achieved by impartial reporting.

Barbara helped many people secure refugee status, and her skills and expertise are sorely missed. However, her legacy lives on in what we can learn from her methods and in the webpages of the refugee legal aid organisation she founded, Rights in Exile, which includes lists of country-of-origin experts and advice on special topics.²

Maja Grundler m.grundler@qmul.ac.uk
Queen Mary University of London www.qmul.ac.uk

1. See, for example, UNHCR (2013) 'Beyond Proof: Credibility Assessment in EU Asylum Systems', p139 www.unhcr.org/51a8a08a9.pdf

2. www.refugeelegalaidinformation.org

The helpfulness of *Imposing Aid*: a tribute from the Refugee Law Project

Chris Dolan

Twenty years after Barbara Harrell-Bond co-founded the Refugee Law Project in Uganda, its current director considers the continuing legacy of the principles that run through her book.

It is a pleasure to have this opportunity to acknowledge the centrality of Barbara Harrell-Bond as a personal mentor, as a founding member of a field that bridges study, activism and practice, and as the co-founder back in 1999 of the Refugee Law Project (RLP), a community outreach project of the School of Law, Makerere University, Uganda, from where I write today.

Imposing Aid – Emergency Assistance to Refugees, possibly Barbara Harrell-Bond's best-known written work, is itself imposing; its rich content models the importance of data, of analysis, of complexity, of collaboration and of acknowledgement. Two decades on from the founding of the RLP, it is worth reflecting on how, as an institution in and of the Global South, the RLP has given further shape to some of the principles and messages embedded in *Imposing Aid*. When I analyse those that resonate for me and that we have sought to give shape to in the intervening years, seven stand out.

First and foremost, we need to understand that refugees and other forced migrants are actors and stakeholders who, regardless of fashionable rhetoric and buzzwords such as 'self-reliance', may need or want a helping hand but do not need or want that aid to be imposed.

Second, if you are in a position to offer some support, and if you are committed to social and political change, get ready to be engaged for the long haul. Barbara's life modelled this. I first learned of her while I was a student in 1991. I then met her at the Refugee Studies Programme's Summer School in 1994 and in 1996 she was my boss for a year. She was at Makerere Institute for Social Research in 1998–99. And she hosted me in her home while at the American University in Cairo in the early 2000s. In every place her

work space was laid out in the same way; her desk looked identical and the ethos and mood she developed were the same. This speaks to me of her particular ability to be adaptable to context while at the same time sustaining core concerns and approaches.

Third, Barbara managed to speak truth to power while simultaneously cultivating relationships with the very people and institutions to whom thus she spoke. This loops back to the question of being in it for the long haul; if those in power, particularly in national and international bureaucracies, tend to have power for life, then those whose role is to challenge them will need a different but parallel tenacity.

The relationships with people and institutions you do not necessarily agree with are key to giving life to what I see as a fourth principle underlying Barbara's work, namely the centrality of legal and policy frameworks to holding duty bearers accountable. Whether holding a government to the letter of the law as set out in its Constitution or a particular Act, or pushing a multilateral organisation to live up to the promises contained in its policy positions (one thinks here, for example, of UNHCR's Policy on Alternatives to Camps), this cannot happen in the absence of a working relationship. However, if I have learned any principle from Barbara, it is perhaps that such relationships are not always immediately possible and that – the fifth principle – if there is no space, or if the shape of existing spaces is not right, then you need to make new ones.

Barbara's career was peppered with critical examples of putting this principle to work: co-founding the Refugee Studies Programme (now Refugee Studies Centre) within Oxford University; establishing the International Research and Advisory Panel

(IRAP) which later became the International Association for the Study of Forced Migration (IASFM); and co-founding the RLP and subsequently Africa and Middle East Refugee Assistance (AMERA) Egypt, AMERA International (formerly UK), the Southern Refugee Legal Aid Network, and ultimately the Rights in Exile Programme website. Each of these was essential in that it created space where previously there had been none and in doing so it did not just add new institutions to the mix but it also shifted the status quo and re-defined the parameters of an emerging field of practice and academic work.

The Refugee Studies Centre, in its early days, took a major set of real-world concerns to the heart of a university that, for many, embodies the ivory tower. Its resource centre, which established an unparalleled collection of grey literature in a pre-internet era, provided a very tangible means by which humanitarian best practice could be examined, as did the establishment of the Refugee Participation Network Newsletter, later to become Forced Migration Review. Both also challenged the assumption within academia that something was only worth taking seriously if found in an academic journal.

From IASFM I myself have learned the importance of having a formal and regular convening of interested persons to help define and institutionalise an entire field of study and a corpus of intellectual endeavour. In founding the RLP (to demonstrate that legal aid to refugees in the Global South is both necessary and possible), Barbara once again created space where none had existed previously. What is more, through doing so in Uganda, a country that even in the late 1990s had already won itself a reputation for its generous refugee-hosting policy, she spoke an important truth to power: even where the frameworks are good, the practice may be less than optimal. She thus also reminded us to not take anything at face value.

Sixth, the act of establishing the RLP was about more than simply speaking truth to power. It was also about putting your words into action: don't simply critique, offer solutions. For Barbara, the development of

local capacity to tackle global challenges was part of that next step. Much though she herself epitomised the 'global citizen' whose meaning and identity in life were not tied to the place of her birth, she was in no way insensitive to the dangers that come when only certain people get to be 'global'. Indeed, *Imposing Aid* can be read as an exploration of exactly those challenges in the humanitarian sector.

Seventh, and last, all the above leads me to the reality that if you are going to establish spaces, you cannot do it alone. The spaces that Barbara created, and that many of us have since occupied and made our own, are a testimony to the importance of collaboration that leaves a lasting legacy through people.

The Refugee Law Project: Barbara's principles in action

Twenty years since Barbara established it, the RLP has operationalised, nuanced and further developed these principles. Do refugees need and want a helping hand? Absolutely, even in a Uganda that is widely regarded as a model refugee-hosting country. Do refugees need legal aid? For sure – even after 20 years, the RLP is the only organisation to provide representation in court to refugees in a country of thousands of civil society actors. What has become clear, though, is that the kind of legal aid that Barbara originally envisaged, and which we initially made available to urban refugees in Kampala, is only one element in responding to refugees' complex needs. In fact, by the time I joined the RLP in 2006 the lawyers who made up the majority of staff at that time had recognised that their legal training had not equipped them to draw out clients' experiences – and so the Project's first psychosocial counsellor was employed. Once counsellors were in place, it became increasingly evident that, alongside huge basic needs related to lack of ready income, many refugees carried legacies of conflict-related sexual violence and torture for which they had found no immediate remedy, let alone longer-term responses. While access to justice for current issues was problematic, access to transitional justice through which to address the harms of yesterday was non-existent.

June 2019

www.fmreview.org/ethics

This history is what gave rise to the RLP's current thematic programming. Our Access to Justice programme addresses immediate legal needs and (since 2007) facilitates adult refugees to learn English – the official language of Uganda – so that they themselves can 'speak their rights'. Our Mental Health and Psychosocial Wellbeing programme works with individuals, couples, households and families – all of whom may be either directly or indirectly connected to, and impacted by, a client's situation and experiences. Our third thematic programme, Gender and Sexuality, reflects how people's experiences of sexual violence are central to their decisions to flee and also acknowledges that far more men are directly affected by such violence than mainstream practice would have us imagine; as part of this, our Screen-Refer-Support-Document model helps enable gendered access to health care in humanitarian contexts. All our work is enhanced by being the only organisation in the country in which refugees comprise one third of all staff.

And finally... is it sufficient that truth be spoken to power, or does it matter who speaks it? Given the core understanding that forced migrants are stakeholders in their own experiences and futures, the answer to the second part of this question is an unqualified 'yes'. Nevertheless, the systems of silencing and disempowerment that largely define forced migrant experiences away from 'home' are not easily overcome. It is from this perspective that the need for

a thematic concern with how to use media for social change emerged. Just as the establishment of the Refugee Studies Centre's resource centre of grey literature broke the academic mould, so in the last ten years an ability to engage with audio-visual media is breaking the mould of what is considered effective communication – and who has that ability to communicate using those media is central to the politics of whether solutions are imposed or not. The RLP has spent the last five years enabling refugees and their hosts to develop their own skills in video advocacy, thereby enlarging the field of those whose voices can be heard.

As this quick sketch shows, there are no limits to where a principled engagement with forced migration and forced migrants can take you. The seedling that was planted by Barbara when she co-founded the RLP with Professor Joe Oloka-Onyango back in 1999 has grown into a tree of many branches that is itself giving rise to new spaces, new capacities and new ways of thinking about the old challenges of forced migration. The helpfulness of *Imposing Aid* in providing the seeds for these processes cannot be over-stated.

Chris Dolan

dir@refugeelawproject.org @drchrisdolan
 Director, Refugee Law Project; Visiting Professor at INCORE and the Transitional Justice Institute, Ulster University; former researcher, Refugee Studies Centre, 1996–97
www.refugeelawproject.org
 @refugeelawproj #RLPat20

Would you consider making a gift to help continue the crucial initiative – FMR – that Barbara started?

Your donation will support the free, accessible sharing of experience and expertise, lessons and recommendations – which is essential for improving programmes, policies and approaches worldwide.

How your donation will help

- ▶ **£30** will get print copies to five refugee camps, local NGOs or researchers
- ▶ **£45** will send three issues a year to eight national libraries
- ▶ **£80** will send copies for sharing at a coordination meeting in Nigeria
- ▶ **£250** will pay for one year of FMR website support



NRC staff in the Middle East

To make a donation, please visit www.fmreview.org/online-giving

If Barbara's work or FMR has helped you over the years, please support our appeal.

Barbara's ethics of antagonism

Joshua Craze

Barbara Harrell-Bond's approach stemmed from her core belief that we are all adults, all equal, all responsible.

Being affable was not one of Barbara Harrell-Bond's qualities. Irascible, impatient and demanding, she alienated and inspired people in equal numbers with what at times seemed to be a one-person quest to advocate for refugees. She had no time for niceties, for there was never enough time; Barbara lived her life urgently, and demanded the same from those with whom she worked.

I was a twenty-year-old aspiring anthropologist, one of many who passed through her living room in Cairo, and she had set me to work investigating Sierra Leonean and Liberian refugees in the city. Some would no doubt question whether it was a good idea to have twenty-year-old students running around doing fieldwork. Not Barbara. It was the work that mattered, and there was a terrifying, liberating equality in what she demanded from everyone, students and refugees, collaborators and opponents.

After she died, I remembered all the rooms in which I had known Barbara. The country varies but the cast of characters does not. There is a young law student reading a case file intently, an earnest anthropologist entering the room, a refugee reciting a story, and a young man or woman whom Barbara has employed to help out around the house. There are people who want to offer help, people looking for help, and people looking for a mentor, a martyr or a saviour. What stands out to me, looking back at that room, is Barbara's relentless insistence on treating everyone as an equal. She wanted to help the refugees, of course, but she also set them to work, just like she set all of us to work. She treated us all as adults, and she did not wear kid gloves.

The last time I saw her, in Oxford, her living room was once again full of the usual cast of characters, although her eyesight was failing and the eternal cigarette had been replaced, unsatisfactorily, with an electronic

vape pen. I had come from South Sudan, and I was exhausted. Barbara grilled me on the situation in the country and then set me to work, thrusting a case file into my hand. For the next three days, my 'holiday' in Oxford was devoted to working on the case of a Ugandan asylum seeker appealing against a Home Office decision. His story was full of inconsistencies and Barbara, frustrated, asked him to come to her flat. As we listened to his story, and I asked questions, trying to iron out the irregularities, Barbara became exasperated. She had no time to deal with his hesitations and uncertainties; she had to deal urgently with his case, and had to get it right. I know many people who thought Barbara's tone was inappropriate: people who thought refugees should be treated as victims or as if they were from another planet. Not Barbara.

She was as wreathed in contradictions as she was in cigarette smoke. She demanded independence from those around her but surrounded herself with acolytes. She relentlessly criticised those who claimed to help refugees, indeed she often criticised the very idea of help, but her enduring question, posed in that unforgettable drawl, was: *who is going to help them?* In these contradictions there is an ethics. What Barbara has left us is not simply a body of work, or a set of memories, but something more exemplary: a way of being in the world that actively tries to answer the question that Barbara poses in one of her essays: can humanitarian work be humane?¹

Barbara was always alive to the inhumanity of the humanitarian industry. In article after article, and encounter after encounter, she pilloried UNHCR, and the way that NGOs worked in refugee camps: the delusion and the defensiveness, the flow charts and the counts. Why, I remember Barbara asking time and again, can't people count themselves? Why can't people

June 2019

www.fmreview.org/ethics



distribute aid for themselves? (They do so anyway the moment the aid workers' backs are turned.) What underlined all Barbara's critiques, ultimately, was an awareness of how asymmetric power relations disempowered refugees and created frameworks of dependency in which the agency of the refugees were ignored.

It always felt to me that Barbara's work and life stemmed from the same ethical conviction: that everyone is responsible for themselves. It is that demand for moral seriousness, which she asked of herself as much as she asked of others, that led to her critiques of the humanitarian industry. She was one of the first to realise the problems caused by the fact that NGOs are responsible to donors, rather than to refugees, and one of the first to critique the strange, unaccountable forms of control one finds in refugee camps, where UNHCR assumes de facto sovereignty without any popular mandate. For Barbara, sovereignty could not be imposed, or created elsewhere; it had to come from people seizing control of their own existence.

I often think that for Barbara the solution, if one could be imagined, was an end to 'refugees': not an end to war – she was a hard-headed realist – nor an end to people being displaced but an end to the term 'refugee' insofar as it functions to suspend political rights and infantilise people. Refugees do not, Barbara insisted, go through a miraculous reverse maturation when they leave their country of origin, suddenly becoming children, unable to care for themselves. Rather, people are always adults, always capable of counting themselves, of organising their own distributions of aid. If they fail, or they are late to work, or just confused, then Barbara felt within her rights to be angry. No exceptions. We are all adults, and there is no time for niceties.

Joshua Craze joshuacraze@joshuacraze.com

A writer living in Berlin.

1. Harrell-Bond B (2002) 'Can Humanitarian Work With Refugees Be Humane?', *Human Rights Quarterly* 24, 5185
www.unhcr.org/4d94749c9.pdf

AMERA: delivering a refugee-centred approach to protection

Sarah Elliott and Megan Denise Smith

Former AMERA staff and advisers reflect on the impact this NGO had in advancing refugee protection and how it embodied Barbara Harrell-Bond's philosophy.

Founded by Barbara Harrell-Bond in 2003, the Africa and Middle East Refugee Assistance (AMERA) organisation embodied her philosophies of promoting refugee voices, ensuring accountability among the people and institutions mandated to decide refugees' destinies, and achieving normative change within the refugee protection sector through continuous learning and truth seeking. AMERA paved the way for many other similar organisations, serving as a flagship model to expand integrated legal aid services for refugees in South America, the Middle East, Africa and Southeast Asia.

AMERA positively affected the lives of every refugee and caseworker working with or served by it during its 11 years of operation in Cairo.¹ Too often the subjects of daily xenophobic harassment and attacks, refugees found a safe space in AMERA where they were treated with respect. Hosting one of the largest urban refugee populations in the developing world, Cairo presented an enormous and challenging workload for AMERA staff and volunteers. At AMERA, protection for refugees focused not just on obtaining refugee status but also on enhancing their safety and dignity in Cairo, and it was the first and only organisation in Egypt to provide legal, social and mental health services to refugees under one roof.

Barbara's emphasis on empowering refugees to direct their own cases was embedded in the ethos of AMERA and its staff. She exposed the silencing of refugees in institutional frameworks, challenging humanitarians to examine the roles of 'victim' and 'saviour' in their work and to regularly and critically reflect on the inherent asymmetrical nature of their relationships.

This self-reflection also underpinned AMERA's exceptional training programme.

All staff and volunteers received an induction in relevant Egyptian national law, the role of UNHCR (the UN Refugee Agency) and the main nationalities of asylum seekers. Training in case management, referral between units (to ensure continuity of care), psychosocial support, data storage and interviewing – involving several weeks of shadowing and on-the-job feedback – were mandatory. By doing this AMERA emphasised the development of soft skills and interdisciplinary approaches to refugee protection. Importantly, AMERA sensitised local Egyptian volunteers on an otherwise largely invisible population.

Barbara's understanding of the intersections between gender-based violence (GBV) and claims for international protection also led to the establishment of a dedicated GBV team at AMERA, whose work included LGBTI refugees and male survivors of sexual violence. Barbara also saw a need for a special focus on the rights of refugee children, particularly in relation to birth registration, education, nutrition and appropriate accommodation. Every child referred to AMERA was assigned a child specialist caseworker who would involve them in therapeutic group activities and provide regular one-to-one counselling.

Community-based protection

Barbara focused on improving social realities for refugees, acknowledging the protracted nature of their situation in many camp and urban settings. According to Barbara: "UNHCR was never intended to become the world's largest welfare agency for displaced people: it was established to protect the rights of refugees.... and the protection of those rights necessitates an international effort to build a new infrastructure in the South."² This understanding led to a critique of

June 2019

www.fmreview.org/ethics

Refugee Status Determination (RSD) in some contexts like Egypt where recognition enables permanent residency but does not grant to refugees other rights laid out in the 1951 Refugee Convention, such as the right to work. For this reason, community-based protection and everyday activism became critical to the survival of Cairo's refugees and a core component of AMERA's activities.

AMERA's community outreach team supported community leaders to be seen and heard by UNHCR, in order to raise concerns or seek updates on cases. Meanwhile AMERA assisted community-based organisations (CBOs) – who provided emergency shelter and humanitarian assistance – to become as self-sufficient and resourceful as possible, including by supporting them in seeking independent financing. AMERA community outreach officers linked up to share best practices and carry out joint trainings for smaller and less-organised communities.

AMERA also recognised the value in learning from those with lived experience in order to improve its service. Refugee staff connected AMERA to the communities it served; they worked as interpreters, caseworkers and community outreach officers. Refugee staff were also able to flag difficult cases from their communities who were unable to reach the organisation. This sparked the idea of mobile clinics that would reach those refugees who could not reach AMERA, including persons with disabilities, the elderly and other at-risk groups living at the margins of Cairo's heaving metropolis.

AMERA's everyday activism

Cairo's dehumanising environment for refugees – despite their legal right to remain – propelled a daily activism among

AMERA staff in order to overcome regulatory or practical hurdles. This might entail accompaniment to health facilities to seek psychosocial support or to police stations

to seek a waiver to the common practice of not registering the births of children born to unmarried refugee mothers. For the most vulnerable, AMERA arranged for direct resettlement referrals to foreign embassies. Indeed, AMERA's behind-the-scenes work on detention, providing counselling and representation via telephone, provided a lifeline for many. Michael Kagan was right when he wrote: "AMERA tends not to bring high-profile cases in court, it rarely publishes reports, and its website is rudimentary. ...AMERA focuses instead on defending

human rights in practical terms, by helping refugees get recognized legal status, get a medical referral in an emergency, helping their children get into school, and so on."³

Through its advocacy, AMERA succeeded in influencing UNHCR's Cairo office to accept the accompaniment of AMERA legal advisors to RSD interviews at a time when many other UNHCR offices rejected it. The relationship between AMERA and UNHCR Cairo was a critical basis for UNHCR's eventual global recognition of the right to representation in its RSD procedures.⁴

Perhaps one of AMERA's greatest achievements was how it helped steer a multi-agency partnership with UNHCR, the International Organization for Migration (IOM), the Psycho-Social Services and Training Institute in Cairo (PSTIC) and Caritas in identifying and responding to the needs of victims of human trafficking – a phenomenon that affected thousands of mostly Eritrean nationals from 2009–14. This multi-agency approach – widely



considered to be best practice in the counter-trafficking sector – included a common protocol for sharing information and data, and the establishment of standard operating procedures designed to identify, refer, protect and seek solutions for victims over a defined time period. With AMERA's support, UNHCR and IOM Cairo managed to resettle around 400 refugee victims of human trafficking to Australia and the US.

While AMERA embodied many of Barbara's personal philosophies, after she left Cairo it became a force in its own right. This small NGO managed to carve out a new path for refugee advocacy and case management and demonstrated how platforms for innovative practice can drive and influence policy and institutional change. The story of AMERA also reminds us that the structures designed – and people employed – to provide refugee protection require constant

re-examination and self-reflection that must be informed by refugees' lived experience.

Sarah Elliott elliotts@unhcr.org

Legal Officer, UNHCR www.unhcr.org

Megan Denise Smith mdsmith@iom.int

Gender-Based Violence Officer, International Organization for Migration www.iom.org

This article is written in a personal capacity and does not necessarily represent the views of the agencies for which the authors now work.

1. This article is written in tribute to all AMERA staff and to the AMERA spirit that lives on in all of us, and we thank those colleagues and friends who supported its development.
2. Harrell-Bond B (2008) 'Building the Infrastructure for the Observance of Refugee Rights in the Global South', *Refugee* 25 (2) bit.ly/BHB-Refugee-25-2008
3. Kagan M (2013) 'AMERA-Egypt, Flagship of the Refugee Legal Aid Movement, Struggles for Financial Survival', *RSD Watch* bit.ly/Kagan-AMERA-2013
4. Azimi N (2018) 'Remembering Barbara Harrell-Bond, a Fierce Advocate for Refugees', *The Nation* bit.ly/Azimi-BHB-2018

From a critique of camps to better forms of aid

Alyoscia D'Onofrio

What insights can the pre-eminent critic of camp-based aid provision, Barbara Harrell-Bond, offer contemporary practitioners?

Barbara Harrell-Bond's major works *Imposing Aid* and *Rights in Exile* (the latter co-authored with Guglielmo Verdirame) examine aid modalities in two different eras: Southern Sudan in the early 1980s, and Kenya and Uganda in the late 1990s. They are rich in detail and insights, devastating in their critique of the policies and practices of UNHCR (the UN Refugee Agency) and international non-governmental organisations (NGOs), and yet anchored in hope for different, better forms of humanitarian action. With a humanitarian aid industry struggling to adapt to changing patterns of displacement and settlement in a world in which the majority of displaced people do not reside in camps, can Harrell-Bond's analysis help inform current approaches to assistance?

*Rights in Exile*¹ presents a litany of cases in which the rights of refugees

were metaphorically exiled through the provision of aid. The authors detail multiple instances in which the basic rights that form constituent elements of refugee and human rights conventions were curtailed, and sometimes actively abused, by the very systems of protection and assistance that host governments and the international community had established. The groundbreaking critique made for devastating reading at the time. However, three aspects of its analysis frustrate any attempt to garner useful guidance for thinking through contemporary arguments about the relative merits and failings of camp-based versus other forms of assistance.

The first of these relates to scale. The authors' organising frame of reference is the list of rights against which they documented at least one violation, and in most cases multiple violations. However, this does not

June 2019

www.fmreview.org/ethics

really give a sense of relative importance or likelihood of future violations under similar conditions. As a humanitarian professional in a world of scarce resources and tough managerial decisions, I need to know the scale and importance of specific rights violations. This may be at odds with a purist view of the inalienable nature of each and every human right but the pragmatics of resource allocation and intervention selection require a better sense of relative incidence and importance.

Second, there are few comparative references to rights violations outside a camp setting. Those that are mentioned relate primarily to processes which drive refugees into camps in the first place. There is no equivalent treatment of rights violations in rural or urban communities. While largely outside the scope of her analysis, this remains an important dimension for any comparative evaluation of camps as sites of aid provision.

Third, while the approach is impressively forensic in establishing that multiple rights were violated, it lacks a framework to help sort through the assembled cases to determine what was specific to a certain confluence of events, policies, resource constraints and managerial choices, as distinct from an unavoidable, essential consequence of creating and managing refugee camps or settlements. This makes it extremely difficult to evaluate the conditions under which such rights violations are likely to (re)occur. There are important clues in Harrell-Bond's books that allow the reconstruction of some sort of a hierarchy of rights, the violation of which provides the context in which a whole host of abuses can follow. Foremost among these relate to the absence of choice for displaced persons in camps (relating to freedom of movement, and the ability to work, generate income and participate in formal labour markets) and the absence of voice (relating to freedom of expression and to self-organise). Without these basic rights, any sense of resilience, self-reliance or agency is rapidly removed, and the risk of de facto collective punishment increases dramatically. While there has been progress in some settings at certain times towards more open camps and greater economic opportunities, it is by no

means commonplace that such rights coexist with contemporary camp-based aid provision.

The continuation of camps

Many of Harrell-Bond and Verdrame's arguments are now part of mainstream discourse about the importance of aid provision within and beyond camps: the importance of the right to work, freedom of movement, safety from sexual violence and so on. UNHCR's policies on out-of-camp assistance have shifted, and new modalities for providing assistance to self-settled refugees (primarily in urban contexts) are of increasing importance. Nevertheless, camps persist, and we appear to be in a mixed – sometimes contested – phase of aid delivery, in which the primacy of camps as aid provision sites has been challenged but in which camps continue to play a major role in responses to forced migration. Harrell-Bond provides three reasons why the international aid industry continues to favour camps.

First there is the issue of resource mobilisation: "To attract money, refugees must be visible."² Camp-based responses facilitate the quantification of beneficiaries, the calculation of resourcing requirements, and the presentation of physical results: people fed, latrines dug, water supplied, shelters erected, activities conducted. All of this information is essential to attract and renew donor funding. Donor and media visits are easier to structure around a single, easily identifiable site, and camps provide a persistent reminder of continued need. While accepted practices for aid communications have shifted over the intervening years, with a greater emphasis on highlighting self-reliance and empowerment, camps still provide an important part of the stories the aid industry tells about itself.

Second there is the relative ease of beneficiary targeting in camps:

"It is difficult to count the numbers of self-settled refugees, and even if they could be identified, the policies of most refugee agencies are too inflexible to allow them to devise a programme which would assist a target population which is 'mixed up' with the local community."³

This view from the 1980s is a little dated, since donor and implementing agencies

now routinely target both displaced and host populations. Nevertheless, targeting remains a challenge for humanitarian agencies in urban settings, with so-called 'area-based' interventions sufficiently unusual as to be still regarded as innovative within the sector. Camps undoubtedly simplify matters by giving the camp authorities the power to count, register and organise people (with all the attendant risks of rights-violation that Harrell-Bond identifies).

Third, and related to the above, donors tend to earmark funding for direct refugee response rather than for "expanding the economic and social infrastructure which would cope with such dramatic demographic changes".⁴ While there are potentially significant changes afoot, with the World Bank and other development actors beginning to commit resources to meet the challenges of forced displacement both in terms of policy change and infrastructure support, these remain the exception. Humanitarian and development funding streams remain separate in most donor agencies, which in turn fuels distinct humanitarian implementation responses which are short-term in focus and execution. With some caveats, Harrell-Bond's observation holds true today: pouring money into humanitarian responses, including camps, is easier for donor and implementing agencies than thinking through long-term infrastructure and employment challenges in partnership with host governments.

There are, however, other reasons why camps might exist and persist in different contexts: political expediency for the host government, lack of absorption capacity in existing settlements, lack of necessary services at the scale required, and so on. Defining and measuring the relative benefits of how aid is provided remains a challenging question for the contemporary practitioner and researcher alike.

Pathways to better aid

So how do we decide where resources are best allocated and what aid modalities are most supportive of refugee needs and aspirations? Harrell-Bond concludes

Rights in Exile with a statement that is tantalising and frustrating in equal measure:

*"Further research is called for. In particular, cost-assessment studies of encampment are much needed. If, as we would hypothesise, camps are more expensive than interventions aimed at local integration and development, then there should be no obstacle to making the pursuit of the latter the primary objective of humanitarian assistance programmes for refugees."*⁵

Very little progress has been made in the cost-benefit analysis of different aid modalities over the decade and a half since publication. This is perhaps with good reason: costing camps is relatively simple but costing service provision in urban settings is significantly more challenging, given the range of service providers and potential funding streams. And there is a still more complex set of conceptual problems to resolve: the need for a framework of equivalence in individual and collective outcomes in the different settings. Despite these challenges, progress is being made in bringing agencies together to use similar costing methods, a small but by no means insignificant step towards greater cost transparency and comparability. It is conceivable that in a few years we might answer Harrell-Bond's hypothesis with a degree of accuracy.

At that point, we will confront her other, rather optimistic hypothesis that better information will lead to better interventions. This hope underpins both books and stands in stark contrast to her analysis of agency self-interest in perpetuating camps as the primary location for aid provision. Time will tell whether her hope will be realised.

Alyoscia D'Onofrio

Alyoscia.D'Onofrio@rescue.org

Senior Director of Governance Programming and Geneva Head of Office, International Rescue Committee www.rescue.org

1. Verdiramé G and Harrell-Bond B (2005) *Rights in Exile: Janus-Faced Humanitarianism*, Berghahn Books

2. Harrell-Bond B (1986) *Imposing Aid – Emergency Assistance to Refugees*, Oxford University Press, p8.

3,4. *Imposing Aid*, p8. 5. *Rights in Exile*, p334.

June 2019

www.fmreview.org/ethics

RPN 1



1987: an A5 type-written black-and-white magazine

RPN 18



1995: now in A4 format, and venturing into colour (tentatively) for the first time

FMR 1



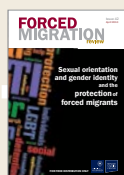
1998: still in A4 format but with a new logo and full colour throughout

FMR 26



2006: with a new FMR designer comes a new logo

FMR 42



2013: with the banking crisis, our budgets shrink and so does FMR – now a pocket-sized A5 that is cheaper to post!

FMR 56



2017: time to refresh the look again in time for FMR's 30th anniversary – still A5 but with a new cover design

FMR: Barbara's initiative

Forced Migration Review emerged from a meeting between UNHCR staff, ICVA NGO representatives and researchers in 1985. Participants at the meeting agreed on the need for a forum to facilitate greater communication between researchers, refugees and all those individuals and organisations working for and with refugees.

Barbara Harrell-Bond, who had founded the Refugee Studies Centre (then, Refugee Studies Programme) at the University of Oxford five years earlier, offered to establish a newsletter and associated network. The first issue of the Refugee Participation Network Newsletter (RPN) was published in November 1987, and in 1998 the publication was relaunched as Forced Migration Review (FMR) in order to explicitly incorporate internally displaced people.

Our ways of working have changed since Barbara first established the magazine, and we have redesigned the magazine a number of times, but our objective remains the same:

...to establish a link through which practitioners, researchers and policy makers can communicate and benefit from each other's practical experience and research results. Those working for host governments, voluntary agencies and international humanitarian agencies acquire invaluable experience but are often too busy to record it; those doing research publish in places and in a style which often make their findings inaccessible or irrelevant to practitioners. The RPN intends to bridge this gap...

(RPN Newsletter No 1, November 1987 www.fmreview.org/RPN/01)

There is as much need as ever for sharing expertise and learning, and for heeding lessons from past experience. Please keep reading, sharing, funding and writing for FMR.

www.fmreview.org



www.fmreview.org/online-giving



Resist injustice

Olivier Rukundo

The assistance that I, as a refugee, received from Barbara Harrell-Bond shows that her defence of refugees went far beyond the preparation of asylum applications.

I first made contact with Barbara in October 2011, after hearing a BBC radio interview with her in which she denounced as premature the planned invocation of the cessation clause for Rwandan refugees. Her defence of Rwandan refugees of different ethnicities encouraged me to think she might be able to help me, and her words gave me hope that I might find a way out of my ordeal.

I was at that time a PhD student living in China on a programme supported by the Government of Rwanda. After I had refused a request to return to Rwanda to make false testimony against the Rwandan opposition leader ahead of the 2010 presidential elections, the Rwandan government had refused to re-issue my passport and stopped my student bursary. The Rwandan embassy in China had also refused to officiate my marriage, and my son – born in China in 2011 – and I were left undocumented.

When I contacted Barbara the first time, I did not expect a response because we did not know each other. But Barbara did reply to my email and she guided me in preparing my case for an asylum application in China. First she shared with me a sample application to help me create my first draft, and then she went through my story with me many times, asking questions until it was complete, and reviewing and proofreading the application over and over again. We communicated by email, instant messenger, Skype and telephone.

Barbara was used to working with Rwandan refugees and had access to all the necessary country of origin information. She was very sympathetic because she even told me about her early life and the difficulties she had encountered. Barbara also sent us money and

contacted UNHCR's Beijing office frequently and persistently to stir them into action, copying her other contacts at UNHCR.

Barbara also ensured that I was able to further develop my career in academia. She proofread my computer science academic papers, introduced me to many scientists in the UK and US working in my area of expertise and, after I completed my PhD, wrote me a recommendation for the US-based Scholars at Risk organisation,¹ who arranged temporary faculty positions for me at universities in the Netherlands and Belgium.

In June 2012 I was granted mandate refugee status in China and in February 2013 I was resettled to Sweden, where I still have refugee status and am waiting for my recent application for Swedish citizenship to be considered. The success of my application for me would mean the possibility of integration and full protection.

During the six and a half years that I knew Barbara, I learned that her defence of refugees went far beyond facilitating asylum claims. She defended us like a mother defending her own children and grandchildren, not only to find a way out of our ordeals but also to become successful in our careers. Her legacy to me is to resist injustice – something everyone could learn from her. The advice I would like to share with other refugees is simply: defend what is right, despite the costs. The easy way out of my situation would have been to bow to the pressure to do what was wrong. I resisted and, ultimately, thanks to Barbara's help, found a way out of my ordeal.

Olivier Rukundo
orukundo@gmail.com

1. www.scholarsatrisk.org/

Olivier and son in Torsby, Sweden.



FOR FREE DISTRIBUTION ONLY

www.fmreview.org/ethics

