Refugee NGOs in a Changing Media Environment: Prospects and Challenges

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B.A. June 2007, Bogazici University

A Thesis submitted to

The Faculty of
Columbian College of Arts and Sciences
of the George Washington University
in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of Master of Arts

January 31, 2011

Thesis directed by

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Abstract of Thesis

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This study aims at understanding the opportunities that today's ever-changing communication environment presents for raising awareness and inspiring action against the worldwide refugee problem. It focuses on the use of old and new media by transnational non-governmental organizations (NGOs), who work alongside national governments and inter-governmental organizations, to put an end to the suffering of millions of refugees. It explores traditional media's approach to refugee issues in the age of satellite TV and the internet. It also looks into how refugee NGOs are responding to the demands of these new media technologies to get their message across in a more effective manner. Throughout this study, my endeavor is to identify in what ways the communication technology and media transformation of our time are affecting the refugee NGOs' ability to garner and sustain attention to the refugee problem.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

Not a day goes by without millions of children opening their eyes to the morning light behind the fences of a refugee camp. Not a day goes by without their parents -if alive- wondering when -if ever- they will be able to provide their children with normal lives. Days go by without us noticing that there are millions out there waiting to be saved, wanting just to have a normal life like us, like those on the other side of the fence...

This study is an attempt to understand the opportunities that today's ever-changing communication environment presents for raising awareness and inspiring action against the worldwide refugee problem. It focuses on the use of old and new media by transnational non-governmental organizations (NGOs), who work alongside national governments and inter-governmental organizations, to put an end to the suffering of millions of refugees. It explores traditional media's approach to refugee issues in the age of satellite TV and the internet. It also looks into how refugee NGOs are responding to the demands of these new media technologies to get their message across in a more effective manner. Throughout this study, my endeavor is to identify in what ways the communication technology and media transformation of our time are affecting the refugee NGOs' ability to garner and sustain attention to the refugee problem.

Although mass displacements of people have long existed due to conditions such as war and disease, a more standardized international response to the refugee problem was first

adopted following the Second World War (WWII). Prior to WWII, there was no overarching international policy articulating what constitutes a refugee, and what their universal rights are (Malkki, 1995). Over a million refugees in Europe were waiting for a solution to their situation following WWII. Thus, the International Refugee Organization (IRO), which succeeded the United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Agency (UNRRA), was established in 1947. IRO's main responsibility was resettlement of European refugees, and it completed its term of office in 1951 with the foundation of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR). The Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees was also adopted by the UN in 1951 and set the minimal rights for refugee populations (Gallagher, 1989).

UNHCR remains the main inter-governmental organization dealing with the worldwide refugee problem. However, the conditions that surround the issue have changed substantially following the organization's inception more than 50 years ago. For instance, by 1960, while the European refugee problem was more or less resolved, the number of refugees in Africa expanded significantly. By 1972, there were more than one million refugees in the continent thanks to internal civil wars and clashes between sovereign African states. By 1980, one could find large refugee populations in every continent on the globe (Gallagher, 1989). According to the UNHCR's 2009 Global Trends report, the number of displaced people worldwide reached 42 million, with 15.2 million refugees, 827,000 asylum-seekers and 26 million internally displaced persons (IDPs). Overall, the increasing number of refugees and the persistency of the problem over the years point to the international governmental community's reluctance and inability to deal with the

refugee issue. This, in turn, brought about the formation and subsequent success of transnational refugee NGOs in the international realm, which constitutes the subject of this study.

The growing impact of refugee NGOs should come as no surprise, as over the past few decades, the traditional international order has been complicated with the multiplication of actors above and below the state level with diverse interests, information channels, and issue agendas. Starting with the 1980s, the world has witnessed the widespread adoption of neo-liberal policies by national economies. This was accompanied by the opening up of national borders following the end of the Cold War in the 1990s. When coupled with the advances in information and communication technologies, these developments have not only facilitated the proliferation of new actors, but they have also provided opportunities for their cooperation and mobilization on a transnational basis. The world system, which was founded upon the notion of sovereign nation-states, has gone through structural changes due to the blurring of political, cultural and economic boundaries (Martens, 2003; Diven, 2004).

Those who perceive globalization as marking the end of nation-state champion the emergence of a global civil society. Global civil society refers to “non-governmental organizations (NGOs) or social movements, of all shapes and sizes, operating in the international realm” (Taylor, 2002). In other words, it encompasses a wide range of transnational social institutions and forces which function outside the domain of the state and the market. Global civic engagement, which is facilitated by the proliferation of

transnational non-governmental organizations and movements, is considered a byproduct of “globalization from below” (Falk, 1993).

Media play a critical role in the advancement of transnational NGO efforts. Traditional mass media, such as the mainstream press, radio, and television, have long been an important tool for activists. Thanks to the recent developments in information technology, however, today cross-border communication is faster, cheaper, and easier than ever before (Brinkerhoff and Coston, 1999; Hafez, 2007; Bimber, 2003). With the advent of satellite TV and other technologies which allowed for the real-time coverage of global events, the reach and influence of news organizations expanded substantially. Some scholars coined the term “CNN effect” to explain the increasing impact of news media on pressuring decision-makers and driving international policy. The U.S. intervention in Somalia in 1992-1993 was used as the primary example of the CNN effect by its proponents (Livingston, 1997; Robinson, 2000; Jakobsen, 2000). Although the real impact of the CNN effect in driving policy has been controversial -as studies found that it was still official sources such as government elites that controlled the emerging media discourse- mass media continue to be one of the most important platforms for NGOs that hope to raise global awareness to their causes (Livingston and Eachus, 1995; Carroll and Hackett, 2006; Gaber and Willson, 2005).

In addition to the rapidly changing traditional media landscape, the evolution of new media, such as the internet, has been applauded by many as enhancing the ability of NGOs to achieve their goals more effectively. Digital media platforms such as email, websites,

lists, and blogs provided NGOs with the opportunity to publicize their messages directly to audiences without the intermediary of journalists or news organizations (Stein, 2007). Moreover, they provided an alternative channel through which NGOs can reach out to larger groups of people as a news story that picks up on the web might be difficult to ignore by the mass media. (Bennett, 2003b; Dahlgren, 2009). Furthermore, new communication technologies gave NGOs the ability to unite and mobilize in a new and unprecedented capacity (Bennett, 2003a; Shirky, 2008).

As emphasized above, the mass media are especially important in bringing remote crises and conflicts to the public eye (McLagan, 2006). A number of challenges have been highlighted in the literature about news coverage of refugee issues. One of the main impediments that refugee NGOs need to overcome has been to attract mass media attention to refugee situations in distant parts of the globe. Recent developments in the news media industry, such as multiplication of online and offline news sources, accelerating shrinkage of audiences, when combined with the increased competition among news outlets, have pushed news organizations to cut back on their foreign news operations (Abbott, 2009). As much of the refugee situations are found in the world's poorest, most unstable and distant regions, capturing the news media's interest have become a difficult task. For instance, Fair and Parks (2001) discuss the logistical and organizational difficulties that the U.S. news media faced in covering Rwanda's 1994 genocide. Due to deteriorating conditions and lack of infrastructure for regular reporting from the continent, news coverage was insufficient and perpetuated stereotypes that were usually associated with the region.

Another problem that refugee NGOs encounter in this regard stems from the nature of the refugee issue itself. Most refugee problems are “protracted”. That is to say, they tend to persist, even when the very conflicts that created them are resolved. According to the UNDPI, today the refugees are spending longer periods in exile. In his study, Jakobsen (2000) argues that media coverage of conflicts is very limited during what he calls the pre- and post-violence phases. In the post-violence phase, if the fighting is stopped, the media’s attention is quickly diverted away from the issue. This has many important consequences, including a shift from long-term conflict prevention to short-term crisis management. In his keynote address called “International Refugee and Human Rights Law: Sides of the Same Coin”, the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights explains the need for prolonged media attention to refugee issues as such:

“It is our responsibility to ensure that their stories continue to be heard and that violations of refugees’ human rights are prevented, denounced, and punished in all circumstances: in emergencies, certainly, but just as resolutely when the attention of the international community may be wavering, or waning, or is absorbed by competing priorities” (Arbour, 2008).

However, one would be mistaken to assume that once media coverage is attained, enough public attention will be garnered to pressure governments into taking action against the refugee problem. News content matters as much as news coverage itself. Over the years, scholars have observed an increase in the number of news stories that are based upon commercial news values of drama, sensation, and entertainment, as opposed to those that

provide in-depth analysis and context with the public interest in mind (Delli Carpini and Williams, 2001; Patterson, 2000; Bennett, 2005). When news media fail to detail the external international connections which link the audiences' own history with that of the refugees, or when news stories lack political, social, and economic context, media coverage might serve to further distance viewers from remote matters and reinforce the assumption that "little can be done" (Barnett, 1997; Fair and Parks, 2001; Malkki, 1996). When combined with the protracted nature of the refugee issues, this practice can easily lead to what Moeller (1999) calls "compassion fatigue", a phenomenon whereby audiences are unable to respond with the same degree of sympathy following constant exposure to traumatic imagery.

Consequently, this study will examine the transnational refugee NGOs' utilization of the old and new media in the advancement of their organizational goals. It will look into the shortcomings of the traditional media coverage of refugee issues from the perspective of refugee NGOs and investigate the old and new media strategies that they employ to cope with these limitations. Hence, the rest of the study is organized into four sections. The first section reviews literature related to the recent developments in today's international humanitarian system and media environment. It provides an overview of the worldwide refugee problem, the traditional media's representation of refugee issues, as well as some of the old and new media strategies that have been utilized by humanitarian NGOs. The second section gives a comprehensive analysis of the media practices of three transnational refugee NGOs, namely the Jesuit Refugee Service, Women's Refugee Commission, and MAPENDO International. The analysis is based upon their web content, as well as

interviews conducted with their representatives. The third section offers a discussion of the findings, which is followed by the final section including conclusions and recommendations. In sum, the objective of this study is threefold; to understand how the mainstream media represent refugee issues according to the refugee NGOs, and how the refugee NGOs are adapting to demands of the ever-changing communication environment in their media practices, and to explore the implications of their undertakings in the resolution of the worldwide refugee problem.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Going Global: Humanitarianism in the Age of New Media

Globalization has become a keyword in describing the political, economic, cultural and social transformations that the world has undergone in recent decades. Although a consensus on the definition of the phenomenon has been difficult to achieve, the globalization debate gained momentum following the widespread adoption of neoliberal policies by national economies, and the acceleration and intensification of linkages across markets in the late 1980s (Prempeh, 2004). This global integration, however, did not remain restricted to the economic domain. Advancements in technology, communications, science, and transportation contributed to an intensifying level of global interconnectedness in the field of politics, environment, culture, and so on.

The heightened interconnectivity among different parts and peoples of the globe made it difficult to define issues such as terrorism, immigration, or environmental concerns in strictly national terms. Furthermore, national governments proved to be unprepared -or in some cases reluctant- to respond effectively to problems that transcend their boundaries. Castells (2008) suggests that these national governmental shortcomings have brought about the formation of a global civil society. The last few decades saw the multiplication and increasing influence of transnational NGOs and movements which aim at tackling global problems alongside nation-states and international governmental organizations (Dahlgren,

1991). According to the Union of International Associations (UIA), the number of international non-governmental organizations has increased 4475% from 1909 to 1988 and 22.4% from 1990 to 1997 (Bloodgood and Clough, 2008). As Kamat (2004) argues, “if the twentieth century represented a ‘top-down’ approach to social and economic growth, then with the dawn of a new century we have entered a new era of ‘bottom up’ growth and social improvement”.

Some scholars attribute the growing impact of NGOs on driving international policy to the emergence of transnational networks. According to Keck and Sikkink (1998), a transnational advocacy network involves “those relevant actors working internationally on an issue, who are bound together by shared values, a common discourse, and dense exchanges of information and services”. Network members typically engage in four sets of strategies: “information”, “symbolic”, “leverage” and “accountability politics”. Through *information politics*, they gather and disseminate information strategically to gain advantage for a given discourse. They resort to *symbolic politics* when linking specific dates or events to their cause in order to raise awareness and shape understanding of the issue at hand. Network actors employ *leverage politics* by associating issues of concern with money, trade, prestige, etc., so that they can call on stronger actors such as governments or international governmental organizations to follow their lead. Finally, by utilizing *accountability politics*, they hold target actors responsible for the actions they took, or the principles they endorsed in the past, in order to move them in the desired direction. All in all, networks open the way for a “boomerang model” of activism, through which restrained domestic actors can exert amplified pressure on their respective

governments thanks to their international allies and successful use of the aforementioned strategies.

In a similar vein, Tarrow (2005) talks about the rising influence of “transnational activists” in the international realm. He defines transnational activists as “people and groups who are rooted in specific national contexts, but who engage in contentious political activities that involve them in transnational networks of contacts and conflicts”. He distinguishes between different types of coalitions that transnational activists could build. *Instrumental coalitions* are short-lived and require low-level of involvement from the parties involved. *Event coalitions* also represent a short-term cooperation, however, the possibility of future collaboration between the actors are higher. *Federated coalitions* require a low degree of involvement, yet long-term collaboration from their members. *Campaign coalitions*, on the other hand, are characterized by a high degree of involvement and long-term cooperation on the part of its members. According to Tarrow, campaign coalitions possess the largest potential to succeed in achieving their objectives due to their fluid institutional structure, their ability to exploit opportunities that are presented at different levels of international governance, and their concentration on a particular issue of concern.

A similar claim is put forward by Bimber (2003), who contends that an “information regime” - a particular era that is typified by a unique set of communication technologies and political structures that result - favors political organizations that are successful in adopting and managing the new methods of communication. An “information revolution”, on the other hand, implies a robust change in the modes of communication which in turn

would alter political arrangements of the time and lead to a new information regime. He mentions four information regimes that have characterized the American history since the 1820s. It is important to note that although they differed in many respects, the first three information regimes were characterized by scarcity of information and high costs of access. During these information regimes, resource-poor organizations found it difficult to compete with their counterparts that had the financial and organizational assets necessary to influence political outcomes. The fourth information regime, on the other hand, is marked by low costs of information that is copious and easy-to-access, thanks to the internet and other related technological developments. Then, it is plausible to expect that low information costs and its abundance empower organizations even with fewer resources, such as NGOs. That is to say, those NGOs that effectively employ the latest communication technologies in their organizational workings are also able to further their objectives more successfully on a global basis.

On the whole, many studies have suggested that non-governmental actors' ability to participate in international policy-making has grown substantially over the past decades (Risse-Kappen, 1995; Smith, et al, 1997). The unprecedented ease with which NGOs communicate with one another and form networks have contributed immensely to the advancement of their transnational goals. As Tarrow (2005) argues, "with the expansion and greater availability of electronic communication, shifting the scale of contention has become both easier and more rapid". Furthermore, thanks to the multilateral structure of today's international regime, NGOs' capability to create and move information strategically to where it will have the most impact has become a determining factor in their

success. As Keck and Sikkink (1998) contend, “network members’ ability to generate information quickly and accurately, and deploy it effectively, is their most valuable currency”. Overall, effective use of old and new forms of media has grown to be a crucial component of transnational NGO strategy in raising awareness to their cause and mobilizing supporters globally.

Humanitarianism is one of the areas in which the increasing presence of transnational NGOs and their growing reliance on media to advance their missions has been felt to a great extent. Smillie and Minear (2004) use the term “humanitarian enterprise” to describe “the global network of organizations involved in humanitarian assistance and protection”. Minear (2002) emphasizes four sets of humanitarian actors that are present on the world stage; governments, the United Nations and other inter-governmental organizations, members of the International Red Cross and Red Crescent movement and NGOs. Although humanitarian NGOs such as Save the Children, Oxfam and CARE have long been present in the international arena, their number, scope of activity and sphere of influence expanded significantly in the past few decades. Often times, NGOs operate in more countries and raise more funds for humanitarian purposes than their respective governments. In 2001, NGOs raised approximately $1.5 billion in private donations. Many of the major NGOs do not only have more credibility in the eyes of the public, but they officially consult key international institutions such as the UN. For instance, in February 1997, the UN Security Council had its first formal meeting with NGOs, who conveyed information regarding the ongoing crises in Africa. It is argued that NGOs oversee up to 60 percent of all humanitarian financial aid (Smillie and Minear, 2004; Minear, 2002).

The media play a crucial role in humanitarian NGOs' ability to publicize their efforts, gain support to their cause, and consequently affect change. As Silverstone (2007) suggests, our knowledge of the world is primarily mediated to us through today's ever-pervading means of communication. Hence, the global public's awareness and understanding of international events depend very much on how they are mirrored in contemporary media. Rucht (2004) argues that "a movement that does not make it into the media is non-existent". Similarly, Bullert (1999) contends that groups that are not represented in the media would find it very difficult to influence public discourse and policy-making. Bennett and Entman (2001) use the term "mediated politics" to explain how political processes are increasingly communicated through various media.

Traditional mass media, such as mainstream press, radio, and television, have long been an important tool not only for activists, but also for those who would like to influence the public's perception of issues in an intended direction. Walter Lippmann (1922) wrote his work, Public Opinion, in response to the WWI, during which extensive methods of propaganda was used to mobilize U.S. public support for war. During this period, he saw how the public's perception of issues could be altered through the use of manipulative language, construction of symbols and so on. Hence, in Public Opinion, Lippmann (1922) suggested that what we know of the world comes to us indirectly. Because the real world is too complicated for people to grasp, our behavior is predicated from a "pseudo-environment", which is the representation of the real environment that we construct in our minds. His theory led to a simple, but powerful proposition; if reality is socially

constructed, and if what we know results from what we are told, then those who control the "story" have control over what we, the audiences, see, think, and believe. One can easily incorporate the mass media into this equation as one of the most pervasive channels through which we acquire our knowledge of the outside world on a daily basis. Yet, what kind of an impact do the mass media have on audiences?

Due to the emergence of then new communication technologies such as radio and cinema, and the impact of wartime propaganda during the 1930s and 40s, the working assumption of social science research during these years was that the media have a tremendous capacity to create direct effects on human psyche (Weiss and Tschirhart, 1994). Writing a couple decades later, Klapper (1960) argued that mass media's impact on the audience is not as direct as how it was predicted in the earlier studies, and that media messages function among many other factors that have a bearing on the audiences' viewpoints. A decade later, McCombs and Shaw (1972) suggested that while previous studies looked at mass media's impact on attitude change, this is not where the real power of media lies. Rather than telling us "what to think", the media determine "what to think about" (Cohen, 1963). According to this "agenda-setting" function of the mass media, the more an issue is covered in the news, the more importance the audiences attach to it in their personal agendas. That is to say, what the media deem worthy enough to cover gains significance in the eyes of the audience as well.

Expanding on the theory of agenda-setting, Iyengar and Kinder (1987) introduced the "priming effect" of the mass media. Priming refers to "changes in the standards that people

use to make political evaluations" (Iyengar and Kinder, 1987). In other words, by focusing on some aspects of an issue and not others, media influence the criteria used by the audiences when they make political judgments. To give an example, if the media choose to focus on the achievements of a president in their news coverage as opposed to his failures, then the audiences will be more inclined to evaluate his performance in a positive light. Moreover, Iyengar (1991) showed how the media's "episodic" and "thematic" framing of issues affect whether or not the audiences assign responsibility to political actors. While thematic frames provide the contextual framework for a news story, episodic frames focus on the immediate event, which makes it difficult for the audiences to see the bigger picture, and determine whom to hold accountable. Overall, the agenda-setting, priming, and framing effects indicate that the mass media might have a considerable impact on the formation and molding of public opinion regarding issues that appear in the news. This also brings to the fore the importance of the relationship between the government and the mass media, which has drawn the attention of many scholars over the years.

Based on his findings from the content analysis of the front pages of the New York Times and the Washington Post between 1949 and 1969, Sigal (1973) concluded that the news media rely heavily on official government sources in the news production process. News, according to Sigal, were for the most part determined by the "journalist beat system", whereby reporters routinely visit official institutions such as the White House, State Department and Defense Department for information on governmental policies, and by the systems these institutions put into place to feed the press (Aday and Livingston, 2008). These may include carefully crafted and timed press conferences, public hearings, news

releases, and so on. In search for a dynamic model of press-state relations, Bennett (1990) introduced the indexing hypothesis, and suggested that the range of debate and controversy in the news is "indexed" to the level of debate and controversy found among government officials. In other words, if the range of contested ideas expands within the government and institutional elites, the news content becomes more diverse with respect to the views that are expressed. This also opens the way for non-official voices to enter into the news reporting. However, when the parameters of elite debate are restricted, so too are the parameters of debate in media content. Then, the news media risk becoming the mouthpiece of the government, which is a threat to its ascribed role as a "watchdog" in liberal democracies.

So far, the media theories explained here showed us that the mass media can play an important role in shaping our understanding of what takes place in the world outside of our personal experiences. However, the government appears to have a privileged position with respect to influencing news agendas due to the routinized interactions between mass media and institutional sources. Further, objectivity in journalism as a professional norm has come to mean that journalists have the responsibility of faithfully telling those official stories without deviation (Bennett, 1990). Yet, with the advent of satellite TV and other technologies which allowed for real-time coverage of global events, the reach and capability of news organizations expanded substantially. When coupled with the massive humanitarian responses which coincided with the media coverage of the humanitarian emergencies of the 1990s, news media were believed to emerge as a critical actor in the international political system (Livingston, 1997). UN Secretary-General Boutros-Ghali

once said that, “We have 16 members in the Security Council: the 15 members plus CNN” (Smillie and Minear, 2004). Accordingly, the term “CNN effect” was coined to explain the increasing impact of news media on pressuring decision-makers and driving government policy. The Western intervention in Iraqi Kurdistan in 1991 and the humanitarian intervention in Somalia in 1992 were both commonly used to illustrate media’s increasing power over international policy-making (Olsen, et. al., 2003). General Shalikashvili, who served as Chairman of the U.S. Joint Chiefs of Staff from 1993 to 1997, stated that, “The CNN effect: surely it exists, and surely we went to Somalia and Rwanda partly because of its magnetic pull” (Minear, et. al., 1996).

Hence, while the indexing hypothesis suggested that media are reactive to government institutions, the CNN effect implies that it is media content that explains government policy and actions. In their study on the news coverage of the Somali crisis of 1992, however, Livingston and Eachus (1995) revealed that it was nevertheless official government sources that determined the quantity and nature of coverage regarding the emergency, rather than media pressuring decision-makers into taking action. Other studies have also shown how media’s over-reliance on official representatives, especially in foreign policy reporting, makes the former susceptible to government manipulation even in the age of satellite television and real-time coverage. For instance, it was argued that the dominance of elite framing in the news media coverage of the Gulf War and the Iraqi invasion of 2003 worked in a way that silenced oppositional voices in the resulting media discourse, and encouraged the adoption of the government’s desired policies, rather than complete and proper

understanding on the part of the public. (Bennett and Manheim, 1993; Bennett, 2005; Bennett, et. al, 2007).

Scholars writing on humanitarian issues also challenged media's ability to independently affect policies pursued by governments. In their study on the level of emergency assistance in humanitarian crises, Olsen, et. al. (2003) argue that humanitarian aid decisions are dependent upon three factors: "the intensity of media attention"; "the degree of donor interest in the crisis area"; and "the strength of humanitarian NGOs and international organisations present in a specific country experiencing a humanitarian emergency". They go on to suggest that media coverage is most effective when governments have no security issues at stake, such as when the place of crisis has no strategic importance for policymakers. Similarly, Robinson (2000) contends that the impact of media coverage is amplified when the direction of government policy is uncertain. Minear, et. al. (1996) propose three degrees of media effect on policy; primary, secondary and negligible. Media has "primary" influence when there is no policy consensus on the course of action to be taken by decision-makers. If there is a larger policy consensus, media's impact becomes "secondary". Finally, if there is a specific, pre-determined plan as to how the decision-makers are going to move forward, then media's influence is deemed "negligible". One can easily see here the interplay between these arguments, and Bennett's indexing hypothesis: when there is disagreement within the government regarding the appropriate course of action to take in response to humanitarian emergencies, the mass media might adopt a more autonomous role, inviting non-official voices into the debate and compelling decision-makers to be more responsive to the emerging media discourse. On the other hand, a pre-

established policy preference on the part of the government gives little discretion to the media in challenging the former's rhetoric.

Nevertheless, a number of special conditions are believed to give journalists greater autonomy from the government in the newsmaking process. Bennett, et. al (2007) recognize three factors that give reporters broader leeway to develop more independent news stories. These are "technology-enabled event-driven reporting", "investigative reporting and leaks", and "outsider counter-spin". Although the existence of the CNN effect has been contested, the advances in communication technology nonetheless made it easier for journalists to access first-hand information and images without their skillful manipulation by government officials. The initial media coverage of Hurricane Katrina is used as a case in point. Investigations conducted by media representatives, and leaks from official sources may also allow journalists to produce stories that run counter to elite frames. Lastly, non-official sources can find their way into the news by adapting their messages and communication efforts to the demands of the journalists.

The arguments discussed here give great insights into a number of important themes within today's complex media landscape. First of all, new communication technologies seem to be stripping officials of their historical advantage of being designated the definers of a distant reality that only they had the means of seeing in something approximating real-time. Second, even within the world of elite dominated news stories, social voices such as grassroots activists and interest organizations can find their way into news narratives, especially when there is disagreement among government officials, or during the initial

stages of an unexpected event that catches decision-makers off guard (Bennett, 2005). Moreover, the mass media appear to be susceptible to the carefully crafted communication strategies of first, official sources, and increasingly of corporations, interest groups, and social activists (Manheim, 1998; Cottle, 2003; Bennett and Manheim, 2001). "News shaping" is no longer the terrain of governmental elites only, and in recent years, civil society actors, such as NGOs have gradually professionalized their approach towards the mass media in the hope of expanding their sphere of influence (Deacon, 2003; Waisbord, 2010). This coincided with the increasing NGO involvement, participation and networking, as well as with the rise of issue politics in the international realm (Anderson, 2003; Taylor, 2002). For example, Deacon (1996) showed that among the voluntary organizations in the UK, 31 percent employed press officers, and 43 percent worked with public relations firms in an effort to increase their public visibility. Earlier studies demonstrated how media-savvy NGOs, such as Greenpeace, have succeeded in increasing their legitimacy in the eyes of the journalists, and managed to obtain media access, enabling them to reach out to mass audiences, and even affect policy (Davis, 2003; Anderson, 2003; Cammaerts, 2006; Gaber and Willson, 2005; Rutherford, 2000).

While traditional media continue to play a crucial role, especially in bringing to the surface issues that could easily go unheard by the general public, scholars such as Cammaerts (2006) and Anderson (2003) emphasize the importance of diversifying media strategies, and delivering information across a variety of sources to maximize impact. As Keck and Sikkink (1998) argue, "mobilizing information strategically" is central to the workings of global activists. Hence it should come as no surprise that the evolution of the new media,

i.e. the internet, has contributed to the activists' efforts in unprecedented ways. Novel mediums of communication such as e-mail, websites, blogs, and social media platforms that may be accessed through various devices such as portable computers and mobile phones, allowed for the dissemination of information, cooperation and collaboration on a much larger scale (Shirky, 2008; Van de Donk et. al, 2004). The anti-WTO protests in Seattle in 1999, which mobilized activists from all around the world under one umbrella, became a cornerstone with respect to signalizing the opportunities that the new media presents for transnational NGOs (Taylor, 2002; Cottle, 2008).

First and foremost, digital media platforms reduced the "gatekeeper" role of journalists, and made it possible for NGOs to publish their messages directly to a much larger number of audiences that come from different parts of the globe (Hafez, 2007). Gatekeeping refers to the daily journalistic practice of selecting the sources and messages that will appear in news stories. It can be affected by a number of factors including the norms and values journalists hold, editorial and management decisions in news organizations, as well as the demands of the news market (Bennett, 2005). Today, however, anyone with access to the internet can easily visit the website of an NGO, learn information relevant to the organization's undertakings, and choose to join their email list for updates on upcoming news and information. Furthermore, new technologies accounted for the emergence of online news platforms, such as Indymedia, the Hub, and Ushahidi that partner with a variety of local and international organizations to provide an alternative to dominant news frames (Abbott, 2009; Tsui, 2009). They also produced "crossover communication effects", as a news story that picks up on the web might be difficult to ignore by traditional media (Bennett, 2003a;

Bennett, 2003b). As mentioned earlier, new modes of communication also served as efficient channels through which NGOs can network and cooperate with likeminded organizations and individuals regardless of distance or locality (Bennett, 2003a; Bennett, Breunig, Givens, 2008; Hafez, 2007). Also, they made it possible for member-dependent organizations such as NGOs to engage with their stakeholders more regularly, to sustain the latter's attention to organizational messages more easily, and to instill in them a sense of community, which in turn helps facilitate long-term support for an organization's cause (Shirky, 2008; Kent and Taylor, 1998). I will discuss this last point in greater detail later in this study. All in all, the new media gave organizations the ability to communicate, unite, and take action in a novel and unprecedented capacity.

Refugees in a Changing Media Environment: Prospects and Challenges

Mass displacement of people is a long-standing phenomenon in human history. The League of Nations' High Commission for Refugees, which was established in 1921, was the foremost international institution that sought to assist refugee populations. It was formed in response to the stateless Russians who fled from their country during the Russian Revolution. Although a universal definition of what constituted a refugee was not established at the time, the institution's original mandate over Russian refugees was expanded to include others such as Armenian, Assyrian, and Turkish refugees. Following the death of its director, the office of the High Commission for Refugees was closed down, and it was succeeded by the Nansen International Office for Refugees, which started its operations in 1931, and was abolished in 1938 (Lubkemann, 2010).

During WWII, the Allies established the United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Administration (UNRRA) in 1943 to help rehabilitate displaced populations (DP) in Europe and Asia. In 1947, the UNRRA was replaced by the International Refugee Organization (IRO), which mainly dealt with the resettlement of the refugees in the post-WWII Europe. Between 1947 and 1951, over a million refugees were relocated in the United States, Australia, Israel, Canada and various European states (Gallagher, 1989). Despite the efforts of the aforementioned institutions, which were formed to deal with the refugee situation in Europe during and after the WWII, there still remained unsettled populations in the continent. The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) was founded in 1950, initially with a mandate over Europe only. The Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees was accepted by the UN in 1951 and included the universal definition of a refugee, as well as their rights and obligations to host governments (Gallagher, 1989). According to the 1951 Refugee Convention, a refugee was defined as "a person, who, owing to a well-founded fear of being persecuted on account of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group, or political opinion, is outside the country of their nationality, and is unable to or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to avail him/herself of the protection of that country".

Although specialized UN agencies were formed on an ad hoc basis to deal with refugee situations outside of Europe, an international protocol was accepted in 1967 to expand the UNHCR's mandate to the rest of the world. This was due to the changing dynamics regarding the world's displaced populations. Africa was one of the main places where anti-

colonial struggles caused large numbers of refugee flows. The end of major anti-colonial conflicts in the continent brought hopes for the future of the world's displaced people. Yet, the fighting of proxy wars during the Cold War period gave rise to new populations who had to relocate in countries such as Afghanistan, Angola, Cambodia, El Salvador, Ethiopia, Mozambique and Nicaragua throughout the 1970s and 1980s (Lubkemann, 2010).

Although the Cold War came to an end in the 1990s, there emerged new conflicts that continued to affect the number of refugees worldwide. By 2001, the number of displaced people in the world approximated 35 million people, owing to developments such as the Persian Gulf War, the dissolution of Yugoslavia, the civil wars in Rwanda, Burundi, Colombia, East Timor, Haiti, the DRC, Liberia, Sierra Leone, and the clashes in the former Soviet republics. While some of these struggles came to an end, new conflicts emerged in Iraq, Afghanistan, and western Sudan, let alone those that have persisted until today (Lubkemann, 2010). According to the UNHCR's annual Global Trends report published in June 2009, there were 42 million uprooted people in the world by the end of 2008, with 16 million refugees and asylum seekers and 26 million internally displaced people (IDP) (UNHCR Press Release, 2009).

Today, UNHCR remains the main inter-governmental organization dealing with the worldwide refugee problem. Due to the reluctance on the part of the developed nations to accept new refugee populations into their boundaries, 80 percent of all refugees today are hosted by developing nations such as Pakistan, Syria and Iran. As today's conflicts produce more and more forced migrants, and as these developing nations struggle with the task of

helping these newcoming refugees within their borders, the growing importance of transnational refugee NGOs, which address the issue alongside national governments and inter-governmental organizations, becomes more evident.

As is the case for all the humanitarian NGOs in today's international system, traditional media coverage is an important determinant of the attention transnational refugee NGOs may attract to their cause. Many scholars such as Jakobsen (2000), Fair and Parks (2001), and Malkki (1996) approach media coverage of refugee issues as far from the ideal. In this respect, Minear et. al. (1996) identify a number of criticisms relating to the media coverage of humanitarian crises. Although the authors do not focus solely on media coverage of refugee issues, their analysis applies to humanitarian emergencies, which include refugee situations.

The most common criticism in this respect is the lack of substantial coverage relating to humanitarian problems. Scholars have found that news organizations are more likely to cover events which are geographically closer to or which, in some way, involve their country of origin (Curran, et. al., 2009). According to the United Nations Department of Public Information's list of *Ten Stories the World Should Hear More About* (2006), "more than 60 percent of today's refugees are trapped in situations far from the spotlight". The problem of insufficient coverage is especially challenging for refugee NGOs, as most refugee issues tend to be protracted. As Dowty and Loescher (1996) suggest, it takes 3 to 5 years for an average humanitarian assistance program to be completed. Moreover, as refugee flows became more of a frequent phenomenon, it also got more common for

governments to deny entry to displaced people, which deteriorated their situation further (Lubkemann, 2010).

Similarly, in his study on the impact of media on conflict management, Jakobsen (2000) discusses media's sparse attention to conflicts during what he calls the "pre" and "post-violence phases". According to him, media rarely take notice of situations before they turn into violence, disasters, or other chaotic conditions. During the post-violence phase, on the other hand, the media feel the need to move onto other emergencies, and fail to follow up on what was left behind. For example, only a few reporters stayed following the peak of the crises in Somalia in 1992, in Haiti in 1994, and in Bosnia in 1995. The media's reluctance to report during the post-violence phase has particularly important consequences for refugee NGOs, as it is mostly after the end of conflicts that the number of refugees who are in need of help reach its highest point (Smillie and Minear, 2004).

Another common criticism is related to media's representation of refugee issues. Minear et. al (1996) argue that mass media generally choose to focus on breaking events, instead of presenting the larger context in which they are born. Above I have discussed the media's propensity to take interest in remote emergencies only when something scandalous occurs. When news media finally arrive on the scene, however, the sensational nature of the coverage causes audiences to neglect the political, historical, and social context surrounding the issue. For example, during the civil war in Sierra Leone, half of the country's population was displaced. According to Smillie and Minear (2004), media's attention to the conflict, which lasted for 11 years and killed 75,000 people, "exploded"

only when some of the aid workers were accused of sexually abusing the children and women in the refugee camps, in a report produced by two consultants who worked for Save the Children Fund and UNHCR. Karnik (1998) proposes a similar conclusion in his study on the media coverage of the Rwandan conflict. He argues that the news media coverage of the conflict lacked deeper understanding of the issue and failed to go beyond the simple narrative of two tribal factions killing each other. When audiences are unaware of the underlying circumstances that produce a catastrophe, such as the "external international connections", it also becomes harder for them to assume any responsibility on their part (Iyengar, 1991).

Mass media are also criticized for over-focusing on elements that are believed to be relevant to the audiences back home such as Western institutions, aid workers or their undertakings (Minear et. al., 1996). That is to say, news media's coverage of humanitarian conflicts is usually too Western-centric to fully account for what actually is taking place on the ground. For instance, much of the televised images from refugee camps highlight Western relief workers being interviewed about life in the camps or while they are providing aid to the refugees. While these news accounts champion Western achievements, they easily ignore the efforts that are led by local actors. This results in the "denigration of local institutions and an overemphasis on the relative importance of international and Western initiatives" in the eyes of the viewers (Minear et. al., 1996).

The third criticism deals with media portrayal of the people affected by a crisis. It is argued that the media tend to concentrate on depressing stories and images in its news coverage.

Critics have coined the term “pornography of suffering” to describe news media’s penchant for negative images from crisis areas. Accordingly, Fair and Parks (2001) point to the two most common representations of refugees in media imagery. News media generally present refugees either as a large moving crowd, their bodies pressing against one another, or in refugee camps, trapped behind fences. The authors argue that these images, when combined with the lack of political, social, and historical context in news reporting, strip refugees of their identities, depersonalize them, and fortify the distance between refugees and spectators. The referral of refugees as a “wave of humanity” or a “human river”, which is also a common practice in news narratives, makes the circumstance appear to viewers as the outcome of a natural disaster rather than the result of politics and history. Moreover, it instills in the audiences the notion that the situation is hopeless, and that there is not much they can do to either stop it from happening or to simply put an end to it.

These criticisms are not limited to the media coverage of humanitarian issues, but reveal a more general tendency in contemporary journalism. Corporate ownership and commercial pressures, the necessity to keep up with 24 hour news cycles, and an increasingly competitive media landscape all gave way to the predominance of news stories that are packaged as dramatic, breaking, and sensational to capture the attention of fragmented and shrinking audiences (Sparks, 2001; Underwood, 2001; Bennett, 2003b; Bennett, 2005; Delli Carpini and Williams, 2001, Thrall, et. al, 2008). According to Bennett (2005) news media coverage suffers from four major information biases; “personalization”, “dramatization”, “fragmentation” and the “authority-disorder bias”. Personalization refers to the journalistic practice of approaching news stories from a one-dimensional perspective

that focuses on characters or personal narratives, as opposed to a multi-dimensional one which explains underlying processes. Complementing this is the dramatization of news stories, which favors crises, scandals and other attention grabbing and emotion invoking elements over contextual analysis. What follows is fragmentation, which refers to the isolated and sporadic coverage of stories, which in turn makes it difficult for audiences to make connections and reach a thorough understanding. Finally, the authority-disorder bias points to the news media's tendency to portray leaders as incapable of handling problems and restoring order. All in all, news reports deluge audiences with a drumbeat of superficial, sensationalized and negative information, which makes the formation of an informed public opinion a difficult reality.

In her influential book, Moeller (1999) explains how all the aforementioned practices by the news media have also led to what she calls "compassion fatigue" on the part of the audiences. She argues that media's fondness for "sensationalism", "formulaic coverage", and "Americanized references" desensitized viewers to the tragedies taking place in distant parts of the world. There are numerous reasons as to why this phenomenon has taken place in today's media environment. First of all, the ever-increasing number of emergencies, which are covered by the news media in almost always the same way, made it difficult for viewers to distinguish one conflict from another. Secondly, the media's rapidly fading interest in crises shortened the attention span of the viewers as well. And lastly, both the media and the audiences have come to lack interest in stories without home connections. As news stories fail to provide adequate context, viewers also have a tough time understanding the relevance a certain issue might have to their lives. As a result, a

mounting number of humanitarian crises, including refugee situations which take place in other parts of the globe, go unheard or unattended by publics who can play a crucial role in pressuring their respective governments to take action. In the end, what we are left with are news reports that lack substance and viewers who are unable to engage with what they see or read in the news in a meaningful way.

NGO Media Strategies in the New Communications Age

In today's global humanitarian field, NGOs vie for media attention for two main reasons. First, NGOs use news media with the hope of influencing policy by taking part in public discussions. Second, mass media appearance helps NGOs gain recognition and legitimacy in the eyes of their stakeholders, which could then be utilized for further support and resources (Waisbord, 2010). Gaining visibility for their cause, as well as their achievements is becoming ever more important for NGOs, who need to compete for funds from potential donors in a highly competitive global aid field. As a result, they are growing more adept at finding ways to gain traditional media coverage. In their study, Cottle and Nolan (2007) found that transnational NGOs such as the Red Cross, Save the Children, Oxfam, World Vision, CARE and Doctors without Borders incorporate the formulaic demands of the mass media into their communication practices. For example, they package and present their stories in ways that would be more appealing to journalists. Thanks to the predominance of event-driven news, they create event days such as "HIV AIDS day" to receive media coverage regarding their causes. They also use celebrities in their campaigns due to the attention that celebrity news gets in today's media. Moreover, they highlight local elements

for journalists, who look for “home connections” in foreign news stories. Overall, the authors argue that today’s NGOs are “becoming increasingly ensnared in a global media logic, whose priorities and predispositions are not principally founded on the historically forged commitment to global humanitarianism”. As a result, NGOs are compromising their values, ideals and goals so as to be picked up by mass media radars.

A similar argument was developed by Fenton (2010) in her study on a number of NGOs and journalists that operate in the international realm. Fenton observed that mass media practices of NGOs increasingly represent what she calls the exercise of “news cloning”. To be able to appear in mainstream media, NGOs produce what they think would make a good story from the perspective of journalists, work on their relationships with reporters in the hope that their stories would receive favored treatment, and hire former journalists who are familiar with the news production process in mass media outlets, and whose networks could be beneficial in this regard. Fenton (2010) argues that as it becomes more and more difficult to differentiate the media practices of NGOs from that of the journalists, the possibility of transforming news agendas and confronting the problems associated with news media coverage turns into a growing challenge. Besides, NGOs with small budgets find it much harder to adapt to the new dynamics of the relationship between NGOs and the news media.

On the other hand, some of the emerging media practices that are put to use by NGOs are championed by its proponents for opening possibilities for more comprehensive and contextual news reports. Today, it is possible to observe a trend towards NGO-media

partnerships in foreign news production. As news agencies are closing down their foreign bureaus and laying off foreign correspondents to counter their revenue losses (Underwood, 2001; Bennett, 2005), collaboration with humanitarian NGOs who already have knowledgeable staff in the field becomes an easy and beneficial alternative for mainstream media outlets (Cook, 2001). Cottle and Nolan (2007) coin the term "beneficent embedding" for when NGOs facilitate reporters to hard-to-access locations and let them embed with NGO representatives to improve their understanding of the issue at hand. Similarly, Abbott (2009) talks about how, in addition to contributing to news stories, NGOs are providing more and more opportunities for reporters, such as accompanying them in the field, providing them with guidance and analysis, and financing their travel and other expenses on the ground. It has become increasingly difficult for journalists, who work under time and budgetary constraints, to capture the complexity and depth of a distant issue without the help of NGOs that have long-term operations and well-informed staff in the field. Hence, some NGOs such as the International Crisis Group started to capitalize on this need, and entered into collaborations with major news programs such as ABC's Nightline to turn the media spotlight on their issues of concern. In addition to giving NGOs "access" and "recognition" in news stories, and allowing for a more in-depth treatment of humanitarian issues, these partnerships open the way for abandoned stories to reappear in news agendas (Abbott, 2009; Bennett, et.al., 2004).

The first question that I will attempt to answer in this study is concerned with the aforementioned arguments regarding the communication strategies adopted by NGOs in their dealings with the mass media in today's information environment. My objective is to

reveal the media practices developed by refugee NGOs in reaching out to the mass media, and to understand if these strategies are conducive to changing news content, overcoming the problems associated with media coverage of refugee issues, and explaining to the audiences the worldwide refugee problem in a much more comprehensive and engaging manner. Or are they born out of a journalistic mindset, to satisfy the news criteria set by the mass media, lacking the potential and foresight to transform the way the news reaches the audiences? In this respect, I will shed light on the refugee NGOs' perception of the news media coverage of refugee issues, and analyze the practices they embrace to gain traditional media coverage.

As NGOs are adapting to the demands of the new multifaceted information environment, they are also becoming more skilled at using modern communication technologies to their advantage. I have mentioned earlier that traditional media outlets no longer serve as the only source of news with the evolution of the new media such as the internet, mobile phones, video cameras, and so on. This constitutes one of the biggest transformations of our time. Today, NGOs are endowed with unprecedented tools and platforms to communicate their messages directly to their stakeholders, and to garner their support without the intermediary of journalists and mass media outlets. The internet, for instance, does not only allow NGOs to have control over their messages, but it also gives them the opportunity to share their stories with a mass audience, which was possible only through traditional media channels before (Kenix, 2007). On the other hand, the boundless potential of these new media technologies brings about the multiplication of actors who function as information sources to have their voices heard on the web. Fenton (2010) calls this the

"seductiveness of space" that is available online. As more and more individuals and organizations are involved in the creation and dissemination of information on the internet, simply having an online presence does not guarantee effective communication with stakeholders. Attracting and sustaining attention to their online messages becomes vital for NGOs that are present in today's crowded information space. As Tsui (2009) puts it, "the role of NGOs is increasingly to prevent voices from being drowned out, and to bring back signal into the noise".

In his book "Here Comes Everybody", Shirky (2008) talks about how the information technologies of our time are transforming the way people communicate with one another and organize group activity. He suggests that "group undertaking can be thought of as a ladder of activities, with each rung on the ladder [symbolizing] sharing, cooperation and collective action in order of difficulty". *Sharing* is the simple act of making information available for others. *Cooperation*, on the other hand, is harder than sharing, as it requires an exchange of information between the parties involved. According to Shirky (2008), the most basic form of cooperation is "conversation". Conversation can be made through emails, text messages, or online platforms that allow visitors to respond or comment to the published content, such as Facebook or YouTube. Unlike sharing, cooperation generates "group identity" among the participants. Moreover, it opens the way for the most difficult form of group activity, *collective action*, which occurs when people are effectively mobilized to take action on behalf of a group. He suggests that the online communication tools that are available today are enhancing our ability to "share, cooperate and act together" in unprecedented ways. But how?

The answer is simple. Before the evolution of the internet, we had two main forms of media; “broadcast media”, such as radio, TV, and newspapers, and “communications media”, such as telegram and telephone. While communications media allowed for two-way conversations based on a “one-to-one pattern” (one sender and one receiver), broadcast media disseminated information in one direction based on a “one-to-many pattern” (one sender and many receivers). The internet, on the other hand, combines the interactive nature of the communications media with the large outreach of the broadcast media. Online tools and platforms do not only allow for those on the receiving end of information to talk back to the communicator, but also to exchange information among each other with an ease and speed that was previously impossible. The emerging “many-to-many pattern” of communication makes it simpler for an organization to gather a large number of people around an idea, instill in them a sense of community, and facilitate cooperation and action (Shirky, 2008; Dahlgren, 2001; Myers, 1994).

The main point here is that two-way symmetrical communication is key to building long-lasting relationships with constituents, which in turn would help generate enduring support for an organization’s cause (Grunig and Hunt, 1984; Kent and Taylor, 1998). Utilizing the internet only for the purpose of disseminating information would be repeating the one-to-many pattern of communication found in broadcast media. Although disclosing information is the first step towards relationship growth, an organization would be better equipped to respond to the information needs of its stakeholders, and to sustain their attention to the organization’s messages, when it integrates the interactive features of the

web into its online communication efforts. By engaging in conversation with their constituents, organizations can encourage participation, develop solidarity, and solicit long-term support for their goals. Many studies stress the importance of dialogue for building effective relationships with online constituents (Greenberg and MacAulay, 2009; Seo, et.al, 2009; Naude, et.al, 2004; Kenix, 2007; Kent and Taylor, 1998; McAllister-Spooner and Kent, 2009; Kent, et. al, 2003; Waters, 2007; Waters, et. al, 2009; Jo and Kim, 2003).

As Greenberg and MacAulay (2009) suggest, "relationships with members, donors and supporters are crucial to building an organization's volunteer, financial and advocacy capital". Hence, entering into two-way discussions with stakeholders could be especially beneficial for NGOs, now that they mostly depend on membership and outside sources of funding in achieving their goals (Kent, et. al, 2003). Three main strategies are emphasized in literature regarding successful relationship building in online platforms. The first concerns disclosing information about the organization, such as its history, mission, and staff members, to promote openness and transparency. Second, organizations should disseminate information that would be useful to its stakeholders, such as information about the organization's larger cause, press releases, campaign summaries and so on. These two strategies, which are built on the one-way model of communication, are important in forming the basis of trust and credibility for an organization and its online platforms. However, it is through the utilization of online functions which encourage dialogue, participation and member engagement, such as a Facebook page, or listing of volunteer opportunities, that an organization can set the foundation for strong relationships with its publics (Waters, et. al, 2009; Greenberg and MacAulay, 2009; Kent and Taylor, 1998).

Therefore, the second objective of this study is related to the nature of the refugee NGOs' online communication practices. Are they based upon a "broadcast paradigm", which is characterized by a one-way model of communication, or are they built upon a "dialogical paradigm", which is geared towards member engagement and relationship building? The answer to this question would be helpful in understanding the main purpose of the refugee NGO's online activities.

We are living in the midst of a drastically changing media environment. Both traditional and new media present numerous opportunities for civil society actors striving to raise awareness and inspire action for their cause in an increasingly globalized world. While official government sources traditionally had the upper hand with respect to setting mass media agendas, the rise of new communication technologies, and their successful deployment by NGOs, activists and interest groups signal the possibility of a more diverse media content, in which non-official voices could find better expression. For NGOs, this requires a thorough comprehension of the demands of the news media landscape, as well as a professionalized attitude towards the communication of organizational messages. Although carefully crafted communication strategies may help obtain media access, they do not guarantee favorable, sustained or comprehensive media representation, on which a clear understanding on the part of the public hinges. As Davis (2003) puts it, "dramatic media victories do not always translate into meaningful changes of government or corporate policy". This is partly due to the exigencies of the contemporary media environment, which, mainly due to commercial pressures, values drama, sensation and entertainment over analysis, context, and follow-up. Hence analyzing the mass media

strategies of refugee NGOs will help us understand first, if refugee NGOs have acquired the competency necessary to pass through traditional media gates. Second, it will show us the terms under which refugee NGOs are granted media access, which in turn will reveal important insights into the media representation of refugee issues. Ultimately the study will bring to light the dynamics of the relationship between refugee NGOs and journalists, and disclose who has the final say in news outcomes. On the other hand, investigating the NGOs' online communication practices would tell us if they are directed simply towards one-way information provision, or if they are utilized strategically to increase return visits, engage members, and establish long-term relationships with constituents. Accordingly, it would show us if refugee NGOs are capable of meeting the online information needs of their stakeholders, sustaining attention to their online messages, and establishing successful relationships with their constituents to encourage cooperation and collective action (Greenberg and MacAulay, 2009; Naude, et.al, 2004; Shirky, 2008). Overall, the analysis would help reveal if refugee NGOs are able to use online tools and platforms to their fullest potential, or not.

Chapter 3: Methodology

The data for this study were collected from two main sources. First, semi-structured interviews were conducted with representatives from refugee NGOs whose work is transnational in scope, but which are headquartered in the United States. U.S.-based NGOs were chosen as most of the media studies, especially those that look at the news media representation of humanitarian crises, are focused on the media coverage of U.S. media outlets. Refugee NGOs whose efforts are limited to the borders of the U.S., such as those that help refugees settle in the country, or those that are not involved in transnational advocacy efforts, were eliminated from the sample. Interview requests were sent to the Media/Communications staff of refugee NGOs that fit the above criteria. Ultimately, three interviews were completed with representatives who were in charge of the Media Relations of their respective organizations. These include the Jesuit Refugee Service, Women's Refugee Commission, and Mapendo International. The respondents were asked 12 questions relating to the news media coverage of refugees, their organization's approach towards the old and new media, as well as their viewpoint on the implications of the changing media landscape. The second set of data was gathered from each of the aforementioned organizations' websites.

To understand the nature of the communication strategies adopted by refugee NGOs in their dealings with the mass media (i.e. are they conducive to changing news agendas), interview data were analyzed qualitatively according to the guiding theoretical perspectives

of the study. Additionally, the organizations' website content was categorized based on a slightly altered version of a content analysis assessment tool that was used by Greenberg and MacAulay (2009) in their study on the web presence of Canadian environmental nonprofit organizations, and was examined qualitatively to determine the characteristics of the refugee NGOs' online communication practices (i.e. are they based upon a broadcast or dialogical paradigm). The websites were studied based on three criteria: "information disclosure (description, history, mission statement, contact information, logo, organizational leadership, annual reports/charity number), dissemination (RSS/sign up, media releases, samples of earned media coverage, self-generated media, campaign summaries and research reports, presentations, photos posted, video files), and member engagement (Facebook page, Twitter profile, YouTube channel, discussion wall/comments, chat rooms, feedback forms, online surveys, calendar of events/upcoming, volunteer opportunities, donate/join/subscribe)" (Greenberg and MacAulay, 2009). Interview data were evaluated to disclose additional information regarding the NGOs' approach towards the new media, and to understand the context in which communications decisions are made.

Chapter 4: Findings

I will begin this section with an overview of the refugee NGOs, whose media practices constituted the subject of this study. Then I will discuss my findings regarding the NGOs' approach towards the traditional media, including their perception of the news representation of refugee issues, and the strategies they employ to gain mass media coverage. Lastly, I will present my analysis on the organizations' approach towards the new media, to reveal the intent and scope of their online communication practices.

Jesuit Refugee Service USA

Jesuit Refugee Service (JRS) is an international Catholic non-governmental organization founded by Fr. Pedro Arrupe, who was the Superior General of the Society of Jesus in the late 1970s. After seeing the struggles of Vietnamese boat people in the aftermath of the Vietnam War, Fr. Arrupe decided to initiate a humanitarian action to provide assistance to the refugees fleeing from the country. Impressed by the effectiveness of the operation, he established JRS in 1980 to help forcibly displaced people from all around the world. The organization started its first overseas operations in the Asia region. It assisted Lao, Cambodian, Vietnamese, Tamil, Burmese and Bhutanese refugees throughout Southeast Asia. JRS began its activities in Africa in 1982, and today it provides relief to refugees coming from countries like Tanzania, Kenya, Burundi, and Sudan. Additionally, the organization offers help to the displaced people in Europe, and partners with European

countries in developing policies to improve the conditions of the refugees in the continent. Moreover, it works with refugees from Colombia and Haiti in Latin America. Finally, JRS's USA chapter provides support for the work of all JRS offices in the world by providing financial and human resources, producing research and publications, and engaging in fundraising and advocacy on behalf of the entire organization (JRS USA Official Website).

Today, JRS operates across ten geographic regions worldwide, consisting of Asia Pacific, Eastern Africa, Europe, Great Lakes Africa, Latin America, Middle East, South Asia, Southern Africa, West Africa and the USA. Its activities cover 57 countries and its staff comprises more than 1,250 people, including volunteers. The organization's mission is defined as "to give help, hope, ear and voice to vulnerable and victimized people on the move by being present to and bearing witness to their plight; by relieving their human suffering and restoring hope; by addressing the root causes of their displacement and improving international response to refugee situations; and by providing human resources and financial assistance" (JSR USA Official Website). In this respect, JRS lends a hand to over 500,000 refugees worldwide, regardless of race, ethnicity or religion.

Women's Refugee Commission

The Women's Refugee Commission (WRC) was founded in 1989 to help provide durable solutions to the needs of refugee and internally displaced women, children and young people, who constitute 80 percent of all the refugees and IDPs worldwide. The organization

started its first operations by taking part in the creation of the Afghan Women's Social Service Center, which provides training programs and literacy courses to the refugees in Pakistan. In the 1990s, WRC focused on issues such as "reproductive health care in refugee settings" and "special concerns of refugee women held in detention centers and prisons in the U.S.". Throughout the 2000s, the organization was involved in efforts regarding "violence against women in conflict settings", "education in emergencies", "conditions of families held in detention center", and "refugees with disabilities" (WRC Official Website).

To affect change, WRC first identifies a problem with regards to the refugee populations that are of concern to the organization. Then, it carries out research and fact-finding missions in the field, and comes up with reports, how to manuals, and training modules for the implementation of the proposed solution. Finally, it communicates and advocates its message to the public and media, as well as to governments, donors, UN and other NGOs that operate in the humanitarian field. WRC has 30 employees, who are specialized in areas such as health care, anthropology, gender, children, and refugee law. The organization's mission is defined as to "advocate vigorously for laws, policies and programs to improve the lives and protect the rights of refugee and internally displaced women, children and young people, including those seeking asylum—bringing about lasting, measurable change" (WRC Official Website).

Mapendo International

Mapendo International was established in 2005 to assist “at-risk” and “forgotten” refugees in Africa. Mapendo means “great love” and the founders of the organization took the name from Swahili, the national language of Kenya, to symbolize their history of working with Kenyan refugees. Among the stories that inspired the foundation of the organization, one was that of Rose Mapendo, who currently serves as the organization’s Ambassador. Rose was arrested with her husband and seven children by Congolese soldiers, when the government of Congo declared war against some of the ethnic groups inside the country following the Rwandan army’s invasion in 1998. Her husband was executed and she was put in prison with her children, where she gave birth to premature twin boys. After 18 months in prison, Rose and her children were sent to the International Committee for the Red Cross protection center in Kinshasa, the capital of the Congo to be resettled to the U.S., only to find out after their arrival that they were not on the evacuation list. Despite strict regulations from the Congolese government, the rescue team decided to move forward with their evacuation, as otherwise, the twins would have died due to severe malnourishment. In February 2000, Rose and her children were transported to a refugee camp in Cameroon, where her twins came very close to death three times, due to malnutrition-related sicknesses. In August 2000, the family was resettled in Phoenix, Arizona. One of the founders of Mapendo was among the rescue team that helped evacuate Rose out of Congo despite the government’s instructions (Mapendo International Official Website).

The founding story of Mapendo is important also because it helped define the mission of the organization. Mapendo strives to help refugees that are neglected even by the current

aid world. In this respect, their efforts are directed towards refugees whose troubles go unaddressed by existing aid programs, such as those who do not live in refugee camps, but in urban settings like slums. According to Mapendo, urban refugees are overlooked by organizations such as the UNHCR and large NGOs, which focus on the campsites. Consequently, the organization's mission is stated as "creating a safety net for people in Africa who are fleeing violence, whose lives are at risk, and who have no access to humanitarian aid" (Mapendo International Official Website). Mapendo International provides protection and assistance to refugees across East and Central Africa. It also operates a medical clinic in Nairobi to help HIV/AIDS victims and others with urgent health issues, such as torture survivors and widows with children, who have no means of healthcare. Mapendo has offices both in the U.S. and Africa, including in Kenya and Nairobi, with employees working under the organization's Urban Health Program, Community Services, and Protection Program (Mapendo International Official Website).

To sum up, all three of the refugee NGOs in this study work towards the betterment of refugee conditions, as well as the policies concerning them at the local and international level. Although the demographics of the refugee populations that they focus on vary, they all operate on a transnational basis, while based in the U.S. They also differ in size; while JRS works with over 1,000 people in more than 50 countries, WRC and Mapendo concentrate on specific regions with relatively less number of employees, Mapendo being the smallest. They all have operations in the field, such as delivering services and providing aid to crisis-affected populations, while they also address their issues of concern at the policy level.

Refugee NGOs' Approach Towards Traditional Media

One of the main objectives of this study was to understand the nature of the relationship between transnational refugee NGOs and traditional media in the age of modern communications. Previously, I discussed a number of limitations associated with traditional media coverage of humanitarian issues, including insufficient news coverage, media's over-focus on breaking events as opposed to the larger context in which they arise, its emphasis on home connections, and its concentration on violence and other depressing images from crisis areas (Minear et. al, 1996; Jakobsen, 2000; Curran, et. al., 2009; Karnik, 1998; Malkki, 1996; Fair and Parks, 2001; Moeller, 1999; Cattle and Nolan, 2007; Bennett, 2005). Here, it is important to identify which of these limitations also apply to the news media's representation of refugee issues, in order to better understand the context in which refugee NGOs develop their communication strategies.

All the refugee NGOs in this analysis argued that the news media take interest in refugee situations only after a major and unexpected event, such as an emergency or a natural disaster, which produces large movements of people. Among the examples given were the Asian tsunami of 2004, and the 2010 Haiti earthquake, both of which displaced hundreds of thousands of people and attracted a lot of media attention in the early stages of the crises. All the NGOs also agreed that news media are generally drawn to violent events. For instance, one of the representatives claimed that the sudden explosion of violence was the main driver of the media interest in Rwanda. Related to these comments regarding media's

over-emphasis on breaking events, the news media were commonly criticized for failing to follow up on refugee situations after the peak of the crises which created them. As one representative put it, “there is a rush of attention followed by a period of storing coverage that then trickles down to only a few stories”. For example, Colombia is home to the second largest internally displaced population in the world due to a long-lasting fighting between the government and insurgent forces. However, mass media cover the situation only when something scandalous or violent occurs, such as the kidnapping, release, or killing of a high-profile official.

Another problem that was frequently brought up by refugee NGOs was the news media’s tendency to look for home connections in refugee situations, which generally take place overseas. It was suggested that reporters usually look for a “hook” that links a foreign news story to home, in order to make it more relatable to American audiences. To give an example, when many people from Pakistan left their homes due to the clash between the Pakistani military and Taliban forces in 2009, news media took interest, as the situation was linked with the U.S. War on Terror. Refugee NGOs also commonly complained about how journalists fail to deliver the complexities involved in refugee situations in their news stories. In this regard, one representative suggested that mass media generally lack proper understanding of a refugee situation, and as a result, their reporting suffers from a number of deficiencies, such as the confusion of refugees, who have certain rights under the international law, with illegal immigrants. Finally, celebrity involvement was found to be effective in commanding media’s attention to refugee issues.

These findings suggest that many of the criticisms that were mentioned earlier with regards to the mass media's representation of humanitarian issues are also found to be problematic when it comes to the news media coverage of refugee situations. Refugee issues usually get picked up by the mass media only during the immediate aftermath of a crisis. News reporting from crisis areas last for a short period of time however, following which the journalists drift away to cover other stories. In order for reporters to revisit protracted refugee situations, there needs to be a new development, such as an outbreak of violence, which qualifies as a breaking news story. That is to say, mass media rarely take interest in refugee issues in the "pre" and "post-violence" phases (Jakobsen, 2000). One of the implications of fleeting media coverage is that the international community's response to humanitarian issues takes the form of short-term emergency funds as opposed to sustained support. This would undoubtedly make it difficult for refugee NGOs to address the long-term developmental needs of displaced populations. Moreover, NGOs are also pulled towards high-profile emergencies due the increased need for funds in today's competitive global aid field. In the case of refugees, this could mean that the suffering of many of the world's displaced people might go unattended even by the refugee NGOs themselves. Besides, as NGOs rush to high-profile emergencies in the hope of receiving coverage and funds, the quality of their services might be compromised due to problems such as difficulty coordinating all the NGO efforts that have operations in the field (Smillie and Minear, 2004; Jakobsen, 2000; Minear, 2002; Minear, et. al, 1996).

In addition to its sporadic and short-term attention to refugee situations, news media reporting suffers from lack of context, which makes it difficult for audiences to fully

comprehend the realities that surround a particular refugee problem. As a result, refugee issues are usually associated with catastrophic situations, the background of which remains unknown to the public (Malkki, 1996; Fair and Parks, 2001; Bennett, 2005). Because the media barely follow up on protracted refugee problems, audiences also do not get to see what their help can achieve in the long-run. Hence they change the channel, or turn the paper next time they run into a similar refugee story (Moeller, 1999). Furthermore, reporters tend to cover events that are linked to their audiences back home, and ignore those that they find irrelevant. When journalists cover global news from a Western prism, they keep local audiences from perceiving refugee problems as those that can only be resolved through global cooperation.

The information provided above helps us understand what attracts news media's attention to a particular refugee issue and what journalists look for in a potential news story about refugees. It also explains the implications of some of the most common journalistic practices with respect to the news coverage of refugee situations. As explained earlier, this study aims to understand whether the media strategies developed by refugee NGOs are conducive to overcoming the shortcomings associated with mass media's representation of refugee issues, or not. Or are they designed specifically to meet the needs of journalists, which were found problematic even by the refugee NGOs themselves? Now that we discovered the demands of the mass media in response to which the refugee NGOs tailor their strategies, it is time to investigate the nature of their communication practices directed towards news access.

To begin with, all the NGOs analyzed in this study have staff dedicated to Media/Public Relations. While WRC and JRS have full-time Public Relations officers, Mapendo International has a part-time employee who deals with the organization's communication efforts. Interacting with the mass media in a way that would help transform news agendas, and overcome the limitations associated with the news representation of refugee issues requires a thorough understanding of the news making process. Not having a full-time staff member who is in charge of the organization's communications functions certainly takes away from Mapendo's ability to influence news content. Nonetheless, employing PR officers hints at a certain degree of professionalization in all these NGOs' attitudes towards organizational communication (Davis, 2003; Waisbord, 2010).

When asked about their traditional media strategies, all the NGOs agreed to the difficulty of receiving news coverage unless they give journalists what they want. As one representative put it, "the information we have has to work for them—there's no talking them into using it otherwise". Consequently, pitching stories and scripting narratives in a way that would appeal to journalists was one of the most common media practices articulated by the refugee NGOs. For instance, one representative agreed to emphasizing elements such as American donors and benefactors in their press releases, so that the narrative becomes more relevant to both the reporters and audiences. Another representative explained how they focus on personal stories to make it more relatable to the audiences. Moreover, knowing that the media take interest in simple stories, the representative accepted selecting less complicated stories to present, at the expense of those that can provide insights into the complexity of the issue at hand. Similarly, another

representative mentioned how he knows what a good story includes: “the five W’s and H – who, what, where, when, why, how” due to his background as a former journalist.

Another strategy that was frequently expressed by the refugee NGOs was reaching out to the media via direct contact. Instead of sending out mass press releases to media outlets, the NGOs prefer communicating with reporters on a one-on-one basis. This helps refugee NGOs establish relationships with journalists, which might be leveraged in the future to have more influence over the emerging news stories. One representative mentioned how they use their contacts to reach decision-makers within major media outlets. To capitalize on the media’s interest in celebrities, refugee NGOs also get celebrities involved in their organizational efforts. For instance, actress Susan Sarandon is on the advisory board of Mapendo International. The organization previously partnered with actor Ben Affleck to publicize one of its campaigns. WRC recently chose actress Mamie Gummer as the organization’s ambassador.

In sum, most of the NGO practices analyzed here correspond with what the earlier studies (Cottle and Nolan, 2007; Waisbord, 2010; Fenton, 2010) perceived as yielding to the formulaic demands of the mass media. Refugee NGOs “pitch and package stories in conformity to known media needs”, such as emphasizing home connections, and simplifying content (Cottle and Nolan, 2007). They hire former journalists who are familiar with the conditions that influence the news making process, i.e. news values, media formats, labor conditions, and editorial positions, and whose output are more likely to fit the news criteria of media organizations (Waisbord, 2010; Fenton, 2010). They make use

of celebrities in their publicity activities, and go as far as to assign them roles in their organizational structures in the hope that the news media will pay more attention to their efforts. These practices could be beneficial in maximizing coverage, however they are not designed to overcome the limitations associated with the news media's representation of refugee issues.

Previously I elaborated on the growing tendency among humanitarian NGOs to enter into partnerships with mass media outlets in foreign news production. Some of the emerging NGO practices, such as facilitating reporters to hard-to-access locations, and providing them with guidance, analysis, and funding while on the ground, were deemed extremely beneficial with respect to enhancing media's understanding of the complexities that surround a particular humanitarian issue (Cottle and Nolan, 2007; Abbott, 2009). Although most of the refugee NGOs studied here have operations in the field, they do not engage in such NGO-media collaborations, which could open up possibilities for in-depth reporting from crisis areas. On a positive note, they do work on cultivating relationships with reporters and decision-makers in major media outlets, which could translate into increased legitimacy, greater cooperation in the news making process, and more comprehensive news stories (Davis, 2003). The outcome of these relationships, however, is partly contingent upon the NGOs' approach towards the traditional media. If refugee NGOs do not perceive the news media as a platform through which they can convey a deeper understanding of their causes, then the outcome of their relationship building efforts would be limited.

In this regard, the NGO representatives were asked to describe the role of traditional media for their respective organizations. All the refugee NGOs answered by saying that mass media coverage is a vital component of their fundraising efforts. They argued that traditional media appearance gives them the "credibility" and "legitimacy" necessary to maintain the flow of funds from their supporters. For instance, one representative suggested that mass media exposure is important in instilling the "oh, I heard them on NPR, they must be a good group otherwise they wouldn't use them on the news" feeling among potential donors. Another representative claimed that "our supporters (who tend to skew older) still use traditional media and having actual press clips is valuable for us, as they are lasting and can be placed in the informational packets we hand out to prospective donors". However, none of the NGOs mentioned leveraging the credibility gained from media coverage to affect public opinion or policy outcomes. Based on these findings, it can be said that refugee NGOs view mass media as more of legitimacy tool that improves their ability to receive and sustain funding for their activities, than as a means to enhance the public's interest and knowledge of the larger refugee problem.

Refugee NGOs' Approach Towards New Media

Previously I discussed how online communication activities that are based upon a dialogical paradigm can contribute immensely to an organization's efforts to establish meaningful relationships with its constituents, and encourage cooperation and collective action to advance the organization's mission. If refugee NGOs utilize online tools and platforms in a way that facilitates discussion and member engagement, then they are better

positioned not only to inform their audiences in a more engaging manner, but also to sustain their support, and mobilize them around the refugee cause. To understand the nature of the refugee NGOs' online communication efforts, their web presence was analyzed based on three criteria: "information disclosure (description, history, mission statement, contact information, logo, organizational leadership, annual reports/charity number), dissemination (RSS/sign up, media releases, samples of earned media coverage, self-generated media, campaign summaries and research reports, presentations, photos posted, video files), and member engagement (Facebook page, Twitter profile, YouTube channel, discussion wall/comments, chat rooms, feedback forms, online surveys, calendar of events/upcoming, volunteer opportunities, donate/join/subscribe)" (Greenberg and MacAulay, 2009).

The refugee NGOs examined in this study seem to be well aware of the importance of information disclosure in their online communications. To begin with, all the NGOs' websites included a detailed description of the organizations' programs and services. For example, on JRS's website, one can find ample information about what the organization does, including its local programs, such as the Detention Chaplaincy Program, and Kino Border Initiative; its program partnerships, such as those developed in collaboration with Boston College and Fairfield University; its international programs carried out outside of the U.S; as well as its advocacy efforts. All the organizations' websites also featured a clear mission statement, accompanied by their logos. Readily available information about an organization, its purpose, and its programs are effective tools of establishing credibility for the organization and its online messages in the eyes of the visitors (Kenix, 2007).

Moreover, on their websites, all the organizations provided an overview of their history, which can be used as a "narrative, story-telling device to resonate with, and engage existing and prospective members" (Greenberg and MacAulay, 2009). To give an example, Mapendo's founding story, which is based upon the personal experiences of a former Congolese refugee, can be useful in connecting with the visitors on a deeper emotional level.

Additionally, all the refugee NGOs' websites gave details on the organizations' staff members, as well as their board of directors. Most organizations even provided background information on each one of their employees, such as their previous work and school experiences. All the NGOs put these information together under the About Us section on their websites. All the websites also included contact information, mostly in the form of a phone number, and an email address. Furthermore, all refugee NGOs gave importance to presenting their annual reports and charity numbers on their websites. By making their management and contact information, as well as their annual reports easily accessible, refugee NGOs add transparency and accountability to their organizational undertakings, which is an important step towards building trust for the organizations' web content (Kenix, 2007; Waters, 2007; Greenberg and MacAulay, 2009; Kent and Taylor; 1998).

So far, our data suggests that the extent of the refugee NGOs' online communication practices contribute to their image as a credible source of information on the web, as the organizations place transparency and accountability at the center of their disclosure related activities. Previously I discussed how the internet presents unprecedented opportunities for

NGOs to publicize their messages directly to their stakeholders without the traditional gatekeeping role of the mass media. As Kent and Taylor (1998) note, "content is what should drive an effective website". Hence, if utilized successfully, an organization's website can serve as an important news platform, not only to disseminate the organization's messages to its constituents, but also to the representatives of the news media, enabling the flow of information from micro to mass media (Kent and Taylor, 2003; Bennett, 2003b).

With respect to information dissemination, most of the NGOs' websites featured campaign summaries, as well as research reports, such as presentations, statistics, and so on. For instance, WRC's website plays a critical role in making public the end work of the organization's efforts. Its official reports, fact sheets, resource kits for field workers are among the many sources that the organization shares with the visitors. Mapendo's website, however, falls short of providing comprehensive information about the organization's campaigns, and research findings, etc. Most of the information related to the NGO's work is not available on the website due to the "sensitive" nature of the organization's activities. This would pose a problem with respect to Mapendo's ability to generate return visits, as limited information deters visitors from using the website again (Kent and Taylor, 1998).

Self generated media, such as newsletters and press releases are crucial with regards to communicating with stakeholders in a direct manner, and keeping them informed on an organization's larger cause, as well as on the activities undertaken to achieve that cause. Updated, well-organized, and relevant organizational news help keep an organization on the constituents' agenda, and provide reasons for visitors to come back to the website for

more information, which opens the way for further engagement (Kent and Taylor, 1998). Moreover, if an organization utilizes its newsmaking capabilities effectively, it also makes it easier for journalists to take cues from the organization's online platforms, which may expand its public outreach substantially (Kent and Taylor, 2003). Self-publishing is useful in advancing an organization's "advocacy, outreach and fundraising" efforts (Greenberg and MacAulay, 2009; Waters, 2007).

Most of the refugee NGOs in this study seem to take advantage of their online newsmaking capabilities, although the extent of their self-publishing activities varies. In this regard, both JRS and WRC's websites offer a rich selection of up-to-date organizational news. For example, JRS uploads all its publications on its website -including those that have been circulated in hard copy originally- and compiles them under the heading "Publications". Among these are "Servir", JRS's magazine; and "Dispatches", the organization's email bulletin. WRC's website includes a Press Room section, on which WRC frequently posts its press releases. Mapendo also has a News and Multimedia section on its website, whereby the organization features its newsletters. However, this section is updated sporadically; the latest organizational news that is available dates back to a year ago. By failing to provide something of "on-going value" on its website, Mapendo hurts its chances of sustaining attention to its online platforms. Moreover, it risks looking irresponsible to the visitors, which in turn would damage the credibility of the messages that come from the organization (Kent and Taylor, 1998). Lastly, all the organizations that utilize self generated media also provide links to their external news stories, such as those that

appeared in major mass media, on their websites. Mass media coverage is leveraged to gain legitimacy in the eyes of the stakeholders (Fenton, 2010).

In addition to their websites, all the NGOs utilize their own blogs to post news items. Greenberg and MacAulay (2009) suggest that updating information on blogs is much easier than websites. Moreover, these NGOs made it possible for users to subscribe to RSS feeds on their blogs. RSS feeds allow subscribers to be notified automatically when there is an update on a web platform. Moreover, subscribers can choose even a particular section of a site to receive updates from. That is to say, RSS feeds deliver new and useful information to the users, rather than them having to search for it. Hence, by making use of blogs and RSS feeds, the NGOs make it easier for the audiences to learn about their organizational news on a regular basis. Furthermore, all the three NGOs supplement the information that is available through their web platforms with visual media, such as pictures, photo essays, and videos. Visual media can be particularly beneficial for refugee NGOs, as witnessing the plight of refugees through pictures and videos may help ignite a passion among the visitors to engage more closely (Torchin, 2006; Entman, 2010).

In sum, not all of the refugee NGOs examined in this study made the most of their online platforms with respect to information dissemination. Although all the NGOs gave importance to making their campaign summaries and research reports public, their approach towards online newsmaking varied. While JRS and WRC utilized their newsmaking capabilities more effectively, Mapendo's web platforms suffered from limited and poorly updated information. As argued earlier, one of the most important benefits of

the internet is that it allows NGOs to tell their stories, and convey their messages to a larger number of audiences without traditional media filters. However, with so many online information sources available, it almost became an imperative for NGOs to find ways to sustain attention to their online platforms, to be able to maximize the impact of their web presence. Distributing timely, updated and useful information helps an organization meet the information needs of diverse constituents, keeps the organization on the constituents' agenda, helps build its reputation as a credible news source, and establishes the basis for meaningful relationships with stakeholders (Greenberg and MacAulay, 2009; Kent and Taylor, 1998; Kent, et. al, 2003). Organizations that fail to build up effective newsmaking capabilities will find it much harder to maintain the interest of their stakeholders in the organization's online platforms, and hence in its larger cause.

Thus far, we looked at how the refugee NGOs discussed in this study utilize the internet to disclose and disseminate organizational information based on a one-way model of communication. Although these functions allow NGOs to secure accountability and credibility for their online messages, and in turn help increase returned visits to their online platforms, they fall short of giving publics the opportunity to discuss and act upon issues that are of concern to the former. Online tools that enable dialogue and engagement are crucial if refugee NGOs would like to build durable relationships with their audiences and genuinely involve them in addressing the refugee problem.

When we look at the opportunities for member engagement that are offered on refugee NGO websites, we observe that the NGOs most commonly asked for direct donations through their websites. On the other hand, none of the organizations posted volunteer

opportunities or provided a calendar of upcoming events. It is argued that listing volunteer opportunities and notifying visitors about upcoming events help create occasions for an organization to engage with its stakeholders offline, which facilitates social interaction and community building (Waters, et. al, 2009; Juris, 2005; Stein, 2007). Besides, focusing too much on donations might turn off potential supporters (Waters, 2007). Most importantly though, if refugee NGOs do not realize the potential of the internet with respect to facilitating dialogue and conversation with their constituents, it would be difficult to unite and mobilize them around a shared interest, regardless of the means that are available to solicit support online. As Searle (2000) contends, "If the route to donate and ask are wrong, the tools won't help".

Earlier I explained how a two-way model of communication, seeking to establish dialogue, shifts an organization's online efforts from the simple act of sharing to cooperating with its stakeholders, and helps create a sense of community. Moreover, it allows NGOs to engage in exchanges of information and ideas with their constituents, which in turn enables them to be more responsive to the latter's needs, opening possibilities for long-lasting relationships and continuous support (Waters, 2007; Kent, et. al, 2003). Live chat rooms, discussion forums, feedback forms, online surveys are among the tools that facilitate interaction between an organization and its online visitors (Greenberg and MacAulay, 2009; Kent and Taylor, 1998; Hackler and Saxton, 2007; Kenix, 2007; Waters, et. al, 2009). Interestingly, none of the refugee NGOs analyzed in this study made such interactive features available on their websites. Similar to Greenberg and MacAulay's (2009) findings, functions that allow for interactivity were usually placed on the organizations' blogs, or social networking sites such as Facebook and Twitter, mostly in the form of message boards. All the refugee

NGOs examined here had presence on social platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube, which keep viewers updated on the organization's news and activities, and give them the opportunity to publish their own comments in response to the information provided. These social platforms allow visitors to express their own point of views, and share their opinions not only with the organization at hand, but also with other stakeholders. This helps construct a collective identity among users, and encourages them to take a more active part in the advancement of the organization's mission (Myers, 1994). Organizations that put their audiences on the receiving end of information only would find it difficult to develop relationships with their constituents, and to mobilize them around the coalition's cause.

As for the refugee NGOs in this study, utilization of interactive platforms might signal the beginning of a shift from simple information dissemination to a two-way model of communication geared towards member engagement and relationship building. However, interviews with the Media/Communications staff of the NGOs point to a different conclusion. First and foremost, none of the representatives perceive the internet as a means to enhance dialogue and collaboration with their constituents. Although they are experimenting with online interactive tools, the rise of digital platforms is believed to be most useful in distributing the organizations' messages directly to their supporters - exemplifying a one-way model of communication- rather than establishing relations with them, and enhancing their participation. For example, one representative commented that, "we use all of these [*new media*] tools to help publicize our priority issues; our website is a

key place where people can learn about our organization, including downloading our reports".

Secondly, refugee NGOs are uncertain about the internet's overall contribution to their organizational impact. This is partly due to the fact that they do not have effective mechanisms in place to measure site performance and usage. In this respect, one representative admitted that "I don't know who visits the site, and what they are downloading, what they are seeing, what they are getting out of it". On a similar vein, another representative argued that "It is harder to gauge [*new media's*] effect on fundraising or program goals—and my guess is that it's minimal". The NGOs are also not even aware that most of what they are already doing online, such as providing updated information, utilizing RSS feeds, or being present on interactive sites are among the ways to attract and sustain attention to their web-based activities, which in turn facilitates lasting support. Besides, except for their use of social networking sites, other member engaging functions of the internet such as discussion forums and chat rooms, or volunteer opportunities and calendar of events, are not present on their web platforms. Overall, it can be argued that the refugee NGOs' partial utilization of the interactive features of the web does not stem from an understanding of the benefits of dialogue in building relationships and enhancing engagement with constituents.

Chapter 5: Discussion

The findings discussed in the previous section point to a number of important conclusions regarding the refugee NGOs' attitudes towards mainstream and new media, as well as the implications of their media practices for furthering the refugee cause. This section will highlight the major patterns found in the analysis of the refugee NGOs' communication activities, and interpret the results in relation to the prior work outlined earlier in the study. First I will focus on the NGO strategies utilized to obtain news access and representation, and then move on to a detailed explanation of their approach towards online communication and discussion.

To Make or Duplicate: That is the Question

Despite the multiplication of media outlets, and the subsequent fragmentation of audiences into separate niches, traditional media such as TV, newspapers, and radio continue to be one of the most powerful sources of communication with mass audiences. Major news channels such as CNN, and newspapers such as the New York Times, retain their influence over public agendas, however they no longer constitute the only platform where people get their news from (Bennett, et. al, 2004; Cottle, 2008; Cook, 2001; Bennett, 2005). For example, according to a recent PEW survey conducted by Purcell, et. al (2010), while 73 percent of Americans still catch the news on national television networks such as CBS or cable TV stations such as CNN or Fox News, 59 percent use a combination of online and offline news sources on a given day.

Media impact on politics and society has been an area of interest for many scholars over the years. In recent decades, studies found strong correlations between news agendas and public agendas (McCombs and Shaw, 1972; Iyengar and Kinder, 1987). Moreover, media framing of issues was shown to affect how audiences evaluate the performance of their leaders, as well as to whom they assign responsibility for the problems they encounter in the news (Iyengar, 1991). When combined with studies that revealed the routinized interactions between the press and the government (Sigal, 1973), it was feared that "by granting elites substantial control over the content, emphases, and flow of public opinion, media practices diminish the public's power" (Paletz and Entman, 1981). Bennett (1990) showed that media gates are usually closed to non-official sources when there is consensus over government policy among institutional elites.

Nonetheless, new communication technologies have instigated a number of changes to the dynamics of newsmaking. First, they gave journalists the capability to report live from remote locations, and circumscribed the officials' ability to dictate news agendas to a certain degree (Livingston, 1997). Second, the proliferation of media choices put commercial pressures on news organizations to attract more and more audiences with shrinking budgets. As a result, news media increasingly moved away from thought-provoking coverage of public affairs towards easy-to-digest, entertainment oriented news formats (Patterson, 2000). While staff cuts were made and bureaus were closed to compensate for financial losses, the new media environment, which is defined by breaking events and 24 hour news cycles, demanded increased output from reporters. Accordingly,

reporters have become even more dependent on outside sources, and media gates are widened to include those who package information according to the most winning news formulas (Underwood, 2001; Bennett, 2005; Davis, 2003; Freedman, 2010). While these news media trends have generally been lamented, they have nonetheless opened up possibilities for previously marginalized actors such as NGOs to enter into the news. Disseminating messages via mass media channels has become an important component of the NGO efforts to convince larger publics and decision-makers that their concerns deserve further attention and support. Accordingly, the past few decades saw a surge in the number of NGO communication experts and media-savvy NGOs, who strive to get their issues into news agendas in a more sophisticated manner. Although traditional publicity generating strategies such as protests and demonstrations are still valuable, they are no longer the only means to mass media coverage for alternative voices (Bennett, 2003b; Deacon, 2003; Anderson, 2003; Waisbord, 2010). Shoemaker (1989) suggests that professional press-management activities may be the only viable solution to overcoming media bias that tends to favor official views. As Bennett, et. al (2007) argue, "outsider-counter spin" is possible with the right combination of communication and content packaging skills. In its search for the nature of the refugee NGOs' mass media strategies, this study found that a similar professional attitude can be found with respect to these organizations' publicity efforts.

Waisbord (2010) defines professionalism as "the application of specialized knowledge and expertise in news management". In this regard, we have seen how all the refugee NGOs in this study employed full-time and part-time staff that are in charge of their respective organization's communications activities. These PR professionals are aware of the inner

workings of the news media, and know what would qualify as a "good story" for journalists. They identify their target audiences, i.e. existing and potential donors who tend to rely on traditional media for their information needs; strive for expanding their network of contacts within media outlets, and establishing good relations with them; and most importantly for the purposes of this study, pitch and package their stories in such a way as to ensure that they meet the journalistic criteria of what is newsworthy. In a world of sustained, comprehensive, and high-quality news coverage of issues, these practices could be championed for granting media access to refugee NGOs, which in turn would entail a greater understanding of the refugee problem on the part of the public. Yet we live in a much different world.

The interviews made with the refugee NGO representatives revealed that mass media attention to refugee situations is highly sporadic, intensifying during the initial period of a crisis, and fleeing when audiences are finally saturated with drama and negativity, only to return at the occurrence of an incident that possesses new shock value. Additionally, mass media coverage usually fails to paint a complete picture of the intricacies that adequately define a particular refugee problem. As one representative put it, "there are a lot of moving parts and different actors involved in refugee issues". As reporters tend to focus on elements that are thought to be relevant to audience interests, it becomes difficult to ensure that all partners and actors involved get due credit in their reporting. One can easily see the information biases put forward by Bennett (2005) at interplay here. First, news stories about refugee issues concentrate on "human-interest angles" as opposed to underlying processes. Secondly, there is usually a surge in media attention to refugee situations during

periods of crises, which illustrates journalists' penchant for dramatization. Also, instead of presenting refugee issues in a coherent and sustained manner, news media reporting of refugees is erratic at its best, making it challenging for audiences to unmask the connections among different stories, characters and elements.

Now let's go back to the central question posed by this study: Are refugee NGO's mass media strategies conducive to overcoming these problems associated with media coverage of refugee issues? Or are they simply born out of a journalistic mindset? This study found evidence pointing towards the latter, as the refugee NGOs' attitudes towards newsmaking were observed to be increasingly converging with that of the journalists. Despite the fact that the NGOs criticize mass media for failing to provide timely, sustained, and comprehensive news coverage of refugee issues, neither their media strategies, nor their approach towards traditional media seem equipped to transform the way the news reaches the audiences. As discussed earlier, the refugee NGOs' media strategies include pitching stories adorned with the formulaic elements of news media reporting. These range from emphasizing home connections, and personalizing issues, to simplifying content. Refugee NGOs hire former journalists, who proudly integrate the prescribed demands of the news industry into their communication activities. They also cooperate with celebrities to attract media attention to their causes and campaigns. Moreover, they believe that if they fail to abide by the criteria by which reporters judge news value, they have virtually no chances of making it into news narratives. In sum, these practices correspond to what scholars deemed as surrendering to the prevailing logic of the news media, rather than challenging the

deteriorating standards by which journalists select and frame their stories (Cottle and Nolan, 2007; Fenton, 2010; Waisbord, 2010). Although these efforts may help refugee NGOs secure news access, they do not translate into sustained and comprehensive coverage of refugee issues through which the public can develop a sufficiently rich understanding, and feel compelled to be part of the solution to the refugee problem.

On the positive side, refugee NGO communication practices such as developing relationships with reporters could potentially lead to more favorable and in-depth news content. Davis (2003) suggests that "by providing a consistent supply of reliable information subsidies (news stories and research) to journalists, non-official sources could become trusted and regular contacts for journalists". In addition, the refugee NGOs in this study avoid "dissent events" such as sit-ins or dramatic publicity stunts, which usually produce news that either further marginalizes opposing voices or buries the attempted message (Waisbord, 2010; Davis, 2003). Hence, by staying away from dissent events, and feeding journalists reliable information, refugee NGOs may earn journalists' trust, and leverage the emerging relationships to generate news coverage that are more likely to overcome the limitations of news reporting. However, this study also found that the NGOs examined here do not perceive the news media as a platform through which they can convey a deeper understanding of their causes. Rather, they adopt an opportunistic approach towards the mass media, defined by the pursuit of short-term media victories, in the hope of expanding their ability to obtain financial resources. As such, the outcome of their relationship building efforts is likely to be limited with respect to challenging the drawbacks associated with the media's coverage of refugee issues.

In sum, this study argues that professionalized communication strategies have become an important component of the refugee NGOs' mass media outreach efforts. However, in practice this has come to mean that the stories that are written in refugee NGOs' press offices have to be identical to those that are produced in professional newsrooms. Pressed by the demands of an increasingly commercialized and profit-seeking media environment, and the need to obtain funds in an ever more competitive NGO field, refugee NGOs seem to have rationalized their approach towards newsmaking. Their mass media practices are better understood as part of a strategy to take advantage of the mainstream media for temporary gains, than as a strategy to leverage the latter's power in informing mass audiences about the realities of the refugee problem, and developing the kind of public understanding that renders itself to effective political action and sustainable change (Thrall, et. al, 2008; Bennett, 2005). To secure access, the refugee NGOs appear to be giving in to the demands of today's media regime, which, as argued earlier, favors sensationalized, negative, and simplified content over contextual analysis of issues. Accordingly, the resulting coverage is less likely to shape public discourse in line with humanitarian ideals, and more likely to be aligned with the terms set by journalists and the imperatives of the contemporary media landscape. In other words, the power to determine how refugee issues are going to be represented through the mass media continues to reside more with the journalists than with the NGOs, despite the increasing use of advanced communication strategies by the latter.

Another conclusion that can be inferred from what has been discussed so far relates to the fundamental question of who has access to the mass media discourse in today's complex information environment. Aday and Livingston (2008) argue that in a world that is shaped by multifaceted global processes, the government might not be the best equipped authority to speak on behalf of global issues such as climate change and human rights. As a result, media might shift their attention to non-governmental sources of information that have special expertise over their issues of concern. In these cases, media may act more independently than was given credit for by the indexing theory. The findings of this study also hint at the possibility of a more diverse media sphere, whereby non-official voices, such as NGOs, may obtain a level of media access that was previously largely unavailable to them (Davis, 2003). Yet, as we have seen, news access seems to be granted to those who are most knowledgeable about the dynamics of the newsmaking process, and who, based on this knowledge, can develop communication strategies that are most likely to meet the journalistic standards. This, however, requires dedicated staff, time, and expertise, which means that not all refugee NGOs have "similar chances of making news" (Waisbord, 2010). As such, those organizations with more resources are expected to find better representation in the emerging media discourse on the refugee problem (Fenton, 2010; Davis, 2003).

New Media, Old Approach

Thus far we have seen how refugee NGOs are constrained by the prevalent media logic to frame and disseminate their issues on their own terms through the mass media. Besides, the

NGOs' communication strategies are aimed more towards "producing short-term influences on news agendas" than building the basis for sustained media attention, and robust public understanding, necessary to prompt substantial change in the policy realm (Thrall, et. al, 2008). Earlier I have explained how the formulaic coverage of refugee issues may lead to compassion fatigue on the part of the audiences (Moeller, 1999). As refugee NGOs tailor their communication strategies to cater to the prescribed demands of the mass media, it becomes even more difficult to mobilize the public on behalf of the refugee problem. This is where the benefits of effective online communication come into play. First, digital media, such as the internet, allow organizations to exercise far more control over the content of their messages. Second, they give NGOs the opportunity to communicate those messages to a mass audience, something that was possible only through traditional media channels before. Hence, new information technologies make it possible for activists and civil society organizations to overcome the barriers to effective communication through the mass media by enhancing their ability to reach out to the broader public on their own terms (Cammaerts, 2006; Kenix, 2007). The interactive nature of these technologies also enable NGOs to take part in horizontal, peer-to-peer communication with online audiences. Scholars perceived this participatory, dialogue-oriented use of online communications to be extremely valuable with respect to enhancing an organization's ability to sustain attention to its messages, cultivate effective relationships with its constituents, and mobilize the latter on behalf of the organization's goals (Stein, 2007; Shirky, 2008; Kent and Taylor, 1998). To understand how the refugee NGOs make use of the Web as a communication resource, their online presence was

analyzed for the existence of items that enable organizational disclosure, information dissemination, and member engagement.

First and foremost, the findings revealed that a certain degree of professionalism can be found in the refugee NGOs' approach towards web-based communication as well. All the NGOs utilized organizational websites, and other web platforms such as blogs, and social networking sites like Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube, to grow their online presence, and raise the visibility of their issues with online audiences. However, this study argued that simply having a web presence is no longer sufficient to maximize the impact of online communications. To gain prominence among other online information providers, NGOs need to start looking at their internet-based platforms as places where stakeholder information needs are continuously served, and where their input and participation are vigorously sought. Only then can organizations maintain the interest of their audiences to their concerns, harness their loyalty, and rally long-term support for their efforts. This is particularly important for "membership organizations" such as the refugee NGOs examined in this study, which depend on the assistance of their constituents both for resources, and the advancement of organizational goals (Kent, et.al, 2003). Many scholars suggested that organizations that facilitate two-way communications on their online platforms would be better suited to engage their stakeholders and nurture successful relationships with them (Greenberg and MacAulay, 2009; Seo, et.al, 2009; Naude, et.al, 2004; Kenix, 2007; Kent and Taylor, 1998; McAllister-Spooner and Kent, 2009; Kent, et. al, 2003; Waters, 2007; Waters, et. al, 2009; Jo and Kim, 2003).

Nonetheless, this study found that much of the refugee NGOs' online communication activities are developed around a "broadcast paradigm", which is characterized by a one-way model of communication, as opposed to a "dialogical paradigm" that is geared towards member engagement and relationship cultivation (Greenberg and MacAulay, 2009). All the NGOs included the items that correspond to the information disclosure category on their websites. In this regard, they provided detailed information on the characteristics of their organizations, such as its purpose and structure, and made available their annual reports, as well as their charity numbers. Activities related to information disclosure promote transparency and accountability, and as such, set the foundation for relationships of trust and reciprocity with stakeholders (Kenix, 2007; Waters, 2007; Greenberg and MacAulay, 2009; Kent and Taylor; 1998).

The refugee NGOs in this study also utilized most of the functions that relate to information dissemination. As emphasized earlier, online platforms such as websites and blogs serve as important channels to communicate an organization's messages directly to mass audiences (Cammaert, 2006). The internet is championed for giving alternative voices the ability to become their own news outlets, allowing them to publicize information without the filter of the traditional media. Hence, once an organization establishes credibility for its online platforms, it becomes important to share useful and timely information with audiences so as to generate return visits, and keep the organization and its priority issues on the constituent's agenda. In this regard, I showed how, although to varying degrees, all the NGOs made use of their online newsmaking capabilities, by

producing and disseminating content relating to their mission, efforts and other subjects of importance to the refugee cause through their websites, blogs and RSS feeds.

The refugee NGOs, however, did not perceive facilitating two-way discussions and enabling member engagement among the purposes of their online communication efforts. First and foremost, the data showed how the NGOs failed to incorporate the interactive features of the Web into their websites. None of the NGOs utilized dialogic tools such as live chat rooms, discussion forums, feedback forms, and online surveys on their websites, which give visitors the opportunity to voice their opinions, and participate in conversations with the organization and other constituents, providing incentives for the formation of "networks of collaborators" (Greenberg and MacAulay, 2009). The websites also fell short of offering offline engagement opportunities for visitors, as they did not include items such as volunteer listings and event notifications. As Cammaert (2006) suggests, "the offline or the more banal micro-level of having a drink together and building trust, developing a collective identity and framework of reference, and negotiating different identities, is not to be neglected in any account of activism". Reducing stakeholder involvement to monetary donations is insufficient to build the basis for long-term commitment to an organization's cause.

On a positive note, the findings revealed that the refugee NGOs in this study are taking a step towards becoming more interactive in their use of the internet. All the refugee NGOs had presence on leading social networking sites such as Facebook, YouTube, and Twitter, that enable discussions with constituents, which is key to the formation of deeper

relationships based on shared understandings. However, as Waters, et. al (2003) contend, realizing the full potential of the web requires more than awareness of the latest online trends. The refugee NGOs in this study had inadequate evaluation methods, and they were skeptical about the real impact of their online platforms. More importantly, all the NGOs still perceived their web platforms as an information dissemination tool, rather than one that could be leveraged to forge two-way interactions, harness loyalty, foster cooperation and collective action. For now, the refugee NGOs reviewed here seem to be "locked in a broadcast paradigm" as they view the internet mainly as a means of providing information, despite experimenting with online interactive tools that could potentially lead to the cultivation of strong stakeholder relationships (Greenberg and MacAulay, 2009). Yet, if the NGOs fail to recognize the strategic importance of their online platforms for enhancing their organizational impact, they will not be able to invest in it thoroughly. As a result, the true potential of the internet will not be realized with respect to increasing awareness, building networks of long-term supporters, and mobilizing them around the refugee cause.

Another important point that can be raised here is related to the claims of new technology empowering groups that have hitherto been deprived of the means to publicize their causes more easily and effectively. Bimber (2003) argued that in an era characterized by "information abundance", disseminating messages and mobilizing supporters no longer requires greater resources. This study investigated the possibility of garnering enduring support, which in turn could translate into effective action through strategic management of an organization's web platforms. It found however, that even attracting public interest in an organization's online content requires constant updates, and relentless commitment to the

delivery of ongoing value, let alone the time, effort and manpower necessary to build and maintain organization-public relationships via the Web. For example, the data has shown us how Mapendo - the smallest organization in the sample, and the only refugee NGO working with a part-time employee as opposed to full-time - had difficulty realizing the full potential of the internet even with respect to one-way information dissemination. Although the organization utilized its online newsmaking capabilities, its web platforms suffered from limited and poorly updated information, which, as argued earlier, would make it much harder to maintain the interest of the audiences in the organization's online platforms, and thus in its larger cause. Accordingly, it can be argued that although new technologies, such as the internet, provided NGOs with more possibilities to have their voices heard by the greater public and decision-makers, larger organizations are better suited to take advantage of these novel opportunities, simply because they have more time, money, and staff, to dedicate to their communication efforts (Fenton, 2010; Stein, 2007). However, as this study have demonstrated, real change involves more than just resources, and requires a vision that treats online communications not as a way of simple message dissemination, but one that can be leveraged to encourage participation, develop solidarity, and rally long-term support, which the refugee NGOs in this study seem to be missing.

Together, these conclusions have important theoretical implications regarding the workings of non-governmental actors interested in advancing their goals in the transnational realm. As explained earlier, Keck and Sikkink (1998) argued that the utilization of "increasingly sophisticated strategies and techniques", such as information, symbolic, leverage and accountability politics, has been a crucial factor in the success of the NGO efforts to

influence policy. However, as this study showed, although the refugee NGOs examined here have adopted a more sophisticated approach towards organizational and external communication, they lack evidence suggesting that this professionalization have been effective in increasing the amount of mass media coverage that refugee issues receive. Similarly, they offered no indication that refugee problems have been covered differently, i.e. in a more comprehensive, sustained, or favorable manner, by the mass media as a result of their newsmaking practices. Nor is it obvious that, as a result of professionalization, they have had substantal impact on public opinion or policy-making.

The same pattern is found in the refugee NGOs' approach towards online communication as well. As one representative succinctly summarized it, the refugee NGOs seem to develop their new media strategies out of the belief that "these days you have to have an online presence to be considered legitimate". The fact that the refugee NGOs continue to invest in their old and new media activities without any measurable results in practice support the argument that the NGOs perceive their professionalized communication strategies more as a means for organizational survival and generating legitimac, which could translate into more funds, than as a strategic component that may contribute to the NGOs' success in driving support and affecting policy outcomes. Accordingly, this study suggests that not all NGOs that operate on a transnational basis are attuned to the kind of network-building, strategic organization/communication thinking that Keck and Sikkink (1998) analyzed in their study. In other words, professionalization per se is not conducive to a different approach to strategic communication, but rather, it may reflect concerns about

organizational survival and development that is not necessarily linked to influencing policy and public opinion.

These findings then support Bob's (2005) argument that the world of NGOs is not immune from motives such as self-interest or practices such as cost-benefit analysis that are usually associated with market environments. Expanding on Keck and Sikkink's (1998) boomerang model of activism, Bob shows how considerations related to organizational survival play an important role in the decisions that are made by transnational non-governmental actors. He argues that "NGOs at their root are organizations – with all the anxieties about maintenance, survival, and growth that beset every organization". The refugee NGO's attitude towards their online and offline communication practices also suggest that while analyzing NGO media practices, it is important to reject dominant views that attribute the actions of civil society actors solely to altruistic and idealistic impulses, and to adopt a more cautious approach that that takes into consideration the organizational realities of today's NGO environment.

Chapter 6: Conclusion

This study explored how today's drastically changing information environment has affected the transnational refugee NGOs' approach towards contemporary media, both old and new, and investigated how the NGOs are seizing the opportunities that these media present for conveying their issues to stakeholders. Like many other global problems of our age, refugee issues are complex, large-scale, and protracted by nature. They typically last for years, or even decades, and their resolution demands a significant commitment of time, resources, and effort, as well as formulation of policies that address the "long-term development needs of displaced populations, host communities, and returnees" (UNDP Annual Report of the Administrator, 1992). "Quite a tall order", as one of the NGO representatives interviewed for this study put it.

Quite a tall order indeed, and one that would be difficult to resolve without harnessing the power of the old and new media as potential drivers of change. As explained earlier, both types of media offer numerous prospects, as well as challenges for civil society actors pursuing an assortment of policy goals in the international realm. Mass media make it possible for NGOs to shift the focus of public discussions to their issues of concern, which could potentially translate into public support, and open the way for greater policy influence (Thrall, et. al, 2008; Langer, 2003). On the downside, not all issues or actors have an equal chance of making it into the news, let alone occupying the news agenda long enough to facilitate an informed public opinion, that renders itself to "effective political action and real political change" (Bennett, 2005). New media technologies, such as the

internet, lower the barriers to information dissemination, and allow organizations to engage in horizontal, two-way communications with their constituents that facilitate collective identity formation, solidarity, and participation (Diani, 2000). However, the internet reaches a relatively smaller audience than mainstream media, and mostly to those who are already supportive of the organization's cause. That is to say, mass media are especially important in raising the larger public's awareness to a certain issue (Cammaert, 2006). As Anderson (2003) asserts, "CMC (Computer-mediated communication) co-exists alongside traditional media rather than replaces them". Thus, a diversified media strategy that combines traditional and new media communication tactics is expected to maximize the impact of an organization's communications efforts.

To understand the nature of the refugee NGOs' mass media practices, this study investigated whether the NGOs had the means and the attitude necessary to overcome the barriers to news access and news representation, or not. What we found is that the NGOs are increasingly professionalizing their approach towards newsmaking, i.e. hiring PR professionals who know how to increase the newsworthiness of an issue, which could help them secure news access. However, they are still very much constrained in their framing of the refugee problem by the journalistic logic, which in turn is dictated by the exigencies of the contemporary media system. Faced with the difficulty of publicizing their issues on their own terms, and maintaining the media's interest in their causes, the NGOs in this study are viewing mass media exposure merely as a fundraising tool, which, according to the author, would further circumscribe their ability to set agendas for action, and advance their goals through the mass media. What emerges is a vicious cycle that ultimately

hampers the public's understanding of the refugee problem. Yet who is to blame for this? As Waisbord (2010) argues, NGOs are no panacea to single-handedly put an end to the existing global problems that are affected by a host of complex, interdependent, and constantly-changing processes, let alone to cure the "structural organizational factors that tilt mainstream news away from civic society". However, as described earlier in this study, there are opportunities for refugee NGOs to contribute to more comprehensive and contextual news reports within today's media environment. As all the NGOs examined here have operations on the ground, they could potentially serve as important sources of information, and facilitators of in-depth coverage from refugee areas. At a time when journalists are becoming ever-more dependent on outside sources, especially in their foreign news reporting, NGOs can leverage their expertise and network of contacts in the field, and facilitate reporters to hard-to-access locations while providing them with guidance, analysis, and funding. In this respect, they can also partner with organizations such as the Pulitzer Center for Crisis Reporting, HUM: Human Unlimited Media Worldwide, and Bureau for International Reporting, which offer grants to journalists, and play the role of a bridge between reporters and NGOs to enable detailed coverage from under-reported regions of the world. According to Abbott (2009), the credibility of these organizations is also increasing in the eyes of news outlets. Therefore, this could be a particularly beneficial means to news access for NGOs that do not have the resources or contacts to establish the kind of legitimacy that is required to appear in news stories.

To gain insight into the nature of the refugee NGOs' new media practices, the study focused on the NGO internet use, and examined the organizations' web platforms to

understand the purpose of their online communications. As the internet is an unprecedented tool with respect to producing and sharing content with current and potential supporters with an ease and speed that was hitherto impossible (Bimber, 2003; Stein, 2007), we have seen how all the NGOs did capitalize on the medium's one-way communication functions. Other functions that may lead to member engagement and two-way discussions between an organization and its stakeholders were less commonly employed, and when utilized, their purpose was not to build mutually beneficial organization-stakeholder relationships. Interactive sites that are built upon horizontal communication structures such as Facebook, and Twitter were perceived as just another platform to get the message out. Scholars have argued that not all organizations would like to enter into a dialogue with their constituents through their web platforms, as maintaining a dynamic online presence might be costly and time consuming (Greenberg and MacAulay, 2009). A study on the use of new media tools by 75 U.S. based transnational NGOs found that some of the communications representatives at these organizations were concerned about their messages being distorted by the comments posted by the visitors (Seo, et. al, 2009). However, the benefits that accrue from the use of dialogic tools, such as cultivating relationships with stakeholders that could entail enduring support and involvement in advancing the mission, far outweigh these limitations. Besides, the NGOs in this study are already experimenting with some of the interactive functions of the web, and assigning them a more strategic role in their online communications would get them a long way in recruiting sustainable supporters to their cause and spurring their interest in future collaborations.

Here, I would like to touch upon some of the limitations of this study. First and foremost, the three organizations examined here can by no means represent the whole population of the U.S. based transnational refugee NGOs, let alone those that are active on the world stage today. Therefore, one should avoid generalizing the results offered here to the media activities of all the transnational refugee NGOs that are present in the U.S. It should also be noted that because this study focused on the communication processes of refugee NGOs rather than on their issue of concern, the inclusion of other humanitarian NGOs to the sample would be helpful in developing a more complete understanding of NGO media strategies. The study could then further be expanded to include NGOs who focus on issues outside of the humanitarian realm.

Secondly, the conclusions drawn in this study are based upon the refugee NGOs' and the news media's general attitude towards newsmaking. However, media coverage may differ from one issue to another, and from one news outlet to the next (Gamson, 2001; Waisbord, 2010). The factors involved in news production are complex, and therefore, the reader should leave room for variance in possible news outcomes. Also, one of the major limitations of this study was the lack of a benchmark with which to compare the effectiveness of the refugee NGOs' online and offline communication strategies. For example, I was unable to find an example of an organization in the literature that managed to change the criteria by which news are made, or that used dialogic communication successfully which in turn produced measurable results. Besides, to confirm the validity of the recommendations I have made, such as partnering with organizations like the Pulitzer Center for Crisis Reporting, a content analysis is necessary to see if their efforts have

actually resulted in comprehensive, contextual coverage of issues. Another point that should be raised here is that while looking at the new media strategies of NGOs, it is also important to know how their web operators are staffed, and who makes the decisions regarding the online communication functions that are used on their web platforms, considering that the Media/Communications staff who were interviewed for this study might not be the ultimate authority in this regard.

Finally, this study focused on the NGOs' individual experiences vis-à-vis traditional media, and online audiences. As explained earlier in the study, much of the successes of NGOs in the international realm are attributed to their increased networking capabilities, and the opportunities that advocacy networks present in moving information strategically to achieve desired outcomes (Tarrow, 2005; Keck and Sikkink, 1998; Bennett, 2003a). Various studies demonstrated that networks can be particularly valuable in affecting policy change by publicizing their causes through the mass media (Gaber and Willson, 2005; Rutherford, 2000; Bullert, 1999). Accordingly, future studies could investigate the refugee NGOs' media strategies on a networked level, such as by exploring media campaigns launched in cooperation with other organizations. Nevertheless, the commonalities that are underlined throughout the study are believed to provide important insights into the media practices of refugee NGOs, and the steps they are taking towards adaptation to the demands of the communications environment of our age.

Taking everything into consideration, this study observed a trend towards increased professionalization in the refugee NGOs' online and offline communication activities. The

days when dissent events were the only way for alternative voices to publicize their issues to a broader audience seem to have come to an end. The NGOs are increasingly operating as their own news outlets, pitching and packaging stories for the journalists based on the requirements of the news media, and producing and disseminating online content for their own constituents. The resulting mass media coverage of the NGO issues, however, are not necessarily on their own terms. Furthermore, the NGOs in this study are not fully aware of the benefits that social technologies may provide in maximizing the impact of an organization's new media practices. Bimber (2003) once argued that "democratic power tends to be biased toward those with the best command of political information". This study showed that the refugee NGOs are in fact taking steps towards having more control over their own "media destiny" (Deacon, 2003). However, a lot more can be achieved with a change in vision, and a greater belief in the power of communication to help provide durable solutions to the refugee problem.

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