

Gender

and Human Security Issues

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C O L L A B O R A T I O N

Dr. Rosalind Boyd, Director

The Centre for Developing-Area Studies (CDAS) is pleased to participate with the Women's Centre of Montreal to address one of the most pressing problems of our time — the plight of so many people adversely affected by violent political conflicts. Increasingly, the civilian population, especially women and children, are the prime victims of wars. How to assist them to resume their lives, to feel safe and secure in their surroundings, whether within the borders of the post-conflict state or within the region or in their new country of choice, is of central importance in our new cooperative program.

The CDAS has enjoyed informal relations with the Women's Centre for over a decade, especially through exchange visits with groups of women from China, Indonesia, Rwanda, South Africa and Uganda. This program enables us to formalize this relationship in an area of common concern, assisting refugee and immigrant women, through action-research which involves the participation of Montreal-based professors, researchers, and community workers. We welcome the opportunity to support graduate students in their research on refugees and peacebuilding as well as to broaden the socio-political and cultural understanding through field visits to the regions where women's groups are also addressing issues of peace and human security.

This new initiative recognizes the importance of community "in-reach" where our knowledge-base in the university can be enhanced by a better understanding of the actual experiences faced by the community. We look forward to three years of fruitful interaction with the Women's Centre which builds on the CDAS' overall mandate of people-centred development.

Ms. Johanne Bélisle, Co-director

It is with much enthusiasm that the Women's Centre of Montreal accepted a proposal from CDAS, an organization with which the Centre has enjoyed close links for more than 10 years, to officially become their partners in connection with the Community-University Research Alliances (CURA) program. This program, in fact, allows the Centre to meet two specific objectives outlined in its strategic plan, which are:

The Women's Centre will broaden its scope and strengthen its foundations through the development of strong partnerships with business, professional and academic communities.

The Women's Centre will broaden its local, national and international communication network and will focus on documenting and sharing its expertise.

This joint effort represents, in our eyes, a unique and ideal opportunity to enhance our theoretical skills (thanks to the collaboration of various researchers), and practical skills (thanks, in part, to a visit to the targeted region) when confronted with the problems faced by this clientele. It will also help us develop innovative tools specifically adapted to those needs, while, at the same time, contributing to improving the training offered to students. It will strengthen the various groups' and communities' capacities to intervene, and, most importantly, it will contribute to improving the lives of a vulnerable population.

In brief, this partnership represents a wonderful initiative which we hope will result in a better appropriation of university research programs, proportionate to the needs of the community.

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The Centre for Developing-Area Studies (CDAS), founded in 1963, is an interdisciplinary research centre based in the social sciences within the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research of McGill University.

The Centre encourages and coordinates student, faculty and post-doctoral research on developing areas and development issues. It contributes to an international dialogue on development research through seminars, colloquia, publications and a documentation centre.

Individuals and groups associated with the Centre have established a tradition of involvement with visiting scholars, outside researchers, trade unions, government policy-makers and grassroots organizations. The CDAS has come to be known internationally for its intellectual diversity and active commitment to social concerns.

www.mcgill.ca/cdas



The Women's Centre of Montreal was founded in 1973 with a simple mission: to help women help themselves.

To accomplish its mission, the Centre offers educational and vocational training, information, counselling and referral services. This non-profit organization also communicates women's concerns and acts as a catalyst for change

regarding women's issues.

Its main areas of activities are: fighting against poverty and violence; helping newly arrived women and their families adapt to their new country; helping women enter the labour force in traditional and non-traditional fields.

From a mere information and referral centre at its outset, the Women's Centre of Montreal has grown to become one of the most important resources for women in Quebec.

Since its founding, it has helped more than half a million women and its influence extends to all levels of governance: local, provincial, national and international.

www.cedep.net/~cfmwcm

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From left to right: Rosalind Boyd, CDAS; Wanjiku Gitau, EASSI; Debbie Serwadda, Hope Counseling Centre; Ginette Aumont, Women's Centre of Montreal; Edith, Hope Counseling Centre. (Kampala, Uganda)

CDAS and the Women's Centre of Montreal Meet their Partner in Africa

The overall objective of this field visit to the Great Lakes Region by **Rosalind Boyd** (CDAS) and **Ginette Aumont** (Women's Centre of Montreal) was to gather information concerning 1. organizations working on issues of peace, women and conflict resolution; and 2. organizations and methods of counseling used for traumatized, abused and violated persons, especially women and children. We were also concerned with documenting any innovative efforts that women are making to redress as well as prevent conflict in the Great Lakes Region.

Preparatory research on various organizations and documents was conducted in Montreal prior to departure. The program of the visit (September 2000) was organized and facilitated by our partner in the region, the Eastern African Sub-Regional Support Initiative for the Advancement of Women (EASSI).

Many organizations in the region are carrying out advocacy work to address the aftermath of armed conflict, to prevent any new conflicts and generally to promote a culture of peace in the region. Most of the organizations that we met in Uganda are also involved in exposing the need for counseling of traumatized persons; however, very few are actually doing this counseling.

On the other hand, in Rwanda, many organizations are doing counseling work and manage a synergy between the need for counseling as part of the healing process with the need for political reconciliation.

(The full report of the field visit is available from the Program Coordinator, Suzanne Boutin)

NEWS IN BRIEF

Myriam Gervais actively participated in the reflection by Canadian and Quebec NGOs on interventions regarding human security issues related to internal conflict situations. On October 11, 2000, she gave a presentation for the participants in the "Table de concertation du Rwanda et du Burundi". The topic was: "*Le concept de sécurité humaine appliqué aux programmes d'aide canadiens au Rwanda*".

As well, in September, Myriam Gervais released a 36-page document entitled: "*Sécurité humaine: une approche centrée sur les problèmes structurels*".

Action-research at the Women's Centre of Montréal

The Women's Centre of Montreal associated itself with various individuals from the academic field in order to accomplish the first part of this research project.

As a first step, the Centre was able to count on the expertise of **Bilkis Vissandjee**, **Miranda D'Amico**, and **Shree Mulay** in order to elaborate various procedures regarding ethics.

It then recruited three trainees, namely **Anne Benoît**, therapist, **Hoory Hamboyan**, graduate in social work, and **Ivic Olek**, nurse, who were joined by a fourth person, **Maria Camila Chica**, student in social work at McGill University. The latter three were mandated to research literature for links, from a socio-political perspective, with the situation affecting women from the Congo, Uganda, Rwanda, Burundi and Algeria. Anne Benoît, on the other hand, was mandated to research art therapy and the role it can play when intervening with women who have suffered traumas.

All the trainees will work under the direct supervision of **Ginette Aumont**, assistant to the Director of Front Line Services and Immigrant Women at the Women's Centre of Montreal, **Dorys Makhoul**; both are Community Activities Coordinators in this action-research.

Finally, the department's professional staff, as well as the trainees participating in the program, will be able to benefit from a training program which will address the following: an overview of the socio-political climate in the Great Lakes Region of Africa;

the migration experience; post-traumatic stress disorder; art therapy; and empowerment. The above training will be facilitated by: Bilkis Vissandjee, Miranda D'Amico, Anne Benoit and **Myriam Gervais**.

Simultaneously, the trainees will start their work with regard to the elaboration of the program content for the group sessions, in collaboration with, among others, **Claudia Mitchell**.

RESEARCH PROJECTS

Women and Orchestrated Violence: A Model for Intervention / The Women's Centre of Montreal

Since its foundation, the Women's Centre of Montreal has always paid special attention to improving the lives of newly-arrived immigrant women. This action-research project will help to identify the needs of immigrant and refugee women from the Great Lakes Region of Africa and Algeria who have suffered psychological and physical traumas; to develop and implement a model of support group aimed at maintaining a process of rehabilitation for these women in the host country, in our case, Canada; to increase and share expertise results with other women's organizations in Canada and abroad.

Political Reconciliation and Issues of Trauma in the Great Lakes Region / Dr. Rosalind Boyd

Globally, war-torn societies and military conflicts are producing more refugees, displaced persons and immigrants than ever before, many of whom are women coming to Canada. The overall goal of our research is to improve the capacity, through cultural understanding and diversity of methods, for assisting women refugees and immigrants, specifically at the Women's Centre of Montreal. In this research, we will 1) identify the various organizations that are working with women who are victims of the conflicts in the Great Lakes Region; 2) share the tools and methods being used to assist women and men through participation in a Workshop to be held in this region with researchers, interveners and women's organizations and 3) develop a scholarly article analyzing the problematic which generally separates the two domains of political reconciliation and issues of trauma.

Human Security Issues in Post-Conflict Situations / Dr. Myriam Gervais

As opposed to natural catastrophies, internal conflicts have their roots in structural problems. Consequently, post-war rebuilding problems need to be addressed by the afflicted society. In fact, reconstruction programs could have an impact on gender relations and on social relations and if so, significant changes can emerge. Therefore, we need to scrutinize reconstruction activities in relation with human security issues. Our research is based on the Rwandan case (1994-2000) and we intend to look at the reconstruction program implemented, focusing on national strategies, donors and NGOs interventions, with a particular interest in CIDA and Canadian NGOs.

The Girl-Child within Refugee and Immigrant Communities in Montreal: An Exploration of Sexuality and Human Security / Professor Claudia Mitchell

Our specific focus in this project is on issues of sexuality in the lives of girls in refugee communities in Montreal. The work on sexuality in a Western context within the framework of popular culture has paid little attention to the lives of girls who are outside the mainstream culture. Even more significantly, we know very little about the ways in which the links between the lives of girls and women, daughters and mothers, girls and their female teachers might contribute to understanding issues of the girl-child. Finally, as (adult) researchers, we have a great deal to learn about how best to work with young people in studying sexuality. How, for example, can girls become partners in co-researching in studying their own lives? How can mothers participate in some of this exploration through memory work? How can we look at participatory process in a "research as social change" context?

After the Peace Processes: the Political Economy of Marginalization / Ms. Manal Jamal (Ph.D candidate)

In the post-Cold War Era, two phenomena have become increasingly pervasive: the first is the eruption of an increasing number of ethnic conflicts; and the second is the emergence of an international context that is more conducive to the resolution of long-standing conflicts. As a result, concerted international intervention has led to the beginning of several peace processes to resolve some of these long-standing conflicts. This research project seeks to explain how multilateral peace-building initiatives may contribute to the demobilization of grassroots organizations and other social sectors that were previously active both at the political and social level, in both community and national context. The two case studies under examination are Palestine and El Salvador.