

# Transitions



**SIERRA LEONE - A DECADE OF DARKNESS AND BARBARISM**  
**THE WEST PAPUAN STRUGGLE FOR INDEPENDENCE**  
**STARTTS IN EAST TIMOR**  
**FAMILIES IN CULTURAL TRANSITIONS**  
**INTERNATIONAL DAY FOR VICTIMS OF TORTURE**

# Transitions

Transitions exists to report on a wide range of refugee and human rights issues of relevance to the work of STARTTS; to focus attention on the impact of organised violence and human rights abuses on health; to provide ideas on intervention models to address the health and social needs of refugees; to debate and campaign for changes necessary to assist, empower and strengthen refugee communities in their settlement process and ultimately bring together a vehicle for cultural and personal expression.

STARTTS was established in 1988 to provide a comprehensive, holistic service to refugee survivors of torture and trauma in New South Wales. It was the first service of its kind to be established in Australia.

## EDITORIAL

Peter Williamson and Olga Yoldi.

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## PHOTOGRAPHY

Cover photo by Peter Williamson. These boys were playing in a river in Viqueque, East Timor. What struck me was their openness and innocence in place and time where suspicion and fear was the norm. Given the chaos that was soon to follow, I cannot help but wonder what became of them and hope that their lives are happy and free in the independent East Timor.

Other professional photography by AAP Information Services.

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# Message from the Director



By Jorge Aroche, Executive Director

## Welcome to the tenth issue of *Transitions*.

This is the last issue as a NSW based magazine. The next issue will commence a new episode in which *Transitions* (from then on to be known as “REFUGEE *Transitions*”) will aim to fulfil a national role and reach a wider audience. This is not a goodbye by any means, but rather the opportunity to say hello to a bigger audience. The current production team at STARTTS in NSW will continue to produce *Transitions*, as one of STARTTS portfolios with the National Forum of Services for the Survivors of Torture and Trauma (NFSSTT), albeit with the assistance and support of the torture and trauma services from other states. We are confident this will result in an even better, more cost-effective magazine with a larger readership. I am also looking forward to sharing the task of writing this message with the other NFSSTT Directors!

It is just as well that I have this last message all to myself, however, since so many things have been happening at STARTTS in the last couple of months! Perhaps one of the most important of these occurred at the International Day in Support of Torture Victims event organised by Friends of STARTTS and Amnesty International at the State Library of NSW, on the 26th of June. The NSW Minister for Health, the Hon. Craig Knowles reaffirmed his support for the work of STARTTS, and chose this occasion to announce that STARTTS’ recurrent budget will be increased by \$600,000.

This will enable STARTTS to continue to address the growing level of demand for our services and tackle long-standing challenges such as the development of more specific services for children, the increase of our psychiatric consultancy services and a larger role in research in the field of torture and trauma. Our many thanks to Craig Knowles, not only for this wonderful news, but also for the thoughtful speech delivered at this event, and the mention in Parliament earlier that day about the significance of the 26th of June and the work carried out in NSW to assist torture and trauma survivors. I have taken the liberty to include his speech from the Hansard Records elsewhere in this magazine.

I did not get to hear the above news personally, however, since I was then halfway around the world having just attended the 6th conference of the International Society for Health and Human Rights (ISSHR) in Cavtat, Croatia. The theme of the conference was *Communities in Crisis: Strengthening Resources for Community Reconstruction*. It provided a wonderful opportunity to learn about the impact of human rights violations on health from a kaleidoscopic variety of perspectives, and to meet again people from all over the world working on this field. As often happens in these cases, we came back inspired by the ideas, many of which have much potential for application in our work, but also with the tremendous spirit and commitment demonstrated by those working with torture survivors in situations where the risk of becoming a victim themselves increases with every person they assist. It was also heartening and gratifying to find our interventions and approaches validated by the positive response to our presentations and the work that is being carried in Australia by STARTTS and other like services. To the extent that is possible, we will try to bring summaries of some of the best presentations and discussions to *Transitions* and to the STARTTS website.

I have also come back from the conference with some additional responsibilities. I was elected to the council of the ISSHR, and then to the executive of the society. As part of this commitment I will be playing a more active role in helping develop better links and networks between members in the Asia-Pacific region, and in the context of my portfolio with the executive, between the different regions. I look forward to doing my best to make a success of this position.

Another interesting, yet sad note captured in this conference is that Australia appears to be now better known internationally for its policies towards unauthorised entrants (particularly its use of immigration detention) than for its progressive policies in the resettlement of refugees, an area where Australia con-

tinues to be at the cutting edge worldwide. The debate about detention, of course, continues to rage in Australia, with hardly a week passing without it making news in some way or another, and these concerns are once again reflected in various articles in this issue.

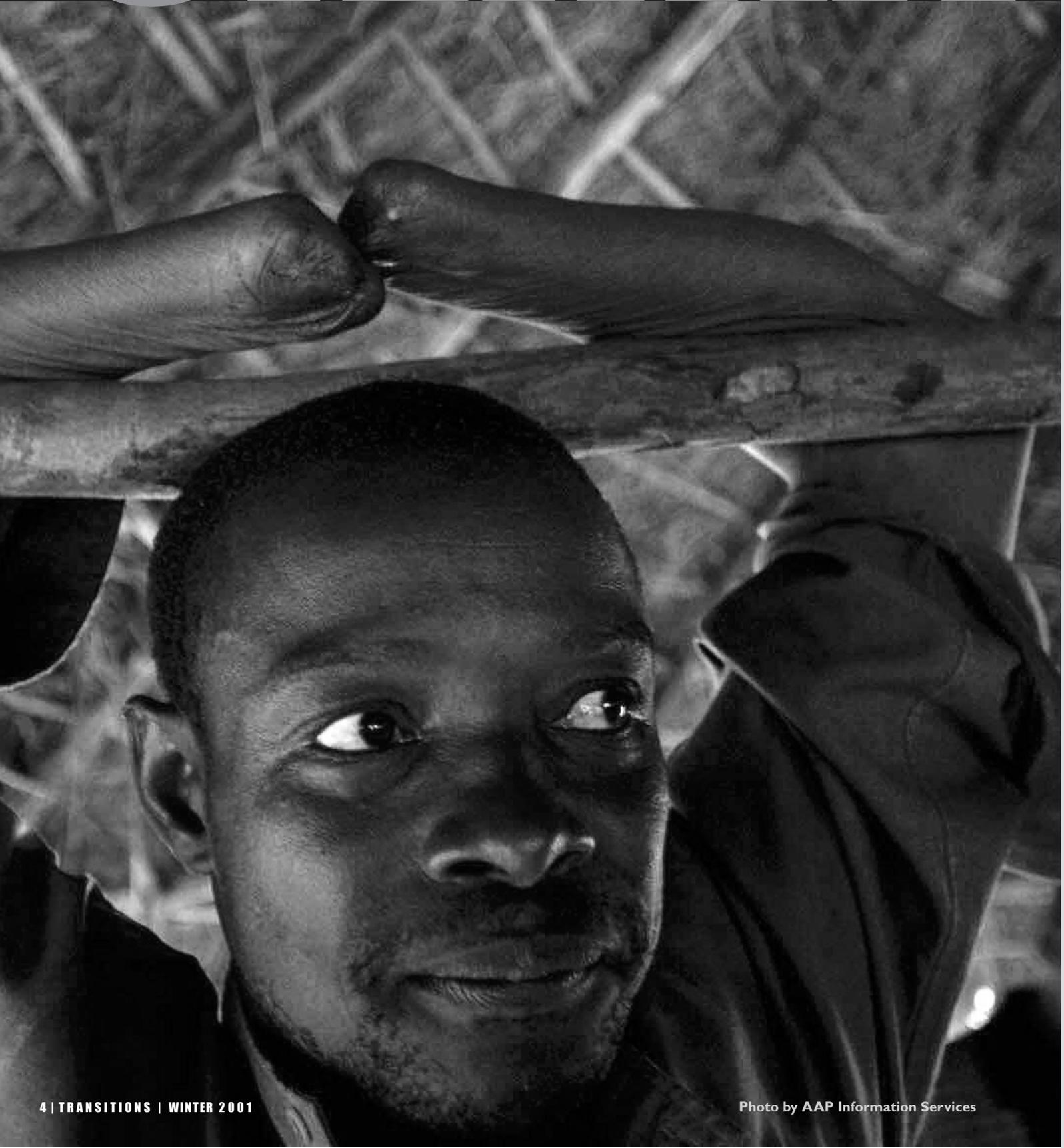
This *Transitions*, as you might expect, tackles a variety of complex issues. These include an excellent analysis of the conflict in Sierra Leone in our forgotten conflicts section, a report on the latest in the efforts to develop an international criminal court, an article exploring the complex issues surrounding the deportation of permanent residents who commit crimes in Australia, a round table discussion on mental health issues in East Timor, and a couple of excellent articles focusing on the complex political and human rights situation of West Papua as it struggles for independence.

Other articles focus on the practical application of the Families in Cultural *Transitions* Program through a successful partnership between the NSW Department of School Education and STARTTS, and the event on the 26th of June observing the UN International Day in Support of Victims of Torture in NSW. This issue of *Transitions* also includes, for the first time, a section reviewing books and films available on video of particular relevance to human rights issues. I believe this is an excellent addition to *Transitions*, which I hope becomes a regular section from now on.

I trust you will enjoy this issue, and hope you join me in looking forward to issue 11 as the first in the new phase of *Transitions*. Until then, all the best, (and don’t forget to subscribe if you haven’t done so yet!!!).

A handwritten signature in black ink, which appears to read "Jorge Aroche". The signature is stylized and fluid.

# SIERRA



# LEONE

## A Decade of Darkness and Barbarism

**The brutal violence that the Revolutionary United Front inflicted on defenseless civilians during the war sent a chilling reminder that the battle to defeat evil is never over. Sierra Leone's recent history is a story of greed, corruption, brutality and political failure. It presents the West with the most profound ethical and moral issues of our time. Olga Yoldi writes.**



"We have virtually wasted a quarter of our life as an independent nation in a senseless and brutal armed conflict" President Tejan Kabbah said last April, in his address to the nation on the eve of Sierra Leone's 40th independence anniversary. He urged Sierra Leoneans to reflect on the strife-torn last decade and called on members of the Revolutionary United Front (RUF) to lay down their arms and end all hostilities. Kabbah appealed to Sierra Leoneans to now work to create what he called a new Sierra Leone, based on the principles of self-reliance and

political tolerance.

The RUF, however, have been reluctant to surrender their weapons and put a final end to the country's decade-long conflict. Last month 1,000 of the RUF's estimated 10,000 combatants were demobilised in the Kambia district, a rebel stronghold. They also released 600 of the estimated 5,000 child combatants and agreed in principle to resume the stalled Disarmament, Demobilisation and Reintegration Program, one of the most crucial elements in the peace process.

But for combatants to return to

civil life they will need to find a place in society, if they are not to return to the bush, and at the moment Sierra Leone is in a very precarious situation. The legacy of war, the spread of disease (particularly malaria and AIDS), environmental degradation, uncontrolled crime, scarcity of resources and poverty will pose major challenges to the government in seeking to move from war to peace. Although there has been a deployment of up to 20,000 United Nations peacekeepers, financial resources for long term recovery are poor and as a result the ▶

future is uncertain.

Sierra Leone was described as the epicenter of anarchy in West Africa. In 1994 Robert Kaplan wrote in his Atlantic Monthly article, 'The Coming Anarchy', that "Sierra Leone is a microcosm of what is occurring in West Africa and much of the underdeveloped world: the withering away of central governments, the rise of tribal and regional domains, the unchecked spread of disease, the empowerment of private armies and the growing pervasiveness of war." West Africa, he predicted "provides

**"Sierra Leone is a microcosm of what is occurring in West Africa and much of the underdeveloped world: the withering away of central governments, the rise of tribal and regional domains, the unchecked spread of disease, the empowerment of private armies and the growing pervasiveness of war" - Robert Kaplan**

an appropriate introduction to the issues, often extremely unpleasant to discuss, that will soon confront our civilization."

The country increasingly became a virtual zone of terror in the nineties when different areas fell under the power of RUF. The government, unable to control its national territory or protect its civil population, became what political scientist Oswaldo de Rivero would have called a Chaotic and Ungovernable Entity.

Only recently has the situation started to improve. Peacekeepers and other observers described the release of child soldiers as a sign of peace. In a war characterised by such atrocities as the hacking off of civilians' limbs and the widespread use of rape to terrorise people, the abduction of thousands of children by all sides was one of the most tragic aspects of the conflict. Humanitarian groups estimate there are 5,000 to 8,000 child combatants aged 6 to 16 in Sierra Leone.

Nobody really knows how many people actually died during the war. According to the World Health Organisation more people have died of malaria in Sierra Leone during the last eight years of ongoing conflict

than from trauma injuries.

The war has also left more than 2 million people (over one third of the population) displaced and refugees in areas under rebel control will soon be evacuated, but security remains fragile particularly in the borders between Sierra Leone, Guinea and Liberia where most refugee camps are located.

"There are signs of optimism" says UN Deputy Emergency Relief Coordinator, Caroline McAskie. "I have a profound belief in the human spirit. I see it in action here in

Sierra Leone. You've gone through things that would crush any ordinary mortal, and yet I see people going back, rebuilding their houses, their villages and reorganising themselves," she said.

### THE LAST IN THE WORLD

Before independence Sierra Leone was a peaceful and reasonably prosperous country. Rich in mineral resources (diamonds, titanium ore, bauxite and gold) it now ranks last in the world in quality of life, according to a UN Human Development Report released last year. Even Rwanda and Afghanistan offer their citizens a happier, safer, more prosperous and dignified life.

The men of Sierra Leone have a life expectancy of thirty-eight and the women forty. Only three out of ten adults are literate and out of every thousand children born there, 164 die in infancy.

Before the British arrived a flourishing multi-ethnic culture and society had evolved. Today there are 20 native African tribes living in Sierra Leone. The dominant groups are the Temne, Mende, Limba and Creole. Islam is practised by sixty per cent of the population.

Sierra Leone had a long tradi-

tion of trade with Europe, which began in the fifteenth century with the Portuguese. The British arrived in the eighteenth century as slavers. They initially ran a slavery operation off Bunce Island and later established the present capital, Freetown, as a settlement for slaves who either had been freed in Britain and North America, or were seized from ships intercepted in the Atlantic after the passing of the Anti Slavery Act in 1787. Their colonial administration was confined to Freetown, but when the slave trade ended the British set their eyes on the mineral deposits and wasted no time in building a railway linking Freetown to the diamond mining areas of the interior. Trade flourished between the coast and the interior.

British rule in Sierra Leone has been described as moderately benign but neglectful. The system left by the British remained unchanged after independence. Sir Milton Margai (1961-64) the first Prime Minister and Head of the Sierra Leone People's Party (SLPP) was chosen to lead the country. Margai's intention was to build a unified country but he died before he fulfilled his mission. Upon his death his brother Albert Margai (1964-67) replaced him and started a pattern of corrupt politics.

In 1967 All People's Congress (APC) leader Siaka Stevens won the elections. Stevens (1967-85), the dominant political figure in the country's post-independence history, was described as a master of manipulation. During his term he executed many of his rivals and adopted a single party constitution.

"Stevens destroyed and corrupted every institution of the state. Parliament was gutted of significance; judges were intimidated or bribed; the university was starved of funds, education was deprecated in favour of the quick acquisition of wealth; and the professionalism of the army was undermined," former US Ambassador in Sierra Leone, John L Hirsch wrote in his book

*Sierra Leone, Diamonds and the Struggle for Democracy.*

Stevens stepped down in 1985 and power was transferred to his friend Major General Joseph Momoh. However he continued to be influential behind the scenes.

Momoh (1985-92) was notoriously inept, with few political skills or leadership qualities. During his tenure corruption, nepotism and fiscal mismanagement contributed to the total collapse of the economy and the education system; as a result many children ended up on the streets. To make matters worse, Sierra Leone became increasingly involved in the Liberian war, a war that would soon drag Sierra Leone into an abyss.

“The pattern of corruption and misrule set by Stevens and Momoh had an impact that went far beyond those who immediately stood to gain by manipulation of government funds, smuggling of diamonds, or poaching of the lucrative fishing grounds. As infrastructure and public ethics deteriorated in tandem, much of the professional class left Sierra Leone, leaving behind a country sliding inexorably to the bottom,” writes Hirsch.

Sierra Leone’s civil war started in March 1991 when a group of one hundred fighters under the leadership of Foday Sankoh, a dissident army officer, launched a rebellion to overthrow the Momoh government. The RUF was unknown to most Sierra Leoneans at the time. The mysterious rebels turned out to be a group of young people, who joined forces with some Liberian fighters loyal to Charles Taylor, leader of the National Patriotic Front of Liberia. The rebellion quickly developed into a campaign of violence, making the diamond rich Kono region their battlefield.

The rebels had an ideology of resentment against the government and foreign companies who had plundered the country’s resources. However, it waged war not against the government but against defenseless civilians. They said they were

fighting for the provision of good health care and education for all, but ended up destroying all the hospitals, ransacking the schools and abducting the children.

It was the start of a vicious civil war which would destroy Sierra Leone’s development prospects and would lead to an almost complete dependence on the international community.

## **FROM LIBERIA TO SIERRA LEONE**

Foday Sankoh would not have got very far in his revolutionary efforts without the support of Libya and Liberia. Charles Taylor had been fighting against Samuel Doe in his quest for power. Taylor resented the Sierra Leonean government for providing logistic support to the newly formed Economic Communities of West African States Cease-Fire Monitoring Group (ECOMOG), based in Liberia to support Samuel Doe’s government. Taylor retaliated by providing arms to Sankoh’s RUF fighters to bring down the Momoh regime.

Momoh found himself in a vulnerable position. The army was small, unprepared and poorly equipped so he asked Britain for help, but his request was turned down.

After 12 months of Sankoh’s butchery, a military junta staged an

tially he attempted to negotiate with Sankoh but talks failed. He then launched a major military offensive against the RUF. But the NPRC had inherited a demoralised and corrupt army. Many soldiers found that they were better off by joining the rebels in looting civilians in the countryside than by fighting against them. By mid 1993 civilians found it impossible to distinguish between rebels and soldiers, adding to their confusion and terror.

The NPRC continued fighting the rebels without success. By 1995 Sankoh had grabbed control of all the big mines and started taking expatriate hostages. The death toll was now being measured in tens of thousands. The economy plummeted as rebels controlled the mining areas, hitting the government’s revenue base.

As the RUF forces were advancing towards Freetown, Strasser, who had been supported by Nigerian and Ghanaian troops, decided to invite Executive Outcomes, a South African mercenary firm expert in fighting bush wars, to come to his rescue.

An intense controversy erupted when mercenaries landed in Sierra Leone in March 1995. The question was raised as to what a government should do when it comes under siege and cannot rely on its own army or on the UN troops.

## **“We have virtually wasted a quarter of our life as an independent nation in a senseless and brutal armed conflict” - President Tejan Kabbah**

accidental coup. All they wanted was wages and supplies for fighting Sankoh and staged a protest outside parliament. Momoh thought he was facing a coup d’état and escaped to neighbouring Guinea.

Twenty seven-year-old army captain, Valentine Strasser declared himself head of the National Provisional Ruling Council (NPRC). He presented himself as a saviour, promising to win the war against the RUF and put an end to corruption. Ini-

Are mercenaries the answer to Africa’s conflicts?

Executive Outcomes’ own origins were obscure. In the 1990s Eben Barlow, a former officer of the 32 Battalion of the South African Special Forces recruited 2,000 men who had served the apartheid regime’s military and intelligence services against the African National Congress (ANC) and other apartheid opponents. These included members of the notorious Koevoet ►

## SIERRA LEONE A Decade of Darkness and Barbarism

(crowbar) Battalion, which had fought against the South West African People's Organisation during the independence struggle in Namibia, and the Civil Coordination Bureau, which had murdered members of the ANC and other anti-apartheid activists. Barlow had also served in covert operations in Angola and Mozambique.

Conspiracy theories persist as to who really introduced Executive Outcomes to Sierra Leone. Accord-

ing to Paul McGeough and Tony Wright from the Sydney Morning Herald, one theory is that the push to get mercenaries came from Gencor, a South African mining house. Diamond concessions were apparently part of the deal between Executive Outcomes and the NPRC from the start, although there is no documentary evidence.

Executive Outcomes was linked to Western mining companies such as Branch Energy, which had invested

millions of dollars in mining exploration. According to Hirsch, Branch Energy played a major role in negotiating the deal between Executive Outcomes and the government. Executive Outcomes would be paid \$1.8 million a month by the government, (for less than 100 personnel) in spite of treasury being bankrupt. The government would grant Branch Energy the diamond mining concessions of the Kono region (once they were taken over from the rebels). Branch Energy would in turn give five percent of the value of all diamonds extracted and 37.5 per cent of net profits to the government.

The mercenaries managed to push the RUF out of Freetown very fast. Later that year they gained access to the Sierra Rutile and other important mining areas.

Executive Outcomes executed its contract, brutally and effectively. But it was a bloody contest. The rebels went around killing civilians who in their eyes supported the government. And when Executive Outcomes' fighter pilots complained to their Sierra Leonean military commanders that they could not distinguish between rebel fighters and civilians, Harpers magazine reported, they were told: "Kill everyone."

### BROKEN PLEDGES

Multi party elections were announced in the midst of war in 1996. The RUF fiercely opposed the elections and reacted with great brutality and contempt for human life. "We will cut off your hands if you use them to write on the ballot papers," they said to discourage civilians from voting, and indiscriminately went about cutting not only the hands but sometimes the arms and legs of hundreds of defenseless civilians including children, babies and the elderly. Many people arrived at the hospitals with massive injuries, but it is impossible to know the number of victims who died before being able to receive medical attention.

Writer William Shawcross, who



Photo by AAP Information Services

visited a hospital in Sierra Leone at the time, was struck by the horror and the complete silence in the wards. "The victims were in shock. The thought of their lives ahead was terrible. With one savage blow, or with many awful sawing cuts, they had been deprived of any livelihood, if not of their lives," he wrote in his book *Deliver us from Evil: Peacekeepers, Warlords, and World of Endless Conflicts*.

The elections were held and Ahmad Tejan Kabbah, Head of the SLPP won with 59.9% of the vote. Kabbah, a self-effacing former UN diplomat who had been out of the country for many years, promised to restore peace. But peace would prove very difficult to achieve because the rebels developed a habit of making pledges that they would fail to respect.

Sankoh and Kabbah signed the Abidjan and Lomé Peace Agreements in 1997 and 1999. But neither agreement was implemented because the rebels refused to relinquish power. The Abidjan agreement included one condition: that Executive Outcomes should leave the country. The government was well aware that their departure would leave Sierra Leone in a vulnerable situation. However, Freetown politicians had complained that the mercenaries were exacerbating the war. There were also growing allegations that the individuals linked to Executive Outcomes were engaged in illegal diamond extraction and export.

Executive Outcomes left and Kabbah established a power sharing multi-party cabinet, but he was unable to rebuild the nation as the peace process soon broke down. Sankoh kept on delaying the appointment of RUF delegates for demobilisation, reconciliation and peace commissions. In fact he had no intention of honoring any agreement. He admitted that he intended to purchase more arms to continue the war. Shortly after that he was arrested by the Nigerian police at Lagos airport and placed under house arrest.

Kabbah started to lose credibility. Sierra Leoneans had placed much hope in him, but soon became disappointed. Worst of all was his handling of the military. When the country was most vulnerable he suddenly announced his intention of downsizing the army due to pressure from the IMF to reduce costs.

But army officers knew too well that the previous government had looted the country's assets and they would not receive pensions, making it very difficult or impossible for them to return to civilian life. This

**"I have a profound belief in the human spirit. I see it in action here in Sierra Leone. You've gone through things that would crush any ordinary mortal, and yet I see people going back, rebuilding their houses, their villages and reorganising themselves" -  
Caroline McAskie**

caused turmoil within the ranks which culminated in another coup d'état, this time staged by Major Johny Paul Koroma, who appointed himself the head of the Armed Forces Revolutionary Council (AFRC).

Another wave of chaos and violence seized Sierra Leone. Gangs roamed the city, looting houses and killing civilians arbitrarily, using RUF's brutal tactics of intimidation and violence. Expatriates were trapped in different parts of the city and had to wait to be evacuated. Kabbah and 200,000 Sierra Leoneans left the country.

Koroma, who was a poorly educated young soldier, said he had staged the coup because Kabbah had been incapable of implementing the peace agreement. He suspended the constitution, banned political parties, and announced rule by military decree. He also started a period of political repression, characterised by arrests and detention. To make matters worse Koroma invited the RUF to join his junta in Freetown, giving them the opportunity they had sought for six years.

Initially ECOMOG troops attempted to defeat them but didn't succeed. Unrecognised by other gov-

ernments and politically isolated, the junta was going to find it difficult to survive.

Kabbah gained the support of the Economic Communities of West African States (ECOWAS), which was requested to mediate with the junta and take all necessary measures to persuade Koroma to step down. ECOWAS decided to resolve the conflict by imposing an embargo on military supplies and petroleum products to the junta.

The UN Security Council met three months later and endorsed

ECOWAS sanctions, however sanctions would not make much difference since Koroma continued to receive arms from Liberia.

Feeling increasingly isolated and pressured, the junta finally decided to send a delegation to Konacry for discussions and negotiations. The Konacry Accords that followed provided for a cease-fire and most importantly for Kabbah's government to return to Freetown by April 1998. The Konacry Accords remained just a written undertaking. The junta would abandon Freetown only after being defeated by ECOMOG troops.

## **BEYOND SALVAGE**

It is difficult to describe the suffering inflicted on the civilian population during the last decade of war. In Sierra Leone no distinction was ever made between civilians and military targets. Civilians were constantly attacked by the RUF for their perceived support to the existing government and also by the military junta.

According to Human Rights Watch civilians were gunned down within their houses, rounded up and massacred on the streets, thrown from the upper floors of buildings, ►

used as human shields and burned alive in cars and houses. They had their limbs hacked off with machetes, eyes gouged out with knives, hands smashed with hammers and their bodies scalded with boiling water. Women and girls were systematically sexually abused and children and young people were abducted by the hundreds to fill the ranks of the RUF.

Victims were sometimes given a choice as to how they wanted to be killed - gunshot, machete or burned alive. Human Rights Watch reported that the atrocities were often planned and premeditated. Upon gaining control of a suburb the rebels went on looting raids, in which families were hit by wave after wave of rebels demanding money and valuables. Those who didn't have what the rebels demanded were often murdered. Victims and witnesses describe the rebels terrorising the civilian population by forcing them to watch atrocities being committed.

Children as young as eight have been implicated in killings and rapes and hacking limbs from other children and adults. According to Chris McGreat from the Guardian, many of these children had been abducted, forcibly fed powerful drug concoctions of cocaine or heroin and pushed into the battle. Many of these children were forced to commit atrocities under threat of death

Not a single rebel has been tried for human rights violations in Sierra Leone because of the blanket amnesty, which Sankoh imposed as a condition for his signing the Lomé Peace Agreement. The amnesty freed the RUF from any legal responsibilities under Sierra Leone's penal code for the death and atrocities that it inflicted on the civilian population.

Last year the Security Council decided to establish a war crimes tribunal to prosecute those responsible for crimes against humanity and violations of international humanitarian law. This also included the prosecu-

tion of child soldiers. Its establishment will not be possible until the war ends.

But the war will never end if the RUF and Taylor continue having access to the diamond resources. It was in fact the government's inability to regulate the diamond trade that enabled foreign mining companies to reap huge benefits without paying taxes, and it was the smuggling of diamonds that enabled Taylor and Sankoh to finance their wars.

According to James Rupert from the Washington Post, Sierra Leone in the mid 1990s produced \$300 million to \$450 million worth of diamonds annually, almost all smuggled through Liberia and Ivory Coast.

According to Hirsch there is a long history of illicit mining in Sierra Leone. "After independence, successive mining ministers agreed to provide large mining concessions to foreign companies for large bribes or joined in the mining and smuggling themselves ... Diamonds became the keystone in the widespread pattern of corruption and private benefit that has remained beyond the institutional capacity of successive governments to control," he wrote.

Last year the UN Security Council proposed a resolution to impose a global ban on diamond exports from Sierra Leone and called on member countries "to take the necessary measures to prohibit the direct or indirect import of all rough diamonds from Sierra Leone to their territory." However, no global certification system has been established as yet. At present some 80 per cent of the world's rough diamonds and about half of the cut stones pass through the Belgian city of Antwerp. A Belgian foreign ministry official recently said: "Without an international system of certification we can never tackle the problem properly."

In May 2000 the UN imposed sanctions on Liberia after the Liberian government of Charles Taylor failed to convince the UN Security

Council that it had ceased its support for the RUF rebels. Liberia will be banned from exporting rough diamonds as well as arms.

After a decade of war and three flawed agreements Sierra Leone remains in a precarious situation. The country is now divided between areas under UN mission UNAMSIL and RUF control. Upon Kabbah's return to Freetown in 1998 the RUF reorganised itself and has continued the war unabated until now.

Foday Sankoh remains in prison at an undisclosed location. But now the rebels' new leader Issa Sessay says their desire for peace is genuine. Kabbah, who recently cancelled the elections due to security problems, is determined to end the war. "We should not tolerate attempts by any individual or group to sabotage the peace process," he said last April.

The international community, which was initially slow to respond to the Sierra Leone's crisis, has finally provided adequate resources for peacekeeping and disarmament through UNAMSIL. Unfortunately, assistance came a little too late. Sierra Leone, a small and strategically insignificant country, received little attention in the international media, while the wars in Bosnia, Somalia and Rwanda occupied the headlines and little was done to prevent the war.

Assisting Sierra Leone to recover from the trauma and devastation will pose major challenges to the international community. If peace is achieved the RUF will become a political party. The question is will RUF combatants find a meaningful place in society or will they remain a renegade force? Peace and reconciliation may be the only options for Sierra Leone. As a Burundian leader said at a civil society conference last year "even the worst person in society must ultimately return to his community." ■

# ONE STEP CLOSER TO DEPORTATION ONE

# ONE STEP CLOSER TO DEPORTATION

Despite completing their sentences, and a finding that their continued detention is a breach of human rights, 30 Vietnamese refugees remain in prison pending deportation some day to Vietnam. Peter Williamson reports on their continuing struggle to return to their homes and families.

Mr Pham sits in Parramatta Jail. He faces no charge, has no release date, no parole, and is not under sentence for any crime. For more than two years he has been waiting for news of a fate that lies out of his hands, locked in a stalemate of international diplomacy.

Mr Pham is no stranger to suffering. A refugee from Vietnam, he arrived in Australia aged 14 after five years in a Philippine refugee camp, to face a range of personal and social problems that contributed to him becoming a drug addict. He was convicted of various drug-related robberies in 1991. He completed his sentence in April 1999, but has not been released. The Minister for Immigration and Multicultural Affairs has decided that he is no longer wanted in Australia. As a Vietnamese citizen, he can be deported, but Vietnam refused to take him back.

Following complaints by Mr Pham and nine other detainees, the Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission (HREOC) found that the length of detention of the complainants is "plainly unpredictable, indefinite and indeterminate". As such, there has been a breach of human rights and the Commission recommended that the complainants be released from detention pending their deportation.

The Government remains indifferent to the Commission's recommendations, and Mr Pham's plight evokes little sympathy. He has been imprisoned and

served eight years in a New South Wales prison. "Fair enough", many will say. But he's done his time, plus two years beyond his sentence. Fairfield councillor Thang Ngo says that the Vietnamese community is unwilling to speak out in support of the detainees, for fear of appearing soft on the drugs trade which has tarnished the community's image in Australia. He says, however, that in accepting refugees, Australia should accept "the good with the bad".

Now the stalemate may have eased, and the situation is one step nearer to resolution. Not a resolution, however, which will offer much comfort to the detainees or their family. Australia has recently signed a Memorandum of Understanding with Vietnam, establishing a process for deporting Vietnamese nationals.

According to the Department of Immigration and Multicultural Affairs (DIMA) there are thirty Vietnamese in Australian jails who, like Mr Pham, are awaiting deportation after having completed sentences. Few details have been released, but it is understood that the Vietnamese Government will want to make detailed village-level background checks on these people, before accepting them as deportees.

The deportation of refugees raises a number of concerns. Firstly, the detainees, having fled Vietnam, were found to have a well-founded fear of persecution upon their return. Their deportation would divide their families

and place further stress and suffering onto families who have already suffered through the Vietnam War, flight from Vietnam, and the difficulties of resettlement in Australia. Some have suffered far more - loss of family members, torture and persecution.

The battle for rehabilitation and to establish stable lives in Australia is ongoing and life-long for some people. That some should fall into drug abuse is hardly surprising. This is a problem within all communities in Australia, and not one for which people should be continuously punished. Their friends, their families, and their support structures are in Australia. They have been in Australia for most of their lives, and many have little to return to in Vietnam.

The refugees who have committed crimes have served their sentences and should be allowed to be rehabilitated within the community. Deportation will most likely result in life-long hardship and isolation, and quite possibly in persecution by a government they have already rejected and from which they have fled. Despite the most serious of outcomes resting on these cases, there is no legal aid for detainees who wish to appeal deportation decisions. Many of these people are forced to represent themselves in court, with limited English language skills and inadequate understanding of the legal process being played out.

Australian law allows for per- ▶

manent residents, who have not taken out Australian citizenship to be deported. For many of the detainees, taking out citizenship is a step which had never seemed important or which never occurred to them. One detainee, Tran Thanh Tuan applied, had his citizenship application approved, but was unable to complete the process because he had been arrested.

Peta Cowell of Justice Action, a prisoners' rights group in Sydney, says that one prisoner complained that the State Office Compliance Officer has not visited for four to five months. According to DIMA, the officer is supposed to visit every 30 days. Furthermore, when an officer does visit, it is always a different person, and on the last visit there was no interpreter.

She also states that DIMA sent a letter to the brother of one Parramatta detainee in which they said that the prisoner could be taken away at any time. The prisoner himself has received no information at all. She says that the prisoners have not been informed of what is happening, either by DIMA or the Vietnamese Embassy. They are confused, anxious and worried. She also states that one of the Parramatta prisoners is in an extreme state of distress, not eating, depressed and suicidal.

Holding detainees who are not under sentence is improper and some lawyers believe it is also illegal. The detentions may well compound emotional problems and suffering at a time when help is most needed. ■

# Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court



**Dr Helen Durham of the Australian Red Cross calls for Australian ratification of the Rome Statute to establish an International Criminal Court.**

Progress is being made towards the establishment of an International Criminal Court (ICC). The Australian Government has announced plans to introduce legislation to ratify the ICC. The Joint Standing Committee on Treaties, a federal parliamentary body, has been taking written and oral submissions relating to this proposed international legal institution.

The proposed ICC is a major step forward for international humanitarian law, and brings the world closer to ending impunity for those accused of committing atrocities. The ICC will be established after 60 states have ratified the Rome Statute for the International Criminal Court, which was agreed upon in July 1998. So far 29 states have ratified it.

**“The Statute ... offers States an extraordinary opportunity, at the dawn of the 21st century, to unite in defending fundamental values and to give true meaning to the concept of ‘international community’ - I hope they will take it.”**

The Court will be located in The Hague, in the Netherlands, with links to the United Nations. It will have the power to try individuals who are believed to have committed genocide, crimes against humanity and war crimes. The crime of aggression will also be included in the ICC statute after further work has been done to create a clear legal definition of this crime.

Whilst the Court cannot ensure an end to the horrors that are committed throughout the world, it must be seen as a giant step in the right direction towards peace and international justice. As Mr Yves Sandoz, Head of the International Committee of the Red Cross delegation stated only hours after the ICC Statute was approved: ‘The Statute that has just been adopted offers States an extraordinary opportunity, at the dawn of the 21st century, to unite in defending fundamental values and to give true meaning to the concept of ‘international community’ - I hope they will take it.’

The topic under consideration is extremely important to the Australian Red Cross (ARC), which has the responsibility for educating the public on international humanitarian law (often called the laws of war) and in the last few years has held over 100 seminars, talks, training sessions and conferences on topics including the International Criminal Court. Well over 40,000 people from all walks of life have attended these events and specifically expressed interest in the creation of a new institution to try those accused of atrocities.

In a submission to the Joint Standing Committee on Treaties, the ARC stated that educators in the area of international humanitarian law find it impossible to talk about the laws of war without questions being raised on methods of enforcing this area of law. Once the concept and the Statute of the ICC is explained in a clear and concise manner, the response from the public is very positive. In particular, the fact that the ICC will not detract from Australia's capacity to try its own people, but rather will add an extra, and in most instances optional, layer to the process, is of great interest to the public. The recent overwhelming pride felt by Australia in relation to the

actions taken in restoring security and peace in East Timor, and the concern expressed by many members of the public at the possibility of the presence of alleged war criminals in Australia, demonstrate that the Australian public has a strong commitment to international justice.

The ARC believes that the ICC is not only viable but an essential step towards international justice. The United Nations has considered the idea of establishing a permanent international criminal court at various times since the end of the Second World War. The creation of the Statute of the ICC was the culmination of years of effort and indicates the resolve of the international community to ensure that those who commit grave crimes do not go unpunished.

The Australian Government played a role at all levels of the negotiations to create the Statute. The ARC was represented in the International Committee of the Red Cross delegation at the Rome Conference and, as a National Society within the Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement, has noted that Australians are interested to engage in international legal issues and are especially concerned about matters of justice. International lawyers within the ARC have been discussing the issue of ratification with other National Societies, such as British Red Cross, and sharing positive views and opinions on the best way to create suitable domestic legislation to ratify the Rome Statute.

The ICC will not impact upon national sovereignty as Australia will have fully formed domestic legislation to allow the prosecution of Australian suspects within this country. As a nation with a commitment to human rights and the dignity of all people, it is in Australia's interest to ratify the ICC.

'The establishment of the International Criminal Court is a gift of hope to future generations, and a giant step forwards in the march towards universal human rights and the rule of law. It is an achievement which, only a few years ago, nobody would have thought possible' - Kofi Annan. ■

## What can the court do?

### ***Its various divisions can***

- investigate and prosecute relevant crime
- try those who have been charged
- hear appeals
- pass sentences.

### ***Who will appoint the judges?***

- The parties to the statute (states) will elect judges from those who would be eligible for the judiciary in their own countries and having appropriate experience in criminal law.

### ***Who can be tried?***

- citizens of ratifying countries or countries giving consent for a particular crime or situation
- people who have committed crimes in these countries.

### ***What crimes are included?***

- genocide
- crimes against humanity
- war crimes
- the crime of aggression (still to be defined)

### ***These include:***

- the taking of hostages
- torture
- enslavement
- deportation or forcible transfer of population
- the enforced disappearance of persons
- imprisonment or other severe deprivation of physical liberty in violation of fundamental rules of international law
- rape
- sexual slavery
- enforced prostitution
- forced pregnancy
- enforced sterilization
- persecution against any identifiable political, racial, national, ethnic, cultural, religious group or gender
- and all serious breaches of the Geneva Convention.

### ***What sentences can be handed down?***

- imprisonment for up to 30 years
- life imprisonment in extreme cases
- in addition to imprisonment, the Court may order:
  - a fine
  - forfeiture of proceeds, property and assets derived from the crime.

### ***Can past crimes be tried?***

- No, only crimes committed after the establishment of the court, or after the relevant country's ratification of the Statute, whichever is the later.

# An Unnoticed War

## The West Papuan Struggle for Independence

by Prabha Gulati  
Photographs by Peter Williamson

“They told me I should confess. They put a gun to my mouth to force me to give them information, but I couldn’t understand them. Then they put a rope around my neck and tried to hang me, but I didn’t say anything. So they got a piece of tire and hit me on the back of the neck... I fell unconscious.” Testimony of Mrs Josepha Alomang

Incidents such as the one described above have been far too frequently reported within West Papua over the last 38 years. After Indonesia obtained independence from Dutch colonial rule in 1949, there continued to be dispute over whether the territory of West New Guinea (now West Papua) would be part of this new nation. Since the annexation of the territory by Indonesia, the governance of the province been characterized by violent conflict between the people of West Papua and the Indonesian army. The indigenous people of West Papua have been waging a battle for freedom and independence since 1963, a struggle little known to the general public in Australia and

rarely reported in the wider international community until relatively recent times. Human rights groups estimate that the numbers of people killed in the course of this running war between the Free Papua Movement, Organisasi Papua Merdeka (OPM) and the Indonesian government are as high as 100,000.

### THE HISTORICAL ROOTS OF WEST PAPUA MOVEMENT FOR INDEPENDENCE

Though the Dutch colonized the island of New Guinea, there was initially little impact on the inhabitants. Their claim to the western half of the island, in 1883, was the result of a move to protect the rest of the Dutch East Indies from encroaching British and German colonizers. The eastern half of the island was divided into German New Guinea and British

Papua. The Dutch kept West Papua as a giant buffer zone, but made little attempt to rule it.

Eventually, in 1898, The Netherlands established an administrative post on West Papua and maintained their presence on the island until the Japanese invasion in 1942. With the end of World War II, Indonesia declared independence from The Netherlands and claimed the territories of West Timor, Sarawak, Brunei and North Borneo as part of its nation, while also asserting claim on West Papua. The Dutch clung on to West Papua, wanting to maintain a base in the region. Previously the territory had been a neglected backwater lacking industry, basic infrastructure or services. Large parts of the highlands had had little or no European contact and lacked roads or economic development.



Indoctrination: Papuan school children salute the Indonesian flag

A colonial presence was retained with The Netherlands gradually preparing to bring about West Papuan independence with the participation of the indigenous people. The Dutch rapidly increased expenditure in the colony, and began developing an indigenous elite with whom they could preserve economic and political ties if and when independence was obtained.

Indonesia continued to demand West Papua be handed over and tensions came to a head in 1961, as the Dutch sought to establish the institutions for independent rule. In April of that year a Papuan National Congress or Peoples Council was founded to initiate a timetable for self-government. For the first time the traditional morning star symbol was chosen as an emblem of the new nation, a national anthem composed, a flag designed and 1970 set as the date for Papuan independence.

On 1s December 1961, a group of tribal chiefs with the tacit agreement of the Dutch, raised the Morning Star flag for the first time and proclaimed a new nation in Jayapura.

In the same month, President Soekarno issued a public statement calling for the liberation of West Papua from Dutch control and began moving troops towards the area. War between Indonesia and The Netherlands seemed inevitable.

It was at the point the U.S. Kennedy administration intervened because of fears concerning the Soviet bloc gaining influence with the Indonesian government. In 1962 the West Papuans were excluded from secret negotiations, which brokered a deal to hand over the West Papuan territory to Indonesia. The proviso was the 'Act of Free Choice' clause in the New York Agreement to be administered by the United Nations, at which time the West Papuans could decide their right to self-determination. West Papua ulti-

mately, became a Cold War sacrifice in order for the U.S. and its supporters to have the emerging, powerful nation of Indonesia as their ally in the region.

On May 1, 1963 Indonesia became the new colonial power in West Papua. The elected West Papuan Council was disbanded,

**"In the end", said the Minister for Transmigration, "the different ethnic groups will in the long run disappear because of integration ... and there will be one kind of man ... Indonesian man".**

West Papuan flags were banned, and burned, the founding of any new political parties was prohibited. Tensions between the Dutch educated Papuan elite and Indonesian authorities rapidly emerged after the Indonesian takeover.

The new administration restricted movement between towns, banned political meetings and jailed those who opposed the lack of democratic rights and spoke up against the deteriorating social conditions. The resulting revolts by West Papuans were met by Indonesian military force and suppression. Several resistance movements, including Organisasi Papua Merdeka (OPM, or the Free Papua Movement), emerged and continued to resist the Indonesian takeover. However, the rise to power of General Suharto (soon to be President of Indonesia) effectively put an end to any international support for West Papuan separatism.

The 'Act of Free Choice' clause in the New York Agreement had promised an act of self-determination for the West Papuans by the end of 1969. President Soeharto set out to comply with the promised act of self-determination, wanting to be seen to fulfill his obligations under the Agreement.

Although billed as an 'Act of Free Choice', observed by the UN, the plebiscite held was a farce. Indonesia refused to hold a referendum

and instead, out of a population of 700,000 West Papuans, 1,025 were handpicked by the Indonesian government before UN officials arrived. There were only 16 UN observers in the vast territory of West Papua in 1969, compared with approximately 1,000 observers in small island of East Timor during the referendum of

1999. The handpicked delegates who were coerced into voting as Indonesian wished, voted unanimously to remain with Indonesia.

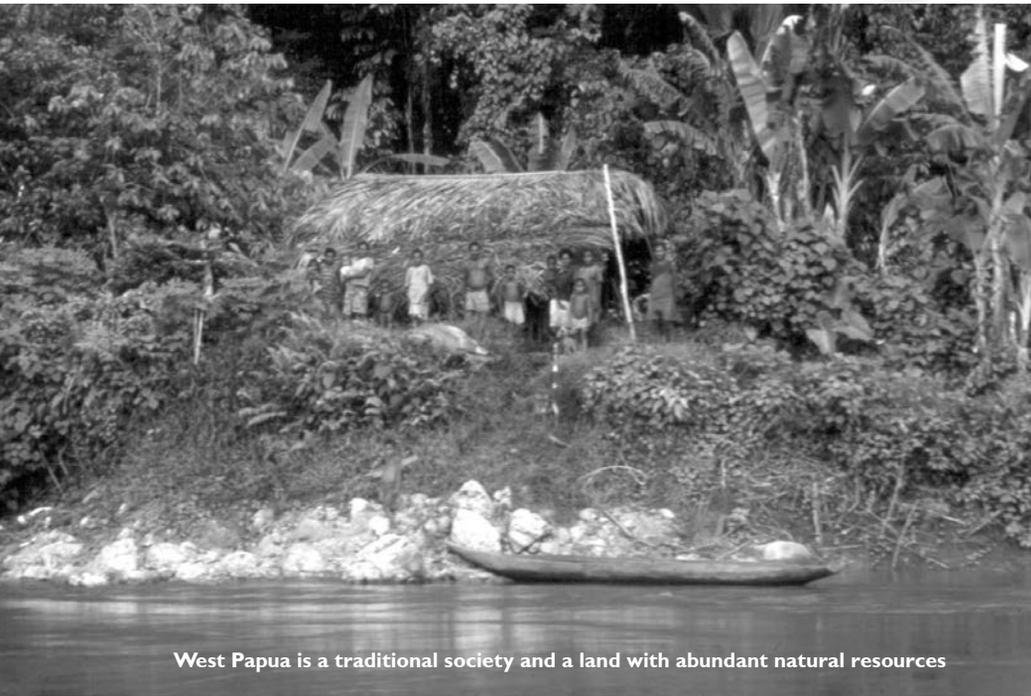
UN mission chief Fernando Ortiz Sanz criticized the process involved, stating in his report: "I regret to have to express my reservation regarding the implementation of Article XXII of the (1962) Agreement, relating to the rights, including to the rights of free speech, freedom of movement and of assembly, of the inhabitants of the area. In spite of my constant efforts, this important provision was not fully implemented and the administration exercised at all times, tight political control over the population."

Nevertheless the General Assembly of the UN ratified the result in November 1969, with 30 abstentions, mainly from African states. West Papua was now fully Indonesian under international law.

## **WEST PAPUA UNDER INDONESIAN RULE**

In 1950, President Soekarno had said that migration to the other islands was 'a matter of life and death for the Indonesian nation'. The Soeharto regime continued the colonial transmigration policy, the goal of which was cultural assimilation. Transmigration, the resettlement of people loyal to the Indonesian government was used as a main tactic for the occupational control of dissi-

West Papua



West Papua is a traditional society and a land with abundant natural resources

dent territories such as West Papua. The Jakarta government cited goals such as national unity, assistance to farmers and improvement of the condition of the local people, to justify the cost of this mass migration, much of which was covered through aid from international development agencies. Population density in West Papua was 4 people per square kilometer; Suharto said the ideal was

resulted in illiteracy nearly twice the national average as local Papuans were taught in Bahasa Indonesia rather than in indigenous languages. Little value was given to indigenous culture.

Destruction of the local system of administration and the traditional means of sustainable resource use resulted in deforestation and soil damage to the land. Widespread

**“Although billed as an ‘Act of Free Choice’, observed by the UN, the plebiscite held was a farce ... The handpicked delegates, who were coerced into voting as Indonesia wished, voted unanimously to remain with Indonesia”**

400 per square kilometer - a level that would have swamped the local peoples.

“In the end”, said the Minister for Transmigration, “the different ethnic groups will in the long run disappear because of integration... and there will be one kind of man... Indonesian man”.

What transmigration in effect accomplished was the spread of poverty, and forced displacement of indigenous peoples from their homes, their communities and their lands. Transmigrants received government built houses and financial assistance, locals found food sources contaminated and ancestral lands sold off. The development-oriented ideology of the education system

use of military force to pacify and break local resistance occurred, as people who were forcibly displaced to make room for the transmigrants were not compensated for the loss of their land.

Traditional Papuans believe that they are owners of the forest, which has economic and religious significance for them. The forest was a source of food, of shelter in times of tribal conflict, as well as a place to communicate with ancestral spirits. Despite local objections, mining began in the southern highlands near Timika in 1967, with the establishment of the world’s largest open-pit gold mine, operated and owned by the U.S. multinational, Freeport McMoRan Copper and Gold Inc.

Much of this land consists of vast tracts of rainforest where land was taken away from the local tribal owners; trees were cut down without any compensation from the government. There also was the creation of plantations, fisheries and the increase of retail trade - the overwhelming majority of owners of these new operations were transmigrants and foreign owners. Hence the benefits - monetary, social and political- that is, financial profits, social power and prestige, too, went to non-Papuans.

According to John Rumbiak, head of a West Papuan human rights organisation, “Natural resources have a religious value...Indonesian law considers the deep jungle to be empty, to have no owners. This is a very wrong perception...in Irian, there is not a single piece of empty land. Every tree has an owner.”

West Papuans continue to insist that these government policies have made them second-class citizens in their homeland by destroying traditional livelihood and culture. They also report widespread ethnic and racial discrimination, being looked down upon as ‘primitive’ by non-Papuan employers.

## HUMAN RIGHTS ABUSES

In 1969, West Papua was declared a ‘military operations area’ (Indonesian acronym - DOM); this status remained in effect until October 1998, five months after the exit of Soeharto. The function of the DOM status was to maintain internal security and stability and limit access by outsiders. A travel permit was needed to travel in the area and visitors had to report to military checkpoints in villages they visit. The primary reason for military presence were the government resources in area, including Freeport mine, declared in 1973, by President Soeharto, to be one of Indonesia’s ten national assets.

Since the annexation of West Papua in 1963, the indigenous Papuans have been treated as second-class citizens within their homeland and subject to serious human

rights violations at the hands of the Indonesian military forces. Government counter-insurgency operations targeted not only the freedom fighting guerillas, but also the civilian population. As the independence movement was driven underground local tribal populations reported that retaliatory actions, human rights abuses, and atrocities against civilians were pervasive. Fear was strong.

Local churches and human rights organisations have documented human rights abuses (during the military control of the DOM), including cases of rape and violence against women in the villages of the Central Highland region. These abuses include killings, arbitrary detention, intimidation and other forms of injustice. It is difficult to obtain accurate figures of how many Papuans have been detained, tortured or killed as little investigation has been carried out, but estimates range in the thousands. Civilians who demonstrated their dissatisfaction with Indonesian governance through peaceful public gatherings and flag raising were brutally repressed by the Indonesian army and police. EL-SHAM (the Abepura-based Institute for Human Rights Study and Advocacy) told the Indonesian press that between 1965 and 1999 there was evidence of at least 926 deaths resulting from military operations. Most Papuans believe that the actual number of casualties is much greater.

In a 1998 report, the UN Spe-

cial Rapporteur on Violence Against Women, Radika Coomearaswamy, in an 1998 report to the UN, concluded that "before 1998 Indonesian security forces used rape as an instrument of torture and intimidation in Irian Jaya (West Papua)", and recommended a thorough investigation as imperative. Human Rights

**"The question of the right to self determination (for West Papuans) is a psychological need. It is about the self identity of a people or group that have been denied and oppressed for many years... The Indonesian government needs to recognize and address this ... before an attempt to arrive at solutions"**

Watch reports that the number of civilian casualties in the three decades of the conflict is not known and that no comprehensive investigation has ever been attempted.

#### **CURRENT SITUATION**

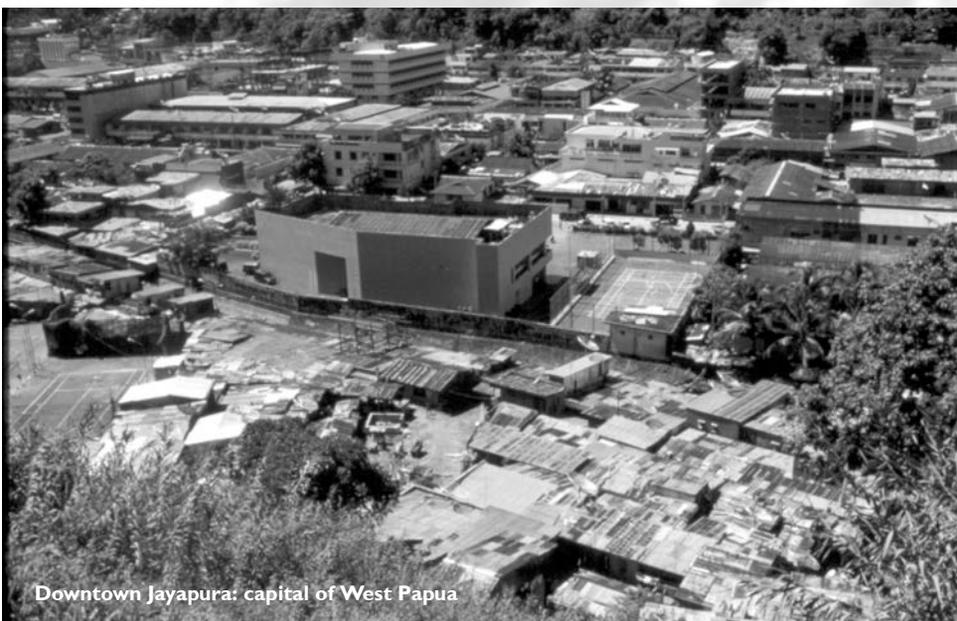
After the demise of the Soeharto regime, there was hope for an 'era of reformasi' within Indonesia. There was no immediate change in the Habibie Government's attitude towards West Papua, but for the first time in their history, Papuans as Indonesian citizens, were able to voice publicly their sentiments regarding independence. Since that time, a broad-based civilian independence movement has emerged, committed to achieving their goal of an independent state through peaceful means. In 1998, a new organisation called the Forum for

Reconciliation for the Irian Jaya Society (FORERI) was formed and called for a referendum to determine Papuan opinion on self-governance and independence. In line with this, they held meetings with the Indonesian government in order to negotiate holding a "national dialogue" on the future of West Papua.

A group of 100 delegates, known as 'Team 100' met in Jakarta with President Habibie and other parliamentarians on 26 February 1999. After initial discussions, the delegates were dismissed with the words "the aspirations you have expressed are important, but founding a country isn't easy; let's contemplate these aspirations again. Go home and take my greetings to the Papuan people." Clearly displeased with the direction the National Dialogue was taking, the Habibie government withdrew its support for the process. However, opposition voices continued, despite a renewed military crackdown, and Papuan leaders persevered in their demands to be heard on the issue of independence.

After the election of President Abdurrahman Wahid, there was revived hope. On 1 January 2000, in an important gesture of reconciliation, President Wahid ended decades of taboo by restoring the name Papua to the province, as an embodiment of aspirations for self-governance and independence. Initially, significant reforms occurred in the face of widespread demands for autonomy, and expressions of peaceful pro-independence sentiment were no longer punished as per government policy. At the same time Wahid has stated categorically that the Indonesian government was not prepared to give in to demands for independence.

The National Papuan congresses that have been held in the post-Soe-



Downtown Jayapura: capital of West Papua



West Papuan boys in the Central Highlands

harto milieu have brought together for the first time a truly representative sample of West Papuans from all regional areas to discuss the issue of 'merdeka' or freedom. As a result of the second national congress, held in June 2000, a new popular body, the Papua Presidium Council was formed and called to represent the people's aspirations to the Indonesian government. But there have been differences in dialogue regarding the independence issue.

Some Papuans, led by Governor Jacobus Solossa of the West Papuan State government, do seem open to different compromises and have come up with a "Draft law on Special Autonomy for West Papua". However, there has been a rejection of this proposal from the student movement, OPM, and most importantly from the respected leaders of the Papuan Presidium who have stated that they are asking for a return of their independence, not autonomy. "Forget autonomy," writes Moses Weror, chairman of former Revolutionary Military Council of the OPM, "because freedom is

a fixed price."

With respect to human rights abuses, the government's actions have not been consistent, and Human Rights Watch reports that abuses have continued. Recent reports indicate that since October 2000 the Indonesian government has more than doubled security forces in the province to an estimated 30,000 soldiers and police. A top commander of the elite Kopasus counter-insurgency unit, Major-General Simbolon (previously in East Timor), has been assigned command in Jayapura. Human rights organisations suggest that militia presence (similar to East Timor) too, has increased in the province. ELS-HAM, an Indonesian human rights organisation has reported that between 1998 and 2000 there have been gross and systematic human rights violations including 80 summary executions and 500 cases of arbitrary detention and torture, some resulting in custodial death. Most alarmingly, in December 2000, five key pro-independence leaders, members of the Papuan Presid-

ium, were arrested and await trial. It seems that the political process and dialogue for reconciliation and understanding has reached a stalemate. By refusing to address the mounting concerns of the majority of West Papuans in their desire for independence, the government of Indonesia is doing little to stem this cycle of violence. Little support for West Papuan rights is provided by the international community, which continues to be reluctant to condemn Indonesia's human rights violations, instead taking the stance of supporting President Wahid's attempts to maintain unity within the diverse nation. ■

Postscript: As this article goes to press President Wahid has been replaced by Megawati Sukarnoputri (daughter of Indonesia's first President, Soekarno). Reports indicate that Megawati and Indonesia's military leaders believe that Wahid has been too soft in his responses to the independence movements within Indonesia in West Papua and Aceh. It is likely that stronger military approach will be favoured.

# Geography and culture

## A diverse land

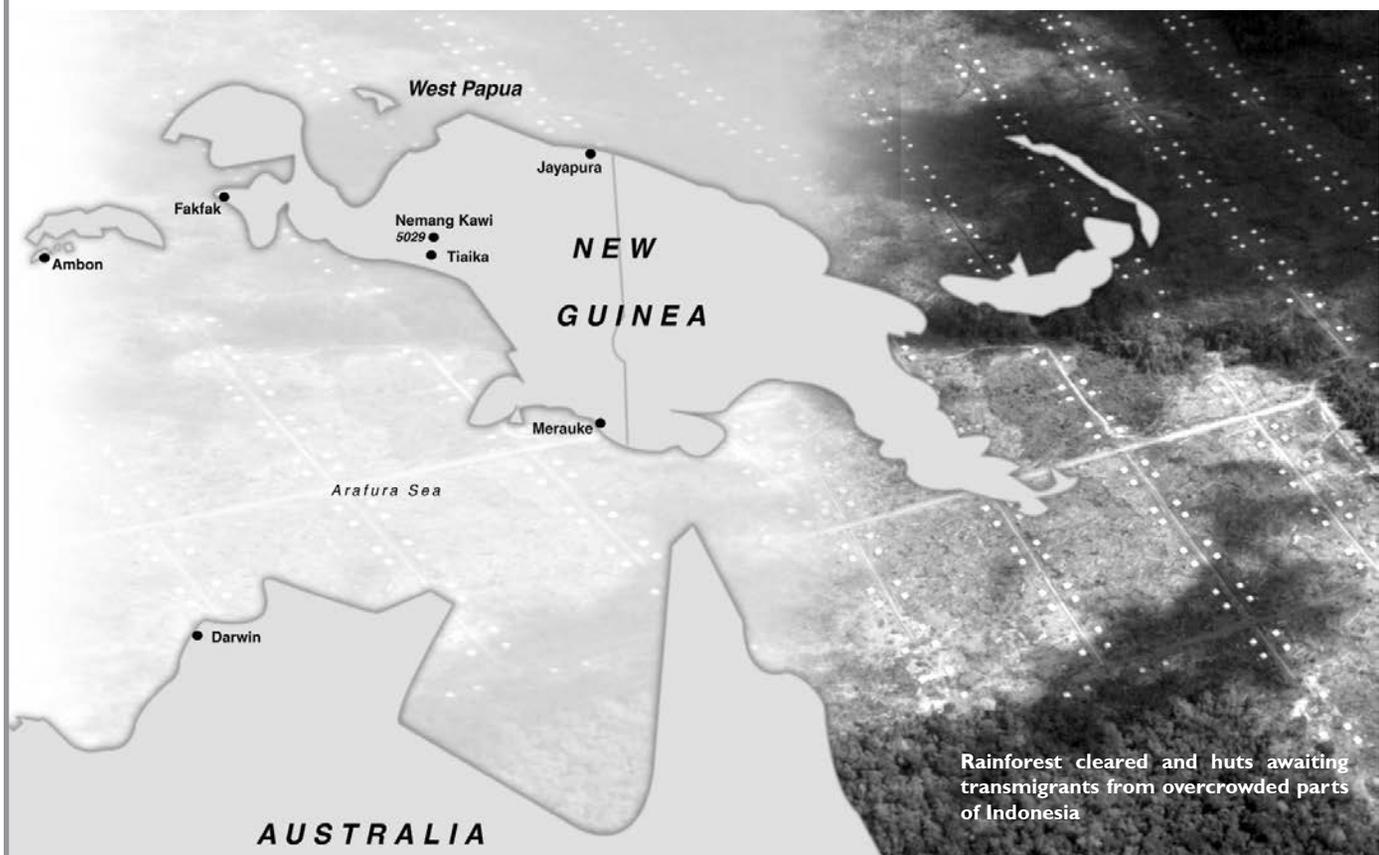
It was the Spaniard, Ynigo Ortiz de Retes, who in 1545 gave the name Nueva Guinea (New Guinea) to a strip of land on the north coast of the world's second largest island. The island of New Guinea is divided into the Indonesian province of West Papua (previously known as Irian Jaya) and the nation of Papua New Guinea.

West Papua, the western half of the island consists of a hot, humid, land of 421,981 square kilometers, rising from the sea, with some of the most impenetrable jungles in the world. It forms one of last great wilderness tracts of the world with more than 70% of its area covered by dense tropical rainforest. The majority of the island is mountainous, with scenic coastal beaches, extensive and inaccessible swamp and mangrove forests in the south, and powerful rivers, carving gorges through the central highlands. The highest peak of the central mountain range, Nemang Kawi (Puncak Jaya), reaches 5,500 meters. These snowcapped mountains form the backbone of the island, dividing it into northern and southern regions.

Sharing the land with the people are many unique species of flora and fauna, including the famed Birds of Paradise, together with 5000 species of butterfly, and many species of reptiles and amphibians.

There are two ethnicities native to West Papua, the Negroid peoples and those of Melanesian stock. The Negritos are believed to have settled on the island first, probably some 30,000 years ago followed by the Melanesians. One theory is that the majority of indigenous West Papuans came from West Africa and were pushed towards the interior of the island by successive migrations. The rugged terrain of the island resulted in communication being difficult between tribal groups, and this isolation produced a huge diversity of cultures. The indigenous people can be divided into more than 250 sub-groups, on the basis of physical features, differences in language, customs, artistic expression and other aspects of culture, although they all belong to the Melanesian race.

Traders from other Indonesian islands, visited tribes living in coastal areas, as early as the 7th century, and European influence was felt from the 16th century onwards, as explorers arrived, looking for the fabled Spice islands. The tribes in the central highlands retain age-old customs and traditions, as they were not privy to contact with the outside world. The process of change accelerated due to the arrival of missionaries who lived and worked with the indigenous population. The Papuans of the north and west are mostly Protestants while those from the south and the hinterland are Roman Catholic. Animism is still practiced by isolated tribes in various parts of the province. **By Prabha Gulati**



West Papua

# John Otto Ondawame

## WORKING FOR WEST PAPUA'S INDEPENDENCE

**Dr John Ondawame is a leading West Papuan academic, activist and member of the West Papua Presidium Council. He was recently awarded a PhD in political science by the Australian National University. His thesis titled *One People, One Soul: West Papuan Nationalism and the Organisasi Papua Merdeka (OPM)/Free Papua Movement*, calls for peaceful dialogue between Indonesia and people of West Papua. In an interview with Prabha Gulati, John Ondawame gave a history of his involvement in the West Papuan struggle for independence. He is currently coordinator of the West Papua Project at the Centre for Peace and Conflict Studies, University of Sydney.**

John Ondawame is from the Amungme tribe in the southern highlands of West Papua. He went to the University of Cenderawasih, in Jayapura, where he studied economics in the early 1970's. As a student organiser, his activism was stimulated by his experiences at university and further strengthened after returning to Akimuga, the village of his youth, near the mining town of Tembagapura.

While at university, Ondawame became increasingly aware of differences in the way that indigenous Papuans were treated by the Indonesian authorities, in comparison with the mainly Javanese migrants. The Indonesian system of university entry requires students to pay fees at both state and private institutions. Very few Papuans were able to afford these and as a result very few were evident on campus. The government provided scholarships, but it was obvious to Ondawame that these were mainly given to recent arrivals from other islands.

He joined the underground student movement, which was supportive of OPM's activities in the jungle. Ondawame stated that he was unable to tolerate the injustices that he saw and his activism eventu-

ally led to his arrest. After a year in prison, he managed to return to his village on the pretext of his grandmother's death. What he noticed was an enormous change in the indigenous Papuans' status within the community and standard of living. It was as if an "apartheid system" had been created.

Mining had begun in Freeport in 1967, despite local objections, with the establishment of the world's largest open-pit gold mine, owned and operated by the US multinational, Freeport McMoRan Copper and Gold Inc. Land was taken away from the local tribal owners and trees were cut down without any compensation from the government. If compensation was asked for the indigenous people were labeled as 'thugs' or seen as OPM guerilla fighters and treated as terrorists.

Papuans were no longer able to enter land that had belonged to them. They were barred from entering the local supermarkets and were displaced. Not only was their traditional means of providing sustenance for themselves and their families taken away, they were offered few job opportunities through the mining conglomerate. Expatriates including Australians, Phillipinos, Koreans,

Malaysians and US nationals were brought into Freeport.

Sacred places were destroyed during the initial exploration of the area and in the establishment of the mine. The forests of 'Nemang Kawi' the highest mountain in the south Pacific and traditionally a sacred site, were cut down without permission or compensation. Witnessing these changes in his homeland made Ondawame decide that he had to fight "not only to gain independence, but to gain regain the respect and dignity of the people".

He worked to organise resistance in his home region and to recruit for the OPM. He later fought with the OPM in the Papua New Guinea border area and organised political and military campaigns. In September 1978, he was arrested again, in Vanimo, PNG - with his colleague Jacob Prai, a leader of the OPM movement - and imprisoned in Port Moresby. He was about to be deported to Indonesia when UNHCR intervened. The following year, he was accepted as a refugee by the Swedish government, along with Jacob Prai. Ondawame lived in Sweden, until 1993 when he came to Australia for doctoral studies.

Since the downfall of the Soe-



Photo: Peter Williamson

harto regime, the OPM has played an important role in mobilising the people of West Papua. The shift towards democratisation, has given the OPM an opportunity to encourage nationalistic meetings, such as flag raising ceremonies, in Timika, Biak, Sorong and Jayapura.

On 26 February 1999 a delegation of 100 members representing different regions within West Papua went to Jakarta to meet President Habibie. Their purpose was to call for national dialogue on the future of West Papua. There was little positive response from Jakarta; they were dismissed, treated as if unimportant, and not worthy of respect. Twelve months later the same delegation came together and a decision was made that a national congress was needed to decide West Papuan aspirations. As a result of the second national congress which was held in June 2000, a new popular representative body, the Papua Presidium Council was formed and called for a re-examination of the 1969 'Act of Free Choice' and to bring the people of state and government who betrayed the West Papuans to

justice.

Ondawame believes that although the principles espoused by the Wahid government were in language more democratic, "in practice, violence and military approaches were still dominant". Ondawame sees West Papuans as political victims for the sake of stability of the region, both in 1969 when the so-called Act of Free Choice ballot took place and again in this current time. "I believe in people's power and I believe that they can bring the Indonesian government to the negotiating table. But international support is needed, pressure from regional powers such as the South Pacific Forum, countries such as the US, Australia, and those countries that provide aid to Indonesia, such as Japan, the European Union ... aid agencies such as the World bank, the IMF and the Asian Development Bank also need to be lobbied."

Ondawame believes that Jakarta is paying only lip service to the autonomy proposals. There has been a regional government and parliament set up through Indonesian govern-

ment auspices - "servants of Jakarta" - but the majority of West Papuans are not interested in special autonomous status. The West Papuan Presidium will call for a referendum of the people if Jakarta continues to reject proposals for complete independence, which are being drafted by a West Papuan collaboration between Cenderawasih University and the regional government.

Ondawame is currently working at the Centre for Peace and Conflict Studies, University of Sydney as coordinator of the West Papua Project. The aim of the project is to promote a dialogue for peace in West Papua and promote strategies for the nonviolent resolution of conflict. The intention is to raise public awareness of the human rights implications of the conflict in West Papua and to promote conflict resolution as a viable alternative to the current escalating conflict. He is also International Spokesperson for the OPM.

Strategies consist of strengthening networks, addressing the information deficit on West Papua through research and a public awareness campaign, and promoting education on conflict resolution. Since April 2000, the West Papua Project undertakings have included meetings with parliamentarians with a view to raising awareness of the project and gaining support; organising fundraising functions; and seeking funding. The Project is also liaising with West Papuan support groups, and with an Australian member of the International Commission of Jurists (ICJ), which is currently investigating the 1969 Act of Free Choice. The aim is to have the International Court in The Hague examine the Act with regard to its status under international law and its human rights ramifications. From there, Ondawame says it would have to go to the Decolonisation Committee of the UN, before the UN could ultimately vote to reverse its acceptance of Indonesia's annexation of West Papua.

Ondawame has his work cut out for him. ■

**By Prabha Gulati**

WESTPAPUA  
BNUBPSGM



# STARTTS IN EAST TIMOR

**STARTTS assisted in the establishment of a mental health clinic in Dili to help people recover from trauma. Mariano Coello, Jorge Aroche, Julie Savage, Marc Chaussivert and Dr Andrew McNaughtan, shared their experiences working in East Timor with Peter Williamson and Olga Yoldi in a round table discussion.**

Photos: Peter Williamson

**OY** What was it like trying to train health professionals in Timor?

**JA** STARTTS worked for many years with Timorese refugees in Australia who were waiting for a resolution of the conflict. We had had discussions about what would be happening to people that had been traumatised in East Timor and how we could help them, by training them to develop services in East Timor. Before the Referendum we developed an East Timorese clinic with Professor Derek Silove. We met with Ramos Horta, discussed the future need to assist in the process of healing. He told us that East Timor was the most traumatised country in the world. In 25 years much had happened.

We trained a group of health professionals in how to work with torture and trauma survivors the year

before the referendum. A coalition between torture and trauma services and other organisations created the Psychosocial Recovery and Development East Timor Project (PRADET). After that we assisted to establish a direct service in East Timor with Aus Aid funding. The University of New South Wales Psychiatric Research and Trauma Unit became the lead agency. After the referendum there was so much upheaval that it was crazy to train people there so instead we brought people over to Australia. The trainees went back to East Timor. Cristina Tang from STARTTS went there and established connections with a nursing training school. They were able to arrange for some premises in a nursing school but it was burnt down and had to be refurbished. We had learnt a lot throughout the years working with the East Timor-

ese community and with other communities that had survived trauma in the context of organised violence, so there were a lot of lessons that could be valuable. But we were aware the culture was different. What they had gone through was different so some things could be applied, others couldn't. Our aim was to transfer our knowledge so that they could apply it to their own context.

**JS** We went in September to East Timor and the destruction was awesome. I suppose we were teaching concepts of counselling and mental health but there was no infrastructure, nobody had anything. I was very optimistic at the beginning of the training, but we went on a trip to the mountains one day and we saw devastation all around us. Then you began to realise that unless people



**Pictured L to R: Dr Andrew McNaughtan, Julie Savage, Mariano Coello, Marc Chaussivert, Jorge Aroche.**

**Andrew McNaughtan is a medical practitioner and an East Timor independence activist. He has visited East Timor on many occasions. The other discussants are psychologists working with STARTTS.**

are in a safe situation the principles we use in STARTTS regarding counselling are not going to be very useful to them. We focussed on community development and things like that. It was very obvious that until people got jobs, until they could get their basic necessities in life, counselling wouldn't be that useful.

On the other hand people were trying to deal with the backlog of severe mental health illnesses the whole time the Indonesians had been in power. The trainees were concerned about the most extreme mental illnesses because they had been trained in physical health but not in mental health. They wanted to have answers about schizophrenia for instance. Some people with mental illnesses in East Timor had never been able to function in society because they were tied to a room for years. The trainees were thinking, "Can we fix these people up with the skills we have been taught this week? How I am going to do it?"

**MC** Since September there hasn't been much happening to rebuild the country. There are still streets with all buildings destroyed. Little has changed. Now there are more people in the streets but there is no reconstruction. The destruction is a continuous reminder of the brutality that was inflicted on the population. If people suffer from trauma or injuries they have scars and those scars are a constant reminder of

their trauma. It is difficult treating East Timorese because every time they look around they see devastation which triggers memories and emotions.

You look at Dili and wherever you look there is a scar in the very fabric of society, to such an extent that it was interesting the denial that one of the women working with me was experiencing. She made me realise about the mechanisms people use to deal with their own trauma. She said to me, "what do you think about Dili? Isn't it a beautiful city?" I didn't know what to say. Suddenly she was very sad and said. "Well it was beautiful." She seemed as if she suddenly realised what was Dili like now. Maybe she was idealising, maybe she was looking around trying not to see the destruction around her or denying it.

Every time I went out of Dili I thought I would find something different but everywhere I went it was destroyed. It was demoralising.

**JS** It was unbelievable the kind of viciousness of that destruction. For the first time in my life I came face to face with war.

I guess that if you have gone through those horrific experiences you don't know what reality is because your world is upside down and to have someone that you can trust and say things like "I am going mad" is of enormous relief.

**MC** I think in a place like East Timor

where it is happening to everyone around, it is much harder to get someone that might listen to you and relate to your experiences, that will tell you that your reaction to trauma is normal. We found that those East Timorese health professionals that we trained had experienced trauma themselves, people that had the role of supporting others. The training at least gave them support, a space where they could tell their story and to some extent and to some level had it acknowledged. That was helpful.

**MCh** At the time many of them had family and they were uncertain about their exact situation. At the time it wasn't long after the referendum and they were very distressed. The sense we got from a lot of them was that they were quite traumatised themselves.

**PW** *The kind of counselling you do here with Timorese refugees would it differ to the counselling provided in East Timor?*

**MC** Counselling doesn't exist in East Timor as we understand it here. They use advice, guidance that is normally provided by different people within the communities such as priests, nuns, teachers, nurses, leaders, in other words these were the people we trained. East Timorese refugees in Australia have particular needs related to being in exile and the structure helps them in a

particular way. In East Timor you try to work within that framework and adapt as best as you can the methods. If it is counselling, it is the same process provided by the teacher, the nurse, the person that you receive counselling from, but the only difference is that I am not going to tell you what to do. I am going to give you the means, the responsibility to find out by yourself with some assistance. That would be a way of understanding the concept.

Receiving advice in some cases may be perfect in terms of fulfilling their needs, however in other cases it may not be the best way to deal with the problems. That is why we stress what counselling means and I think the East Timorese professionals that we trained incorporated it and took with them the concept.

The problem is that the East Timorese society has been totally dismantled, not only the buildings, but also the infrastructure. There are no services to refer people to. The power relations have changed in society. The new movements within society are challenging the traditional values and beliefs. For example, women now want to play a greater role in society than before and that influences the way the people think, behave.

**MCh** Women became involved in the struggle, they were given a bigger role during the Indonesian occupation in various social and public institutions because men were involved in the more military form of the struggle. Women were left on their own and took responsibilities that until then had belonged to men.

Apparently there are a lot of tensions. Some men have returned from the guerilla movement to a traditional relationship with their wives and perhaps with sisters and daughters.

**JS** that tension was present at the women's conference. Women were disillusioned with male politicians. I heard that many women had a lot to say that was being ignored by the political leadership. There was a

fiery discussion. The women were outraged when Xanana came in and delivered his speech. They were accusing him of being a womaniser and not being committed enough to the political cause. They complained about Xanana ignoring women's possible contribution to the future of East Timor.

**MC** Recently they have been trying to apply quotas for their parliament and there has been some discussion and opposition to women. Young people are also changing.

**AM** Society in East Timor is fairly traditional, patriarchal, dominated by the elderly. It is fairly conventional but the students became leaders and put themselves on the line participating in many activities that led to independence, and now they are saying, "Hang on, where is our place at the table?" You have people trying to reassert control and the elderly are saying to them, "Now go back and do what we say".

**MCh** The tensions play themselves out in issues such as language. Young people would like Indonesian, but the older generation or the more established leaders want Portuguese. Hardly anyone speaks Portuguese.

**MC** They don't want to be controlled by Australia, where English is the language, or Indonesia. Things are published in the four languages. In actual fact language is a much a more profound issue because it is related to identity. We are now talking about what is being said in Dili the capital, the place that has the new ideas. The countryside is as traditional as ever. There is little change there.

The students and professionals that came back have studied in Australia or Indonesia. The only thing that unites the whole country is the religion and the language of liturgy and the language of the struggle is Portuguese. I mean by Portuguese not the Portuguese spoken in Portugal. Portuguese has permeated through Tetum. Many people

don't speak Portuguese they speak Tetum.

I disagree with the issue of being controlled by the elderly. Language is about control also, there are issues there in terms of fears of being colonised.

**JA** That is why they have chosen Portuguese, it is far away enough.

**MCh** I just wonder whether there is that kind of romanticising, idealising the previous colony as well.

**MC** I really don't think so

**JA** One of the problems with Indonesian is that it is only spoken in Indonesia so they would have to rely on Indonesian literature, on Indonesian education materials.

**MC** Or on Australia if they choose English.

**JA** At least with English there is more diversity of countries while Indonesian is only spoken in Indonesia.

**MC** Portugal may be far, but remember one thing the unification of Mozambique was done through the Portuguese language, through the Portuguese culture. The same happened in Angola. I believe language plays a very important role. India has many languages, but English has been the language of bureaucracy and the political class while Hindi and many other languages are spoken by the rest of the population. English has become the elite language of those countries that once were colonised. I will agree with the fact that there is a hint of idealisation of the old colonial power. I hope languages can unify.

**MCh** Language is an additional burden on top of many other burdens.

**MCh** Language is a worrying trend in terms of keeping their culture. Maybe it is inevitable. People will conform to it and English will be the official language.



**PW** They will, but it doesn't mean that they don't speak Tetum or whatever. It is the norm throughout the world that people speak more than one language.

**MC** Most of the international agencies providing assistance in East Timor are English speaking. The businesses you see are run by English people. Obviously the whole thing about language is a fantasy, probably it is more of a statement that they like to have Portuguese.

**PW** *How does language intersect with recovering from trauma?*

**MCh** It does, it is an extra stress, an extra burden. Stressful to have to think about that, to have to learn a new language as well as dealing with many other things. There are few educational resources.

**OY** Nothing much seems to be happening in terms of moving forward. They have to construct a whole political project from scratch. They have to write the constitution, establish the institutions of government, the judiciary, but I can't see them moving forward in that respect.

**PW** Not knowing what kind of language to use is a metaphor in a sense of where they are.

**MCh** Looking at third world countries, when I watch the news about Mozambique and think that's what I was looking at in the 1970s. The notion of development is the ultimate myth. Many of those countries are not developing at all. I am cynical and pessimistic. I don't know if East Timor will ever be different.

**AM** Much money will come to East Timor but it is a matter of using it wisely, not allowing to just foster corruption. That is the risk. The one good thing is that the economic future is reasonably secure and the revenues they should get for the oil and gas are quite significant, enough to run the country if it is used properly. You don't want the oil ministers starting to buy private jets and embezzling millions of dollars. There has to be effective systems and if that is the case there should be enough money for decent public health and education system.

In terms of what Julie was saying about the violence, it was orchestrated and planned. We went to places that were ghost towns, it was eerie. Many places were burnt. The amazing thing was that people said that after the referendum all these trucks turned up, the military, and the police, the military militia were forcing people into trucks and starting torching everything. Huge con-

voys heading to West Timor. It was a massive operation. Before the ballot people were terrified, they knew something bad was going to happen. They had this document signed by the militia that said that if people voted for independence we would be distributing 15,000 automatic weapons and would commence their program and that would involve killing all children aged 10.

It was unclear if this was intended to intimidate people or if it was part of a secret plan leaked by someone. The effect was intimidating. I had the same experience before the ballot. A lot of people said we will vote and run to the hills which is what many people did. Here is what the UN said: "Don't worry we will be here, we will look after you. You can trust us". The Timorese were wise enough not to and they already had contingency plans. "We will vote, gather our possessions and flee to the mountains", they said. Two thirds did, the ones that stayed were killed or forced into this incredible organised program.

The army, the airforce, the navy were involved in this coordinated program. Like something out of the Third Reich. They turned up in village after village that were not in the same track. They were even forced to pay fares. Leaving a trail of emptiness across Timor, with everything destroyed or burnt. It was so premeditated.

**MC** If the international community knew that and this happened, how can East Timorese trust anyone? One of the things East Timorese have mastered throughout all these years is passive resistance. This is positive and negative. It's good because changes will be imposed upon them and may not wish to go along with them. It is negative because they don't trust anyone because of the trauma they have experienced.

**PW** *Is this felt in the counselling process?*

**MC** The first time one had to work very hard to gain their trust. You had to prove you were equal to them but had something to give as well.

**JA** These are symptoms of people who have survived oppression. Trust is not something you can give at face value and then hope for the best.

**MC** at the same time East Timorese are warm and generous. But there is a difference between forced respect and the respect you gained through your work.

**JS** There was confidence in the new East Timor. The participants did criticise and evaluate what we were doing. They said when the Indonesians were here we had to do what we were told, but now we are in free East Timor and we want you to know that.

**MCh** One thing that makes me optimistic is the level of enthusiasm those people had.

**MC** While we were in East Timor we were living in this nursing school which had resident students. Our living quarters were basic but fine. Next door students didn't have a washing machine or a fridge, which we had. They had to do the washing and the cooking outside with fire, even if it rained and there was mud. They would wake up at 5am singing. They were such happy souls. They

got dressed in immaculate white aprons and went together to study. They were always smiling, ready to talk to you and sometimes they would play the guitar. They were so self disciplined.

**OY** There seems to be a leadership vacuum at the moment. Xanana does not seem to be convinced that he wants to run the country.

**MC** How many countries do you know where the first leader has lasted more than 3 months? He is wise. He wants to be the second leader. Xanana doesn't seem to inspire confidence to outsiders. He changes his mind.

**AM** I think he wants to be the leader on his own terms without all the political fighting. There are a lot of factions, groups, a lot of maneuvering. I think Xanana partly gets sick of it. He also finds it to be politically expedient to say "OK I don't want to be President", then the others say, "You must come back". "OK, but on my own terms". He has more bargaining power. "If you want me to lead you, you must do this and this". It gives him more control.

Elections will be held two years after the referendum. A lot preparatory work is happening now. Work has been done but cannot be formalised until they have a proper elected government. For every department of the UNTAIR there is an equivalent Timorese department working beside it.

**AM** I worked very briefly in Timor as a doctor but I noticed people seemed to have a very concrete expression of their feelings. Before and after the referendum they suffered from pain everywhere. That was called the Dili syndrome, a non-specific ache starting in the head going down to the shoulders, arms, down the legs. "I can't sleep, concentrate". But what was happening is that these people were manifesting at a concrete level psychic pain that had been somatised. People

who worked in Cambodia after Pol Pot said that this was a common manifestation.

We are more used to the idea of saying "I am feeling depressed, angry", and you can recognise this is emotional, but in fact emotional and physical symptoms are like two sides of the same coin. What I noticed in East Timor was that firstly there may be a cultural reluctance or maybe it is because you have a whole society traumatised and people don't have the ability to identify their feelings. They turned up wanting pills. In Timor you have this culture where people are frightened to be labeled mad.

**JS** If you have been for 25 years unable to talk about anything the level of dislocation must be enormous.

**MC** It is my experience that people are quite reluctant to express feelings. It is a combination of political repression, cultural issues. They don't want to appear weak or mad because madness is manifested in spiritual terms, as people being possessed by spirits and becoming strange creatures, which isolates them from society. Men seem more reluctant, women are more expressive. Body language plays an important role particularly in the clinical sense. Until they trust you, you cannot get anything out of them. You can see sadness, fear, but you have to guess because there is no clear expression.

**AM** The Timorese have a warrior culture, a tribal culture. They have their own machismo, we need to add to that the 25 year fight against a brutal foreign force. All that combined produces machismo. My theory is that this has to do with domestic violence. If you disassociate yourself from your own emotions they come in unpredictable ways.

**PW** *Could we then talk about a traumatised nation, or just traumatised individuals?*



Timorese women are demanding a greater voice in the running of East Timor

**MC** You can talk about traumatised individuals in the sense that it doesn't matter if the person has been affected individually but someone has been affected in the family or in the neighbourhood. It is what I said before, even walking in the streets I felt the impact of being in a place that had been dismantled, brutalised.

**PW** *What is the prognosis for a community or a nation that had this kind of experience?*

**MC** Not everything needs to be seen in a negative way. People and communities go through trauma and in the process they can become stronger. Trauma has strengthened their values, their understanding of life and their survival skills. It is very much our concern because we work

in the helping profession.

Trauma is not an absolute. It affects people in different ways at different times. Sometimes the aftermath of trauma is something that hits you much later, whenever you stop and get out of the survival mood. Others are very strong and determined through these experiences as happened with the Holocaust.

**JA** Mentally ill people are more vulnerable particularly when the traditional methods of looking after people are broken down, when there is no health system or when they have been exposed to violence.

**MC** Many people we had assisted that had mental illnesses had deteriorated after traumatic experiences.

In fact after the Referendum many people were suddenly ill.

Some people had been mentally ill but were controlled by the circumstances, by the social structures and the support from their communities. But when there is a breakdown and trauma in the community mentally ill people become more vulnerable. The same occurs with people who have a propensity for mental illness. War, turmoil introduces additional stresses which might trigger symptoms.

Behind the whole Post-traumatic Stress Disorder is the notion that anybody put in a situation that is traumatic enough will develop some problems as a result and certainly in East Timor there has been more than enough trauma going around to affect a significant proportion of the population at different levels.

**MC** The circumstance and the environment have not been conducive to recovery. Some people have had massive losses including loss of relatives and loss of status, which is important. You might recover faster if you happen to recover the status you lost.

**JA** When you have this massive trauma people learn to live and develop adaptive mechanisms to survive in a situation of repression where you cannot take things for granted, where trust becomes precious. In a way a lot of people would have experienced trauma, not necessarily symptomatic but it is still having an effect.

**MC** There are issues around impunity, people who have committed atrocities have not been punished.

**JA** If you look at Cambodia, Bosnia, Kosovo, these are places that are struggling to overcome the effects of that repressive violence and that is in itself an issue that needs to be taken into account. After conflicts of that magnitude societies don't just go back to functioning as usual, as if the conflict never happened. It takes a long time. At the same time these



Rice farmer, Ocussi

societies have to develop their economic infrastructure, build up the social capital again.

**MC** It is similar to what happened in Chile with Pinochet. The comparison I might make may sound ridiculous because one death is too many. We are talking about 3,000 people who disappeared or were killed in Chile. There were 100,000 to 300,000 in the case of East Timor. Every single family has been affected and if people cannot forget in Chile, can you imagine what a demoralising effect it must have in the whole fabric of society?

**AM** *You are suggesting that there should be some sort of justice?*

**MC** Of course. If you go out in the street and someone mugs you, wouldn't you expect that this person is punished and that he or she is going to be caught by the police? It is a violation. Can you imagine if you have lost your son or your wife or the whole family and your property? Justice is very important for the process of healing. It is important particularly for the adolescence.

If there is no justice what are you showing those young people is that you can kill, that you can brutalise other people.

**AM** It would lead to a profound cynicism if you have these terrible crimes being committed but you know nothing will happen.

**MC** The legal system in many countries now provides for the victims to confront the perpetrators to understand the impact their action has on the victims' lives. For the victim it is a positive move because someone acknowledges that the perpetrator's crime isn't just a single and isolated act but that it does have an impact on the victim. Impunity on the other hand creates a desire for revenge.

**MC** I met an investigator in East Timor who was rather angry at the lack of political will to unearth the human rights violations. This guy had been in Bosnia and other war areas. He said that the investigative teams of the mass graves had become very blasé. They were doing their work in a rushed way. As a result

nobody could identify anything from the videos. Now it is impossible for the families to recognise any family members. He said that he had been in many countries at war, but one of the things that struck him here was the sort of tactics that they were using. In other places at least they knew who the enemy was but in East Timor the Indonesian police would say things like "Come here we will protect you" and then they would kill everyone with a smile on their faces.

Someone told us there is a lack of will to uncover what really happened.

**AM** Yes, the human rights investigation is underfunded ineffectual, badly organised and under-resourced. There is no political will, the investigations are slow. Why is that? Is it because of incompetence? The UN isn't cooperating because they signed an agreement that allowed for Indonesia to control security so they are in a sense culpable. There will probably never be any justice. ■

# Families in Cultural Transitions



**A joint STARTTS/ NSW DET program is achieving good results in helping refugee school children and their families adjust to their new lives in New South Wales. The program is even being trialled with families from non-refugee communities. At the Diversity In Health Conference, in Sydney in May, Elisabeth Pickering and Monica Lamelas presented a paper titled A Holistic Approach to Families in Cultural Transitions – STARTTS and DET Working Together. This is an edited excerpt.**



**Elisabeth Pickering is a Refugee Resettlement Project Officer/ IEC Counsellor with NSW Department of Education and Training. Monica Lamelas is Families In Cultural Transitions Coordinator at NSW STARTTS.**

Good afternoon, and thanks for the opportunity to present today.

Having been here for the three days of this conference, I must admit that by this stage I'm feeling a little exhausted. I have seen so many great speakers, heard information and discussions on so many important issues, that my head feels like it can't really absorb a lot more. What's more, there's a sense of being overwhelmed at the many issues faced in health, especially by those in our particular group of interest, refugees.

It feels really good, then, to be able to stand up here this afternoon and talk to you about solutions, rather than more problems. And in this case, about a solution that involves working in partnership across organisations and government departments, to address the needs of refugee families in settling into a life in Australia, in a way that will hopefully prevent problems within the families later on.

The concept of 'working in partnership' is almost cliché in the public service, but as we all know from experience, partnerships don't always work to their fullest potential - sometimes because of the different focus of the organisations involved, and at other times because of the bureaucracy that often needs to be faced and handled, particularly when we are talking about working with and within government departments. So, we will try to look at the process of partnership itself, some of the problems we encountered, and some of the things that worked really well, which will hopefully help you if and when you decide you want to set up something similar in your organisations and groups.

As you would all know by now, refugees face any number of complex and interrelated challenges when settling into Australia, not least of which are the physical and mental sequelae of their traumatic experiences overseas. Service providers working within a framework of divided services (one worker does counselling for trauma, another looks at finding accommodation, and so on) have found that it is very difficult to address any one of these issues in isolation.

A program which can approach the many areas of a refugee's life that are affected by their experiences has the best chance of really assisting in the very difficult task of getting better, and starting again here in Australia.

The Department of Education and Training was facing the impact of refugee experiences on students and parents every day in its Intensive English Centres, and Primary and High Schools. Although staff were doing great work with the students themselves, it was clear that the parents needed to take an active role in their children's schooling in order for them to really settle well, and advance through the system. In many cases, it was also clear that the parents had issues of their own which were not being addressed, and which were affecting the whole family. School staff would try and get refugee parents involved - but many just didn't want to know!

NSW STARTTS, as the specialist torture and trauma service in NSW, was also seeing these issues everyday. An issue they were also facing was that many families who could benefit from STARTTS' services were not taking advantage of them, sometimes because they didn't know about the service, and other times because of the not insignificant stigma, in many communities, associated with accessing mental health services. How to reach people without turning them off?

It was clear that although our 'core businesses' are quite different, here was a place where our paths converged and we could successfully assist each other. And this is what we did- through the "Families In Cultural Transitions" program.

This is a group program, designed by STARTTS, to assist migrant and refugee families with the family processes associated in making the cultural transition from their country of origin to Australia.

A resource kit equips facilitators with a comprehensive package to help groups of refugees or migrants deal better with the process of adjusting to their new home.

There are nine three-hour sessions or modules in the program, and each module covers a topic area (such as "Money" or "Children") of particular relevance to families trying to settle here. See the box at right.

When you put them all together, it's like putting together the pieces of a puzzle which, through the course of the program, will cover many of the key areas of concern.

Now let's look at the highlights and the hassles of working across government organisations.

We'll start with the highlights:

- A big plus of working together was the increased access that refugee families achieved to both services. By the end of the groups, many parents felt much more comfortable in the school environment and with school staff, as well as with STARTTS as a service.

- DET staff who were working as CIOs and TAEs often had a number of skills which were not being utilised to the fullest in their jobs. This program provided an opportunity for them to formalise some of those skills and really bring them all to bear on their work- they're happier and much more productive!

- Sharing resources is one of the major reasons why people go into partnerships in the first place, and this project has meant that, for instance, the money STARTTS had aside for FICT groups could be spread much further

The hassles - these were the more challenging aspects of the partnership:

- Red tape! - for anyone who has worked with any one government department, you should try working with 2!!! Need we say any more?

- Money is always a problem - especially the concept of one Government Department paying money to another. It took a while to sort out

who needed to pay what, and as DET took more full responsibility for the program that became much clearer and easier to organise. At the moment, DET pays STARTTS for the facilitator training, and any further kits and that's the extent of STARTTS involvement- everything else is already in-house.

- Legal responsibilities have to do with the venue of the groups, child-care and insurance for participants and children. If STARTTS are organising a group, but it is run on DET premises, such as a school, who is responsible for insurance? Again, this is something else that has been easier to sort out as DET has taken responsibility for the program as a whole.

- Clashes in responsibilities - facilitators were generally enthusiastic about the program and what it could do for their school community - but some schools were only willing to let the groups happen if organising them didn't take up any of their school time which, of course, is really hard as organising a group takes a significant amount of time.

Of course, the uncomfortableness and difficulties are really small compared to some of the results that have been achieved.

For example:

One school managed to run a group with mixed nationalities from the Former Yugoslavia- Bosnian, Croatian and Serbian, with Bosnian and Serbian co-facilitators. Not only was this group free of infighting, but they continued meeting after the group finished to try and counter the antagonism within those communities.

I don't know of anywhere else that this has actually succeeded - and it is an incredible success!

After groups, parents started being more active in their school communities - volunteering in the canteen and library, as well as attending Parents and Citizens and

School Council meetings - something unheard of before this!

One Afghani mother of three children, and whose husband had been killed, was very disconnected. After the group, the son said "Mum's got her soul back - and life is beginning to be good again".

Making it work for you - if you're wanting to implement similar programs in your organisations, there are a number of factors which we think have been critical to the success of this project.

- Keep it flexible - organising and running groups can create incredible headaches - flexibility on the part of everyone makes things go a lot smoother.

- Ensure support from the top - in this partnership, the people in charge of the Multicultural Programs Unit, as well as individual school principals, gave their support; without it, it would have been very difficult to get things done.

- Good internal structures are critical to the success of a program like this one. In particular, it's important to have someone who is coordinating the groups, to ensure that everyone has all the resources that they need, and that the standard of the groups is maintained. It is also critical to have inbuilt support for the facilitators, as the work they will be doing with the groups can sometimes get difficult and facilitators need to have an avenue through which they can discuss issues and exchange ideas.

- Ensure good screening and training of facilitators - In this program, facilitators need not only to be very familiar with the contents of the FICT kit, but also need skills in group facilitation, public speaking, and a great sensitivity to the issues of migrants and refugees. Screening and training are important in making sure that participants are receiving the best possible assistance through the program.

## The FICT Program: Nine steps towards successful resettlement

An outline of the topics covered:

**1 Introduction and Settlement** - getting to know each other, the concept of settlement, and differences between migrants and refugees.

**2 Support Services** - what's out there, as well as how to use basic tools like the phone book and street directory to find the services you need.

**3 Money** - everything from budgeting to getting a safety deposit box to buying in bulk at the markets.

**4 Trauma and Healing** - psychoeducation about the process of loss and grief and things that individuals and families can do to feel better

**5 Families** - issues faced by families moving between cultures - how things change and how they can stay the same.

**6 Children** - how children are affected by migration and trauma, common responses of children, how to communicate with children, and child protection issues.

**7 Gender** - dynamics between men and women in Australia, in comparison with the country of origin; legal issues including equal opportunity and domestic violence.

**8 Youth** - impact of migration and trauma on teenagers, cross-cultural conflict, and issues impacting on youth in Australia, such as unemployment.

**9 Enjoying the New Environment** - finding the time to take care of yourself and your family.

STARTTS is developing a further module to cover employment and education, and NSW DET has developed a module about the school system.

Achievements:

In the last three years, over 50 DET staff have been trained as facilitators, and plans are to continue training staff across different areas of NSW. More than 15 groups have been run in the last two years, seven of these in the last school term alone. More are planned, with the language base expanding all the time.

Looking to the future:

FICT has become a permanent part of DET's approach to parent involvement and participation in schools, as well as their approach to refugee students

The program is being extended to non-refugee communities, such as Filipino and Pacific Islander, and is being trialled with the students themselves.

Overall this has been an extremely productive and successful partnership, which has benefited the refugee communities and school students who needed it, and both organisations are hopeful that it will continue into the future. ■



# PART OF THE GLOBAL CLAMOUR

**On 26 June, to commemorate the UN International Day in Support of Victims of Torture, about 100 people gathered in the State Library of NSW for a Friends of STARTTS/Amnesty International seminar on the rehabilitation of victims of torture. Peter Williamson reports.**

“In Australia it may seem that torture is a distant issue, but it’s not and we can’t abrogate our responsibilities. As a nation we have an obligation to be part of the global clamour and everything it implies. Also, as a refugee-receiving nation, we have an obligation to respond with sensitivity to those who have experienced trauma and torture and to provide the services they need to continue their lives in Australia”. So said John Casey, Chairperson, Friends of STARTTS Management Committee, in welcoming people to the seminar.

At a seminar to mark the UN International Day in Support of Victims of Torture, the treatment of asylum-seekers in Australia was alluded to by many speakers, including Craig

Knowles, NSW Minister for Health, who said: “Australia has to face up to the way in which we treat the refugees in detention centres, many of them children, many of them shockingly dispossessed in their countries of origin, many of them traumatized in their journey from their home to here, their new home, and who still face much more in terms of the system, the manipulation by governments, before they can find peace and a degree of comfort in their new environment.”

Having a day to commemorate the victims of torture serves to focus attention at least once in the year on the ongoing abuse of human rights around the world and the resultant flight of affected people. While many parliaments condemn the practice,

the gathering was reminded that torture remains widespread.

Professor Stuart Rees of the Centre for Peace and Conflict Studies at the University of Sydney, questioned what torture means, and said that one form was denial of essential services, such as the inadequate provision of medical treatment. Again, we were reminded that no nation can be complacent about its status as being free of torture, and that even in those where torture is thought to unthinkable we must always be alert to the possibility of allowing practices to develop which come dangerously close to various kinds of torture.

Professor Derrick Silove of the Psychiatry Research and Teaching Unit, School of Psychiatry, Univer-

sity of New South Wales, and based in Southwest Sydney Area Health Service, quoted Primo Levi, who survived Auschwitz, and defined torture as “the most unfathomable evil; the deliberate infliction of pain, suffering and humiliation on helpless and innocent victims for the sake of some ideological, political or religious belief system.”

On a happy note were two announcements. The first, was that STARTTS Director, Jorge Aroche, was elected to the executive of the International Council for Health and Human Rights and will be the Asia/Pacific representative.

Craig Knowles spoke of his pleasure in recognising the work done by organisations such as STARTTS and the Refugee Health Service in NSW, and of his “extraordinary amazement at just how competent the professionals who work in this field really are. To work with people who have been ripped apart, and to assist them with their physical needs, their psychological needs, their needs of care, not just for them but for their families, and to do that with a grace and style and competence and professionalism which I now have had the opportunity to witness, is just a wonderful experience for somebody like me who has never had to experience first hand that horror and trauma.”

He spoke of a need for specific counselling services for children. It was appropriate that the gathering heard the moving words of two participants from the STARTTS Youth Program. Ana Gagic, a Year 12 student at Cabramatta High School, recited her poem titled Illusion (see the back cover) and 16 year-old Zlata Nezirovic who spoke frankly about her family’s separation, her flight from her home in the Former Yugoslavia, and the long road to eventual resettlement and adjusting to a new society in Australia.

Speakers mentioned their inability to comprehend what it must be like to experience torture, but even for survivors, expression of

the experience can be impossible. Derrick Silove quoted one of his patient’s words: “Whatever I say is inadequate, words escape me. Maybe the biggest problem that torture survivors face is the failure of language. There is no language that describes what they did to me and the way it has continued to affect me. I am no longer the same person that I was.

“So how do we approach the issue of rehabilitation?” asked Professor Silove. To illustrate his answer, he told three incomplete stories.

“Story one. A white man, dressed in a casual suit is standing in discussion with a group outside a burnt-out building. He turns and walks through a puddle of water and mud, seemingly oblivious to the mess it is making of his shoes. He crouches over a rusty tap and begins tinkering with the leaky pipes, watched carefully by the accompanying group.

“He stands up, walks back to the group and mutters: ‘You know I have a background in water supply. What a pity’, he says with a gesture of frustration, ‘if only I had the time and some materials, I could patch it up’.

“Two. Two people are sitting in a room at STARTTS. The younger person is briefing the consultant about a patient. He’s told that the patient is a 23 year-old woman from the horn of Africa region. She’s grown up in a war-torn country knowing no other life than one that was disrupted by fighting, chaos, and danger. One brother died in combat, another was tortured in front of the family, as a form of intimidation. And her father was abducted, incarcerated, tortured and killed. How could anyone survive, psychologically, such trauma?

“Yet it didn’t end there. She and her two sisters were abducted and enslaved by the warlords and she had to endure years of sex-slavery, abuse and violent punishment when she attempted to escape. Eventually, during an attack by another

militia group, she was able to escape and, miraculously, she was one of those able to find her way through the treacherous desert to a refugee camp in Kenya, where she was reunited with members of her clan and with her mother.

“She was fortunate to be offered resettlement in Australia - one of the very few - but soon after arrival lapsed into a severe depression for which she sought help from STARTTS.

“Picture three. The same refugee camp on the edge of the desert in a very remote part of northern Kenya, and a consultation is taking place between a UNHCR consultant enquiring into mental health services, and this is taking place with a head man and clan leaders of a displaced Sudanese group living in the camp.

“In attendance are the community mental health counselors. This is a group of volunteers or semi-volunteers working with a single psychiatric nurse in a camp of 60,000 people. Now the numbers have increased to 100,000 people. And they are all dressed in their distinctive blue overalls to identify them as mental health community workers.

“When asked, the report uncomplainingly that each worker is paid the equivalent of one dollar a week for their work. Not really pay, but a stipend. When asked about transport, since the camp is large, and spread out, they reply that each worker covers approximately 10 kilometers by foot, every day to visit their clients in their clinics and their homes (no cardiovascular disease in this camp, I should add). The visiting consultant asks almost spontaneously, when he hears that they are walking under this heat, ‘What keeps you going in your work under these conditions?’

“I’ll come back to these later.”

Derrick Silove told the seminar that there is no single treatment for torture survivors, and that in all instances, important questions need to be considered before any reha-

bilitation is embarked on.

Firstly, it must be asked "Is the intervention necessary?" A second question is what does the person want and can we engage the person in a partnership that will minimise the power imbalance inherent in most therapeutic relationships? Thirdly, will the comprehensive yet targeted intervention consider contextual, cultural, social and spiritual factors?

And finally, what provisions can be taken to ensure that there is no unintentional harm to the survivor or his community?

Silove took pains to emphasise that, given appropriate support structures, most torture survivors adapt. He added that it is a mistake to regard torture as a direct cause of mental illness. "Torture survivors are not, by definition, mentally ill."

However, the quality of the post torture environment is critical to successful adaptation. He noted that detaining torture victims does little to improve the restoration of their mental state and, from a public health perspective, we have a paradoxical situation in Australia where "on the one hand, we are helping torture survivors and, on the other hand, we are doing a lot to make things worse."

Finally, he said that a minority of torture survivors do suffer from protracted and severe psychological reactions and do need "timely, active and energetic intervention. And to declare that they are not in need of that intervention is a very serious mistake."

To end his talk, Derrick Silove returned to the three stories he had begun.

"First, the white man crouching in a pool of mud under a leaky water tank - well who was he? His name is Knowles and many of you will know him as the Minister of Health in New South Wales. Now this is not a party political plug - I'm sure Minister Knowles would be the first to acknowledge that a minister on either side of politics might have done the same thing. That is, offer to visit East Timor

to support a struggling and fledgling mental health service run by a hastily assembled Australian coalition called PRADET.

"Craig Knowles' spontaneous act, not only to visit East Timor, but also to take a practical interest in the nuts and bolts of the project, down to ensuring water supply, is precisely what was needed at this point of development of the rehabilitation program. This is an important message. It shows that what we have to attend to is all aspects of the foundations before making progress.

The key principle regarding good rehabilitation approaches is precisely that. It takes a multitude of skills, knowledge and contributions and the approach has to be creative, flexible and meaningful within that particular context. It cannot be done by one expert or one sector. It requires the input of all.

"Narrative two - the young woman from the horn of Africa. When this young woman walked into the room, there were several surprises. Of course, what I expected was someone extremely disabled, extremely depressed and chronically traumatised and I had this vision ahead of me of years and years of painstaking and slow rehabilitation.

"Here are the surprises: first she was dressed in ultra-modern Australian get-up, second she spoke fluent English, and third she recognised me. She had met me when I visited the refugee camp as part of a UNHCR mission. So we could converse fondly about the director of the psychiatric service there, Michael Kamau who later came out to Australia to visit us, and so on.

"And what was on her mind? Was it about torture? Well, it was about her mother, actually, who was still living a traditional life in Sydney, and was upset about her daughter's determination to live the life of an Australian with all its freedoms. And much of the intervention (although the issue of torture came into it in a complex intermingled way) was about resolving the acculturation issue between the mother and the

daughter.

"The daughter herself was ambitious and determined, went on to study at TAFE and is currently employed and socialising mainly with Australians.

"So the message here is 'Don't assume the worst when someone has been tortured. The human spirit is a powerful force.'

"And the final story - the Sudanese mental health workers in the refugee camp whom I naively asked 'What keeps you walking ten kilometers a day in searing heat to see your patients?'

"The response was a stony silence and I regretted asking the question. Then one of the spokesmen drew himself up to his full seven foot two inches, towering above me, and he said quite simply, 'We are proud of our work.'

"And that message lingered with me. I wondered how many of us wake up in the morning and say we are proud of our work, even though we're paid a lot more than one dollar a day. He did say something else though: 'And what we need is bicycles.' And so what I did in my report was emphasise the need for bicycles.

"And lo and behold Michael Kamau has told me that they have got their bicycles.

"So, again, what I went there with was an idea that I was going to train them in some complex therapeutic intervention. What I left with was ensuring that they had bicycles to do their work."

The public is made aware of the ongoing crimes of torture and persecution through the excellent work of Amnesty International and others. However, there is little public knowledge about the personal impact. Such sessions supplement the work of human rights groups, deepen our understanding of torture, and harden our resolve to maintain the "global clamour" against torture, wherever it occurs and in whatever form. ■

# Minister's Statement on Victims of Torture

On 26 June, Craig Knowles, the NSW Minister for Health, was asked a question in Parliament about the services provided to victims of torture in New South Wales. Here is his reply.

It may interest honourable members to note that today is the United Nations International Day of Support for Victims of Torture. Right round the world today, places of assembly, including the United Nations General Assembly, are formally recognising torture as the most extreme violation of human rights and human dignity. Today we stress our abhorrence at the fact that the United Nations receives reports on acts of torture from more than 60 countries each year as well as evidence of government-sanctioned torture ranging from 100 to 130 countries. All nations have a responsibility to speak out and say "No" to torture and help to eradicate these evil practices.

I am proud to say that New South Wales is recognised as having one of the world's leading programs for assisting and rehabilitating victims of torture. I have spoken in this place before about the fine work of the Service for the Treatment and Rehabilitation of Torture and Trauma Survivors [STARTTS] which was established to address the growing, but unmet, needs of traumatised refugees, particularly those who have been tortured as part of their ordeal. In recent years the number of people in detention in Australia has increased significantly owing to unauthorised boat arrivals of people largely from Afghanistan, Iraq and Iran. The vast majority of those who have arrived have been detained and eventually have been found to be refugees. This, of course, is not surprising, given the terror that they have had to deal with in their countries of origin.

Afghans and Iraqis are fleeing two of the most persecutory regimes in the world, the Taliban and Saddam Hussein. The Taliban in Afghanistan has systematically violated the human rights of women through denying them education and the

right to work. Most people who arrive in Australia are from the ethnically and religiously distinct Hazara Shiite minority who have been ruthlessly pursued by the Taliban.

In March 2001 Amnesty International released a report on the massacre of Hazaras by the Taliban. During August 1998, in just three days 2,000 Hazaras were murdered. With increasing arrivals in this country, the number of children in detention also has risen dramatically. Over the course of 2000, 500 children were held in detention for some parts of that year. An example of a child who is currently receiving help from STARTTS is a 12-year-old boy who was taken to the Woomera Detention Centre after being shipwrecked on Christmas Island. The child survived a kidnapping, persecution, trauma and forced separation from his mother, father and four younger sisters. As a Sabeen Baptist living in a hostile religious environment in Iraq, this young boy escaped with his family following his father's torture and arrest.

For the past 11 months, this child has received no schooling. He witnessed his uncle being locked into a caravan hotbox, kept awake all night and forced to endure searing heat during the day. It is interesting to note that, in common with approximately 80 per cent of asylum seekers in detention centres around Australia, this young boy and his extended family eventually were found to be genuine refugees and were granted temporary protection visas. As might have been expected, the counsellors from STARTTS found a very traumatised 12-year-old who was suffering from depression and anxiety. He had constant nightmares and gross eating disorders. STARTTS, with its highly skilled individuals, has begun to help him to rebuild his life. The STARTTS professionals have worked with the

child to restore his physical health, address psychological problems and help him to re-establish communication with his mother.

As I said, last year there were 500 children in detention centres in Australia-children in circumstances not terribly dissimilar to those experienced by this individual-but this is a typical story of the daily work of the men and women who make up the STARTTS team and the thousands of individuals and families they serve, that is, families who originated from more than 50 nationalities but who now call Australia home. As is well known, STARTTS was the lead agency in providing torture and trauma alleviation services to the Kosovars and East Timorese as part of Operation Safe Haven-a great honour in international terms and a great tribute to the dedication and professionalism of the STARTTS team. It is therefore entirely appropriate on this special day-on this international day-that I announce an additional \$600,000 for STARTTS to increase its annual recurrent funding to \$2.1 million per annum for the provision of vital services.

The additional funding will establish a clinic especially for children who have been the victims of torture and trauma, employ an additional staff specialist psychiatrist to support external consultant psychiatrists and expand current counselling services. I am sure that I speak for everyone in this Parliament and in the broader community when I express gratitude for the work undertaken by the STARTTS team. Today's announcement from the Government is a show of our support and compassion for genuine refugees. It recognises that, as a nation, we are more than willing to do what we can to assist those who are less fortunate and those who have been subjected to the terror and degradation of torture. ■

# Reviews...



## BEAUTIFUL PEOPLE d. Jasmin Dizdar (1999)

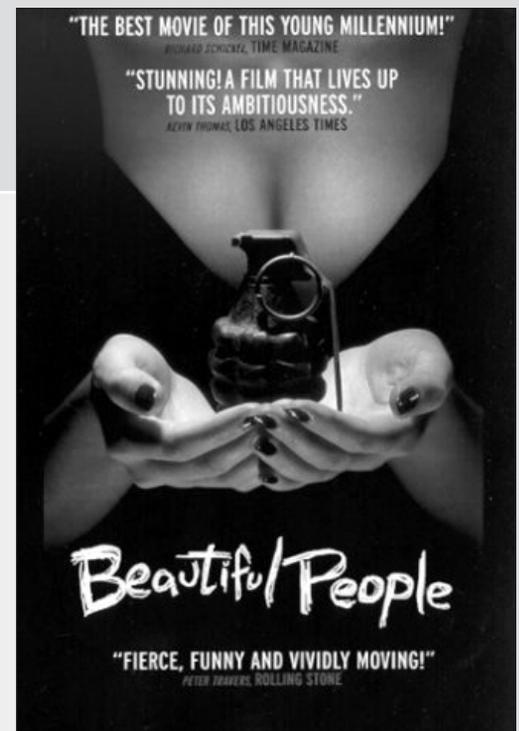
Now available on video

“You’re English. Never forget that”. So one English football hooligan tells another in *Beautiful People*, a movie about the day-to-day travails of an assortment of Bosnian refugees in London but which has a few corrosively pertinent things to say about nationalism of any stripe. While English football hooligans play at refighting old battles in the pubs and in the stands, entire nationalities do the same thing for real in vicious wars. It’s the same myopic hatred, just on an immensely larger scale.

The Balkans have provided tragically fertile soil for filmmakers in recent years. *Beautiful People*, a British film by a Bosnian director, is partly a black comedy but also a poignantly knowing portrait of refugees in a country whose attitude to them is deeply ambivalent. They are a dislocated underclass, housed in council flats if at all, let adrift in a strange place, hampered by language barriers in gaining access to services such as health, patronised by the complacent upper class, kept at arm’s length by mealy-mouthed politicians and regarded by established immigrant communities as a threat to already dwindling resources. To the racist white unemployed, they are to be scorned, blamed and resented. Problems at home, problems abroad.

Several stories are skillfully tracked. Refugees encounter an indifferent Britain; Londoners encounter a distant and unwanted war. Idealism collides with pragmatism. An idealistic young medico falls in love with a handsome refugee at her NHS clinic, to the distaste of her snobbish Establishment family; when she takes him home, one of them says cluelessly “personally, I’m very much against ethnic cleansing” while another holds up the historical fact that the English Civil War was 400 years ago as some kind of lesson. A young husband and his wife, raped by Serbs in the war, seek an abortion from a weary English doctor on the edge, himself battling an ex-wife for custody of his own kids. A middle-aged Croat and Serb get into a name-calling brawl on a London bus and pursue their rather farcical vendetta even into the hospital ward they end up sharing with a curmudgeonly Welshman; and a paralytically hungover English soccer hooligan named Griffin wakes up in wartorn Bosnia without a clue how he came to be there.

*Beautiful People*’s humanism brings an appealing warmth. When Griffin is awoken by starving Bosnian peasants poking at him, it’s boisterous black humour; but when he stumbles uncomprehendingly through a UN field hospital, farce is mixed with tragedy. He volunteers his stash of heroin to anaesthetise a bloody amputation, his first ever act of true selflessness. It’s a moving sequence upon which the movie and indeed the whole of Griffin’s life hinges – when he returns home Griffin is no longer a mindlessly xenophobic football hooligan. The Bosnian husband and wife are slowly persuaded by the weary English doctor’s benign humanity that they cannot visit the prejudices



of the past on an unborn, blameless child. The grumpy, hostile Welshman in the hospital ward - product of a culture repressed for centuries by the English - makes the Serb and the Croat put aside their animosities, or at least compel them to understand that they aren’t the only peoples with a bone to pick.

Their stories are realistic and humanely told, and engagingly small-scale even if the issues are not. If I have one criticism of *Beautiful People*, it’s that the resolution of the various stories is a little too schematic, a little too neat, and the story of the BBC war correspondent grappling with post-traumatic stress syndrome is not quite convincing. On the whole, *Beautiful People* blends black humour and humanist concern to bring empathy and a sense of hope. The concluding scenes - video footage of a happy wedding day in Bosnia before savage animosities overwhelmed it - are a bitter-sweet echo of the weary English doctor’s advice to the young pregnant Bosnian bride: “If life works out just a tiny little bit in your favour, it can be beautiful”. Words of a sadder and wiser man.

**Reviewed by David Bolton**



## ABYSSINIAN CHRONICLES

By Moses Isegawa

Picador \$21.00 PB 493 PP

It is not often that a book dealing with life in Uganda captures the imagination of Western prose readers. Moses Isegawa's thinly-disguised autobiographical narrator Mugezi matures from a wide-eyed boy observant of village life to a politically astute adult having experienced personal loss against a background of national tragedy.

This book is an observation of post-colonial decay set on a large canvas of vibrant characters drenched in superstition, Catholicism and sexual longing.

The tale opens with the flavour of magic realism as Mugezi's father Serenity is caught in the jaws of a crocodile. By the time of Mugezi's final flight to Amsterdam, Uganda is in the grip of a far sinister predator - AIDS.

It would be wrong to assume that Isegawa's debut novel is solely a story of endless despair. Ultimately it is optimistic and characterised by some amusing vignettes. The discovery the narrator's mother is nicknamed "Padlock" on her wedding night illustrates this vibrant family is not bereft of humour. Inevitably, Idi Amin Dada cast a formidable shadow over the proceedings thereby undermining Mugezi's trust in his country's leader.

In 1971 Idi Amin seized power from Obote in a bloody coup declaring himself president for life. He traded

with Britain and the US while flirting with the socialist world. It was the war with Tanzania in 1979 that forced him to flee Kampala and a bankrupt country.

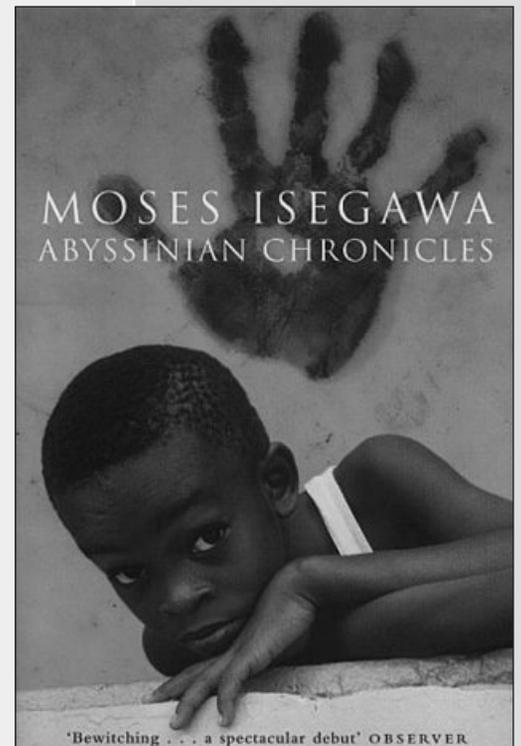
Mugezi's discovery of his grandfather's broken body on a street corner and the horror of his aunt Kasawo's gang rape is a potent reminder of how human tragedy can ignite an author's passion. His course through life as an above-average student, school-teacher, liquor brewer, black marketeer and politically-astute operator is threatened by the country's abyss. Serenity believes Abyssinia (Ethiopia's ancient name) is a fitting name for modern Uganda: "land of false bottoms." Never is there an end to the depth of despair.

Isegawa's move to Amsterdam has given him the distance he needed to reflect with clarity on the sadness of his country's post-colonial history.

In scope this vast debut novel can be compared with the celebrated works of Salman Rushdie giving us a bitter-sweet taste of life in a forgotten part of the developing world.

It is to be hoped this welcome English translation will herald future works of quality from countries too often without a voice. Tired he may be of First World cocktail perceptions of Africa, he is nevertheless as celebrated in Europe as he is in his beloved homeland. This searing, passionate work of life on the inside of a country on the road to political and economic order is highly recommended.

**Reviewed by Peter Bouilly**



# Reviews

# Transitions

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### As if I am not there: A NOVEL ABOUT THE BALKANS Slavenka Drakulic\*

(Abacus, 1999. r.r.p. \$25.25)

Those of us lucky enough to have been born and grown up in Australia can not fully appreciate what it is that survivors of genocide/ethnic cleansing, political violence, torture and rape have gone through. Certainly, we have images, statistics and daily news reports of humanity's inhumanity. However, we can not presume to know what an individual has suffered. When the philosopher Martin Buber was challenged on the number of Jews who perished in the Nazi Holocaust he replied that it did not matter if it were 6 million or not, it mattered still if it happened to only one person. Our emotional response and insight is greater from an account of personal outrages than from the cold tabulation of human rights violations. It is through personal accounts rather than statistics that we can know their pain. It is to fiction or biography we must turn for some insight into the emotional life of individuals caught up in these atrocities. Drakulic's novel is one such.

The narrative follows a year (1992/93) in the life of S. a primary school teacher in a Bosnian village. The book opens with S. (daughter of a Serbian mother and Muslim father) just having given birth to a boy conceived from one of many pack rapes/beatings she underwent in a concentration camp (it is estimated that up to 60,000 women have been raped in the Balkans conflicts). We are then

**A publication of the Service for the Treatment and Rehabilitation  
of Torture and Trauma Survivors**

taken back to the day Serbian forces enter her village, separated the males and females and transported them to adjacent death camps. For the first few weeks S. undergoes privation in the form of minimal shelter and food. When she is transferred to “the women’s room” she is subjected, almost nightly, to gang rapes and bashings. After 3 months in the camp she catches the eye of “The Captain” who while feeding her and treating her decently, still takes sexual advantage of her (at this stage S. sees the sex as an acceptable “pay off” for being treated civilly). After 7 months in the camp the women who are still alive are exchanged for Serbian captives. They are dumped over the border in Croatia, and soon find themselves in a refugee camp outside Zagreb. Within a month S. is accepted as a refugee by Sweden and is flown to Copenhagen where she gives birth to the son conceived in the camp.

This is an important and carefully constructed novel - Drakulic is at pains not to make this an anti-Serbian tract. The use of initials only to identify characters means that we are not constantly reminded that this person is Bosnian, Serbian, Muslim, Orthodox, or Catholic. Similarly, apart from chapter headings needed to identify where the action is happening the words Bosnia(n) or Serbia(n) rarely occur in the novel. One is constantly reminded while reading this novel of the universality of abuses the characters undergo. Indeed, this universality is apparent from the novel’s epigraphs - quotes from the writings of Primo Levi (survivor of Auschwitz, and along with Tadeusz Borowski the best chronicler of the Nazi Holocaust), Eva Grlic (survivor of imprisonment and torture in Tito’s Yugoslavia), and Varlam Shalamov (survivor of Kolyma, a Russian concentration camp).

Frequently, while reading this book I was struck by the fact you could change the location from Bosnia to Germany, Poland, or Siberia, from the 1990s to 1930s, 1940s, or 1950s. The story would be basically the same - rape, torture and other forms of brutalisation, with local variations.

Drakulic employs a plain almost distanced style (at least it seems so in this English translation), which paradoxically makes the narrative more powerful, the emotional impact that much greater. Again, Levi and Borowski both use an unadorned style which is all the more affecting for being so.

People who work with traumatised refugees will recognise the emotions, rationalisations, the coping mechanisms S. employs in simply surviving, both in the camp and after. Dissociation, somatization, irrational feelings that one somehow deserves this, not wanting to ask about the “disappeared” in case one is told, the feeling of falling in the crack between the past and the present, the recurrent nightmares, and not having the words to describe your ordeal.

After being released from the camp S.’s ordeal is not yet over. There is the waiting and waiting, there is the finding of a new home. Like many survivors, S. is faced with 2 common responses from people who have not been subjected to such abuses. Firstly, people just don’t want to know - the novel’s title comes from Levi’s book *If this is a man* where he tells of his Auschwitz experience and people, including his family, behave “as if I am not there”. Secondly, many people behave as if it were the fault of the survivor, as if they brought it on themselves.

The novel ends on a positive note with S. reconciled with the baby



she did not want (she discovered her pregnancy too late for an abortion). She will probably keep it (the novel opens with the birth and S.’s determination not to touch the child but have it immediately adopted).

If you are looking for an explanation of how or why one group of humans try to turn another group of humans into non-humans this novel will not supply it. If, however, you want an account of the emotional life of a torture survivor I recommend this novel. Read it and marvel, while horrified, at the resilience of the human spirit.

\*Slavenka Drakulic was born in Croatia in 1949. She is a journalist who has written 3 previous novels and 3 books of non-fiction (including *Cafe Europa*). She writes in both Croatian and English. As *If I am not there* was Croatian translated from Croatian into English by Marko Ivic.

A number of articles in English by Drakulic are available on the Internet.

**Reviewed by David Finlay**

# ILLUSION

by Ana Gagic\*

I'm going,  
I'm going, through cruel land...  
Without returns;  
The steps are hopeless!  
I'm slowing down...  
I know I have to run away..  
Far away...  
To reach infinity;  
I feel the sun will come,  
Very soon, Just for a moment  
But no...

I should continue my way,  
Through thick fog, I can see...  
Shadows of different lives,  
As they swing, like church bells!  
The fatigue is taking over me,  
Filled with emotions, I'm shaking...  
Surrounded with nothingness, I ignore  
My own blood, flowing through my veins.  
Black holes of ruin swallow me!  
As I shiver a spirit of mine is tortured.  
Above frozen planet, suddenly death  
Has spread her large wings!  
Weakly my illusion is disappearing...  
Now it's gone!  
Throwing me destroyed in reality...  
My trip is over...!  
My illusion is dead!!!!

\* Ana is a 16 year old Year 12 student at  
Cabramatta High School

