

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

MAY 1999 - ISSUE 2

Transitions

50 YEARS OF HUMAN RIGHTS

ONE WOMAN'S BATTLE FOR SURVIVAL

MEDIA RACISM

FEMALE GENITAL MUTILATION

WORDS THAT WOUND

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.

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MAY

- 3 **A MESSAGE FROM THE DIRECTOR**
By Jorge Aroche.
- 4 **50 YEARS OF HUMAN RIGHTS**
By Olga Yoldi.
- 7 **SERVICE UPDATE:
THE EARLY INTERVENTION AND CASE
MANAGEMENT PROGRAM**
By Helen Basili.
- 8 **ONE WOMANS BATTLE FOR SURVIVAL**
By Helen Basili.
- 11 **ARTIST PROFILE**
- 12 **NSW RESPONSE TO FEMALE
GENITAL MUTILATION**
By Helen Basili.
- 14 **COUNSELLING VIETNAMESE
REFUGEE SURVIVORS OF TRAUMA**
By Tiep Nguyen and Robin Bowles.
- 16 **WORDS THAT WOUND**
By Helen Basili.
- 18 **MEDIA RACISM**
By Helen Basili.
- 19 **HOW TO HELP REFUGEE SURVIVORS
OF TORTURE & TRAUMA**
- 20 **UWS VICE CHANCELLOR TALKS
ABOUT STARTTS**
Interview with Professor Janice Reid.
- 22 **REACHING OUT TO REFUGEES IN NSW**
By Jorge Aroche.
- 23 **PROFILE OF THE BOSNIAN-
HERZEGOVINIAN COMMUNITY**
- 24 **POEM: ME TOI/MY MOTHER**
By Nguyen Chi Thien.

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Service for the Treatment and Rehabilitation of Torture and Trauma Survivors

A MESSAGE FROM THE DIRECTOR

By Jorge Aroche, Executive Director

Welcome to our second issue of *Transitions*. A great deal has happened since last November when *Transitions* was first distributed at our 10th anniversary celebration. Firstly, we had a great celebration, with overwhelming support from over 500 people who attended Auburn Town Hall, and many more that couldn't make it but sent apologies and letters of support.

Meeting so many old friends of the service, colleagues, clients and ex-clients of STARTTS was great and gave us all an incredible emotional boost. Meanwhile, the announcement made by the then Minister for Health, Dr Refshauge, of another \$350,000 recurrent funding really made our day, and provided a much needed resource enhancement to meet the growing demand on our services.

These funds will not only make it possible to fund some urgently needed positions on a recurrent basis, but will also enable us to put in place a concentrated effort to address our waiting list problem. Currently STARTTS has 250 people waiting to use its services. This number will be reduced significantly by implementing a number of strategies. These will include:

- setting up a counselling team that will focus on people that have been waiting for STARTTS services for some time,
- making changes to our assessment and initial intervention practices,
- increasing our training and support services to mainstream counselors,
- systematizing our work with postgraduate clinical students to maximize their contribution to the service.

The last two strategies will be made possible through the employment of a clinician/trainer position. We are very excited about these developments, and very optimistic about their potential to assist our clients.

In a way, the timing of this project could not have been more opportune. With so many humanitarian crises developing in different parts of the world, it is hard to imagine a time

when our services have faced a more imposing prospect of increased demand. As I write this message, it is still not clear whether operation Safe Haven might go ahead, and we continue to draw contingency plans for the possible arrival of 4000 displaced people from Kosovo, and for the likely increase of Kosovars in the make up of the Special Refugee and Humanitarian Program. At the same time, the situation in East Timor and Indonesia is becoming increasingly critical, and humanitarian crises continue to erupt in other countries while most of the world eyes are focused on the Balkans.

Closer to home, it is important to consider the emotional impact of the conflict in the Balkans on the communities from that region who have settled amongst us. The combined effect of worrying for relatives friends and compatriots, and the memories rekindled by the images of war, suffering and destruction that fill our TV screens can be very disturbing, particularly for those who have survived similar circumstances. It is important that we are sensitive to this anguish, and conscious of the potential of our own reactions to these events for exacerbating the legitimate distress felt by these communities.

On a different note, there have been substantial developments in several areas of STARTTS activities: two wonderful camps took place that had children and youths from different cultures having fun and learning about themselves together; an uplifting note in these difficult times.

Since the last issue of *Transitions* we have also seen substantial developments in the implementation of our Early Intervention program (EICM) funded by the Department of Immigration. No longer the new kid on the block, it is now providing a solid service supported by productive partnerships with a range of service providers, from a number of locations. An excellent report titled *A Sound Investment* has been completed on the early intervention program Australia wide. *A Sound Investment* was a joint project of the National Forum of Services for

Survivors of Torture and Trauma and was produced in Victoria. More on the EICM inside this issue.

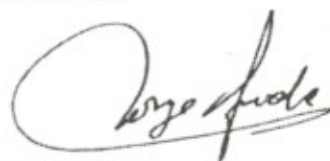
In the coming months we will also be in a better position to address some of the specific problems in the area of gambling that some refugee communities have identified through our community consultation process. Thanks to funding received from the Casino Fund a counsellor will be employed with special skills in this area.

This message would not be complete without a few words about our *Friends*. With the departure of our Chairperson Mr. John Worthington after several years of solid contribution to the organization, Friends of STARTTS (FOS) is now in great need of new blood. FOS plays a very important role in supporting many STARTTS programs, such as youth camps, self help group projects, research projects and other innovative projects and programs. Indeed, many very successful STARTTS programs would not have taken place without FOS. It also has a very important role in enhancing STARTTS profile and advocating on behalf of the communities we work with.

If you support our work and would like to assist us, please consider joining Friends of STARTTS, either as a member, or even better standing for a position in FOS management committee. The next Annual General Meeting of Friends of STARTTS is on the 31st of May 1999. Details elsewhere in this issue of *Transitions*.

A community representative position in STARTTS management committee has also become vacant at the end of its two year period of tenure, and has been advertised in the Sydney Morning Herald. For details please ring me on 02 9794 1900.

Thank you for your continued support. Until next time



Jorge Aroche
Executive Director

50 YEARS OF HUMAN RIGHTS

By Olga Yoldi

Out of the ruins of World War II came the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. The Declaration was endorsed in an effort to protect the rights of all people and their fundamental freedoms. Fifty years later, the nations of the world are overwhelmed by images of mass executions, destruction and displacement of communities. Europe - the birthplace of the Declaration- is engaged in another conflict. What has happened to human rights?

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights was adopted and proclaimed by a UN General Assembly resolution, the 10th of December 1948, in New York. The Declaration would become the *Magna Carta* of all nations.

In 1941 President Roosevelt sent a message to Congress. He wanted a world founded on freedoms: freedom of speech, freedom of worship, freedom from want, freedom from fear and freedom from hunger. He wanted a world with equitable distribution of resources. It is said that the Declaration itself was shaped by modern America, inspired by some notion of universality and by the principles promoted in the French revolution.

The Human Rights Declaration states that rights are not only universal but indivisible, interdependent and most importantly

inherent. Human rights are not a concession from the state. This is emphasised in Article 1: "All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights. They are endowed with reason and conscience and should act towards one another in a spirit of brotherhood." A revolutionary idea, the notion of being equal just because we are human beings.

During the 50th celebration of the Declaration, it has been repeatedly said that human rights constitute a universal achievement, the most important ideological construct of this century. But if this is the case, what impact have they really had over the last five decades? Have human rights really made much of a difference to state practices?

The fact is, the Declaration itself provided no mechanism for the enforcement of human rights. It was

entirely left up to the states to make a commitment to it. However, it did provide moral values, vague guidelines, basic standards, a framework and some parameters for negotiation.

In many cases the Declaration became a source of inspiration and hope. As Nelson Mandela once stated: "For all the opponents of this pernicious system, the simple and noble words of the Universal Declaration were a sudden ray of hope at one of our darkest moments. During the many years that followed, this document served as a shining beacon and an inspiration to many millions of South Africans. It was proof that they were not alone, but rather part of a global movement against racism and colonialism, for human rights, peace and justice."

Human rights have been used as a tool to criticise

governments, as a benchmark to measure democracy and as a justification to intervene in the domestic affairs of countries. Human Rights have also been used to justify invasions and to start wars. Unfortunately many states tend to forget about human rights. They seem more interested in balancing their national and international interests and pressures. In fact in the last decade governments seem to have become more and more obsessed with economics, with increasing trade and development, with protecting the rights of foreign investors to the detriment of human rights, indigenous rights, workers rights, and rights as basic and important as health and education.

Lately a debate has started about the effect of globalisation on human rights. Mr T. Rajamoorthy, a Human Rights lawyer from the Regional Council on Human Rights in Asia, defines globalisation as the process of integration into the world economy and also as a method of development. At a conference on Human Rights at the University of NSW, he said: "The strategy of globalisation has two powerful forces pushing it: transnational corporations and financial firms. Transnational corporations, who gained power in the Reagan years, have been pushing for the liberation of trade and services for some time. They attempt to push through the process of multilateral treaties, have access to all sectors of the economy and are a driving force behind multilateral agreements on investment. One human right constantly violated is the right to work," he pointed out. "Because of globalisation, one third of the world's population is unemployed as a result of industrial restructuring, massive retrenchments, the casualisation of labour, outsourcing etc. The right to organise is also becoming increasingly difficult." Globalisation, he indicated "is a castle built on sand."

International capital and the challenges and pressures associated with globalisation have been named as being responsible for human rights abuses. According to the

Asian Human Rights Commission, abuses are also caused by other factors. Volatile political situations which cause social, economic and political relations to deteriorate in rapid and unpredictable ways; civil wars in which all parties are guilty of abuses; political abuses in areas of extreme poverty which are highly vulnerable to natural disasters and poorly developed social support infrastructures that may be targeted in conflict situations.

Nobel Prize winner, Jose Ramos Horta, from the National Committee of Maubere Resistance (East Timor) has pointed out on many occasions that corruption, stupidity, mismanagement of governments and greed are also responsible for human rights violations. On the other hand, the culture of militarisation is not doing very much to improve human rights records. Unless countries stop purchasing arms and move away from that militarised culture, systematic violations to human rights will continue and may even increase.

INDIGENOUS RIGHTS

Indigenous rights groups have argued that the Declaration of Human Rights does not address the specific issues faced by indigenous people. Indigenous rights groups have said that they have justified the right to self determination and the right to the land for too long. Although there has been substantial progress made in terms of legislation and a few achievements recently, when Canada established a self governing homeland -the state of Nunavut- for the Innuit last month, there is still a long way to go.

It is interesting to note that Australia is the first Western government to be asked to explain its racial policies under the UN Committee for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination's Early Warnings and Urgent Action Procedures. The Sydney Morning Herald reported recently that Australia has been forced to explain its Aboriginal policies to a high-level United Nations Committee.

Questions have been asked about why the Australian government has taken 14 months to appoint a new Aboriginal Social Justice Commissioner. Australians for Native Title and Reconciliation (ANTAR) has told the committee that the Wik 12 Point Plan breached four articles of an international treaty against race discrimination which Australia has signed. The UN committee has also indicated that the situation in Australia has deteriorated since 1994. This suggests that in the general field of human rights there is no guarantee of continuity. Governments inevitably change and so does their level of responsibility and commitment.

HUMAN RIGHTS IN TIMES OF PEACE

Political change does not always bring an end to human rights abuses. Democratic transitions and processes reached through pacts, referendums, cease fires or peace agreements are not without contradictions. Democratic transitions, in theory should bring hope, social reform, basic freedoms, respect and a guarantee of civil, political and economic rights. Most importantly they should bring justice.

However, it has been demonstrated in many instances that injustice prevails. Injustice found at the root of serious conflicts and political violence is not always redressed in the new democracies, only disguised in different shapes and forms.

The adoption of liberal economic systems does not always help either. Developing countries with weak economies that adopt liberal economic systems, excluding large numbers of people from the mainstream economic process, create social conflict, inequality, marginalisation and widespread poverty. Human rights and poverty do not go well together. Economic injustice produces internal displacements and migrations. Individuals and groups, victims of different degrees of social and economic exclusion, become displaced as a consequence of

dispossession or in search of better opportunities. They cannot even call themselves refugees anymore since they live in so-called democratic regimes. In the best of cases they become immigrants, or illegal immigrants. Deprived of rights and status, they become invisible.

Those who remain make demands, claims in an effort to build up a social and political order that will guarantee some degree of democracy and social justice. Social unrest, demonstrations and discontent are soon savagely repressed by the state. In the worst cases human rights are systematically violated and total impunity is granted to the perpetrators.

In many countries armed conflict has become a reality which governments do not recognise as legitimate political movements for obvious reasons. States also tend to remain silent about human rights violations to avoid jeopardising their economic interests and the unwanted attention of the international community. Democracy, in such social and political environment, cannot possibly develop.

It is true to say that democratic transitions have often brought a certain degree of civic and political freedoms.

However access to basic rights such as health, education and housing are still being denied to large numbers of people in many countries.

THE POWERS OF THE UN

The UN's relevant activities could be classified into three distinct categories: Standard setting (conventions and declarations); promotion (advisory services, broad studies, reporting systems) and protection (procedures for assessing information received about violations of human rights and reporting them to the general membership).

The Human Rights Commission within the UN is empowered under resolution 1503 to respond in a variety of ways to reports of human rights violations. It may dismiss the case, either by deciding that a consistent pattern of gross violations has not been established or for any other reason. It may keep the case on its agenda for further consideration, or it may decide to initiate a thorough study with or without consent from the government concerned. The Human Rights Commission can draw on its authority under resolution 1235 and can appoint an *ad hoc* working group or a special rapporteur to study the situation, they prepare a report and draft recommendations which the Commission can then debate in public, adopt and forward to the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC).

Article 2(7) says: "Nothing contained in the present Charter shall authorise the United Nations to intervene in matters which are essentially within the domestic jurisdiction of any state or shall require the Members to submit such matters to settlement under the present Charter." Such prohibition does not apply in cases in which the Security Council decides a situation is a threat to international peace and security and takes action under Article 41 of the Charter.

However such decisions seem to be selective and inconsistent. Cases are dealt with in an *ad hoc* way. Somalia and Bosnia's interventions are good examples. Normally, steps are taken after the main disaster has occurred, when the situation has become uncontrollable. Interventions in the form of diplomatic missions or peacekeeping rarely manage to break the cycle of violence. They can have the potential to contribute to the destabilisation of the region and consequently to an increase in

human rights abuses. As a rule governments object to the international community placing political and economic pressure on their states regarding their domestic actions.

We cannot overlook the achievements made by the UN in the field of human rights, particularly in consolidating peace, as in the case of El Salvador or settling disputes. However the distance travelled throughout these five decades does not particularly offer grounds for optimism.

The latest political developments indicate that the UN may be marginalised as a force in world politics. At present it is divided over the NATO bombing of Yugoslavia. In fact, the US and its European NATO allies failed to seek UN Security Council approval for the strikes because they believed the Security Council is divided over the question of Kosovo, simply because Russia and China will never support military action against Yugoslavia. This is not the first time the US strikes without UN authorisation.

As the former UN secretary general Boutros Boutros-Ghali told the New York Times "the marginalisation of the UN has increased with America's discovery of its role as the sole remaining superpower. Weaker states depend heavily on diplomacy. When you're powerful, you don't need it."

Human rights will remain a field strewn with political landmines. As Stanley Hoffman, a foreign policy advisor to the Carter government, once noted: "The issue of human rights, by definition breeds confrontation. Raising the issues touches on the very foundations of a regime, on its sources and exercise of power, on its links to its citizens and subjects." It is a dangerous issue indeed and history suggests it will remain an unavoidable one.

SERVICE UPDATE: THE EARLY INTERVENTION & CASE MANAGEMENT PROGRAM

By Helen Basili

Settling in a new country is a daunting prospect. Migrants who have willingly left their country of origin often find the settlement process difficult but for refugees who have left their country under traumatic conditions beyond their control, settlement poses an even more complex set of problems.

Refugees arriving in Australia are unlikely to have had the chance to prepare for their life in the new country. With only sparse belongings from their country of origin, they face the stressful task of meeting their most basic needs of food, shelter, language, employment and health care. Their feelings of homesickness will be compounded by the knowledge that they may never see their homeland again or the loved ones who have been left behind, often in dangerous circumstances. They will certainly find themselves dwelling on the injustices which forced them to flee in the first place.

STARTTS' Early Intervention and Case Management (EICM) program was established in August last year to assist newly arrived refugees to cope with these issues and to minimise the problems associated with settlement. By the end of January this year, 230 people who had recently arrived in Australia under the Refugee and Special Humanitarian Program had sought assistance from the EICM program.

"The program has changed the settlement process [for newly arrived refugees] in that they now have the opportunity for a comprehensive assessment and to be referred to the services that they need right from the beginning. They don't have to wait for things to develop into a crisis or to go without because they don't know services are there and how to access them," says Pam Hartgerink, Coordinator of the Program.

The majority of EICM clients have been from the former Yugoslavia (60%) with large numbers also coming from the Middle East (27%), in particular, Iran and Iraq. Nine percent of clients were from the North East

African countries of Somalia, Sudan, Algeria and Ethiopia.

The settlement needs of clients may differ according to their country of origin and the socio-economic position they occupied in that country. "Those kinds of factors can help in terms of how well the client can interpret a new cultural system," says EICM Senior Case Manager, Kerry Stewart.

She cites the differences in settlement needs between someone who lived in a city in the former Yugoslavia to a person from a rural area in Africa.

According to EICM Case Manager, Sarah Desmond, the immense cultural differences between Australia and her clients' countries of origin have exacerbated settlement difficulties for them. For example, the dispersion of Sudanese families throughout the suburbs means that it is difficult for them to maintain the social support networks they are used to.

Sudanese and Somali families are particularly distressed at the prospect of deaths of relatives in their country of origin and their inability to return and provide a proper burial in accordance with their traditions.

Kerry emphasises that the similarities between clients are more overwhelming than the differences. "I think for all communities housing is a real need. It is a difficulty for single people because single accommodation is quite hard to afford...and it is a difficulty for large families.

"I think probably across the board, depending on what the culture has been [in the country of origin], the understanding of what the system is and how things work here is quite difficult."

The EICM Program offers a comprehensive assessment and referral service to clients appropriate to the needs they have identified with their case worker. Clients whose settlement is being effected by the impact of torture or the trauma of their refugee experience are offered short to medium term counselling.

Of the clients who had attended the EICM Program by January 31 this



Pam Hartgerink, EICM Coordinator.

year, 27% stayed in the program for counselling on torture and trauma issues. This figure, says Kerry, greatly underestimates the true incidence of torture and trauma among the client group. She points out that the refugee experience is traumatic in itself.

"I think [talking about these issues] can be retraumatising for some people or it might be culturally inappropriate to talk about those kinds of issues.

"For women it might be an issue of shame if it's related to sexual assault or sexual torture.

"Sometimes it may be too soon for them to go near that... That's not something you'd talk about in your own country so you may not want to talk with a foreigner that you don't know. You've got to take care of the number one concern of the person," says Kerry.

Pam notes that the distinction between assessment and counselling is often not relevant. "The assessment is carried out in a very client-centred manner and issues relating to trauma may be dealt with as they arise. Helping people understand that what they are feeling is a common reaction to the experiences they have been through can be very beneficial in itself," she says.

Clients are referred to the service on a voluntary basis, as soon as possible after their arrival in Australia. The main sources of referral are Department of Immigration and Multicultural Affairs (DIMA) staff -

continued on page 23 >

ONE WOMAN'S BATTLE FOR SURVIVAL

By Helen Basil

A STARTTS client speaks out

When Zenia Collazos* entered the doors of STARTTS seven years ago, she was in desperate circumstances. Unable to speak English, estranged from her family, and alone in a foreign land, the unimaginable horrors inflicted upon her by Peru's Shining Path guerillas haunted her with unremitting ferocity.

"I couldn't trust other people. When I was working, I was looking behind me always. I never had peace. I was thinking that people around me were going to come and attack me. I couldn't sleep. I couldn't eat. Nothing. It was horrible. Really horrible."

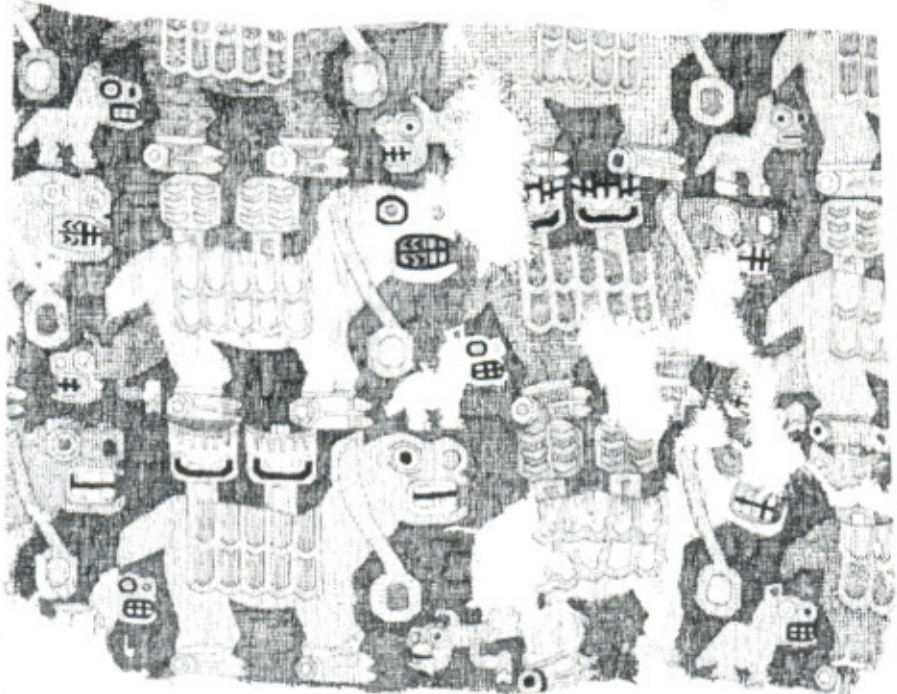
"I intended to kill myself. The person I was living with was so afraid she introduced me to a social worker," says Zenia.

The social worker recognised Zenia's distress as symptoms experienced by many refugee survivors of torture and trauma and referred her to a counsellor at STARTTS. It was there that the source of her anguish was revealed.

In 1987, Zenia's father was executed by the Shining Path guerillas from the Communist Party of Peru. She was still coping with her grief two years later when the hospital she was working for as a nurse was attacked by the guerillas.

"I don't know how many there were around the hospital. The thing I remember was that the whole of Lima was in darkness. [The Shining Path] bombed the electricity stations.

"When the lights went out we tried to find some candles and suddenly there were armed people



with masks. It was so fast and unexpected. I had to obey orders 'Get killed or go this way'."

"I couldn't trust other people. When I was working, I was looking behind me always. I never had peace. I was thinking that people around me were going to come and attack me. I couldn't sleep. I couldn't eat. Nothing.

It was horrible.
Really horrible."

Zenia, along with several of her colleagues, was kidnapped for two weeks and forced to care for the Shining Path soldiers who were sick or injured. After she was released, she was too afraid to return to work and remained in the family home.

Soon after, the Shining Path, once again in need of Zenia's

nursing skills, located her at home and abducted her. She was blindfolded and driven to a remote village guarded by masked guerillas.

For the next six months, Zenia was forced to work in silence, forbidden to communicate with the other residents. Her escape was a hair-raising one.

"They had planned an attack [against the government] and they decided to kill me after that attack because I refused to cooperate with them. On the night of the attack, I had an opportunity to get out. There were not many people around to control the area."

Zenia walked for days through the wilderness until she found a road where she hitched a ride back to the capital. She arrived at her uncle's house and soon after, he organised for her to fly to Australia on a tourist visa. The Australian government later accepted her claim for refugee status.

In the seven years since Zenia commenced counselling, she has made some remarkable achievements. She now speaks

fluent English, works as a clerk and has completed the first year of an accountancy degree at the University of Sydney.

For Zenia, the most remarkable thing is her survival. "The most positive thing [in my life] is that I'm alive. Thanks to my counsellor for his professional psychological support, I am still alive."

However, her pain and suffering have been exacerbated by news of the murder and rape of relatives in Peru and her continued separation from her mother and siblings, who now live in exile in Chile. Despite several applications made to the Department of Immigration and Multicultural Affairs, Zenia's family has so far been denied permission to live in Australia.

Zenia does not have the financial resources to bring her family to Australia for a holiday and for the same reason she cannot visit them in Chile. Even if she were able to go to Chile, Zenia says she would be reluctant to do so due to Chile's proximity to Peru and the possibility of finding Shining Path guerillas residing there in exile. Despite the amount of time that has lapsed since she left Peru, her fear of the guerillas has not abated.

Until Zenia is reunited with her family, she says she will never fully recover from her traumatic experiences. "Hopefully one day God will give us a chance to be together again."

** Zenia's real name has been changed to protect her privacy.*

Issues effecting treatment of torture and trauma survivors

Zenia's counsellor, Mariano Coello, is the Coordinator of Clinical Services at STARTTS and has been working with refugee survivors of torture and trauma for 15 years. He describes availability of family and social support after a traumatic incident as an important factor in the recovery process. Unfortunately, these factors are

often lacking for refugee survivors of torture and trauma. In cases like Zenia's, family support is absent altogether due to a combination of geographical and political factors.

Mariano contrasts the availability of social support to survivors of natural disasters with that of human inflicted trauma. Survivors of natural disasters usually have a host of emergency services directed to meet their needs whereas the survivors of human-inflicted trauma are often neglected and left to their own resources, says Mariano.

The absence of physical injury and scarring is another factor associated with a positive prognosis for survivors of torture.

"In general, the more disabling the injury, the greater the reminder of the trauma and the more difficult it is to cope with it. If it is something visible then people will ask them about it continuously," says Mariano.

A positive outcome for survivors is more likely if they are able to secure a financial and occupational position similar to the one held before the torture or trauma took place. In the case of many newly arrived refugees, who may have difficulties mastering English and prior qualifications which are not recognised here, this criteria is often impossible to meet, says Mariano.

The result of the torture experience for most, but not all, survivors will be posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD). A diagnosis of PTSD is based on the person's exposure to a traumatic event and the subsequent presence of three categories of symptoms: intrusive recollections, avoidant/numbing symptoms and hyperarousal symptoms.

No theory has been able to adequately explain why some people will develop PTSD and others won't and the applicability of a PTSD diagnosis to refugees from non-Western cultures has been debated vigorously.

Mariano believes it is more constructive to think of in terms of "post-traumatic symptoms"

because the undeniable fact is that all people suffer as a result of their experience and whether their symptoms are displayed in such a way that leads to a PTSD diagnosis or not is, in many ways, irrelevant.

It is difficult to obtain a reliable estimate of the prevalence of torture internationally but Amnesty International reported that people were tortured or ill-treated by security forces, police or other state authorities in 117 countries in 1997.

A study conducted in Europe in the early 1990's found that up to 35% of the world's refugee population has had at least one experience of torture. Another study by researchers at Wollongong University reported in 1996 that one in four refugee entrants to NSW had been subject to severe trauma and torture.

Given that 8779 refugees were admitted to Australia in 1997-98 it may be assumed that between 2195 (25%) and 3073 (35%) of them had experienced torture.

Not all torture survivors are adults. STARTTS employs a youth worker and a specialist case manager for children and other counsellors treat child or adolescent survivors where appropriate.

"I've seen kids who have seen their parents murdered or raped and I've seen kids who have been tortured themselves," says youth worker Gary Cachia.

Mariano says: "Children are sometimes in a powerless situation and if parents are not really supportive of the treatment it becomes very difficult to treat them.

"Sometimes parents are so engaged in dealing with their own traumatic experiences and the strenuous demands of resettlement that they have difficulties identifying their children's problems. In other cases parents feel extremely guilty about, what they perceive, as their failure to protect their children from trauma.

"Paradoxically enough, interventions with children are more successful in shorter times than with adults in cases where there is a supportive family and so on."

In some countries, torture is



Mariano Coello,
STARTTS clinical services coordinator.

viewed as a science, which is developed and modified according to the needs of the government. Particularly favoured are those methods that inflict unbearable pain but leave ambiguous scars or disabilities that cannot be easily attributed to torture. This allows the government to deny that systematic torture has occurred.

"Sophisticated" torture methods today can destroy the personality and self-respect of human beings, and still it will be claimed that the victims were never exposed to torture. A new science has developed, and torture is practiced with psychological and medical assistance in many countries," said Dr. Inge Genefke, representing the Copenhagen based Rehabilitation and Research Centre for Torture Victims at a Cape Town lecture in 1995.

In a 1997 report *Arming the Torturers*, Amnesty International documented the increasing use of electric shock torture and stun technology. "It is sometimes said that torturers prefer using electric shock torture because they believe it will not leave permanent marks as evidence on their victims' bodies," the report said.

This has ramifications for the refugee selection process in countries like Australia where physical evidence of torture may be required to prove that the person has been and will continue to be persecuted in their country of origin.

However, according to Mariano, the use of primitive torture

methods is still endemic. "I have many clients who have scars and torture is not always so sophisticated in some countries in some situations, that it doesn't leave marks, cuts, bruises, bones that have been broken and injuries.

"There are other methods of torture that although they haven't left scars they have left disabilities. For example, if you leave someone hanging by the arms for long periods or standing for long periods or in situations that they may get infections. I had a client who was put in a septic tank and he got huge infections on his thighs and genitals, which had previously been burned with cigarettes, that left him with terrible scars."

This does not mean that he disputes the fact that torturers often attempt to minimise the evidence of their misdeeds. "One practice that I have heard of is that people who are detained for short periods and are quite badly tortured, before they are released, are treated with anti-inflammatory drugs and anticoagulants and other medications in cases where they have visible marks in order to discredit their account of torture," says Mariano.

Related to the "science of torture" is the involvement of medical professionals in torture. This alarming phenomenon has been described by the British Medical Association as a "significant ethical issue".

A study of 200 torture survivors in the *Danish Medical Bulletin* in 1990 found that 20% of them had experienced the involvement of medical personnel in their torture.

"Ten persons said that a doctor was present during their torture and in some cases performed a medical examination...On the basis of the examination, advice was given as to whether the torture could continue.

"Fifteen persons said that they received medical resuscitation because they lost consciousness during the torture," the report said.

Mariano discusses the impact on some of his clients who identified paramedics or medical professionals assisting their

torturers: "This [issue] came up very late in the process of counselling therapy. They had an absolute distrust of people in helping positions including me. They took quite a while to seek assistance from [STARTTS] and when they started there were questions directed to me about my political affiliations, my ideas and the philosophies of STARTTS."

The idea of involving medical personnel in torture might appear strange to those who believe that the purpose of torture is to extract information and ultimately to kill the victim, but this is not the case according to Dr. Genefke. "The main aim of torture is to break down, to destroy the identity, the personality...

"[Torture victims] are sent back to their community with all their physical and psychological problems after torture. They suffer, they are full of anxiety, they cannot eat properly, have nightmares, depression, etc. Naturally, the family and the children suffer. Others in the society are afraid of being exposed to the same procedure and therefore do not dare to act as these courageous persons. This is how a dictatorship creates repression and fear in countries where there is government-sanctioned torture."

The idea of unleashing upon society a crushed, broken individual as a deterrent to other political activists has been largely unsuccessful. STARTTS counsellors tell of the gratification that they feel when they see such a person resume a fulfilling life.

"I can see that for many of my clients who have been extremely traumatised, although they still remember the past, they function in society in a very normal way and have been very successful as well," says Lucy Marin, STARTTS counsellor for the Spanish speaking communities.

A Kurdish client recently dedicated a poem to STARTTS. He wrote: "I will survive the long night and put the darkness behind me, I will not give in to disappointment because I am a Kurd and I was born to be strong."

ARTIST PROFILE

Gia Hai Nguyen

Photographer

Gia Hai Nguyen was born in South Vietnam in 1960 and arrived in Australia in 1985 after spending three years in a refugee camp in Thailand. He started teaching himself photography in 1991.

"I have been dreaming about photography since I was 18 years old but in Vietnam I had no chance to be involved," says Hai.

The materials needed to pursue his art are expensive but Hai's commitment and passion for photography have allowed him to overcome many financial obstacles. He has set up a dark room in his home and develops his work himself.

For Hai, photography is a powerful means of self-expression, which has helped him cope with the difficulties arising from his refugee experience.

He hopes to exhibit his work this year and gain more widespread exposure.



New South Wales response to female genital mutilation

By

When attempting to eradicate the practice of female genital mutilation, cultural sensitivity is of utmost importance.

Media accounts of female genital mutilation invariably portray it as a barbaric practice, often stigmatising the communities involved who are accused of offenses such as child abuse or deep-seated misogyny.

It is assertions like these that enrage Juliana Nkrumah, Community Education and Development Officer of the New South Wales Education Program on Female Genital Mutilation (FGM). It is not that the pain and suffering and deaths associated with FGM

do not disturb her. It is just that she is tired of FGM being sensationalised, fed up with seeing women effected by FGM portrayed as victims and sick of hearing communities who practice FGM described as callous or primitive. "The way that some people have gone about their work on FGM has been nothing less than recolonisation and exploitation," she says.

Juliana argues that to really understand the practice of FGM, and work towards preventing it, it is necessary to abandon all preconceived notions and assumptions. Firstly, it does not occur in *all* African countries, indeed the practice is not confined to the African continent at all, and in countries where it does happen it is generally not a uniform practice.

Juliana cites the dismay she experienced when, as a teenager, she discovered that FGM was carried out in parts of Ghana, the country where she was born and grew up. "Because it is not in my part of the country, my people don't do it, we didn't understand," she says.

It is a mistake to assume that all women from countries practicing FGM have been effected. Although in countries like Somalia, Djibouti and Sierra Leone over 90% of women have experienced FGM, in Senegal, Cameroon, Uganda and Zaire the practice is a lot more sporadic with rates of less than 30%.

It is equally erroneous to surmise that all women who have undergone FGM are psychologically scarred by the experience. "These women don't see themselves as victims and it's important we don't give them the victim mentality," says Juliana.

"It's a loss because..."

they redefine that to be something that people should have the right to choose."

She advocates a clarification of what is meant by 'sexuality' and believes it to define 'sexual pleasure' as something concentrated on external genitalia. "For some women who are circumcised a blind person, they can use other senses and use that to experience sexual pleasure."

A woman's reaction to the operation depends on numerous factors: the extent to which the woman has accepted the norm of her culture, how old she was when the operation took place, where it took place and in what context.

"If a woman was circumcised in a ceremonial atmosphere where many activities are used to nurture their feelings, they are presented with huge psychological buffers against the physical pain. I've been told girls come out [from the operation] and they are denied the chance to express that it was awful. They get the response 'what are you talking about? You get the red carpet treatment, you get festivities at the end of it, what are you talking about?'"

"All these festivities secure the girl against the psychological effects but when the girl has the operation outside the cultural context it has huge psychological effects," says Juliana.

She also cites anecdotal evidence, which suggests that the negative psychological impact of FGM may be reduced if the operation is done at a younger age.

Communities that practice FGM do so for a myriad of reasons that are...



promote hygiene, to accentuate femininity, to enhance the man's sexual pleasure, to mark a rite of passage into adulthood or to preserve a girl's virginity. Muslims, Christians, Jews and the followers of traditional Animist religions alike may practice it.

The NSW Education Program on FGM was established in September 1997 and is funded by the Commonwealth Department of Health and Family Services who allocate the money through the NSW Department of Health. Similar programs are conducted in other states and territories. The Program aims to prevent the occurrence of FGM in Australia and to assist women and girls living in Australia who have already been effected by FGM, to minimise the adverse health outcomes and psychological harm.

Prior to this, the Ethnic Affairs Commission of NSW also ran an education program on FGM that Juliana worked for. The program was funded by the NSW Treasury between April 1995 and November 1996 following the passage of legislation criminalising FGM in NSW.

The barriers to prevention are overwhelming. FGM is more than just an isolated event effecting certain individuals; it is an integral part of the day to day life of the village. "You have to think of what the process of change would do, not only to the individual, but to the whole life of that community. It would break the community apart," Juliana says.

She describes the importance of FGM in Sierra Leone calling it "a process of social cohesion." FGM takes place after the harvest. Groups of girls are taken to huts outside the village and circumcised together. While they are healing, the older women teach them all they need to know to live as an adult woman in the village. They are taught everything from child development and marital relations to dance and hair-care. When they return, the whole village participates in the celebrations.

"How do you get rid of the operation which is the defining factor in all of this?" asks Juliana.

"What we need to do is work through with [Sierra Leoneans in NSW] to separate the operation from the whole process, to say 'is there any other thing we can do to ritualise this process without touching the girl's body?' We haven't found anything at the moment and this is something we will be working on in the next few months."

The recriminations faced by women who refuse to circumcise their daughters are another obstacle to prevention. In the countries of origin, the child is likely to be ostracised at school and possibly for the rest of her life. The mother may be condemned by the whole community and faces the prospect of her daughter never marrying. As outcasts in their society their lives are virtually rendered unlivable.

Despite these difficulties, both the Programs have contributed to some important advances in the treatment and prevention of FGM in NSW and Australia. Program workers were successful in campaigning for the recognition of deinfibulation – the process of unstitching a vaginal opening which has been sewn together during circumcision – by the Federal government as a life-saving medical procedure. Now women effected by FGM can be deinfibulated in a public hospital and have the costs covered by Medicare.

Program workers assisted the birth unit at Auburn Hospital, in Sydney's west, to establish policies and procedures for the care of women effected by FGM during childbirth. They also assisted the Royal Australian College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists to publish a book on FGM for health professionals.

The Program played an instrumental role in the lobbying that resulted in the NSW Family Planning Association employing a part-time worker to deal with issues relating to FGM.

Most importantly, training programs have enabled many women effected by FGM to identify the health problems they experience as being a consequence of FGM and seek appropriate medical attention.




Juliana Nkrumah, Community Education and Development Officer of the NSW program on FGM.

The personal sacrifices for workers involved in running a program of this nature are significant and their perseverance is a key factor in making these achievements.

"It has been the most challenging time of my life", says Juliana, who has been employed by the program since 1995.

"I have had the community on my back, I've had stress and pressures, I've had people insulting me, I've had people vilifying my character. But one thing it taught me is to realise I'm pretty stubborn in the sense that I believed this had to be prevented in New South Wales and I put my life on the line for it."

The NSW Education Program on FGM is based at Cumberland Hospital, Parramatta. For more information on the Program contact Juliana Nkrumah on 02 9840 4101 or Lesley Garton on 02 9840 3910.



*If you can enter your clients' worlds for a time
and join them on their journey, you may find a
new understanding and respect for how their
worlds are different from your own.*

*(Ivey, Ivey and Simek-Morgan, *Counselling and
Psychotherapy - A Multicultural Perspective*, 1993, p.2)*

COUNSELLING VIETNAMESE REFUGEE SURVIVORS OF TRAUMA

POINTS OF ENTRY FOR DEVELOPING TRUST AND RAPPORT*

What approaches should health and welfare professionals adopt when working with Vietnamese survivors of trauma? STARTTS counsellors **Tiep Nguyen** and **Robin Bowles** share some of the knowledge they have acquired in the past decade.

Many authors have pointed out that establishing trust with survivors of trauma is a central issue in successful counselling. This article examines three aspects of establishing trust with Vietnamese clients, which we have been examining in our clinical practice: self-presentation of the counsellor; approaching a problem and working through an issue.

Self-Presentation of the Counsellor

In our experience, we have found that the style and presentation of the counsellor is important for building trust with people from a Vietnamese culture. The complex dimensions in the concept of 'culture' are discussed more fully in the longer published article referenced below.

The style and presentation of the counsellor could be described as 'being a friend' to our client. 'Being a friend' does not at all mean that we should drop our professional role with boundaries and ethics, but rather means that we should be *caring, sharing* and *acting* as a true friend would normally be. Communicating *caring* to Vietnamese clients is being friendly, warm, interested in family, attentive to concerns raised, being an empathic listener, trying to understand and respond to non-verbal communications, and being ready to assist with practical matters.

Presenting 'as a friend' also means that we, counsellors, may initially have to share, or disclose, a little more about ourselves than usual. This is often necessary to put Vietnamese clients at ease and win their trust.

Another dimension of being a 'friendly' counsellor is being a 'friend in need'. Many counsellors of Indochinese refugee clients have found it vital to assume multiple helping roles and to be actively involved in providing them with practical assistance or concrete services that provide immediate

results, before engaging them in dealing with past trauma or in making important self-disclosures.

Approaching a Problem

The success of establishing trust and rapport with Vietnamese clients is not only dependent upon the way the counsellors present themselves as described above, but also upon the way they approach a problem.

Within Vietnamese culture there are distinct ways of dealing with problems. Prominent features of the Vietnamese style include indirect expression of feelings, reluctance to confront conflictual situations, preference for allowing time to work out seemingly insoluble problems, and reliance on personal inner strength in facing difficulties. Given the quite different ways of dealing with problems in Vietnamese culture, we would like to suggest that non-Vietnamese counsellors have to move slowly and gently and approach with the right timing.

Following a respectful, slow pace suitable to the client is important, especially during the rapport building stage, to avoid jarring or offending the client. The timing of approaching the problem is important for maintaining the relationship and for resolving the problem. If the counsellor takes the initiative to bring up an issue, it is important to do this gently, keeping in mind the cultural norm of 'saving face' and the risk of confrontation.

Working through an Issue

As issues begin to be worked through, we suggest three ways of continuing to build rapport and trust with Vietnamese clients: working with somatisation, working from here and now and working through the family.

A great number of Vietnamese refugees express their experience of emotional distress under the guise of physical symptoms such as headache, fatigue, insomnia. As somatisation is

a culturally acceptable way of presenting mental problems, counsellors can work with these problems first, before moving onto deeper levels.

Most Vietnamese refugees are concerned with day-to-day survival. Offering them practical assistance is seen as offering much needed help and assisting to set up a trusting relationship and also an external environment in which emotional issues can be more safely worked through.

For Vietnamese, the family plays an important role, in a resettlement country as well as in their country of origin. It appears to be present and influential in many issues, which the Vietnamese client discusses in the session. It has been pointed out that the family can support or sabotage the relationship between the therapist and the patient. Therefore, in post-trauma counselling with Vietnamese clients, dealing with the family dimension is crucial for the building of trust and understanding and for the success of the intervention.

It is hoped that this article can contribute some suggestions for successful building of trust between Vietnamese-born clients and their counsellors. Points of entry rather than barriers have been emphasised in three aspects of counselling. Credibility and giving are seen as being crucial in this process. No counsellor need feel afraid to travel along with Vietnamese refugees on the road to recovery from trauma. Vietnamese refugees have a great need for company, because they have suffered multiple losses, including faith in the goodness of humanity. Through a counsellor establishing a trusting relationship with them, they could regain this faith, so as to cherish the life that they have sacrificed everything for.

** This is a reproduction of part of a longer article with the same title, by the above authors, published in the Journal of Australian Social Work, June 1998.*

WORDS THAT WOUND

By Helen Basili

Opponents of laws to prevent racial vilification argue that such laws compromise our right to freedom of speech. But is it asking too much that minority groups bear the burden of hate speech so the rest of us can enjoy this right unhindered?

Words are powerful tools. They can have an impact on minds and hearts. Words in the form of propaganda have moved masses. When words are used to insult, ridicule or incite violence against a group or individual because of their race or ethnicity, the effects can be devastating. In legal terminology this is known as racial vilification.

Australia made its first move towards addressing racial vilification in 1975, when it ratified the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination (ICERD). By agreeing to abide by the Convention, Australia was required to declare racial vilification, or hate speech, "an offence punishable by law".

However, it was another 20 years before Australia introduced racial vilification legislation at the Commonwealth level. Concerns about the effect of potential racial vilification legislation on freedom of speech, expressed mainly by civil libertarians and media commentators, were one of the main reasons for the delay in its introduction.

By the time of the 1996 Federal elections, the issue of racial vilification legislation was still well and truly on the agenda. John Howard declared himself opposed to the existing legislation while the Democrats wanted it strengthened. The ensuing debate illustrated that racial vilification laws are not to be taken for granted and their importance is something that needs to be constantly reinforced.

Academics, such as Canadian

Professor, Kathleen Mahoney, Japanese-American, Mari Matsuda, and NSW Anti Discrimination Board President, Chris Puplick have opposed arguments that racial vilification legislation poses an obstruction to free speech. They emphasise that free speech is not an absolute right and is qualified by other competing rights.

For a Vietnamese boat-person who escaped their country in perilous circumstances, often after a debilitating confinement in a 're-education camp', and whose citizenship status in their country of origin has been virtually nullified, the words 'Asian go home' bring unbearable grief.

In Australia, this idea has been supported by two decisions of the High Court in 1992. The High Court found that although there was an implied right to freedom of speech in the Australian Constitution, the right extended to freedom of expression in a political context only and did not include freedom of expression generally. Freedom of speech is limited by a host of legislation including that relating to defamation, sedition, treason, copyright, privacy, blasphemy and censorship to name a few. Racial vilification legislation,

therefore, does not represent a great obstruction to freedom of speech.

Arguments that assert that racial vilification legislation compromises freedom of speech are based on erroneous assumptions and ignore some fundamental realities. Proponents of such arguments assume that all individuals have equal access to free speech. According to Professor Mahoney: "Advantaged groups possess a disproportionate share of freedom of expression by virtue of their greater share of power and wealth. In a marketplace where some have a greater ability to speak and be heard than others, it is more likely that the ideas of the advantaged will emerge out of the competition of ideas, rather than the truth."

They also ignore the historical factors which have led to the oppression of various groups. The historical context of words is often the key to understanding why they are so damaging.

For a Vietnamese boat-person who escaped their country in perilous circumstances, often after a debilitating confinement in a 're-education camp', and whose citizenship status in their country of origin has been virtually nullified, the words 'Asian go home' bring unbearable grief.

The same could be said of refugees from any country who are confronted with racial vilification. Forced to leave their own countries due to extensive persecution as a result of their race, religion,



ethnicity, politics or social group, the occurrence of further persecution in Australia is severely traumatising.

The arguments used by civil libertarians to oppose racial vilification legislation are founded heavily on ideas formulated in the United States in the 18th and early 19th centuries. Eighteenth century philosopher, John Stuart Mill advocated complete freedom of the press and unrestricted public discussion among citizens as a means of attaining truth. According to Mill, the full truth could only be attained by confronting an opinion with other contrary opinions.

The theory of utilitarianism espoused by Jeremy Bentham in the early 19th century was particularly influential. Bentham argued that citizens must be protected against rapacious governments, which are inherently ruled by self-interest, if the greatest happiness among the greatest number of people was to be attained. One way of providing this protection was to ensure that citizens had the right to unrestricted free speech.

The relevance of these arguments to western democracies in the 20th century is questionable. The assertion that vilifying the most disadvantaged groups in society will lead to the discovery of truth is disturbing. By openly vilifying such groups with impunity an environment is created where racist violence can flourish. For example, a British study found a clear link between the distribution of racist literature and attacks on ethnic minorities.

The Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission's *Report of the National Inquiry into Racist Violence in Australia* in 1991 noted an increase in racist violence towards Arab Australians during the Gulf War. This was a time when Arabs were the targets of much negative media publicity. The *Report* said: "Events following the outbreak of the Gulf War included incidents of vandalism and arson. The most serious incident took place on 24 January 1991 when the Rooty Hill Islamic Cultural Centre at Mount Druitt (NSW) was attacked with a Molotov cocktail in the early hours of the morning."

"A Lebanese family in Sydney was subjected to a 'terror campaign' for almost two months. They felt isolated in an area which had a reputation for hostility to and racist violence against Muslims."

As for the need for protection from governments, Professor Kathleen Mahoney says: "While great care must be taken to contain the exercise of state power, to view the government as villain is incorrect. Governments must speak on behalf of those who cannot be heard to facilitate the expression of their ideas and to promote the interests of tolerance, pluralism and individual autonomy."

Some opponents of racial vilification legislation argue that words alone cannot cause harm. A wealth of evidence exists to the contrary. According to Professor Mahoney: "The purpose and effect of hate propaganda is to lay the foundation for the mistreatment of members of the victimised group." She describes the work of social psychologist, Gordon Allport, who shows how Hitler's vilification of the Jews was the first step in a chain of brutality, which led to the gas chambers at Auschwitz.

The idea that racial minority groups would benefit from knowing they are disliked in an astounding one. It is related to the "fresh air" theory which asserts that it is better for racists to discuss their views openly so that they can be adequately countered and exposed for what they are. Mari Matsuda says that: "To be hated, despised, and alone is the ultimate fear of all human beings." She describes the psychological and emotional symptoms experienced by victims of racial vilification including "fear in the gut, rapid pulse rate and difficulty in breathing, nightmares, post-traumatic stress disorder, hypertension, psychosis and suicide."

The National Inquiry into Racist Violence in Australia described the psychological and social impact of racist threats as "crippling". In particular, it highlighted the devastating effect of racist abuse on refugees: "It is likely to have a particularly damaging effect on those who have come from war-torn areas and anticipated that Australia would provide a safe and peaceful refuge from violence and fear."

To avoid receiving hate messages, victims are often forced to drastically change or restrict their lifestyles. The National Inquiry into Racist Violence in Australia reported the case of a Vietnamese woman living with her two children in Melbourne. After three years of harassment from an Anglo neighbour including racist verbal abuse, destruction of clothing, smashing of windows, death threats and fuses cut at all hours of the day, the woman was forced to move out of her home.

The fear that racial vilification legislation could lead to the perpetrator being depicted as a martyr derives from the Canadian experience, where criminal trials of perpetrators lead to their views being widely and repeatedly broadcast. Given the nature of the Australian legislation, with its emphasis on conciliation rather than criminal proceedings, this seems an

continued on page 21 →

COMPLAINING ABOUT MEDIA RACISM

By Helen Basili

Australian journalists are governed by ethical codes that prohibit racism but lodging a complaint against journalists breaching the codes is no straightforward business.

The person that makes the complaint must be determined, persistent, energetic, skillful in dealing with complex institutions and have a more than adequate grasp of the English language. Even then, the penalties imposed on the offending journalist are likely to be mild and the power to enforce them is limited.



Television and radio stations

The Codes of Practice of the Federation of Commercial Television Stations say that:

"A licensee shall not broadcast a program which:

- (a) Is likely to incite or perpetuate hatred against; and
- (b) Gratuitously vilifies any person or group on the basis of ethnicity, nationality, race, gender, sexual preference, religion or physical or mental disability."

The Federation of Australian Radio Broadcasters has developed a similar code.

To lodge a complaint about a commercial television or radio program the offending station must be contacted directly. If the station fails to respond to the complaint in 60 days, or the person making the complaint is dissatisfied with their response, then he or she may complain directly to the Australian Broadcasting Authority (ABA).

The ABA, if it decides to take action, has a range of sanctions available to it. For example, it can make compliance with a code of practice a condition of license.

Since 1994, only three cases of racial vilification referred to the ABA have been found in favour of the complainant. The incidents regarded broadcasts on commercial television, community radio and commercial radio.

Individual journalists

Clause two of the Australian Journalist's Association (AJA) Code of Ethics states: "[Journalists] shall not place unnecessary emphasis on gender, race, sexual preference, religious belief, marital status or physical or mental disability." All journalists who are members of the Media Entertainment and Arts Alliance are obliged to work under the Code of Ethics.

Complaints about individual journalists can be made to the AJA. It can fine the journalist up to \$1000, suspend the journalist from membership of the Association for 12 months or expel the journalist. These options are rarely used. In the five years to 1997 the AJA fined only one journalist for a breach of ethics.

The print media

The Australian Press Council receives complaints relating to the print media. Under the Press Council's Statement of Principles journalists are urged not to place undue emphasis on race, nationality or colour.

The impartiality of the Press Council is dubious as it is funded by the newspaper and magazine industries. Further, the Council's ability to enforce its findings is limited as its authority rests on the willingness of publishers and editors to respect the Council's views, to adhere voluntarily to ethical standards and to admit mistakes publicly.

The Council requests that any complaints are first taken up with the editor of a publication. If the complaint is unable to be resolved it may then be referred to the Press Council in writing within three months of publication. After hearing a complaint, the Complaints Committee will draft a recommendation which goes to the full council for final adjudication.

Structural discrimination

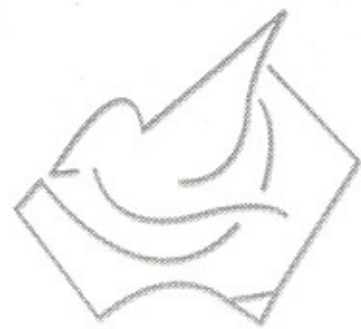
According to UTS researcher Kalinga Seneviratne, it is unusual to find examples of blatant racism in the media however commercial TV and radio, and even the ABC and SBS, virtually ignore the non-Anglo Celtic population of Australia.

"Racism in the media is not necessarily name calling, but lack of non-Anglo Celtic people on our airways who think and talk differently, and the way they are excluded from our media structures, especially in production and management," says Seneviratne.

This inherent problem is one that industry complaint procedures are ill equipped to tackle.

The continued exclusion of Indigenous and non-English speaking background perspectives from the mainstream media and the difficulty of lodging a complaint about racism, means that a balanced, unbiased media is still an ideal to be pursued.

How you can help



survivors of torture and trauma

For people who have an interest in refugee and humanitarian issues but work in an unrelated field, involvement in an organisation like STARTTS can be a gratifying and rewarding experience. It can also equip them with new skills and contacts that will enhance their future career prospects.

This has been the experience of past members of the Friends of STARTTS committee. Friends of STARTTS, or FOS, was established in 1992 as the non-government charity arm of STARTTS. The aim of FOS is to increase the profile of STARTTS and raise money for its projects through a diverse array of fundraising activities and events.

Lovers of the arts have many opportunities to pursue their passion through the FOS committee. FOS has raised money by staging numerous art exhibitions over the years including *The Lost Nolans*, featuring a collection of private paintings by renowned Australian artist Sidney Nolan. *Face to Face*, an exhibition of refugee children's art and writing was organised by FOS in conjunction with the Australia Council and the Ethnic Communities Council. Last year FOS exhibited the work of refugee artists from a variety of backgrounds as part of Refugee Week.

The FOS committee has developed close links with prominent and up-and-coming artists such as Carlos Barrios and Dario Palermo, who have donated their work to FOS for fundraising purposes.

Several classical music recitals performed by talented Vietnamese musicians have also been organised by FOS.

The FOS committee is actively involved in the ongoing drive to increase membership of FOS by encouraging individuals to pay an annual fee of \$20 and pledge their support for the organisation.

FOS allocates its funds to innovative projects such as the unique board game *New Connections*, created for newly arrived refugees to provide them with settlement information in an accessible way. It also assisted with costs for the production of the *Families in Cultural Transition* training kit. The FICT kit went on to win an award for the novel way it assisted refugee families adapting to a new lifestyle. Recreational excursions and camps for refugees,

English classes and arts and crafts projects are just some of the many other activities that FOS has funded.

FOS has been instrumental in publicising events such as Austcare's refugee week by regularly staging a *Candlelight Walk for Peace*. Last year the Hon. Elizabeth Evatt and Cabramatta MP Reba Meaher were among those who spoke at NSW Parliament House at the behest of FOS. The occasion was the annual UN International Day in Support of Victims of Torture.

The work of FOS is assisted by its patrons who include Helena Carr, Kathryn Greiner and High Court judge Michael Kirby.

WANTED

Friends of STARTTS are currently seeking enthusiastic, talented people to be on its committee. Those who are interested are strongly encouraged to attend the annual general meeting of FOS on 31 May 1999. For more information call Lachlan Murdoch or Jorge Aroche on 9794 1900.

One of the keynote speakers at STARTTS 10th anniversary celebrations last year was Professor Janice Reid, Vice Chancellor of the University of Western Sydney. Professor Reid co-authored the 1987 report, *Torture and Trauma: The Health Care Needs of Refugee Victims in New South Wales**, which led to the establishment of STARTTS.

"During the course of our study we were struck by the resilience and dignity of those [torture survivors] we met. Their strength and bearing affected us as did the stories of their pain and loss," said Professor Reid in her speech.

Describing the early years of STARTTS she said: "All those in the organisation had to confront their own vulnerabilities, their fears, anger and grief and to deal with the unrelenting and stressful stories of cruelty and loss."

Professor Reid recalled her involvement with STARTTS as a pivotal time in her career: "When I was interviewed for my current position at UWS this time last year, the chair of the committee asked me about my proudest achievement...I said that I was most proud of having been a part of the establishment of STARTTS."



UWS VICE CHANCELLOR TALKS ABOUT STARTTS

In the following interview, Professor Reid discusses her views about the development of the service over the last 10 years.

What is the significance of STARTTS 10th anniversary for you?

JR. I think it's the success of STARTTS in coming from such small beginnings into being such an important part of the community. It's a very significant service for refugees and migrants but it's also very significant because it's done groundbreaking work which is recognised overseas and which inspired other services starting up in other states in Australia.

So it has significance of all kinds: Community significance, clinical significance and research significance. It's really very much owned by the communities.

Did the process of researching and writing the report *Torture and Trauma* change you in any way?

JR. Yes, I think it touched everyone who was involved in those early days. It was a privilege and it was painful to be talking with people who had never told their stories, who were here, who had no access to counselling and no access to care of any kind. It gave me a much deeper appreciation of the depth of the human experience contained in the refugee stories. It enriched my understanding of the resilience of the human spirit, of the mental and emotional anguish that people have suffered and also the impact of a service like this in actually ameliorating the pain people suffer and helping them to start on a new path.

What sort of impact do you think the establishment of a service like STARTTS has had on refugee communities?

JR. I think it's had an enormous impact. I think it's had it in several ways. It's sent waves of healing through families. Just helping one client helps that client's family. It helps that client's community by enabling that person to feel reintegrated and re-empowered. The way in which STARTTS is operated, quite deliberately, to be a community based service, not just a clinical service, means that its effects have been rippling through a lot of refugee communities. This has enabled other people to come forward and say 'yes, I've suffered too and I can acknowledge that I need help because other people I know have acknowledged that and changed as a result'. But I think we'll never know what its impact has been. I think the impact has been far more widespread than what's immediately visible or the people who are immediately linked to the service. I think it's had a healing effect many times greater than just the pure number of clients it has had.

* The report, *Torture and Trauma* can be purchased from STARTTS for \$10. Call 9794 1900 for more details.

Words that wound

< continued from page 17

unlikely consequence. Our experience with the laws to date does not provide any evidence to support the concern that the racist may be transformed into a martyr.

The argument which illustrates the greatest misunderstanding of the effects of racial vilification is the one which suggests that the victim should learn to be more tolerant of his/her abuse. There is no evidence that tolerance of racist behaviour leads to its diminution. Asking the most disadvantaged groups in society to tolerate their oppression for the sake of dominant groups seems undeniably cruel. Says Mari Matsuda: "Tolerance of hate speech is not tolerance borne by the community at large. Rather, it is a psychic tax imposed on those least able to pay."

The futility of 'tolerance' in the face of racial vilification is illustrated most poignantly by a case reported by the National Inquiry into Racist Violence in Australia:

"A Lebanese family in Sydney was subjected to a 'terror campaign' for almost two months. They felt isolated in an area which had a reputation for hostility and racist violence against Muslims. After an increasing number of incidents, including attempts to set the house on fire and windows being broken by stones, the husband and father of the family suffered a stroke and heart-attack, and died. His physician attributed his death to the campaign."

Arguments about restrictions on free speech have been influential but they have not stopped Australia joining a host of other governments by implementing racial vilification laws. Today, nations as diverse as New Zealand, Canada, Britain, France, Czechoslovakia, the Netherlands, Denmark, Germany, Pakistan, Mexico, Bulgaria, Dominica, Austria and Cyprus all have some form of legislation preventing racial vilification. The message from the international community is clear: hate speech is not to be tolerated.

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REACHING OUT TO REFUGEES IN NSW

By Jorge Aroche

Auburn
Blacktown
Campsie
Canterbury
Fairfield
Liverpool
Manly
Mona Vale
Paramatta
Rockdale

Areas where STARTTS provides counselling services in the Sydney metropolitan region.

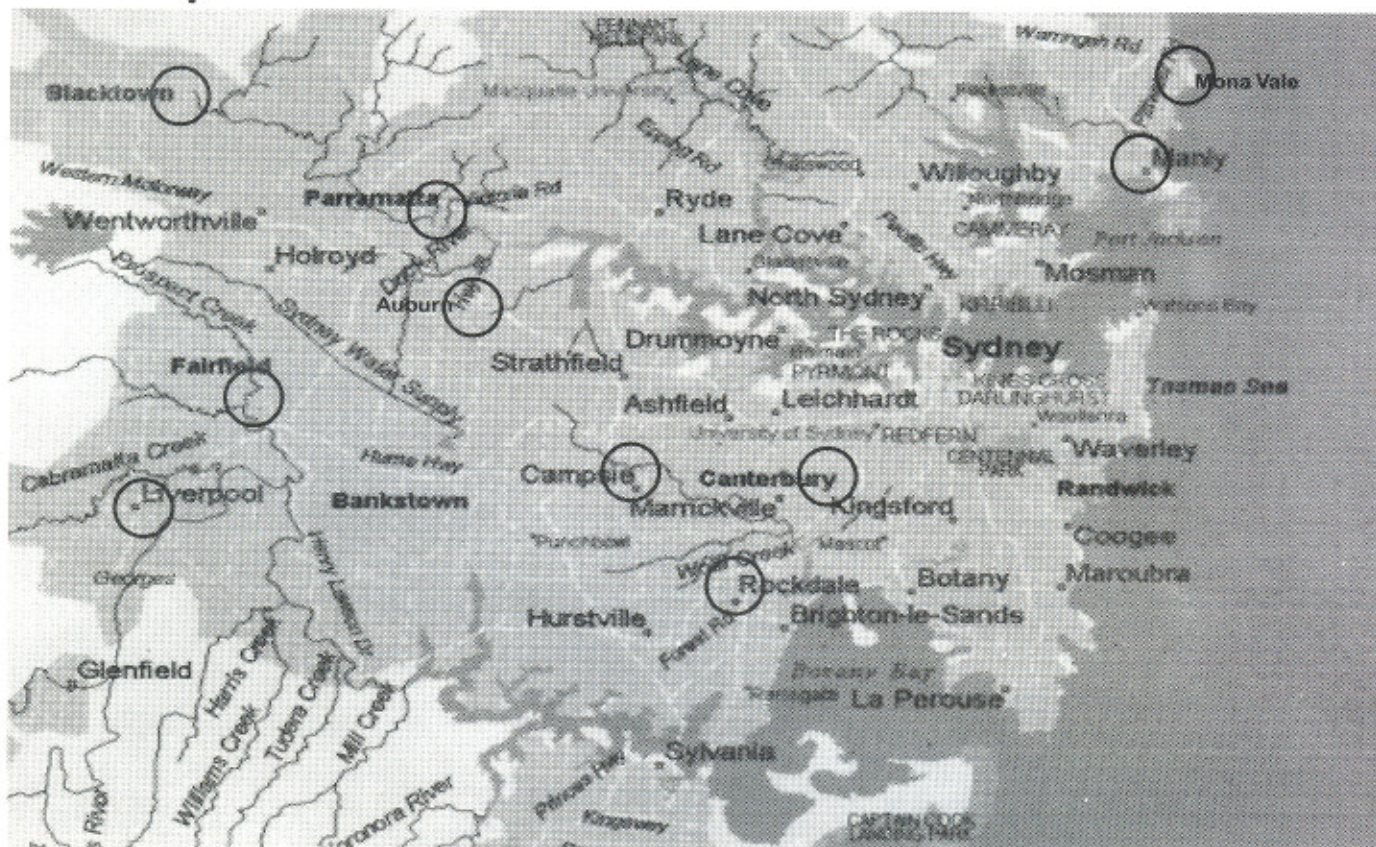
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As a small statewide organisation, STARTTS has faced an ongoing challenge in providing services to refugees across New South Wales. We have experimented with a variety of ways to address this issue, and have decided that the most effective way of reaching refugees in areas outside south-western Sydney involves a combination of approaches. One is having STARTTS counsellors working on a sessional basis from community health centres. The other involves training and supporting health and welfare professionals in other area health services to work with refugees. This has been facilitated by establishing partnerships with area health services in the form of service provision agreements.

STARTTS' outreach strategy has acquired further impetus with the development of STARTTS' Early Intervention Program. Their services are offered to all newly arrived humanitarian entrants in NSW and it is important for them to be able to access the services in the areas where they reside.

At present, direct services are being provided from 11 different locations in Sydney and two more in Wollongong and Newcastle. The place of residence of our clients has changed since STARTTS' early days in 1988. A considerable proportion of our clients now live outside south-western Sydney.

The ultimate aim of STARTTS' outreach strategy is to ensure that people who need specialised torture and trauma services are able to access these services regardless of where they live. We are getting closer to that goal but the greatest obstacle is to find effective ways to address the needs of small populations of refugees living in rural areas. We are currently considering various ways to meet the needs of these groups.



Service Update:

THE EARLY INTERVENTION & CASE MANAGEMENT PROGRAM

< continued from page 7

particularly settlement services officers who work closely with newly arrived refugees in short-term government accommodation - individuals, and community and government organisations.

Establishing an efficient referral network - one that can both receive EICM clients and make referrals to the Program - and developing partnerships with other services has been a major task in the development of the EICM Program.

"While there have been some initial hiccups, on the whole there has been good cooperation from referring agencies and processes are now running smoothly," says Pam.

However DIMA is about to commence a tendering process for many of its services which could result in a vastly different configuration of referring bodies. This will mean that EICM staff will have to start rebuilding the close ties that have been made with

referring bodies over the past few months.

"The environment that we are going to be working in when the tender happens is going to be extremely chaotic because nobody really quite knows how it's going to work...So that process of developing relationships with other services is going to have to go on continually, I would say for the next 12 to 18 months," says Pam.

Recently two focus groups were held for Bosnian and Serbian clients to obtain their feedback on the EICM Program (other nationalities were targeted by similar programs interstate). The outcome suggested that the clients were very satisfied with the services they had received. A Bosnian client attending the group remarked: "Trauma will affect me till the day I die. The EICM worker assisted me in debriefing and offloading the pressure I felt for so many years during the war and as a refugee in other countries."

A PROFILE OF THE BOSNIAN-HERZEGOVINIAN COMMUNITY

The first profile on the Bosnian and Herzegovinian communities living in NSW has now been completed. For the first time social planners and community workers will have concrete statistical data and information that will assist them in planning and delivering services to these communities.

Bosnians and Herzegovinian refugees have been settling in Sydney since the early nineties.

"Until the completion of the project there had been a general lack of comprehensive information on Bosnians and Herzegovinians living in NSW", Ms Indira Novic, President of the Bosnian-Herzegovinian Project says, "the report does not set out to be conclusive but it does provide an overview of the community as accurate as it can possibly be with the information available".

The research project was funded by the Department of Immigration and Multicultural Affairs (DIMA) and was conducted by Beatriz Leoncini and Chun Wing Fan from the Australian Development Training Group. A seminar is being organised to launch the report in June. This event will provide a unique opportunity to discuss in depth the needs and issues affecting Bosnians and Herzegovinians living in NSW as well as the findings of the report.

For more information about the report and the seminar, contact the Bosnian Information and Welfare Centre on (02) 9749 9177 or fax (02) 9749 9372.

**Out of detention but now
feel like you're in Stage 3?**



**The
Coffee
Club**

**meets every Wednesday
from 4.30 to 6.30pm at:**

**Blacktown MRC
every Wednesday in MAY**

**Campsie MRC
every Wednesday in JUNE**

**Auburn MRC
every Wednesday in JULY**

Meet up with other
refugees from Stage 1 & 2
who understand Villawood
and its affects, to spend
some time together.

*** Your questions answered**

*** Speaker**

*** Outings to places of
interest in Sydney**

For more information call:
Melissa Phillips 02 9229 4211
Helen Barnes 02 9699 2063
or Ian Nicol 02 9794 1911.

Mẹ Tôi

Mẹ tôi trong những ngày giỗ chạp
Thường ngồi chắp tay cầu khẩn giờ lâu
Chiếc áo hoa hiên cũ đã bạc màu
Tôi chỉ thấy mẹ dùng khi lễ bái

Đời của tôi nhiều khổ đau oan trái
Mẹ bao giờ cũng cầu nguyện cho tôi
Đứa con trai tù tội mấy phen rồi
Hàng nước mắt chảy giòng trên má mẹ

Ngồi bên mẹ, tôi thấy mình nhỏ bé
Tình thương yêu của mẹ lớn bao nhiêu
Mẹ ơi, con lòng chỉ nguyện một điều:
Được gần sống, đừng lìa xa khỏi mẹ !

Giờ hẳn mẹ mỗi khi ngồi cầu lễ
Cho đứa con tù bệnh chốn rừng sâu
Chiếc áo hoa hiên cũ đã bạc màu
Phải đắm ướt biết bao hàng nước lệ !

(1963)

MY MOTHER

Nguyen Chi Thien

My mother on anniversaries or festival days
Is wont to put her hands together and pray for
a long time
Her old saffron dress has somewhat faded
But I would see her take out for the occasion
My life being full of suffering and injustice
Mother always has to pray for me
A son who has seen a number of jail terms
Causing tears to flow in streams on Mother's cheeks.
Sitting next to her, I find myself so small
Next to this great vast love of my mother.
Mother, I only have one real wish
And that is, never to be far away from you!
Now each time that you sit in prayer
For your sick prisoner son in the deep jungle
The old, fading saffron dress you wear
Must be soaked with tears unending!

From Nguyen Chi Thien, *The Flowers of Hell:*
A Bilingual Selection To Hop Xuat Ban Mien Dong Hoa Ky Publishers, 1996.