

Refugee TRANSITIONS

Summer 2007 - Issue 19

**The Ogaden
A State of Decay**

**The Border
of Discontent**

Biofeedback

Dealing with Pain

Dance Therapy





Message from the Forum

By **JORGE AROCHE**,
Executive Director, STARTTS



Dear Friends,

Many of us working at STARTTS are often asked "How can you work in this field, bearing witness to so much horror, so much loss...It must be very difficult..."

I've heard variants of this question answered many times, in many ways, sometimes even by myself and the answers tend to always fall into three categories:

a) It is hard, but it is also an incredible privilege to be able to assist the people we work with, and to witness first hand the strengths and attributes of people that enable them to survive and even thrive in the aftermath of so much horror.

b) It is hard, sometimes even difficult, but it is also a very exciting area to work in. From a professional perspective, be it clinical or community development, it provides an opportunity to work on the cutting edge, of an area where we have the chance to apply many of the latest advances in our understanding of how trauma and stress affect the brain, the mind and the body, at various levels, and

use this to assist people to claim back their lives.

c) Sometimes it can be hard, but it is also tremendously rewarding to be able to contribute while working on something that aligns your values and your passion with interesting work, great people and a great work atmosphere. Most people can only do these things as a volunteer.

The articles in this issue of "Refugee Transitions" cover all three of these areas, and more... We look at some tremendous real life stories of survival and strength drawn from the experiences of our own staff. We also introduce the conference "Sharing our stories, sharing our strengths", an innovative conference, organized by a group of refugee communities with the support of STARTTS, to bring refugee communities together so they can exchange stories, information and strategies that have worked for them in the past.

We also report on some very exciting breakthroughs in the current understanding of the neurobiology of trauma and how this new information is

helping us develop new approaches to assist some of the people worst affected by torture and trauma. Still on the same theme, we also look at pain from a different perspective, and explore the practical applications of this perspective for pain management and prevention, and examine the therapeutic qualities of the world-port.

Last but not least, we also look at a little known situation in our forgotten conflict section. Ogaden, a place that few people have even heard of, and we also explore the challenges and opportunities facing the Mandaean community in Australia.

I hope you enjoy "Refugee Transitions" 19th issue.

All the best

Jorge Aroche

Refugee TRANSITIONS



OGADEN
A State of Decay
REBECCA HINCHEY



THE BORDER OF DISCONTENT
ANTONIO CASTILLO



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A WEEK IN DHAKA
JOHN CASEY

FORGOTTEN CONFLICTS

- 04 OGADEN - A STATE OF DECAY** REBECCA HINCHEY
10 THE BORDER OF DISCONTENT ANTONIO CASTILLO

AGENDA

- 14 BIOFEEDBACK** DANIELA AROCHE
18 DEALING WITH PAIN TOM NESSER
24 DANCE THERAPY AMBER GRAY

HUMAN RIGHTS

- 28 A WEEK IN DHAKA** JOHN CASEY
32 THE MANDAENS REBECCA HINCHEY

STARTTS

- 36 SOCCER AND RESETTLEMENT**
JASMINA BAJRAKTAREVIC-HAYWARD AND MOHAMED BAARUUD
40 COOKING CLASSES CAROLINE REGIDOR
42 SHARING OUR STORIES, SHARING OUR STRENGTHS REBECCA HINCHEY
44 FROM SUDAN TO AUSTRALIA REBECCA HINCHEY

REVIEW

- 50 THE ISLAND** OLGA YOLDI
51 INVENTING HUMAN RIGHTS VINCENT SICARI

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Refugee 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.



Photo by EcoPrint

OGADEN

A state of decay

There are almost no schools, no roads and no hospitals. Food is scarce and trade in life's basics has been blocked. The Red Cross, the last of the big aid-agencies, was expelled in July. But, in plentiful supply are guns and bullets. Welcome to Ogaden state in Ethiopia, home to the desperate and the dying.

By REBECCA HINCHEY

Ogaden is a barren land with a rich geology. Home to vast quantities of under-explored oil reserves, the precious resource has only added to the difficulties of a region steeped in conflict.

Everyone is a loser in the 50-year-old Ogaden war.

The people of Ogaden look back to betrayal, subjugation and war and look forward to more of the same. Refugees from the land have lived for decades with uncertainty, hopelessness and the fallacy of the United Nations telling

them it's safe to go home.

The US and British governments' donations of hundreds of millions of dollars, designed to prevent the growth of Islamic terrorism, are instead being used against the civilian population to the opposite effect.

And finally the Ethiopians, whose 'democratic' government neglects their basic needs and perpetrates human rights abuses, while spending vast sums on a military campaign against the Somali people of Ethiopia.

This conflict has its beginnings in the European colonialism of the nineteenth century.

In the early 1800s Somalis in Ethiopia enjoyed a largely peaceful life. With no central government, clans wandered freely between the present-day Ogaden and Somali regions, following predictable rainfall to feed their cattle.

The arrival of European explorers in the 1850s shattered this existence. The British Empire quickly laid claim to the lands of East Africa. France, Italy and Ethiopia were hot on their heels. They too saw East Africa as an area of strategic and economic importance.

To the horror of the Somali chiefs, a British treatise in 1897 ceded parts of Ogaden to Ethiopia.

The divided Somalis tried to resist colonial rule, but internal clan conflicts and a lack of modern weapons left them hopelessly disadvantaged. By the 1920s, the Somalis were all but defeated.

At the same time, there was increasing conflict between the superpowers in the region. In 1935 the Italians invaded Ethiopia and annexed British Somaliland into Italian Somaliland.

In 1941, with World War II at its height, Britain defeated the Italians in the region and reoccupied Ogaden and British Somaliland, along with Italy's portion of Somalia. Ironically, the British victory meant that for the first time in history much of the Somali population was united under one rule.

In 1954, Ogaden came under the rule of Ethiopia, despite their differing ethnicities and differing administrative histories. Six years later, the British and Italian Somalilands united to form present day Somalia.

For its part, Ethiopia warned the Somalis in Ogaden: "You are by race, colour, blood and custom, members of the great Ethiopian family. And as to the rumours of a 'Greater Somalia', we consider that all Somali peoples are economically linked with Ethiopia, and therefore, we do not believe that such a state can be viable standing alone, separated from Ethiopia.

Relations quickly deteriorated. In 1960 the Ethiopian Government voided the treaty which allowed Somali pastoralists to move freely between Ogaden



Ogaden: Ethiopia's second largest state

Ogaden is home to about five million people, most of whom are ethnically Somali. The Somalis are mainly nomadic pastoralists, in constant search of ever shrinking pastures for their livestock. Most are illiterate and few have skills outside of their traditional, nomadic and herding lifestyle.

The second largest state of Ethiopia, Ogaden shares borders with Djibouti in the north, Somalia in the east, Kenya in the south and other Ethiopian states in the west.

and Somalia – a substantial hardship for the Somali Ethiopians who relied on this passage for their livelihood and survival.

By 1964 the government's repression of the recently formed Ogaden National Liberation Front (ONLF) resistance broke out into war, with Somalia also entering the fray. The intervention of other nations resulted in a negotiated truce in 1965.

The uneasy peace was short-lived. In 1977 a vicious war broke out between Somalia and Ethiopia over the Ogaden.

Somalian troops invaded Ogaden, taking advantage of an Ethiopia, which had been left vulnerable by the ousting of its long time emperor, Haile Selassie.

It proved a fruitless move, with the intervention of the USSR and its ally Cuba on the side of Ethiopia. Despite their previous support for Somalia, the Soviet Union sided firmly with the Ethiopians. Somalia, no match for the Soviet's superior finances and arms, withdrew their forces from Ogaden in early 1978.



Photo by Zachary Garber

Life in Kenya's refugee camps

For 30 years they have lived on UN rations, and even these twice daily meals are sometimes a luxury. During heavy rains the international trucks get bogged and basic staples do not reach the camps.

"The food we eat in camps, it's the food you give to horses," said Mohamed Barruud, a worker at STARTTS, a second generation refugee from Ogaden and a Somali community leader in Australia.

"I had no idea. We're all very grateful for what the UN gives us. It wasn't until I went to America that I saw what we eat in camps is what animals eat in the west," he said.

Hundreds of miles from the major cities and towns, the camps exist in the most underdeveloped parts of the country. Like much of Africa they are dry, dusty and incredibly hot. At times the heat is so intense that even the hardened Ethiopian Somalis cannot leave their huts. Boredom, uncertainty and listlessness are facts of life.

"There are some schools but only up to year 6 or 7. Kids can go to school but it's just entertainment really," said Mohamed. "Sometimes they are in huts and sometimes just sitting under a tree. Three hundreds students share one classroom and one teacher.

"After that there's nothing left. There's no jobs, no high school, no universities."

Safety is another issue, particularly for women. There is violence between

different clans and tribes in the camp, as well as violence between camp inhabitants and the local Kenyan communities. The Kenyans, who mostly are desperately poor too, have guns. They frequently rob camp members and rape women.

In a 2002 report, Dr Eileen Pittaway and Linda Bartolomei deplored the lack of safety for women and girls in Kenya's Kakukma refugee camps.

"Women from both these communities [refugees and local Tukarana/Kenyan population] are most often the victims of this conflict," they wrote. "There are regular reports of rape and sexual mutilation of refugee women by gangs of Tukarana men. Most recently a 60 year-old woman was raped and her genitals were mutilated.

"The incidence of rape and sexual violence is extremely high and domestic violence is commonplace. The abduction and sale of young girls as brides, the forced marriage of widows and the physical and sexual abuse of those in mixed marriages is commonplace ... Women who are raped by rival groups, especially those who give birth to babies, are stigmatised and harassed and are in urgent need of protection."

Many Ogadenians have left the Kenyan refugee camps to try their luck in other nations or to look for work in the bigger cities. With no skills, no education and no work permits there is not much

on offer. They take the most menial and low paying jobs – polishing shoes in Nairobi or doing back-breaking work unloading trucks.

Tens of thousands have tried to escape to other countries. Many have died on the Somali coast as they tried to flee to Yemen or South Africa. Overcrowded boats, deadly waters and an inability to swim have proved a lethal combination for thousands.

Life in South Africa is not safe either. The local population views them as job and wealth stealers, Somalis, both Ogadenians and others, are considered an easy target. There are no investigations when they die. Many have been murdered by South African gangs.

At least 70,000 Ogadenians remain stateless in Kenya alone. Just 25 families have been granted permanent visas in western countries, representing a tiny portion of the total population languishing in squalid camps and shanty towns.

The failure to provide either a safe returning environment or resettlement has completely demoralised the multigenerational Somali Ogadenian refugees.

The first arrivals in the refugee camps across Kenya, have watched subsequent waves of asylum seekers from Sudan and Somalia being assessed, processed and granted passage to a new country while they continue to wait.

The 1980s saw a mass movement of refugees from the Ogaden region to Somalia. Although official hostilities had ceased, war had destroyed all the limited infrastructure and a crippling drought had laid the country to waste.

Yet Somalia was not a safe place either.

Initially the Ogaden Somali refugees were tolerated. While some resented them taking land, the Somali nationalist feeling of the time meant the Ogaden refugees

were left alone. Life for the refugees was basic, even austere, but it was about to get much worse.

Despite deep divisions, dreams of a greater Somalia gave the clans a common cause. The issue that joined them was their hatred of the corrupt President Siad Barre and a desire to overthrow his brutal Somali government.

By the close of the 1980's both US and Soviet support for the two warring nations was fading. Without US support,

Barre's government collapsed. After he fled to Kenya in 1991, tribes, rebels and warlords fought for power. However, when no single leader emerged the economy collapsed and dreams of a united Somalia died. The anarchy that followed hit the refugees hard.

More than half a million Somali Ethiopian refugees were living in Somalia at the time. Everyone was forced to flee - the Ogadenians included - or be caught up in the violent attacks between different tribes.

Thousands of Ogaden refugees – mostly women and children – died in the little-known Banbalaayo massacres of 1991 and 1992. When their camp came under attack, the Ogadenians were showered with thousands of bullets. Many fell to the ground, dead or dying. Those that didn't tried to run but their only option was to cross the river behind them. Only a few were able to swim. Some men survived, but almost all the women and children drowned.

Banbalaayo – which roughly translated means 'desert of hell' – remains an unpunished and unrecognised atrocity today. Ogadenians in other camps joined the hundreds of thousands of Somalis escaping to Kenya, marking the beginning of a refugee crisis that continues to envelop that country today.

Government abuses ethnic Somalis

The range of abuses committed against the Somali people in Ethiopia spans the breadth of human cruelty. It is part of a long-running and bloody history of conflict that has its roots in ethnic rivalries and attempts to control the Ogaden region.

Although Ethiopia receives hundreds of millions of dollars in foreign aid, Ogaden remains a virtual wasteland. Ethiopian money in the region is spent on soldiers and weaponry.

"The government claims that we are part of Ethiopia, but they have done nothing whatsoever in sharing resources with other Ethiopians and building things for the people," said Abdullahi B Feytin, an Ogaden community leader living in Australia.

"If Adam came back to earth today he will remember Ogaden because there is no change; no roads, no hospitals. The way god created it is the way it is," he said.

Trade blockades and movement restrictions mean that Ogadenians are unable to travel to the markets with their livestock or access pastures for their animals, exacerbating an already dire food situation.

Obstruction is officially denied by the Ethiopian Government, but the United Nations and Human Rights Watch report that trade and aid are not being allowed to reach Ogaden.

"The attacks on villages and economic blockade may be part of a strategy to force thousands of people from rural areas to larger towns and deny [the rebel militia group] the Ogaden National Liberation Front (ONLF) a support base," a spokesperson for Human Rights Watch said.

Whatever the intention, the effect is catastrophic. Mass starvation is just around the corner. If the people cannot access food aid or sell their produce at market, there will be almost nothing to eat by the end of the year.

Food prices already point to the looming disaster. The Famine Early Warning System Network recently announced that the cost of essential provisions in some areas of Ogaden had more than doubled in just one month, 50 kg of rice has risen from US\$24 to US\$55.

"Our people are dying because of hunger, disease and malnutrition," said Hassan Ibrahim Belle, another Ogaden community leader in Australia.

"It is genocide, the food blockages, the expulsion of the international organisations, the killing of intellectuals," he cried.

If Ogadenians are anxious about food, they are terrified of the Ethiopian forces.

Eye witness after eye witness reports villages being burned, livestock confiscated and women gang-raped.

According to Human Rights Watch, Ethiopian soldiers killed 21 people from the Labiga village when they refused to hand over their livestock in June this year.

Gettleman, a journalist from the New York Times, reported on the abuses after a visit early in 2007.

"Ambaro, a 25 year-old now living in the capital city told me she was gang-raped by five Ethiopian soldiers in January. Troops come to her village every night to pluck another young woman," Gettleman wrote.

"Moulalin, a rheumy-eyed elder, said Ethiopian troops stormed his village in January looking for rebels and burned much of it down. 'They hit us in the face with the hardest part of their guns,'" he said.

Torture and arbitrary detention are reportedly widespread. Amnesty International claims that political prisoners, particularly those suspected of links with the ONLF, are being detained and brutalised. Common methods of torture include beatings on the feet while hanging upside down and electric shocks.

As one forty year-old woman told Gettleman: "Soldiers took me to a police station, put me in a cell and twisted my nipples with pliers".

She told how government security forces routinely rounded up young women under the pretext that they were rebel supporters so they could bring them to gaol and rape them.

Ogaden off limits to journalists

While horror stories from Ogaden are disturbingly common, both from refugees and those still living in the state, hearing about them is rare.

The Ethiopian Government wants to ensure the world does not know what is happening in the state. Reporters are not allowed into the region and those in other areas of Ethiopia are in great danger – as three New York Times staffers recently found out.

Reporting on the Ogaden conflict from an unrestricted area of the country in April this year, they were arrested by military officials and held incommunicado for five days. Their equipment was confiscated, they were threatened and Vanessa Vick, a photographer, was assaulted. No explanation was given for their detention.

And yet foreign reporters are treated better than local journalists, some of whom are on capital charges.

The rise of the Ogaden National Liberation Front

In 1984 the Ogaden National Liberation Front (ONLF) was officially founded under the stewardship of a youthful chairman Abdirahman Mahdi. The militia army, the most powerful rebel group in the region today, is made up of ethnic Somalis from the region.

While the ONLF claims it targets 'legitimate' military and political targets, they are also guilty of human rights abuses, including the high-profile killings in April of nine Chinese and 64 Ethiopian civilian oil workers.

The ONLF wants more autonomy for the region and a UN backed referendum, whereby Somalis in Ethiopia can decide

their own fate. They also are opposed to other nations reaping the rewards of their oil without compensating the Ogadenian people.

They use violence, kidnappings and bombings to achieve their aims and are responsible for countless insurgencies against the Ethiopian Government.

Despite their violent tactics, the ONLF have the support of most Somalis living in Ogaden. This is largely in reaction to the appalling treatment of the Ogadenians at the hands of the Ethiopian Government.

Mohamed Barruud just wants the violence to stop.

"When will we stop helping people

with guns and start helping them with education," he laments.

Despite fierce opposition to the ONLF tactics, he understands their motives.

"The people we call rebels [ONLF] today, they are the people whose mothers were killed, whose sisters were raped, whose stock was confiscated and whose villages were burnt.

"It's awful, but the more you commit big crimes, the more people pay attention to you.

"When my aunts, my uncles my cousins were killed, no one cared. But when 75 oil workers were killed, the world began to take notice," he said.

Greater oversight of aid needed

The New York Times' interest in the area was sparked in part by the White House's support for the Ethiopian regime.

The Ethiopian regime is dominated by Christian members who are a key African ally in the United States' 'war on terror'.

Both the American and British administrations provide hundreds of millions of dollars in financial, military and intelligence aid to the Ethiopian government. However, according to some US Senators, there is very little oversight of this assistance. No one is ensuring it is not being used to fight a war against civilians in Ogaden.

In an August 2007 letter to the Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice, 10 US Senators wrote:

"As you know, last month the Ethiopian Government announced a crack-down on Ogaden National Liberation Front rebels operating in Ethiopia's eastern Somali region after the rebels attacked a Chinese-run oil exploration field in April. While the threat posed by the rebels is real and increased security measures in the areas are warranted, the military's operations appear to go far beyond what can be justified by national security concerns.

"Although aggressively denied by Ethiopian authorities, reports of murder, torture, rape and village burnings have been corroborated by independent observers and aid groups struggling to respond to the growing humanitarian crisis in the region.

"For years, the State Department's own Human Rights Country Reports have cited unlawful killings and arbitrary detentions by Ethiopian security forces and police, most of which have never been investigated or resolved. In the meantime, the United States Government has been providing increased non-humanitarian assistance to Ethiopia, with a request to nearly double that support next year."

Where to from here

Their words appear to have had some effect. The United Nations has just sent a fact-finding mission to the region to investigate human rights abuses, as well as food, water and health needs of the population.

For the first time, Washington has allocated \$19 million in funds specifically for Ogaden.

But such actions will not bring about peace unless a lasting solution can be

found. Patchwork aid and food allocations are useful, but only in the short-term.

"We are asking peace loving nations, free nations, to make sure that the genocide, the killing and the human rights abuses in Ogaden stop," said Hassan Ibrahim Belle

"The world responded to problems in Kosovo, Bosnia and Darfur, they responded in Iraq and Afghanistan, the world responded in East Timor. I ask that they do similar in this area too.

"The solution is to make sure that the referendum takes place. Let the Ogadenians for once in their life decide what they want to do with their lives," he said.

"It is only a small problem now, but it will become a big problem like Darfur," said Abdullahi B Feytin.

"I would love to see Australia and the international community taking notice and trying to intervene before it becomes the world's problem," he said. ■

Find out more

For information about how you can support the Somali's living in Ethiopia please call Mohamed Baaruud on 0412 811 466 or email mohamed.baaruud@sswaha.nsw.gov.au

The Border of Discontent



Poor Mexico so far from God, and yet so close to the United States. By Antonio Castillo

Let me tell you one thing; those pinches Americanos will employ illegal Mexicans to build the wall," says Dr. Mauricio Gamboa. An academic at the Metropolitan Autonomous Mexican University, Dr. Gamboa can't hide his irritation when I asked him about Washington's plan to build a wall along the Mexican border. He is convinced that those "damned Americans" - as he calls them - will rely on cheap undocumented Mexican hands to build the proposed wall along the 3,000kms of border that divides Mexico and the US.

Mexicans call it La Herida (the wound) and Americans call it The Line. The Mexican-US border is carved by the Rio Grande that extends from the border town of Tijuana in the west, to the Gulf of Mexico in the east.

For Mexicans the Rio Grande is an open wound that refuses to heal. It is a place where misery and death are never far away. Last year 500 people died trying to cross the border. Mexican Senator Raymundo Cárdenas said that between 2003 and 2006 "more Mexicans have died trying to cross it than the total of German casualties during the existence of the Berlin Wall."

Crossing the border is a matter of life and death. Let's say more like death than life. Since the 1994 decision by Bill Clinton to increase the border patrols at the crossing spots of Tijuana-San Diego - the so-called "Operation Gatekeeper" - and then the 2006 deployment by George W. Bush of a 6,000 strong US National Guard; the number of Mexicans who have died attempting a crossing has increased alarmingly.

Attempting to avoid the tough security patrols, Mexican immigrants have been pushed to the desolated, merciless and mountainous Arizona deserts where the temperatures can reach up to 50 degrees centigrade. It is a land of deadly rattlesnakes and scorpions.

The number of deaths of Mexicans attempting the crossing has increased sharply. According to the Oaxaqueño Institute for Migrant Assistance, from 1999 to 2005, there have been 1239 deaths; however the identification of an additional 127 bodies remains incomplete. Among the deaths - for the same period - causes included 22 deaths by drowning and 87 by dehydration.

If Mexicans think of the border as a wound, the attempt to build a wall is a band-aid. There is general consensus – on both sides of the border – that neither a wall nor a militarisation of the border will stop the bleeding.

However this has not discouraged the US government from making new attempts to toughen its border protection legislation. In early September 2006, the US House of Representatives passed a bill - the Secure Fence Act – proposing the construction of a wall along the more than 3,000kms of border with Mexico, with the objective of stopping the crossing of Mexicans and OTMs (Other than Mexicans) to the US. It will cost as much as US\$2.1 billion.

The US Senate ratified the proposal by an overwhelming majority, and soon after, President Bush signed the bill into law.

“They [American people] want to know that we are modernizing the border so we can better secure it,” he said.

Mexican writer Elena Poniatowska described this initiative as a barbarity in

the face of the destruction of the Berlin wall; the US “wants to build a wall on the longest border line in the world, when in the past Mexicans used to cross from one side to the other without any problem”.

The construction of the “Great American Wall” – the grandiose name as Mexicans have been calling this project. The “US Department of Homeland Security Secure Border Initiative” or the “SBI-net Project,” as the official line goes, “is designed to provide the US Department of Homeland Security with increased security capabilities”.

Central to this initiative is a wall that would extend to cover parts of California, Arizona, New Mexico and Texas. It is not just a massive double iron wall of four meters; it is also a major “virtual wall” that consists of one of the most sophisticated systems of surveillance in any border crossing in the world. As US officials have said, this is the application of old and new technologies.

The tender for the construction of the “virtual wall” was awarded in September 2006 to the Israeli company Elbit Systems

and to its American-base subsidiary Kollsman Inc. Based in Haifa, Elbit Systems is Israel’s largest non-government defence contractor. It is the company that built the sophisticated 500km fence that in 1994 sealed off Gaza and the West Bank.

The selling point for Elbit is its extraordinary high-tech capabilities in surveillance. Elbit’s jewel in the crown is its Border Control and Management System (BCMS). As stated in its prospectus the BCMS “is a state-of-the-art system that supervises and controls all border movements. [It] is an automated, extremely efficient solution designed to detect and thwart border intrusion attempts, identify forged documents, prevent illegal immigration, stop smuggling, combat cross-border crime, as well as to monitor and administer passengers, vehicles and cargo. Its catch phrase advertisement is enticing: “Faster, Far More Efficient Handling of all Border Crossings”.

The company’s subsidiary Kollsman Inc, based in New Hampshire, develops and manufactures highly sophisticated systems of surveillance. The company said the contract was obtained due to its “ability to deliver border-security technology used today in extreme temperatures and high-threat environments.”

Elbit has been very active selling its technology in the Americas. It has provided avionics systems to the Colombian air force valued at about US\$17 million, and to the Brazilian Air Force. Last August it was revealed that the company received three contracts valued at a total of US\$163 million for the supply of tanks and artillery systems upgrades for clients in three Asian countries.

This technological sophistication for the Mexico-US border will assist the existing 11,000 border police. However, there is little evidence to suggest it will stop Mexicans and OTMs attempting to cross the border. Julieta Nuñez, from Mexico’s National Immigration Institute, said that toughening the border won’t stop the flood of Mexicans to USA. “To the contrary, the numbers will increase”.

Daily, 2,800 Mexicans and OTMs attempt a crossing. It is estimated that up

to one million slip across the river while the US patrols have a success rate of one out of four detentions.

Among those crossing the border are thousands of young minors who are trying to achieve the American dream. Immigration activists estimate that up to 40,000 minors cross the border on their own each year. One of the favourite spots is called the Paso Del Aguila (the Eagle Pass), in the Baja California municipality of Tecate.

Julio Morales is only 14 years old and has tried to cross the border “at least seven times.” He is roaming around attempting to find ways to outwit the sophisticated technological devices installed on the border. “In Mexico I can’t get lana (money) and I need to help my mother”.

Amnesty International denounced the practice of undocumented minors being treated as delinquents and subjected to lengthy detention.

If Julio can outwit the border technology, then once in US territory he will have to outsmart the highly sophisticated US Border Patrol equipped with infrared cameras placed in the mountains and choppers equipped to patrol during the night.

“If I get caught seven times; I will attempt eight crossings,” said Julio. But in a burst of pessimism he already thinks he won’t make it. “If this is the case, I will try the Tijuana border.” In Baja California, the border is also blocked by an extensive metal fence, four meters high that extends well into the Pacific Ocean.

“I would get a coyote (people smuggler), if I had the money,” Julio said. For him however the US\$1,500 a head – the minimum needed to pay a coyote is an impossible amount of money. If one day Julio is able to cross the border he will be able to earn an average wage that is four times higher than in Mexico. That is the American dream.

Apart from “real walls” and “virtual walls” the US government has tried to toughen its penalties against those caught in the US without documents. One of the initiatives was to remove from the Department of Justice all matters related to migration affairs. Immigration matters are

now under the stewardship of the Department of National Security.

The other initiative – far more controversial on both sides of the border – was the criminalisation of undocumented people. This was the key objective of the 2005 “Border Protection, Antiterrorism, and Illegal Immigration Control Act (H.R.4437).” This anti-immigration legislation was passed by the House of

Mexico’s coffers need the migrants’ remittances.

The Californian agricultural sector can’t flourish without them. Undocumented Mexican workers are a central part of the agriculture business in California. Howard Rosenberg, the author of the report Who Works on California Farms, exposed the dependency of Californian farmers on the labour of illegal



US Mexico border fence on Tijuana side looking into San Diego

Representatives at the end of 2005. The bill in part establishes criminal penalties for illegal immigrants; previously this was a civil matter. It also banned citizenship for children born in the USA to illegal immigrants. In addition it increases penalties for employers who hire illegal migrants.

Despite the bill’s collapse this year due to technicalities; it’s only a matter of time before it goes back on the political agenda in Washington. It will be one of the key topics in the 2008 presidential election. The undocumented immigrants are not only a political issue but an economic one, on both sides of the border.

The Californian economy depends on cheap undocumented labour; and

immigrants. This study showed that 91 percent of seasonal workers were born in Mexico and that more than 42 percent were illegal. It is estimated that there are around 450,000 Mexican immigrants working in the agricultural fields of California, of which 70 to 80 percent are illegal immigrants.

Undocumented provide the Mexican economy with about US\$18 billion annually, making them the second largest source of income after oil revenue.

This is the point: as long as undocumented immigrants can find work on the other side, neither walls nor high-tech gadgets will stop Mexicans and OTMs crossing. And the wound will keep on bleeding. ■



Highway sign showing family crossing



BIOFEEDBACK

Rebuilding Fragile Foundations

Psychology and physical therapy have long been proven to be essential to the rehabilitation of torture and trauma survivors and to their return to normal life - but often the horrors of trauma over a prolonged time cut so deep that even a therapist cannot get close enough to act. DANIELA AROCHE attended the recent STARTTS clinical evening to find out more about neuro-feedback and fear extinction learning – two therapies delving deeper into the psyche to facilitate further treatment of Post-traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD).

Introduction to PTSD

From remembering a complicated algorithm, to facilitating every day thoughts and movements or channeling instinctive reactions – the extraordinary control center that is our brain enables us to feel, think, analyze and react in perfect synergy.

But in the event of trauma - in any way, shape of form – that synergy is interrupted, and a deregulation of brain function occurs, overlapping the normal workings of the brain with an instinctive 'fight or flight' reaction.

The psychological effects are scaring - the extent of which depends on both the trauma suffered and the individual's own response and reaction – but in some cases the instinctive response to trauma is so strong that even long after the trauma has passed, and the danger is over, the initial 'fight or flight' response to once threatening stimuli continues – even once normal life has resumed.

This is described as Acute Stress Disorder, a predictive symptom of posttraumatic stress disorder – a chronic condition which can formulate from prolonged trauma.

Besides the obvious psychological impacts of exposure to prolonged trauma and the developing PTSD, research has also come to show that those who develop PTSD also suffer from physical changes to the brain – more specifically a few areas of the brain called the amygdalae, hippocampus and medial prefrontal cortex.

These are areas of the brain that work both independently and collectively to control emotions, fear reactions, learning, memory and stress management. Prolonged trauma severely affects these areas of the brain to the point where a subconscious record of the events, surroundings and other stimuli before, during and after the trauma, along with the initial 'fight or flight' reaction is ingrained in the brain.



The bottom line effect is that the individual then reverts to the 'fight or flight' instinctual reaction, whenever this stimuli – whether it be certain smells, movements, colours, surroundings or feelings experienced when the trauma first occurred – presents itself.

Essentially these triggers were encoded into their 'state' or unconscious memory at the time of trauma and so they are now strongly associated with the traumatic event, even when the actual person, place, action or object is not actually threatening.

Besides the obviously crippling effect that PTSD and its symptoms have on the individual, their partners, friends, family and their everyday lives – the most immediate problem lies in the fact that this particular type of trauma is particularly difficult to treat.

The condition is multi-layered, and with the PTSD symptoms acting as a shell against the deeper, psychological issues beneath - even extensive therapy sessions and traditional treatments are rendered ineffective – and in most cases, the therapists are not even able to get close enough (either mentally or physically) to the patient to work on the core issues beneath.

Clearly, this creates a serious barrier for the therapist and ongoing treatment, so the removal of this initial defence reaction and finding a way to retrain the brain to separate these every-day 'triggers' from the traumatic experience is essential so as to commence the in-depth psychological therapy.

Neurofeedback therapy (Neurotherapy) is based on the learned modification of brainwave activity by the process of operant conditioning. A patient is given positive or negative feedback about the state of brainwave activity via a computer game or by changes in volume or brightness of audio and visual signs from music or movie files. The patient is effectively observing their own brain activity in real time and can ultimately learn to modify this activity with practice and repetition.

Neurotherapy can help to promote the formation of new synapses (connections) between nerve cells in the brain, therefore improving efficiency of brain activity in patients with learning, behavioural or mood disorders.

Retraining the brain

The beauty of neuro-feedback is that it essentially helps the patient help themselves.

Of course, it's not as simple as that – but what neuro-feedback provides is a space whereby the patient can essentially 'control' the movements and direction of the neuro-feedback exercise by regulating their own brain waves or how they think and react to certain stimuli.

During neuro-therapy, EEG sensors are placed on the scalp and connected to high-tech electronic equipment which provides direct audio and visual feedback about brainwave activity. The sensors measure the electrical patterns coming from the brain, which are then relayed to the computer and recorded.

Ordinarily, brainwave patterns cannot be influenced because of a lack of awareness of them. However, when one can actually see their brainwaves on a computer screen a few thousandths of a second after they occur, the connection between thoughts, actions and the brainwaves they produce is exceptionally clear – and this creates the opportunity - and gives the patient the ability - to influence and change them by producing brainwaves at particular frequencies. This is called operant conditioning.

These brainwaves are then incorporated into the computer game by initiating a reaction from the characters or objects in the game.

At STARTTS (Service for the Treatment and Rehabilitation of Torture and Trauma Survivors), neuro-feedback sessions are supported by a trained counsellor, who supervises participants throughout the therapy.

This is also the first time neuro-therapy has been undertaken with refugee populations, and the therapy has produced

very positive results in patients who previously presented resistance to other therapies due to their prolonged exposure to trauma.

One of STARTTS counsellors, Mirjana Askovic, who works with patients participating in neuro-feedback, presents at the clinical evening and says that many of the patients have benefited from the therapy, with positive outcomes including a greater sense of emotional calm, reduction of fear response, ability to sleep better and increased body awareness to name a few.

Once neuro-therapy has alleviated the brains automatic survival fear reaction through reconditioning, patients are more able to absorb and take advantage of other, more common types of therapy, and continue on their road to recovery.

Acute Stress Disorder and fear extinction learning

There are a number of ways to treat PTSD, each method and therapy depending on the patient and their own receptiveness or resistance to the treatment.

The practice of fear extinction has been associated with eliminating or alleviating fear reactions in people who display symptoms of Acute Stress Disorder, which can develop into PTSD – essentially treating the initial symptoms of PTSD.

In typical extinction learning or fear-conditioning, a stimulus such as a tone or coloured card, is paired with an aversive event such as a shock. After several pairings of the stimulus and shock, the presentation of the stimulus itself leads to a fear response.

Extinction occurs when the event is presented on its own, without a shock several times – eventually the stimulus loses its negative association to the patient and can be presented without eliciting a fear response.

Although fear extinction learning has been regarded as process of "unlearning", in actual fact, it is rather a process of new learning - of fear inhibition.

DCS - Accelerating extinction learning

The guest speaker at this particular STARTTS clinical evening is Richard Bryant, Scientia Professor, and ARC Professorial Fellow in the School of Psychology, University New South Wales, and Director of the PTSD Unit at Westmead Hospital.

His work in the past few years has consisted of ongoing research into PTSD, including a range of studies on the psychological effects of trauma, and most recently developing the first assessment measures for acute stress disorder and consequently conducting the only controlled trials for acute stress disorder.

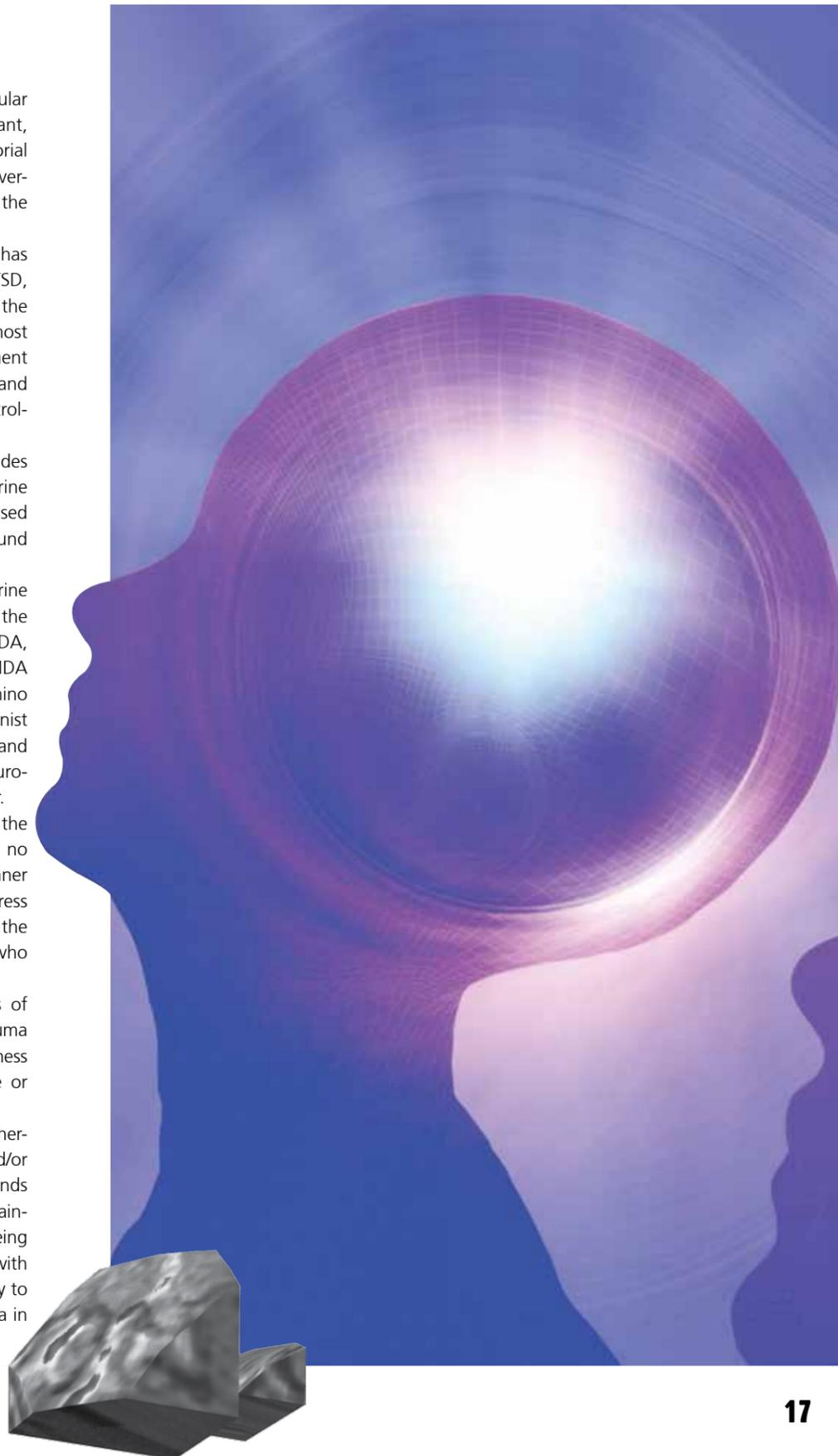
Bryant's current work also includes research into the medication D-cycloserine (Seromycin), originally an antibiotic used to treat tuberculosis which has been found to accelerate extinction learning.

When administered, D-cycloserine (Seromycin) or DCS, essentially boosts the activity of a brain chemical called NMDA, which is needed for fear extinction. NMDA (N-methyl-D-aspartic acid) is an amino acid derivative acting as a specific agonist that acts on the NMDA receptor, and therefore mimics the action of the neurotransmitter glutamate on that receptor.

This - coupled with the fact that the antibiotic currently displays little to no side effects - has made it a front-runner for treating the symptoms of acute stress disorder, and in this way avoiding the development of PTSD in those people who may be susceptible.

Of course, there are many types of therapy available in the treatment of trauma and PTSD, with each therapy's effectiveness dependant on the patient's resistance or receptiveness to the treatment.

Essentially, both DCS and neuro-therapy act as aids in the prevention, and/or treatment of PTSD – working at other ends of the scale with similar processes of training the brain – the hopeful end result being to use both methods in conjunction with other, more traditional types of therapy to help the patient overcome their trauma in the most effective way possible. ■



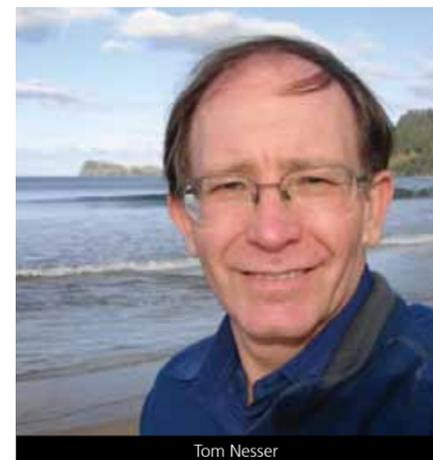


Dealing With Pain

Dealing with people who have chronic pain has taught New Zealand psychologist TOM NESSER many things. He spoke to OLGA YOLDI about his experiences working in one of the hardest and most unpopular areas of psychology: pain management.

“Regardless of how lucky, blessed or privileged one might be, there is no life that is not called at some time to walk through the bleak valley of suffering,” writes John O’Donnohue.

“When suffering comes into your life it brings great loneliness and isolation. Your life becomes haunted: your belonging breaks, the normal certainties collapse....”



Tom Nesser

You have been working with people with chronic pain for quite some time. Would you agree with this definition?

Yes indeed. Suffering brings a sort of darkness with it. When I am well, I feel alive. For me feeling alive is being outside, feeling the wind and the rain on my skin and being part of the world. But when I am in pain, I am closed in and separated from life. I don’t feel I have a place in the world or that I am part of anything greater.

Many people in pain feel a deep, existential sense of injustice, particularly when it has been caused by an accident or through the carelessness of other people. Pain breaks our sense of connection with the world. We feel not only broken, but also fragmented and very alone, and to work with this therapeutically means that we have to instil some kind of hope in the patient, because despair erodes hope. It erodes the possibilities of life. People with persisting pain can experience a deep sense of horror at times, because pain slowly stifles their soul and their capacity to appreciate that life is always bigger than they are. Because of their injury, life becomes smaller and smaller. Looking at it from that angle, I would say that pain is a psychosocial and spiritual experience

in which we lose connection with our body, with others, and with the world.

I guess you don’t only lose the connections, but your status as a person.

Yes, because pain prevents you from doing things. Men particularly derive their sense of self-worth from what they do. I am worthwhile, because I am competent; I can build, make things, achieve goals, meet challenges and make decisions. Now my pain comes in and changes all that. I can no longer do all the things I feel I should be doing. Internally, I feel as if I should be able to, but when I try to push myself my pain becomes unbearable and I am pushed back into a corner, I lose my sense of self and feel useless. I have little stress resilience, less confidence and I have a deep feeling of not being good enough. Then I label my whole existence as useless. I become devalued and I suddenly feel a hopeless rage and envy towards those who look healthy and happy.

Because of the pain, the sufferer feels different to others, but he still wants to feel



part of a larger community. He is still part of his family and culture but remains aware of what is broken, and finds it very hard to make sense of the meaning of pain. Pain is such a profound experience. It redefines the individual and all that it is to be human. Sufferers feel they have been pushed to the end of their humanity. Many of our health systems struggle to find a way to reintegrate people into their social groups when they have weakened relational connections. Medically we can give a pill to reduce pain. We can go to counselling for help to cope with the pain, but ultimately what many patients long for is to be reconnected with others, although they may not necessarily be able to articulate it in that way.

Why are pain and trauma unpopular areas to work with? How do you go about helping your patients?

As therapists and helpers, we like to work in areas that produce clear and definite results. When we work with patients we need to understand their issues can become embedded in their psyche over the years. We need to gain an appreciation of the nature of the changes that have happened to them, including the way the brain operates. For instance the hypothalamus, within the mid-brain, is substantially smaller in people who have had long periods of exposure to traumatic experiences than in the normal population.

As therapists, we need to ask ourselves, what can we realistically accomplish? When we start to deal with a person's depression, panic, isolation and withdrawal, other issues will often come out as well. Many different factors combined will make it difficult to unravel the complexity of the problems.

I am not necessarily going to make my patient feel better immediately. What I need to do is get a sense of the feel of the person and ask, with all the accumulated life experience, what is his or her potential now? What are they capable of becoming in the best sense of the concept?

Frequently, when patients come to me or to my colleagues, they have been assessed by a range of professionals and

specialists and have had a variety of treatments. So they may feel misunderstood or angry and they can take it out on us. As therapists, we need to become aware of what our own physical, emotional heart-felt responses to the people that we are working with are. I think many therapists can become quite sensitized to emotional and physical pain, because they see and experience it all the time.

I see colleagues who have developed an inability to take pleasure in the little things in life themselves, as they start to become vicariously traumatised through exposure to a whole depth of emotional suffering that just seems to continue round and round. Unless we can guard ourselves from this kind of process we will not be able to help our patients.

Normally patients want something that will help them right now. One of the difficulties that I find is that initially they cannot concentrate for a whole session. They cannot hold different ideas in their mind long enough to process things. So if I allow the session to simply happen in a client-centred way, it won't work, because often the patient will repeat himself, going through the same patterns that they have experienced up until this point. Initially they have difficulty in applying the ideas the therapist suggests. At times they will have a deep sense of what Martin Seligman has described as "learned helplessness" I don't say that in a critical sense, but rather as an acknowledgement of a reality.

What happens to the body and the mind when one is in pain? Is it true that the more you resist it the longer it stays?

Pain is like a magnet. As it draws my attention into it, it makes me more aware of it. People normally avoid frustration and pain, as well as those situations that trigger awareness of it. So if I am experiencing physical pain, I will develop a range of postures, movements and ways in which I hold my body in order to minimise the pain, which will inevitably result in reduced activity, whether that be physical activity or social interactions with others. On the

other hand, since we are social beings, the more I split away from connections with other people, the lonelier I become, and in that loneliness I am going to start experiencing depression. It is very hard in that context not to be negative about what I can do physically, emotionally, intellectually and spiritually.

I want patients to understand the social and the transpersonal context in which they find themselves.

There are no thoughts, no impulses or sensations that I can have that don't impact on a physiological level. I want people to understand what is going on in their body in terms of the changes in their hormonal system, their nervous system, the way they breathe and the way their heart beats as they experience suffering. This can provide them with a body-based set of cues that can be valuable tools in managing their own suffering.

I have discovered that if I can explain to a patient what is happening to him or her physiologically in understandable terms, it makes it more acceptable to them than if I had explained it in psychiatric terms.

Pain is a significant physiological and emotional stressor. When I experience high levels of stress, the different systems in my body do not work well together and I lose the sense of inner harmony. This is called physiological incoherence. It takes more energy and effort for the different systems to work together. The more relaxed I am, the more I am able to focus on my pleasurable experience, and not only do I get changes within the brain, but I get a ripple effect going through my different systems as each tunes to other connected systems.

For example, if I start by breathing in a relaxed way, my heart beat will tune in to that rhythm by speeding up when I breathe in and slowing down when I breathe out. The next thing that happens is that my parasympathetic nervous system starts to tune in through to what is known as the Vagus nerve, which has a ripple effect both down to my digestive system and up into my brain stem. Strong connections exist between the brain stem and the mid-brain, which is the seat of our

strong emotional experiences as well as the place that starts a sequence of stress related hormones. As changes happen in the mid-brain, signals are sent to the frontal lobes, where I do a lot of thinking and understanding, and I also start to produce more alpha waves. This synchronised effect across different physiological systems is called coherence, and has been shown to improve immune functioning.

Biofeedback is a valuable tool that I use in order to teach people how to obtain a better level of physiological coherence. This inner coherence also gives me a very good indicator of the degree of stress being experienced by the patient. I use a very simple blood volume pulse to measure the changes in heart rate and the relationship this has to the rate of breathing. The autonomic nervous system both influences and is influenced by the heart, and computer programs exist now that enable the biofeedback equipment to provide an indication of how stressed or relaxed the patient is. Patients are then able to learn how best to release tension and achieve the best possible inner state despite their pain. This in turn improves their quality of life, and helps them to cope better with the challenges brought about by their pain. Although it is not a cure, it is possible to begin a cycle of improvement in which the patient is able to obtain an increased sense of being able to have greater influence over the way he feels. This reverses the "learned helplessness" and the sense of being disconnected which I spoke of earlier.

Also, I want to de-pathologise the concept of trauma and pain by speaking instead of pain and trauma as involving a set of learned habits. We also need to challenge some of the myths that we have all been brought up with. For example, many people believe that pain and pleasure cannot coexist. You can experience a deep sense of dis-ease and still have a place, separated from the rest of that experience, where you have at least a little awareness of pleasure. While we are aware that patients have reduced physical and emotional abilities, we can acknowledge the reality of these difficul-

ties but also frame each difficulty as a potential strength in some way. In other words, I want patients to relearn some of the simpler ways of enjoying life again, savouring the moment and being able to trigger more positive experiences instead of being sucked into a deeper sense of despair by their pain.

So do you mean that weaknesses can actually turn into strengths? Do you mean that if you learn to carry pain you can lessen its burden?

Yes. I want to be able to provide some alternative ways of living that are easy to understand, learn and practice. I then want to focus on some strategies that are simple enough for them to do in order to gain some relief early in the treatment. But I have learned not to make promises, not to make cheap reassuring comments. At times the patient may be upset by what I say, especially if he or she is entrenched in a particular way of seeing their problems and I want to do all I can to help them become more solutions focused, rather than problem focused.

I commit myself to not just trying to improve the person's experience but also to understanding it. In that understanding a connection is established. Then hopefully I will be able to start to instil some sense of hope. I try to help the patient redefine what change means for him or her. Some patients desperately want to regain their previous level of function, and insist that no other change is worthwhile.

To make matters worse they tend to idealise their past life, and believe that they were capable of doing more, prior to their injury, than was in fact the case. They can use that impossible dream to help reinforce the stagnation in which they find themselves now.

My role is to redefine the value of little changes. It is not so much yearning for what you could be, but being able to appreciate what you already are. What I try to teach people ultimately is to pay attention, to appreciate the little things in life. What defines happiness is not what you accomplish. Happiness is an internal experience. The external things such as

health and wellbeing will influence my happiness, but don't determine it. Because of my pain I may never again be fully able to do everything I used to do, but what I can do is place value on finding little shelters, islands of wellbeing in a stormy sea of pain.

Teaching people to enter these islands and enjoy the small pleasures is vital. It is not to say there is no storm outside or no sea of despair out there, but it is saying that their reality can also include the little islands and they have to negotiate their way there themselves.

My message is: If your life as it is now is swept away by pain, you still have some other undeveloped potentials within you, which under normal circumstances you may never have used. Or may never have even known about. So if you can release the developed potential and start to explore the undeveloped one, you can get results that might work for you, which might fulfil you, and could potentially change your whole experience.

The transitional journey into this unfamiliar territory may be difficult, but it is important to give myself permission to start exploring. Sometimes this is hard because people don't place value on little things, which are essential to be able to create some sense of balance between pleasure and pain.

Learning to enjoy life when you are in pain must be one of the most difficult things to do.

I will tell you that where I live in New Zealand we have lots of rain and mist. In these weather conditions I normally drive to various clinics through beautiful countryside. There is one particular place in the journey where I go through a series of mountain roads that look down on a valley that is often covered by mist during winter. I know every inch of that road, and when the mist is heavy and the visibility might be down to 15 metres or so, I play a kind of game with myself. The game is to try to remember different landmarks alongside the road that are now obscured by the mist. I may not see the different trees or paddocks because of the mist, but

as I get up close to them they suddenly spring into sight.

It is just like that for people suffering from chronic pain. You have got to get close enough to the little pleasurable experiences to be able to notice them, because pain is like a mist that obscures the pleasures which are still there.

Everyone is wired to experience pleasure, but at times we have to make some conscious choices and learn new skills to be able to notice the pleasures in life. So patients have to orientate themselves in a radically different way to their normal life by learning to savour and pay attention to these little moments of pleasure.

I say to people that if the Innuits in North Canada have 20 words for snow, I want you to develop 20 words for pleasure. I do not give pain diaries for people to fill in over the week. I give them a pleasure diary instead. I say: go away and try to take your attention away from the distressing experience of pain and focus instead on the little moments of pleasure. This is where it becomes important to develop a mindfulness, a discipline and an ability to pay attention to the little things. I use the example of becoming physically fit. It is initially hard but it is achievable. I want my patients to exercise their pleasure place and I want them to become pleasure fit. It is really important to understand this. So I say to them: let's have a look at meditation, let's have a look at diet, exercise, relationships and conflict, mood, irritability and sleep, all of which are concrete things. This is not about avoiding and escaping the pain which is still there regardless. We have a challenge here. The question is how prepared I am to face it, to embark on the task of building temporary shelters.

I suppose people end up finding the resources or some mechanism to survive, and that will vary from person to person.

I worked with some trauma survivors, women who had been sexually abused as children, people who had gone through horrible experiences and had been subjected to violence, women who had experienced horrific domestic violence or

torture. I had some people describe to me how they managed to keep going through that by retreating into a place in their minds, what they called their god place, a memory of some good experience. They focused on that and have drawn some sense of emotional strength from that despite the simultaneous pain.

We tend to believe that we must stop suffering before we can have quality of life, that there must be a medical answer when there is not always one.

Some people say it is the illness that cures you.

Yes but it is a "shock" blessing. I would always advocate other ways of personal growth, but I have seen a handful of people over the years who, in the process of struggling with their own suffering, have become spiritually beautiful people, they are heroes who are unnoticed by the world. They have found a deep healing in a holy way. Suffering is a very sharp blessing in which everyone has a choice. But there are also people who have been crushed by the experience and have become bitter and overwhelmed by resentment. I do not blame them for that, because if I were in their shoes I may well have gone down that way myself. None of us can guarantee how we would react to the experience.

What practical advice would you give to people with chronic pain?

People with chronic pain conditions have to be very selective as to what they do with their lives because they have less energy, less resilience and less ability to sustain an activity. They need to place value on self-nurturing and doing things they value that help them to go beyond their own suffering, perhaps providing some kind of care to others despite their own suffering. If they fail, their pain will wear them out.

Of course there are different stages. Connecting with the pain may be necessary but most patients cannot do that initially because they are too overwhelmed by the experience.

As a therapist I do not place much emphasis in the early stages on welcoming the pain. I do not say to people 'keep fight-

ing' because I do not believe in that either. I say it is a matter of finding the balance of what is right for you. I am not sure what the balance is for you but I do not want to encourage you into any extreme.

There are aspects of that condition that we can never truly escape. I believe instead in making forays into the pain experience to see what I can change, and then making forays into other experiences that will hopefully emerge in my life despite the pain. It is not about facing or not facing the pain. The point is how I can immerse myself in life again, rather than trying to get away from the pain. If I can live life to the best of my abilities now, then I am able to face all of life, including the pain, including my desire to escape. The point is to live life. That is the challenge. Yes, we have pain but we are able to enjoy life in some other ways to develop and grow. It is possible to do it.

We all carry our own wounds. Some say suffering refines us, that it transfigures and enlarges human beings.

Pain is something that is unwelcome in modern society it is an inconvenience and it is supposed to be curable. We have fallen into believing that we must be able to cure everything. It is actually quite worrying. Yes, life involves suffering. This is not a complaint or a criticism but a simple statement of facts. I remember hearing a story years ago about botanical research on plants. They were trying to get a new breed and the plants were getting the right mix of genes, but they were very sick and weak. A lab assistant drew this to the professor's attention who said, "You have to be wrong. The genes are fine; the problem is the plants are living in such a perfect environment in terms of light and nutrients that they are weakened by the ideal conditions. They would be strengthened to disease and resistance if they didn't grow in a perfect environment." So they actually started to make some changes to make the environment less perfect, then the plants grew faster and healthier than they had in the more ideal surroundings.

The average human being can be strengthened by a certain amount of

suffering, pain and hardship. But that is a different order of magnitude to the experience of someone who has been in a catastrophic accident that resulted in half of the family being killed. Having to live through that and adapt to the consequences is a very different degree of suffering to ordinary hardship.

I would rather not have pain, but I need the little deaths in order to prepare me for the big ones, because as I live well through the betrayals, the hardships, the broken hearts, and the illnesses, I will be better prepared. Even the hardships I suffered as a child helped to make me the person that I am now.

I have seen people who had their spirit broken through pain, and I want to treat them with a great deal of respect because I would do them a disservice if I was to deal with their suffering differently. They may lack resources because there are situations where people really do suffer more than they can bear.

Have you come across many cases like that?

Yes, some. I might have seen about 2000 patients in high levels of pain, in abnormal pain. Sometimes I have asked them, how do you bear it? And they say 'because we do not have a choice', so they have found ways of coping that I may not have discovered. However, others just collapse and almost die. They die spiritually before they die physically. That is hard for someone like me in the helping profession, because they leave a residue of vicarious trauma on the helper.

It is a mystery that some people cope with suffering while others don't. What is it that brings out the real strengths of the human soul to rise up to meet these incredible challenges? At times I have felt a little unworthy working with people in that sense, because nothing from my own past can compare with some of the suffering that I see in them. People in the helping profession must be willing to live with the threat that another person's suffering presents to them, and they need to be comfortable with that threat.

At times you go into a room and there is someone in there. You can feel the heavy dark weight, the deploring nature of their suffering. But I have to go there and be open, because I may be able to break through some of the disconnection. I think I can bring some light to someone by understanding and relating to him as a human being rather than as a professional. If I relate to the patient as a human being, I can understand the bigger reasons, I can communicate compassion, and at that moment there is a different quality of light, that is sunshine. It took me two years of working in this field to actually understand that it is my willingness to be with them, to be human with them that is most effective. I may say to them, yes, life is unfair, but I still do value you. In validating their humanity, even their broken humanity, I work clinically and when I find myself struggling with someone's issues I go for a walk along the beach.

Some people never improve. I had to learn to accept that that is also part of the human condition. As a therapist I have to be able to discern what each person is capable of. Sometimes I am wrong, and this is literally as good as it gets, and in that it is helping the person to reconnect first of all with their own humanity and be human.

What have you learnt from this?

For me this work is a profoundly spiritual experience, a continuous journey of discovery. I feel I can work in this area a lifetime and be a beginner, but I am hopefully a beginner who is to some extent able to help.

I have learnt not to delay the good things in life now for the possibilities that might come later. I'd say to you, live and appreciate every moment. Ultimately, the connections that I have developed between people are far more valuable than any possessions I may have. I have learnt that it is okay to live without certainty and that need not be scary. I have learnt not to be contented.

Happiness is no mystery. It is about living life simply and welcoming the little pleasures. ■





Dance Therapy

AMBER GRAY is a dance therapist with 10 years experience working with torture and trauma survivors in the US and Haiti, and 20 years working internationally. Amber practises somatic psychology, and balances theory with experiential learning, integrating somatic psychology and dance movement therapy into the restorative process. She visited Australia and gave this presentation to STARTTS staff at one of the clinical evenings.

Thank you for inviting me to STARTTS. I am glad to be in Australia. This is my first time here. Tonight I would like to speak to you about my experience as a somatic psychotherapist and dance movement therapist with survivors of torture and war.

During this incredible journey I have learnt that the body is the site of all our human experience and that dance is the essence of creative expression. Because the creative process is so rich and evocative, sometimes it can be difficult for survivors of extreme abuse to work with their body.

Many people say to me "there is no way I am going to see a dance therapist." "I don't want to have to dance! I need therapy. Why would I want to dance?"

Dance is the creative expression of movement and movement is a primary language. By primary language I refer to the way we first communicate when we are born. Our early communication begins with sensation and movement. We don't emerge from the womb able to construct analytical sentences or able to talk about what is it that we are thinking or needing or feeling; we first communicate



with movement and exploration.

Dance, as an ancient tradition, has been used for a long time as a healing modality and I want to emphasize that dance really has roots in all civilisations.

Dance movement therapy is in the field of psychology. As mental health professionals we work with the body. Freud once said, "The ego is first and foremost a body ego."

So basically, we look at the body as the root of human experience. Cognitive behaviour therapists are also working with the body, because cognition has its root in sensation and movement, so the body is a resource to integrate these various aspects of human experience.

If you stop for a minute and think about human development, you realise once again that both, sensation and movement are primary languages. Our perception, emotional, and cognitive processes, develop later on. But they all have roots in the body. The ways we feel, the way we think, our belief systems, are all rooted in some bodily experience. That is the fundamental premise of somatic psychology.

We have every kind of therapy you can imagine in the US. Dance therapy is both a creative-arts therapy and a somatic therapy. Dance therapy is the place where two types of psychology intersect.

As therapists we work with the body and with movement as a primary language. But we also work with creative expression or creative modality because, for example, the shape of how I express myself gives a sense of what is going on inside of me.

The ability to express, to organise and understand how we think or feel has a direct relationship to movement repertoire. What is movement repertoire? One way to demonstrate this is showing you what a kinesphere is. The term came out of the dance world. Kinesphere means that wherever I stand in my space, it is, in part, my ability to extend myself outwards. The issue is, how comfortable am I extending

my body into the world around me? We don't always feel comfortable doing so, and this can be especially true for those people whose bodies have been violated. The way we move and extend into space directly relates to how safe we feel, and also how safe we are.

Dance therapy arose from the modern dance movement, which was a response and a reaction to ballet. One of the early modern dancers, Isadora Duncan, was a revolutionary in the dance field. Marion Chace was another pioneer, who worked with psychotic patients in a psychiatric hospital during a time when patients were shifted to the back and often ignored or mistreated if they were extremely dysfunctional. She spent time there and observed the patients. She made contact with them through a process of attunement and mirroring, which is now a part of her work, called kinesthetic empathy. If someone was standing in a corner pulsing their head or hand on a wall and she went up and mirrored them, they often began to engage with her.

She obtained permission to bring patients together as groups, and worked with straight-forward movements through rhythm and music with these patients. She would have people marching their feet and clapping their hands, and she noticed that patients became more able to organise their experience and therefore more inclined to talk about it. It wasn't a magic cure but what she noticed is that patients started to organise. When the soldiers returned from WWII, many were not able to speak about their experiences - not unlike many survivors of trauma - she worked with them using dance and drama. She did a lot of non-verbal work with people nobody else could reach.

Dance therapy brings a developmental perspective to clinical work. Therapists spend three years learning assessment and diagnostic methods that are rooted in how a person moves. We look at things such as basic neurological actions, the

development of movement sequences and certain efforts and body tensions that take some time to notice - and a very trained eye to see. A reason we do this is because our bodies develop in an organised, sequential manner if we experience a reasonably normal developmental process. It is in our development process that our earliest experiences are stored in the body; these may, and often do, emerge later on in life.

For example, somebody who grows up having a tremendous amount of room to explore may have more potential to grow into an openly expressive body. But if someone has to hide a lot or is often scared, he or she may end up shaping his/her body with chronically hunched up shoulders, or a lot of muscle development (hypertonic) in the area of the body charged with protection or defence.

We need to take into consideration that in human development, our earliest relationships are based on non-verbal or pre-verbal communication with the significant other. Movement is the core of this early communication exchange. These forms of communication are based on tuning into basic rhythms, sound and movements, i.e. what we might call somatic attunement. A mother and a baby respond to one another's sound and movement. The body is a primary mode of communication, regardless of age and culture. Having said that, culture has a tremendous impact on how we live in our bodies, the shape our bodies take, and how we move our bodies through, and in, space. It is essential to acknowledge culture in the therapeutic - or any - relationship because we cannot assume that just because we understand movement, we understand what movement and gestures mean in another's culture.

When a body is directly violated, everything that culture has taught it about safety and movement, comfortable movement, and familiar movement can be disrupted, destroyed and/or deeply altered.

At times there are cases where people

coming to another country end up in a treatment centre or on a waiting list for clinical treatment. They may not come from countries where they would go to a clinic. Instead they may come from a place where socio-cultural processes such as collective ritual were a significant way to ameliorate suffering. Many rituals include dance and can take the place of, or be a part of, the psychological intervention, or what we would "normally" do in a clinical practice.

We need to take into consideration that in many non-Western countries there is a much deeper connection to the natural world, the ancestral world, and that the existence of both are also partially defined within the communal organization. So these are some of the things that are important in our training and they are inherent in the work of dance therapy.

I have just listed some of the different traditions that I know of that are utilised by different groups. These include the use of circles and spirals. There is a strong metaphorical meaning to the circle in many traditions. I spend a lot of time in Haiti and am familiar with the Vaudou, Santeria (Cuban) and Candomble (Brazilian) traditions where a lot of rituals are done in a circle for very specific reasons. If you draw a picture of a ceremony, you actually see the centre space.

Marion Chace believed the circle provided some sense of containment and safety. It can allow people to re-organise themselves and start to feel more at ease about talking and sharing. In somatic psychology we work a lot with the idea of the core, the centre, which is often what is destroyed in severe trauma like torture and political violence. Slaves in Haiti were allowed to play traditional instruments during the Carnival and move their bodies the way they have always been accustomed to, to celebrate the divine. It is a very powerful experience to see.

We also work with mirrors. In developmental psychology, kinesthetic empathy is the ability to be empathic through the

body. It is about letting somebody know that you are listening to him/her and that you see him/her with your movements, not just with your words or facial expression. The whole process of healing in some traditions has much to do with kinesthetic empathy.

The idea of having a witness is particularly relevant to this work. One of the schools of dance therapy, Authentic Movement, is partially defined by being seen by a witness. We observe somebody through movement without any judgement or criticism. Every event, every breath, every moment has the potential to be witnessed. The idea of having a witness is really important clinically with survivors of human-rights abuses.

Torture violates the body, it affects the body at all levels. This understanding is very important in the therapeutic process. A lot of the people say trauma happens to the body and the body has to be involved in the recovery, in the healing process. That is true, and when the body is so deeply violated, when the boundaries have erupted as intensely as they can with torture, the body can feel like a minefield to the person who lives in it. In other words, with torture the body can become that which betrays. The creative process requires a certain amount of safety and ability to feel comfortable about sharing and being expressive.

I believe that the inability to regulate emotions, to understand them and to control them is one of the most distressing things for survivors.

I once worked with an African woman who couldn't talk about her experiences. She couldn't manage her emotions, her response to events. I was working with her and her immigration lawyer came to see us because she wanted me to help her tell her story for her asylum application. Every time I tried to talk with her about her experiences she would dissociate, go "flat", and remain unresponsive.

One rainy day she came for her session and in our check-in, she made a comment

about water. One of her positive memories was going to fetch water, so I asked her to 'show me how to do that'. She showed me how she would go to the well, bend down until her pot was filled and put it on her head. As we explored this action together (I asked her to teach me) I invited her to 'show me how it really feels in your body'. We worked with this, then I asked her to teach me how to walk and carry water. We tried, started again moving backwards and forwards, side to side, up and down, teaching one another. I taught her how to take a shower and how to drive a car, some of my culturally relevant activities, and she taught me how to swaddle and carry a baby. Together we created a dance of our different cultural experiences with movement, like squatting on our knees, cleaning ourselves and gathering water. I invited her to show and tell me how it feels when the water is heavy, and to show me, with her movement and her body.

Because she loved that memory, she could tolerate the heaviness of water and the feeling of heaviness, which we later explored emotionally. This helped her discover her sadness. Then we started to talk about the things that had happened to her, and I reminded her that if she could tolerate the heaviness of the water, she could also tolerate the heaviness of the memory and the heaviness of her pain. We worked with this over a period of time. She started to get a clearer recollection of her memories and that is when she was able to begin to put her story back together. Then we worked with the heaviness, the lightness, the strength and all those qualities as metaphors and as real bodily experience. Because this work emerged from a very important tradition in her culture, I believe it helped her to tell her story. She did testify, and I was there, and she did get asylum. It was brutal because the judge was very hard on her, but she did it with her memory of water acting as a resource throughout, and it was a very powerful work. ■

A week in DHAKA



Photo by Niels van Gijn



My first impression of Bangladesh was the usual assault on the senses that I experience when arriving from Australia into one of the world's least developed nations. No matter how many times I make such a trip, I can't help but being overwhelmed by the crowds, the smells, and the sense of uneasiness that invades me as soon as I leave the plane. Call it 'rich man's guilt', but my obvious separation from the local population means I can never relax. I am very aware that I am a privileged outsider.
By JOHN CASEY

In April I had the good fortune to spend a week in Dhaka, its capital, visiting a friend who is a working there.

Bangladesh is a small South Asian country, about twice the size of Tasmania, with a population of 158 million (Tasmania in comparison has just half a million people). It is the seventh most populated country in the world.

It is a product of the partitioning in 1947 of the Indian subcontinent on independence from Britain. It is a primarily a Muslim region. It became known as East Pakistan, even though it was situated some 1,600 kms from the rest of Pakistan. After a civil war in 1971, Bangladesh separated from Pakistan and became an independent nation.

Since then, it has remained politically unstable, with fourteen heads of government and four military coups in 35 years. The population is generally poor and rural. With a per-capita annual income of only US\$2,300 in 2006, it is ranked among the world's poorest countries.

Most of Bangladesh is part of the delta of the Ganges River. The delta is at sea level, so each year when the monsoon rains fall, 65 per cent of the country is flooded. If the rains are particularly bad or accompanied by cyclones, there can be widespread devastation.

My friend in Dhaka is working on a UN-sponsored police-reform program. When I arrived, he introduced me to some of his colleagues working on poverty reduction

and education programs for a Spanish non-government organisation (NGO), Intervida. I spent the week shuttling between police stations and schools in the slums.

My friend had spent seven months working on a police reform program, but political turmoil had led to frequent changes in Inspector Generals (Commissioner) and senior officers, so he admitted that very little has been done on reform itself, as most of his time had been spent just briefing the new appointees.

The cultural, social, and economic gap between the expatriate consultants and nationals working on the police reforms program is huge. The expatriates I met appeared to be good people and good professionals, but seemed to be driven by the high wages offered to UN consultants. They appeared to have little commitment to the country, had made no effort to learn the language, and didn't hold the nationals in particularly high regard. Given the distance between the foreigners and nationals, it was hard to imagine that much collaboration or learning was taking place.

But I did observe some significant changes in policing. I visited a police

station that is being renovated from the old "fort" model. Police stations had traditionally been surrounded by iron gates and the only entry was by permission through locked gates. Now, in an attempt to break down barriers between the police and the population, police stations are being remodelled to include modern reception areas where the public can make enquiries. Outside the station there were new motorbikes and 4-wheel drive vehicles that bore stickers indicating they had been donated by the UN.

However, while there were new waiting rooms and new vehicles, the lower level police officers were still living upstairs in the police station, with 12 to 15 of them crammed into barracks so small that beds were pushed together. Low wages and poor working conditions still present the greatest barrier to reform.

I've been on a few capacity-building missions to third world countries over the years, so I know there are no easy solutions as reform is a long-term prospect. I always try to evaluate the level of the "residue of reform" that is being left by each mission. I got the sense that there was some of it in Bangladesh, but I found it hard to judge just how much.

I visited the schools they ran in the slums of Dhaka and in a small rural village. My friends from the Intervida seemed to be committed. They were working with local grassroots initiatives to provide education to primary school children, where no other opportunities existed. There is no doubt that they were making a significant contribution to the lives of their pupils, but they were frustrated by the small numbers they could teach and their inability to connect to broader education or poverty reduction initiatives.

Walking through the slums, it became obvious to me how cricket-mad the men and boys are. Wherever there was a patch of clear ground, they were playing cricket, often with a crowd of women and girls watching.

But what was most remarkable about my time with the Intervida staff was that during that week they learnt that directors of the NGO back in Spain had been accused of embezzling \$20 million. According to Spanish prosecutors, the directors of Intervida, the third largest aid NGO in Spain, had diverted public contributions to create private businesses. The directors are currently under arrest and the future of Intervida and its aid programs around the world are in jeopardy.

In Bangladesh, human labour is so cheap that unlike in developed countries where "time is money", it is cheaper to use human labour than to buy and maintain machines. Near where I was living, a building was being demolished by a legion of workers with picks, while all around the city tall buildings were being erected with bamboo scaffolding lashed together by rope, with workers carrying bricks and concrete in baskets on their heads.

Aside from these contacts with the realities of life in Bangladesh, my main recollections of my week there are about the lives of the expatriates. They live in Dhaka's best suburb and hang around the clubs of the foreign embassies or the city's finest restaurants, where the other diners are all expatriates or local film stars and business leaders.

But even in the best neighbourhoods of Dhaka the streets were in terrible condition, and the reality of the poverty was pressed up against the wealth of the upper classes. One of the most evident differences between rich and poor countries is the lack of connection that exists between the private and public spheres in poor countries. Inside the homes of the rich, luxuries are the same as in Australia.

But this private inside world has to be protected from the outside by an army of security guards and as soon as one moved out into public realm you were surrounded by the poverty of the masses.

An article I read recently described Western men living in Japan as "nerds and losers in their own countries who become gods in Japan". Perhaps that description is a little exaggerated and cruel, but it has more than a grain of truth as a description of many expatriates working in developing countries. The ones I met in Dhaka would probably be just one of the crowd in their home countries, but in Bangladesh they automatically became part of an elite. With my Australian dollars changed into Bangladeshi Takas and by the mere fact that I was a westerner I was welcomed into that status.

Living as an expatriate working in a developing country is both seductive and unpleasant. At home I always choose to walk wherever I like and think nothing of walking for half an hour across town. In Dhaka it was all but impossible because as soon as I left my building I was besieged by persistent rickshaw drivers. At times I resisted, but ended up giving in and jumping into the rickshaw (and allowing

myself to be charged 10 times what a local would pay for the same trip).

The challenges faced by Bangladesh are considerable. It is a densely populated country with few natural resources and a history of conflict and instability, which still persists. Last August widespread rioting broke out in universities across Bangladesh. Students have become impatient with the military-backed caretaker government's delay in restoring democracy and its increasingly repressive tactics. This government was installed in late 2006 to oversee a new election process, and moved swiftly to quell the rioting. It could not afford to allow the protests to reach other sectors of Bangladesh society as the government had already lost the support of much of the business and political sectors and the population was angry as prices of staples such as rice were rising quickly.

When I decided to go Bangladesh, it was hard to find tourist guides to the country and most people who I told about my trip would ask, "Why go to Bangladesh?" It is a hard question to answer from a purely touristic point of view, but it is a country that provides a warm welcome and an unforgettable experience to anyone who ventures there. ■



Rickshaws in Bangladeshi capital of Dhaka

Photo by Isa Ismail



MANDAENS, a unique culture



As the Iraqi war battles into its fifth year, one minority religious group wonders if this latest conflict will finally destroy their ancient faith and culture. REBECCA HINCHEY spoke with some of the Mandeans taking refuge in Australia and found a people despairing for their very survival.

Shoulders shake, legs fly and hands clap in intricate rhythmical patterns. The wooden floor is packed as men and women revel in the joys of their frenetic traditional dance. It is the first anniversary of the Mandaean Women's Union and tonight they celebrate with much abandon.

There are perhaps 300 Mandeans gathered for the night's festivities. Almost every single one of those smiling faces hides the scars of deep personal tragedy.

"Before the war there were approximately 60,000 Mandeans in Iraq, now we have only 5,000," religious leader Rabbi Dr Brikha Nasoriaia of the International Mandaean Nasoraean Supreme Council said.

"The Mandeans have always been persecuted, but this is definitely the worst," he said.

"Mandeans live under pressure always. Always they are being attacked. Always hiding themselves," explained Dr Amad Mtashar of the Mandaean Australian Community Cultural Club.



The ancient Mandaean religion

Mandaeans are believed to be one of the oldest practicing monotheistic religions in the world. They have been living in Iraq and Iran for thousands of years.

Mandaeans are sometimes confused with Christians, possibly because of their history of persecution in the Middle-East, and their affinity with both the Adam and Eve story and tales (if somewhat different) of John the Baptist.

In fact, Mandaeans have their own faith, separate to any others - tiny in number and ancient beyond age.

While they share some things in common with Christian beliefs, they are not Christians. Their first prophet is Adam, and John the Baptist is their most recent prophet.

The baptism for which John is widely known is central to Mandaean beliefs and practices.

On any given Sunday, take a stroll along the banks of the Nepean river and you can watch modern Australian Mandaeans take part in this centuries old cleansing ritual.

Both a means of purging oneself of sin and protecting one's soul from earthly wrongs, baptism is the most important of the five tenets of their religion. The other tenets are a belief and love of god, prayer, fasting, and alms-giving.

Quoting from the Holy Book, the Ginza Raba religious leader, Ganzivra Salah Chohili, says, "If you see anyone hungry, feed him or her, if you see anyone thirsty, give him or her a drink and when you do a good deed with your right hand, don't tell your left hand and vice versa."

Peace is also extremely important to Mandaeans, who adhere to a non-violent code even when being attacked.

Religion by birth only Persecuted through the centuries

In contrast to many religions, Mandaeanism is only achieved through birth. No one can either convert to the faith or marry into it.

"Marrying only between each other is a problem when you're dispersed," said Rabbi Dr Brikha Nasoriaia.

The concerted effort to obliterate Mandaeans in Iraq and Iran, together with their dispersion across the rest of the world, presents additional hardships.

"Exposure of young people to a new Western culture is placing their traditional faith at risk," explained Esber Melhem, a counsellor at STARTTS working with the Mandaean community.

"Many Mandaeans, especially older Mandaeans, are concerned that their children will be lost to their faith; through marriage with others, through new ideas, through different avenues," he said.

Community leaders estimate that there are somewhere between 3,500 to 4,000 Mandaeans living in Australia, mostly in the Liverpool and Fairfield areas. Most have come here as asylum seekers and refugees, although a significant number have also arrived on skilled, business, and spouse visas. It is likely that this is one of the largest Mandaean populations in the world, with estimates putting their total population across all countries at just 70,000.

"For thousands of years they have survived, despite attempts to obliterate them," said Gamal Dawlatly, another STARTTS counsellor working with Mandaeans.

"It would be tragic if during our time, during times of such civilisation, their religion and culture disappeared," he said.

Ganzivra Salah Chohili agrees, "Mandaeans need a refuge in Australia so that those facing genocide may live and so that an ancient community with a rich and historically significant culture and spirituality may not be obliterated and exterminated, but may contribute to enriching Australia."

Persecution of the Mandaeans is almost as old as the religion itself, with early recordings of suffering at the hands of the Persian dynasty in the third century AD. Genocidal pogroms occurred again in 1480, 1632, 1782, 1853, 1870, 1890 and 1915.

Yet most Mandaeans can't recall times ever being this bad.

Jo French, a Child and Adolescent Counsellor with STARTTS, put it starkly when she said, "Almost every Mandaean client has survived kidnapping, either directly or through a close family member," she said.

Fadia Al Faris, a young Mandaean woman, says of her life in Iraq, "There's no freedom, there's no safety, we can't practice our religion."

Another young woman, also a recent Mandaean arrival from Iraq, describes the horror of this situation when she says, "We came here because of the persecution against the Mandaeans. [In Iraq] they come to your house and they slaughter you."

Robberies, assaults, forced conversion, confiscation of property, arbitrary dismissals, arrests, kidnappings and killings; the list of threats against Mandaeans in Iraq is both long and frightening.

The Mandaeans are persecuted because extremist Iraqi and Iranian Muslim clerics believe they are infidels who should be converted to the Islamic faith. Dedicated to peace and non-violence, the Mandaeans are an easy target for cowards and bullies.

Another significant factor is the wealth of many Mandaeans.

"We have been specifically more targeted than other groups because of our trade professions, such as jewellery and gold making. When there is lawlessness such people are mostly targeted," said Sabri Fezai, a member of the Mandaean Association.

Kidnap and ransom attacks have especially been a problem for richer Mandaeans and other minorities in the rapidly disintegrating democracy called Iraq.

Mandaeans in immigration detention

While wealth helped many Mandaeans escape, the cost borne was much higher than the gold and silver exchanged for their passage to freedom.

Like refugees from Afghanistan, Mandaeans became the victims of the international 'war of terror' twice over. Once in their homeland, then again when arriving in Australia on 'illegal' routes from Indonesia.

Locked in detention behind high wire fences they spent months, even years sharing quarters with some of the very people they were trying to escape.

As immigration detainees they lived with all the harsh realities of life behind razor wire. Particularly women and children (who came in greater numbers) were exposed to suicide attempts, repeated roll calls, inadequate medical care, little education and play facilities, exposure to acts of violence and brutality, interrogation by immigration officials, interrupted sleep and torches being shone in their faces many times a night.

Thankfully, almost all the Mandaeans who resisted the pressure to repatriate have now been granted permanent protection. But the effects of trauma, dangerous journeys, mandatory detention and a period of temporary Australian protection have taken a heavy toll on community members.

Research by STARTTS among members of the Mandaean community who experienced detention and temporary protection has shown that when compared with other Mandaean refugees not affected by these two policies they are at increased risk of depression, post-traumatic stress disorder and associated problems.



Art classes with children from Iraq

Settlement issues in Australia

"The Mandaeans are suffering badly. We don't work ... life is expensive here," said Sabri Fezai.

Coming from mostly educated, middle-class backgrounds to low-paying menial jobs has been demoralising for some Mandaeans, much as it has for other refugees and migrants in the past. And that's for community members that can find work. Many can't, despite a strong working culture and high levels of education.

Unemployment is mostly related to a failure to recognise overseas qualifications and a lack of English skills which Dr Amad Mtashar describes as "being deaf and dumb in this language".

Like for many communities, the 510 hours provided by the government is often inadequate preparation for meaningful employment in Australia.

Lack of English also means that the Mandaean community has had problems communicating their circumstances, issues and requirements to service providers and government decision-makers.

Yaloofi dietary requirements (similar to the Jewish kosher) and a desire to build both a community recreation centre and a mendi (place of worship) are three specific concerns that Mandaeans are working to address.

Like refugees before and no doubt after them, the problems of the Mandaean community are complex, multilayered and overwhelming.

The future for Mandaeans in Australia

Yet there is hope for Mandaeans in Australia.

They have skilled and experienced leaders.

Their talents are beginning to be recognised. The Casula Powerhouse Museum has featured a number of exhibitions by gifted Mandaean artists.

Children whose schooling was interrupted by war and life in refugee camps are attending classes and developing skills they only dreamed of. A volunteer artist and teacher, Ibrahim Barsi is helping a group of young Mandaean boys realise their hopes of becoming artists. They have just completed their second exhibition.

Many young people are undertaking tertiary education.

The Sabian Mandaean Association soccer team looks like they will join the Federation next year.

Mandaean men and women, young and old, who just two years ago could not speak English, are studying, volunteering and working.

There are many jewellery shops owned and run by Mandaeans.

These are not isolated examples. They are a true picture of a culture and religion that is desperate to survive, and desperate to become part of their new community. Desperate to say thank you for the help they have been given and desperate for more. ■



Kicking goals for resettlement

Organisations across Australia are turning to soccer as a way to connect with young refugees and assist them with resettlement.

But how does 'the world game' help address the complex issues young refugees face? How can soccer help young men fit in at school, improve their English, and deal with grief and loss?

Following is an edited transcript of an interview between two STARTTS workers and Mick O'Reagan from ABC radio, discussing the therapeutic benefits of soccer and how it is being used at STARTTS.

Community services coordinator Jasmina Bajraktarevic-Hayward and boys and young men's worker Mohamed Baaruud spoke to Radio National's Sports Factor program on 22 June 2007.

Jasmina Bajraktarevic-Hayward (Jasmina): There's often a discussion about whether children are more vulnerable to trauma, or more resilient than adults, and in some way they have innate resilience and ability to deal with things. But children are also more vulnerable, because if trauma, displacement, deprivation, hunger, losing your family members

and witnessing traumatic events happen when you are still a child, it will impact on how you develop, who you become as a person, on your sense of safety and trust and on your ability to connect to other human beings and learn and cope with everyday needs and issues.

Some kids become too old too soon. Others behave like children of a younger age. And, then, once kids are here in Australia, they have to deal with the fact that they often become more familiar with the new environment the new country much faster than their parents, and so they act as a cultural bridge between the parents and the new society.

Mick O'Regan (Mick): And in making that bridge, is sport often a useful tool?

Jasmina: Sport is significant for both recovery and connection.

In terms of recovery from trauma sport offers children and young people

something that they might be really good at, and a possibility to meet new people and make friends. It encourages team work and harmony. It helps young people develop leadership skills, but it also helps them feel that there is a meaning to their lives. They call football 'the beautiful game' and it's a way of life for many people. So regaining your contact with an aspect of your life that's really important to you that you're good at gives new meaning to your life and new connections.

Mick: Well let's bring Mohamed in now. Mohamed, you've been very involved in actually setting up football camps, soccer camps, for children of refugees, as a way of doing some of the things that Jasmina has been talking about.

Mohamed Baaruud (Mohamed): We get about 30 young people from different communities, and most of these young people are either from a refugee background or are humanitarian entrants into Australia. So we work with schools,

we work with communities and we see those who are interested in sports and recreation and create for them a platform where they meet, play soccer and organise activities. And usually the camps are one of the best means to do this sort of thing, because they are away from home, concentrating more on the soccer than thinking about home, or school.

Mick: Tell me about when the camp comes together, what are they like at the beginning, before they've built up those connections and maybe established a bit of trust with each other.

Mohamed: At the beginning, when you're going to the camp, it's like you have all those baskets with different fruit in them and then suddenly it is rough and all the fruit are mixed, and that's how relationships start.

At the beginning everyone comes on their own. They don't know each other, and then after they have been to the camp and have had their first soccer clinic, it's as if the young people have known each other for a long time. Soccer creates a very good atmosphere. Some say, 'this is the best thing that I have done so far', because you see all the smiles on their faces, you hear all the conversations.

It also creates long-term friendships where they get their telephone numbers from each other, and say 'OK, what are you doing on the weekend?' or 'Where do you live?' or 'Can you come to our team and play with us?'

So for me, it's not only just the camp, it's all about those other things that are associated with it, whether it might be friendship, group participation, leadership style, confidence, or breaking the social isolation and creating interaction among young people.

Jasmina: We see young people who are more confident, who have more connec-

tions and relationships with others, who trust others a bit more. Because in order to play a team game, you do need to trust the other players. So we see the development of trust of confidence, and we see young people smiling once again after a long time.

Mick: Indeed, and there are enough players from specific locations, or nationalities, to actually form a team. Now I understand that Burundian refugees are fairly new to Australia; almost all of them have arrived in the last couple of years, but they've actually come together with the help of STARTTS to form the Western Sydney Burundian soccer team. Mohamed can you talk about that?

Mohamed: This team came to me via one of my colleagues, who is a community development worker who works with the [Burundian] community. And what they really wanted to do was to establish their own team. We took them to Newcastle so that they could meet with other Burundians and play a game.

One of the things that they really want to do is sort of promote their cultural identity as well as what they love most, which is to play soccer. So it was very successful in terms of the community getting together and meeting in Newcastle.

Soccer is also about trying to reach other communities and show them that they exist in Sydney and they have this team that can play in the African all-age tournament or other tournaments that are happening around the Sydney area.

Mick: Does being on the same football team mean that people who originally came from different sides of a dispute had a chance to work together?

Mohamed: When you're playing soccer, for instance if you're playing a team which has culturally diverse members from different countries, it's not about whether you like that country they come

from or whether you have a problem, it's all about teamwork, it's all about winning. And that makes people understand each other and they become more open-minded.

Mick: Among these young children, the children of refugees, is there an indication of how important football is back in Africa, to what we see in the kids?

Mohamed: Yes, it is. Because most of the young people play soccer in their village, where there are no parks, where there are no appropriate soccer fields. They play with hand-made balls, which are made by putting some papers in a sock. So coming here and having these beautiful parks, having the balls, the goals posts ready is just like a dream come true. All they have to do is kick the ball and shoot the goal. They have the other skills as well, because one of the things that I found with young African people is that they like to run a lot.

After you give them a few soccer skill sessions, they gain the skill necessary to play in a team. Soccer is not all about one man's game, running with the ball and going to the goal. It's also about passing the ball, trying to share the ball with your team-mates and trying to have a very good team that's ready to attack the other team.

Mick: How is sport a bridge back into the Australian community?

Jasmina: Just look at the importance of sport in Australian culture; it's a joint language, it's a shared universal language. Really it brings us to the realisation that while we are all very different, culturally, there are some things that we all share as human beings, and I think sport and music and many other things, but in this case, sport, is a universal language. ■



This is about my holiday

My holiday started really good. On the last day of school, after school, my cousin and I went to a soccer camp which was going to last for three days. We did a lot of things and played a lot of soccer. There were about 50 kids there and I stayed with my friends in the same room with bunk beds which takes two people for each bed. There were 10 of us in the same room.

After finishing settling down, all of us went to play soccer and had some good coach teaching us some techniques about soccer, which was really good for some of us that play soccer. We finished training and went back to our rooms and took a shower and then went to the hall to watch a movie.

The next day was the second day of camp. We woke up at six o'clock in the morning and went for a walk around. We did some activities like climbing ropes which was really fun. After that, we went to do canoeing and we had someone talking to us about the safety, but one thing the water was too cold and that didn't make it really fun. We did it for

about one and a half hours and I was so cold I couldn't even feel my feet on the ground.

The last day of the camp was the best. The leaders sent us to different groups of soccer teams. Everyone was in a group and they told us we are going to play a world cup and there will be trophies for the winners and for other things.

My team went well, we worked hard and beat all the teams and won the final. Everyone in my team was happy. They gave us our medals and another trophy which was the golden but for the highest goals soccer and the person that won it was in my team.

That was the last day of camp.

I think it was really good camp and I would like to go back to it because it was so good.

Augustine Mawein

Ayen teaches African men to cook

What is it about the kitchen that makes it the scene of gender battles across cultures? CAROLINE REGIDOR tackles the gender battles of the kitchen as she teaches African men the essentials of cooking.

In western culture the most revered hospitality professionals are typically male chefs. Most restaurants that score coveted chef's hats in the annual Sydney Morning Herald Good Food Guide predominantly employ, and are managed by, male chefs. Internationally, Tetsuya, Jamie Oliver and the Iron Chefs on SBS' popular television show are male. In western society, the hierarchy between the professional and the amateur – and the prestige and pay packet that go with it – is clearly demonstrated in kitchens.

Fiction using cooking as the central metaphor is replete with illustrations of the gender divide. In Laura Esquivel's novel *Like Water for Chocolate*, the protagonist's journey is told through her recipes. Mexican culinary delights incite passions as extreme as love and murder amongst the characters. However in this case, with the domestic kitchen as the main dramatic setting, the strongest characters in the novel are female, with male characters in support roles.

Ayen's Cooking School, a project of Supporting Survivors of Torture and Trauma in South Australia, similarly conveys the importance of the kitchen as a space where gender roles are articulated and negotiated.

On the most basic level, an SBS documentary, first shown last February 2007, looks at how Sudanese men are learning to survive in their new surroundings. Like fish out of water, they cannot cope with having to keep house in their new environment. But it's more than that. The focal points of the dramatic tension in this warm and funny documentary are the skirmishes between Ayen, a Sudanese female who starts a cooking school for men, her male trainees and the elder women in the Sudanese community.

More than a teacher, Ayen is a community leader and feminist. Her aim is to address the practical and urgent needs of her trainees. Some of the men, who had never cooked in their lives, were starving despite having a fridge full of food!

There are roadblocks to the deceptively simple task of cooking. A young male Sudanese refugee,

Alier, puts it very plainly, "cooking, cleaning, washing the dishes, it's the duty of your sister". Some Sudanese women – particularly those from older generations – agree with Alier.

The female elders of Sudan do not allow their men into the kitchen. The traditional division of roles and responsibilities between the genders is the broad reason. Just how much of a taboo is it for men to cook? Some Sudanese believe that men should not cook because their penises might burn on the cooking fires. Clearly Ayen faces an uphill battle in the face of such entrenched customs!

But she turns the tables when she reaches the dramatic climax of her training program – cooking for female elders. Tougher critics could not be found; they have strong doubts about the men's newly acquired skills and also have high standards.

Of course the story has a happy ending, but Ayen takes us on an unforgettable journey along the way.

More than two million people have perished as a result of decades of fighting in southern Sudan. More than four million have fled their homes. The portraits painted in this documentary bring to life the impact of what is happening on the other side of the world.

The men who learn to cook are husbands, brothers and sons, each of whom has lost someone. They are coping with the challenges of being displaced in Australia, where life is as different as can be. Food is just the beginning. As the men learn the basic cooking skills to survive, they discover other rewards that come with playing the role of nurturer.

In the end, perhaps men of all cultures can relate to this – they might see that cooking for a woman from time to time is a guaranteed way to impress her. It's important that everyone should be able to cook a few simple meals, not just for survival, but also to impress the ladies, including, of course, wives, mums and aunts. ■



Sharing our Stories, Sharing our Strengths

A Refugee Conference

Refugees assaulted co-worker: Tamworth tension fears

AFP probes terror fundraising by local Somali extremists

REFUGEES TURN TO CRIME FOR KICKS

Racist pamphlet targets Africans

Mental care for migrant detainees

With headlines like these it's easy to see why some people believe refugees are troublesome, needy and even downright dangerous. Stories of resilience and fortitude are rare, and are generally confined to the later pages or features pages of the major newspapers.

Yet spending time with most refugees builds an overwhelming picture of courage, resourcefulness and a capacity to laugh despite enormous tragedy.

As, Karitane worker and Vietnamese conference committee representative Anhlinh Pham says "Vietnamese refugees... have done a lot of things that have contributed to Australia, but they are

not very much recognised

The Sharing our Stories, Sharing our Strengths conference, is taking place from December 6-8 this year and supported by STARTTS, is based on the notion that more than anything, refugees have a remarkable ability to overcome adversity.

By bringing members of many different refugee communities together, the conference aims to enhance the ability of those who came here seeking safety to deal with their settlement issues and recover from the impact of trauma.

It recognises that people who escaped violence and persecution have the capacity to solve their own problems when given the right supportive environ-

ment. The organisations, communities and individuals involved in developing the conference believe that although experts from Australia have much to offer, other refugees can provide different understandings, assistance and ways of building the necessary social capital for succeeding in a new country.

Carlos Encina, Coordinator of the NSW Spanish and Latin American Association for Social Assistance and a conference committee member said that, "it was time for us to have our own conference, to tell others about our experiences, to tell others about our strengths, our struggles."

The idea for this conference came from members of the Vietnamese

No apology for linking Africans to crime

Refugee mum dies – Husband is charged

Visa row on links to terror

community. In consultation with STARTTS they said they wished to learn from other refugee communities about issues such as multigenerational trauma and care of older people. In turn they desired to assist others by sharing their own experiences, mistakes and successes so that other communities might discover new ways to approach old problems.

From there, representatives of varied refugee communities and organisations (see below) helped plan and develop the conference, deciding upon the four major themes: Building communities, making a living in Australia, families, and negotiating Australian laws and systems.

The success of the conference was to involve as many people as possible in organising it and helping out on the day, including both those with experience and those without. From graphic design work, to the selection of speakers to organising publicity, people with refugee backgrounds have been intimately involved with organising Sharing our

Stories, Sharing our Strengths.

One of those involved in the organisation is Noel Zihabamwe, a student and refugee from Rwanda. When asked about how the conference could help he says:

"This conference is very good for us, so we meet up with many people from different backgrounds who can share, and what we share we can use so that our fear that we have can be stopped."

Presenters are representing Australia's wonderful cultural diversity and focus on the breadth of issues which refugees face in their new country. Speakers originating from the Middle East, Africa and across Europe, Asia and South America will address topics which range from learning English to maintaining culture to intergenerational conflict within a new culture.

Sharing our Stories, Sharing our Strengths is being held at the University of Western Sydney, Bankstown, who have kindly donated their venue on 6, 7 and 8 December 2007.

Assisting the conference so far are

members of the following communities Assyrian, Australian, Bosnian, Burundian, Chilean, Karen, Khmer, Kurdish, Mandaean, Rwandan, Serbian, Somali, Southern Sudanese, Tamil and Vietnamese. Some of the organisations represented are Assyrian Workers Network, Australian Assyrian Workers Association, Australian Karen Organisation, Australian Red Cross, Cambodian Welfare Association, HARDA – Horn of Africa Relief and Development Agency, Karitane, Mandaean Australian Community Cultural Club Inc, NSW Spanish and Latin American Association for Social Assistance (SLASA), Parramatta City Council, South West Recruitment, Southern Sudanese and Marginalised Areas, and the University of Western Sydney.

Sharing our Stories, Sharing our Strengths, 6-8 December 2007, University of Western Sydney Bankstown www.startts.org.au "When people come to this conference and they hear your experience, they will know we're not alone." ■

Richard Kerbaj *The Australian* 27 December 2006, **Justin Vallejo** *The Daily Telegraph* 7 July 2006, **Natalie O'Brien** *The Weekend Australian* 22-23 April 2006, **Greg Roberts** *The Australian* 4 April 2006, **Connie Levitt** *The Sydney Morning Herald* 10 August 2007, **Cath Hart** *The Australian* 9 May 2007, **Cameron Stewart** *The Australian* 23 April 2007, **Brad Clifton** *The Daily Telegraph* 31 January 2007

From Sudan to Australia, one woman's story of **COURAGE**



**“War, this is the story of life,
the story of everyday.”**

By **REBECCA HINCHEY**

STARTTS bicultural counsellor Naome Yar Paul Madut pronounces this tragic statement with simple resignation.

It is a fact of her life. Even before she was born the war in Sudan was determining the pattern of her existence.

Despite the horrors behind such words, Naome shows no signs of bitterness. Instead, the forces of her life have produced a woman with an extraordinary blend of strength and gentleness, a woman who embodies the word resilience.

Naome should have been born in Southern Sudan, but the civil war which began shortly after independence in 1956 forced her parents to flee. Instead, Naome was born in the eastern Sudanese city of Algadari in 1967.

It was the year her grandfather was slaughtered. A chief in his village, he had refused to name the rebels among his people. Although she was too young to realise it, Naome was marked with the same sort of bravery, a bravery which

would eventually see her become a leader among her people.

Five years after her birth, the rebels in the south signed a peace agreement with the Khartoum government in the north, allowing her family to return to their rightful home.

For the five-year-old, life was happy, joyous even. Her large home was full of love and laughter, filled with a constant stream of family and friends looking for work in the capital or returning from fighting in war.

In the hot afternoons she would collect lemons from their trees or the flowers of the henna, later using their brown paste to create intricate designs on her small hands.

“In the evening we have story time. My father would tell us tricky stories, about what happens to animals when they lie or steal. You would have to learn something from it, about good character or attitude.

“My mum would go for the ancestor thing, where we came from, our histories. My aunts and cousins would talk about love stories. It suited each of them,” she mused.

“It was family, what I call happy family,” she smiled.

Yet among all the happiness, lay dangerous undercurrents which the blissful child only sometimes perceived.

Originally a teacher, her father became a politician, holding regular meetings in the family home.

As the rebels returned from fighting, they would gather at the Paul house, bringing stories of the conflict with Arab militia from the north.

“I understood the problem since I was a child,” she said.

“There were lots of stories everyday of war.

“It was terrifying when I heard about my grandfather and people who were fighting, but I wasn't sure how much danger my father was in.

“He was working within the main government, trying to work inside to change things.

“Sometimes they would take my father to prison, if there were going to be demonstrations.

“One day I remember following my mum to prison, she had heard dad was taken from work. We were still in primary school,” she said.

Each disappearance would last just a short time, days or sometimes weeks. Each lasted just long enough for the government to prevent the people's leader from taking an active part in the struggles.

At school, Islam was the golden subject, despite the fact that most children

come from Christian families.

“If you didn't do religion studies you wouldn't be at the top of the class, it gave you the marks,” Naome explained.

“My parents were very angry, they would ask me to give up the marks and I would argue. They would say ‘This is why people went to war. This is the way the government is pressuring people to be Muslim.’” she said.

When Naome grew old enough for junior secondary, her father was transferred to the smaller city of Bor, where they built their family home. When work required another move to the southern Sudanese capital of Juba, the family remained behind, for the children to continue their schooling.

The bright young student enjoyed her studies, particularly her favourites of maths and science.

“I used to be clever, I used to get the highest marks,” Naome reflected, somehow ignoring her considerable achievements in Australia.

But an uneventful education was never to grace this proud Dinka Sudanese Australian woman.

In the early 1980s, the Arab government of the north introduced Sharia law across the whole country.

“We had to put on trousers and tarha, it's like a veil,” she explained

At each morning's assembly the girls would engage in their own small, mutinous acts, rolling up their trousers or sharing their veils.

The precarious peace was deteriorating. Demonstrations in the streets grew in number and frequency.

“People were being amputated; the first people were from southern Sudan. They would say ‘which hand did you steal with’ and they would cut it off,” Naome described the horror.

“People were arrested, some were shot,” she said.

Amid the chaos, a personal tragedy befell the family. In 1982, her father Paul K Awar died suddenly, following a very brief illness.

“It was a very, very difficult time, he was the head of the extended family,” she said.

“My father was special, caring, loving. We had a very good relationship, he showed us love. Men don't tend to show love in Sudan. He was very approachable, not like other fathers,” she whispered.

Around this time schooling in southern Sudan was transformed. The government of the southern regions negotiated a conversion from studies in Arabic to all studies in English.

Naome, who previously had learnt the rudiments of this internationally dominant language, found it extremely difficult. Notwithstanding this, most students, Naome among them, were glad to be done with the hated Arabic, a symbol of the oppression of their native voice.

The English experiment was short-lived.

In May 1983 at three in the morning, war knocked on her door.

It was the sound that first attracted her notice. Lying in bed there arose from the pitch blackness a piercing noise, like no other sound she had heard before.

For Naome, it was to become the sound of Sudan.

“It was completely terrifying. It sounded like thunder but it continued, heavy and strong. It was the sound of shells being dropped.

“That's when the rebellion started, 16 May 1983.

That day, the town moved en masse, making for a village 26 kilometres away. There were no cars, everyone walked.

As war dictated, she became separated from her mother. Thankfully, Akur Ayom joined the younger members of her family the following day.

After one month, they were informed by the government that the situation had calmed, and they were able to return to school.

“When we returned, the town had been taken over by the military, there were guns and military cars moving around everywhere.

“They would come everyday to school and harass us. The boys were beaten up in front of assembly.

“They would say ‘so and so is a rebel’ and then they would hit and kick you and

hit you again. They would hit you with bike chains.

"Afterwards they would go, leaving the school in horror.

Studies were abandoned. The morning terror made it impossible to concentrate. Instead, students would gather, discussing the events of the assembly and who they would target next.

After a few months, the school emptied of boys. They had fled or been rounded-up by brutal soldiers.

The young female students faced a dreadful decision. Did they stay in their hometown caring for their mothers and fathers but risking a forced marriage or did they abandon the home they loved for a chance to be free?

Naome was determined, regardless of the enormous cost. There was no way she would be the enslaved wife of an Arab. Along with 15 other girls, she made the decision to be first to leave.

The secrecy surrounding her departure was absolute. Not even her mother, who would surely have forbidden her from leaving, was told.

For two weeks their blackened feet trod the path to Ethiopia. Supplies were meagre but they shared what they had, scavenging for any water they could find.

The women travelled by day, trying to avoid the intensity of the sun's fearsome rays by marching in single file, following the shadows of the person in front.

Arriving in Africa's melting pot in 1984, Naome managed to find employment in an office, working for the Sudanese Relief and Rehabilitation Association (SRRRA).

It was during these years in exile that Naome met her husband Caesar Madut, a fellow worker with the SRRRA.

Although the demands of their work kept them mostly apart, the loving couple had their first three children while Naome still lived in one of the world's oldest Christian states.

In Ethiopia, Naome also had her first intimate encounter with death. One night she spotted a young boy who seemed

stuck in the wire of a fence. She called her two sons to disentangle him.

The boy was critically ill, but the hospital turned Naome away, suggesting she return in the morning with the child.

All night, he cried out in pain. Sleeping next door, Naome brought blankets and panadol. Perhaps they helped, perhaps he felt cared for. Who knows? He died that night.

"I can't explain how that felt. His parents did not even know their son was dead," she lamented.

"What do they imagine? Do they think he died in a bush? I just wanted to communicate with them but I couldn't.

"I wanted him to die like a human being. It is still very painful to me," she said.

Although she never knew him, she reached out to the young Nuber boy as only a person of her compassion could. She organised the funeral, and invited the Nuber to complete a proper Muslim burial, which she attended with her children as if it were her own family.

"When I hear the story of the lost boys I think, 'this is really the lost boy,'" she mused.

It wasn't long before Ethiopia too descended into conflict. Mengistu's Ethiopian government collapsed in 1991 and the rebels began targeting the Sudanese, believing they were siding with his genocidal rule.

Naome's organisation was forced to re-establish headquarters in Torit, in southern Sudan.

Just prior to their return, the president of Sudan was overthrown, and a transitional government came to power. Poisoned with mistrust, the Sudanese People's Liberation Movement (SPLM), the main opposition, refused to head to the capital Khartoum. Negotiations to join the new government broke down and in the fresh elections an alliance of mostly Islamist parties swept to power.

Around the same time a claim was made for the upper Nile area.

This action led to a vicious conflict between the divided tribes of the south.

It was a massacre

In Naome's hometown, everything was destroyed, cattle, homes, schools.

Naome's grandmother was killed and her uncle too. Despite the scale of the atrocities, news of this massacre did not reach the media. It remains a forgotten conflict in the largest country of Africa.

The young mother's home became a makeshift restaurant, hotel and sanatorium.

"We cared for everyone. Sick children, adults, they would just walk into your house. You try and feed them, fix them, take them to hospital if you can," Naome explained.

The war only intensified, with daily aerial bombardments and news of another loved one dead.

Eventually, a move to Uganda became the only option.

The journey was petrifying. Paul would move forward, and then return for the rest of the family.

There were no meals, just scraps for survival shared among all. A droplet of water was the most you could find. Many people went missing, starved or were killed as they lost the path they hoped would lead them to safety.

In Kampala, the capital of Uganda, life was relatively peaceful, if lonely. Naome found a job with International Aid Sweden, while her husband returned to a violent Sudan to continue his relief work.

Although the job brought desperately needed funds, Naome lived in a constant state of tension, never sure if the next phone call would be more news of death. Perhaps it would be her husband or her brother. Already they had lost so many.

Her husband returned three times a year, fathering another two children with his young wife.

As their time in Uganda moved on, more friends came to join her. Times became more relaxed. Her children joined school; mastering the local language and helping their mum to do the same.

After the birth of their fifth child, Naome joined a Sudanese human rights organisation, helping to protect refugees.

It was intense and dynamic work. They were coordinating with the Red Cross to ensure prisoners of war from the north had their basic needs met. Although in the full-flight of parenting, family support allowed Naome the freedom to undertake this hectic and sometimes hazardous role.

This passion for justice led to even more deadly work with the Humanitarian Landmine Project. Based in Sudan, she travelled across the country, training, consulting, and educating communities about the dangers of the landmines in their midst. Meanwhile, Naome's mother cared for her children in Uganda.

There were many horrendous experiences. The Sudanese were under a constant onslaught of bombs from the sky. Security, such as it was, was found in large concrete bunkers.

"When the bomb is ready to drop you will hear it. You wait for them and then you go underground. Any running person gets hurt.

"By that time we were the rescue team in town. When there was an incident of bombs or anything we would take the patients to the hospital. We would help when there was a fire.

"When you are in that situation you don't think of danger, you just have to face it.

"In early 1999 about six bombs were dropped on the compound where we were living. We stored explosives there which we used for the demolition of mines. Everything was burned, houses, everything.

It was not long after this experience that another peace agreement was signed, but not before another tragedy befell her family.

Just 48 hours before that momentous day her husband 'disappeared'.

"I knew from 21 years experience that he would be killed, no one ever came back.

"But still I tried. I had appointments with the Red Cross, letters, and meetings. I travelled to Nairobi where the negotiations were taking place.

"I knew he was dead but I couldn't stop searching.



Capital of Uganda- Kampala

She found solace in a new job, helping to demobilise child soldiers.

"We held official ceremonies where they would hand over their gun. Many cried. The gun was their mother, their father, their protection, their food.

"We set up transit centres where we undertook tracing, counselling, case management. We used lots of activities and sports.

Although not really sure of what she wanted, Naome applied for refugee resettlement in Australia in 2003.

The visa came quickly, faster than Naome could scrounge up the funds for the airfare. She approached the International Migration Office for assistance, but being a woman of integrity, she refused to pay bribes, so they would not help her.

Eventually a member of the Sudanese community, Joseph Akoonda, Chair of the Southern Sudanese community in NSW, sponsored her resettlement. She was on her way. Almost.

Before leaving she returned to Uganda one final time. To move through Uganda required travel documents, but with limited days before her departure there was no time to apply. She knew the language, knew the area, and thought she would be ok.

She wasn't. At the border, a female official pulled her up. At first, the Sudanese woman claimed to be Ugandan, but she wasn't believed. A series of basic questions unravelled her mask.

"I knew the answers, it was simple stuff. I knew the names of the towns, the mayors. They were things I knew back-to-front, people I had negotiated with everyday in my work. But for some reason I couldn't remember.

"It made me so angry. I wanted to shout 'Look at me. Why should I sneak? Why should I illegally cross borders if only Sudan had not been in civil war. It is my country's fault.'"

Thankfully, they released her, and on 9 February 2004, Naome, together with her five school-aged boys, arrived in Australia.

The new journey was hard. Like most refugees, Naome was ecstatic upon arrival. She lived with an aunt and quickly scored a job with the Department of Education.

Yet the euphoria quickly diminished. "The most terrible part was looking for a house. I applied for more than 10 houses but they would reject me again and again.

"I would get the paper and look outside the houses at night after work but I wouldn't know where to go. People were very helpful, take this train, and go to this platform. On Saturday I would go for the appointment.

"I felt discrimination. The way they would look at me at reception. They would say they would call, but they wouldn't, they wouldn't tell you why you were refused," Naome protested.

Eventually Naome Yar Paul Madut scored a house in Blacktown and applied for one of the African trainee counsellor positions at STARTTS.

Almost three years later, she is no longer a trainee and is studying for a degree in social work from Charles Sturt University.

When asked if she was happy, she answers like many migrants.

"My children love it so much, more than I do. They laugh all day. There are so many opportunities for them." ■

AUSTRALIA a safe place for refugees?

Michael Hiriwo, a Sudanese refugee and community leader, explains how one young man's death can strike fear into a whole community.

Refugees and many migrants leave their homes because of war, political and religious persecution and natural disasters. Racial discrimination and gender abuse add to this random displacement.

More than anything else we flee hoping to find safety, freedom and better living conditions. International organisations play a large part in securing this protection, but it is the host country which is ultimately responsible. Are they able to create an environment where we feel secure and ready to trust again? In Australia a pattern of vicious and deadly assaults against Sudanese people combined with a sometimes unhelpful government response is making some people question that role.

One of these tragic cases involves the alleged murder of a refugee in Parramatta in December 2006. What was the cause of the death of the late Geoffrey Taban? Reports say the young man joined his sister in Australia in December 2004. He had so much potential, so much energy. In a very short period his wonders were beginning to show, but before long he was beaten and killed by thugs who may have been racists.

When Taban arrived in Australia, he had a good command of the English language. He was able to attend Blacktown TAFE, and obtained qualifications in computing. He progressed to Granville TAFE which gave him the necessary push to embark on a Bachelor of Commerce at New South Wales University. Taban had successfully completed his first year just two years after arriving in his new home. On the eve of his success, Taban and a



Geoffrey Taban

close friend went out shopping to celebrate the end of the year. It should have been a night of laughter, but the young Sudanese was attacked by thugs. He sustained a brain injury while his friend suffered a broken arm and leg. Although Taban was rushed to Westmead Hospital, he remained in a coma until the 16th of December when death robbed him of his life.

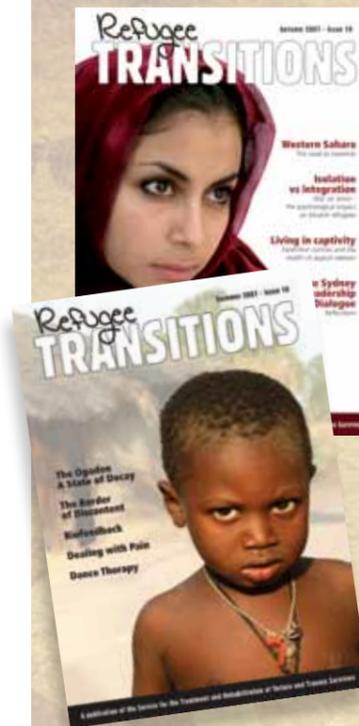
Who murdered this young man and why? Today, refugees and other migrants ask these questions. Are refugees safe in their new environment? The mysterious death of this young man reminds every refugee and migrant that there are still dangers ahead. There have been other killings too, more recently in Melbourne but also in Sydney. Justice is slow. A report reveals that the police are still in pursuit of those who killed Taban, but how can they be found after such a long time?

However, although some refugees, migrants and humanitarian entrants to Australia have met with tragedies, humanitarian and government organisations do much to help refugees enjoy a prosperous and bright future.

It's true that refugees are strangers, in both their culture and behaviour, from those born in the host country, but refugees need to be educated about how to live and share together the joy and responsibilities of where we settle.

Some responsible statesmen such as the Blacktown Mayor Leo Kelly have assured the public that many African refugees have successfully settled in Blacktown, but more need to follow his example.

Positive statements from those in power will give confidence to humanitarian entrants, blaming the victim will only perpetuate fear. ■



SUBSCRIPTIONS

A publication of the Service for the Treatment and Rehabilitation of Torture and Trauma Survivors (STARTTS).

Refugee Transitions exists to report on a wide range of refugee and human rights issues of relevance to the work of STARTTS. It aims to:

- focus attention on the impact of organised violence and human rights abuses on health
- provide ideas on intervention models to address the health and social needs of refugees
- debate and campaign for changes necessary to assist, empower and strengthen refugee communities in their settlement process
- provide a vehicle for cultural and personal expression.

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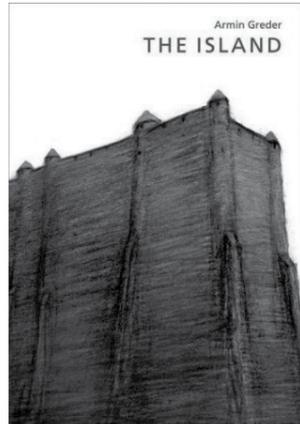
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Book Reviews



THE ISLAND

By Armin Greder

Published by Allen & Unwin

Retail Price: \$29.95

Reviewed by Olga Yoldi



This somber and striking picture book for adults, and perhaps for older children, is an essential teaching resource for teachers, and for anyone, interested in human rights and refugee issues.

When a stranger is washed up on the beach of a remote island, the locals are faced with a challenge of what to do with this naked man. They become hostile towards him. They consider some options but none seem possible and he becomes this unwanted presence.

They decide to isolate him on a remote corner of the island. They lock him up in a goat pen and leave him there without any food or water. But the stranger is hungry, very hungry, so he escapes and approaches them begging for food.

The islanders have no compassion, they are angry when they realise that by iso-

lating him they still cannot avoid him. This presence is starting to sit uneasily in their consciousness. He has become a problem that needs to be resolved quickly.

Discussions follow, tensions are running high. Growing fear and intolerance take over and he is finally condemned. The islanders then decide to fortify the island against all strangers.

This amazing picture book, winner of several international awards and available for the first time in English, has been written and illustrated by Swiss born Armin Greder, who lives in Brisbane and teaches design and illustration to students at the Queensland College of the Art.

He learned to draw at school in the back of his exercise books to escape the tedium of the schoolroom. The Island is his latest book.

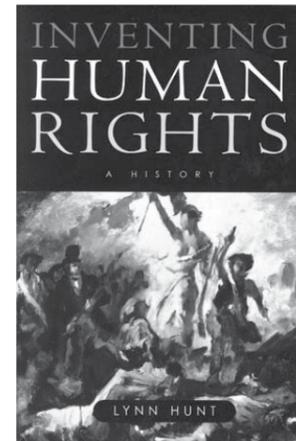
His spare prose and

mesmerising illustrations present a sinister picture of the plight of many asylum seekers around the world searching in vain for a place to live and belong to. It also illustrates the way racism, irrational fear, and intolerance can transform human beings.

The illustrations speak for themselves. They are all done in dark tones and represent very well the emotions, the anxieties and the sheer terror experienced by the stranger.

The fear, the anger and intolerance of the islanders are palpable and the vulnerability of the stranger is overwhelming.

This is an excellent resource material for teachers and group facilitators as it can be used to initiate discussion about racism, human rights and refugee issues, in the classroom or in workshops. However, it might be too harsh for younger children.



Inventing Human Rights , A History

By Lynn Hunt

W.W. Norton and Company 2007, 273 pages

Reviewed by Vincent Sicari

book. I was also a boat-person. I was also a refugee.

Of course the idea of human rights has always appealed to me. Did I not have the basic rights that are shared by all by the mere fact of being a human being? Let me clarify something: the boat I was on was the "Australia". It was 1955, I was four years old, and we were on our way to Sydney to meet my father who had fled war-torn Europe some years before to prepare a new home for us in a new land. My situation was very different to that of those wretched refugees on the sinking boat off the coast of northern Australia. It was different but I could certainly empathise. These were people like me, like my father: searching for a new land, for a new opportunity for themselves and their children. Surely they would not throw their own children overboard.

Lynn Hunt's thesis is that, as society in the eighteenth century learned to empathise with others, the idea of human rights developed. It is also a theory that depended on the development of new means of communication. The novel became a literary form that communicated the common humanity of us all. The popularity of works such as "Julie" by Rousseau and "Pamela" by Samuel Richardson introduced another person in her most intimate

reality to the public at large. We learned to empathise.

During the Federal Election campaign of 2001 the story broke. It was a story of outrageous human behaviour. How low can some members of the human species go? What will some people do to elicit a human response from us. What kind of people would blackmail us with such despicable actions?

I, with many others in our society, asked these questions. And yet there was a worm in the apple – something did not seem right about the story. Those of us who have the privilege of having children, and those of us who could imagine having them, will know that the story did not fully convince. We could not believe totally.

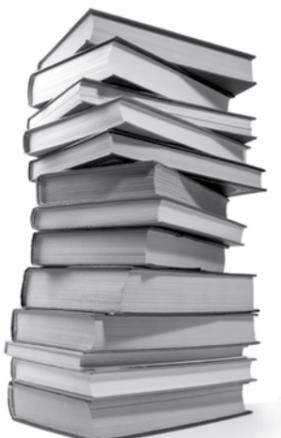
The story I am referring to is "Children overboard" affair.

"Inventing Human Rights" by Lynne Hunt tells us something about that affair. While it is not directly about that infamous incident, it sheds a new light on human rights and how they have developed as a concept. It sheds light on the plight of people in extreme situations and how we react to them. My interest was immediately taken by this wonderfully written little

Surely the most far-reaching invention of the human mind: "Love thy neighbour as yourself" had some influence in the shaping of our human consciousness. And much more....

I felt that the children overboard story would turn around and it did. They were, after all, just people like us: wishing to be free, to be safe from persecution, from violence and the threat of death; wishing a new beginning for themselves and their precious cargo – their children. Lynn Hunt illuminated the plight of people like them and I appreciated that. She did it with wonderfully fluid prose; in a manner that captivated me with a multiplicity of images and ideas. She is a good writer. She is intelligent. But I could not help but feel that she fell short of her mark: that the story was even bigger and more interesting. And that it should be told, and that it will be told.

But for all the admiration of the ideas that Hunt so brilliantly proposes, I could not but think that her thesis, as interesting and captivating as it was, left a large part of the story untold. It was not, I felt, just the invention of the epistolary novel that produced this ability to empathise with the situation of others. Surely this was something much larger, much grander: something that encompassed, not only the movements of the enlightenment, but the history of mankind itself and our emergence from a pre-human past. Surely there are links to the judeo-christian past of our enlightenment forebears and their ideas, to their journey through the crucible of the Greco-roman culture as expressed by authors such as Sophocles and Aeschylus.





The NSW Service for the Treatment and Rehabilitation of a Torture and Trauma Survivors (STARTTS) helps refugees deal with their past experiences and build a new life in Australia.

Our services include counselling, group therapy, group activities and outings, camps for children and young people, English classes and physiotherapy.

We also work with other organisations and individuals to help them work more effectively with refugees.

Opened in 1988, STARTTS is one of Australia's leading organisations for the treatment of torture and trauma survivors.

