Refugee Transitions

Winter 2003 - ISSUE 14

Solomon Islands and the failing of a nation

Turning the Tide Body Shop campaign

Human Rights Law, and international order

Dissociation as a Symptom of Refugee Trauma

Women’s Camp Celebrating our diversity

Women of the World The Muslim woman’s experience

A publication of the Forum of Australian Services for Survivors of Torture and Trauma
Refugee Transitions exists to report on a wide range of refugee and human rights issues of relevance to the work of the members of the Forum of Australian Services for Survivors of Torture and Trauma; 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.

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- NSW Service for the Treatment and Rehabilitation of Torture and Trauma Survivors (STARTTS)
- Victorian Foundation for Survivors of Torture (VFST)
- Association of Services to Torture and Trauma Survivors (ASeTTS), WA
- Phoenix Support Service for Survivors of Torture and Trauma, TASMANIA
- Queensland Program of Assistance to Survivors of Torture and Trauma
- Survivors of Torture and Trauma Assistance and Rehabilitation Service STAIRS, SOUTH AUSTRALIA
- Torture and Trauma Survivors Service of the Northern Territory (TTSSNT)
Message from the Forum

By Jorge Aroche, Executive Director, STARTTS

Welcome to the 14th issue of Refugee Transitions. It has been a long time since the last issue of RT - a reflection of the difficulties involved in producing a magazine of RT’s standard on a shoe string budget, and with the input of services challenged by increasing demands.

We have tried again to provide a forum through RT for comment and points of view on issues affecting refugees and human rights. By far the common theme of this issue is the need to ensure that human rights, the fight to eradicate torture, and the needs of refugees are not forgotten in the context of a world increasingly shaken by the horror of terrorism and measures, both small and large scale, designed to neutralize and fight this threat.

As I write these paragraphs, previously “unthinkable” proposals such as the reintroduction of the death penalty are not only being hotly debated in radio talkback programs, but have even attracted comment from the Prime Minister acknowledging the arguments of both sides in the debate. Public debate and the coexistence of differing and even diametrically opposed views that can be expressed without fear of reprisal are, of course, at the heart of democracy. The fact that we feel the need to debate a matter such as the reintroduction of the death penalty, that was seemingly put to bed over thirty years ago, however, reflects the extent to which fear is affecting our society, making it seem justifiable to contemplate previously unconscionable courses of action involving the degradation and postponement of human rights.

Two of our full-length articles, A Crossroad on Torture, by Professor Derrick Silove, and an interview with International Law expert, John Pace provide thought provoking insights into the human rights and terror debate. In another vein, the FASSTT collaboration with the Body Shop showcases the very real benefits that can accrue from innovative partnerships between the people of goodwill in the corporate sector and services such as those of the Forum. With tens of thousands of customers participating over the month of August, the Body Shop campaign is certainly playing a vital role in promoting a better understanding of refugees and working to allay fears of ‘the other’ that may be held in the wider community.

In our forgotten conflicts section the situation of the Solomon Islands is brought into sharper focus. While Australians have recently become more attuned to this conflict on our doorstep, Olga Yoldi’s piece gives a detailed backdrop to the recent decision to send Australian troops into the conflict zone.

Finally, this edition brings to the fore some clinical work with torture survivors in an article on dissociative states as well as turning our attention to the experiences of Muslim women.

The magazine concludes with a fitting tribute to the life and work of Quentin Buckle, who was a tireless advocate for human rights, a founding member of the Victorian Foundation for Victims of Torture (VFST), and a great friend of the Forum.

I hope you find reading this issue of “REFUGEETransitions” as stimulating as I have.

All the best

Jorge Aroche
Executive Director
STARTTS
On behalf of FASSTT
SOLOMON ISLANDS
And the failing of a nation
Australia has just launched its largest armed intervention in the South Pacific since World War II. But restoring law and order, without serious economic development, may not bring peace to the Solomon Islands. OLGA YOLDI reports.

It is a far cry from the pristine palm fringed beaches on tourist brochures. In the outskirts of Honiara the outlook is bleak. As we drive in the bright afternoon light, I see rows of run down houses and children playing in the streets. Poverty is visible everywhere. The driver tells me that the situation is not getting any better, “law and order is our biggest problem. No government has managed peace so far, no matter how hard they try.

It is late afternoon and the heat is oppressive. Groups of young men roam the streets. Honiara is a small town, spread over a hill overlooking a shimmering harbour. The main street is dusty and almost seedy. A group of vendors are selling vegetables, fruit, fish, betel nut and jewellery. The market is crowded, but life is a struggle for Joanna, a teacher, mother of two, who complements her wages selling chickens. She still remembers vividly the coup and the unrest that followed. “Everyone wanted power, everyone wanted to be the boss.” Our conversation is suddenly interrupted by people cheering. I walk over and see two men fighting, one of them is bleeding badly. Nobody has called the police. There is no functioning police force in the Solomon Islands and, for that matter, no functioning government either.

The Solomon Islands is an archipelago of 992 islands stretching over 840 miles in the South Pacific, with a population of nearly half a million people that speak 87 local languages, including Pidgin English. Migration from all directions over thousands of years has produced a country rich in cultural diversity. Melanesians, Polynesians, Asians and Micronesians call the islands home, with rich traditions and ancient customs still practiced in thousands of small villages.

After they were discovered by Spanish explorer Alvaro de Mendana in 1567, the Solomon Islands were lost for centuries, until whalers and traders disturbed the peace with their shonky business practices and diseased bodies. During the later part of the 19th century, labour recruiters known as ‘blackbirders’ raided the islands to supply indentured labourers for the Queensland and Fiji plantations. Approximately 30,000 islanders are believed to have been taken as labourers. The islanders grew to hate traders and would often kill any white person they saw, so the Solomon Islands quickly gained the reputation for being the most inhospitable place in the Pacific. Even the missionaries watched their step.

The British colonial administration had made little effort to develop the country, economically or socially so the colony was poorly prepared for nationhood. At independence in 1978, Solomon Islanders adopted the Westminster system of government and were introduced to party politics, but the institutions needed to run an effective democracy were inadequate and the traditional leadership systems, that had ruled the Solomon Islands for decades, were ignored.

The post independence period could be described as a long story with a sad ending. It is a story of weak governments struggling for legitimacy, of economic stagnation and a population growth capable of fuelling constant disputes over land and resources. A story of tribal violence and governments attempting to keep law and order in a country where corruption and criminality became the norm, turning it gradually and inexorably into a failed state. No wonder former Prime Minister Solomon Mamaloni would describe the Solomon Islands as “a nation that was conceived but is yet to be born.”

Ethnic tensions

Land has been central to the ethnic conflict in the Solomon Islands. Over the years, the population in the island of Malaita grew while land became scarce. Many Malaitans saw the bigger and less populated island of Guadalcanal as a vacant land and decided to migrate there. If only a few dozens
had done so instead of thousands, it may have worked. But with time, the numbers of Malaitan settlers grew and so did the tensions between locals and new settlers.

In 1999 disputes over land and resources took a dangerous turn when militant Guadalcanal youth calling themselves the Isatabu Freedom Movement (IFM) began arming themselves with World War II vintage rifles and home made guns. The IFM set about driving Malaitans from Guadalcanal. The government initially dismissed these activities as isolated incidents, but 20,000 Malaitans fled their homes. Many took refuge in Honiara, others returned to Malaita, even local residents of Honiara left the city. A state of emergency was declared in Guadalcanal. Despite several efforts to negotiate a cease-fire, the conflict continued unabated throughout 1999.

Hostilities intensified in 2000 when the Malaita Eagle Force (MEF) emerged. Using stolen weapons from police armouries in Auki (Malaita), the MEF launched an armed struggle against the IFM and Guadalcanal villagers. Both militias turned Honiara and settlements east and west of the city into a battleground. Two hundred people died, thousands were displaced and villages burnt. In June 2000, the MEF, supported by disaffected police officers, staged a coup and took Prime Minister Bartholomew Ulufa’alu hostage, demanding his resignation. The militants claimed that his government had failed to compensate for loss of Malaitan life and properties and he was forced to resign. Ulufa’alu had asked the Australian government to send police to assist in protecting him and his government from a coup, but the Australian government declined, saying it would be seen as an intrusion into the sovereignty of the country.

Following the coup the key export earners, the Gold Ridge gold mine and oil palm plantations ceased operations and aid was suspended. The economy faltered, government revenue plummeted and government services were disrupted. Manashe Sogavare became Prime Minister, but his government was corrupt and his actions contributed significantly to an economic decline and a deterioration of law and order.

Growing pressure from civil society, business groups and the international community led to the signing of the Townsville Peace Agreement in October 2000 by members of the MEF, IFM and the government. The Agreement provided a framework for consolidating peace. It provided for disarmament, compensation, reconciliation and development. A monitoring council was charged with responsibility for its implementation.

The Agreement was based on trust and confidence, but not all promises made were honoured and complying with its terms proved a lot more challenging in reality than on paper. The war ended only to be replaced by endemic, low level violence and intimidation by former militants who created a gang culture in Honiara.

University of Hawaii Researcher, Tarcisius Kabutaulaka Tara, sees “Townsville as being important because it provided for cessation of violence … it didn’t bring peace. We were given five days to negotiate the future of the Solomon Islands after experiencing two years of crisis. We have always had a weak state in the Solomons. We put too much hope in a very weak government that was incapable of taking over from Townsville and creating changes young people wanted the government to create.”

National Peace Council Chairman, Paul Tovua believes that the conditions were totally unrealistic. “The Agreement was thought to lay the foundations for an equitable society, for equitable distribution of resources, so they came up with this list of development ideas for Malaita that was unrealistic. All this was written without thinking about finance and without conducting prior economic assessments,” he says.

But the biggest obstacle to peace has been the reluctance of many former militants to hand in their weapons, one of the most important conditions of the Agreement. “We didn’t succeed there because militants were and still are fearful of reprisals by those they have harmed,” Tovua explains. “A lot of young people realise power comes from a barrel of a gun,” writes American academic, David Capie, “and if you have a weapon you become an important person and get to resources and things you couldn’t otherwise have.” Capie believes that it was the uncontrolled circulation of weapons that fuelled the conflict in the first place and is now preventing peace. “Easy access to weapons might make a difference between a dispute being settled by peaceful or violent means. Nowhere is this more evident than in the Solomon Islands, where the loss of control over a few hundred military firearms led..."
to a coup and to a state of ongoing instability.”

According to the MEF spokesperson, Andrew Nori, full disarmament has never been achieved in any post-conflict society and will not be achieved in the Solomons either. “The UN has been dealing with disarmament all over the world and that is their finding.” However, the leaders of the MEF have agreed to hand in their weapons. In fact, all groups were expected to do so under the amnesty, which run out in August 21.

The National Peace Council is confident that peace can be achieved by engaging all civil society groups, including traditional leaders, in all peace building efforts. They believe that by restoring the traditional patterns of authority, undermined by the conflict, some degree of social order could be achieved in the villages. However disarming ex-militants proved problematic because officers won’t arrest those they perceive as their kin.

The Agreement also stipulated the appointment of 200 former militants (100 MEF and 100 IMF) as special constables, but in actual fact the numbers went up to 2,000, placing an enormous burden on the government’s payroll system. It also provided for compensation to those affected by violence and displacement. However, very few legitimate compensation cases were settled; instead large sums were disbursed to former militant leaders and political leaders.

THE MYTH OF DEVELOPMENT

On my last day in the Solomons I venture outside Honiara. It is a beautiful morning and the sun is piercing through very tall trees. As I travel through narrow, slightly mountainous roads, to the war affected areas, I have an opportunity to observe village life. The driver is negotiating his way across the jungle with some difficulty but does not seem disturbed by it. I see villages, some of the houses destroyed, others burnt out and a few luckily still standing. “These homes were destroyed by the MEF,” the driver explains to me, “but those ones near the palm trees were actually burnt much earlier by the IFM.” We stop in a peace monitoring post, part of the National Peace Council’s activities and speak to the guard. “What we desperately need in this country is development, jobs and education,” he explains.

Indeed, without education or income ex-militants will continue to turn to crime. Poverty and high youth unemployment are contributing to the unrest, exacerbated by a chronic failure of the state to address problems and develop the nation. Although development has been high on the political agenda, most of the Solomon Islands to this day remain underdeveloped. “The village remains the heart of the nation but are the least helped,” Dr John Roughan says. “Their lifestyle has deteriorated markedly and today’s health, education and social services have fallen to low levels.”
Dr Roughan, an American former priest, attributes the failure of development to poor governance. He has lived in the Solomon Islands as long as he can remember. In the 1950s he founded the Solomon Islands Development Trust, which he still manages with aid funds from a Dutch Charity, and has devoted most of his life to improve the quality of life in the villages, where 85 per cent of the population lives.

“There has been an avoidance to look at the village as the resource base. Our resources are on the ground: rivers, lakes, trees, fisheries... the resource base should be the centre of investment,” he adds, “but the government says: ‘concentrate your investment dollars in big operations - gold mines, wharf and road construction, et cetera - as they will bring back returns.’ My question is: Returns to the nation? or, returns to the elite that runs the nation? If they invested in the village the return to the elite wouldn’t be much, so they go for the big operations and this way they think they will get the money to finance social, education and health services,” he says. “The theory looks good, in practice it doesn’t work because the elite never has enough. It always wants more. The eradication of poverty would mean a shift of power, but we don’t want to talk about that! This is the pattern of governance here. The politicians look at it this way: ‘Us first, the people second.’”

Professor, John Connell from Sydney University says that cultural fragmentation and the scattered nature of the islands have inhibited economic development. “The Solomon Islands can’t compete in a conventional sense with other countries to find niche markets,” he says. “Governance is a problem. The Central Bank is pushing reform programs, but there is also a strong push for proper governance from aid donors, who are frustrated by the government’s lack of response.”

Only months before Sir Allan Kemakeza, from the People’s Alliance Party, was elected Prime Minister in 2001, he had been sacked as Deputy Prime Minister, for allegedly helping himself to compensation for civil war victims. The biggest challenge for Kemakeza has been finding enough money for special constables claiming to have suffered by being sworn at during the civil war. “Paying off the trouble makers has been the policy of the government,” Dr Roughan says. “You pay the blackmailer and it is good for a period of time but they are back again and this is what is happening.”

Last December the country’s finance minister resigned in protest after Kemakeza asked him to allocate more funds for the special constables. Small wonder that the country is on the verge of bankruptcy. A visiting IMF team concluded the government’s policy “would entail disastrously, a further increase in budgetary and debt arrears, loss of donor financial assistance, intensified exchange restrictions and eventual economic collapse.”

The Asian Development Bank’s latest report described the situation as “desperate”. In fact, it is so bad that the government did not even have enough funds for parliament to sit and neglected to pay the electricity bill and the salaries of its public servants, sparking hospital and school strikes and leaving its international debt unpaid. The report said that the economy had contracted by 26 per cent since 1998. Only 5 per cent of the population is employed in the formal sector of the economy, the rest make a living from farming cash crops. The Solomons’ economy relies on gold and palm oil exports, both of which collapsed as a result of the ethnic conflict, leaving logging and fisheries as the only income sources.

Since 1978, timber has earned $US1.3 billion and the sale of fishing rights to Japanese firms has added substantially to this income. According to Foreign Correspondent, Mary Louise O’Callaghan, it is estimated that 90 per cent of the Solomon’s consolidated revenue does not even reach the country’s Treasury, “but is handed out in bribes, bogus allowances and ‘compensation’ payments to whoever possesses a gun and demands money.”

Journalist Robert Keith Reid writes that cases of corruption grew to be dealings not costing just a mere few hundred thousand dollars but hundreds of millions. “Melanesia is notorious as the Pacific’s most fertile ground for massive corruption, usually centering on the bribery of political and public service leaders by foreign exploiters of Melanesia’s forests, mineral and fisheries wealth,” he wrote. “Illegal logging by Asian Timber companies has cost the Solomons hundreds of million of dollars in lost development revenue.” According to Reid, Asian logging interests were instrumental in engineering a change of government by providing money used to bribe opposition MPs to government...
sides. “Former Prime Minister Solomon Mamaloni granted extraordinary concessions including massive tax relief to his logging pals and was equally corrupt in handing out fishing licenses,” he writes.

In the last 25 years the government received $1.1 billion in aid. A recent report issued by Helen Hughes from the Centre for Independent Studies, called for the suspension of foreign aid. “The Solomons’ economic problems arise from development strategies that combine the exploitation of economic rents (unearned windfall incomes) from natural resources (timber and fish) with communal and government welfare. Bilateral and multilateral aid has supported these strategies, with rents from aid adding to resource rents to create swollen government and a culture of corruption that, with joblessness, has led to crime.” She recommended that funds be disbursed only on the evidence of met targets and audited expenditures. “Without such changes Australian aid will continue to damage the Pacific.”

Dr Roughan says that there has been a tendency to use aid money in consumption rather than development. “On Election Day a villager becomes a Minister and he is administering millions of dollars donated by aid donors, with no previous preparation or guidance. He sees it as his wealth, and, you are expecting him not to waste it?” he says. “These countries need to understand the context in which they are sending the funds, otherwise donors are just as much at fault as recipients.”

After years of working in the longest established and most widely recognised NGO in the Solomon Islands, Dr Roughan has come to the conclusion that development is just a myth that we tend to perpetuate. “After 50 years of development only 24 out of 187 countries are developed,” he says. “The concept most people have of development is what is happening in the United States or Canada and that is the light they are going towards … it is an unattainable goal. Development simply means a dignified life, health, education and some degree of prosperity.”

THE POLICEMAN OF THE PACIFIC

The Australian government perceives failing states in the Pacific as a threat to Australia, a potential haven for drug running, money laundering and terrorism. But it is also the illegal traffic of arms that poses a threat to the stability of the region as a whole. A study ‘Small Arms in the Pacific’ published by the Geneva based Small Arms Survey, has revealed that the Pacific is awash with illegal guns and lax security. “Whether they spring from inadequately guarded state armouries or unmonitored private stocks, it is clear that the current mechanisms often fail to prevent the transfer of small arms from legal owners to criminals,” the report says. “The 3.1 million guns in civilian hands in the region outnumber those of the armed forces and police by nearly 14 to 1.”

As Australian troops landed in the Solomon Islands after the 2006 election, Helen Hughes pointed out that the donors not only had fulfilled their obligations, but also had a lot to answer for. “After the 2006 election, the government received an extra $90 million in aid,” she wrote. “This was in the context of a country that had already received $280 million in aid in the previous five years.”

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The market in Honiara
Islands, the Prime Minister, John Howard gave a strong indication the Federal Government was prepared to intervene in other Pacific trouble spots. “Very importantly, the Australian intervention will send a signal to other countries in the region that help is available if it is sought, that we do have a desire to help all the peoples of the Pacific to have conditions of law and order, hope, peace and stability for their future generations,” Mr Howard said.

Restoring law and order may take longer than planned. Taking into consideration the resources needed for logistic support and administration, it is uncertain whether the 2000 Australian police and military will be able to tackle the law and order problem beyond Honiara. A bigger force may be required to deal with criminals fleeing to remote areas.

But until the causes of the conflict are resolved there will be no lasting peace, no matter how many Australian troops are deployed. As norm Dixon wrote, “an Australian military intervention cannot begin to solve problems that are the legacy of more than a century of imperialist economic domination and the inability of the capitalist system to develop poor societies.”

Until land ownership is resolved there will be no gains from development. Land is life in the Solomon Islands, so a land reform needs to be a vital element of peace building. Bishop of Malaita, Terry Brown recommends Australia should support a program for the registration of customary land. Unlike other Pacific nations, more than 90 per cent of land in the Solomons is held through “customary land tenure” - that is, corporate ownership of land by a whole tribe. “There is no system for legally registering this land with clear boundaries, genealogies and land trusts. The result is an endless string of land disputes, dividing communities and bringing violence,” he wrote. When cases are appealed, the High Court tends to give ownership of the land to an individual on behalf of the tribe, who can then register or sell the land as ‘alienated land.’ According to Brown, this system is constantly abused and has enabled the unsustainable exploitation of natural resources by foreign investors, who gain access to the land by paying bribes to these individuals.

The establishment of a Truth and Reconciliation Commission will enable the people of the Solomon Islands to confront and deal with the past constructively. It will also help perpetrators to reintegrate into their former communities. Many senior politicians and police have been involved in militia activity, some as leaders as well as in crime and corruption and they are now saying that any crimes committed in the past will be exempt from foreign military and police prosecution. But many people are against giving a blanket amnesty to perpetrators. As Adrian Smith, Catholic Archbishop of Honiara, wrote, “great harm has been done to our people over the past three years. It will be difficult to go forward if perpetrators of serious crimes are allowed to go unpunished.” So far the biggest breakthrough of the Australian-led intervention force has been the negotiations that led to Harold Keke’s surrender. Keke, a former militant, has been accused of killing more than 50 people in Weathercoast, a remote area in Guadalcanal. The surrender of Keke is important for the disarming of other remnant militia groups and criminal gangs.

A return to the rule of law must be matched with a long-term strategy to help villages get back to self-sufficiency. Aid money may need to be invested in health and education. Most parents cannot even afford to send their children to high school. Free education is vital. As Bishop Terry Brown writes, “without education, the pool of illiterate, dissatisfied, disappointed youth will simply grow. They form the pool that will produce the terrorists that Australia is so afraid of.”

Building the judiciary and the police force are vital steps towards peace, but so is economic development. Most importantly, it will be necessary to listen to what the Solomon Islanders really want from this intervention. Economic development should also contribute to the rise and involvement of civil society. This will prevent government corruption and will help to create ownership and accountability. Village communities need to participate because without real transformation the initial phase of optimism may give way to resentment.

In my last few hours in Honiara I read about the constant frustrations of living in a failed state. The editor of the Solomon Star describes the pain and hardship Solomon Islanders have experienced since independence and the mistakes made by governments. Many believe that it is the family, religion and cultural ties that have held Solomon Islanders together, but if it won’t take long before frustration turns to desperation. “It’ll take years to correct ourselves if it won’t take long before frustration turns to desperation. “It’ll take years to correct ourselves if it won’t take long before frustration turns to desperation. “It’ll take years to correct ourselves if it won’t take long before frustration turns to desperation. “It’ll take years to correct ourselves if it won’t take long before frustration turns to desperation. “It’ll take years to correct ourselves if it won’t take long before frustration turns to desperation. “It’ll take years to correct ourselves if it won’t take long before frustration turns to desperation. “It’ll take years to correct ourselves if it won’t take long before frustration turns to desperation. “It’ll take years to correct ourselves if it won’t take long before frustration turns to desperation. “It’ll take 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The editor of the Solomon Star describes the pain and hardship Solomon Islanders have experienced since independence and the mistakes made by governments. Many believe that it is the family, religion and cultural ties that have held Solomon Islanders together, but if it won’t take long before frustration turns to desperation. “It’ll take years to correct ourselves but some of the damages we have created are beyond repair,” he writes. “We have to live with the mess since independence. How will we correct it?”
Yusuf had a dream that he could escape persecution in Iraq and find safe haven for his family in Australia. A graphic designer, who worked on a paper which ran foul of Saddam Hussein, he suffered Saddam’s wrath along with all the other staff. Taking his wife and two small children, they fled to Syria. The long journey to Australia was too dangerous and too expensive for the whole family, so Yusuf went alone. By Peter Williamson

Perhaps he was naïve to believe that Australia would take him in. But they had done so for others, and Australia had a reputation for kindness to refugees. He dreamed, too, that one day he would go to the zoo, and watch the kangaroos through the bars. He could never have foreseen the treatment he would receive. Arriving in Australia’s arid North by boat from Indonesia, Yusuf realised quickly that there would be no warm reception. His nightmare had begun.

The Australian authorities did not accept Yusuf’s story. Although they condemned Saddam Hussein’s brutality and labeled him the world’s worst dictator, there would be no asylum for Yusuf and thousands of other Iraqis being persecuted at home. Yusuf made himself useful, and his English improved rapidly. In the Port Hedland Detention Centre he helped as an interpreter for his captors. He got drawn into endless negotiations, resolving crises, and working as an intermediary in bureaucratic communications.

Yusuf asked to be released so that he could go somewhere else in the world. The Australian government said “No”. They would not send him back to Iraq, and no one else would take him. He could not be released into the Australian community, so despite having committed no crime, he would be in indefinite detention. The situation was Kafkaesque.

Eventually depression and exhaustion got to him, and in one single act of compassion, they agreed to give him a break from his unpaid work in Port Hedland, and they transferred him to Villawood. That is where I met him.

Lawyers had taken up his case, and were challenging the legality of his detention. He was now hopeful, that something could be done. But three and a half years into his detention, Yusuf ran out of hope. War clouds were gathering in the Middle East and he thought of his wife and his children, now 9 and 10 years old, and he realised that they needed him.

Syria agreed to give Yusuf a visa, valid for six months, but no more. As I write this, Yusuf must be sitting on a plane at Sydney Airport. A guard will be sitting next to him, until his plane lands in Thailand, and it is deemed no risk that he can return to Australia.

It is a hot muggy day in Sydney. Yusuf has seen many hot days in Australia. Bar a few trips into Port Hedland, to the dentist and to the shops, he never saw the outside of a detention centre. Even when he was transferred from Sydney Airport to Villawood, he was put in a van with blacked out windows. He never saw the beach, and he never saw the Sydney Harbour Bridge, the Opera House, or had a walk in the Australian bush. And, of course, he never got to go to the zoo.

He did see the kangaroos, however. One day in Port Hedland, two kangaroos hopped up to the fence of the detention centre. Yusuf stared at the strange animals, looking back at him. He thought it was odd the way the kangaroos stared at him, and that he was on the other side of the fence, the one behind the wire.

Yusuf made it to Syria, but he was robbed of his money by guards at Bangkok Airport. He is still looking for a safe place to live.

Afterword

Yusuf made it to Syria, but he was robbed of his money by guards at Bangkok Airport. He is still looking for a safe place to live.
Human Rights Law and International Order
An interview with John Pace

For 33 years, international lawyer, JOHN PACE, worked for the United Nations. For several years, he was Secretary of the Commission of Human Rights, the UN body where international human rights law is drafted. He was also responsible for the first UN human rights investigative procedures, and he conducted fact-finding missions on human rights abuses in Chile, South Africa, Palestine, Poland, Cuba and Afghanistan. He is a Visiting Fellow at the Australian Human Rights Centre, part of the Faculty of Law of the University of New South Wales where he lectures on Human Rights Law. He is currently in Geneva researching a book with the provisional title “International Human Rights Law, Evolution, Structure and Content”. OLGA YOLDI met him in Sydney, where he spoke about the refugee convention, Australia’s treatment of asylum seekers, globalisation and a broad notion of human rights - all in the context of international law.
Is the detention of asylum seekers legal under international law?

Detention is a deprivation of the right to liberty. International law is designed to protect asylum seekers and refugees; it would neither contemplate nor authorise the detention of asylum seekers, and certainly not for an indefinite duration. However, it is accepted that a state can take measures to control its borders and some people may be detained for purposes of checking the veracity of their documents, or for having access to the individual while they process a claim, but it would be a short detention and not in conditions of incarceration. When that process is finished and if it is found that the person does not qualify for any kind of protection under international law, or national law, then he or she may be deported, as it is presumed that the applicant can return to his or her country of origin. If a person has left his country because of circumstances that render the continuation of living there impossible, it is presumed that he would need some form of protection.

There are international conventions that protect the rights of children, however children are being detained in Australia now. Is detention of children illegal under international law?

There aren’t many conventions that protect the rights of children. If you look at the history of the conventions that the Commission on Human Rights produced, there is the Convention on the Rights of the Child. It took 18 years to develop this convention, and it has been ratified by a record number of governments; yet, it has some drawbacks and there are areas that are not adequately addressed. The expert body [Committee on the Rights of the Child] that monitors how governments are putting their obligations into effect has done good work in expanding the jurisdiction within the parameters of the convention itself, even though some child protection related problems have not been specifically addressed.

Can asylum seekers in detention, who have been refused status but cannot be repatriated, be protected in any way under international law? At present they are in interim detention until the political situation of the country of origin changes. Change, however may never occur in which case they will be indefinitely detained.

Human rights law does not allow mandatory detention, as it is not consistent with international human rights law. If Australia has ratified the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights then the government is contravening their obligations under that Covenant.

Shouldn’t the Refugee Convention be broadened to account for environmental and economic refugees?

Yes the Refugee Convention should be broadened. The Convention is old, outdated. It doesn’t work for most people. It only works for small groups of people. When the Convention was drafted in 1951, it was responding principally to the needs of refugees of World War II in Eastern Europe.

The whole regime of international law was geared to protect persons who had to leave their country for political reasons, because of discrimination or persecution. The protection of refugees under international law does not address problems of economic, cultural and social rights. That is why many people believe today that the so-called economic refugees should not enjoy the protection offered to political refugees, because they cannot prove that they have a deep-seated fear of persecution. I do believe, however, that the covenant on social and cultural rights should be applied to protect those people.

Last week the Migrant Workers Convention came into force. Guatemala was the twentieth country that ratified the convention, and that completed the number of countries required to bring the convention into force – to make it applicable. Migrant workers is a classic case of denying economic rights. It took much longer than most conventions just to bring out the 20 states to ratify it for it to become legally binding. Because, in spite of its intrinsic merits, there was a great deal of political unwillingness among governments to extend the protection of social and economic rights to migrant workers.

Poverty and inequitable distribution of resources are contributing to the denial of economic and social rights and that has to be addressed. Twenty one million people are moving around the planet today. People don’t leave their country for the joy of it. Most people, given the choice, would stay in their own country. The only reason they leave is because of survival. It is that deprivation of their economic rights that causes most conflicts.

Governments try to protect their borders, their societies, but sending them back does not solve the problem. Those people that were sent back to Afghanistan are trying to survive in a country that is still hostile and dangerous.

Parallel to the convention we have the Statute of the High Commission for Refugees, which includes a mechanism for applying the convention in a
manner that makes it more elastic, so over the years the provisions of the Refugee Convention of 1951 have been stretched, but the convention cannot be stretched anymore. It is not addressing the so-called economic refugees. That is where the problem lies. Political persecution today is marginal. In Afghanistan people left because of religious persecution, not because of political persecution.

It may take a long time before economic refugees are accepted and protected by international law.

It is unfortunate that the law is always following the reality and not leading it.

I really do hope that economic and social rights will be implemented alongside civil and political rights, because these two sets or rights form one set of standards that enable individuals to live with a certain amount of dignity, which forms the basis for social order and peace. So much so that the Universal Declaration of Human Rights incorporates all these rights in one single document. Unfortunately, for historic reasons, economic and social rights were separated from civil and political rights and each set was made the subject of a covenant or pact. So even if each covenant is part of international human rights law, the fact that they are separated weakens both.

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights which, as I said, incorporates all human rights in a single document. Unfortunately, for historic reasons, economic and social rights were separated from civil and political rights and each set was made the subject of a covenant or pact. So even if each covenant is part of international human rights law, the fact that they are separated weakens both.

The problem started at the top where the division took place in 1952. You have to understand that at that time the notion of protection was limited to civil and political rights. When you talk to government officials or people in the street about human rights they think of torture and arbitrary detention. Nobody thinks about the right to work, to health, to education and the right to shelter.

It is interesting to recall, anecdotally, that the first draft declaration of human rights to be proposed to the UN in 1946 was by Cuba, followed shortly thereafter by a second proposed draft submitted by Panama. The Latin American countries were well prepared at that time. Indeed, they had had a meeting in Mexico shortly before the charter was drafted. In fact, the Latin American countries were the first developers of human rights. A human rights treaty for the region, the Treaty of San Jose, was signed in 1938 in Costa Rica.

After World War II there was a movement that pushed to put together an international system that was more durable than the League of Nations had been. Under the charter of the UN, there was a mandate to set up a commission of human rights which had the mandate to develop international human rights standards. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights was adopted in 1948. At the time the Declaration did not have the effect of law. Thus, the General Assembly of the UN decided that a human rights convention would be drafted that would be legally binding for governments, and work started on the drafting of this convention in 1948. But by 1950 the Commission on Human Rights, which was drafting this convention, was experiencing problems keeping all human rights together in one unitary convention, and by 1952 the Assembly reluctantly agreed to separate civil, political rights from social and economic rights. When the drafting of these binding laws was finished in 1966, it took another 10 years for 35 governments to ratify them, by accepting the legal obligations and its implementation. Such governments from then on would be obliged to report to a body elected by the States who would have become party to the covenant. This body, known as The Human Rights Committee, is made up of individual experts – not government representatives, as in the case of the Commission on Human Rights - elected by the governments who have ratified the Covenant, and whose task is to monitor the conduct of governments, and to point out
what measures governments should or shouldn’t take to make their national laws and practices consistent with their international obligations.

It took 30 years, from 1948 to 1978, for international human rights law to start being implemented and even then it was only limited to those states that had ratified the Convention. A very slow process indeed! There are others, but those don’t have a mechanism for implementation for there is no supervision.

Who is this group of experts that form the regulatory body for the implementation of human rights?

The Human Rights Committee is made of a few members from each region, elected by those governments who have ratified the covenant. This Committee supervises the implementation of the international Covenant on Civil and Political Rights. They meet three months a year, they focus on individual cases, hear complaints about governments, receive reports from governments on the way in which they say they have implemented their obligations, such as, how they have adapted their judiciary systems, and so on. Not only governments provide feedback but also non-government organisations (NGOs) such as Amnesty International, MSF [Doctors without Borders] and others also submit reports to complement the information provided by governments. It is not a perfect process and it doesn’t always work as well as it should, because when these treaties were done it was not expected they would be so popular today.

Ironically, if you measure the success of a treaty by the number of governments that have ratified it, then you can say that the success of the treaty has also been the cause of its inefficiency. Governments are expected to report only every few years; that, of course, is not good enough, there are however measures that can be taken in between. The Commission can also hold extraordinary sessions to focus on specific countries, in parallel to the usual convention or treaties.

Also, many governments simply do not submit reports. Therefore the committees have had to develop a procedure whereby if a government doesn’t report to the committee, then the committee is empowered to make an assessment of the situation in that country, even in the absence of a government report. The committee will do so from the information available from NGOs or other UN human rights bodies, and, from the so-called Special Rapporteurs, or by using extra conventional mechanisms. In the 1960s, in addition to the treaties, the Commission on Human Rights developed a second parallel system of implementation of human rights. This is known as the Extra-Conventional System, which is based on the principle of fact finding, or investigation, under specific resolutions of the Commission on specific situations in certain countries.

For instance, when the coup took place in Chile in 1973 the Convention on Torture didn’t exist. But there was such a public outcry about human rights violations perpetrated by the Pinochet’s military junta that the Commission decided to conduct an ad hoc investigation into these allegations. During that period the Rapporteur in Chile was reporting to the Commission about the government of Chile. This is a good example of how the UN, in parallel to the legislative process, can also undertake ad hoc measures. The Commission has been accused of not taking steps in relation to other human rights violations perpetrated in other countries where the situation was as bad as in Chile.

A short time later, a proposal was tabled in the Commission on Human Rights, against the Argentinean junta, who decided to cooperate in the drawing up of the resolution. A compromise was reached when a mandate to conduct a collective investigation on disappearances (not necessarily related to Argentina) was carried out. Of course, the emphasis was on Argentina and indeed the Commission set up an infrastructure to, among other things, record the names of those people who had disappeared. When a civilian government was elected in Argentina years later, it came to us to seek the records to enable them to track down the people who had disappeared.

When we speak about implementation of human rights, you have got to take into account that these are standards that have been set up as a result of the collective political interaction of governments. It is not perfect because governments always negotiate with each other on the basis of national interests. However, the platform of consensus and agreement among governments has consolidated itself; today, it is possible not only to denounce but also to prosecute the perpetrators. There is such a thing as a human rights crime, the so-called crimes against humanity, it is the subject of jurisdiction set out in the Rome Statute, setting up the International Criminal Court; something that not so long ago was simply not possible. It wasn’t possible to talk about human rights crimes because the political consensus didn’t allow it. We have had a constant evolution, hardly noticeable, because what we see is essentially the denial of human rights.
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There are countries that are consistent and countries that aren’t. The force of international law lies in the international collectivity and not the individual country itself. In some countries it fails, however other countries have an interest in making sure that it doesn’t fail because the denial of human rights in some countries may have repercussions on others.

However human rights continue to be violated, we see and read about them everyday. The genocide of Rwanda for example, people hardly remember that it was the third genocide that had taken place in the last 30 years in the same region. Tutsis against Hutus and vice-versa. Before it was not possible to have a trial about the genocide in Rwanda; now it is possible because of the International Criminal Tribunal on Rwanda. It may not be working with the utmost efficiency, but it is working. A number of people are being convicted of these crimes. Up to 10 to 15 years ago you had impunity. Even Pinochet was considered to be untouchable until a Spanish magistrate issued an extradition request to the judiciary of the UK, on behalf of a Spanish citizen who claimed his rights had been violated in Chile, while Pinochet was in power. From a legal point of view, Pinochet was held responsible for crimes that had been committed in violation of the Convention against Torture to which Spain, Chile and the UK were parties. That would never have been possible a few years before. He got away, but in Chile he was deprived of the immunity he had as a senator. Even the courts in Chile took up the case.

Milosevich is answerable to a court. He may be found guilty or not, but Idi Amin got away, Bocassa, the Shah of Iran and Mengistu got away because the international legal system had not yet been developed to the level it is today. Although the present system is far from satisfactory and there is a long way to go, the fact is, it is a process that is constantly acquiring strength and momentum.

“The temporary notion of asylum is inconsistent with the spirit of the Convention.”

Is the issuing of Temporary Protection Visas legal? Is this temporary notion of asylum within the spirit of the Convention?

Yes, they are legal to the extent that they are the result of a national law but they are also inconsistent with international law. The temporary notion of asylum is inconsistent with the spirit of the Convention. The convention has very strict principles of non-refoulement under international law. Those governments that receive asylum seekers are not to send them back. On the other hand, they can only be given refugee status if they conform to international law. Protection under international law is only possible if governments have agreed to certain criteria, certain standards, which are embodied in the convention.

The Refugee Convention says that you are a refugee if you cannot return home. Under the Convention it is irrelevant if the situation in the country of origin changes. Refugees who came to Australia in the 1950s from Germany or Russia were never sent back when the situation in their countries did change. At the moment many asylum seekers’ lives are being put on hold because they don’t know whether they will be sent back or not and when that will happen, if ever. Is it reasonable to repatriate refugees if the situation in their country of origin changes after applicants have been processed?

The question of repatriation of refugees after the situation in their country of origin changes is an artificial one, because the circumstances that would have caused people to leave will not only change if the political situation changes, but if the social and economic conditions change. You can have another government in Afghanistan, but in reality, that government may not have addressed the conditions that caused people to flee.

The policy of refugees in Australia has always been on the generous side. It was never as restrictive as we see it today. But what has happened in the last few years is the result of the hysteria, which is understandable if you take into consideration the huge number of people moving around the world. Australia receives a symbolic fraction of asylum seekers coming in this direction. But if we look at Europe, the flow between Africa and Europe is massive with boats crossing from Africa to Southern Europe constantly. However they don’t detain them. The same happens with the Mexico-US border. They may not qualify as refugees but they are not sent back. Migration from impoverished to developed countries is a big tragedy and has not been addressed sufficiently by the international community. We cannot close the door to these people because if they don’t come by boat they will come by plane or by foot.

The purpose of development is to create conditions that eliminate the causes that oblige
people to flee. When people leave it impacts on the economy of their own countries, often-rich countries as in the case of Angola for instance. Angola has one of the richest lands. It is blessed by fertile grounds, by rich mineral deposits, by oil, diamonds etc, yet people are starving because the economy has been destroyed as a result of decades of civil war and by the colonial system, which had no interest whatsoever in developing countries. Unfortunately, colonialism, at least in many cases, never helped to build solid political structures and solid economies. Colonialism only developed dependent economies. Countries rich in natural resources supplying to developed countries.

Globalisation, the internationalisation of trade is a modern phenomenon. Has it contributed to human rights violations or economic exploitation?

Today markets are no longer limited to borders. The internationalisation of trade is ironically helping the realisation of economic and social rights. Unfortunately multinationals only speak about the maximisation of profits and don’t take sufficiently into account the need to respect economic rights. However there is a strong indication they are moving in this direction. The freedom of making profits at all costs is being limited by the recognition of the need to respect international law. The respect of human rights is in the best interest of trade. Corporations that have a short-sighted policy will collapse. They may make a lot of money in a short term, but then most businesses are increasingly recognising the need for long-term survival and in order to do that they need to ensure that people to whom they are selling, employing and providing resources, have their economic and social rights respected under international law.

If we look at Indonesia for instance, the changes are quite phenomenal. It is a country that is big, that has an impossible geography, a wide variety of cultures, and is rich in natural resources. In recent years they have been reorganising their economy in such a way so as to have a more equitable distribution of resources. Until recently they had an autocratic government, the economy was deteriorating, however the younger generation of Indonesians are engaging in the task of reorganising the economy so as to make it consistent with these international standards.

I will give you another example, Chad is a country with a long tradition of internal conflict. There is a project aimed at helping the people of Chad, who have long suffered as a result of this internal conflict. The project developed last year includes three parties: the government of Chad, a consortium of oil and gas companies from a number of countries, and the World Bank. Under an agreement, the oil companies extract the oil, the resources from that exploitation are going to the World Bank, the World Bank only releases those moneys to the government, directly taking care of the bills for the construction of projects that strengthen the economic and social infrastructure of the country, such as schools, hospitals, staff training etc. Only a small percentage goes to the government. This is a way in which the international system is seeking to strengthen the infrastructure of the country. Eventually the government will have a society that is better protected. It won’t be necessary for it to continue to repress its citizens and may instil a culture of respect to its own individuals within its own jurisdiction.

The World Bank is serving a purpose, the multinational corporations are making their profits but the people of Chad are getting the benefits. This project could address some of the long-term problems by strengthening the economy and making it possible for an equitable distribution of the wealth of the country, thus enhancing the basis for stability.

The private sector is assuming this responsibility more and more. You have the sort of projects happening now such as the Global Compact, which is a concept that it is still in its infancy, aimed at raising awareness in international corporations, in regard to the implementation of human rights standards, including international labour and environment standards. The UN Secretary General announced the Global Compact in the 1999 World Economic Forum in Davos Switzerland. Since then a number of international companies and NGOs have been co-operating together to bring the international human rights agenda closer to the private sector. Many corporations are moving in that direction, which is something that was inconceivable...
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not so long ago. Having said that, we must emphasise that there is still a long way to go, and many corporations have still to fully understand the logic of endorsing a human rights agenda.

The multinational corporations were traditionally associated with economic exploitation of colonies. They were tools of the colonisation process. Today, they are competing with each other to look better. Some still consider this as a pure public relations exercise, but many of them have begun the process of injecting this culture inside their corporations as part of their values.

If you see the current social and political state of our world there is a long way to go in the implementation of human rights.

The implementation of treaties by countries has a long way to go but it is moving. I have worked in the UN for 33 years. When I started it was almost like science fiction. It was paper pushing. Today in the UN we speak about investigations, about the international criminal court, we speak of the efforts to fight impunity. These are concepts that were totally foreign not long ago. So, although there is a long way to go we have been making considerable advances.

Human rights are not something that you win or lose. Human rights are a way of life. They work if you have institutions in the country that are able to provide the individual with the possibility of addressing problems of human rights and believe in them. So, if the courts are functioning well, if the individual has the opportunity to be assisted to find a remedy to a problem then that is fine. But if you don’t have those institutions the individual has no way of seeking protection. Then you are in trouble and the international system is there to encourage and strengthen those institutions and those mechanisms at the national level.

Asylum seekers are like a barometer; they show us to what extent we need to address the causes that create asylum seekers in the first place. Until that is addressed we will have a problem and the international law can only continue to create this natural fibre, tissue, material that minimises the chances of abuse.

The protection of the individual is the primary responsibility of the state. Some states fail to protect its citizens. When states fail the institutions have a duty to intervene. Intervening does not mean short-term solutions, but providing support to strengthen the economy and the social and political institutions so that the state can survive as an entity on its own merits.

International law is like a chain, a chain is as strong as its weakest link. It can only work to the extent that it is applied. If you have a regime that is corrupt, that doesn’t respect the rights of its citizens, then international law remains weak. On the other hand, those states that have institutions that have a tradition, a culture of human rights, have a duty to export that culture to assist people who don’t have that benefit. That can be done by creating the conditions in that country that will enable it to strengthen its institutions and economy.

International law is a process that relies heavily on its components and the components are governments. But now there aren’t only governments, civil society is strong. You have organisations such as the International Committee of the Red Cross, Amnesty International, Medecins sans Frontieres, World Council of Churches. Governments also listen to them. The nature of civil society has also changed, from one of purely denouncing to one of doing. The protection of civilians is directly linked to these organisations. So, you have governments and civil society. You have international systems working, helping and educating people on human rights. International entities work together and complement one another not only to protect individuals, but convict the perpetrators.

So, today international law is a much more sophisticated process than it used to be. It is no longer simply a reaction to a violation but a productive process. We still have a long way to go. New generations make stronger claims and some have a global culture mentality. Look at the reaction to the war that took place in Iraq. You saw the persistence and insistence of people including the new generations who are trying to do something about it, and that is important.

International law is necessary to ensure world order—international human rights law is necessary to ensure world peace.
The year 1987 marked a sentinel year for the struggle against torture, both internationally and locally. The idea of a NSW torture and trauma service was born in that year and the idealism and passion that it generated led to the establishment of STARTTS the very next year. By Professor Derrick Silove.

At an international level, previous declarations on torture were at last consolidated and adopted into international law as the UN Convention against Torture. These converging developments at the global and local level, gave many of us hope that our work assisting torture survivors had the beginnings of a durable foundation. We felt supported and championed in our work and cherished the hope that the tide had at last turned in that the leading world nations had at last made an unconditional commitment to condemn and struggle against the practice of torture worldwide.

Sixteen idealistic years later, so much has changed. I have no doubt that I reflect the deep feelings of unease of all of us here tonight, by saying that those heady days are no longer with us, and that we have reached a profound and troubling crossroads with evidence all around us that there has been an erosion in the global commitment to human rights.

What has happened? The commonly repeated catchphrase after September 11 was that the world had changed and would never be the same again. The gravity of the tragedy in the US is beyond question, yet many of us were a little mystified by that mantra about the world changing forever. We hoped it meant that the tragedy in the US would unite all nations in recognising that much of the world remained a dangerous and terror-ridden place, where wars raged in over 100 regions and where 11 countries worldwide routinely terrorized their populations with torture. No, this is in hindsight, was not what we meant—it seems that the subtext really was that the world would never be the same because henceforth, human rights concerns would be subordinated to the so-called war against terrorism. And after Afghanistan and Iraq, we now know that the War against Terrorism really means a commitment to the interminable Terror of War.

Let me list just some of the remarkable reversals in human rights we have suffered in the last few years under the new philosophy.

• A prominent Harvard professor claims publicly that torture may be justified in certain circumstances.
• Alleged terrorists, some of them minors, are held incommunicado in inhumane and cruel conditions in Guantanamo Bay, several being released without trial.
• Suspected terrorists from Afghanistan are
At a Crossroad on Torture

diverted deliberately by Western powers for interrogation to security police facilities in countries known to use torture.

- Our own administration obstructs the passage of the Optional Protocol to the Convention of Torture, arguably the most important preventive strategy on torture ever produced by the world community. I was privileged to be asked to comment on an early draft of the protocol and was immediately struck by the quantum leap it could achieve – an obligatory undertaking by signatory states to allow independent visits to places of detention and the setting up of torture prevention committees in member countries. Hardly an objectionable idea, surely?

- Asylum seekers held in cruel, inhumane and degrading circumstances in Australian detention centres, at Manus Island and Nauru, with it finally falling to the Family Court to rule that the indefinite and non-reviewable detention of children is illegal in terms of the Convention on the Rights of the Child.

- The passage of a bill that will allow the detention by ASIO of persons as young as 16 years for questioning. We are assured that the system has checks and balances and will not be abused. The same superficial reassurances were given in South Africa during the Apartheid era, the end result being repeated claims of torture and deaths during incommunicado detention, the gory details of which were finally revealed in the Truth and Reconciliation Commission. That is not to say that Australia is anything like the Apartheid Regime but our willful historical amnesia in terms of our failure to learn from the mistakes of past renegade regimes is extraordinary. We seem to be cavalier in our willingness to forget the aged-old dictum that power corrupts and that absolute power corrupts absolutely. Access to the court to test the legitimacy of detention is an inviolable safeguard that we forfeit at our peril.

Perhaps most provocatively in the last few days, we have heard a talkback debate about the virtues or otherwise of Australian victims of Bali, attending the court hearings and launching verbal attacks on the accused outside a Denpassar court. This event was given far more airplay than the claims made by more than one accused that they have been tortured by Indonesian police. This corrosion of our airspace to my mind puts us as a community to the ultimate test. We naturally feel revulsion for the smiling accused chanting and waving their fists unrepentantly on TV. Yet the human rights regime is there precisely to constrain us from retaliating and sinking to the levels of cruelty and violence that have been perpetrated.

Because the alleged perpetrators seem so heartless and lacking in contrition, can we say that they deserve to be tortured or at least that we will turn a blind eye to their claims? This is the moral Waterloo that we face – can torture ever be justified or dismissed as irrelevant given larger horrors that the tortured may have committed?

It is precisely at junctures such as these, mindful of the anguish and grief of our compatriots that we need, painfully, to reaffirm our absolute rejection of torture, a practice that is proscribed by international law under all conditions.

The lesson that this teaches us is that the regime of human rights that we guard so jealously comes at a price and may demand of us pain, constraint, sacrifice and the willingness to risk even our own security to uphold the principles we cherish. The human rights regime is not a luxury to be invoked when convenient and to be discarded when it irritates. Human rights are degraded when invoked cynically to justify removing regimes, however evil, by acts of war when embarrassingly, weapons of mass destruction are not uncovered.

To establish a genuine and durable regime of human rights we have to defend their primacy and the obligations that accompany them – human rights are inalienable, unconditional and apply to everyone, at all times and in all contexts, otherwise they have no meaning. The ultimate test of our commitment is our capacity and willingness to defend human rights in the face of provocation and threat, simply because we value beyond all else the freedoms and dignities that they offer and because we know that a society without human rights is not worthy of its name and not worth belonging to.

We need to return to the age-old dictum that an injustice to one is an injustice to all. We need to re-affirm a deep commitment to acknowledging, however painfully, that a durable peace and a genuine global security can only be achieved by extending justice, human rights and fairness to all and not through the barrel of the gun. So as a local community, what can help us through this global crisis of conscience? A good form of self-therapy is to remember and celebrate what has been achieved already. To paraphrase Gandhi, when we feel paralyzed by the scale of injustice, then the trick is to start small where we are right now. And STARTTS is well named to embody that principle.

STARTTS, the NSW torture and trauma service that I have had the deep privilege to be associated with since its birth, stands out as a shining beacon, since it puts words and principles into practice. Turning universal human rights precepts into the
particularities of every day activity – focusing our attention on helping survivors right here and now.

The underlying mission, to turn general principles into effective action, has permeated the agency from its humble beginnings. Since its inception, STARTTS has grown to become one of the largest and most sophisticated services of its kind worldwide. STARTTS has developed a model of multidimensional and multidisciplinary service that is an exemplar of practice in the field, a badge of achievement that is endorsed regularly by visitors from far and wide.

The innovative services and projects initiated by STARTTS are too numerous to recount in detail, but to mention a few:

- A groundbreaking early intervention program for recently arrived refugees that has pioneered brief and comprehensive interventions, and which, like no other service worldwide, is producing evidence of its effectiveness by staff undertaking a comprehensive documentation of its assessments and outcomes.
- A fully documented Families in Cultural Transition group program that has assisted thousands of newly arrived refugees to resettle and acculturate to their new homeland.
- A multidisciplinary clinical program where clients and families have access to bicultural counselors, interpreters, psychologists, social workers, family therapists, somatherapists, psychiatrists.
- A training program that has seen the dissemination of knowledge to literally thousands of professionals, career and stakeholder groups in the state and further afield.
- The development of emergency programs for East Timorese and Kosovar displaced persons arriving in the temporary Safe Haven in NSW.

The special initiatives for East Timorese asylum seekers and refugees that brought together my unit, the Psychiatry Research and Teaching Unit, and STARTTS to develop a novel researcher-advocacy program that culminated in the formation of the national consortium, PRADET–Psychosocial Recovery and Development in East Timor—that established the first community mental health program in Timor Lorosae, building a foundation for the ongoing East Timor National Mental Health Program, funded by AusAID.

And, most recently, STARTTS with the support of my unit has initiated the development of a research institute in Refugee and Post-conflict Mental Health, a fledging venture that we are all very excited about.

What does this all mean? It means that the spirit and passion to assist torture survivors and to promote human rights remains alive in New South Wales, embodied in organisations such as STARTTS and many other sister agencies working in the field. New South Wales, by supporting STARTTS, continues to endorse the principle that the best way to counter torture is by action.

STARTTS is about action – practical, skilled and comprehensive assistance to survivors of torture. And what keeps us going when our spirit flags is, of course, our clients and their communities who remind us over and over how indomitable is the human spirit even when faced with the most horrific adversity.

The only complaint I have about STARTTS is its tendency towards modesty, reflecting, I believe, the unique character of its leader, Jorge Aroche. I read somewhere recently that Uruguayans are like that – unassuming people who do not readily trumpet their achievements – I am sure that is not universally true. But the remarkable thing about STARTTS is that it gets on with its work without spending too much time waving flags or indulging in self promotional activities. STARTTS, I believe, has always taken the view that the work must speak for itself, and most importantly survivors of torture are the ones to listen to, not those presuming to speak for them. I, of course, am breaking that golden rule with comments tonight that have been all too immodest and tendentious – but what can you expect from a university professor?

So if STARTTS won't promote itself, I will have to do so. It is a special tribute to the agency that the definitive international textbook on refugee trauma and torture, to be published later in the year, will contain 3 chapters from our group, a representation from NSW that is larger than from any comparable region worldwide. Jorge Aroche, of course is one of the contributors with Mariano Coello and others. Jorge remarked recently that the title of the book, not chosen by us, did not necessarily reflect our local perspective on the field. The title is: Broken Spirits. The philosophy of STARTTS has always been that the spirit of torture survivors is never broken; dented, undermined and challenged, yes, but not irreparably damaged and certainly not broken.

Here, tonight, it is incumbent on us to re-affirm our strong belief that the torturer can never be victorious because the human spirit and its capacity for recovery can never be broken. It is our humble and respectful task to assist the survivor along that difficult but reachable goal of recovery. That is our privilege.
Photo by Denis Jones
As if it were Happening to Someone Else

Dissociation as a Symptom of Refugee Trauma

Coping with the experience of extreme psychological trauma sometimes results in the subject splitting off the experience from one’s everyday consciousness and attributing the memory to a separate identity. GENEVIEVE CRIBB examines a case of Dissociative Identity Disorder (formerly known as Multiple Personality Disorder) and reports how this is dealt with in the counselling context.

My most memorable experience of dissociation in its most complex form was with a client in the UK who had survived severe childhood trauma. During a counselling session one day, Anne began to behave differently. She was very childlike and coy. I asked her what she would like to do next and she said to draw.

She drew with the crayon in her left hand a picture of a group of men who had abused her and whom she had never told me about before. The drawing was very simple, like that of a six year old. When she seemed to have finished I was concerned that she had become lost in the trauma the picture depicted and asked her to draw with me a happy picture. Together we drew purple flowers and the sun over a lovely garden. Following this I tried to ask her about the process we had just gone through. She made no response. As I said “Annie?” to attract her attention she continued not to respond. I looked at the nurse who was with us in the session and she shrugged. We both knew there was something new happening here. Trying another angle I asked her to write her name on the picture. In child like writing she wrote “Annie”. “Annie?” I asked and she looked straight at me.

At the end of the above session Anne “came round”, which is to say that she returned to her usual self. I asked her how she felt the session had gone. She was surprised it was over, she couldn’t remember any of it. As time went on I came to realise that Anne was suffering from Dissociative Identity Disorder (DID, formerly known as Multiple Personality Disorder). There were more than just her and Annie; there was also Dana.

While Anne suffered the more extreme example of dissociation, it is a phenomenon encountered commonly by survivors of trauma. Its complexities and psychological processes are just beginning to be known so it is impossible at this stage to give a comprehensive account of the whys and wherefores. What we do know is that dissociation comes in several forms, that it is more common than most people think and that it has been crucial to the survival of many people including refugees.

The essential feature of dissociation, according to Stanley Krippner, is an “alteration in the usual integrative functions of identity, memory or
consciousness”, that is to say that something in the experience is split off from the rest. In its different forms it can manifest as a feeling that your experience is “unreal”, that your identity is temporarily forgotten or a new one imposed, that events in your past cannot be recalled, a sense of being outside your body or of simply being “vagued out” (or in a fugue state). We can all relate to these to some extent in our everyday lives. You know when you’re driving to work, like you have a thousand times before, and suddenly you realise you’re there and you cannot remember the journey or the process of driving there? That’s dissociation.

The example of a survivor of childhood sexual abuse who, when she gives birth to her first child, suddenly remembers the abuse, also illustrates the point. Dissociative amnesia is not uncommon in such survivors. But how, might you say, is it possible to completely forget such an important event in your life? This brings me to the function of dissociation; it enables you to survive a trauma.

Dissociation has been found to be closely associated with trauma. When a trauma occurs you are completely overwhelmed by the physical senses and emotions of the experience. The brain is flooded and simply unable to deal with the event in the way it deals with every other in your life. The emotions are too strong and too many and the implications for your life are too huge. Your brain therefore resorts to its more primitive mechanisms in order to survive the experience and continue to function. Dissociation is one of these mechanisms.

Take dissociative amnesia for example. If you forget the experience ever happened, then you are able to continue to survive beyond the trauma and its implications will not interfere with your functioning. In the case of Anne, at certain key events in the ongoing abuse, she split off her personality. Those “alters”, as they are known, contained their own memories of that part of the abuse and the “primary alter”, Anne, could continue to survive and function.

One thing we do know about dissociation is that it is associated with trauma in earlier life, more severe and more chronic, a theory which explains why Anne was so severely affected. How then are refugees, who suffer extraordinary trauma, affected by dissociation?

A typical example will be dissociative fugue during a counselling session; that is, the client will drift off during the session, as if they are “vagued out” or “in another world”. Usually just by saying their name or gently touching them on the arm you can bring them back. Dissociation will commonly happen when you begin to discuss a particularly traumatic memory. The emotions attached to the memory will be so strong that, in order to avoid them, the client will, quite unconsciously, dissociate. Over time the counsellor and client can work together to prevent the dissociation and remain grounded so that the memory can be brought into the counselling process and dealt with. Grounding refers to remaining in the “here and now”, attached to your current experience.

We also see dissociation in another way when working with refugee clients. Unable to integrate the emotional trauma in their life, many clients experience the results as bodily pain or dysfunction. This is called somatisation. They may have been to doctors seeking a physical explanation, but none can be found. Common examples are headaches, backaches, an inability to properly use parts of their body like shoulders or legs. The use of physiotherapy at STARTTS is, in part, due to this very phenomenon. It is not uncommon for the symptoms to disappear when the attached memory is resolved.

Just like other psychological responses to trauma, dissociation is experienced by refugees from all backgrounds. Unfortunately, we are not able to say to what extent, because research has not yet caught up with the issue. Studies have found a high incidence of dissociation among Cambodian refugees settled in the USA, in Former Yugoslavian refugees in camps in Macedonia and in Bhutanese refugees in a refugee camp in Nepal. Studies investigating the nature and extent of dissociation among refugees who have experienced trauma are few and far between. Much more research is needed before extensive conclusions about its role in ensuring the psychological survival of many of our clients, let alone its long term affects, can be known.

In the meantime, as I work with refugees, it never fails to amaze me how similarly trauma affects people from all over the world. The ingenious capacity of the human mind to enable the spirit to survive horrors beyond the imagination, is as effective in a young single Kurdish woman from Iraq as it is in a Vietnamese grandfather. They both benefit from the natural survival based processes of dissociation experienced by Anne.

Genevieve Cribb is a STARTTS Counsellor/Team Leader.
A New Partnership

STARTTS and the Australian Centre for Languages (acl) will join efforts to better assist survivors of torture and trauma in NSW. A Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) was signed August 7 by the heads of both organisations, Jorge Aroche from STARTTS and Helen Zimmerman from acl and witnessed by the Hon Gary Hardgrave, Minister for Citizenship and Multicultural Affairs. Among other areas of cooperation, acl, a well known educational institution providing English language classes for newly arrived migrants and refugees in the Western and South Western Sydney, will provide professional development materials to STARTTS voluntary English language teachers and STARTTS will be training acl teachers and acl Consortium staff on torture and trauma issues.

“The MOU is a formalisation and expansion of the existing relationship between STARTTS and acl” Mark Lack, acl Community Relations Coordinator says. “It goes a long way to integrate the Adult Migrant English Program and the Integrated Humanitarian Settlement Strategy, in this case the Early Intervention Program." According to Jorge Aroche, STARTTS Executive Director, the aim of the MOU is to ensure that our common client group is able to derive maximum advantage of the knowledge, expertise and resources of both organisations. “There are many areas where this partnership has already lead to more accessible, appropriate and effective services, and has enormous potential for further gains.”

Other areas covered by the MOU include arrangements for STARTTS to support acl Consortium counsellors through training and regular meetings to discuss clinical matters and look at appropriate referral practices. Another area of collaboration with tremendous potential is the implementation of the Families in Cultural Transition (FICT) program across all acl centres, with key acl Consortium personnel being trained on the nature of that program. The FICT, which is part of the Early Intervention Program, aims to assess the needs of refugees soon after their arrival in Australia and ensure they are connected to appropriate services to address those needs. Research shows that the earlier problems associated with torture or trauma are identified, it is more likely survivors will experience a successful recovery.

A pilot for school student homework centres, within existing acl Consortium AMEP teaching colleges, will be established to better assist young people survivors of torture and trauma with homework and other school related issues. STARTTS’ Specialist Migrant Placement Officer will also provide outreach services at acl on a part time basis, to better assist professional jobseekers currently learning English. The MOU also flags the potential for collaboration in joint research projects focussing on the interface of resettlement, language acquisition and torture and trauma issues.

Finally, and certainly of great importance to this magazine, acl will also make a financial contribution to sponsor Refugee Transitions.

At the signing ceremony, Helen Zimmerman cited the MOU as another example of acl’s efforts to work in close partnership with settlement service providers in NSW. “All AMEP and STARTTS clients can potentially benefit from this partnership, which demonstrates the importance of integrating the AMEP within the settlement context.”

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Women of the World

The Muslim Woman Experience

The legacy of world events since the September 11 attack in America and more recently the Bali bombing and the war in Iraq, has taken a toll on the Muslim community worldwide. Many feel they are unfairly targeted and held responsible for events they have no connection with - spiritually or ideologically. MALIKEH MICHAELS looks at the effect of this on Muslim women, as they are often conspicuous if they wear traditional Islamic scarf.

One could easily argue that Muslim women collectively have suffered disproportionately in recent history. Wars have driven more Muslim women from their homes and to hardship than any other collective religious group. The continuing conflict of occupied Palestine which has been struggling against Israeli expansion since the early 1920s; the war in Lebanon from 1982 to 1988; the Gulf wars including the ten year Iran-Iraq War; the tragedy of former Yugoslavia in the mid 1990’s; the Russian - Afghanistan conflict of the 1970’s; the unrest of civil war that afflicted that country for twenty years and which culminated in the recent American onslaught and its ‘War against Terror’. The images portraying women in these conflicts, generally of the aftermath of wars are of poor women crying over the dead, suffering in refugee camps, often with dependent and disaffected children. The images which portray Muslim women often have negative connotations. The ideas formed about Muslim women in the west generally come from the western-based media’s generalisation of Muslims. Those ideas are formed on assumptions made about Muslims who choose to practice a strict observance of the religion or the reactionary ‘extremist’ groups who have chosen for their own reasons to inflict violence on those who they see as a threat and claim to connect this with the religion. These views are not necessarily related to the real experience of the religion, but they do affect the way Muslim women are viewed in society and consequently how they are treated. Many stereotypes exist regarding Muslim women and many of them are wrong.

The women of the Islamic
faith are part of one of the most historically expansive and culturally diverse religions in the world. Islam is represented in around 270 countries. The number of Muslims in the world is approximately 1 billion, or 20 percent of the world’s population.

Women of Islam all have the essence of their religion as a common thread. The common bond of understanding brings Muslim women together as sisters regardless of culture or language. Speaking to the broad range of Muslim women gives a better understanding of their experience of the world and how they feel they are treated in their communities.

FATIMA

Fatima is a trained youth worker of Lebanese background. She works weekends in a fast food shop to help support her family of three girls and three boys. In her late thirties, Fatima has been married for over twenty years.

A big part of my life is cooking and hospitality. I spend almost my mortgage on food every month. This is the tradition in Islam; we have to serve our guests with five star service. We give the best food to our guests.

Fatima’s experience in the wider community includes being President of her local primary school council, studying for a Diploma for Welfare in the Community and working as a youth counselor at a local youth center.

She believes it is important to build relationships across all cultures. We can only get knowledge by exchanging ideas. Some people viewed Muslims in a negative way but after meeting me they say they understand the big picture.

How do you feel as a Muslim about the war with Iraq and the situation after September 11 terrorist attack in the United States?

Very disappointed. I cannot see how this is a target for humanity. September 11 has affected me badly but what evidence do we have for this? People at TAFE were looking at me sideways. Just being Muslim makes us bad. We need to get out and communicate and exchange information and culture.

LATIFFA

Latiffa Craig is an Australian convert to Islam. She is a mother and an accomplished painter in her early forties.

When did you convert to Islam?

In 1991, I was introduced to Islam through a person I subsequently married. This was the time of the first Iraq Gulf war. I converted in Australia two years before I lived in Indonesia. I lived in Indonesia with my ex-husband, for four years.

Latiffa worked in the Botanical Gardens next to the presidential palace Kebun Raya, Bogor, Indonesia. She taught
English to the botanical staff and was commissioned to do a series of cards of Indonesian orchards to sell to tourists. She returned to Australia in 1996.

**What is Islam in your life?**

Islam has opened up the scope of my life. I have been a Muslim for thirteen years and I am still fascinated with studying about God, human nature and the relationship between us and God. The structure of Islam is beautifully simple; there is an enormous amount of knowledge and spirituality to be gained within that structure. As a painter, I have always been inspired by light and nature and felt there was a positive presence and force that was the source of life. With the birth of my child, I was convinced that God existed, but I never became part of an organised religion until I studied Islam and my criteria for reasonable evidence was satisfied.

**How is life in Australia as a Muslim?**

I mix with my family; I invite my parents and friends to mix with Muslim friends. I will talk with anybody from any background about anything. It’s a bit difficult to mix closely with non-Muslims because of inappropriate conversation, such as gossip or the exchange of intimate details of their lives, which is unacceptable in our religion.

Some non-Muslims regard me as an oddity and question me tactlessly about my lifestyle, and they make negative assumptions about my religion. I am treated like a migrant or as if my IQ is lower. Non-Muslims’ life philosophies may not be compatible with my Islamic beliefs. For example, neo-Darwinism and social Darwinism. I find this all pervading philosophy such as materialism and the ‘party’ lifestyle that pervades western culture as empty and not fulfilling. Non-Muslims tend to assume that because I wear Islamic clothing I am beaten and down-trodden.

**How is your experience of Islam affected as an Anglo/Australian Muslim?**

I feel advantaged in not being caught up in the cultural binds of Islam. I often get asked questions about my religion by non-Muslims. In general if the conversation gets more involved and real information about Islam is imparted, they generally take fright and don’t want to talk about it. I like to teach about the real Islam and give a better understanding of the true religion.

Latiffa gives mosques tours in the Gallipoli Mosque in Auburn and also gives lectures for the HSC religious studies course.

**TAZIN**

Tazin is a media student in her early twenties who was born in Australia and was raised in Bangladesh. She is currently completing her honors. Tazin is very vocal on campus and a spokesperson on Islamic issues. She writes for university publications on women’s issues and speaks on issues affecting Muslims at forums and information days in the general community.
Tazin started to observe her religious obligations more and put on a scarf a couple of years ago. I asked her how this experience had affected her.

“When I first put on a scarf, of course, the first task at hand was to explain to everyone of my acquaintances why I wore a scarf. The misconceptions were plenty – even amongst my closest friends – but I suppose they felt comfortable asking me as they had known me previously when I didn’t wear one. After I put on a scarf, I did feel quite inhibited to simply go out for a walk like I used to. But, people weren’t unfriendly and they would generally be nice.”

Did you feel uncomfortable on the street after September 11?

It’s a misconception in itself that after September 11, the Bali bombings, refugee issues and the ‘War on Terror’, that Muslim women had to constantly explain themselves as we had to explain ourselves all the time before as well. It’s only that the need to explain arose more after those incidents. After 9-11, there were people who would stop, smile, say hello and ask how I was. There were others who were hostile, but it was mostly glares and stares. And it’s gotten worse over the last year.

If you notice when you’re outside, people feel free to look at a Muslim woman up and down. I’ve seen people stare at my drink, at my food, observe my every move without pause. They don’t even get embarrassed if I glare right back at them or give them a dirty look. It’s as if people now feel it their right to stare and question your every move. If we’re out shopping, I’ll notice the salesperson speaking to my sister (she doesn’t wear a scarf) first or not paying me attention to me sometimes.

How does Islam affect your daily life - like how does it come out in your everyday living?

Now I schedule things around my five daily prayers. If I’m looking for a job, I have to ensure that the employer will allow me to pray during lunchtime. I can’t eat everything. I have no problems in class at uni or with teachers at all.

How do you feel being a part of the Muslim community?

It’s very nice to have a community to fall back against. I have a very close circle of friends who are always there for me. It’s nice to have people who share your experiences and your thoughts. The beauty of Islam is always evident in these situations.

My friends and I don’t agree on everything, we do not share every opinion, but at the end of the day, Islam unites us. Islam allows us to be individuals and yet function as members of an interdependent society.

And your personal experience of being a Muslim woman in a western society ?

Unlike Western society, where you may not be legally punished for dressing a certain way, you are nonetheless punished by social opinion and social consensus. If you don’t have nice hair and a good body, there goes your worth as a woman. In Islam, you can be your individual self, you can have your own opinion and be respected for it. Our worth is not in our hair style or a stick of lipstick. I feel my worth comes from my intelligence, from my ability to express that intelligence.

Non-Muslims may be looking at us condescendingly because we are Muslims and because of the way we dress. But when a non-Muslim speaks to me, the only thing they have access to is my intelligence and what I have to say. We know we are not being judged by our dress size, etcetera.

They can’t judge me on the basis of my beauty or the shade of my lipstick, because that just stops being a central issue.

Family life is paramount in Islam. Being a mother has the highest position in Islam and is the highest priority in a Muslim woman’s life. If a woman is not married and doesn’t have children, her responsibility will be to help her immediate and extended family. Women have responsibility for teaching children in Islam. This places a focus on women’s behavior and the expectations of women can be high because of this position of responsibility. It is however not only women who have responsibility to the family in Islam.

Everybody has a duty in the Muslim family; the husband to the wife; the wife to the husband; parents to their children and vice-versa; the extended family to each other. The community is like a part of the extended family so the notion of family commitment goes further to include neighbours and friends. Overall the experience of Muslim women is hard to define except for the common goal of the values of the religion and the commitment to the family. These are core elements of Islam; beyond this, women find their own identities and experience in life.

MALIKEH MICHAEL (a.k.a. Michelle Veneris) is an Australian woman who converted to Islam.
What motivates them? Interview with three STARTTS staff members

Counselling people who have experienced war and displacement, torture and trauma is a challenging field of work which demands skill, sensitivity and care. NICOLA CARTER spoke to three counsellors at STARTTS about their work with survivors of torture and trauma, what sustains them and what inspires them.

Marc Chaussivert is a clinical psychologist who has worked as a counsellor at STARTTS since 1994. Marc worked for a number of human rights organisations as well as working extensively in the jail system before coming to STARTTS.

Gordana Hol-Radicic worked as a clinical psychologist in Belgrade and Sarajevo in the Former Yugoslavia, as well as in the USA, before coming to Australia and commencing work at STARTTS.

Meng Eang Thai is a Khmer counsellor who has worked at STARTTS for the past ten years. Meng studied dentistry, psychology and social sciences before commencing employment at STARTTS during its formative years.
Meng, tell me how you came to be working at STARTTS?
Meng: Looking back through my personal experience… I’ve had an underlying interest in working with people. In Cambodia I studied medicine… then when I went to a refugee camp I worked with the International Medical Team as a volunteer and later I worked as a volunteer in camps in Thailand and with the Australian Embassy. Since arriving in Australia I’ve had various jobs and voluntary community involvement and I have a strong interest in communities. I had a particular life experience, being a refugee and going through the whole process of hardship under a political regime. So looking at all these experiences… it’s not a surprise… you could say it’s like a collection of experiences which have allowed me to come to STARTTS.

I think I had become ready to challenge myself in a new field. But I didn’t have a full picture of what I would encounter in my work. I had a brief picture: in 1987 I heard Richard Molica talk at the Institute of Psychiatry. He was a psychiatrist who had been involved in working with Khmer refugees for a long time. I went along to participate as a community worker. Professor Morris Eisenberg was another psychiatrist who was very involved in this work. I found myself almost overwhelmed by Molica and his colleagues’ interest in Khmer problems. I was fascinated by the findings and the presentation… the way they looked at the problems as a whole, the way they handled people’s symptoms and helped them work through the problems.

We had so many problems; from 1975 things had been destroyed and people and things were completely wiped out. There was no contact with the outside world for five or six years and for all of that time the whole society was under the control of the Khmer Rouge. It was like living in a dungeon, people weren’t aware of anything other than living in darkness. So seeing that, Molica and his colleagues were paying attention, that they were aware and trying to help us find a solution to overcome the suffering of the past, it was really something that made a big impression on me.

Can you tell me about your role and work at STARTTS?
Meng: Well, I’ve been at STARTTS for ten years. In the beginning, I was more like a bicultural counsellor. In the earlier days at STARTTS we used a two worker model. At the time I arrived, the service had only been established for four or five years, and the bicultural counsellors were co-workers with a mainstream counsellor to provide therapy for clients. So that part was like an apprenticeship.

As STARTTS developed, bicultural counsellors began to see clients by themselves, bringing their cases for discussion during supervision. This was an enormous challenge at the beginning. I started learning about assessment, structuring sessions, managing the whole process of counselling, looking at the meaning of what was happening in sessions, the signs of progress, the drawbacks of the process. I certainly discovered the need and the benefits of counselling training and the importance of having a proper structure to work in! I realised the importance of having a good mentor. I owe a lot to [STARTTS Clinical Director] Rise Becker. She gave me a lot of support and shared her knowledge of cross-cultural psychotherapy and counselling, which gave me a lot of energy to get on with my work successfully.

Can you talk a bit about counselling with the Khmer community?
Meng: We often hear, specifically from our own community, that we don’t have a concept of counselling, or that counselling doesn’t work with the Khmer community. I was surprised at first to hear that and it raised questions for me. I wondered what the idea was based on, and about the implications of this idea. I needed to explore and challenge myself over this issue. I didn’t believe the issue was simply that Khmer people didn’t believe in counselling.

I think maybe it’s out of fear. Being a person in our culture and not feeling resourceful and capable is very shameful. Denial may be less shameful, so people are not willing to say “I don’t know, I don’t understand.” They may worry that in counselling they’ll be blamed. So sometimes they don’t realise that counselling is not about judging. Really, in Cambodia, the only people who do counselling are the monks. And people trust the monks will be honest and law abiding, that they won’t judge a person’s problems or try to make a person feel weak or take their confidence outside of that room. I find that confidentiality is very important for Khmer clients.

I think in counselling we have to look at what we have in Khmer culture and then see how it connects to the western view. We have to think about it and talk without judgement, and do a lot of exploration. It’s as if you’re standing on the other side of a river bank and you try to picture the scene over there. The western view doesn’t fit very well unless you can get over there and look and understand things from that side.

It’s difficult to think about weighing, judging, inserting different ways of working. But
Interview with three STARTTS staff members

I think I am coming from my culture and my clients’ culture and I have added western ideas and knowledge so the mixing is about fifty-fifty. I didn’t take things I’d learnt from western ways of working and apply them straight away. I tried to keep in mind the knowledge I had already … and tried to understand the client, what they are bringing from their side. I think about what it is possible to fit in from my other training or what will match to make it work. I test out ideas, thinking about what we have in our own culture which would fit with western methods, so that ideas from western methods can be used in ways which are not threatening and are more useful for working with people.

So is it a bit like filtering western ideas through your own cultural knowledge?

Meng: Not necessarily like filtering, it’s more like having a pool of different knowledge. Like having two baskets of tools - western, and my own culture’s, and trying to think which ones we can connect, which ones from my culture and from the western culture I can connect with each other. With individual clients, because they are all unique I don’t try to just apply a whole approach and expect it to fit, I have to try to bring the big picture, to look at counselling itself, to look at what is the situation now, what is that person used to from the past. It can be important to try to understand why people want to say we don’t have counselling in our culture. It is not labelled as counselling, but we have a similar process… and by bringing the ideas of western and cultural practice together I think we can help people to accept that and slowly help people to feel that counselling is not so foreign.

I talked once on a radio program about counselling, and the STARTTS service. The people listening didn’t realise that counselling was a means of relieving stress. This was a new idea to them, but it was something they could understand when it was explained this way. So some people who thought they wouldn’t want to come to counselling have been ready to accept it, when the basic confidentiality, neutrality and support are provided and when the counsellor can attend to them without judging or pre-judging them. An understanding environment certainly allows people to say what they need to say to you, things can almost flow out by themselves if you can allow the person to trust you, if the person can find the confidence in themselves to open up whatever is so entangled, that needs to be untied.

While Meng’s experience as a refugee and community volunteer led her to her current work, for psychologists Marc Chaussivert and Gordana Hol-Radicic it was his political activism and her work with refugees in her native Yugoslavia, respectively. Marc: After university I worked a bit in human rights and political organisations that were working for human rights in specific countries. Particularly one group called the Resource and Action Committee for Latin America, RACLA. Then I got a job at Mulawa Women’s Prison. I also worked with young offenders, mostly running groups, and for a short period with adult men in a minimum security jail. I became interested in STARTTS while I was at this men’s jail. STARTTS brought together my human rights interests as well as counselling and psychology.

How has your counselling work developed over the time you’ve been at STARTTS?

Marc: It’s hard sometimes to pin it down but I think the experience of coming into contact with people… I think their life experiences shape the way I think about counselling. At the beginning whilst I’d had a bit of contact with people from refugee backgrounds before, I didn’t really have much direct experience. Initially I struggled a bit to get a hold on the realities of people’s lives and what they’d gone through. It’s not as if with time you find answers but perhaps you learn to be able to sit with the complexities of peoples’ experience rather than trying to solve problems, when sometimes there are no solutions. And it’s important to get to a point where you can recognise that.

I think what people really want is a process where someone is interested in and acknowledges their experience. That’s been one impact of this work. In other ways I’ve learnt a lot from people I’ve worked with, usually more than I’ve learnt through clinical training or academic areas. Being able to work with clients and get good supervision… again, it’s about learning from the clients and their life stories, although I’ve also learnt a lot of valuable things from reading about various theoretical models, attending conferences and so on.

Gordana, can you tell me about your training as a Clinical Psychologist and your early working life?

Gordana: My psychology training was very focussed on assessment, diagnosis and appropriate treatments for different disorders. The training was quite eclectic. My Honours project was looking at adolescents and young adults within a closed situation, a military barracks, and how disorders develop in this situation, and...
The work there was similar, it was specifically for Bosnian refugees in the United States which was at a refugee camp in Carolina to help with counselling work centres. Later I was asked to go still living in different refugee beginning of the war, and were children who had left home at the working with women and in Croatia I was predominantly in a trauma counselling centre. and here I was again working of the war. had been difficult to get because electricity, heaters, which helped with resources, offices and electricity, which had been difficult to get because of the war.

In 1995 I went to Croatia, and here I was again working in a trauma counselling centre. In Croatia I was predominantly working with women and children who had left home at the beginning of the war, and were still living in different refugee centres. Later I was asked to go to help with counselling work at a refugee camp in Carolina in the United States which was specifically for Bosnian refugees. The work there was similar, it was quite demanding.

What are the main influences now in your clinical work and your approach to therapy with clients?
Gordana: Definitely very eclectic. I prefer working with clients in long term therapy rather than in short term work. But if clients want to focus on current issues or symptoms in short term work, then I am also happy to work with them. It is always in agreement with clients, making a contact then seeing how we go with looking at the issues. But I deeply believe that the roots of people's strengths and weaknesses are established years and decades back in the past, in early childhood. So, I try to discover the reasons for the current reactions and symptoms, going through a process with the client of looking at this with them, if they are ready and want to. Of course, this is all in the context of the family, both the current family, and the family of origin.

Marc, do you use a particular preferred therapeutic model in your work?
Marc: I think it's important to be fairly open about different perspectives. Though, I think the psychosocial approach is very important in terms of not isolating people. It's terribly important to avoid pathologising individuals, which can be a way of turning away from the terrible things that have happened to people. So a social perspective, situating individuals within a systemic perspective is important. For instance, with Latin America, I'm thinking of psychologists, psychoanalysts, psychiatrists who lived through states of extreme political violence, and who theorised and wrote about the systemic psychology of this sort of social violence. A psychosocial tradition has really grown up around individuals and groups like these.

The psychodynamic perspective is helpful in the sense that it gives a place to overwhelming experience in a way which other traditions don't... intense reactions, feelings and developing quite a nuanced understanding of how people might present. Sometimes more technically based approaches that want to restructure thoughts or tell people they should feel or think differently can be unacceptable to a person who's experienced terrible events. I think a sensitivity to anthropological perspectives can be very useful too... one needs to be very open and recognise that we get trained in a particular western perspective and realise the people might view their experiences in a way we may initially find very new.

How would you put into words your philosophy of therapy?
Marc: I think that the psychosocial approach is the best way to describe it. Looking at the individual's experience, the way their own history has impacted on them... but to always place that in its broader context: the social, historical, political forces which have impacted and how these have played out in a particular individual's context. This is important in counselling anyway, but particularly important where we are working with people who have suffered human rights violations. So, it is about the client seeing that we can apportion responsibility where it belongs.

If we look at diagnosis, psychopathology in exclusion... there is a real sense in which the victim can be blamed unintentionally, so it's very important to situate their experience in the broader context, both to assist them

Comparing this to students who are not in the military. Looking at which type of disorders developed in each group, and how they developed. Later, in my Masters, I looked in more detail at how military life impacted on psychological disorders. I found a lot of alcohol problems in the army, and I was looking at the sort of psychological conflicts which lead to alcoholism, and how to understand these conflicts and treat them.

In 1992 in Sarajevo, war broke out. I began working as a volunteer for refugees who were coming from East Bosnia. The UNHCR International Rescue Committee established six trauma counselling centres in Sarajevo, which were situated in different areas of the city, close to where the people were. There was no transport, trains or buses operating and no electricity. I was the team leader at one of the counselling centres, working with six other counsellors, and one administration person. I saw individuals, children, adolescents, adults, elderly people. We did individual and group therapy, and also home visits, especially for elderly people. The work was supported by the International Rescue Committee, and they helped with resources, offices and electricity, which had been difficult to get because of the war.

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individually, and to understand what has taken place at the broader level. I think, also, that because issues of responsibility and guilt are so important in terms of peoples’ recovery, this is a central issue in our work.

It’s also useful to think about ways of working collectively with people. I see people at very different stages in their lives, and this can be difficult. Their issues may be centred around resettlement, or they may be at a place in the process where they are applying to be considered for refugee status. Many of these people who are asylum seekers may be less willing or able, for cultural or other reasons, to want to work individually. Recently, I’ve been trying other approaches. For example, I’ve been running a printmaking group and I’ve learnt a lot through the process of that, and I’m looking at other forms of artistic expression too. It highlights other aspects of recovery.

Could you give me an example?
Marc: Well, asylum seekers, for instance… really feeling their life is out of control. They don’t feel that they can have projects. I think it’s the existential movement that talks about how we need to have projects in our lives… and for asylum seekers they don’t, it’s like that freedom is non-existent. And so although it’s limited when they participate in a group where they’re creating something, there’s a sense that they can make something and be happy with it… others appreciate it and there’s a collective validation of what they’ve made. This validation seems to be one of the benefits, along with the self-efficacy, the mutual support.

N: What do you see as the biggest challenges of this work?
Gordana: I think working with many different cultures is very challenging. Finding a transcultural way of working, and understanding how people from different cultures see things and developing different approaches for different people and cultures is challenging. Combining knowledge from a western approach to therapy with an approach which can be accepted by someone from a different culture. We have to marry these different approaches together in a way which suits clients. I think understanding the history of different cultures and different religions is very important, learning about different cultures’ ideas about healing, and then knowing how to implement a treatment which respects that person, and is most appropriate for them. These are all very challenging areas.

Dealing with the trauma which we hear about is also challenging for counsellors. We have to look after ourselves well to keep working in this field.

What do you think it is that is most healing about therapy?
Gordana: Acknowledging someone else’s pain and understanding someone’s trauma is very healing. Offering that person the chance to talk about their experiences, for them to have a counsellor who will listen to their feelings, help, understand and be there for them.

Marc, what do you find most challenging?
Marc: People are experiencing such a level of pain, and sometimes it is a challenge not to fall back on controlling that pain, reducing it, because it is too much for us. So there can be a tendency to run away from the persons’ pain, not to do it justice. The intensity of what people experience sometimes in a very real sense is not something which can be reduced to words or theories. So it’s a challenge to be able to stay with people as they experience the difficulties, the pain. To find a way to support them as they go through it. And linked to that is the impact of that experience on ourselves. It can be a challenge at times when we don’t fully address this. Hearing the stories and seeing the pain can be a hard reality for us to deal with. If we don’t recognise that, I think it can have a negative impact on us… but can also mean we’re not able to help the person. Unconsciously we may fall back on ways of trying to dismiss or put to one side peoples’ pain because it’s too hard to hear or share on some level.

How do you see healing or recovery, particularly in relation to trauma itself?
Marc: That’s a complex question! Lots of ideas go through my head about that… and lots of them sound like homilies in the literature… but… people need to integrate their experiences, to find a space where the trauma can be re-experienced in a context where it’s not so overwhelming. Somehow I agree with these, that it’s a question of integration of experiences that have not been integrated because they were too catastrophic, too much at the time. But at another level I think it’s very hard to capture what it is, what trauma is. It’s about loss… and healing loss is quite complex… it’s about them coming to terms with their experience, whether it’s integrated or not. Someone said once that it’s not about getting over something, but getting through it, and I think that seems to fit. And again the psychosocial approach comes in, because the trauma we work with is about the breakdown of relationships
and communities and societies, the breakdown of the whole context. So it’s not just individual integration of experience, it also involves communities healing themselves. It may be that people don’t go back to the same communities, but people need to re-establish another community, and new relationships. They need to have faith again that there’s some degree of predictability and justice, and that they can depend on others and trust others. So it’s much broader than just an individual process. The individual and the therapist can be an important part of that process though, of reflecting on the past and present and of the process of rebuilding a life for themselves.

What are the rewards of this work?

Marc: The rewards are as strong as the challenges, and as exciting! I think being able to provide written material in the Khmer language, which is appropriate for people and helps them understand issues better, is very rewarding. The process of doing this has helped me become more aware of and sensitive to the Khmer community as a whole as well as to individuals within it. Another reward is being able to share what I’ve learnt with people back in Cambodia, this is something that gives me a lot of energy.

It is difficult to describe, but I have felt very happy when I have gone back to Cambodia and done some work there. In 1998 I went with Professor Derrick Silove and we did some training with GPs, looking at primary mental health care and training in medical approaches and interventions. In 2000, I travelled to an area of Thailand which was part of the Cambodian Empire before the thirteenth century. I was looking at intergenerational trauma and depression in people with post traumatic stress disorder, in a Khmer ethnic group. During these visits I connected with people working in mental health fields and was able to share some of my knowledge about psychological assessment and some of the other things I’ve learnt.

Marc and Gordana, what has been most inspiring for you?

Gordana: My work with children and adolescents, particularly, is very inspiring. Because I am able to see changes in a limited period of time... seeing a young person after a period of individual therapy, a group therapy experience or a STARTTS camp... developing and growing up, becoming a confident person... sometimes even coming back to STARTTS as a volunteer or on a student placement is very inspiring to me.

Seeing a person becoming settled and happy is a great honour. It is inspiring to work hard with a client and then see changes in a positive direction. Particularly with young people, seeing them able to go ahead and find their place in a new society is very satisfying. Seeing families, parents, children calm down and start to live at peace with themselves I think is the greatest thing that we as counsellors can see. When people overcome their problems and come to you and say thank you very much, I’ve found my way. I’m happy. Its not a formal thing, it’s something that comes from the bottom of their hearts. That to me is the greatest acknowledgement of my work with clients and it is the most inspiring thing.

Marc: It might sound like the ‘right’ thing to say, but I think lately I’ve been very fortunate that some of the clients I’ve been working with... I think it’s peoples’ resilience. Sometimes seeing this person in front of me... sometimes you just can’t believe peoples’ resilience.

One client I am thinking of experienced catastrophic events, losing basically all of his immediate family, and holds fears for the safety of other relatives... but this man is just so generous to those who he comes into contact with. People like that inspire you. Sometimes you expect someone who’s suffered so much to be incredibly demanding, but this man is incredibly generous. In the small space he has to move he’s concerned about others, here and now. Sometimes people are very needy and that is where they’re at that moment. But it’s a two way process and I feel that we gain a lot too as counsellors from this work.

I also remember in the past wanting to meet people who in their own countries did what had to be done to make life better for others, even though the consequences for themselves could be terrible. Being able now to meet some of those individuals is definitely quite inspiring. Also my colleagues... the way they keep working hard, and work to support each other in their work... people who stand up to human rights abuses, and who work to make the world a better place... particularly in this period where I think there’s a fair degree of cynicism, and a feeling that you can’t make a difference. When people continue to struggle for what’s right, whatever the cost, it’s always inspiring.

Nicola Carter is a clinical psychologist who works as a counsellor with people from a variety of communities at STARTTS.
Dreams of a Prisoner
For the refugees who have spent years in incarceration

By Tiep Nguyen
Everybody knows that prison is not a 'dreamworld'. The ambiance in prison is not conducive to dreams. Yet my life in prison begins with a dream. It happened the first night following the event that landed me in this ugly enclosure.

I fell asleep, deadly tired. Soon a dream came upon me and I was quite aware that I was dreaming. The content of the dream, however, was the exact replay of the real event. No other foreign elements were included. The actual scenes unfolded in sequence, vividly and clearly. I had no control at all on the content or the sequence, but was left to suffer through the nightmare.

I was having dinner by myself, a meagre meal served specially for me, as I was the last to get home from downtown. A familiar security officer in uniform stepped in, without warning, a cap on his head, a pistol in its holster clipped to his belt. He told me to go on with my meal. I had the presentiment that something evil was about to happen. Whatever it was, I had no choice but hurried to finish my dinner, in vague fear and anxiety.

Then in solemn manners, the security officer stood up. Immediately some precinct civilian officials entered from outside. To the witness of these officials, the officer produced a piece of paper and read out to me an administrative order from the City People's Committee. Quickly a handcuff was clicked tight on my wrists. No time to pack up a basic outfit. No time to say goodbye. I was taken away on foot to the security police station up the street.

I awoke from sleep, fully conscious that I just had a terrible dream, but at the same time conscious that this dream was reality. I had got in touch with the same place, the same time, the same situation and the same people. I had experienced the same thoughts, the same feelings and the same sensations. There was no need for me to decipher the meaning of the dream.

This sort of 'lucid' dream occurred to me only once during the prolonged period of internment. Other dreams, however, did occasionally happen, as far as I can remember, which included one about my early childhood and one about my near future.

While the first dream kept me connected with the present, the dream about my childhood disconnected me from it. Perhaps because I only had vague and faint memories about the early years of my life spent in a little village, the large details of the dream seemed sketchy and out of focus. I can only give a brief, maybe incomplete, report of what I dreamed of:

It was morning. The church service was over. I was hopping along the riverbank in front of the church building; my father and mother were on each side of me. My hands were in theirs. We were heading towards my sister’s house, which was built and given to her by my parents. I was very happy, chattering all the way.

The second part of my dream was when I was playing with a small soccer ball in the lane dividing my house and a neighbour’s. Right at the entrance of my house was a flamboyante. It was in full bloom. I cried every time people came and cut the flowers from the tree. I did not want my parents to give them to anyone.

This dream is also real, just as the last dream is. Both represent conscious material. Only the nature of dream material is different. One is troubling and disturbing. One is soothing and calming.

In fact, the dream, or I would rather call a 'recall in sleep of my past memories', created peace and joy for me while I was asleep. I was able to experience genuine happiness by following the pathways of my dream. I indulged myself in thoughts and images of how cheerful it is to be...
I was among the crowd of prisoners ready to pass through the guarded gate to work. An officer came straight to me and said, 'Leave the queue. You have been set free.' I was so excited that I forgot to take off my hat and glasses - a sign of obligatory respect to the officers. Before I realised that I had violated a prison camp rule, the officer had turned around to the people behind me, commanding them to keep moving. I stepped out of the line. The excitement at once gave way to the fear that my failure to show respect to the camp officer would rob me of the chance of freedom.

For some time I hoped that this was a premonitory dream. It was an unsuccessful dream, however, as the subsequent group release of a few dozen prisoners on the occasion of the Vietnamese ‘Tet’ (Lunar New Year) that year - my fourth year in the prison camp - did not pick my name. I was very, very upset. I lost trust in dreams, but began to think about the dynamics of dreaming.

Around that time, my thoughts dwelled much more on needs other than the immediate survival ones. I was not very worried, then, about the camp food rations, as I was lucky enough to receive supplies from home, now and then. I was also accustomed to working or going to bed on an almost empty stomach. I felt fit and healthy, though my occasional glance into somebody’s pocket mirror showed a greying hair and a lengthening beard. Daily labour could not scare me any more, because I was already used to tilling the land, cutting wood, carrying logs and so forth.

My dominant emotional concern at the time was when I would have the luck of being picked out from the two, three thousand inmates to receive a release order. When would I be home again, and where would home be, now that my family house had been confiscated? What would become of me if the three-year ‘re-education’ term were renewed for another three years and still another three years? The vision was terrifyingly bleak and gloomy, so that I tried hard to turn it away whenever it bounced back into my consciousness. Better for it to go into my sleep, I thought.

My ordeal was over after four and a half years. Since then I have never had a dream about how I came to be released, but I have often had repetitive dreams in which I find myself in the prison camp again. I also notice that from deep down within me has emerged an ever-strengthening need for creative self-expression. This piece of writing is a response to such an internal demand. And with this I gain a better understanding and acceptance of my dreams, pleasant or unpleasant, as valuable parts of my life experience.
CALL FOR LETTERS ....

we are interested in your opinion

RefugeeTransitions plans to begin a letters page from the next issue. The editors feel that a letters page will afford you, our readers, to express your views on refugee, human rights and migration issues, as well as matters relating the treatment of torture and trauma survivors. It will also give you a forum in which to respond to matters raised in our pages.

Finally, it will also give us, the editors, an opportunity to receive feedback from the readership.

We hope to continue to build our magazine into a forum for discussing refugee and related issues, raising concerns and sharing ideas. We also invite any comments about the magazine itself, positive or negative, and any suggestions you may wish to make.

So please, keep in touch, and share your ideas with us and all RefugeeTransitions readers. Looking forward to hearing from you.

Letters to the editors may be addressed to:
The Editors RefugeeTransitions
PO Box 203 Fairfield NSW 2165

or email: yoldi@tpg.com

Anonymous letters will not be published, although names will be withheld at the request of the sender.
Developing leadership, confidence and self-esteem was the guiding principle of a weekend camp at the Victorian seaside town of Anglesea. OLGA YOLDI reports on a weekend of affirmation for 61 young migrant women from 25 countries.

Regaining confidence and self-esteem is one of the most difficult challenges when women are uprooted due to war, migration, loss, trauma, or simply by big changes to their lives. Coming into a new country, the stress is so intense that one can easily become depressed, socially isolated, or ill. With this in mind, AMES Victoria, an organization with a long trajectory working with newly arrived migrants and refugee women, came up with the idea of organizing a gathering of young women students. The women, aged 18 to 40, were attending English classes across Melbourne.

Some participants had escaped war from countries such as Sudan, Somalia and Eritrea and others had migrated to Australia through marriage. Katerina Alekososka, one of the organisers, said that “we wanted them to feel a sense of ownership in the new country and offer a space to express their ideas, feelings and thoughts through artistic activities and in an environment of joy and fun.”

All sorts of artistic and physical activities were organised for the three days. Friday was spent exploring the beaches and the bush near Anglesea. “Some participants from Somalia discovered the sea for the very first time” Katerina said, “they were stunned looking at the immensity of the ocean and brave enough to venture into it with caution, holding hands in big circles.” At night there was dinner, music and dancing. Dances ranged from African, Eastern European and many other types. “I am so happy here, I made so many new friends, it is absolutely great,” said Mona. One of the aims of the camp was to express their creative potential through specific activities. “Just because many of the participants do not speak English, that does not mean they need to be silent or invisible in Australia, because their ideas can still be expressed through drama, painting, and other forms of artistic expression”, Katerina said. “We wanted to instill women with a sense of pride and achievement. The objective was to value one’s self, one’s story and therefore one’s life.”

Even the themes of racism and ethnicity were explored in a seminar facilitated by Carol Ransley from the Equal Opportunity Commission and Jiselle Hanna from Darebin Legal Service. Both used examples from people’s lives and the media about common forms of discrimination and racism...
and informed women about their rights. “We hoped that these discussions would help women to challenge their own stereotypes and prejudices, and thus help to foster attachments and links with women outside their own cultural group,” wrote Katerina in her report. The camp was a success, it was hard to leave and say goodbye. The warmth, the creativity, the dancing and singing and having the space to bond with each other contributed to a unique synergy that broke all cultural and linguistic barriers.

Although cultures are diverse and unique, something does prevail in every culture and that is their basic humanity. The camp confirmed that. “We emphasized that while communities are normally formed on the basis of nationality, language or religion it is also possible to forge communities in their dreams and goals”, the report said.

According to Melba Marginson, who has been working on a leadership and advocacy project for ethnic communities for some time now, the camp was only the beginning. The Leadership project will also include a module that promotes and nurtures leadership in young women. Initially the plan was to target Arabic speaking women, but that proved too difficult and instead AMEP students were invited to participate.

The camp approached the promotion of leadership in an innovative way. The report states that “We believe the women were already driven and knew how to be leaders, but did not have the confidence or the self-esteem to believe they could be. We thought that if women were introduced to new ways of expressing themselves, they would see ways in which they could achieve and maximise their potential.”
Refugee Transitions

Tide to improve my English. I am a geologist and want to continue to work as a geologist, so I may need to go back to university before I am able to work again in Australia. My wife, Hagir, is an economist and hopes to work here, too.

“We wish for a settled life and for a peaceful life. We wish for our children and ourselves to contribute to Australia and to achieve our full potential.”

Early in 2002 The Body Shop first indicated they were interested in running a major awareness raising campaign on refugees. In the preceding six months, the Australian government had requested the Tampa saved a boatload of asylum seekers headed for our shores, before thwarting their attempt to find safety on Christmas Island. The Government had been re-elected in a campaign where the treatment of asylum seekers, framed as “Border Control”, was a major issue. On the other hand, Australians had woken up one Sunday morning to discover that they’d been misled about the “children overboard” affair. Journalists were denied access to detention centres and in addition, Australia had enacted the “Pacific solution” which to some seemed more of a problem than a solution. The treatment of refugees and asylum seekers seeking safety and a new life in Australia was high on the agenda. Everybody had an opinion and was airing it - no matter how ill informed.

Looking back it was the low-point, although at the time, many must have wondered if the situation would get worse. Australians’ fears were stirred up and being vocalized and, in contrast to the great wave of anti-refugee sentiment, there seemed to

Four year old Rama, from Sudan, is standing on top of the photographer’s step-ladder in a Melbourne park. It’s a sunny late autumn morning. Delighted with the attention, Rama bestows us all with a queenly sunbeam of a smile.

Osman and his wife Hagir arrived in Australia with their three children in late 2002 from the Sudan. Like many newly arrived refugee families they have been assisted by the FASSTT agency in their new home city. Their case-worker visits them regularly at their house in an outer Melbourne suburb, where she helps them to recover from the experience of being tortured in their own country. Slowly they are rebuilding lives that had been shattered by unstable governance, imprisonment, torture and other human rights violations. This is their story as it appears in a flyer available for customers to take with them when they visit Body Shop stores in August.

“My name is Osman. I came from Sudan in Africa. I have a wife and three children. My daughters, Zulfa (10) and Rama (4) and my son Fady who is eighteen months. We also have a pet dog called Lucky from the Lort Smith Animal Hospital. I was campaigning for a democratic, multicultural government in Sudan and because of this I was imprisoned and tortured for 3 years.

“We were in Cairo for 18 months after we left Sudan, waiting for the United Nations to tell us we could come to Australia. We could not work and the children could not go to school. We couldn’t go home and we couldn’t stay in Cairo and we couldn’t know if another country will welcome us. It was 18 months at full tension and feeling very sad to miss our families.

“I have been in Australia for 9 months. I am studying to improve my English. I am a geologist and want to continue to work as a geologist, so I may need to go back to university before I am able to work again in Australia. My wife, Hagir, is an economist and hopes to work here, too.

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LOUISE DOYLE reports on a company that proclaimed its commitment to human rights and “walked the walk” when it linked up with the Forum of Australian Services for Survivors of Torture and Trauma (FASSTT).

The Body Shop teams up with FASSTT in a national refugee awareness campaign.

Turning the Tide

LOUISE DOYLE reports on a company that proclaimed its commitment to human rights and “walked the walk” when it linked up with the Forum of Australian Services for Survivors of Torture and Trauma (FASSTT).
be only silence. No voice reminding us of the great contributions that refugees and asylum seekers make to Australia. No voice inspiring us with visions of a happy, productive, multicultural future for our country. But slowly those voices of opposition began to be heard. As 2002 wore on, one Australian after another realised they would have to fight for values they had always taken for granted.

In the depressing post-Tampa climate the idea that a big corporate entity would make its voice heard in support of refugees seemed impossible…. The subject was seen as too political - too hard. At a time when corporate funds are being channeled to less controversial causes, The Body Shop has decided that this issue deserves their full support.

In August 2003, the windows of each of their 72 stores around Australia will display posters of Osman’s beaming family and 16 year old Bosnian refugee Mina, together with their respective stories. The caption shouts out the message: “Recognise the Journey – Celebrate the Future”.

Inside the stores, customers are encouraged to send postcards, which tell Osman and Mina’s stories, to friends, to family or to their local politician. Leaflets for customers with definitions of refugees and asylum seekers, myths and facts, and information about how to help refugees by becoming a member of FASSTT or making a donation, are also widely available. Secondary school students can enter a national writing competition about “How refugees and asylum seekers make a positive contribution to Australia” and win cash prizes donated by The Body Shop.

Customers will be able to stamp “passports” with messages like “Refugees and Asylum Seekers deserve dignity and respect”, “I support the protection of refugees” and “I welcome refugees to Australia”. These messages of support will be displayed in the shops before being gathered up in each state and territory to become part of state-based displays in September. All eight displays will be brought together nationally in October to mark Refugee Week.

The preparation for the campaign has been intense. Sue McGrillen from the Victorian Foundation for Survivors of Torture says “involving clients in a campaign like this is a very sensitive issue. I agonised about it – just wanting to make sure that Osman and Mina really understood what it would mean and how high profile it would be. I don’t know how I’d feel about having my picture in 72 shops! But Osman and Mina are both very committed to telling their stories and they know that by doing so they are, in a way, speaking for all those who have had a refugee journey”. “I think it’s a very serious job doing this campaign,” says Osman. “I want to do it because I think it makes it easier for other refugees to come.”

All Body Shop staff will be wearing t-shirts and badges to promote the campaign, and they will be ready and willing to talk to customers about it. FASSTT has been involved in a two-part program training Body Shop staff members across the country. The second round of training looks at the issue of refugees specifically and staff from FASSTT...
When you work for The Body Shop, you commit to spending some of your leisure time learning about the issues that affect your community and your world – and the staff wouldn’t work anywhere else. Nicky Tracey, speaking for The Body Shop, says that all staff are expected to be actively involved, and that it is part of the job to participate in Body Shop campaigns. This campaign has enjoyed especially strong support from the staff: “We have found that 99 percent of the staff support and endorse the campaign. So far we have had no refusals. Staff are now undergoing the second lot of training, and not one person said they did not agree with what we are doing”.

Holly Fraser, a manager at the Bourke Street Mall store, in Melbourne, feels very strongly about this issue and cannot wait for the campaign to start: “I look forward to learning more and continuing to be inspired and enlightened by other people’s stories. This campaign has come at a poignant and challenging period in Australian and world history and I feel honoured to be a part of it.”

The Body Shop (Australia) runs a major social or environmental campaign each year. Last year’s major campaign focused on global warming and green energy. The 2003 campaign, funded almost entirely by The Body Shop provides FASSTT, as the campaign partner, with an opportunity to gain valuable public exposure and raise awareness of their work with refugees. Body Shop customers will be encouraged to sign on as members or make a donation to support FASSTT’s work with those who have survived difficult journeys.

A national launch was held in Melbourne on August 4th. The launch was predominantly for the media so that this message of welcome and hope can be broadcast far and wide. Those who have worked so hard to make this campaign happen will be there to celebrate.

You can get involved by going into a Body Shop store between August 4th and 24th and stamping your message of support on a passport, or by logging on to www.thebodyshop.com.au or www.fasstt.org.au to enter the writing competition if you’re at high school. You could also get involved by becoming a member of FASSTT and supporting its work rebuilding the shattered lives of refugees.

The photo shoots on that autumn morning were beautifully organised - relaxed clients, enthusiastic Body Shop staff and lots of laughter. There was even a Body Shop gift basket for the Osman’s family and for Mina. As the photo shoot drew to a close, I see Sue, never missing a trick, explaining all the products in the gift basket to Osman’s wife Hagir. Labels are a challenge when your first language is Arabic.
Join the FASSTT agency in your state to help survivors of torture rebuild their lives, and receive three copies of Refugee Transitions annually.

| Name: |  |
| Address: |  |
| State: | Postcode: |
| Home Telephone: ( ) | Business Telephone: ( ) |
| Mobile: | Email: |

I have enclosed ...

- $55 (GST inclusive) for 1 year’s full membership including subscription to Refugee Transitions
- $44 (GST inclusive) for 1 year’s concession membership including subscription to Refugee Transitions
- $36 (GST inclusive) for 1 year’s subscription to Refugee Transitions only (excluding membership)

and a donation of $_______

TOTAL AMOUNT $_______

- I have enclosed a cheque / money order (please make payable to FASSTT) or
- Please deduct from my:
  - Bankcard
  - Visa
  - Mastercard

Card Number:                     Expiry date _ ___/__ __
Name on card: ___________________________________________
Signature: _____________________________________________

Please send completed form to:    FASSTT, P.O. Box 96, Parkville, VIC 3052

For more details on how you can help survivors of torture to rebuild their lives, please contact the FASSTT agency in your state.

ACT - Companion House
1st Floor, 6 Faworia Way, Nightcliff, NT 0810.
Ph: (08) 8918 3311
admin@melaleuca.org.au

NSW – Friends of STARTTS
Service for the Treatment and Rehabilitation of Torture and Trauma Survivors in New South Wales,
152-168 The Horsley Drive, Carramar, NSW 2163.
Ph: (02) 9794 1900
startts@swsahs.nsw.gov.au
www.startts.org

NT - TTSSNT
Melaleuca Refugee Centre (Torture and Trauma Survivors Service of the Northern Territory),
1st Floor, 6 Faworia Way, Nightcliff, NT 0810.
Ph: (08) 8918 3311
admin@melaleuca.org.au

QLD - QPASTT
Queensland Program of Assistance to Survivors of Torture and Trauma,
Kalbe House, 118 Park Road, Woolloongabba, QLD 4102.
Ph: (07) 3391 6677
admin@qpastt.org.au
www.qpastt.org.au

SA - STTARS
Survivors of Torture and Trauma Assistance and Rehabilitation Service in South Australia,
12 Hawker Street, Bowdon, SA 5007.
Ph: (08) 8346 5433
sttars@sttars.org.au

TAS
Phoenix Support Service for Survivors of Torture and Trauma
49 Mole Street Hobart, TAS 7000.
Ph: (03) 6234 9330
phoenix@mrchobart.org.au

VIC - VFST
Victorian Foundation for Survivors of Torture
House 23, 35 Poplar Road Parkville, VIC 3052.
Ph: (03) 9388 0022
admin@survivorsvic.org.au
www.survivorsvic.org.au

WA - ASeTTS
Association of Services to Torture and Trauma Survivors
3rd Floor, Bon Marche Arcade, 80 Barrack Street, Perth, WA 6000
Ph: (08) 9325 6272
admin@asetts.org.au
www.asetts.org.au
Quentin Buckle, a fiercely committed human rights and social justice activist for 30 years, died on February 26 in Sydney after a short neurological illness.

In Melbourne in the 1980s, Quentin was very active in solidarity with people struggling against repression in Iran and Chile. His experience with Chileans led directly to his work in founding the Victorian Foundation for Survivors of Torture.

Quentin was prominent in the youth and homelessness services sector in Victoria, serving as the first Executive Officer of the National Youth Coalition for Housing and later helping to reshape the Victorian Government’s approach to homelessness.

In his later years in Sydney, Quentin, who was of Anglo-Indian descent, worked with activists in the emerging GLBT communities in Asia and the Pacific. He did voluntary planning work with the Humsafar Trust, the AIDS organisation in Mumbai, helping it expand its services over five public hospitals in Mumbai and other areas.

He was a member of the Asia-Pacific Rainbow Network and played a major role at its first assembly. His work in this area was crowned by his championing of the outreach and diversity programs for the Sydney Gay Games 2002, including the very successful scholarship program, and in the Amnesty-sponsored human rights conference during that time.

From Paris Aristotle - Director, VFST...

“It is difficult to fully describe Quentin’s contribution to the creation and development of the Victorian Foundation for Survivors of Torture. What began as a seed of hope amongst a group of committed community groups, professionals and human rights activists, has grown into a flourishing and innovative service for thousands of people who have survived the horrors of torture and persecution. Quentin’s passion to shape the service into one that had the courage to sit with the pain and anguish that survivors feel and to help them rebuild their shattered lives is borne out in their actual stories of rebuilding. His vision of an agency that would constructively carry that learning into the political realm, where social and systemic change could be achieved, has also been one of his most enduring legacies.

Quentin’s generosity and effort was never motivated by personal reward. He was committed to advocating for and protecting the human rights of all people, particularly the most vulnerable. Quentin wanted a better world for everyone and was willing to spend the hours, days, months and years providing much of the intellectual rigour, creativity and passion needed to achieve this. He argued for and supported us to be politically astute, sophisticated in our analysis and as strategic as possible, so that we could push the boundaries as a service and as advocates.

He advocated that we build a service, holistic in its approach, grounded in the community and committed to valuing the cultural diversity of the people with whom we work. There is no doubt that the Foundation is an infinitely better place as a consequence.

In some important and fundamental ways, much of what the VFST has achieved and what it has become, is because of Quentin. Our good fortune is not that Quentin crossed our path but that we managed to lay the path together. Thanks QB, we are forever in your debt.”

Quentin Buckle 1953-2003

- Founding Member of The Victorian Foundation for Survivors of Torture (VFST)
- VFST Committee of Management Member 1988 - 2001
- Awarded VFST Life Membership December 2001
DEMOCRACY IN LATIN AMERICA

George Philip
Blackwell, 216 pp. $65.95

Since 1980 there has been an enormous extension of democratic governance in Latin America. Democracy has spread to some countries with little or no democratic history and Democracy has in fact survived in Latin America. However, George Philip writes that democracy has not solved many policy problems and has proved problematic in a number of ways: many Latin American countries have seen little, if any, per capita growth; poverty has increased; and political crises have often recurred. The idea of the ‘Washington consensus’ – that democracy, free markets and prosperity would go together in the region – has so far failed. In this book, Philip, a Professor of Comparative and Latin American Politics at the London School of Economics, explores the process of democratisation in Latin America. In the first part of this book, he identifies some of the reasons why this should be so. The chapters are organised around relevant historical and institutional factors, such as problems with law enforcement and the political tensions inherent in some Latin America variants of presidentialism, authoritarian legacies, patrimonial bureaucracies, civil-military relations, market reform, and, international involvement. According to Philip, globalization has exacerbated these difficulties, since it has aggravated the already acute problems of governance facing emerging democracies. The second part of the book explores these issues in relation to a series of case studies involving Peru, Mexico and Venezuela.

George Phillips confronts the challenges in this book by highlighting the gap between the electoral processes, which appear to function well and the failure to consolidate democratic institutions. He also focuses on the root cause of non-consolidation in the region – the perverse ability of pre democratic patterns of political behaviour to survive and indeed flourish in many countries.

This book is easy to read, an ideal source for students taking courses in Latin American politics and Latin American studies and to anyone interested in the evolution of modern politics in Latin America.
AN ANTI-CAPITALIST MANIFESTO

By Alex Callinicos

BLACKWELL Publishing Asia 179 pp. $49.95

Callinicos writes about resistance and confrontation, particularly about the great demonstrations at Seattle and Genoa, which have shown that we are in a new era of protest. He writes that the neo-liberal economic policies that are pursued by the Group of Seven leading industrial countries and the international institutions they control, are in fact providing widespread resistance. Growing numbers of people in all five continents are rejecting the values of the market and the vision of a world made safe for the multinational corporations. But, what does the anti-globalization movement stand for? He questions. Is it, as its most common name suggests, against globalization itself? Is it opposed merely to the neo-liberal Washington Consensus that became dominant in the 1980s and 1990s? or, is its real enemy the capitalist system itself? The World Social Forum at Porto Alegre has popularised the slogan ‘Another World is Possible.’ But what is that world?

Alex Callinicos, a Professor of Politics at the University of New York, seeks to answer these questions in An Anti-Capitalist Manifesto. He analyses the development of the movement, distinguishes between the different political forces within it, and explores the strategic dilemmas – notably over violence and the nation-state – that it increasingly confronts. He argues that the movement is directed against capitalism itself. The logic of competitive accumulation that drives this system is not only increasing global inequality and economic instability, but threatens ecological catastrophe. To meet the challenges of global capitalism the new protest movement requires, according to Callinicos, a creative synthesis of its own inclusive and dynamic style and the best of the classical Marxist tradition.

This is a very relevant analysis of today’s world: robust, articulate, engaging and above all provocative.
POLITICS IN THE DEVELOPING WORLD
A Concise Introduction

By Jeff Haynes

BLACKWELL Publishing,
299 pp. $61.55

Professor Jeff Haynes from the Department of Politics and Modern History, at London Guildhall University, has purposefully written this book for those coming to politics for the first time. Haynes has written a concise and lucid introduction to the developing world. He provides an exploration and analysis of the most important political issues affecting it. Offering a different perspective from standard texts in this field, Politics in the Developing World encourages an understanding of the breadth and nature of a range of pressing – and previously understated – issues: the striving for democracy; the political consequences of economic growth and development; the struggle of religious and ethnic minorities; human rights, particularly women’s rights; the impact of globalizations; and the politics of the natural environment. In doing so, the interaction of domestic and global factors affecting many of the developing world countries is highlighted and a new, qualitatively different set of concerns is identified. Some of these factors have resulted from recent international changes following the demise of the Soviet bloc, including the shift to democracy in South Africa, and the ramifications of the late 1990s Southeast Asian financial crisis.

To illustrate the importance of these themes and issues, five developing world regions are examined in detail: Latin America and the Caribbean, South Asia, East and Southeast Asia, the Middle East and North Africa, and sub-Saharan Africa.

While based on Haynes’ previous publications, Politics In The Developing World: A Concise Introduction (1996) is a new book, completely rewritten, with updated regional analysis and data throughout. It concentrates on changes in the developing world in the last decade, with an increased focus on its international relations, complementing those chapters concerned with domestic issues. An ideal introduction as well as an invitation to further study, this text is essential reading for introductory students studying a range of courses including development studies, global politics, world politics, developing world politics, comparative politics and international relations.

This book is rich in analysis and in examples drawn from a wide variety of developing countries and the political and economic developments occurring within them. Politics in the Developing World is most welcome and an important document to the growing literature on political and economic development.
GARDEN’S GATEWAY TO PEACE

Approach my garden, your garden, our garden
Immerse yourself in it, and you’ll see
The measure of peacefulness, serenity and tranquillity
It is absolute fragile fragrance of the roses
Shedding their petals under the warmth of the sun
Glistening, sparkling and shimmering
With the morning’s dew.
Take your hands and run them through the stream
Run them through the thick fresh grass
Let the wind rush through your hair
Beneath the canopy of the trees
Listen to the rustling of leaves.
Let the beauty of spring time melt your icy thoughts from winter
Fill your soul with this peace
For this is the garden of peace and hope
Where the trees of thoughts sow
Nurtured by the kindness
Revealing the concerns that good friends show.
The roots are the essences the origin of memories
Of the most cherished times in the past
The branches of trees reach out in tender promises
That all life endures and lasts.
This is a place where bright new hope can start
it is the thoughts and lessons we learn and teach, listen and act
That can amazingly soothe the hurting heart.

Christopher Chan (2002)
Year 12
Cabramatta High School

Photo by Denis Jones