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REFUGEE TRANSITIONS

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REFUGEE TRANSITIONS

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

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CEO's Message

Over the last few months, in a pattern that now spans years, the discussion about refugee issues has been largely dominated by the issue of unauthorized maritime arrivals. It is a complex issue that becomes more so as time goes by, and should by rights deserve thoughtful and considered debate. Sadly, with notable exceptions, the public debate has often lacked rigor and perspective. Even when discussing serious attempts to unravel this complexity, like the Houston Report, the tendency has been to concentrate on a couple of salient aspects and ignore the rest.

Analysis of the factors affecting the fluctuations in people movements exploited by people smugglers has often been disregarded in favour of over simplistic explanations and local would-be solutions to global problems. Paradoxically, this focus on border protection as an end in itself has largely left out of the public arena the area in which Australia has excelled over the years; that of assisting people damaged by torture and other human rights violations to overcome their problems and become contributing members of our society.

Surely, we should continue to attempt to stop the boats; many people drown in the attempt to cross dangerous seas in unseaworthy vessels, and many more risk all, and lose all when they are returned, only to line the pockets of people smugglers. But is it feasible, and is it affordable, both from economic and human capital perspective? Or should we concentrate more of our efforts and resources in ensuring that we continue to do really well in assisting humanitarian arrivals to become well integrated and contributing members of Australian society?

Over the years, successive waves of refugees have not only become part of this country, but contributed significantly to shape the very fabric of Australian society and make it what it is today. Australia does this really well, and the investment made in this area over the years has paid off handsome dividends, both in human capital and hard currency. Surely, this is an important perspective to consider in the larger debate, and probably our only realistic fall-back position in a world where people movements have never been easily managed or stopped.

This issue of Refugee Transitions provides a modest effort to throw some light onto various issues associated with the complexities of life in post conflict situations, as well as on various aspects of the process of assisting people to reclaim control of their lives in this, their adopted country. I hope you enjoy reading them!

Until our next issue, all the best!

Jorge Aroche

Chief Executive Officer
STARTTS

PHOTO: Sébastien Cuvelier

Contents

Libya: *A New Beginning*

Two years after the revolution Libya is facing momentous challenges. If the new government is successful, this oil-rich country could emerge as a positive force for democracy and stability in North Africa. OLGA YOLDI writes.

A Libyan rebel fighter wraps him–self in heavy machine gun ammo before heading to battle against pro Gaddafi forces. March 2011. PHOTO: ROBERTO SCHMIDT/AFP /Getty Images

A Libyan woman passes a building dressed with a huge old Libyan flag, in Benghazi, eastern Libya.
PHOTO: AP Photo/Hussein Malla

Thousands of residents took to the streets of Libya's main cities last February to celebrate the second anniversary of the revolution. But beneath those celebrations, observers reported there was a sad aspect to many of the revellers.

Head of the National Congress, Mohammed el Magarief told citizens in Benghazi, the cradle of the revolt, to join ranks and resolve their differences as a nation. But so far resolving differences is proving difficult.

The newly appointed government lead by Prime Minister Ali Zaidan is struggling for legitimacy and to restore law and order. Critics are becoming impatient, calling for a new revolution, accusing the new leader of failing to usher in much needed reforms. They say democracy has not materialised and they are yet to see the fruit of their military struggle.

Nonetheless, elections were held freely and fairly, a remarkable democratic experiment in a state that had had no experience in any type of participative politics for four decades. Now Libyans are able to express their political views without fear.

But four decades of Gaddafi's rule has left the country bereft of modern institutions. "There was no vital state apparatus in place," writes Ali Tarhouni, former Minister for Oil and Finance in the National Transition Council in *Bloomberg*. "For that reason the new Libya has far fewer pieces to work with in building an effective governing structure."

The new government, a mixture of liberal figures and Islamists, is under pressure to rebuild the nation. Indeed, there is much that needs to be built on after years of neglect, from regional governments, institutions, civil society organisations, to the economy and infrastructure.

Unlike Egypt or Tunisia that have armies to protect the state, Libya is highly vulnerable, as it lacks an effective government, an army, a police force, or international peacekeeping soldiers able to protect its cities and borders. The current police and army have been described by political commentator Frederic Wehrey as "hollow shells – ill equipped, understaffed and tainted by their association with the former regime."

The new government will not be able to build a nation instantly. Neither will it be able to root out the

Libya's national assembly leader Mohammed Magarief attends the second day of an extraordinary summit of Oraganisation of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) held in the city of Mecca. August 2012. PHOTO: FAYEZ NURELDINE/AFP/Getty Images

antidemocratic social, cultural and economic legacies of the Gaddafi era overnight.

Yet Libya's vast oil and gas reserves, its untapped deposits of mineral wealth and its manageable population (6.8 million) could turn it into a nation of limitless potential.

Libya once was "a Mediterranean region of immense cultural and economic wealth, anything from the world beyond the sea," writes Robert Draper in *National Geographic*. "Spreading over 1,100 miles of coastline, bracketed by highlands that recede into semiarid wadis and finally into the copper vacuum of the desert, Libya had long been a corridor of commerce and art, and irrepressible social aspiration."

But Gaddafi suppressed all types of aspirations. He crushed political dissent and free expression, creativity and innovation. He blocked the creation of political and social institutions and ignored the country's advantage - its strategic position between Europe and Africa.

Central to his vision for Libya was a populism designed to undermine the main cities that threatened his power base. Like many other dictators, Gaddafi favoured some groups over others, particularly the dark-skinned Africans of sub-Saharan descent, the Berbers. He provided them with jobs and housing in return for loyalty.

This divide-and-rule strategy turned some tribes and groups against others. The revolution turned those divisions into battlelines, which have remained intact in post-revolutionary Libya where the wounds are still raw.

Now those loyal to the former regime fear they will face the brunt of revenge attacks by militants, who are not ready to forgive and forget. According to Human Rights Watch, some Gaddafi loyalists were summarily executed by militants, about 40,000 were forced out of their homes; many have been languishing in overcrowded, temporary prisons awaiting their fate and the rest continue to live in their communities but are struggling to define a place in post-revolutionary Libya.

There are still about 60,000 internally displaced people living in public facilities. According to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees about one million refugees are still living in neigh-

bouring countries. Many of these are loyalists.

A city that is still haunted by the ghost of Gaddafi is Bani Walid. Located 140 km south-west of its rival city Misrata, Bani Walid has been tarnished as a town sympathetic to the former regime. During the war the area was the scene of violent clashes between pro-Gaddafi loyalists and revolutionary militias from Misrata who suffered the full wrath of Gaddafi's forces.

West from Bani Walid is Tawurgha, now a ghost town of originally 30,000 people located 25 miles south of Misrata. Tawurghan volunteers also joined Gaddafi's soldiers, marched on Misrata, killed their neighbours and raped the women.

Almost all Tawurghans are now gone. Some fled when rebels advanced with vengeance in mind; others were captured and live in displacement camps or illegal detention centres, mainly in Tripoli and Benghazi. They have been banned from returning until a still undefined process is completed to determine if they are guilty of war crimes. They face mistreatment, torture and extrajudicial killings.

Their plight has attracted the attention of international human-rights groups and has raised questions about the behaviour of Misrata's militias. "Tawurgha appears a case in which old enmities, the fog of war and the brutality of battle have conspired to obscure the truth, at least now," writes Patrick McDonnell in the *Los Angeles Times*. "It seems likely that neither side is innocent. But it is the victors who control the town's fate."

Sydney Kwiram, from Human Rights Watch said, "Even the worst crimes allegedly committed by some people in Tawurgha don't justify the colective punishment of the town." The situation won't change until militias are disbanded.

The 300 militias created during the eight months of uprising in 2011 have occupied the vacuum left by the army. In 2012 the government registered more than 240,000 armed gunmen. They now control much of the country. They won't accept orders, won't disband and will not surrender their weapons to the new government. They say they want to protect what they fought so hard for. Some militias are affiliated with towns and tribes, with Islamic factions and Gaddafi loyalists.

After the war, in the absence of a police force or army, the National Transition Council (NTC) used them as hired guns. The new government has been trying to rein in these armed groups to join a centralised police force and army, but it is proving difficult. It looks like the very revolutionaries that freed Libya from tyranny are now depriving it of the stability needed to move forward.

While some groups are coordinated by the central government, others continue to operate like gangs and are involved in human-rights abuses. According to press reports, many have been implicated in revenge attacks and communal strife in Benghazi.

Last year, the government blamed Ansar-al-Sharia, a Salafi armed group, for the September 11 attack that killed US Ambassador Chris Stevens and three others in the US Consulate in Benghazi. They have also been accused of bombing the headquarters of the public prosecutor, killing 20 prominent security officials, attacking Sufi shrines across the country, digging up graves and destroying mosques and libraries.

"It looks like the very revolutionaries that freed Libya from tyranny are now depriving it of the stability needed to move forward."

A senior Algerian officer claimed that the organisers of the Benghazi consulate attack are the same as those who organised the seizure of the Tigantourine gas field in south-east Algeria that left 38 hostages and 29 Muslims dead. According to press reports, the group recruited by Mokhtar Belmokhtar includes several Egyptian jihadists active in Libya.

Former US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton warned that Jihadists groups have formed a complex alliance in North Africa with southern Libya and Mali as their main basis.

Following the attack on the US consulate, members of Ansar-al-Sharia were kicked out of Benghazi by locals. But months later they are back, openly manning checkpoints and a hospital.

While they are still seen as a threat to the security of Libya, the group is also held up as heroes for the Libyan uprising by some locals because according to them, they are doing a better job of protecting residents than the central government in Tripoli.

"These men are also people who fought on the front lines, care about their city and provide services. We cannot shun them" said Benghazi university professor Iman Bugaighis. "We had to ask them to come back and protect our hospital and streets."

Benghazi Council spokesman Osama al-Sharif said hospital staff and residents had had no choice but to ask locals to protect the facility, following a few violent incidents. "It is just the reality of the city. The police have complained of a lack of authority and resources and the interior ministry says it can't do it so we have to rely on these brigades."

There are fears that as long as militias remain armed their power will be entrenched.

Arms confiscation is one of the biggest challenges for the new government. According to the *Peace Brief*, published by the US Institute of Peace, there is an average of at least four weapons for each of its 6.8 million people. Neither rebels nor civilians are about to give them back because they claim it is a matter of self-protection.

Thousands of weapons were looted from Gaddafi's stockpiles. Arms range from pistols and machine guns to bullets and rocket propelled grenades. According to Euronews arms dumps can still be found all over the country, outside unsafe bunkers, in the cities, museums, or in the countryside. None are guarded. They represent a danger to the civil population.

A Harvard University report warned last year that apart from the risk of explosion, there is also the temptation to collect and sell arms for some cash. There are fears that they could find their way to terrorists in Sub-Saharan Africa.

Gaddafi had over 1,000 arms depots. Vivienne Watt wrote in *Time World* that Gaddafi was a prolific arms buyer, who spent billions of oil revenue during his last years on state-of-the-art weaponry and left behind miles of unsecured warehouses, filled with rockets, machine guns, ammunition and anti-aircraft systems, much of which had never been unpacked.

Francois Heisbourg, a security expert and chairman of the International Institute for Strategic Studies, said that there is still a lot of stuff sloshing its way in all directions.

Indeed, arms caches uncovered in both Tunisia and Algeria were believed to have originated from Libya. Islamists are thought to be behind the cache found in Tunisia, but an arms-smuggling syndicate has not been ruled out. The caches contained missile launchers that can be used to shoot down airlines.

According to the *New York Times*, Libyan arms have also turned up in Egypt, Gaza, Chad, Lebanon, Syria and elsewhere, causing further instability in the region, perhaps most vividly in Mali.

"Within hours of Gaddafi's death many ethnic Tuareg fighters from northern Mali who had fought alongside Libyan forces as mercenaries retreated across the Sahara, carrying as much weaponry as they could stuff into pickup trucks," Watt wrote. Most press reports indicate that the Tuareg and Islamist rebels that carried out the coup d'etat in Mali obtained most of their weapons from Libya.

There is no doubt that a few lessons could be learned about security in post-conflict situations from the mistakes made in post-Gaddafi Libya. As Stewart M Patrick wrote in *The Internationalist:* "by adopting a light footprint approach in Libya the Alliance unwittingly contributed to a security vacuum that allowed countless weapons to stream out of Libya and fuel insurgency extremism and crime in neighbouring countries."

Ian Marlin, the then special representative of the UN Secretary General and head of the UN Support Mission in Libya, drafted a plan to help stabilise Libya in August 2011. It consisted of 200 unarmed military observers plus an interim protection force for the observers. However the NTC rejected the idea of the UN deploying international military forces. But given the rebels' internal rivalries they were in no position to provide the basic security and rule of law that Libya needed and neither were they able to control the arms depots, or national borders.

According to Patrick, while there were discussions between the US, NATO officials and NTC leaders about securing the weapons stockpiles, these discussions and operations appeared to have focused on securing mustard gas and surface-to-air missiles only, rather than on the massive stores of conventional arms. Daunted by the task of securing thousands of miles of remote desert borders, officials expressed concern but did little.

Experts say that clamping down on arms-trafficking networks will require border control capabilities: much better situational awareness through a combination of remote sensing investment in human intelligence and information sharing among neighbouring national governments.

But national governments are not cooperating. The attitude of Algeria, which has the region's largest military, has been described as 'benign neglect' by Heisbourg. "As long as the Jihadists kept to themselves, and operated outside of Algeria, the Algerians did not want to get involved," he said.

While border control capabilities and international cooperation are important, observers say the problem is that the Sahel region of North Africa does include

A Libyan National Transitional Council fighter walks past a mosque with anti-Muammar Gaddafi graffiti scrawled on its perimeter wall as fighters prepare to attack pro-Gaddafi forces in this desert oasis of Bani Walid. October 2011.
PHOTO: AFP / KARIM SAHIB

some of the world's poorest countries, where criminal activities including arms and drug-trafficking are some of the most profitable enterprises.

Until the security situation is brought under control progress on other fronts will be difficult to achieve. Libya has the largest oil reserves in Africa. It produces 1.5 million barrels of crude oil a day, with much of its wealth derived from its exports to Europe and China. The National Oil Corporation aims to boost oil output to two million barrels a day by 2015. The Libyan GDP per capita is among the highest in Africa, but unemployment and income inequality remain high.

The economy was disrupted by the civil war and the freezing of the country's assets. The new government will need to rethink how it will manage it to take greater advantage of its oil and mineral resources and create employment and prosperity for its citizens. A successful economy would help build the popular support, reduce corruption and enable private enterprise to flourish.

The new government will be under pressure to address the growing challenge of youth unemployment, an obstacle that was aggravated by the civil war. Libya has traditionally relied on the public sector to create jobs, a measure that, according to the African Economic Outlook, has proven unsustainable. At the same time the country's inefficient private sector has been unable to compensate for the lack of jobs.

Tackling the current economic inefficiencies and building a strong market economy will require making reforms to strengthen the private sector, the financial and education systems, after years of decline. Libya will need technical assistance from other countries but the foreign firms needed to help reconstruct war-ravaged areas and modernise the petroleum industry are reluctant to work in Libya because the security situation has not been resolved. Unfortunately this could take a long time.

Political stability and security will not be achieved without effective institutions such as courts, police and government bureaucracies. According to political commentator Frederic Wehrey, building the army and a police force will be fraught with difficulties as many militias see these institutions as tainted by Gaddafi loyalists.

On the other hand, the recent Political Exclusion Law, which Parliament has accepted in principle, disqualifies anyone associated with the Gaddafi regime from holding public office in Libya– not just senior regime officials, but also upper and mid-level bureaucrats.

Such a law will do nothing for building democracy or even the economy, as it will only reinforce social divisions, perpetuate instability and the regrouping of Gaddafi loyalists, which could end up having unintended consequences.

According to Ibrahim Shaqieh from the *New York Times,* the officials targeted by the Political Exclusion Law are also the ones with governing experience and the knowledge of how to actually run the country.

"Stable liberal democracy usually emerges only at the end of long, often violent struggles, with many twists, turns, false starts and detours."

Sheri Burman

The writing of the constitution will be a test of Libyan unity. It will require the General National Congress to address difficult questions that will impact upon its legitimacy as a government.

Most importantly, the Constitution will delineate local and central powers, and whether power should be centralised in Tripoli or in the regions. Calls have been made for federalism in the eastern region of Cyrenaica, where 80 per cent of the country's oil is produced.

The east has complained of having been marginalised during the Gaddafi era, and there is a sense that the marginalisation and as a result the inequitable distribution of oil wealth are likely to continue in the future if power continues to be centralised in Tripoli.

Some federalists demand a return to the 1951 Constitution's division of the country into three areas: Tripolitana, Cyrenaica and Fezzan. Federalists are represented by the so-called Barqa Council that called for an election boycott and has organised demonstrations against the new government.

The constitution must also ensure inclusive governing institutions that bridge the traditional divides. Islamists might pose problems given their ambivalent attitudes to the concept of democratic processes and their insistence on adopting Sharia law.

Akakus Desert, Libya. PHOTO: Tobias Helbig

The biggest priority for the new government is to restore the rule of law and start addressing the detainee crisis and the security situation. Brigades must be disarmed, demobilised and reintegrated into society as soon as possible.

It might need assistance from the international community. France reasserted its intentions to support the deployment of European experts to assist Libya get its security situation under control but those intentions haven't been acted on.

There is no doubt that the Libyan transition will take a long time, longer perhaps than Libyans are prepared to wait. There will not be a shortage of risks and potential setbacks, so it may be inappropriate to set too high benchmarks.

Let's not forget that most countries that are stable liberal democracies today experienced great difficulties getting there, in some cases they took a long time to do so and have had decades to perfect it. "Stable liberal democracy usually emerges only at the end of long, often violent struggles, with many twists, turns, false starts and detours," writes Sheri Burman in *Foreign Affairs*.

According to Burman, this is a feature, not a sign of problems with democracy itself but evidence of the difficult, messy process of political development through which societies purge themselves of the vestiges of dictatorships and construct better democratic orders.

The journey for Libya has just started. The new government will need to deal with the pathologies left by Gaddafi; this is a monumental task in itself. It will also need to build a new order, starting at zero, while achieving reconciliation between the different tribes and regions and rebuilding the nation. It will not be easy.

It is clear however that Libya has had a few achievements along the way and it is eagerly awaiting its future. It may stumble along the way but let's hope it will continue to plunge forward rather than turn back. Then it might become a beacon for Arab transition. R

A Human Tragedy

More than 2.5 million Syrians have fled their homes since the outbreak of the civil war in March 2011, taking refuge in neighbouring countries or within Syria itself. One million Syrian refugees have settled in neighbouring countries, although the actual number might be higher.

The number of refugees could triple by the end of the year if it continues at the current rate, according to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR). "If this escalation goes on, we might have in the end of the year a much larger number of refugees, two or three times the present level," the UN higher commissioner, Antonio Guterres told reporters in Ankara. "Syria could become the world's worst refugee problem area, ahead of Afghanistan and Iraq", he said.

Many refugees have fled to Jordan (332,297), Lebanon (332,297), Turkey (185,000). Some have even fled to Iraq (106,697) despite the uncertain security situation in that country; others have travelled to North Africa (8,262).

In March an average of 10,000 people were crossing borders a day. Many flee under the cover of night, arriving frightened and exhausted and often with only the clothes they are wearing. This is a sad illustration of a crisis that is bringing unbearable pain and suffering on a massive scale. It is also putting much pressure on scarce resources and funding and causing tensions among local communities.

Life in most refugee camps is very hard, scorching hot in summer and freezing cold in winter. Charity organisations are struggling to meet even the most essential needs of refugees and the UNHCR reports that funding is drying up. It has now announced plans to cut basic aid programs to over 400,000 Syrian refugees in Lebanon because of lack of funding. Yet funding is vital to ensure food, clean water, schooling for children, health and shelter.

Children particularly are enduring much pain. Many have been orphaned as a result of war. They have witnessed horrific violence and tragic loss.

This is a human tragedy that demands immediate action from the international community in the form of political mediation and funding for humanitarian programs.

A Syrian man, resident of the Jabal Badero neighbourhood whose house was destroyed, reacts as others inspect the damages, after an alleged missile strike two days earlier in Aleppo, Syria, February 2013. Six children were among those killed. PHOTO: EPA/BRUNO GALLARDO

Syria Azaz Border Camp, February 2013. PHOTO: Thomas Rassloff

Refugees waiting to cross the Turkish border at the Syria Azaz Border Camp, February 2013. PHOTO: Thomas Rassloff

Refugees inside their tent prepare for Winter in Jordan's Za'atri Camp. PHOTO: UNHCR/B. Sokol

A Syrian woman comforts her grandson in the arrivals area at Za'atri refugee camp. In recent weeks there has been a rise in the number of relatively wealthy Syrians fleeing to Jordan and more female-headed households have been making the journey. December 2012. PHOTO: UNHCR/B. Sokol

Refugees employed by the Norwegian Refugee Council, a key UNHCR implementing partner, carry metal sheeting that will be used to create a covered kitchen area outside a family's tent. December 2012. PHOTO: UNHCR/B. Sokol

Trucks pull pre-fabricated homes through the centre of Za'atri camp. UNHCR is working to relocate about 2,000 refugee families to these homes, which provide better protection and insulation in winter. December 2012. PHOTO: UNHCR/B. Sokol

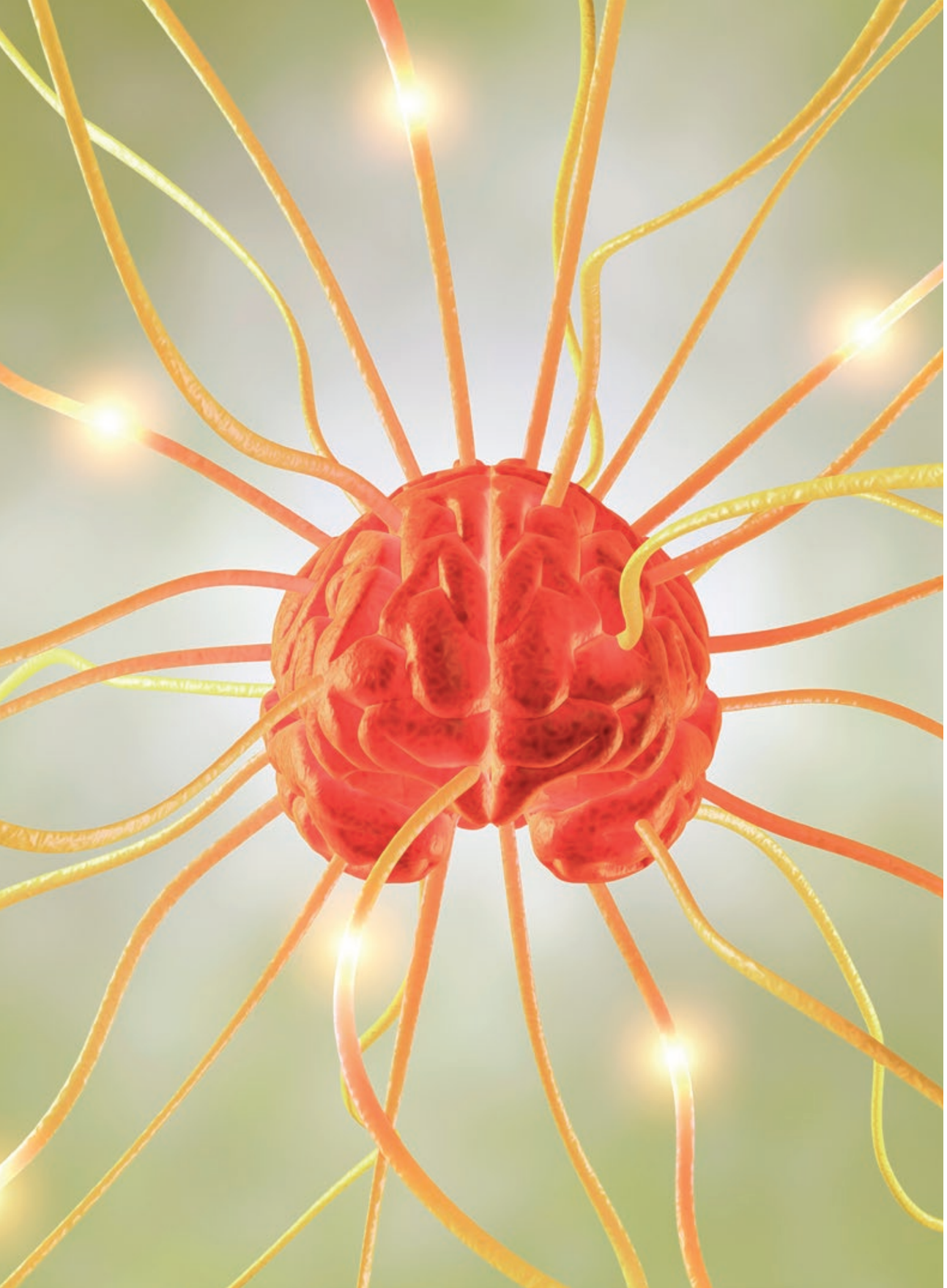


PHOTO: AFP

*Dr **JOHN ARDEN** is a US psychologist and author. His study of neuropsychology has inspired him to integrate neuroscience and psychotherapy, synthesising the biological and psychological into a new vision for psychotherapy called Brain-Based Therapy. Author of 12 books, including the popular Rewire your Brain: Think Your Way to a Better Life, Dr Arden is the director of training at the Kaiser Permanente Medical Centre in northern California. He presented a seminar for STARTTS and spoke to **OLGA YOLDI**.*

Rewiring the Brain: *Brain – Based Therapy*

What is brain therapy?

Brain therapy is an effort to integrate many of the strands of theory and research, from developmental psychology to attachment, temperament, memory, neuroscience, and to evidence-based practice. Brain-based therapy factors in the brain's capacities of neuro-plasticity and neurogenesis, with psychotherapy, mind-fulness, nutritional neuroscience and social intelligence.

You could define brain-based therapy as the integrated approach, the bio-psychosocial approach. It is not reductionist. I am someone that has been immersed in all sorts of things, from cross-cultural theory to hypnosis. I am not saying that everything should be reduced to brain function and forget about the rest of it. I would say that brain therapy is bi-directional.

Would you say it is a holistic approach to treatment?
I have difficulty with the word holism in the sense that we used it a lot in the 1970s, but did not explain the interaction of all the aspects to human experience that I have just mentioned, which occur in a dynamic way. For this reason I explained during my presentation today the contribution of complexity theory.

Complexity theory is about the multiple levels of different variables all working together at the same time, such as culture, emotion, cognition, bio-physiology, endocrinology, neurophysiology, and social factors. In other words, all these different factors that have an impact in terms of how we feel and perceive the world around us.

So brain-based therapy is all these integrated bio-psychosocial elements that are holistic. We now have ways of understanding how the parts of the whole interrelate. This is different from that time in the past when we used to throw the word holism all over the place. We knew what it meant, but we didn't know how all the elements worked together.

You have been in the field of psychology for nearly 40 years, how did you start?
I began working in the de-institutionalisation of mental-health patients. We were trying to create alternatives to hospital care and were concerned that people were being treated like patients and somehow developing an identity whereby they thought of themselves as incapable of doing productive things, like working.

That work had a formative influence on me. From the mid-seventies until 1990, I was running psychosocial rehabilitation programs and simultaneously I was also doing training in hypnosis. I was interested in hypnotic techniques and in the way people experience reality.

At that time hypnosis and cross-cultural perspectives seemed to be so pervasive in terms of the way we identify who we are, so I was very interested in all that- psychodynamic theory and at the same time I was running programs for severely mentally ill people.

It wasn't until the 1980s that I started getting into neuropsychology because I was looking for cross-cultural constants. I was keen to understand the way the brain processes our thoughts and feelings and the way we can assess its capacity to do that despite our cultural background.

Having an understanding of human experience is crucial. Yet there is no education about the practical management of our thoughts, feelings and mind. Most education systems don't cater for that, yet it is so important in life.
Unfortunately practical wisdom is not taught in our education systems. No, we are not instructed about how to think and manage our thoughts, fears and emotions. Apart from other branches of knowledge; in ancient Greece, Plato and Aristotle taught their disciples how to think and reason. These were deeply ingrained in the old Greek world. But we have lost them in modern culture.

"You cannot understand an individual without the culture. It is your brain within your family which is within that culture that will define who you are and how you perceive the world around you, your relationships, etc."

It is such a shame we lost all that. Unfortunately in the US I have been rather concerned about the lack of people's ability to think clearly. I mentioned in the seminar what I would call America's meltdown and why. I was so concerned that when George Bush accused Al Gore of being a thinker nobody thought that was bizarre. That is why we get the Sarah Palins of this world. We have trash politics, which is all about being intimidated by thinkers. Then thinkers don't want to intimidate people like Sarah Palin.

I do believe that our education system should include philosophy in the curriculum, which would teach students how to think and ways to discipline the mind. It is an element that is missing in the US education system.

We have heard about cross-cultural psychology many times. How does culture influence psychology?
Culture is part of the systems of thought that we use to define ourselves and those around us. It provides us with an understanding of the world we inhabit right now. For instance, now you and I are speaking in English but your ancestors come from Spain, you are from a Spanish background and I am an American Armenian.

Our cultural backgrounds had a big influence on who we are, and now we are both adapting in this Anglo culture which is so different from the cultures we originated from.

When I interact with a person I want to get a sense of where the person comes from. I need to identify their cultural background because it serves to set the stage for how that person conceptualises reality, relationships and everything else.

You cannot understand an individual without the culture. It is your brain within your family which is within that culture that will define who you are and how you perceive the world around you, your relationships, etc. You are the product of that web of interactions. You cannot put your finger on one area and say that is the most important part. It is this multidirectional interaction which defines who we are.

In your presentation you often talk about attachment. Could you expand on that?
Yes, attachment to the principal care givers. We normally adapt to the world, not only within cultural systems, but also within family systems. Our families set the tone for how we respond to other human beings. In relation to the social brain, it has been demonstrated that specific networks and neurons are hungry for attachment. We are like dry sponges soaking it up. We adapt to the world within those family systems.

"Our families set the tone for how we respond to other human beings."

You could call it attachment because we do become attached. We learn to have relationships by learning from those early relationships. That doesn't mean you can't learn differently later on. That is what therapy is - helping people with not so good attachment patterns to "earn security" and have a better capacity for intimacy later on.

Lack of secure attachment affects the brain negatively. If a person has little control over their affect they will probably have an overactive amygdala and less of an ability to have balanced activation of the two hemispheres. They might be a bit skewed to the right pre-frontal cortex, versus the left. The right pre-frontal cortex processes negative emotion and the person tends to experience more anxiety.

In the last few years much has been published on the new advances in neuroscience, neuroplasticity, mirror cells, neurogenesis and the social brain. There seems to be a new vocabulary.
Yes we now know much more about the way the brain operates in terms of not only attachment but also in terms of the way it can be rewired. In therapy we help people rewire their brain for the better.

Trauma does rewire the brain, for the worse. When you are traumatised your brain gets rewired to look out for more trauma. That is rewiring the brain in a negative way. This means you are more susceptible to look for more trouble. Most people get anxious after they have been traumatised.

Psychologists at STARTTS work with refugees who come to Australia which is a wonderful place compared to war-torn countries like Afghanistan, for instance, where there are suicide bombers and continuous trouble.

Now, as refugees, if they have been traumatised, they arrive here in need of help to rewire their brains, as they are still hyper-vigilant and anxious all the time. So rewiring of the brain can now occur in a positive direction. The therapeutic process incorporates all the elements that we talked about initially. Establishing a good alliance in a relationship gives people a sense of safety, a "safe emergency" by encouraging a person to expand their comfort zones.

The therapist also has to pay attention to the memory capacity and whether or not memory is disregulated, as it is in the case with Posttraumatic Stress Disorder; she has to assess if systems have become disregulated from one another if the person has a whole continuum of trauma; so the initial assessment is critical, as is the understanding of the neuroscience.

Refugees are uprooted from their country and from their culture in a violent way. When they come to Australia they find themselves in no man's land and have to adapt to another culture. That poses different but additional problems. They have to recover from the past and face the present all at the same time.
Yes it is challenging. The culture shock can be great. In many cases refugees have lived in villages made up of family members, whole communities, extended families, tribes, and suddenly, they are uprooted from that sense of community.

It takes a village to put together a sense of belonging and identity, and then you are plucked into this foreign culture. Suddenly they find themselves in a very dissimilar environment. It is a culture shock of the

Dr Arden presents at the STARTTS Clinical Seminar. PHOTO: Richard Walker

worst kind. It can be devastating. So refugees have two adjustments to make.

The psychosocial work at STARTTS is very important. People traumatised tend to isolate themselves from others and when you feel alone social medicine is the best cure because without a sense of belonging it is impossible to function.

They feel like a fish out of water so whatever you can do to replicate a community for them in Australia will be crucial to their wellbeing. Regaining a sense of community is incredibly important.

The good news is that in our brains we have tremendous potential to change, to adapt and develop new habits and new feelings, and enjoy life again.

What is neuroplasticity and neurogenesis?
Neuroplasticity can be thought of as the process of rewiring the brain. It involves the development of new synaptic relationships between neurons, strengthening those relationships, as well as the development of more glial cells.

Briefly speaking, we have 100 billion neurons in the brain, there are up to 10,000 connections within the neurons. Developing new synaptic relationships translates to learning. Therapy involves the process of rewiring to help clients to better regulate their emotions.

When someone has experienced trauma he has a hard time controlling his affects. Our job as therapists is to help them to deal with the uneven flow of emotions as they come up.

Neurogenesis is about building new neurons in specific areas of the brain such as the hippocampus and the pre-frontal cortex. This benefit is especially critical because some people who suffer from PTSD have suffered from hippocampal atrophy. The best way to generate neurogenesis is exercise. It is a great antidepressant. You get multiple benefits and the side effects are fantastic.

What happens to our brain when we age?
People lose cells after age 55 on the right hemisphere before the left hemisphere. Novelty which the right hemisphere masters seems to get lost before routinised behaviour, meaning details, routines. Routine seems to be more important. We lose cells in the dorsolateral pre-frontal cortex which is the executive control centre and is involved in working memory.

Though as we age working memory can falter, those who are exercising their ability to remain focused in the present moment do better down the line. If this area of the brain is not exercised on a regular basis, one tends to forget things.

As we age, there is also a possibility of experiencing a more positive feeling because the right prefrontal cortex, which is the area of the brain where we lose cells, processes negative emotion and the left positive emotion. We know for example that people who are hyperactive on the right prefrontal cortex suffer from anxiety and have an under-active left prefrontal cortex.

What happens to the adolescent brain?
During adolescence the prefrontal cortex is busy going through this remodelling process. Up to 50 per cent of the synaptic connections are being reconstructed. The dorsal prefrontal cortex does not get totally myelinated until around age 25.

Adolescents know they are not you. They go to great pain to let their parents know they are not them. They tend to say "You know mum? You know nothing". They are trying to individuate and identify themselves as independent thinkers. Sometimes they do a bit too much of that.

After enduring much of such behaviour I said to both my sons when they turned 16: "It looks like there is nothing I can say that you are really going to agree with" and both my sons said "get over it. It will be over in a year".

How else can we enhance our wellbeing?
By orchestrating many health promoting factors all at once. There is not one thing that achieves that wellbeing. I often say that planting SEEDS will help achieve wellbeing and longevity. It is an acronym that stands for: social support, exercise, education, diet and sleep.

The SEEDS factors represent the foundation for a healthy life and a healthy brain. Social support is crucial, having good social relationships; I mean positive, reciprocal social relationships, not the ones that are lopsided.

"S" is for social support.

Social isolation, loneliness is bad for your brain. We know that even the caps at the end of the chromosomes called telomeres shrink with loneliness resulting in accelerated ageing. People who are lonely develop dementia symptoms earlier.

"E" is for exercise.

Exercise is as effective as psychotherapy indeed and as good as antidepressant medication and as good as psychotherapy and antidepressants together. Once a person knows about his body, about his brain, he can make use of that information and make his life better. I often educate people about their brain and say "if you want a quick and easy lift to your mood and a means to calm yourself go for a brisk walk".

I am not advocating for the end of medication but it is important we try other things before we get to medication. Many people who suffer from anxiety don't need medication and they can reduce anxiety by exercising. If you are not exercising 30 minutes a day you are missing something critical to your health, you are bogging down your system.

"E" is for education.

If you are not learning something new, you are looking out your rear view mirror, rumination about the past and you are thinking you are not excited about anything. Learning, including late in life, can build cognitive reserve, and result in developing fewer dementia symptoms later in life.

"D" is for diet.

If you are only eating simple carbohydrates, fatty foods, trans-fat acids, you are making your brain less capable of learning, of feeling positive, and you will be creating anxiety and depression symptoms.

If you don't have a well-functioning brain, if you are using drugs for example –marijuana, alcohol, or if you are consistently undernourished, then the brain is not going to be able to remember and control your emotions.

"S" is for sleep.

Healthy sleep practices are conducive to a healthy brain. Sleeping pills mess up the sleep architecture. We need to teach our clients how to get good sleep. Some tips include: a balanced diet and avoiding looking at the computer screen late at night, because you are looking at light and as a result your pineal gland will not secrete melatonin, you want it to secrete melatonin, the sleeping hormone. So our job is to help people get better sleep practices, so yes, how do you get healthy living? Plant SEEDS. ꟷ

Yaboisembut outside court, Jayapura 2012. PHOTO: West Papua Media

Indonesia's Reign of Violence in West Papua

Violence, intimidation and unlawful detentions by Indonesian security forces are common in West Papua, writes ***DR CAMELLIA WEBB-GANNON****, the coordinator of the West Papua Project at the Centre for Peace and Conflict Studies at the University of Sydney.*

Last June I hung up the phone after a conversion with my West Papuan friend Victor Yeimo with a heavy heart. Victor is the spokesperson for a popular student organization called KNPB (West Papua National Committee) that organises peaceful protests for independence from Indonesia.

Victor was very worried for his own safety and that of his friends. The deputy of KNPB, Mako Tabuni, had just been assassinated in broad daylight by the Indonesian police, for lobbying for an independent investigation into the spate of killings that had taken place in West Papua over May and June 2012.

Several other KNPB members had been murdered, as had a German tourist in West Papua just one week after Germany had criticized Indonesia's human-rights record in West Papua in the UN periodic Review of the Human Rights Council.

The Indonesian security forces apparently scapegoated KNPB members as suspects for the killings. This was a somewhat illogical move – as Victor had asked, why would the KNPB be shooting their own members? Several KNPB members had been arrested. Five members' names circulated on a most-wanted list, and five were allegedly detained by forces from Densus (Detachment) 88, Indonesia's counter-terrorism squad, trained and partly funded by Australia.

In addition to these killings, which took place in West Papua's largest city, Jayapura, soldiers from a battalion stationed in the highlands town of Wamena had run amok in early June, lighting fires, shooting into crowds, and vandalizing property, in retaliation for the killing of a soldier who hit a West Papuan child on his motorcycle.

The Indonesian president, Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono, chided the soldiers for their "inappropriate actions" but called the violence "small-scale" compared to that afflicting the Middle East.

Up to 500,000 West Papuans have died as a result of Indonesia's occupation of the territory since 1962. This dire situation, paired with a characteristically inadequate response from Indonesia's leader, explains why West Papuans have had to take politics into their own hands. So, what kind of political leadership have West Papuans set up for themselves, and how has Indonesia reacted?

The Jayapura Five

I first met Forkorus Yaboisembut, the man recently declared by West Papuans to be their president, in 2008 in his home village near Sentani in West Papua. I had been driven out to meet the customary leader by some Papuan friends, in a car with tinted windows (they were afraid we would be followed), and was received warmly by both Forkorus and his wife and treated to refreshments on what was a hot and humid day.

His humility and his youthful appearance at that time were striking to me – he was a revered independence leader and a seventy-year-old man, tall, immaculately dressed, softly spoken and kind. He earnestly explained the importance to Papuans of their many indigenous cultures, which were in the process of dying, as the indigenous Melanesian population had slipped into a minority in West Papua.

My photos of that occasion are treasured, and mark a sharp contrast to the Forkorus that I see photographed now, five years later. A shock of white hair, a white beard, and deep lines of anxiety are carved into his face. I find it hard to recognize him in pictures now except for his trademark air of courage and dignity and a palpable passion for his cause. So what has happened to Forkorus that brought about these changes?

On October 19, 2011 around 5,000 West Papuans gathered near Jayapura, West Papua, for the third West Papuan National Congress – a meeting of historic significance. The previous two Congresses over the last 50 years had been held when hopes were high of impending independence for West Papua (it never eventuated).

This particular Congress had lasted for three days, and was wrapped up by Forkorus with the reading aloud of the 1961 Papua Declaration of Independence, a re-declaration of independence, and the announcement of the people's choice of a Papuan government that included Forkorus Yaboisembut as West Papua's president, and Papuan lawyer and academic Edison Waromi as its prime minister.

Two hours after formal proceedings had concluded, several hundred people remained mingling in the Congress field when Indonesian security forces commenced firing into the crowd. Up to seven people were killed and hundreds were beaten and tortured, despite the Congress' leaders having obtained a permit to hold the event. Hundreds, including Forkorus and four other Congress leaders, were arrested. Forkorus was allegedly kicked in the chest by police and suffered beatings to his head with a rifle butt, for exercising his right to freedom of expression, association and peaceful protest.

The five leaders (the Jayapura Five) were convicted of treason in March 2012, despite Indonesia's alleged democratic credentials. The five men remained silent in response to questions from the prosecution, and maintained that they did not need to answer to an Indonesian court that had (in their view) no legal jurisdiction over them as Papuans. The trial was heavily guarded by the military.

The Papuans' lawyer was threatened for defending them, and there are serious doubts about the judge's independence. While the five were sentenced to three years' prison for treason, the only action taken against the police officers and military personnel responsible for the violent crackdown was a written warning for disciplinary infraction.

"Up to 500,000 West Papuans have died as a result of Indonesia's occupation of the territory since 1962."

So why are events, such as the one just described, happening? Papuans are resisting Indonesian oppression for two main reasons. First, they are reacting to the violence they have been subjected to for 50 years as a result of the Indonesian occupation. Second, the resistance is also a proactive movement pursuing West Papuans' right to self-determination and hopes for freedom. In other words, the independence movement is both a reactive and a proactive one.

This is important, because it underscores the fact that even if Indonesian violence had not been inflicted on Papuans to the current extent, Papuans would still be struggling for their right to self-determination. The question is, why is it that Indonesia will not relinquish Papua or at least grant Papuans a referendum on self-determination? How is the occupation maintained? And what constitute West Papuans' aspirations?

A history of violence

Indonesia invaded West Papua in 1963, using its formidable special forces, Kopassus, as the Dutch were preparing the Papuans for independence. The appendage of West Papua was seen as a boon by

Dr Camellia Webb-Gannon and Forkorus Yaboisembut, Jayapura 2008. PHOTO: Courtesy of the author.

Indonesia, given Papua's vast expanse of land and relatively sparse population compared to the overcrowded islands of Indonesia.

A government sponsored program of transmigration with associated cultural indoctrination programs, followed by continued spontaneous migration, has not only served to make West Papuans a minority in their own land, but has suppressed West Papuan indigenous cultures and languages. It forcibly removed West Papuans from their land, destroyed sacred environmental landmarks, cornered West Papuans out of business and other career opportunities, and persecuted them for cultural, religious and political practices.

Apart from nationalist beliefs among many Indonesians that West Papua and Indonesia are a single political entity due to a shared Dutch colonial heritage, West Papua is also the home to one of Indonesia's biggest revenue earners, the US-owned Freeport McMoRan gold and copper mine.

That is why Indonesia refuses to countenance West Papuans' independence aspirations and continues to run the territory with an iron fist. This is despite apparent concessions such as the 2001 Special Autonomy Law that provided better economic and political conditions for Papuans on paper, but had been pronounced a failure by Papuans in less than a decade due to a marked lack of results and political commitment.

The Indonesian occupation of West Papua depends to a large degree on its redoubtable exercise of "PSYOPS", or "PSYWAR" – psychological warfare techniques that it has used for almost five decades in its largely covert war against the West Papuan people.

In response, West Papuans have launched a relentless counter-struggle using methods such as guerilla warfare, international diplomacy, non-violent resistance and mass political action, prompting further coercive measures from the Indonesian government and security forces. Methods used by the occupying forces include torture, ever-expanding military deployments, including of Densus 88, and other terrifying psychological warfare – to contain the resistance through fear.

An independence activist, Markus Haluk, whom I came to know during a visit to West Papua in 2008, issued a report in 2009 on security forces attempts to dissuade him and other activists from their resistance activities.

Haluk and his friends had been sent numerous SMS threats and phone calls and received nasty "souvenirs" such as blood-soaked letters. They witnessed staged hostage takings in supermarkets intended to strike fear into activists, and were continually followed and spied upon.

Ardiansyah Matra, a journalist in Merauke, West Papua, who was reporting on the controversial Merauke Food Estate Project near local election time, and who was found dead in a river in 2010, had also received a number of SMS threats regarding his work. One of his colleagues subsequently reported that he too had received an SMS death threat for investigative articles.

The threatening presence of Kopassus and other security forces is constantly made known to West Papuans through intimidating and intrusive surveillance. From the TNI (Indonesian military forces) houses that are wedged between Papuan houses in Papuan villages and TNI checkpoints at the entrance to villages, to the strategic placement of terrifying statues of troops in public places, West Papuans are made to feel the presence of Indonesian security forces in their everyday activities.

"*Merdeka* encapsulates the future for which Papuans hope."

During my 2008 visit, I noticed that Indonesian troops even monitored church services and church-provided clinics, and asserted their presence by taking early morning runs and singing nationalistic songs loudly as they jogged, reminding West Papuans who controls the public space.

When visiting the highlands town of Wamena, I was witness to the sudden shut down of a lavishly planned church opening-ceremony by 20 police trucks and army troops parading through town and blaring sirens before dispersing crowds. It is easy to see why, in the face of such ubiquitous violence that pervades all aspects of West Papuans' lives, they have hopes for a different kind of future.

What do Papuans hope for?

Spending even a short amount of time with West Papuans produces the rapid realisation that the word merdeka, directly translated as freedom, is the mantra for the independence movement. Merdeka encapsulates the future for which Papuans hope.

The word itself is controversial amongst non-Papuan scholars and some Papuan supporters of Indonesia who have an interest in seeing Papua remain part of Indonesia. This group claims merdeka does not mean political freedom but instead refers to basic everyday freedoms or spiritual freedom only.

According to the vast majority of West Papuans with whom I have come into contact, however, merdeka represents the whole package – political independence; freedom from direct, structural and cultural violence; spiritual freedom; and the ability to self-actualize and community-actualize.

One of the reasons merdeka does not just signify simple daily freedoms (such as the freedom to hunt and garden on traditional lands, or the freedom to have a stall at the marketplace rather than a floor space) is because the West Papuan struggle for peace with justice is not simply a negative or reactive one to Indonesian violence, but a positive one for fundamental political self-determination.

West Papuans are ethnically Melanesian and culturally have more in common with their Melanesian neighbours in Papua New Guinea than they do with their Asian Indonesian neighbours. This includes similar understandings and an appreciation of land and water, other resources, relationships, customs, family, food, song and dance.

"They hope that a solution will be brokered by the UN or an international third party mediator, via a dialogue process or a referendum on independence."

The vast majority of West Papuans are Christian, and many resent what they see as the Islamisation of West Papua by Indonesian migrants who outnumber them in their homeland. Nevertheless, many Muslim West Papuans are firm supporters of West Papuan independence.

Even if Dutch colonisation of Indonesia had not ravaged West Papua with its military and transmigration programs, West Papua would not have been negatively predisposed to Indonesian nationalism, probably Papuans would have still crafted a "Melanesian" style nationalism, similar to its neighbours to the east, rather than an Indonesian nationalism as per the islands to its west.

Elements of merdeka are thus infused with Melanesian nationalism. Some proponents of an independent West Papua call West Papua "West Melanesia" to more closely tie Papua to its cultural heritage.

West Papuans hope that merdeka will bring safety and security, employment and health facilities, cultural and linguistic protection, freedom of religious expression and freedom of association, environmental integrity and political freedom. All of which are limited or even nonexistent within the current Indonesian regime. Political independence cannot be separated from the goal of merdeka; it is its bottom line. This is one of the strongest political views currently uniting West Papuans.

Papuans are working hard to obtain their goal of political self-determination. They hope that a solution will be brokered by the UN or an international third party mediator, via a dialogue process or a referendum on independence.

The use of social media is remarkable, including the leaking of YouTube videos depicting torture. The development of global networks is strengthening and there are now campaigns such as International Parliamentarians for West Papua and International Lawyers for West Papua. Public protests within West Papua are gaining a critical mass.

When non-violent student leaders are assassinated, and political leaders are convicted of treason for exercising their democratic rights, it is little wonder that West Papuans insist ever more strongly upon independence from Indonesia. An indomitable spirit of resilience and hope amongst West Papuans at home and abroad will overcome Indonesian violence and realise their human rights.

This spirit should be met by us as West Papua's nearest neighbours with solidarity and courage. We need to lobby the Australian government to stop training Indonesia's counter-terrorism forces. Densus 88 is meting out at least some of the current violence in West Papua. Let us match the Papuans' courage – this should not be too hard considering we have far less to lose. ꟷ

For breaking news on current events in West Papua visit the West Papua media website at

http://westpapuamedia.info/

PHOTO: Frederic Courbet

HUMAN RIGHTS

SEKAI HOLLAND is the Zimbabwean Co-Minister of State for National Healing and Reconciliation and Integration in the Cabinet of President Mugabe and Prime Minister Morgan Tsvangirai. Sekai, who received the Sydney Peace Prize last year, has been involved in a number of human rights issues from those of the Australian Aborigines, ending the apartheid system in South Africa and the rights of women and democracy in Zimbabwe. She spoke to JANSET BERZEG and MARIANO COELLO.

The Quest for Peace

Can you tell us a bit about the Zimbabwe you grew up in, what and where were the experiences that made you the human rights activist you are today? Who influenced you most?

My mum and dad have influenced me a lot because they had very strong views about the world, on education, honesty, fairness and equality. They thought that we had to get a formal education; no matter how bad it was, because a formal education disciplines and teaches how to read the world. My parents never distinguished between boys and girls when it came to education. We were all educated. They also taught us to be as good as the next person, and the notion of equality for all people. So they taught us to respect everyone, to share. Both my parents were teachers, and then they got into media.

The human-rights activist in me started in my family home. Our house was always like a hostel. People would just come and stay. They sought refuge from several problems or just advice from relatives. Everyone was assisted. In Africa if somebody comes to your house it is because they trust you. So do feed them, give them a place to sleep. So every corner of our house was always full of guests. Although we were all brought up the same way, these values are now best carried on by us girls, I think the boys weren't listening, because none of them really followed in those footsteps.

You were also part of the protest movement in Australia in the late 1960s. What did you learn from Indigenous Australians?

The year I came to Australia was 1964. That was a year of complete transformation for Australia, Zimbabwe and the world. Everywhere in Africa they wanted independence. Ghana became independent around that time. The British PM was talking about "winds of change sweeping through Africa".

In Zimbabwe from 1957 the nationalists were setting up their structures. They had a big fight with my father because they wanted him to lead but my father laughed and said "how do I lead people if we cannot respect one another?". He thought that education was the key.

When I came to Australia I asked to stay with missionaries. I was hosted by an Anglican sister who was very pleased to welcome a good Christian from Africa.

I happened to appear on ABC radio and someone gave me the contact of Jim Webb and a small intellectual group in Melbourne. When I met him the first time, he had just come back from the US where he had met President Kennedy, who was influenced by Jim's idea of sending Australian volunteers abroad to assist, and implemented it in the US.

Jim saw Australia as being part of Asia and favoured the idea of young Australians getting to learn about their region better and getting educated through volunteer work. Jim and his team were far ahead of the society of those days. They insisted that young African students needed to understand that Australians had abused their own Indigenous peoples and they were not recognised in Asia. So I realised that what we were learning in class was not real. I was looking for Aborigines and there were none.

Eventually I moved to Sydney and starting making contacts. I met Faith Bangla and teamed up with a brilliant group of people in Redfern. In the meantime at Sydney University people like Meredith Burgmann and Denise Freeney were advocating for change. People who had very good ideas were in Sydney in 1969.

At the same time my husband's godfather was the Secretary of the Liberal party. So immediately we were linked into the political structures of the right. It was a very volatile time for everybody though. I was extremely naïve actually. But we really couldn't do anything wrong. So that's how my husband and I got involved, in fact we ended up being the leaders with people who wanted to follow.

A lot of exciting changes have been made since, and of course the fire I think started at the 1967 Referendum that allowed Aboriginal people to be counted as citizens.

"The only way to do things is through peaceful means. You can be loud, get angry, upset, shout etc. But non-violence is the only way."

You helped found the Movement for Democratic Change in 1998, the only substantive challenge to President Mugabe, and as a result you had to endure torture, harassment and death threats. Yet, you have been working closely with Mugabe as a Minister for Reconciliation, how is it working for you?

Politicians aren't worried about bruises or threats. What we want is an environment where we can put things on the table to find a common ground, so that the nation is able to move on. So with Mugabe when we meet him, to us he is an enabler because it is his people that are the perpetrators. In the end, this must change. If we distance ourselves from Mugabe, these people are going to be a big problem. But in the last four years he really has been getting better in articulating the National Healing Organ's message of peace.

At the end what we want from him is his signature; his signature condemning violence, his signature to build an infrastructure for peace. He has been part of the problem and part of the solution agreeing on very basic things like no violence. Mugabe now articulates the message of non-violence and as far as we are concerned he has done his job. That's an important step.

Packed to the rafters … the house of Sekai Holland and husband Jim is home to about 30 children. PHOTO: Frederic Courbet

Tell us about the Transitional Government set up in February 2009. What has it achieved so far?

Everything, we have got the infrastructure for peace completed. It is a tool recommended by the Organ that encourages survivors of political violence, victims and perpetrators to acknowledge the history and culture of violence and to address the damage caused by violence. It includes mechanisms to prevent future violence. It is now a part of the constitution.

We've had our input for the Constitutional Parliamentary Committee (COPAC); the constitutional reform process. We did what we could.

You are in the process of negotiating for the Zim STARTTS project; a service for the treatment and rehabilitation of Zimbabwean torture survivors, to partner with the IRCT member CSU (Counselling Services Unit), Midlands State University, as well as STARTTS, to establish a similar mental health service in Zimbabwe to provide rehabilitation programs for refugees and internally-displaced persons. How is the project progressing?

I am very sorry to say that CSU was attacked last night and five CSU staff are in jail. Some of them were going to come here today. They were attacked and the police officers confiscated computers and documents from the CSU office.

On the other hand, there is a need to secure funds and we are hoping the European Union will support the project at some stage. So, this project has been a long-time dream and need of our society. Hopefully it will kick start when we secure the funds because the technical assistance is already there, thanks to STARTTS.

You have always advocated for political transformation through non-violent activism. What has time taught you?

The only way to do things is through peaceful means. You can be loud, get angry, upset, shout etc. But non-violence is the only way. The passing of time and my experience is not going to change my opinion on that. I have only learnt to model change through non-violence. ᴙ

PHOTO: Hans Findling

HEALTH

Exploring No Man's Land

Working Effectively with Asylum Seekers in the Australian Setting

By Dr Belinda Green

Working therapeutically with asylum seekers in the Australian setting can be both challenging and complex. There are multiple and interactive forces at play for clients, including past experiences of violence, deprivation and loss as a result of organised violence and inter human conflict in their homeland, as well as the process of flight and seeking safety.

This process of seeking asylum can in itself produce new traumas which have a cumulative effect and could result in re-traumatisation. For instance, in the case of Australia, evidence-based research shows that mandatory detention can cause mental health issues.

Being incarcerated for a protracted and undetermined amount of time, lacking information about one's legal status, while having to re-count stories of past persecution, evokes a loss of control, uncertainty, hopelessness, a sense of alienation and isolation, social exclusion, depression, boredom, anxiety, fear, despair, and a variety of physical ailments including digestive problems, headaches, sleeping disturbances and other stress related somatic conditions amongst clients.

Research highlights that six months or more of mandatory detention diminishes overall health.

For those people seeking asylum in Australia who do not experience mandatory detention, the uncertainty and lack of assurance that they will not be returned to a dangerous situation while having very little control over the decision about their future status,

also impacts upon their health and wellbeing.

The international events that led to them leaving their homeland may well be continuing. This can create fear and concern for the loved ones left behind. Asylum seekers may be hesitant to make contact with relatives due to the fact that family members may be the target of persecution, as a result of their relationship to the asylum seeker.

Family members may also be waiting or relying on the asylum seeker for financial support or sponsorship. Given the protracted process of applying in Australia, clients may feel shame and guilt as a result of family members waiting for them. This may result in having to lie to relatives, or not informing them about what is going on in Australia, which further renders the asylum seeker socially and culturally isolated. This is reinforced by sensationalist and negative media representations, and politicised ambivalence towards asylum seekers in Australia.

It is important for therapists to appreciate these multiple forces at play for clients and appreciate the ways in which these factors interact with one another and inevitably affect the asylum seekers' experience of interventions and service delivery.

One overarching principle to best practice is building a successful relationship with clients. This means being open to your client as an individual with their own beliefs, values, experiences, cognitive styles and patterns of relating to people, while conveying respect, positive regard and interest alongside acting both ethically and honestly in your engagement.

It is also crucial that as practitioners we reflect on our own perceptions of the social world and where these values come from, in order to come to terms with our own cultural prejudices. If we can acknowledge that our behaviours, beliefs and values are based on our own culture and life experience then we can begin to understand that our way of seeing things is not absolute. We can understand and appreciate that clients may have different perceptions of their problems and possible solutions that can be equally valid.

Accepting that there are other ways of doing, being and thinking outside of one's own cultural prism, and being curious and open to understanding difference and its logic, is vital. Treating clients with respect by acknowledging and responding to their needs and values is important. Asking your client what their expectations are and how things are done in their country can also be helpful. This includes a willingness and ability to adapt your behaviour to avoid being offensive to them, and being open to clients' different response styles.

For instance, not everyone labels their affective state or mood the same way. Trying to understand the particular idioms of clients' affective states, even if the therapist makes a mistake, can be useful because it can build and deepen the relationship with the client through the process of reconciliation or by the client clarifying what they mean.

"It is also crucial that as practitioners we reflect on our own perceptions of the social world and where these values come from, in order to come to terms with our own cultural prejudices."

Another aspect of working effectively with asylum seekers in Australia includes understanding the impact of sexuality, gender and gender relations. Gender refers to the social organisation of biological sex categories known as 'masculine' and 'feminine'. It is generally accepted that gender and gender roles are culturally rather than biologically determined. As a result of the feminist movement the idea of gender complementarity i.e. where women and men are assigned certain roles and characteristics based on their biological categories have been replaced by policies advocating gender equality.

This transition in perceptions of gender and gender roles is a part of the cultural and legislative apparatus in Australia. However in some societies and communities the idea of gender complementarity has greater influence.

For some clients the idea of gender complementarity may mean that women are expected to behave in ways which may not comply with conventions in Australia. This may certainly be the case in terms of expectations pertaining to women's dress, sexuality, mobility, levels and types of participation in the public domain. Therefore, some male clients may have particular ways of relating to women which may be appealing to therapists.

For instance some cultures emphasise male chivalry, being romantically explicit towards women they are attracted to and behaving in ways which some women may find endearing and charming compared to their western male counterparts.

In other communities for example amongst some Muslims, negotiating relations with the opposite sex is resolved by incorporating them into the fold of family members i.e. as 'brother', 'sister', 'father' and 'daughter'. Through this cultural appropriation this allows for the Muslim client to have a platonic and mutually respectful relationship with the clinician.

A therapist should be wary of acquiring a sense of validation she may receive through comments by the clients about her looks. This could have implications for clear and professional boundaries.

Issues related to sexuality may also arise in the context of the therapeutic relations. For instance, some clients may not feel comfortable disclosing their sexual preference to workers as a result of past persecution and discrimination. They may also hold different values and beliefs pertaining to same sex relations.

"In other communities [...], negotiating relations with the opposite sex is resolved by incorporating them into the fold of family members..."

Given that clients remain in a state of uncertainty about their future status, it is important for therapists to recognise the limited sense of safety and control they can possibly feel. In many ways clients are behaving in ways which represent their predicament. Coupled with this, past traumas as a result of organised violence and human rights violations also leads to feelings of disempowerment, distrust and fear of other people.

Instilling a sense of safety, control and trust for the client is paramount to good practice. For instance, when clients offer information about their background and culture, allow yourself time to learn from the client. Avoid rushing, being directive or patronising towards the client. Be patient and willing to repeat information several times while checking in with the client through open ended questions. Using a calm voice, even tone and open body language, while expressing a genuine openness and curiosity in your approach towards the client, is important to the above principles of safety, control and trust. Continuing to check in with the client to encourage him or her to ask questions, while remaining open and transparent in your role and communication, is also crucial for asylum seekers who may have been exposed to corrupt institutions and authority figures in their home country.

Given the uncertainty of the clients' status, it is also important to work with the present and focus on the clients' strengths, acknowledging that although they don't know what the future might hold, ask the client to think of what is it that has helped them so far and what has motivated them.

Ask them how did they cope in detention and draw out the positives for the client. Encourage and resource them to take on activities in the present which are constructive and could make a positive contribution to their future; e.g. language classes, or organising people who do have good language skills to assist others. Asking the client to choose a symbol or something which comforts them and reminding them of their strength and power is also useful.

Finally, when working with asylum seekers it is also important to be mindful that clients are in a very high-pressure situation, so things can change quite dramatically in terms of their mood and ability to cope. Therefore, making sure you conduct risk assessment for suicidality on a regular basis is also important.

While working with asylum seekers is inspiring and rewarding, hearing their stories of traumatic experiences can have a significant impact on you as a worker, particularly in the case of asylum seekers with their specific circumstances, and can result in both the clinician and client feeling helpless and hopeless. Therefore, the importance of maintaining self-care principles including having appropriate supervision is critical for all practitioners working with asylum seeker clients. ꟾ

Dr Belinda Green is the STARTTS Training Officer.
Dr Green would like to acknowledge Mariano Coello and other STARTTS staff who contributed their clinical knowledge for this article.

Traditional Chinese Medicine Helps Trauma Survivors

By Richard Walker & Janset Berzeg

PHOTO: Phil Crossie

For many years STARTTS has used traditional Chinese medicine as part of the range of services it offers to trauma survivors. Research Coordinator ***MARIANO COELLO*** *and Chinese medicine practitioner* ***THUY TRAN*** *discuss the great impact this therapy can have on traumatised clients.*

RT: What is traditional Chinese medicine?
Thuy: Traditional Chinese medicine is a practice that we use as a form of healing. It is a combination of Chinese herbs, physiology, general exercise, diet, acupuncture and so on. There are many aspects to it and you could study it for 150 years and still not comprehend all of them. Within Chinese medicine, acupuncture is a highlight in terms of the types of treatment we provide here at STARTTS, particularly for pain management.
Mariano: Chinese medicine is an integrated system which sees the person in a holistic form, not only their physical but also their mental health.

There are a number of techniques related to that, from the use of herbs to acupuncture, tuina (a type of deep tissue massage), energy points and meridians. Traditional Chinese medicine is based on energy, and the blockages of energy, that is the principal concept.
Thuy: But there are also many different interpretations. Originally, Chinese medicine was all over the place, even different families practised different versions of it! So it was not a unified system. It was not until the 1950s that Mao established a group of Chinese medicine practitioners to look into it and put it in a context.
Mariano: Chinese medicine is not only practised in China but also in most South-East Asian countries and also in places north of China such as Mongolia and as far as Turkey. It was very much divided according to schools and practitioners.

The practice in Tibet was totally different from the practice in Hong Kong or in Beijing. There was no unified method. So Mao Tse-tung attempted to unify all the forms of practice into one method and to use it as a national health system. So what we see today is the integration of diverse practitioners and schools into one method – the system of channels and energy points – which was deemed the most successful and the most practical according to the traditions and to professional practitioners. From that point on, regardless of geography, the practice of Chinese medicine was the same. And because it is based on energy, it also relates to other traditional methods such as tai-chi or qigong.

Thuy: However much of my practice is based on four generations of practice in traditional medicine, and we don't follow the ways of Mao. We were refugees that fled to Vietnam, so we practise some 'Old Chinese' styles. On top of the unified method we have the family traditions also.

RT: Why do you find traditional Chinese medicine so useful with STARTTS clients?
Mariano: Many of our clients come from traditions and cultures where traditional Chinese medicine is important, and they believe in its power and value.

However western medicine has its own problems in terms of the reach of its methods on how far it can help people. In the last 50 years there has been valuable scientific research to prove the effectiveness of acupuncture to treat certain problems. To date, acupuncture has been shown, using evidence-based methods, to be effective for several conditions including chronic back pain.

We use it because for some clients it is a culturally appropriate treatment method. We also use it because it is effective for certain problems that clients present with. Often, the main thing that is improved by using this technique is the client's physical pain. However, we believe that pain and mental health are very much related – most people with chronic pain have problems with depression, and depression exacerbates pain. So it is obvious to us that if you can influence one of these problems it also helps reduce the other.

RT: Do you have much difficulty convincing people who are not familiar culturally with traditional Chinese medicine to take it up?
Mariano: Well that is why it is essential to do a proper assessment before doing any kind of treatment. Each STARTTS client goes through a detailed assessment and traditional Chinese medicine is used alongside counselling. We apply a comprehensive evaluation of the client in order to determine and recommend the most suitable methods.

But as you say, many clients are not familiar with it, and many problems can arise. They may be afraid. They do not understand the procedure. They may have been tortured with sharp instruments. So there is a preparation by the counsellor and we need to show them what to expect, show them the needles and so on – we psycho-educate the client in a way. And most people are receptive to that.
Thuy: Also, we can be flexible in the way we work. This year I have a woman who is afraid of needles, but her friend was receiving acupuncture from here and got better, so she asked her counsellor to be referred to see me. So we are doing aromatherapy instead of acupuncture because of her fear of needles.
Mariano: We are able to shift the techniques that we use and we do not focus too much on one particular technique. At STARTTS we do not prescribe herbs or supplements, but we do give advice on diet and exercise and Thuy also works with groups doing exercise, meditation and other techniques that improve physical and mental health. In that context our clients from Africa and Iraq are usually happy to receive treatment. Once they are happy with the results, they talk about these treatments in their community.

RT: So most of the clients are not from Asian backgrounds?
Thuy: No, the majority of our clients now are from Iraq or other Middle Eastern countries, as well as a number of African clients. And they do not want to leave the program!

RT: Can you describe the before and after of someone who has been helped by traditional Chinese medicine?
Thuy: We had one particular client who could not get herself out of the house because of the pain. She was in a 'halfway house' and had just come to Australia two or three months before. So what she did was she came to the front of her house to catch a bus to come to STARTTS, but then she rang us up and said "No, I'm sorry, I can't come because I can't walk further than that". So we decided to go to her. When we got there she was still sitting on the front porch, she could not move. Eventually we were able to get her into the house for an assessment, and after that I saw her regularly.

She had severe headaches and chronic back pain, as well as knee pain, ankle pain and hip pain. She was not motivated, and had insomnia and severe depression. Much of this was related to the fact that she had walked hundreds and hundreds of kilometres to reach a refugee camp with her child on her back and six other children, including the children of her cousin and brother.
Mariano: Her escape was very daunting and she was strongly affected, plus there was also violence perpetrated against her, so she was physically and mentally very damaged.
Thuy: So this particular client, after about 20 sessions was quite recovered, she walked and she was a different woman. It has been a life changing experience for her.

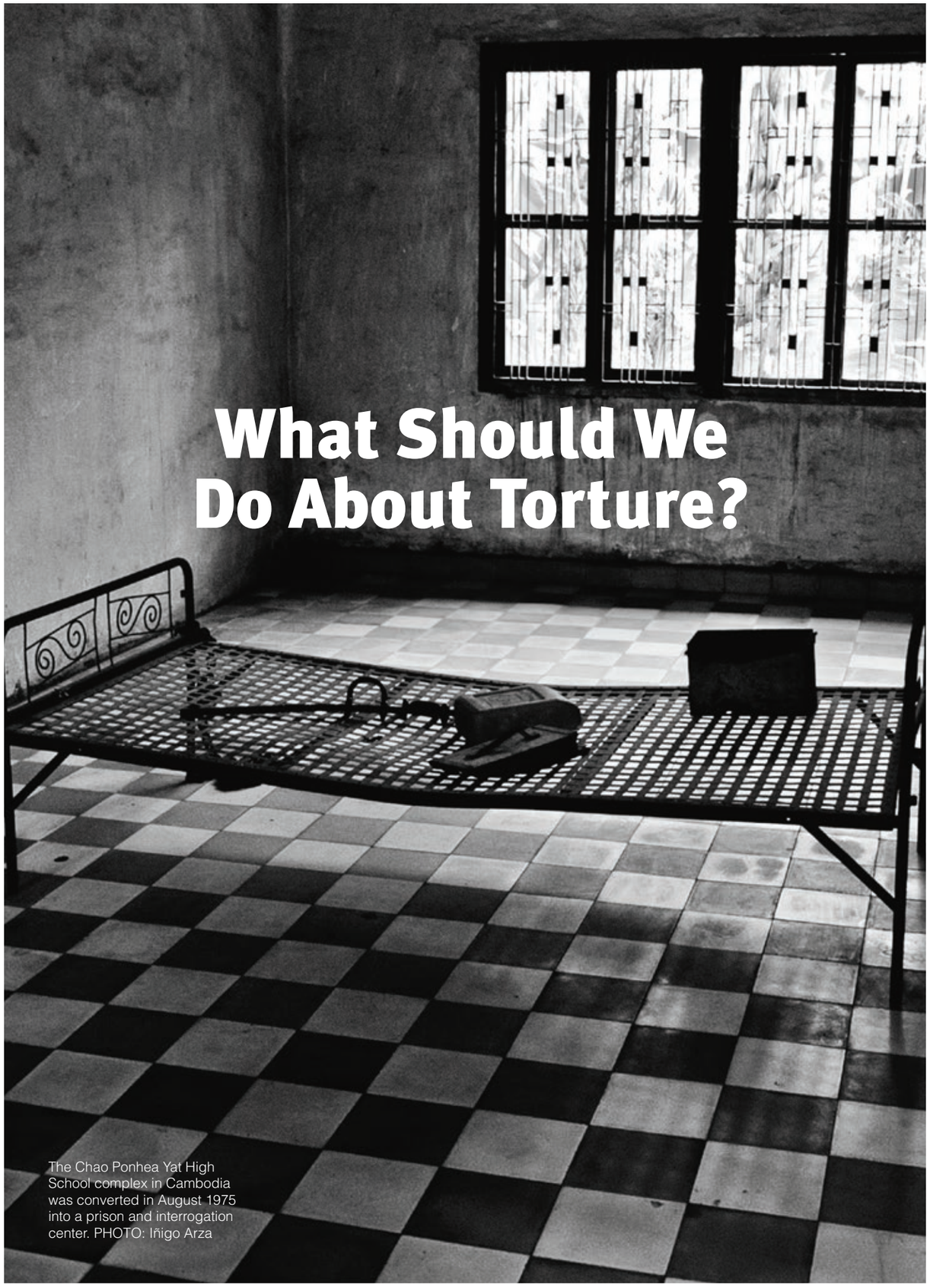
RT: How long has STARTTS been using Chinese medicine?
Mariano: We've been using it for a very long time. There is a history of using Chinese medicine, particularly acupuncture, at STARTTS. We opened our physiotherapy department in the early 1990s and it was our physiotherapist, Paula Raymond, who began using acupuncture. We have treated hundreds and hundreds of clients since the inception of the program. Previously we really targeted the Indo-Chinese community but now it is everyone and it is very welcome and very successful with many communities.

"Pain and mental health are very much related – most people with chronic pain have problems with depression, and depression exacerbates pain."

RT: What does the future hold for traditional Chinese medicine at STARTTS?
Thuy: Well I am just beginning some PhD research focusing on posttraumatic stress disorder and somatic stress, in a joint project with the University of Technology Sydney. We will be comparing different treatments – acupuncture alone, counselling alone and a combination of both.

I normally monitor the level of pain of the client each session, to see if clients are improving or not through the treatment. This style of continued monitoring provides a good guide to what I have to do next, and also a guarantee that what I am doing is effective.
Mariano: We are expecting to find that the combination of acupuncture and counselling is going to be a much more effective treatment for the posttraumatic consequences of refugee trauma, including mental health issues. This type of research has not been done before. ꟷ

PHOTO: Hans Findling



The Chao Ponhea Yat High School complex in Cambodia was converted in August 1975 into a prison and interrogation center. PHOTO: Iñigo Arza

HEALTH

What Should We Do About Torture?

To mark the International Day in Support of Victims of Torture (26 June), STARTTS and Amnesty International brought together a panel of experts to discuss the question: "What should we do about torture?" ***DANIELLE CELERMAJER****, Director of Sydney University's Human Rights Program, and Torture Prevention Project researcher* ***ALOYSIA BROOKS*** *spoke about how we can try to prevent torture. Here are edited extracts of their speeches.*

Associate Professor
Danielle Celermajer

I will begin my remarks not by talking about torture in far-flung places, but by pausing for a moment to reflect on the role that torture has historically played in the projects of imperialism and colonialism, and as such, in the settlement of this country.

We will misunderstand torture if we cast it as an act of individual aberrance, or a result of the evil character of particular people. Torture is always part of a broader political project, be that a project of colonialism, or of authoritarian nationalism.

If we are going to think about prevention, we need to move beyond individualising discourses and analyses to place torture back in the context of the politics of domination.

Reading back over the history of imperialism, we see that the systematic physical and psychological degradation of Indigenous peoples was one of the key mechanisms colonial administrators used to tame occupied countries for imperial rule, in an effort to annihilate the pre-existing sovereignties and systems of law.

This was the case in Asia, the Americas and Africa. And it is true for the neo-imperialisms of today, including those carried out by multinational corporations (MNCs). Witness the torture of the Ogoni people in Southern Nigeria who have sought to protect their land from the comprehensive rape by Shell Oil and other MNCs.

Coming back to this country, we have few records of the practices of torture, but we do have some oral histories, including these words from the child of an Aboriginal woman who survived the Myall Creek Massacre in 1838:

One might wonder whether those practices of dehumanisation were simply consistent with the dominant view that Indigenous peoples were less than fully human. Or was torturing people a way colonisers could prove to themselves that Indigenous people were less than human, and as such, that invasion and violations of human rights were not violations at all, but simply a form of rational action? If people are not really human, you cannot violate their human rights.

A letter to the Australian in 1838 would indicate that this is precisely the case: "I look on the blacks as a set of monkeys … the earlier they are exterminated from the face of the earth the better. I would never consent to hang a white man for a black one." (Cited in Bruce Elder, Blood on the Wattle: Massacres and Maltreatments of Australian Aborigines since 1788.)

It is also an irony worth noting that imperial powers have always drawn and imposed distinctions between

the apparently 'civilised' forms of violence they inflicted, always in the name of some higher cause (civilisation, security, public order, the introduction of democracy and the rule of law), and the 'uncivilised' forms of violence of the natives.

And I am not speaking about ancient history here – for even as we continue to lock Aboriginal boys and men up in prisons sometimes thousands of kilometres away from their family and their country, in the name of good public order, we fear that recognising traditional punishments such as ritual spearing might amount to cruel and inhuman punishment, in violation of our obligations regarding the prevention of torture.

Similarly, even as the US and Australia remain for the most part silent about the complicit torture carried out by authoritarian regimes in the Middle East. We bravely leap to the defence of apparently powerless Muslim women who need to be saved from the cruelty of veiling.

Here I am not denying that the enforcement of veiling can also be a form of political control, as it is in Iran. Rather, I am pointing to the political basis of the distinction between those practices that imperial powers sanction and those against which we choose to protest.

I wanted to commence with these remarks, grounded in the lived reality of our own country, so that we could get right to the heart of the connection between torture and human rights.

While torture may, in some cases be motivated by a desire to extract information, and we all know that this utilitarian justification is the one that gets bandied about most frequently, torture is ultimately about the dehumanisation of those whose humanity we are, for some political, social or psychological reason, compelled to annihilate.

"Torture is ultimately about the dehumanisation of those whose humanity we are for some political, social or psychological reason, compelled to annihilate."

We saw this powerfully in the torture of blacks in Apartheid South Africa and leftists in Latin America. And we see it today with respect to the torture perpetrated by the United States of Muslims as part of its neo-imperial project in the Middle East, of Tamils in Sri Lanka, of opposition figures in Zimbabwe, of gay men in Kenya and lesbians in South Africa and of women in the Congo.

When one considers that the prohibition against torture was one of the fundamental tenets of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, adopted by the United Nations in 1948, and subsequently elaborated in the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and the Convention Against Torture, the prevalence of torture is discouraging.

"Torture is always part of a broader political project, be that a project of colonialism, or of authoritarian nationalism."

Indeed, I would say that this fissure between the commitments made by states to international human-rights law, and the improvement of outcomes in terms of the actual protection and enjoyment of human rights, is one to which those of us who work in the field really need to train our attention.

While not denying the importance of international human-rights law, or of naming and shaming perpetrators – a style of advocacy that human-rights organisations have traditionally adopted, I would suggest that we need to begin to think much more creatively about effective torture prevention.

Without doubt, laws criminalising torture are an absolute sine qua non of a comprehensive strategy, but we also know that in many countries that have ratified the Convention Against Torture and even enacted domestic legislation, torture remains endemic.

In the few minutes I have here, I am certainly not going to lay out a strategy for eradicating torture. But I do want to make some observations that I think might assist us in developing such a strategy over the longer term.

First, as I indicated, we need to understand that torture is a highly political act, and not an act committed by aberrant and thus individually correctable individuals. In this sense, we need to connect our strategies for torture prevention with broader projects that address the political pathologies that underpin that particular practice.

So, to make that concrete, in Sri Lanka where we are currently working, we need to understand that the systematic practice of torture is inseparable from the civil war and that sustainable prevention of torture will require the just and equitable settlement of long term grievances and shifting the relations between Tamils and Sinhalese.

Second, and relatedly, torture is very much about identity. In other words, the victims of torture are not randomly chosen but almost always belong to groups that are broadly denigrated and are objects of significant social and political hostility.

I recently interviewed Glenn Carle, the CIA agent who wrote a book about torture as part of the "war against terror", and he spoke with me at length about the attitudes of ordinary Americans who consistently made comments like: "why don't you guys just carpet bomb the whole area? They are all terrorists?"

Third, while people who inflict torture may do so because they are ordered to, in most cases, practices of torture emerge in a much more indirect and amorphous way. We see this for example in the testimonies of US soldiers who speak about a permissive environment and indirect messages. Rumsfeld's words "the gloves are coming off" were probably if not more important than the legal briefs justifying torture as falling within US and international law.

My colleague who is currently stationed in Nepal just sent me a note telling me about the latest Bollywood blockbuster she had seen in which the police, the heroes, are celebrated as they beat and kick some evil looking prisoners.

What this means is that we need to get a much better understanding of the cultures in which torture becomes normalised. We may well stand on the outside of organisations where torture is practised and label those practices aberrant, but the critical point is that people in those organisations do not experience them as aberrant at the time that they are practising them.

Prevention thus requires that we understand how people come to experience their world as one in which torture is acceptable.

Fourth, and following from this, standard human-rights interventions that simply tell people that torture contravenes international law do not work. It might be morally satisfying for us to believe that torturers are either evil or (even more naively) to believe that all they need is a good dose of international law. But those beliefs provide us with no access to changing their behaviour.

We need to be prepared to leave the comfortable worlds of moral condemnation and get a lot closer to the lived realities and worldviews of the people whose behaviour we would like to shift.

Finally, and probably most provocatively, I think we need to take a leaf out of the basic tenet of human-rights theory that says that all human beings are equal in dignity and right and sit for a while with the uncomfortable fact that people who torture are for the most part fundamentally not different to us.

Certainly, there may be the odd sadist, but organisations that sanction torture generally find sadists to be poor torturers. Far more amenable are people with no particularly remarkable psychological predisposition, other than the very human one to be shaped, and in some cases deeply distorted by organisational practices and cultures.

From the work of people like Zimbardo going back to the Stanford prison experiments, we know that torture is far more situational than it is psychological and as such, we need to turn our focus from aberrant individuals to aberrant cultures and organisations and learn how to reshape the latter.

Public opinion surveys tell us that in fact, large proportions of people support torture. In this sense, the deep and sustainable prevention of torture will require reform not only of the organisational dynamics that are born in police and military training schools, but also in the broader cultures of societies whose governments are engaged with the projects of neo-imperialism and rabid nationalism.

Aloysia Brooks

Tonight I want to speak to you briefly about the social conditions that give rise to torture – of which there are many. But at the core of all brutal acts that are perpetrated against other human beings, are a few central concepts ¬such as a dehumanisation of 'others', and the normalisation, relabelling or 'softening' of torture or extreme violent acts.

We have plenty of others in Australia – those who are spoken of as inconveniences, as threats to national security, those who practice different religious and have cultural backgrounds, the boat people, or those who are suspected of crimes such as terrorism.

Studies into conditions that give rise to torture or extreme violence demonstrate that, once someone is labelled as different from us, then it becomes easier to hurt them or outcast them from the community. Once someone is labelled as different, they are unlike you or me, or our brothers or sisters – they become individual objects, devoid of human qualities – almost animalistic to the torturers or to those who permit torture.

This was one of the main features of the debate sur-

Discussion Panel: Jorge Aroche (STARTTS), Aloysia Brooks, Katie Wood (Amnesty International) and Danielle Celermajer.
PHOTO: Richard Walker

rounding torture and its use in Australia, particularly over the past 10 years. A 2006 BBC World Service study found that 59 per cent of people surveyed in 25 different countries are opposed to torture. According to the results, acceptance of torture appeared to coincide with countries that experienced high incidences of political violence, such as India and Israel.
Whilst the same poll found that a majority of Australians were opposed to torture, more recent research indicates a change.

Since 2009 in particular, there has been a startling shift towards pro-torture thinking that appears to correlate with the impact of the fear-based rhetoric that permeated the so-called 'War on Terror'.

A 2009 Red Cross study found that 40 per cent of Australians, and 50 per cent in the Australian Defence Force, thought it was acceptable to torture 'captured enemy soldiers' in circumstances where they are looking to obtain 'important military information'.

These results parallel studies carried out in the U.S. which demonstrate an increase in pro-torture views since the election of President Obama. Torture expert Darius Rejali believes that this is due to the fact that torture has now become a partisan political issue in light of the social context post 9/11.

But I also think that there is another element to this, and that is the public 'softening' of some torture techniques. There is a general misconception out there in the population that torture must be a physical act, such as pulling fingernails, or severe beatings. I think these recent views can partly be attributed to the discourse surrounding torture post 9/11.

Particularly when the Bush administration's lawyers attempted to redefine torture as only reaching that threshold if it was 'intentionally' inflicted, and the physical pain must be, and I quote "equivalent in intensity to the pain accompanying serious injury, such as organ failure, impairment of bodily function, or even death".

But it wasn't just the US. In Australia too, we saw comments from our former attorney general Philip Ruddock stating that sleep deprivation was not torture, even though we know that it is one of the worst forms of torture because of the devastating psychological impacts it can have on someone.

The Istanbul protocol, which is the Manual on the Effective Investigation and Documentation of Torture, notes that "The absence of physical evidence should not be construed to suggest that torture did not occur, since such acts of violence against persons frequently leave no marks or permanent scars."

The use of so called 'clean torture' or what has appallingly been labelled 'torture lite', has been employed by democratic governments simply because they leave no physical scarring – but that does not mean that the scars on the mind are any less destructive – in fact, experts believe that psychological techniques can have a much more detrimental impact on the survivor.

It is this kind of softening of the language around violence that not only leads to the normalisation and institutionalisation of certain torture techniques, but also creates an environment that discredits those who speak about the torture inflicted on them but lack physical marks. Even more devastating, it creates a social context that explicitly condones torture.

But sometimes acceptance of torture is much more insidious and implicit. Whilst you might have public figures condemning torture, there are sometimes qualifications that come along with it – particularly depending on who it is who is providing the torture testimony.

The media is the most complicit culprit in this. There are numerous examples of the media re-framing torture allegations effectively into whether the person was 'deserving' or 'undeserving' of the treatment, and is usually synonymous with guilt or innocence.

"Torture has now become a partisan political issue in light of the social context post 9/11"

Darius Rejali

After the photos showing the tortured men of Abu Ghraib were published in 2004, research into media framing suggested that the Australian media took much the same line as the media in the U.S. and referred to the actions of the military as 'abuse' and 'mistreatment' rather than torture – the framing also appeared to push the notion that believes that if something bad has happened to you, it is because you have done something to deserve it.

This has extremely destructive impacts on the way that a community thinks about torture, as well as the devastating impact on survivors and victims, when they feel discredited and marginalised. It also paves the way for fear-based rhetoric to saturate the human-rights debate.

We have seen the subjugation of human rights particularly in the past ten years, as we have been told that limiting human rights is necessary to protect the community. This is not the case – in fact, it is the distinct opposite.

So then, if we are to address the underlying causes of torture, we have to start by regaining a sense of community and by recognising that if one person is suffering human-rights abuses, we all are. If it is our brother, sister or loved one who is being tortured, its impact is much more personal and profound to all and it becomes unthinkable.

Until we start thinking as a global community that our humanity is the common denominator, we will continue to see atrocities such as torture on an international scale. There must also be a response to torture at the public and political level when torture has been exposed.

I am not suggesting that shaming the perpetrators is the answer – but a more basic response, an acknowledgement and remorse that this has been perpetrated against a fellow human being, rather than a distinct move to cover it up, discredit the survivor and create a further silence around torture. But this requires courageous leadership – one that promotes inclusion and diversity rather than capitalising on people's fears.

Creating a 'human-rights culture' is also an important part of prevention – what does that mean? Well, whilst passing federal human-rights legislation is important, it is not enough. We have to understand what torture is if we are to address it, as well as harnessing political will. We have to name it and condemn it, no matter who is perpetrating torture, or who the victims are.

For torture survivors, regaining trust in other human beings and re-establishing connection with the community can only occur through validation and by creating a safe space where healing can occur. That safe space cannot be one that says it is okay to torture the 'others'.

Above all, my message is simple. It is your brother, your sister, your child, your husband and your wife who is being tortured in a dark and lonely place right now as we speak. We must pull down the barriers between 'us' and 'them' to create a sense of community and common humanity if we are to address any element of torture – we have to learn about it, call it out and expose it, and remove its power. ꟷ

PHOTO: UNHCR

HUMAN RIGHTS

Rehabilitation After Torture:
What Do We Do and Why is it Important?

STARTTS CEO Jorge Aroche also presented at the panel event on International Day in Support of Victims of Torture. He spoke about how we rehabilitate and why it is so important.

Why rehabilitate?

We rehabilitate because it is the right and humane thing to do. Because it is the moral thing to do to reverse, to the extent that is possible, the damage perpetrated by morally corrupt people and systems. Because it is the compassionate thing to do whatever we can to help people reclaim their lives after surviving unspeakable man-made horrors. This should be enough to justify why rehabilitation is important, but there are many other reasons.

The right to compensation and rehabilitation
It is widely accepted that Article 14 of the Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment provides for the redress of victims of torture, including compensation and rehabilitation.

Christopher Keith Hall from Amnesty International states that, in addition to the justice remedies contained in Article 13, "Article 14 of the Convention, which contains no geographic restriction, requires each state party to ensure in its legal system that any victim of an act of torture, regardless of where it occurred, obtains redress and has an enforceable right to fair and adequate compensation, including the means for as full rehabilitation as possible".

The host nation's interest in ensuring survivors regain their ability to contribute to society
These are compelling reasons. But they come largely from the victim's side, and rely on a pre-supposition that we are driven in our actions by lofty ideals. True for all of us, but it is not universally the case.

The other compelling reason for rehabilitation is that it is good for our society and good for our economy.

Once we accept the responsibility of providing protection through resettlement, it becomes obvious, even to the most ardent economic rationalist, that it is far better to invest in people's rehabilitation so that they are able to regain their capacity to contribute to society, both socially and economically, rather than becoming reliant on the state on a permanent basis.

Prevention in terms of the cycle of perpetration of torture
Last but not least, I believe, based on my observations and discussion with colleagues working in many post-conflict countries over the years, that failure to invest in rehabilitation at both individual and societal levels, can contribute to the entrenchment of torture as an accepted practice, and to the perpetuation of cycles of repression and torture in those societies, both as a manifestation of latent pathology and engrained systemic practices.

How does torture damage people?

How does torture work?
Torture does so much damage that it is difficult to summarise its effect in a few sentences. It works largely by creating situations of extreme power imbalance, fear, humiliation and often extreme pain and discomfort.

In its most sophisticated iterations it relies on the precise study of individual attributes and the careful manipulation of environmental variables to undermine the individual's ability to self-regulate their emotions. The interpersonal nature of the trauma undermines basic beliefs about humanity, trust and our worth and place in the world.

At a societal level, it is the ultimate tool of social control, and affects systemic relationships at all levels, from the family to civic society.

The bio-psycho-social impact of torture
At START'TS we use what we call a bio-psycho-social model to understand the impact of torture. Basically, it means that torture affects the physical body, especially the nervous system and particularly the brain. It also affects the mind, in terms of how we perceive ourselves and the world around us, and how we organize these

perceptions, and of course, it affects our relations with other people, both as individuals and within social systems.

The impact of torture on the brain and the nervous system
We could talk for days about how torture and trauma affect the brain, but let me summarise this by saying that the extreme fear and trauma combined with both the deliberate and incidental deregulation of the nervous system can, in many individuals, result in long-lasting effects, which include both physiological and structural changes in the brain. In addition, because our brain is plastic and changeable, our brain adapts to help us survive life in horrific circumstances, and some of these adaptations and survival strategies can be problematic in a more normal environment.

Torture can also affect how we use and organize our brain. In other words, to use a crude analogy, it can affect both our hardware and software. Like in most things, the magnitude of the consequences of trauma is a product of the interaction of both environmental and genetic factors.

The most common sequelae of torture at individual, family and community levels
What does this mean? Many different things. Amongst the most common problems are sleep problems, hyper alertness, recurring memories of the traumatic event, nightmares, concentration problems, irritability, dissociation, anxiety, depression and many others.

Many of our clients talk about feeling in danger all the time, unable to trust or rely on others, and this plays havoc with their family life and their relationships with people around them. All in all, these issues combined with other difficulties that are part and parcel of commencing life in a new environment create quite powerful cocktails.

How do we assist torture survivors to rehabilitate?

We rely on people's strengths and capacity for self healing
The first axiom is that we see our job not as curing people from the effects of torture, but as helping them marshal their strengths in order to heal themselves. This may involve "treating" some particular issues that impede their recovery, but rehabilitation is a lot more. Rehabilitation is about empowerment, about reclaiming their life back from the torturers, about regaining control of their lives. Thus, we always work in partnership with our clients, and often, also with other helping professions. Reclaiming health and mental health is only one aspect of it, albeit a crucial one.

A bio-psycho-social approach
This approach is very useful to describe a model for healing. If the brain is working in a way that makes daily life difficult, we need to address this problem in order to make healing possible. This is the "bio" aspect of the healing process. Similarly, if the torture experience has changed the way we perceive and interpret the world, rehabilitation means finding ways to process traumatic memories and re-interpret these experiences so that they can be reconciled with a notion of a "safe enough" world. This is the "psycho" aspect of the healing process.

Assisting the individual and shaping their healing environment
Often this also means working to make the other crucial ingredient, the healing environment, as conducive as possible to rehabilitation, and assisting our clients to re-build a good social support system around them. This is the "social".

Informed eclecticism guided by science and experience
How do we do this? The short and uninformative answer is, any way we can... In slightly more technical terms, I like to think of STARTTS as practising an eclectic approach that combines the benefits of various therapeutic approaches informed by experience, empirical research and, increasingly, the latest developments in neuroscience.

We work with complex problems and to unravel them we need a diverse array of tools. The challenge is often to know what tool to use when. We are learning all the time, and the last few years have been incredibly exciting in terms of the new tools that have become available to help us undo the damage caused by torture.

The much misunderstood and mystified role of culture
Last but not least, if therapy is a partnership, it will not be very productive unless our work makes sense and somehow fits with the worldview of our partners. Hence the necessity for us to make every effort to understand the worldview of our clients, and to make sure we package and adapt what we learn through research, neuroscience and clinical experience with other groups, so that it becomes congruent with their cultural attributes and belief system, but without allowing them to become a barrier. ꟿ

Policing the Gap:
How Blacktown Police Won Over the Community

Blacktown is home to people from many cultures. The Police and the community have worked closely together to create harmony and understanding, as ***LIN TAYLOR*** *explains.*

What's happening in Blacktown is bit of a mystery. According to the Australian Bureau of Statistics nearly 32 per cent of people living in Blacktown have a non-English speaking background, and 19 per cent have arrived in Australia in the last five years, yet this western Sydney suburb should, in theory, be a lot more problematic than it is.

Even with nearly 200 cultural groups represented, Superintendent Mark Wright from Blacktown Local Command says the area is more harmonious than it has ever been.

"We now have about 180 different cultural groups in Blacktown, but we don't have a dominant culture which I think is a real strength.

"When was the last time you've heard of a cultural issue or cultural divide within the community of Blacktown? You know, there hasn't been one," he says.
But it was not that long ago when serious tensions simmered between police and South Sudanese youth.
"There was a sudden influx of South Sudanese in Blacktown and there were a lot of young men hanging around," says STARTTS Community Services Coordinator, Jasmina Bajraktarevic-Hayward.

While shopkeepers felt intimidated by their presence, the young people on the other hand claimed they were being unfairly targeted whenever police or security staff approached them.

"Young people get targeted anyway and when they stand out, like the South Sudanese do, people experience fear. Even when there's no justification for that fear," says Bajraktarevic-Hayward.

Fear and a distrust of authority were also apparent in the South Sudanese community, leading to widespread misunderstanding arising from both the police and the community.

"Coming from a war-torn situation, we don't trust police. No-one trusts the police," says South Sudanese community elder Ajang Biar. "What was happening was the misunderstanding of police with the Sudanese culture."

Being together in large groups is the way Sudanese people socialise, he adds. They will see each other on the street and stop to chat.

"We are a connected community," Biar says. "But to

Blacktown Station. PHOTO: Alan Orchard

the police, they see it as a threat to the public, without any reason."

As more claims of racial targeting surfaced, Superintendent Wright decided to engage with the community to improve mutual dialogue and relieve tensions. "We engaged with the community leaders, but it wasn't just the Sudanese. It was the Pacific Islanders, the Indians and others."

As an overt symbol of unity, he asked community leaders from all cultural groups to walk with Blacktown police officers through hotspots like Westpoint Shopping Centre and around railway stations.

"There was a potential element where the community leaders thought that maybe the police were targeting [the South Sudanese youth].

"But when they walked with us and they were educated, they would actually go over and talk to the boys for us. And they would take those messages back to the community to say, 'Well I've actually met the police, I've met the commander and they're actually not racist'."

Since taking over Blacktown Local Command five years ago, Wright has also worked tirelessly to expose his officers to the different cultures present in Blacktown.

"I think the other 'secret' is we tried to change the whole culture of the [police] command by exposing all the police to the community."

While multicultural and youth liaison officers are helpful, Wright believes the entire command needs to be culturally aware and educated.

"My whole objective when I first started [at Blacktown police] five years ago was to build those relationships across the entire community - refugees, cultural groups, Caucasians, the whole lot."

Biar also played a key role in bridging the gap between the South Sudanese community and the police.

"We needed to change the image of police to the youth. And also we wanted the police to learn about our culture - that a group of Sudanese walking together is not harming, it's a friendship," he says. "If there is an issue we approach it collectively, not the police alone but the community too."

Biar says the initiative has since improved trust and mutual respect between Sudanese youth and the police.

Over in Victoria, however, the story is very different, with reports of police allegedly targeting young members of the African community, particularly in Melbourne's inner north.

In fact, ABC News recently obtained details of a secret Victorian police operation, Operation Molto, that specifically sought out criminality within the African youth. The Operation Molto document read: "There has been a spasmodic and yet continual increase in the number of robberies as well as armed robberies occurring in and around the Flemington Housing Estate.

"The as yet unidentified suspects for these serious offences are primarily young African males.

"The increased level of visible police presence will assist in the identification and targeting of offenders."

Operation Molto which was established in 2006, still has an impact on the young African community today. Nearly 30 formal complaints were filed against the Victorian police as a result of the alleged targeting. Most recently, a group of six young men, who were teenagers at the time of the allegations, settled a civil case with Victoria police on the issue.

The men claimed that between 2005 and 2009, they were stopped, searched and sometimes verbally and physically abused by police because of their African heritage.

"Coming from a war-torn situation, we don't trust police. No-one trusts the police"

Ajang Biar

But it wasn't just anecdotal evidence that drove the case. Lawyers representing the African men approached University of Melbourne statistician Professor Ian Gordon to analyse how frequently the men were being stopped by police.

Professor Gordon found that young African men in the Flemington and Kensington and North Melbourne areas were 2.5 times more likely to be stopped by police than white people or non-African people. Interestingly, the research found that they were also less likely to commit a criminal offence compared to other populations.

The African men involved in the case were teenagers living in public housing in the Melbourne suburbs of Flemington and North Melbourne. One of them is Maki Issa, who is originally from Somalia.

"It comes down to stereotyping. They see three or four African guys there and automatically assume that these are gangsters, or they're in a gang," he told SBS News.

"So what we're trying to work on is for them to understand that these are a group of kids who live in the [Housing] Commission flats who all share one little park. They're obviously going to be in big groups all the time, [so] understand that that's their backyard."

Jeremy Rapke QC represented the young men in the Federal Court case and was Victoria's director of public prosecutions during Operation Molto. He too believes the police operation came down to racial profiling.

"They were nominated in the operation order as being the people most likely to be involved in the crime, primarily involved in the crime, and indeed statements made by people who were involved in the operation - statements of witnesses - confirm that that was the primary focus of the operation," he told ABC News.

But the Victorian Police force has consistently rejected claims that Operation Molto was racially motivated.

A recent statement read: "We reject that Operation Molto involved racial profiling... This operation targeted serious offences of robbery and armed robbery in a small, defined Flemington area and was predicated on credible intelligence and witness reports.

"We do not accept that Victoria Police undertakes racial profiling. We have been actively working with Australian-African communities to build closer relationships."

Still, as a result of the court settlement, Victorian police have agreed to implement measures to stamp out racism within the force, and to review its cross-cultural training, thus avoiding a lengthy court trial.

The situation has Victorian police - and other state police forces - scratching their heads and asking why Blacktown is not experiencing similar woes.

"It's actually quite simple," says Wright. "From my perspective... the leadership from the community in Blacktown has also accepted some responsibility for themselves.

"They're not sitting back and saying, 'you fix it, you do this'. They were prepared to work with us as well."

Incidentally, Blacktown community elder Ajang Biar could not be more passionate about encouraging the police to engage with the community. "Involve, involve, involve the community leaders, because if there's a problem, no-one from the outside will come and solve your problem. If you are part of the problem you must be part of solution." R

A Family Daycare that is Truly Amazing

By Isabelle Roe

Empowering … Deeqo Omar with Aqil Barruud, 4, left, and Hamza Abdullahi, 6, at a home childcare centre in Granville. PHOTO: Wolter Peeters

Amazing Family Daycare was created to address the issues of ethical child-rearing within the refugee and migrant communities, and provide refugee women with a means to become self-sufficient.

Established in 2011 by Somali refugee Deeqo Omar, Amazing Family Daycare was Australia's first multicultural day-care centre.

Its aim is to give members the means to become functional participants in society and contribute to their communities. Amazing Family Daycare is a low-cost service, ready to help anyone without discriminating on the basis of ethnic background or religious belief.

The majority of its members come from war-torn countries such as Somalia, North and South Sudan, and Pakistan.

The centre's main office is in Mount Druitt and is staffed by Omar, alongside her husband Mohamed Baaruud, who works as both deputy director and accounting manager. They are joined by the centre's co-ordinator Teresa Ganner. Two ex-childcare workers-turned-field-officers, Mandy Ayad and Ahlam Alkin, perform monthly checks on the childcare workers. They also carry out home safety checks before the childcare workers are allowed to start their own centres.

"Deeqo is the best employer I have ever had," says Ganner. "She has achieved so much but she does not want to take any credit for it, saying that we work as a team." Deeqo was recently awarded a 2012 Humanitarian Award for her hard work within the community.

For refugee and migrant children, the opportunity that Amazing Family Daycare provides in allowing them to be exposed to their own home-language and culture outside their home is a very important one. Without that opportunity, children lose a tangible connection to their roots and an important part of their cultural identity.

"Now they are able to be taught culturally specific songs and stories in their native language," explains Omar. "They are exposed to specific cultural traditions, such as a wider community, that they would not have had otherwise."

The centre has fulfilled its aim of empowering refugee women, many of whom did not have the necessary qualifications to enter the workforce, nor the English-language skills, by giving them the tools necessary to become fully functioning members of society.

This was done by registering Amazing Family Daycare, as a Registered Training Organisation (RTO) with the Australian Government. As an RTO, the centre is able to provide the necessary accreditation and training to equip its members with a Certificate III in Childcare.

The benefits have been immense. Many refugee and migrant parents were struggling to find childcare centres that were both affordable and culturally appropriate. Now they are able to give their children, many of whom were infants when they arrived or were born in Australia, links to their home language and culture.

Another benefit is that each member is certified and a subcontractor, which means that they are able to open their own day-care centres. With the extra income, members are able to pay for English lessons and so develop more employable skills. The success has enabled all members to become more financially independent, where before they were dependent upon Centrelink benefits. Six of them have now bought their own homes.

For refugee women, coming to Australia can be very isolating, because when they first arrive, they often do not speak English well. They don't know how to ask for help, or even how to catch a bus.

"The number one thing refugee women want is to be included," says Ganner. "They feel unable to attend to their children's school activities, such as PTA meetings or prize-giving ceremonies. They feel embarrassed, as if they were a burden. Once they are able to learn English, they can contribute at their children's school by attending meetings there, and at home by helping their children with their homework."

In order to fund her original idea, Omar was provided with help from STARTTS and their Enterprise Facilitation Program run by Felix Ryan.

Enterprise Facilitation works one-on-one with entrepreneurs of new and existing businesses, linking them with people who can help with the basics of running a business, such as marketing, financial management and product development.

It works in tandem with a community-based Volunteer Resource Board to provide confidential assistance in business management and networking advice, all while strengthening community ties.

The marketing was by word of mouth and there are now over 100 family day-care operators, in both Sydney and Canberra.

Amazing Family Day Care has been so successful that new offices have been created in Sydney's West, Outer West and South West, with negotiations underway for more offices to open in the ACT. ℞

Luis Rico Sings for a Better World

In a beautiful fusion of song and narrative, Bolivian singer ***LUIS RICO*** *shares his own experiences of Bolivia's social, economic and political realities. In a nation affected by dictatorships and corrupt governments, his 32 recorded albums bring music to the people of the Amazon.* ***JANSET BERZEG*** *spoke to him during his visit to Australia.*

When did you start singing? What does music represent to you?

I think music in its essence is a recreational instrument that enhances spirituality in a human being. If you add an additional dimension to reflect on life, or human rights, for example, then the song becomes a useful tool to try to achieve a better, more equitable and less violent world.

I was a happy student when studying in provincial Bolivia. I felt lucky to have access to a university education. Initially I chose to study the orthodox branch of economics while I dreamt about solving economic problems and easing the suffering of the world.

I studied in Potosi, the most historic city in Bolivia that has a long history of exploitation by Spaniards in the struggle for its gold and silver mines. During my years at university in Potosi, I started playing my guitar at social events that catered to different social classes. This helped me understand the different ways of life and the social inequalities that existed between Indigenous peoples, labourers, mine administrators and the owners of the mines.

When we played for the poor, we drunk pure alcohol with them, and when we played for the owners of mines, we were offered whisky.

In 1967 during the traditional celebrations of San Juan (at which people burn furniture and other wood items on the streets. Because it is the coldest night of the whole year in Bolivia, we were at a party. There was food, music and dancing when suddenly a young man announced that something strange was happening in Siglo 20, a well-known mining camp, where a massacre was taking place.

The dictator General Barrientos had ordered the killing of the miners and their families, who had gathered at Siglo 20 from all around Bolivia to morally and economically support Che Guevara's guerrillas.

Che was in Bolivia that year but he had health problems so the miners wanted to help his guerrillas and that was a good enough reason for Barrientos to order the massacre. Eighty seven miners, women and children lost their lives that night. So I asked myself: what is it that I do? And, what is it that I should be doing? I dropped out of university, and started writing music and singing. I have been a musician for the last 45 years.

We went through a difficult period when the infa-

mous Operation Condor was taking place. From exile, and in prison, I wrote a good quantity of songs about the political situation.

They were love songs for our country. Love songs against persecution, the suffering of children, the terror and the massacres that took place during the dictatorship. In the end we did manage to regain democracy. However it brought more shame than the times of dictatorship.

I lived in fear all the time, and was imprisoned eight times. I was forced to sign documents that declared that I wasn't going to produce or sing any protest songs. But I knew that there were so many marginalised Indigenous peasant communities. The country had also become a breeding area for international non-government organisations, but no one really knew what they were actually doing there.

That was around the same time that I started to travel to the Amazon to experience the way of life of the Indigenous peoples, to learn about their concerns and how the government and the church managed to get there. The government was there to take away their land and resources. So I started focusing my music on strengthening Indigenous cultures and our ties with them.

What is the current political situation in Bolivia?
After long periods of dictatorships and corrupt democracies, today we have an Indigenous president who was elected by peasants, workers and indigenous peoples, those who have been among the most marginalised. They provided him a helping hand to become president.

However he is now following the advice of experienced politicians who in my opinion, have not followed his vision, and have contributed to him making mistakes. As always, in an imperfect democracy, there are privileged sectors of the ruling party and those who grow coca and do not pay taxes.

Apart from having made Indigenous Bolivians more visible, have things improved with the new government?
Bolivia is home to 32 different Indigenous groups including the Aymara, the Quechua and the Guaraní. President Evo Morales is also from an indigenous background. He did not have a chance to study at university. There is a national park in the middle of Bolivia, which is considered to be the lungs and the centre of the Amazon; this area is called TIPNIS (Indigenous Territory and National Park Isiboro Sécure).

Morales wants to build a highway across the TIPNIS, which will serve the economic interests of Brazil, so it can access world markets rapidly and cheaply. The purpose is also clearing out more land for cocaine production. The area where cocaine is grown is too small and no longer caters for the big demand.

Bolivia produces absolutely nothing. We only have a raw materials-based industry so it is hard to justify how the highway that will cross our sacred lands is going to help Bolivians. The Indigenous people are protecting their land against the Brazilian authorities and the political and cocaine-based economic interests of Morales, who is surrounded by an army of corrupt politicians behind him.

The current government's policies are not fair. There are Indigenous ruling party supporters who enjoy privileges while there are other Indigenous groups that inhabit the TIPNIS who are quite marginalised. Some of them are even being persecuted and accused of opposition to President Morales' political project.

What do you see happening in the near future?
Well, Morales himself has turned into a power driven politician who wants to extend his mandate to more than three or four terms, despite the fact that the constitution prohibits re-election. Just like in the case of Chavez. So, the problem is quite complex.

"I believe that Morales has made big mistakes when he followed his own political advisors, acting against the interests of his own people, the very people that actually helped him come to power."

I believe that Morales has made big mistakes when he followed his own political advisors, acting against the interests of his own people, the very people that actually helped him come to power. This is socially quite painful for the people. Now the President is in the process of initiating what he calls "a community consultation" to get the Indigenous peoples to agree and collaborate to the construction of the highway that will cross untouched Amazon lands. It is obviously a forced, obligatory consultation.

I wrote a song about this project which has become a symbol of the Indigenous people's fight to preserve the area and since then Morales considers me to be part of the opposition, just for being on the side of the indigenous peoples. I think that Morales needs to listen to all Bolivians and not only his advisors and those privileged people. He likes to be applauded and he has lost his way.

What do you want to achieve with your music?
Luckily I happen to write songs that become emblematic of the struggle of the Indigenous people to preserve the Amazon and their human rights. My music is current and connected with the issues. I am always prolific, producing music and writing songs.

I think music has a big role to play in providing leadership and influencing public opinion, just like the mass-media does. I have a duty to convey the truth about the actions of a government that calls itself "Indigenous".

Through my music I ask for respect for democracy and the human rights of all Bolivians.

You have just given a public lecture at ANU in Canberra where you spoke about dictatorship and democracy in Bolivia. What is your connection with universities?
I had my first experience in Bolivia with a lecture at the Université de Tous les Savoirs which is a system of free education that was proposed by the French embassy in Bolivia. This year there will be 365 keynote lectures of important scientists, academics and researchers. They also invite people like me and we talk about what we know. The first time I was invited, I suggested summarising the history of Bolivia in twenty songs. It was a challenge but everyone loved the concept.

Do you have any message for readers of Refugee Transitions?
Australia is a beautiful country; multicultural and multiethnic. I am glad to have been invited to Australia for the third time, because it allows me not only to connect with the Bolivians and other Latin Diasporas here, but also, to bring some issues to the attention of the broader Australian community, like the challenges that our Indigenous peoples are facing today. We have to keep talking about these issues so the younger generations can enjoy discrimination-free lives. R

Glitz and Glamour as Refugee Ball 2012 goes off with a Bang!

By Richard Walker

Two incredible bands, four inspiring speakers, 340 guests, and $22,000 raised, and all to support one amazing program to help refugee young people.

After three years of steady growth, the fourth STARTTS Refugee Ball once again topped all expectations. Guest numbers grew, there were more raffle and auction prizes than ever, and most importantly, we raised more than double the money of the previous year.

Every dollar raised on the night went towards the STARTTS Capoeira Angola project – an innovative program using the ancient art of Capoeira to help young people overcome trauma. It has been one of the most effective programs that STARTTS has ever had for young people, and already the extra funds are making a huge difference in expanding its reach to more students and schools.

Dr David Corlett spoke eloquently of the need for more compassion and understanding of refugees, while school counsellors Elizabeth Pickering and Angelina Bea outlined the benefits of Capoeira to their students. Lastly, many in the room were moved to tears by Capoeira participant Evelyn Agripa's heartfelt speech about what Capoeira has meant for her.

Politicians, leaders, community elders and even celebrities turned out to support our cause this year, while many businesses showed their support by donating prizes to the auctions and raffle.

Special thanks must go to our major sponsors and supporters, as well as to the hardworking team of volunteers that helped make it all possible.

Join us once again at Refugee Ball 2013, not only to help us raise even more money to support refugees, but for what promises to be another magical evening of entertainment and inspiration.

The 2013 Refugee Ball will be held on the 9th of October. If you are interested in attending, or would like to support us by becoming a sponsor, donating a prize or volunteering, contact Richard Walker, STARTTS Public Affairs Coordinator, on 9794 1966.For photos and video of the 2012 Refugee Ball, go to **www.startts.org.au.**

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"When I first arrived my memories were strong. I've learned not to forget, but to deal with those memories."

Female client

"STARTTS helped us lose our visions of the past and have a vision for the future."

Daniel, counselling client from Burma

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The NSW Service for the Treatment and Rehabilitation of Torture and Trauma Survivors (STARTTS) helps refugees deal with their past experiences and build a new life in Australia. Our services include counselling, group therapy, programs for children and young people, community development activities and physiotherapy. We also work with other organisations and individuals to help them work more effectively with refugees. Opened in 1988, STARTTS is one of Australia's leading organisations for the treatment of torture and trauma survivors.

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