

## Afghan Refugees



Photograph by N. Gardner OXFAM.

Temporary accommodation for Afghan refugees.

### SOCIO-ECONOMIC CONDITIONS OF AFGHAN REFUGEES IN PAKISTAN

#### Introduction

The arrival of Afghan refugees into Pakistan on a massive scale began in 1978. In 1986 the registered refugee population numbered about three million. The refugees are partly sustained by a large-scale relief operation (initiated in April 1979) as well as by their own work and initiatives. Viable means of livelihood have not been developed for refugees. However, some income-generating activities have been initiated on an experimental basis by NGOs for a small proportion of the population. Finding employment has been the refugees' own affair. As in other countries, donated rations of dried food and kerosene for cooking and heating are handed out regularly to registered refugee households. Occasionally, many refugees receive a limited cash allowance from the Government of Pakistan.

The relief operation is government-managed and implemented, with the international community providing funds and monitoring services. It is the largest operation undertaken by the humanitarian community in a third world country. Great efforts have been invested in order to meet the needs of the refugees. The relief operation was amended in 1984 and experimental self-reliance activities were gradually introduced.

The majority of the refugees are accommodated in some 320 camp-like villages. Others reside independently among the Pakistanis. Most refugee villages are located near Pakistani villages or towns but occasionally isolated. The population varies from a few thousand to more than one hundred thousand, and range from dense settlement to being widely scattered. For administrative purposes the larger settlements are divided into self-contained sectors, or 'villages'. Each village is composed of

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numerous compounds which according to the refugees' tradition are usually walled to prevent passers-by from looking into the accommodation area. A compound may be shared by several households. Compounds usually contain a number of dwellings – either tents or *katcha* houses – accommodating sometimes two to three households, each occupying a separate room. The villages are usually equipped with health, water, and education services. Schools are available, and the sick have access to dispensaries or hospitals. Housing has been, or is being, constructed by refugees who were first provided with tents. The refugees have no right to buy land or other property and have not been allocated vacant areas for food production by the government. Some refugees, however, have small kitchen gardens within the compound yard; a few brought livestock with them from Afghanistan.

#### **UNRISD Research**

In orienting the relief operation towards self-reliance, a solid basis of information on the socio-economic conditions of the refugee population is needed to develop a systematic and appropriate project approach. The United Nations Research Institute for Social Development (UNRISD) studies various aspects of the social conditions and short and longer-term prospects of integration of refugees.

UNRISD has been studying the Afghan refugee situation in Pakistan for the past six years. Research has focused on food relief, related socio-economic conditions and integration processes. Early studies revealed wide variations in the self-reliance of the refugee population.<sup>1</sup> However a large-scale, representative data base providing valid information on these issues was lacking. On the request of UNHCR a third and large-scale survey was launched in 1986 which covered all main refugee affected provinces, examining the conditions under which the Afghan refugees were living after having spent up to eight years in exile. The report was published one week after the peace agreement was signed in Geneva last April.<sup>2</sup>

The survey included some 2,300 households comprising 19,653 individuals living in 58 refugee villages. Information was obtained through interviews with the refugees in their homes. Male heads of households and senior females were interviewed separately by male and female Pakistani interviewers in the refugees' native languages. The survey collected information on a wide range of socio-economic issues.

#### **Survey Findings**

The findings show how refugees have gained their livelihoods and how the relief operation has assisted them. It presents findings on the conditions of the household and of its male and female members, with emphasis on the refugees' capacity to support themselves.

A massive change has taken place in the Afghans' occupational structure since they took refuge in Pakistan. Whereas most of the households (about 70 per cent) were princi-

pally engaged in agriculture in Afghanistan, only a few were engaged in this sector in Pakistan. In practice, this means that refugees growing up in Pakistan have been unable to receive instruction in farming, apart from the limited cultivation of kitchen gardens and care of domestic animals.

According to our sample two thirds of men (aged 18-49) had found gainful employment in Pakistan. More than half of these were casual wage labourers. Most were employed in construction or unskilled labour. About one-tenth of the men were employed as drivers or in sales and service jobs. Approximately one sixth were self-employed in shop-keeping, long distance trade, mechanics, carpentry or tailoring. Women also support the household financially, with one in nine adult women working. Virtually all were self-employed in their homes in tailoring, sewing or embroidery. Their income was generally extremely low, but a few (5 per cent) earned more than the self-employed

#### **Refugee Family in Pakistan.**



men and were thus able to contribute a significant portion of household income.

Most refugees had very low incomes and large proportions of the population have found themselves in financial difficulties. Most vulnerable were refugees who had been in Pakistan less than two years and those households without able-bodied men. The great majority of the Afghan refugees rely on aid to supplement their income. However, not all were registered for aid distribution. Officially registration takes place on arrival. Members of a household arriving later may not be included, nor are any children born after initial registration. A significant number (20 per cent) of households were found unregistered for aid, although they live in official refugee villages. The reasons for this remain unclarified. In only about one third of households surveyed had all their members registered. Even registration does not guarantee full ration receipt. Frequently supplies are unavailable and, in some refugee

villages, an informal system of indirect distribution is operated. The leaders of the refugee communities (Maliks) supervise the distribution on behalf of the refugees, and the refugees must pay a certain amount of their entitlement to the Maliks for this service.

Among those registered, virtually all received wheat and kerosene, but only half received tea and milk powder. About one third obtained sugar and edible oil. Some 60 per cent of the households had received some cash during the past year, amounting on an average to Rs. 25 per household per month. Cash allowances are intended to meet other basic needs such as soap and clothing. The survey found that many refugees cannot manage on their rations. Four in five households receiving wheat rations purchased supplementary wheat, while 14 per cent said they did not need more than their rations and some 5 per cent who needed to buy more claimed that they were unable to afford it. Refugees perceived the supply of



Photograph by N. Gardner OXFAM.

rations to be a more serious problem than any other aspect of camp life. When rations were not received, about 10 per cent of the households had no income at all. Two per cent of the households had neither income nor aid. Given the size of the refugee population, this means that for up to 60,000 refugees, survival and subsistence could be threatened. The earnings of one third or up to about one million appeared to be far too little to subsist on, *even when food aid is taken into account.*

The low levels of income are related to various factors. The majority of able-bodied men in the prime working age are engaged in unskilled, casual labour which means low wages and unstable employment. This is due to the nature of the local labour market and skills of adult refugees, together with a divided commitment between settling affairs back in Afghanistan and providing for the household in Pakistan.

According to the study, about 40 per cent of the men and 3 per cent of the women are literate, but two thirds of the literate are under 18 years of age. The majority have incomplete primary education. Only a quarter of the literate men have completed primary school, and 10 per cent, secondary or higher education. Almost all those educated beyond primary level upwards are men. The age distribution among the literate indicates that the vast majority have received their education in the refugee villages of Pakistan as a direct result of the assistance programme. The proportion of adults with skills in addition to farming is one in four men and two in three women. Men are mostly skilled in driving, tailoring, carpentry, mechanics or teaching. Some are engineers, aircraft pilots, doctors, or lathe operators. The majority of women claimed skills in the same trades as they made use of when earning incomes. Expertise no doubt varies considerably but most men have been unable to maintain, let alone develop, skills through work in Pakistan. The refugees in the survey expressed a wish for vocational training programmes, mainly in the trade skills.

About 60 per cent of the refugee population is made up of children and young people under the age of 18 years. This means that the adult population is likely to increase in number by about one quarter in 1991. Thus there will be an even larger number of school aged and unemployed youths.

The survey found that the refugees interact with the local Pakistani population in both positive and negative ways. About 16 per cent reported ties of friendship with Pakistanis living outside the refugee villages. Smaller proportions reported conflicts with their hosts. About 5 per cent of all households reported conflict over firewood, 4 per cent over pasture land, and 2 per cent over employment. Other sources of conflict were rights of passage through land and over drinking water. These aggregate figures conceal more intense problems in specific villages. The most positive relationships between the two populations were reported in Peshawar and Kohat – urban centres with a

long historical tradition of interaction between the two populations.

#### **Use of the Survey Findings**

As a large scale survey, considerable time was needed to process all the data, though a preliminary report on key variables was circulated after a few months. While the refugees remain in Pakistan, the survey findings may help those who design programmes geared to maintain or improve their living conditions. Agreement over how many refugees there are, and what to do about unregistered individuals and households, is subject to negotiation between donor governments through inter-governmental agencies, the host government, and refugee organizations. However certain vulnerable groups can be identified in existing village registers: refugees who have stayed less than two years in the village and refugee households without able-bodied men. Special assistance could be targeted to these groups. Provision of education, vocational training schemes, and income and employment-generating projects could be tuned more finely to the needs and abilities of the refugees. Survey findings on the sources of conflict can be used for devising measures to ease relationships between refugees and the host population wherever needed. However, to date, there is no information as to whether there have been any such changes in policy.

In the event of repatriation, the survey indicates that a considerable proportion of the population could be without means of support on their return home and hence in need of rehabilitation assistance. The survey profiles on literacy rates, skills and work experience of men and women are important for planning the reconstruction of Afghanistan. Large age cohorts of children and young people may be returning who will need education, vocational training, and instruction in agriculture, trade, and industrial production. In order to make rapid progress in a future resettlement situation in Afghanistan it will be important to draw on all human resources of the households and to tap the work experience of both men and women. Information on this is now available and at the disposal of all the parties involved.

*Hanne Christensen*  
UNRISD

#### NOTES

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——— *'Afghan Refugees in Pakistan: From Emergency towards Self-reliance'*. A Report on the Food Relief Situation and Related Socio-Economic Aspects. Report No. 84.2, UNRISD, Geneva, 1984.
2. Hanne Christensen and Wolff Scott, *'Survey of the Social and Economic Conditions of Afghan Refugees in Pakistan'*. Report No. 88.1, UNRISD, Geneva, 1988.



# REFUGEE WOMEN

## A CHILEAN REFUGEE WOMAN IN BRITAIN: A PERSONAL ACCOUNT *By Silvia Velasquez*

The word refugee has an interesting ring to it, but it is part of a compulsory C.V. that we refugees have to present every time we meet someone new in the English world. The different meanings and implications of the word are still not clear to me since they have changed with the circumstances in which I have had to use it. Sometimes the word has sounded proud and self-sufficient, a shield with which to face the world. At other times it is shameful and sad like a penance for someone else's crime laid against my soul. It is always present. For so many years in this foreign land, where I have had to find an identity, fight for my survival, the idea 'refugee' has served to justify my emotions and actions, to justify myself to others around me. But after so much time, justification is no longer enough. I am tired of the longing for a land lost forever, for cultures remembered in dreams and raised to unattainable heights of perfection. I am sick of failure and rejections from a changing world, and of people wrapped in their own lives, incapable of seeing the way history repeats itself in different parts of the world.

In 1977 I came to Britain. I was alone with four children, expecting another. I came with hope, to the England I knew from David Niven films, an England of eternal fog and phlegmatic gentlemen with black umbrellas and bowler hats. I expected a country of human warmth which could be put to any test, a country of legendary politeness, and above all, a country of people ready to welcome me. For I was Chilean, I was part of a heroic fight, of a historical process which, if permitted to exist, would have been an example to the world. I wasn't coming to stay for a long time. I only wanted a break, a rest from the poverty and the day to day struggle. I wanted to learn something interesting to teach, afterwards, back in my own land, to which I thought optimistically I would return within six months or a year.

The first thing they asked me when I arrived at the airport was where in London I was going to stay? Who had helped me to come? They insisted that I needed an address for them to give me an entry visa. The plane had arrived after office hours and it seemed that I was not important enough for the agencies sponsoring me to send someone to meet me at such a crucial moment. I didn't understand the impatience of the immigration officer, nor the seriousness of the man from the airline who was kind enough to carry one of my children through the endless corridors of the airport. I still remember that vast, empty room and the sailor bags with which my children played football: the bags were full of presents and messages for people in England whom I didn't yet know. I still feel my swollen feet and my empty pockets which stopped me from having anything but water to drink on the plane, for fear that I would have to pay. I still have the ponchos which, proudly, I had made my mother buy. They give a touch of Chile to my living room. In moments of crisis they have provided extra support, when my identity and security have seemed threatened, they have protected me from possible enemies in new and difficult situations. They have been like faraway friends who are nearly forgotten, but who

come back with force, each time I am in difficulty.

At the hotel, after my children had created an uproar in the dining room and the waiter tired of my requests for countless quantities of milk (which to my surprise was always cold), it was decided that we should keep to our room. They sent up great trays of food: juice that was so sour I had to add kilograms of sugar to be able to drink it; strange beans and eggs which seemed nearly raw and which I could never eat.

When members of the political party to which I had proudly belonged found out that I was alone and that the 'political mind' of the family had not come with me to England, they lost all interest in me. I was left alone with £5 in my pocket and computerised instructions on how to use the phone. Nobody told me about takeaway food. Day after day I wandered aimlessly in the streets near Hyde Park Corner: I was nine months pregnant and had four little children. We tired of walking all day, eating cold chicken and sour yogurt from supermarkets.

Eight months later, I had brought some order to our lives. It was then that the family's political leader arrived. With him came the political leader of the 'party'. He was needed in London to serve the cause. He could not do so from some faraway town in Scotland on which I had set my heart. I longed to escape from the big mechanised stairways which scared me, the crowd which suffocated me. Above all I wanted to see and breathe fresh air. A Chilean dreamer had promised that everything difficult to get in London, like nursery places, houses, English courses, work, would be given to me on a plate in Dundee. It had promised to be a small paradise where I could rebuild my marriage, bring up my children and have the rest I sought.

This time, contrary to my role of obedient militant, I stood firm. From the depths of my political frustration, I retorted that one could serve Chile wherever one was. I left for Scotland knowing that everyone thought me selfish and bourgeois. In Scotland we were greeted by the only three days of sunshine in the year and a group of Chileans anxious to open their doors to us. There we were friends, until political divisions and different perceptions of work for solidarity made many emigrate and others isolate themselves from the rest.

Resentment that it was I who had exerted pressure on my ex-husband to come to Dundee and the fact that he had, in a way, given up the political struggle for nappies, kitchen and dependence on other people, hovered over our relationship like a ghost for many years. He has never adapted himself rationally to this country, although I believe he leads a happier and more fulfilled life than I. He used to accuse me of being absorbed by the British system, because I spoke a little English before he did and because I had found that not all the British were so horrible, nor all Chileans so perfect. I found work, developed and supported projects which may have at one

point seemed unnecessary, 'not very political' or impossible to achieve but which became my reality. The final break-up came after a difficult period of separations, re-starts, dramas and violence, which made our lives seem like a soap opera.

This conflict, as well as all the other problems of exile, led to difficulties suffered by our children. Like many other refugee families, our children left school at an early age and became unemployed. Others have language difficulties and behaviour problems and were misunderstood by school teachers. I took my children to family therapy but they have been unable to continue the treatment because, like many refugees, they believed that psychotherapy is only for the middle classes or for lunatics. Some believe that the concept of the family is traditional and that it will be changed in a Socialist world. Any family problem is either the fault of the mother or that of the 'alienating society' in which we were forced to live.

My eleven years experience in this country cannot be considered either positive or negative. My children will not be reactionary in their adult life, but the militant little heroes of the world which we had wanted to create have been lost. Lost, partly because they were forced socially to identify with the interests of their friends, and partly by the time wasted by us parents who, full of insecurities and critical perceptions, were defeated in our own search for values which we tried to transplant in a foreign land. That is why it worries me when publicity slogans use stereotypes like isolation or frustration, even though they are sometimes necessary, to attract finance to the projects that are dedicated to work for refugees.

I remember one day a man approached me who wanted to make a film about the isolation and poverty of refugees. I told him that at that time I was not the best person to give a contribution. I went on to say that Latin American refugees have managed to organise themselves, and, if given the resources, would be able to survive in this country. I did not want to see ourselves represented as a people defeated. History and the situations around us are changing, the image of us in 1986 is different from that of 1973 or 1977. I would have liked to have shown the European world the immense practical and intellectual skills of my people and to demonstrate that, although political defeat is carried inside and can never be completely overcome, it can still be transformed into an element of growth and development. Of course the person interested in making the film never came back.

Integration is a word which has dangerous meanings and insinuations. Do we Latin American refugees really want to integrate? To what? Where? We organise parties, activities, groups and sub-groups where we see the same people, with some Latin American variations and some patient Britons who sometimes come out of boredom, solidarity or education, rather than to have new social experiences. The groups are closely knit and sometimes the new faces which show up are not received with the

renowned Latin American hospitality, but more likely we ask about the part they play in British political life, or whether they have high professional status or useful contacts. If they or their partners do not have anything interesting to offer, they become a 'gringo' without a face, a being to whom everyone is completely indifferent.

Latin Americans in Britain are not known for active participation, not even in the activities of other Latin Americans. Their contribution to solidarity movements such as those for South Africa, Kurdistan and even Nicaragua leaves a lot to be desired, not to mention their participation in demonstrations about the social problems here. It seems that history stopped on the plane that brought them here.

I don't want stereotypes or general integration. I don't want integration with the neighbour who has just come out of prison; nor with the mother across the street who screams hysterically at her children whilst smoking, drinking and eating crisps. I don't want integration with the neighbour from upstairs who at four o'clock in the morning decides to return to his cultural roots, elevating himself in clouds of marijuana and loud music, drum beats and guttural sounds which remain incomprehensible to me. I don't want my children to integrate with teenagers whose only aspirations are to work in a Wimpy or to buy the latest in jeans or hit music. I don't want my children to be educated in a school where I know the career opportunities to be zero, a discovery which cost not only me, but also other families, some of our children.

That is why it is not possible to talk so easily about integration. When I came here council flats seemed like luxurious apartments. Second-hand cars were like Rolls-Royces; my money from the DHSS was a fortune and jumble sales a bargain. With time I realised that poverty, deprivation, isolation and loneliness have an international face, that I was a small atom in an immense world that neither began nor ended in the mountains of the Andes.

How can I speak of integration? Unless, contrary to those principles which made us have to leave our country, we are perhaps now looking for integration to the class, values and principles against which we had fought: those of the middle class or 'trendy' world. Who would not prefer to live in a genteel street in South London? Who would not want to have English friends who listen, interested or admiring, to our experiences. We would like to visit houses with touches of Englishness about them and no graffiti on the walls. I am not only speaking about those of us who grew up in middle class homes. Regardless of the different careers we had, I believe that everyone in Chile, no matter our different levels of education or social standing, expected that the opportunities for our children would be better in England than they had been in Chile. We had no thoughts of remaining here but of learning all that we could of what was new and inspiring in Europe.

Human beings are reduced to nothing when they are put into new niches from which they have to relearn everything they know. Barriers are created that may seem insurmountable. A single journey may wipe out the past. People then have to prove to themselves, continually, their intellectual worth and practical skills. Such barriers distort refugees' view of reality and magnify the disadvantages facing them in this society. So it is important that

refugees are given a realistic, but not pessimistic vision of their potential future here based on experience and the skills they bring with them. For some of us, it may be a lifetime.

*Translated by Rodrigo Pizarro.*

*(As we have translating facilities we accept articles in most languages)*

## REFUGEE WOMEN

### **World Council of Churches Defines Refugee Women as the Most Vulnerable Group.**

The Refugee Service of the World Council of Churches has prepared a background paper stating that most of the world's refugees are women and girls. Although they share many characteristics with men, women refugees experience greater problems and are more vulnerable than men.

A serious problem faced by all women refugees in the world is that of protection. The paper states that this is because they are more vulnerable to physical and family violence, sexual abuse and intimidation and exploitation. Perpetrators of violence often include camp administrators, government and military officials, as well as other refugees. Efforts to provide adequate protection and assistance to refugee women would also help to reduce prostitution as so many are forced to exchange sexual services in return for the means of survival. At present most programmes to assist refugees are designed to meet the needs of all refugees and assume that men are the heads of families. The paper argues that this assumption is inappropriate for many refugee situations where women assume major family responsibilities. Future refugee programmes should therefore be designed primarily for women. (Reported in *The Times of Papua New Guinea*, Week 24-30 November 1988)

The Coordinating Group of Women Refugees (c/o CSP-14, Rue du Village-Suisse, 1205 Geneva, Switzerland) has recently been established in Geneva to bring together women refugees from different communities in Africa, Asia and Latin America now living in Switzerland. The aims of the groups are as follows:

- to organise women refugees, to share information and give mutual support with the aim of improving conditions for women refugees;

- to denounce the human rights violations to which women refugees are subjected in all countries;
- to establish contacts with NGOs and UNHCR by providing them with information on the situation of women refugees;
- to examine the possibility of establishing a local training programme for women refugees in conjunction with NGOs, the local authorities, reception centres, and adult education institutes.

### **Womensgroup of the Federation of Refugee Organisations Holland**

The Womensgroup within the Refugee Organisations in the Netherlands (VON), founded in May 1987, consists of twenty-five women from Ethiopia, Eritrea, Uganda, Zaire, Chile, Kampuchea, Kurdistan, and Iran. The aims of the Womensgroup are:

- to better the position of women;
  - to give advice to the Dutch Government on issues concerning refugee women;
  - to give information to refugee women on government policy in Holland and on available facilities;
  - to give information about refugee women to organisations working with refugee women;
  - to build up a network of refugee women living in Holland;
  - to participate in seminars/meetings concerning refugee women;
  - to stimulate refugee women to organise themselves.
- Womensgroup are anxious to get in touch with women and people working with refugee women outside of Holland. Please contact:

**VON**  
*Merelstraat 2 bis*  
*3514 CN Utrecht*  
*Holland*  
*Tel: 030 714505/733844*

# LATIN AMERICAN REFUGEE WOMEN HELPING THEMSELVES

## Introduction

The Latin American women present at the First International Consultation on Refugee Women in Geneva, Switzerland, from 14-19 November 1988, have created the Latin American Refugee Network. Coming from different countries, backgrounds and experiences, most of us met for the first time at the Consultation.

The women attending this Consultation came from Africa, Asia, the Middle East, the Americas and Europe. About a quarter of them were refugees. Many issues were discussed at the Consultation but particular attention was focussed on protection. The Latin American women were representatives of refugee-based organisations, or from Latin American NGOs; others came from religious organisations, academic institutions or as consultants for western governments. We came from different countries in Latin America ranging from Mexico to Argentina. A few of us are now resettled outside South America, in Canada, Britain, Switzerland and Australia.

Our social and ethnic backgrounds and experiences are as varied as our current geographical locations. Margarita is a widow and displaced peasant woman of Central America who lives with her seven children in a community which is systematically terrorised by the army and paramilitary groups. In contrast, Claudia is a director of a local NGO in the region. From Alma, a proud Mexican Indian woman dedicated to working for the cause of the indigenous people of Mexico, including the Guatemalan refugees, to Rosa, a cheerful Argentinian of German-Italian background now living in Canada and working with refugees and immigrants. From Francisca, a Chilean who spent months in a prison camp, but who still retains her sense of humour, and now lives and works in Canada, to Susy, a Chilean who emigrated voluntarily to Australia and works with Latin American refugees there. The group also included an Argentinian returnee working with Chilean refugees. The plight of the Salvadorean and Guatemalan refugees was pointed out to us by several women representing their compatriots.

It is not often that one finds so diverse a group not only in social and/or ethnic backgrounds, but also in personal experiences: widows, relatives of missing political prisoners, divorcees, feminists, more traditional women, Christians, socialists, ex-political prisoners, and mothers (I think between us we had about thirty-three children!).

The combination of all these elements produced a kind of chemistry, a group dynamic. The dialogue was rich and frank and carried out in a non-competitive manner. Respect for the other person was the norm, and decisions and actions to follow were taken collectively through consensus. It is ironic that democratic practices were being exercised by women coming from countries notorious for their human rights violations. Hopefully women of this calibre will be able to help rebuild their shattered countries.

## Protection of Refugees, Returnees and Internally Displaced People

Undoubtedly, we were stimulated by the atmosphere at the Consultation. The refugee woman who opened the first plenary session proudly said 'We are women of courage, we are not hopeless or weak. We are not here either as donors or recipients, but are participating in this Consultation as equal partners'. The overall objective of the Consultation was to discuss the particular needs of refugee women within six areas: protection, health, cultural adjustment, employment, development, and root causes. Root causes of flight were analysed and presented at the first plenary session by a panel of refugee women representing the different regions of the world.

Issues concerning Protection were discussed on a regional basis. This proved positive as it provided an official setting for people from countries in conflict with one another to share ideas. Additionally, all but one of the participants of the Latin American workshop on protection were Spanish speakers. This allowed women who did not speak English to participate fully in the discussion.

It was decided that the discussion should focus on those aspects of protection that were not addressed at the plenary session and that were relevant to the Latin American region. We agreed that the concept of protection needed to be expanded to include the guarantee of the basic material human rights of food, shelter, education etc. This theme emerged from most of the regional workshops on protection. The UNHCR policy to reduce assistance programmes in Latin America and throughout the poorer nations was seen as jeopardising the implementation of the right to protection. Furthermore, the policy carries the danger of ultimately forcing refugees to return to their own countries. One of the Central American representatives questioned the extent to which UNHCR is prepared to guarantee the protection of poor people in Central America stating, 'A large proportion of our refugees are poor, illiterate and are indigenous people. In other words they are powerless. To what extent then is UNHCR really prepared to protect the poor? What has happened to those Salvadorean and Guatemalan refugees who have gone back to their countries? UNHCR helped them to return, but many refugees have since disappeared. . . . What then is UNHCR's role on protection?' In general, refugee women attending this event spoke in a frank and often challenging manner.

The participants of the Latin American workshop agreed that security of both returnees and refugees in the region was an issue requiring urgent attention. For instance, in El Salvador refugees and displaced people are subject to systematic intimidation. In Guatemala, many people are forced to live inside the ill-famed 'polos de desarrollo' or strategic villages. All the regional workshops on protection agreed that UNHCR must be urged to extend their mandate on protection to returnees and displaced people throughout the world. For Latin America, we agreed to support and disseminate information about the following



five points adopted in Mexico this year by the Commission of Guatemalan refugees, namely:

1. the right to return to one's country of origin
2. the right to repossess land
3. the right to form organisations
4. the abolition of military-controlled territories
5. the right to receive international help and to be accompanied by international observers.

The women participating at the Latin American workshop on protection felt that one session was inadequate time to spend on the subject. There was a need to follow up some of the issues that had arisen. Although informal, further meetings took place during 'free time' in an organised manner, with a chairperson and a rapporteur.

#### **Why We Created a Network**

One of the issues discussed at the workshop was the need to create a network that would disseminate and coordinate information in the region. The network would allow NGO workers and representatives of refugee-based organisations to learn from one another. As one of the women representing an NGO suggested, 'I think one of our main goals should be the creation of a network to bring together all interested parties and to prepare projects in a coordinated manner. At the moment no one knows what the other organisation is doing until it is too late'.

The technicalities on how to start a network were also discussed. We decided that the network should develop in an informal way at the national level. Simultaneously, the national link should develop into a regionally-based working group for Latin American refugees and displaced people. Those at the meetings were aware of the need to overcome many difficulties for this network to become a reality. Representation was considered a key issue. In the case of refugees, many of those best able to represent their communities at international forums are prevented from doing so because they are not issued with travel documents by the relevant authorities, or, in the case of displaced people, it is extremely difficult and risky to apply for a passport.

Representation is not only limited by legal restrictions. All those present thought language differences should be given greater consideration when organising regional or international events. A large proportion of the Guatemalan refugees belong to indigenous communities who have admirably and proudly preserved their own language and culture. Many indigenous people are monolingual, and the large majority of these are women. Thus it is important to mobilise participation at the local level and, in the case of Guatemalan refugees, in their own language. Such an approach would not only encourage participation but would also recognise the importance of people's socio-cultural backgrounds and their right to continued existence. Indians are certainly in the majority in Guatemala, but they have been culturally rejected and

discriminated against by the dominant minority. The existing situation in Guatemala can be compared with that of South Africa where a small white minority dominates and represses the vast majority.

Another issue also discussed at these meetings was the need to negotiate the different interests of various parties. For instance, local NGOs depend for funding on international organisations, aid agencies, religious institutions, etc. Therefore, local agencies are expected to comply with certain regulations and restrictions. As one of the women said, 'We have to be aware that real participation is not an easy thing to achieve . . . but this needs to be our goal'. These meetings provided a realistic evaluation of the many issues that need to be taken into account when working towards the formation of a real participatory network.

It was agreed that the Latin American refugee network will initially start by mail, with an attempt to organise a regional meeting later. In the meantime participants should start organising at local and national levels.

#### **Recommendations of the Consultation**

At the last plenary session of the Consultation, two of the recommendations put forward were directly related to refugee networking: first, the formation of an international steering committee which would include representatives from the various regional and national working groups, and secondly, this international steering committee should be a coordinating instrument linking regional and national groups concerned with refugee women. In principle, Latin American women agreed with these recommendations, but we considered it premature to centralise a process which, in general, appears to be at the gestational stage at both the national and regional level.

One of the main objectives of the Geneva Consultation was the formulation of recommendations to be used by non-governmental agencies, international organisations, and governments to ensure that the needs of refugee women are taken into account when developing programmes for refugees. The Consultation achieved this goal. It also provided a unique venue where refugees, practitioners, academic and statutory representatives met and openly discussed issues of concern. But it may be some time before the many recommendations are implemented by the bodies concerned.

Meanwhile, I find it difficult to imagine any short term improvement for Margarita and her children. As it stands, their situation resembles that of prisoners of war rather than that of citizens in their own country. The camp or village where they live has been surrounded by a mine field. Only those with the necessary identity documents are allowed to leave the camp and this depends very much on the mood of the guards. Those allowed out can only bring back one item, whether of food, clothing, or medicine. In Margarita's own words 'There is no freedom or

# EDUCATION

## EDUCATION FOR ERITREAN REFUGEES IN THE SUDAN

security for us. To go from one village to another we have to leave our identity cards. In this way they make sure we come back. If a child over ten years of age is caught by the police or army patrol without an identity card, he/she is fined, and if they do not pay, which is often the case as we have no money, they are put in jail . . . this is how we live, without any legal protection'.

Most of the people living in the camp are unemployed and are not allowed to go to the big cities to sell what little they have managed to cultivate. International agencies and religious representatives are not allowed in, nor are they allowed to provide the much needed food and medicine. Furthermore, the governments of Guatemala and El Salvador have started to redistribute the refugees' and displaced peoples' land to landless peasants brought in from other regions thereby creating a potentially difficult situation for the future. Margarita and her children embody the suffering of hundreds of thousands of Guatemalan and El Salvadorean refugees and displaced people throughout Central America. Margarita is a strong and confident woman, full of hope for the future. She does not want charity. She might need material and technical assistance but, above all, she wants political support to tackle and resolve the underlying political, social and economic causes that made her first a refugee, and now a displaced person in her own country.

Despite the little time available, at the end of the week we felt we had succeeded in creating the Latin American refugee network. The First International Consultation on Refugee Women provided us with the opportunity to meet, discuss and share experiences. But it was the refugee and displaced women themselves who, without realising it, through their testimonies encouraged us all to transform our individual efforts into a collective action.

### **Maria Eugenia Salinas**

*(If anyone is interested in joining the Latin American refugee network then please write to Maria Salinas through the RPN)*

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### **YWCA Refugee Women's Programme**

The Papua New Guinea National YWCA has started a programme for refugee women in Port Moresby which includes English and sewing classes. Counselling and legal assistance services are also provided under the scheme. The aim of the programme is to assist the women by providing them with training in skills that can generate some income that will help them to become self-confident, regain their dignity, improve their economic status and help them to integrate into the PNG community.

*(The Times of Papua New Guinea, 24 November 1988)*

*Projects such as this would doubtless be welcomed by refugee women anywhere.*

According to UNHCR's fact sheet of March 1986, a total of 43,332 refugees from various countries were enrolled at primary, secondary and tertiary levels of education in the Sudan. Unfortunately, a more detailed breakdown is not available.

There are three types of educational provision to refugees in Sudan's Eastern Region. Refugee pupils are accommodated in thirty-two UNHCR sponsored schools in settlement areas in the east. About 8000 refugees were enrolled in Sudanese primary schools in late 1986. Finally there were those who attended new schools run by refugee-based agencies over which the Kassala education office claimed to have 'no technical supervision'. It would appear that the majority of those refugees lucky enough to receive some form of primary schooling, attend schools run by refugee-based agencies.

### **Eritrean Relief Association (ERA) Schools**

Aware of the acute demand for education by refugees, the refugee-based organisation, ERA, set up primary schools in the settlement camps and in some towns in 1980. By the end of 1987, there were twelve ERA schools in Port Sudan, Gedaref, Kassala, Kilo 7, Abouda, and Dihema with a total enrolment of about 4000 pupils. At the end of grade 5, promising pupils from these schools are given the opportunity to sit an entrance examination to the Comboni Junior Secondary School. Competition for secondary education is high and the selection is becoming tighter. However in 1987, 273 out of a total 392 students who completed junior secondary education in the ERA schools qualified for admission to the UNHCR school in Kassala or to the Comboni and Unity Secondary schools. This percentage (69.6 per cent) demonstrates the high standard of education in the ERA schools.

The curriculum in the refugee settlement schools is the same as in the Sudanese schools and the medium of instruction is Arabic. ERA schools teach Arabic, Tigrigna, English, Arithmetic, Geography, General Science, Drawing and Sport. English is taught from Grade 2 upwards, a reflection of the importance Eritrean refugees attach to this subject.

In spite of the limited resources and other shortcomings of refugee schools, ERA schools had two outstanding qualities: the resolve to create a good rapport with the refugee community, and the ability to mobilise the community to build classrooms.

### **Non-ERA Schools**

Although exact figures are hard to come by, there are a fair number of non-ERA schools for refugees in the Sudan. Many of these primary schools operate on a shift system in order to cater for both Arabic and Tigrigna pupils. The subjects taught in those schools I managed to visit include Arabic, Tigrigna, English, Maths, General Science, Geography, History, Drawing, Traditional Eritrean Culture, and the Eritrean's Fight for Freedom.



Photograph by J. Hartley – VSO

### **The Kassala Secondary School.**

The quality of education offered by many of these schools appeared to be inferior to that of the ERA schools. A reason for this may be the even more acute shortage of finance, equipment and text books suffered by non-ERA schools. Moreover, lack of space has forced these schools and their ERA counterparts, many of which are housed in buildings designed for residential purposes, to turn down thousands of eligible refugee pupils.

### **Refugee Intermediate and Higher Secondary Schools in Kassala**

An intermediate and a higher secondary school were set up in 1977. They operate from two nearby Sudanese secondary school premises in the afternoons, from 1.45 to 5 p.m. Both schools are sponsored by UNHCR and are often referred to as UNHCR secondary school. Ultimate control of these schools lies with UNHCR. However, it should be noted that the Sudanese Ministry of Education oversees these schools whose day to day teaching and administrative tasks are performed by Eritrean refugee teachers and administrators. Both schools use English as the medium of instruction. They teach Maths, History, Geography, Biology, Chemistry, Physics, and special Arabic, all of which suggests a very academic type of tuition.

Since its establishment in 1977, about twenty graduates from the Higher Secondary School have enrolled in uni-

versities in the Sudan, North Africa, the Middle East, Europe and the USA. A good number of school leavers have also been employed by non-governmental organisations in various refugee camps. For refugee schools without proper buildings and run by refugee teachers, this is no mean achievement. They show what refugees can do for themselves given the opportunity.

The number of teachers in both the intermediate and higher secondary schools rose from twelve in 1977 to thirty in 1986. With the exception of four English Language teachers, all the staff were Eritrean. The academic qualifications of staff in both schools ranged from the completion of two or more years of higher education to the possession of university degrees. Their teaching experience ranged from three to over twenty-five years. Despite these impressive qualifications, my discussions with the Head, the Deputy Head, staff and students left me with the impression that all is not well in these two schools.

Two major areas of concern were the quick turnover of teachers and anxiety about the future of the secondary school. The first is mainly due to the fact that salaries are too low to cover high rents and the need to support large numbers of dependents. This, coupled with the harsh reality of inflation and the inability of staff to supplement their incomes by teaching in the evenings, has led many

teachers to leave their jobs whenever opportunities avail themselves. Added to this is the absence of in-service courses which many felt deprived them of 'giving their best' as professional teachers.

Anxiety about the future of the school is of great concern not only to refugee students and teachers, but also to refugee parents whose children do not go to UNHCR schools. The reasons for this were: UNHCR's insistence on reducing the number of grade 10 scholars from 116 in 1985 to 50 in 1986; its decision to eliminate the maintenance budget unexpectedly and without explanation; its unwillingness to provide a library service to the school; and its refusal to erect a separate school building for refugees. Understandably this has led to the fear that UNHCR is about to phase out the sole higher secondary school open to refugees. It is hardly surprising that the refugees interpret UNHCR's decision to limit the number of scholars as a measure of the world's neglect of the Eritrean case and cause.

Following discussions with Eritrean refugees of various religious and political persuasions, it became clear that the refugees are never fully consulted in educational agreements. Their opinions, fears and aspirations are by and large ignored. Added to this, the fact that Sudanese schools are invariably filled to capacity and that ERA and non-ERA schools had to refuse admission to thousands of school-aged children, strongly suggests that the provision of education is nowhere near meeting the refugees' demand.

#### **Identification of some educational problems and needs**

I identified five major areas of difficulty for the ERA-run schools. These were a) inappropriate school buildings and shortage of classrooms; b) shortage of educational furniture and equipment; c) lack of references, text books and basic teaching aids; d) shortage of trained qualified teachers; and e) the problem of integrating educational theories with practice. These constraints are capable of affecting the overall efficiency and effectiveness of the teaching and learning processes in any school system. The negative impact is high as the school system is run by refugees for refugees, all suffering from inbuilt uncertainty and meagre socio-economic conditions.

#### **Curricula Problems and Needs**

The complexity of the interrelationships between the curriculum and the official statement of goals, the structure of the education system, the time-table, the medium of instruction and even the type of examinations undertaken, is obvious to many educators. There is the difficulty of maintaining harmony between quality and quantity, between theory and practice, and between the vocational and academic components of a curriculum. Also there is the potential dichotomy between bold educational objectives (e.g. education for production or self-reliance) and the tendency to allocate a minor place to agriculture. These problems affect the curricula of both ERA and

non-ERA sponsored schools and the following are broad areas of need.

First, ERA's move towards making the curriculum vocation-oriented is most seriously hampered by lack of financial, material, and even manpower resources. Second, there is the need to strengthen the Curriculum Development Research Centre. Third, members of this Centre need to be offered regular in-service courses, locally or abroad, on the methods of curriculum design and relevant assessment. Fourth, if the curriculum is to reflect the needs and aspirations of Eritrean refugees in the Sudan and in the liberated areas, then they must be consulted and involved. ERA must listen and talk to the refugees. Finally there is the need to standardise the syllabuses in the Eritrean refugee schools in the Sudan.

#### **Shortage of good TEFL volunteer teachers**

Owing to the importance of the English language in the curriculum of refugee schools and given the acute shortage of Eritreans who have specialised in this field, plus the rather outdated approach currently followed, the need to obtain a regular supply of volunteers whose mother tongue is English and who are well trained in TEFL teaching is imperative. For the recruitment and perhaps selection of these teachers, ERA needs the assistance of WUS and other donor agencies.

#### **Teaching methods and needs**

I was very impressed by the level of commitment of most of the ERA teachers that I observed. In spite of all the difficulties, these teachers maintained good discipline and executed well-prepared lesson plans although talk-and-chalk method was the commonest teaching method. A major factor for the teachers' failure to experiment with what is known as the 'discovery method' is the acute shortage of teaching materials. A second factor was the low skills and low self-confidence particularly of the Eritrean voluntary teachers and those with less teaching experience. A third factor may be due to the negative impact of examinations. These, and other factors, have led teachers to devote a substantial proportion of their lesson periods to note-giving.

#### **Teacher Training courses and needs**

Training teachers requires expertise, financial resources, time, peace and continuity. These are all commodities that ERA does not have. Nevertheless, ERA has embarked on intensive in-service training courses.

ERA organises in-service courses for teachers during the long vacation (July - September). These courses are designed to assist those with no professional training and to improve the competence (professional and academic) of those who have had some training. These summer courses are complemented by monthly meetings held by the teaching staff to discuss issues such as pedagogy and the assessment of pupils' needs. ERA's efforts to upgrade the academic and professional standards of its teaching force is commendable, but, as ERA would be the first to admit,



there is still plenty of room for improvement. For instance, in-service courses could run throughout the year instead of waiting until the long vacation, workshops could be organised to assist staff in the teaching of subjects such as music, arts and crafts and English.

In the near future, ERA is expected to set up a teacher training centre on a model scale. If funds were forthcoming, this move would go some way towards relieving the acute shortage of trained teachers. What should not be left to chance is the launching of a teacher training programme without an adequate feasibility study and without recognition of the limitations that insufficient material and human resources can impose.

#### **What is refugee education?**

Is education a means of assisting the refugees to assimilate into Sudanese society or a device for helping them preserve their own cultural identity? This is, without doubt, the most complicated educational problem concerning refugee education. Any discussion on refugee education is bound to be clouded by emotive terms such as acculturation, integration, assimilation, cultural identity, mother tongue teaching, separate or common curriculum and ethnicity. In spite of their low status as refugees, or perhaps because of it, many of those to whom I spoke have an unequivocal view of the aims of education. The primary aims were: a) to equip the refugees with skills, knowledge and attitudes; b) to earn a living; c) to regain their lost dignity; d) to prepare them for the eventual return to their homeland. In view of the fact that the educational system in Sudan is different to the one the refugees left behind, many express the fear that the former may be inadequate to meet their children's needs, in particular in the teaching of Eritrean history and geography and the introduction of remedial Arabic or Arabic as a second language courses for Tigrigna-speaking refugees.

To many Sudanese, daring to raise the above doubts may be tantamount to heresy by the 'ungrateful, ethnocentric refugees'. To others a separate Eritrean curriculum and/or bilingual education may itself prove a stumbling block in the developmental process of the refugees themselves. But, to a third group of Sudanese – experienced educators and keen students of human behaviour – the refugees' desire for mother tongue teaching and for designing their own curriculum has very little to do with ingratitude or objection to being integrated into mainstream society. This last view points to allowing refugees to run their schools in ways that do not conflict with the rights of the majority society and may enable refugees to function in at least two social worlds: their own ethnic community and the larger host society. It also reinforces the notion that education becomes significant for refugees essentially when it is designed *by* rather than *for* them.

#### **Concluding remarks and recommendations**

If we are to stop robbing refugees of confidence in themselves, and if we are to make some inroads into the complex constraints of refugee education, then we should consider the following steps.

First, UNHCR in consultation with the Commissioner for Refugees (COR) should prepare long and short term policies on refugee education and make these available to WUS and refugee-based organisations such as ERA and other donor agencies. Second, UNHCR, COR and refugee-based agencies should involve refugees in educational decision-making. Finally, donor agencies such as BANDAID and other humanitarian organisations should be persuaded to provide financial assistance on a regular basis for educational purposes as, without education, their long term development schemes are bound to fail.

**Teame Mebrahtu**

*Department of Education, Bristol University, Bristol, UK.*

#### **RSP Research**

Rosemary Preston is preparing a proposal for research: 'An analysis of educational provision to refugees in camps in Thailand, Central America and Pakistan'. The comparative study aims to analyse the conditions affecting the timing, mode and effectiveness of educational assistance to refugees or asylum seekers in temporary camp settlements; and its implications for development.

#### **Documentation Centre**

RSP has a comprehensive collection of documentation from all parts of the world and aims to make this resource as exhaustive as possible. It is widely consulted by scholars and practitioners. We would like to suggest that writers send copies of their publications and reports for inclusion

in this collection which has been built up through the goodwill of all those concerned with the Programme.

RSP has a highly specialised international mailing list of some 3000 academics, UN and NGO practitioners, government officials and members of the general public who purchase our publications. If you are interested in having information concerning your publication(s) included in one of our mailings, sent out in January, April, and October, please write to the RSP Deputy Director indicating the mailing in which you would like your publicity to be included. RSP charges 12 pence per address and includes no more than two flyers in any one mailing. If you wish to place an advertisement in *The Journal of Refugee Studies*, please contact the publisher, Oxford University Press, Oxford, directly.

## HIGHER EDUCATION FOR NAMIBIANS IN BRITAIN

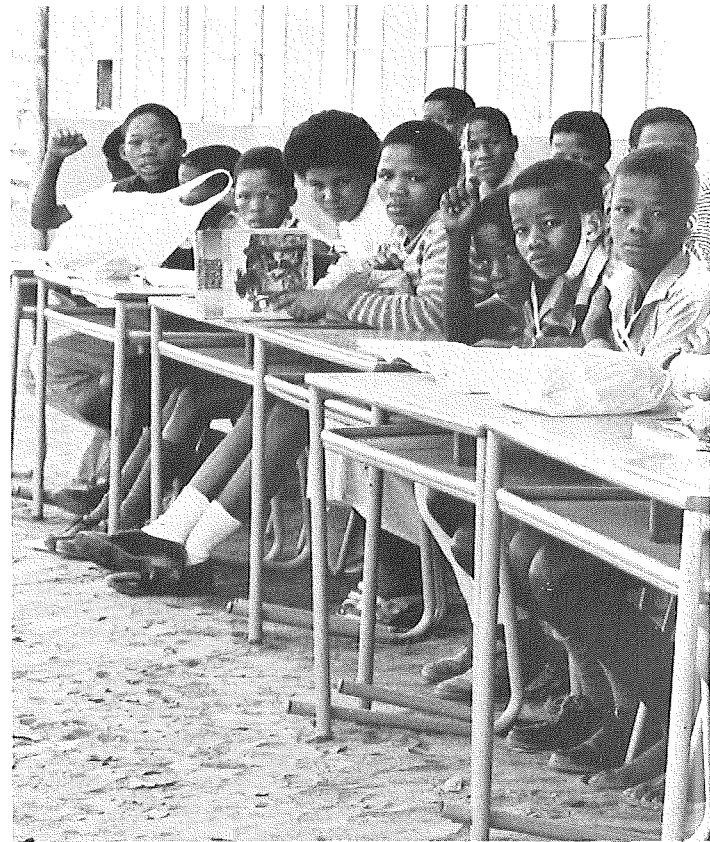
The illegal military occupation of Namibia by South Africa, and the repression that is required to maintain this, has long been a subject of international concern. The potential implementation of UN Resolution 435 and resulting independence brings to the fore questions about how far Namibians in exile and within the country have been able to prepare for power. Various international organisations and concerned bodies have been providing scholarships for study overseas. These were reviewed in part in Network No. 2, along with the distance-learning materials that have been developed by the Namibian Extension Unit for the approximately 75,000 refugees in Angola and Zambia.

This contribution focuses upon the stumbling blocks faced by Namibians studying overseas. These constraints are largely created by the background political/educational situation within Namibia. Resources need to be allocated to address these constraints to enable the scholars to fulfil their potential. This discussion concentrates on the situation of Namibians in Britain. It will be clear that these problems are similar in nature and extent to those of many other refugee and exiled groups, both in Britain and in other countries. It is hoped that this contribution will open up a more general debate about the role of higher educational opportunities for refugees and how best they may be provided.

### **The Low Level of Existing Educational Opportunity in Namibia**

Namibians suffer under the burden of 'Bantu Education' heritage. Whilst compulsory, free and high standard secondary education is provided for whites, Africans face an impoverished system. There are two options for blacks at secondary level. In the state system the fees are relatively low, but the examined curriculum is basically restricted to such subjects as Afrikaans, English, vernacular, history and bible studies. Needless to say the history is that of the Afrikaaner pioneers, and the Bible studies hardly liberation theology! It is only very recently that the struggle for the right to be taught in English (rather than Afrikaans) has been won, but schools still have to opt specially for this. White students follow a normal range of subjects including maths and sciences with better qualified teachers and more equipment at their disposal.

It is in the context of this restricted state education for blacks that private, church-run schools have struggled to develop an alternative. These schools mostly use English, though some combine this with Afrikaans. The schools aim at Cambridge Overseas examinations or other non-South African syllabuses, in an attempt to improve both the curriculum and to link the students into the international system and that of independent African neighbours. Mathematics has been introduced, but the shortage of teachers for science is desperate. These schools are unsupported by the state and are thus fee paying. Nevertheless the fees are held remarkably low. However the fees are higher than in the government sector, and many parents struggle to meet even state school fees.



**Bersheba Independent School: the children were dispersed with**

Not surprisingly, the government is hostile to the independent schools, and is undertaking to starve them of teachers. Salaries in the government sector are several fold those in the church schools and other inducements such as interest-free loans are also provided. Some teachers transfer from church to state schools to meet their family obligations. Yet the independent schools still manage to keep staff due to the high level of politicisation and commitment of so many Namibians. In most areas, state school facilities are poor, and parents often have to build classrooms. However, where independent schools are successfully established, the government has frequently invested large sums in establishing plush new state schools nearby to try to lure the children away.

The South African Interim Government has been anxious to increase teacher training for school leavers. Although the training course is full of reference to concepts like pedagogy and theories of teaching, in practice it is a traditionalist course and does not break out of the cycle of low teaching skills and low pupil achievement.

The South African Standard 10 school leaving certificate can be of Higher or Lower grade. The higher grade is considered 'metric equivalent' facilitating entrance into South African universities. More recently the Windhoek Academy has been 'up-graded' to so-called university standard, and is open to blacks. Neither the teacher training college nor the Academy offer the expertise to reach



Photograph by Chris Johnson.

tear gas at the opening ceremony.

the standards expected in British universities. In practice higher education opportunities for blacks are extremely limited within this system.

#### **The Problems of Education Overseas**

The lack of opportunities within Namibia puts the onus on overseas training. The international community has provided a number of scholarship schemes. The competition for these overseas scholarships is immense, and the students are typically very bright and committed. Many scholars have made enormous achievements on these scholarships, nevertheless disappointing results overseas have also been common.

Namibians have first to try to upgrade their school leaving certificates so as to enable them to enter higher education. In the United Kingdom this usually entails taking 'A' levels. However the failure rate for Namibians in the UK has been around 90% per subject. Apart from the personal tragedy involved, this high failure rate does not encourage continued funding to the project. The high failure rate has its root in the educational system in Namibia. In addition to the narrow range of subjects and low level of teacher skills, Namibians have to adjust to different methods of learning from the rote learning to which they have been accustomed. They lack critical skills and experience of class participation. Alternative avenues to develop these study skills are being explored for students coming to Britain.

Funding institutions are now putting more money into access courses. These are of a B-Tec nature, which are more skill-related and orientated to the world of work. They can then provide a foundation for OND, HND diploma courses, which, when appropriate, can lead on to degrees. This means that six to seven years may be required to build up to a degree. This is, of course, expensive and superficially appears not very cost-effective. However some of the scholarship agencies are now convinced that such long-term personal backing will ultimately produce the best results.

In common with other students, Namibians often face further difficulties with life overseas. No matter how strong their commitment and formal preparation they are rarely ready for the realities of life in the UK. British unfriendliness, the climate, the food, the pace of activity, and the complexity and difference of everyday life, all take their toll. More attention should be given by funders to providing induction into UK life and to subsequent support. Money is also always a problem. Grant givers often pare down grants to a minimum so as to fund more people and perhaps do not have enough flexibility. Scholars may have to stretch their grant to support people at home. Some try to support a partner and even children on one grant.

Within the UK not all Namibians have felt able to meet and support each other. In common with many other

groups they are somewhat divided on political lines. There can be suspicion between refugees and those who have come direct from Namibia, due to the fear of South African infiltrators. Different refugee groups and political organisations can be distrustful of one another, or fear that they will be questioned by their political backers for fraternizing with other factions. These factors can increase isolation.

However further problems of 'integration' can arise at the end of study about going 'home'. For refugee students 'home' is often spartan camp conditions in a neighbouring African country. Some feel that their skills can not be usefully employed and rewarded in these conditions. Naturally SWAPO is anxious to use their skills for the development of camp institutions. In theory those with skills that cannot be used and developed within the camps are sent to work in other African territories. As only a tiny fraction of the refugees have the UK as a first country of asylum they are forced to leave Britain, unless they can find further educational opportunities. Namibians who have come direct to the UK often have not been able to view favourably a return to living under South African occupation, and have experienced prejudice against their British qualifications in seeking work. Despite these problems most of the scholars have enthusiastically thrown themselves back into the struggle in Namibia or in exile in other African countries.

#### **The Role of the Colin Winter Centre**

The Colin Winter Centre for Namibia is one example of a charity aimed specifically at helping Namibians. It was set up in Oxford in 1985 to support development projects within Namibia, education in independent schools in Namibia and Namibian students in Britain. Colin Winter was the Anglican Bishop of Namibia from 1968-1981. After his deportation for supporting the liberation

struggle (in 1972) he continued his work for Namibia in London and Oxford until his tragic death in 1981. The Centre's donors have included several major British charities and some from Scandinavia. Private donations have also been critically important. The Centre has one staff member and a part-time Director.

The Centre receives applications from Namibians seeking scholarships and educational advice from both inside and outside the country, and is able to then present these to appropriate donors. Most students are placed within the UK, but some have also been supported further afield in Zimbabwe and Germany. It offers no scholarships of its own. If there are readers aware of scholarship sources that are not already in touch with the Centre the information would be very gratefully received. There is a superb selection of applicants this year at the Colin Winter Centre which have yet to receive funding.

The Centre has given considerable emphasis to providing personal support for Namibians in Britain. This includes emergency accommodation in the Centre in Oxford. Small financial grants to help people in particular difficulty can also be dispensed, as well as practical advice of all kinds. Surely this kind of advice and counselling in times of need is essential for effective assistance.

Should anyone wish to contact them, the address for the Centre is:

*Colin Winter Centre  
9, Cowley Rd  
Oxford OX4 1HP  
Tel. (0865) 249977*

*(Our thanks go to Amanda Macfarlane, Director, Colin Winter Centre, for educational information)*

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## **THE ROLE OF DRAMA IN REFUGEE EDUCATION AND DEVELOPMENT**

### **The Nyangombe Refugee Camp Community Theatre Workshop for Mozambicans in Zimbabwe**

In August 1988 an experimental community drama workshop was held in Nyangombe camp for Mozambican refugees in Zimbabwe. Conceived by the Refugee Service and the Communications Department of the Inter-Regional Member Bishops of Southern Africa (IMBISA), the project was implemented in co-operation with the Ministry of Education and Commissioner of Refugees.

Theatre was conceived as meeting multiple objectives within the camp setting. Not only could it tap creative talent and provide entertainment, it was felt that theatre could meet psychological needs and contribute to the development of 'community'. An additional role would be a method of teaching to facilitate some development and

relief activities in the camp, such as primary health care and literacy.

Theatre was seen as an unusually powerful medium of bringing together people of different social standing and enable them to participate as equals. Dance drama was emphasised because of the way in which it could draw on 'traditional culture' and past experience.

The workshop focused on the development of drama skills and organisation as well as providing actual entertainment. A festival was held on the last day of the workshop, which was extremely popular. The play most appreciated depicted ordinary camp life, calling for responsibility and work, cleanliness and care.



People have continued these dramas on a weekly basis, and we believe that further locally-organized festivals have occurred. Funding for a further ten workshops is in the pipeline for IMBISA.

Some weeks after the workshop, Miss Kasere, the camp coordinator of the drama activities, organized an evaluation. Twenty-three representatives were gathered together, and this increased to over thirty during the discussions. The response was so full of praise that it was difficult to get criticism and suggestions for improvements in future ventures. Things 'that made one feel happy that are remembered today' included 'positive memories of home', salutary 'reflection of the situation we are in', and a feeling that 'children will learn through drama why we are here and why they have not been born at home'. With regard to the method, people liked 'story telling' as a means, and wanted more 'traditional plays from Mozambique', 'about life in the camp' and also 'Bible stories'. They wished to use ChiNyungwe as vernacular, which no doubt reflects the interaction of complex factors concerning the national value of Portuguese, and the way in which its use tended to exclude those less fluent in it. Problems included difficulties in acting scenes of intimacy. Organizers were advised to be more sensitive to what is embarrassing in another culture. There was also no place to practise except the school rooms out of hours, and too many people came to watch rehearsals when they were in the open air.

There were interesting responses to the question 'is anything different in the camp as a result of the workshop'? 'Ten young men had been strongly motivated to return home to join Frelimo in order to help their country towards a solution'. 'Reflection on the plays afterwards led people to question whether they should not all return home, such a strong impression had been made'. They argued that 'people now understand a little better that they themselves are responsible for the quality of life in the camp'. Apparently 'other camps had heard about the workshop and wanted to have them too'.

The initiative at Nyangombe is probably not unique and we would invite comments and comparative experiences. Drama, dance and music are a powerful tool for creating community. There is now a body of experience in 'development' that can also be drawn upon, for example Green Deserts work with puppet shows in the Sudan. Art can contribute towards making people feel more rounded human beings, and can help them deal with their conflicting emotions and experiences. Furthermore, as a number of refugee groups have illustrated, these activities can make a significant contribution to nation building. Certainly such activities point to ways in which refugee 'relief' can move beyond a purely 'physiological needs' approach.

*This account is based upon internal IMBISA documentation and a telephone call with Fr. Timmermans in Harare.*

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## PROBLEMS WITH HIGHER EDUCATION FOR AFRICAN REFUGEES: LESSONS FROM A PERSONAL EXPERIENCE

This case of a Ugandan refugee 'stranded' in his scholarship in a third country illustrates clearly some of the range of problems faced in the field of refugee education. The following summary of his situation and extracts from his letters should hopefully initiate heated debate! We welcome the chance to debate such issues drawn from the personal experiences of refugees.

The student graduated from the Lutaya Senior Secondary School built by refugee students in the southern Sudan. He accepted a place at Juba University in the department of Natural Resources, but dropped it to take a UNHCR scholarship in computer science in a Western Asian country. He took the offer as computing was 'in line with my professional career', and (no doubt) because third countries offer more opportunity. Unfortunately due to no fault of his own he arrived late, and found that the course in which he was enrolled was taught in Arabic, which he did not speak. He writes that his sponsor, UNHCR, knew that the course was to be in Arabic but had failed to inform him. According to his letter, his plea to transfer to a university was refused because he arrived too late but he was transferred to a secretarial college.

The American University in that country offered him a place, but he claims UNHCR stated that this was too expensive. Instead he arranged to do an Electronics and Computers course in another city. Though accepted by the school, and the fees apparently were within the allotted budget, the UNHCR Representative refused to give approval and he was forced to remain at the secretarial college.

We have a copy of the letter of complaint he sent to UNHCR at the end of last year:

'I wouldn't have suffered harsh conditions, without proper text books and apparatus, doing sciences only to end up as a secretary, otherwise a typist . . . What [is] the use of filling forms prior to exams [about] personal interests and talent? It is like putting an aspiring law student in a garage . . . If I have made a mistake, it's that of my being a refugee'.

He then goes on to request an:

'...amenable solution [such as] joining that Electronics

and Computer course, or any other university where I can put into practise what little I learnt in sciences.'

In January this year he wrote again to a friend about his plight and that of two other colleagues:

'I did apply to some organisations for scholarship assistance. Some have replied but without anything fruitful . . . In the [local] UNHCR Branch Office, the official to whom we gave our certificates said that if we can convince the UNHCR Representative, we can even join the Arab Maritime Transport Academy in February 1989. But it is impossible to move the Representative, especially without foreign backing.

We are all three here victims of the same thing. Very often we think the possible reason of the Representative's refusal is that he thinks we are blacks coming from one of Africa's worst jungles where knowledge of Electronics and Computer Sciences is not applicable. We are preparing to write him a letter. Whether or not the letter will cost us our lives or status is not known.

I am filled with shame when I think of my letters all being hand written, though I take typing lessons. I find myself paying more attention to how the machine works than to what it does. At times before starting [a lesson] I vow never to look at the inner parts of the machine, but concentrate on the keyboard. But all the

same after a few minutes I find myself doing the same mistake.'

The letter only provides partial information and from one point of view. It does, however, provide an opportunity to draw attention to many important areas of conflict in the provision of higher education to African refugees. There is so often a lack of trust between the major donors and the refugees. This is perhaps rooted in the way in which funders and outsider contacts dictate scholarship allocation. Often this outside support and funding reflects political interests or bureaucratic rigidity and there is too little concern with the needs of the individuals involved. Definitions of what is 'appropriate training' for Africans can frustrate the actual skills and aptitudes of African scholars as individuals. Indeed such delineations also threaten to maintain the international inequality in key skill areas. This letter draws attention to the sense of vulnerability and marginality felt by refugees about critically questioning the decisions being made by others about their future. Other cases of refugee students leaving Juba University also point to the need for more counselling of refugees about educational decisions. We recommend to all readers an article by Hugh Pilkington, 'Higher Education of Refugees in Africa: Suggestions', in *Refugee Issues*, Vol. 3, No. 1, November 1986. It can be ordered from RSP at £2.00.

*(An article by Kim Bush on the Lutaya School will be published in our next RPN newsletter.)*

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## NOT SO POLES APART

The following was sent to RPN in response to Rosemary Preston's article 'Poles Apart' published in RPN 3. It addressed the issue of cultural differences between trainee teachers and their trainers.

This is not a new phenomenon, nor is it confined to refugee situations. I myself, a Briton, was trained in Uganda by a mixture of Ugandan, Kenyan and British staff.

I have trained teachers in Sudan and in Ghana where the phenomenon of the 'drain' of experienced teachers is well known in the national school system. It is frightening how quickly a qualified teaching service can be replaced by an unqualified one.

Ms Preston has observed that the 'preferred method of teaching [in UNBRO camps] is by rote'. Yes, but it is *always* the preferred method of teachers who lack confidence - in the West as well as in the third world.

The purpose of a teacher's work is to produce a change. The teacher does not obtain his/her style solely from the children's expectations. In Africa it has long been accepted that the school is the place where children are

encouraged to question, even if it is not the cultural norm at home.

There is also, I think, confusion between formality to the teacher and a dull teaching programme. I have watched many successful lessons where the teacher has had the full respect required by society (which in Africa can be very strong) and gives a lively, interesting lesson. Generally speaking the children's respect for such a teacher grows and one of the biggest difficulties in training is to convince the teacher that this is precisely where she will get the respect she requires.

I find it alarming that in the UNBRO camps 'the trainers do not observe their students perform as teachers'. Surely this is impossible? At least there should be peer-group and micro-teaching.

Finally, I must take issue with the statement that 'no information is available about ways in which strategies might change to improve training'. There is a wealth of published material on this and, of course, this is what training colleges hope to do every working day.

**Barry Sesnan**  
*Director*  
*Sudan Open Learning Unit*

# RESPONDING TO THE CURRENT KURDISH REFUGEE EMERGENCY

## Editorial Comment

In order to increase public knowledge of refugee situations, the Refugee Studies Programme organises day workshops, sometimes at short notice, on issues of immediate importance. In November such a workshop was organised on the situation of the Kurds in Iraq and Turkey. Because Turkey has resisted the involvement of international agencies, there are few sources of reliable information on the situation which has given rise to their flight, or on conditions of the refugees in Turkey. Even when they are allowed opportunities to observe conditions, inter-governmental agencies are loth to jeopardise their relations with host and refugee-producing governments. Contradictory press coverage of the adequacy of the aid programme for those who had fled Iraq, undoubtedly increased the reluctance of several European governments to accept asylum seekers who travelled through Turkey, even those who were subsequently found to be suffering the effects of chemical warfare. Practitioners need to remain active in countering the political constraints on protection and assistance.

The RSP, together with the Working Party on Chemical and Biological Weapons, invited a group of internationally respected scientists and journalists to give reports on their first-hand experiences.

One of the points emphasised in the report which follows, of which practitioners should be aware, is the difficulty in

identifying and substantiating evidence of the use of chemical weapons, even when only a very short period of time has elapsed. Sadly, it may be increasingly necessary for practitioners to acquire these skills, as well as knowledge, of how to diagnose evidence of physical and psychological torture. An important opportunity to gain these skills can be had at an International Medical Congress on 'Detection and Examination of Human Rights Violations' to be held in Copenhagen from 4-7 September 1989. Details are available from:

*Medical Congress of Human Rights 1989*  
*c/o Amnesty International, Medical Group Office*  
*Frederiksborggade 1*  
*1360 Copenhagen K*  
*Denmark*  
*Tel: 45 1 11 89 29*

Also of relevance is a series of lectures to be given by Dr Mahjoub, University of Louvain, Belgium on 'The Psychological Consequences of Involuntary Migration and War on Children' from 25 May - 2 June 1989. For further information write to:

*Refugee Studies Programme*  
*Queen Elizabeth House*  
*21 St Giles, Oxford, OX1 3LA, UK*  
*Tel: 0865 270722*

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## A REPORT ON THE CURRENT KURDISH REFUGEE EMERGENCY

A one-day workshop on the Current Kurdish Refugee Emergency, convened by the Refugee Studies Programme and the Working Party on Chemical and Biological Weapons, was held on 9 November 1988. This collaboration reflects the conjunction of the two issues responsible for the current crisis. These issues are the use of chemical weaponry and the danger that the survival of an entire ethnic group is under threat. The information in this article is derived from statements made and discussed by participants at the workshop.

The Stark Commission of the US Senate which visited the area in mid-September 1988 states that 'Since 1984 Iraq has used chemical weapons on a large scale without paying any price in political or economic relations with other countries.' What has suddenly brought Iraq's use of chemical weapons into the forefront of western media coverage is the use of these weapons against a section of its own civilian population as part of a systematic policy to crush Kurdish cultural and ethnic identity. This is the first instance in history of the use of chemical weapons by a government against its own civilians. Kurdish peoples have been articulating their nationalist aspirations for a long time. As Anthony Hyman noted at the workshop, the recent exodus of Iraqi Kurds to Turkey is only one of a

number of forced migrations of Kurds which have taken place over recent years. It is the fact that this migration has been prompted by terror tactics involving poisonous gas that has served to catapult their plight into the political consciousness of the international community.

The Iraqi government has adopted a military policy to depopulate the Kurdish region. This involves the systematic destruction of villages and towns and the relocation of ethnic Kurds to new concentrated settlements where military control can be exercised. Hazhir Temourian, in *The Times*, likens this to the genocide practised by Hitler against the Jewish people. It is not the use of chemical weapons against a civilian population which makes their deployment deplorable, their use against a foreign enemy is to be no more condoned or tolerated. Likewise, it is not the use of chemical weapons as part of the systematic persecution of the Kurds by the Iraqis that makes that persecution reprehensible.

### **Geopolitical Constraints on Justice and Relief of Iraqi Kurds**

The refugee emergency of Iraqi Kurds in Turkey is complicated by various political factors. Turkey has its own sizeable Kurdish population and its treatment of, and

stance towards, the Iraqi Kurds has direct domestic policy implications. If Turkey accepts that Iraqi Kurds have legitimate nationalist aspirations there is an obvious risk of having to concede the same to its own Kurdish population.

Alexander Sternberg of the Association of Endangered Peoples, Göttingen, Germany, suggested that the arrival of the Iraqi Kurds had resulted in a strengthening of self-confidence of the Kurds in Turkey, and that their continued presence has served as a catalyst for the articulation of the Turkish Kurds' aspirations. Turkey does not officially recognise Kurds as an ethnic group, calling them Mountain Turks. On his visit to Turkey in September 1988, he noted that the emergency had served to subordinate tribal conflicts between different Kurdish factions resulting in a hitherto unknown unity. This unity was responsible for putting pressure on Turkish government institutions in the affected areas to respond quickly. There now exists hope for some liberalisation of Kurdish cultural rights in Turkey.

Turkey's response to the displacement of Iraqi Kurds is dictated by a number of political considerations. Turkey does not want to jeopardise its position of neutrality with regard to the Iran-Iraq war by open denunciation of the Iraqi policy. The Turkish authorities have also denied independent investigators access to those wounded in chemical attacks. Alexander Sternberg described a visit to a provisional camp set up near Chukurca where six or seven people, badly wounded by chemical weapons, were quickly removed by the Turkish authorities to a military hospital. Immediately after the August 1988 bombings, the Working Party on Chemical and Biological Weapons attempted to arrange an investigative visit for Alistair Hay, a chemical pathologist from Leeds University. The visit was thwarted by the Turkish Embassy in London. Turkey has vested political and economic interest in not providing the world with proof that Iraq has used chemical weapons. The Turks want to lay claim to a stake in the post Iran-Iraq war reconstruction market; Alexander Sternberg quoted a figure of \$375 million a year raised in oil royalties for the transit of Iraqi oil.

It is important to Turkey, for internal political reasons, and also to disarm European criticism of her record on human rights, that she is at least seen to behave properly towards the refugees. The contradictions and consequent frustrations of this situation were again echoed by many participants of the workshop. Turkey's sense of responsibility to support the refugees could offer the international community a handle upon which to press for access. Alexander Sternberg felt that it was time for humanitarian organisations to make a concerted effort to 'force their admission for humanitarian work in the area'. Philip Rudge of the European Consultation on Refugees and Exiles pointed out however, that in its desire to prevent the internationalisation of the issue, Turkey has even totally excluded the UN High Commissioner for Refugees. There is a great deal of information suggesting

that many of the Turkish provisions for the refugees are actually cosmetic. Indeed, a great deal of pressure has been put on the refugees to return to Iraq or go to Iran. Tim Kelsey of *The Independent* corroborated this by recounting rumours he had heard in Ankara about the Kurds' intentions to settle in Turkey (perceiving it as their own country) and the hostile reaction these rumours had evoked from the Turkish authorities.

Othman Ali of the Kurdish Students' Union described a sixteen-day visit to Kurdish refugees in Iran from 28 September. Kurds who had just come from Turkey said they had been beaten whilst staying in the camps: 'The youths were beaten so that the mothers would feel bad about it, and they would be forced to leave either for Iran, or go somewhere else.' He also described the reduction in ration distributions to Kurdish refugees in Turkish camps.

This emergency is compounded by the condition of the camps. Medical provisions are in short supply as are staple foods and essentials such as tents and blankets. To a large extent this situation is a consequence of the restricted operations of aid agencies and the fact that Turkish hospitality appears to be calculatedly superficial. Several first hand accounts of conditions within the camps were given at the workshop. Alexander Sternberg described the conditions in camps near Yuksekova which had been speedily set up in preparation for a visit by the BBC, various radio stations and German and Turkish television networks. The surrounding countryside was barren of trees and bushes: 'Within two days, in an area of 10 Kms around the camp, the women had collected everything, down to the last thistle.' There was only one senior medic with responsibility for 100,000 people. The food that Sternberg saw being distributed had been supplied by prosperous Kurds settled in Yuksekova; the Turkish Red Cross were selling things at normal prices. The provision of blankets was insufficient, death from gastro-enteritis, malnutrition and cold were frequent. Clare Pointon, a freelance journalist who visited camps in south-east Turkey, described scenes of piles of rotting rubbish, human excrement, effluent between tents and the Turkish officials denying the existence of a problem. The Turkish doctors with whom she spoke suggested that the conditions were the result of the Kurds' inability to use the facilities correctly. Quite clearly these refugees are suffering the most appalling conditions.

The historical and geopolitical context of the whole Kurdish question bodes ill for the future. Tim Kelsey remarked that 'Ever since the foundation of the new Middle East following the establishment of the Turkish Republic and the Treaty of Lausanne in 1923, which provided for the creation of Iraq, Syria and Saudi Arabia, the Kurds have been overlooked in the wider scheme of things.' Kurdish aspirations have been subordinated to other more powerful vested interests. Hajo Temourian drew attention to the power and influence wielded by economic considerations and deplored the fact that Tony Newton, the British Trade Minister, had been sent to Baghdad as part of a trade delegation to 'win a few more paltry millions of



pounds for British companies...'

A general feeling of reluctance on the part of western governments to condemn Iraq's use of chemical weapons was noted as linked to the fear of prompting the Iraqis to walk out of the Geneva peace talks with Iran. It was further suggested that western countries were not keen for too close an examination of their supply of military weaponry to Iraq. The Kurdish question seems likely to take second place to the Iran-Iraq peace talks, despite the appalling plight of the half million Kurdish refugees in Iran and Turkey.

Edward Mortimer of the *Financial Times* illustrated how the issue of sanctions, raised by the Senate in Washington, had got 'bogged down in Congressional manoeuvring and procedural argument.' In October 1988, a draft bill that would have resulted in the application of sanctions against Iraq, was agreed by the House of Representatives and the Senate. This legislation was written into the Tax Bill but removed at the last minute by the House of Representatives in a manoeuvre designed to persuade the Senate to include some other, unrelated, items as part of a legislative trade-off. Notwithstanding their strong support for sanctions against Iraq, the Senate was prepared to sacrifice this legislation in order to prevent the inclusion of these other items.

#### **The Problems with Establishing Proof of the Use of Chemical Weapons**

The consideration within the international community of the current Kurdish emergency and Kurdish nationalist aspirations in general has been consistently subordinated to other political issues. The resulting need to make the international community sit up and take notice makes the failure to establish incontrovertible documentary proof of Iraq's use of chemical weapons particularly frustrating. International law and the Geneva Convention mean that if proof is established considerable pressure can be brought to bear for the imposition of economic sanctions or other measures against Iraq.

The other tragedy attached to the failure to establish scientific proof is that it is quite clear that chemical weapons have indeed been used, and that Saddam Hussein 'has got away with it.' When the international community fails to respond and censure the use of chemical weapons in any context, then respect for Geneva protocol is undermined and this makes the use of such weapons more likely in future conflicts. Edward Mortimer noted that 'Among governments of the world there is a strong disposition to say the evidence isn't absolutely conclusive. If there's any room for doubt they can say it's not really scientifically collected, or has been gathered by non-scientific people.'

First hand accounts of Kurdish refugees exhibiting the symptoms characteristic of chemical weapons injuries are commonplace. There is also a film (made by Roberts and Wycombe Film-Makers) showing footage shot during chemical attacks on the villages in northern Iraq. It is

demoralising that in the legal context for mobilising retributory action against Iraq, this evidence is considered 'compelling', but not *conclusive*.

There are problems which make the gathering of scientific proof difficult in the present situation. Independent investigators have faced political difficulty in gaining access to those affected. The very nature of the weaponry itself poses problems. The Stark Commission report states 'Symptoms are hard to diagnose among lightly-injured survivors of the attacks and only the lightly-injured were able to make the rugged trek across mountains to Turkey. Moreover, the absence of certain physical evidence is more consistent with a chemical attack than with any other form of attack...' Beyond this, the evidence that Amnesty International submitted to the UN Sub-Commission on the Prevention of Discrimination and Protection of Minorities described the success of the Iraqi authorities in cleaning up the evidence, including the bulldozing of bodies.

Tim Kelsey illustrated another problem when he described how the refugees' accounts of what they had experienced had been influenced by media coverage to which they had access, so it became difficult to establish the validity of their accounts. Philip Rudge pointed out that these refugees had been subjected to calculated terror tactics. One should therefore not be surprised when terrified people make the strongest possible case for help; this might include lying but such distortions have to be put into context.

#### **Conclusion**

Possible means of action were suggested to bring pressure to bear within our own government, within the European community and within the international community; but the workshop did not close on an optimistic note. While the world procrastinates about its response to the Kurdish refugee emergency, the Kurdish people become ever more impatient. Increased relief and assistance to the refugees in Turkey are clearly vital, but fail to attack the fundamental issue. A people who feel they have no recourse to justice in the eyes of the international community, and whose welfare and aspirations have been consistently subordinated to more powerful interests, may conclude that guerilla attacks on westerners is the only course of action open to them that holds any prospect of prompting action by outsiders. Othman Ali of the Kurdish Students' Union stated at the workshop 'It is time to consider that these people may resort to something which will not be in the interest of peace and security in the world, especially in the western world'.

*Compiled by Brigitte Marshall  
Refugee Studies Programme*

*We would like to thank Janet Leatherby for transcribing the Kurdish Day workshop. The transcription is available for consultation at the Documentation Centre at RSP.*

# Poetry

## INGRATITUDE

I know what animals feel like  
that have freely roamed in the forest.  
Food may have been scarce,  
forest fire, flood and drought  
may have daily threatened their lives  
but, they breathed the air of freedom.

The animal lovers redeemed us  
from uncertainties and  
the violence of the forest.  
But now –  
We pace within 6'×10' rooms,  
wait for our regulated feed times,  
and time-tabled fresh air quotas.

These humans are so organised  
that every flap of wings or wag of tail  
is computerised.  
Instead of instinct, now machines dictate  
their every minute action.

**Sudha Coomarasamy**  
March 1986  
London, UK

*(Frustrated by the long delay in the sponsorship process)*

## BIENVENUE AUTOMNE

Warmth of the sun warmed  
then burnt.  
Tanned and grilled we closed our eyes  
Unaware autumn crept behind us.  
Now trees are shedding leaves –  
Golden, like the dreams of youth  
or  
like people shedding their suntanned skins  
we lose lustre and grow pale.  
Grow pale at the thought of the future –  
flurries, snow storms, boots and shovels,  
laws, legislations and rejections.  
Yet within us echoes  
the promise of Spring and Summer sun,  
Always this little voice of hope  
springs, warms and blooms –  
hurts, heals and grows  
this year and the next  
again and again without rest  
we bloom, fade and fall  
only to bloom again –  
ready for another fall.

**Sudha Coomarasamy**  
September 1987  
Montreal

*(Provoked by the new Immigration Bills – C55 and C84)*

Sudha Coomarasamy is a Sri Lankan Tamil refugee living in Canada. Like thousands of Tamil refugees, Sudha's life was shattered by the July 1983 massacre.

In 1983 Sudha gave birth to twins during her five week stay in a refugee camp. In April 1984 she left Sri Lanka, little knowing that it was a final goodbye, and has since lived in India and the United Kingdom before resettling in Canada. While in the UK she was sponsored by the Anglican Diocese of Montreal, Canada under the Convention Refugee Programme.

In Montreal Sudha has done research on the integration and adaptation of Sri Lankan refugee women to life in Montreal. Now living in Toronto, she continues to work with refugee groups. She has written many poems including a book of Tamil poems (August 1988) published by Tamil Progress Publications, Montreal, Canada. Sudha hopes to publish a collection of poems in English and French, in the near future.

# THE ROLE OF REFUGEE-BASED ORGANISATIONS IN REPATRIATION:

## Editor's Comments

Since the early 1980s, there has been great enthusiasm among donors for solving the 'refugee problem' through encouraging repatriation. More than one agreement has been made to repatriate people back to their country of origin where the government whose actions led to their flight is still in power. These programmes have received severe criticism from many quarters.

The exodus to Sudan, in 1984-5, of thousands of Tigrayans and their subsequent repatriation in 1986-7 – both movements organised by the Relief Society of Tigray, a refugee-based organisation – may provide an example of how voluntary repatriation could be supported by international donors. This case, however, suggests the importance of involving refugee organisations in any repatriation and subsequent rehabilitation exercise. It also highlights a major issue in international law and custom which most governments would prefer to play down.

Governments may have been able to shut their eyes to the enormity of suffering of civilians trapped behind military lines, but agencies are frequently confronted with enormous dilemmas about the supposed non-political nature of their humanitarian work. RPN does not pretend to provide answers to these questions, but it is believed that refugees and agency workers may have something to contribute to this important debate.

The Tigray case may represent a watershed. Recent pronouncements by the US government concerning its determination to provide material aid to people in southern Sudan, and the less-than-covert interventions by other governments through Kenya to the Sudan Peoples' Liberation Party (SLPA), suggest that adherence to the restrictions of international law, which would prevent aid from being directed through political organisations to the people within 'non-recognised entities', i.e. so-called liberated zones, may be dissolving.

In reading this report, it should be remembered that, had there been agreement among donors to provide food aid to people inside the territory held by the Tigray Peoples Liberation Front (TPLF), much of the exodus would probably not have been necessary in the first place. Many lives were lost because donor governments were loth to breach the legal principle of non-interference. Others would argue that donor support for the cross-border operation which permitted the refugees to return to Tigray and begin to rebuild their lives in their own territory, has only prolonged the civil war in Ethiopia. This report is prepared by REST, interpreting the experience from their perspective. At least three lessons can be drawn from this example: no assistance programme can adequately meet the long term needs of refugees; only refugees themselves can organise voluntary return and a programme of sustainable development; and wherever they assist, it is the responsibility of donors to *trust* the organisations which the people themselves trust.

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## REST'S REHABILITATION PROGRAMME FOR TIGRAYANS

### The Exodus

In 1984, huge columns of refugees from Tigray crossed the Sudanese-Ethiopian border at Wad Kowli and marched into the conscience of the international community through television screens and the world press. This revealed the extent of the crisis at the time and the failure of the relief strategies then being implemented.

Seasonal migration by farmers from the central highlands to the fertile areas of western Tigray and to eastern Sudan, is a long established response to harvest failure. By 1984, after four consecutive years of drought, the situation of the people of the central highlands had become critical. No grain could be saved for seeds, and tools, oxen, and household goods had been sold to raise cash to purchase food. But crisis became catastrophe with the failure of the harvest in western Tigray. This threw the entire region into dependence on outside grain. The overwhelming majority of Tigray's population of 4.5-5 million are farmers who live in areas under the administration of the Tigray Peoples Liberation Front (TPLF). The TPLF have been engaged in military struggle against the central government since 1975. Donor food aid was channelled through the regime in Addis Ababa, which meant relief

distribution was controlled by a regime essentially at war with the intended beneficiaries.

Internationally donated aid was used to lure famine victims to distribution centres in government controlled towns, from where some were forcibly resettled in south western Ethiopia. Many families were turned away empty handed from these centres when it became apparent that they came from areas under the administration of the TPLF. Men of military age were sometimes seized and press-ganged into the army.

The mass exodus to eastern Sudan was thus caused by the regime's use of famine as a 'weapon of war'. This is prohibited by Protocol 2 of the Geneva Convention to which Ethiopia is not a signatory. 'The direction in which starving Tigrayans walk to escape starvation has become a political act', observed a journalist as he described how many Tigrayans preferred the long, hazardous trek to Sudan rather than go to government centres (*International Herald Tribune* 18.12.84). As far as possible REST and TPLF tried to make the evacuation orderly, REST relief stations were set up along the 400 mile route to sustain the trekkers. Even so, many died en route and on 3 December

1984 a column of famine-stricken people nearing the Sudanese border was bombed by an Ethiopian fighter plane, killing fourteen and injuring forty.

In 1984, Sudan itself was suffering from famine. The Sudanese people, though renowned for their generosity and hospitality, were hardly in a position to host their two million refugees. Nevertheless, Sudan accepted and provided refuge to more than 200,000 Tigrayans who crossed the border at that time, which is something the people of Tigray are unlikely to forget.

### **The Desire to Return**

From the end of 1984, REST's fundraising appeals reflected the desire of the people to return home. In many cases heads of families had stayed on the land with assistance from REST, while the rest of the family trekked to Sudan. Despite the stabilising of the camp situation and the better organised international response, these families needed to be reunited. Life in the camps of Sudan was no alternative for people with a deep attachment to their land. For all the reports and studies on income-generating projects and self-sustainability, usually made by outsiders, the fact remains that only a tiny handful of settlements in Africa have ever achieved self-sufficiency. Good land in eastern Sudan is at a premium – those staying could realistically aspire to only seasonal employment in the vast rain-fed agricultural schemes of the area.

The desire to return was given added impetus by good reports of the early rains in February and March 1985. REST's requests for 1985 included rehabilitation assistance (seeds, tools and oxen) to 150,000 families living inside Tigray and to 50,000 refugee families who would be assisted to return. Emergency relief aid was also requested to keep these assisted people alive until the harvest was ready.

These repatriation plans were jeopardised by a major military offensive launched by the Addis regime in March 1985. Furthermore a disappointing response was received from the donor community which was traditionally more receptive to requests for relief than rehabilitation. Donors may find relief easier to account for than rehabilitation, especially when it is being implemented through a liberation movement in a war zone. Some donors did not accept the wisdom of the return at that time. By March 1985, only 6 per cent of the budget had been covered.

The wish of the people to return home had to be balanced against the risk of increasing the numbers of those in need inside Tigray. REST decided to focus on getting the farmers back to the land. The repatriation programme lasted until 1987; in 1986 70,000 Tigrayans were repatriated and in 1987 more than 20,000. Leaving families was a difficult choice for many and one which could only have been presented by an organisation to which people belonged and in which they had trust.

### **Repatriation, January to April 1987.**





Photograph by REST.

### **The Rehabilitation Programme**

Rehabilitation inputs for those returning were to have consisted of seeds, oxen, tools and food. But given the shortage in funding, most of those identified as eligible for assistance have not received all the inputs. REST decided to spread what little was available rather than seek to rehabilitate a very limited number. In addition to those returning from Sudan, people in Tigray needing assistance were identified at village level, through the 'baitos' or local councils.

'The process of targetting of assistance is in the hands of the villagers. Selection of beneficiaries is done democratically at village level. ARP (Agricultural Rehabilitation Programme) assistance reaches the poorest. The criterion of giving to 'active producers' is interpreted only so as to exclude the very old and disabled. Most ARP assistance is partial rather than full, and households are incrementally rehabilitated over a period of years. The village *baitos* are responsible for monitoring the use of ARP assistance. The current system of targetting cannot be improved: the systematic use of centralised information for targetting is unnecessary, nearly impossible and would undermine the strengths of the existing system.'\*

One of the strengths of RESTS's APR is that resources are allocated to the people known by villagers to be in real need and to be able to put them to productive use. A second strength is its involvement of local institutions in administration which strengthens genuine participation and local autonomy. Third, unlike many conventional rehabilitation programmes, where high capital input is used by outsiders to create novel, and usually technically and economically unsound agricultural schemes, the village-based system identifies and tackles the real constraints of the farmers.

Factors militating against ARP are both internal and external. Internal factors include quality of land, skills of farmers, cultural constraints (the large number of religious holidays), and the state of the internal economy with regard to markets, credit availability and opportunities for off-farm income-generating activities. External factors are the lack of funds and the military activities of the Addis regime. REST's ARP report for 1988 states: 'While REST is doing its best to implement the rehabilitation programme with assistance given by various humanitarian organisations, the Ethiopian government is purposefully intensifying its activities and attempting to dislocate the people through resettlement, forced conscription and destruction of development programmes.' Aerial bombardment has led to 45,000 people being displaced and destruction by both the airforce and ground troops has meant that many families have lost the inputs provided by the programme.

That the rehabilitation programme is continuing despite these constraints, is an achievement in itself. But the importance of ARP lies not only in providing people with the means to produce food in the short term, but as an essential component of the strategy for long term sustain-



able agricultural development. 'Side by side with the rehabilitation programme, the other agricultural development programmes such as extension, soil and water conservation, bull servicing, improvement of agricultural tools, and other food security programmes (small scale irrigation, horticultural seeds, cactus planting) are being implemented. These development programmes are taken as rehabilitation programmes, working towards self-sufficiency. To a large extent, the success of the rehabilitation programme is a prerequisite for the success of the development programmes and should be seen as a means to an end, enabling the farming population to remain on their land and start supporting themselves.' (ARP Report, REST 1989)

It has been difficult to identify precisely the numbers rehabilitated due to the multiple levels and ways in which rehabilitation has occurred, and repeated losses due to drought and war, etc. REST's ARP report states, 'One can generally assess that people who migrated to Sudan, [to] government-held towns, and were internally displaced, are now able to come back to their own villages and live on the land once more. Before rehabilitation this was not as likely.'

The true measure of success for REST's repatriation and rehabilitation programmes can be seen in that despite the war, Tigray is the only part of Ethiopia to which people are returning, whilst Ethiopia under the Derg remains the second largest source of refugees in the world. Nevertheless, continued war and drought finds REST estimating 1.1 million in this region will require some emergency assistance this year.

### Conclusion

REST's programme draws attention to the contribution of refugee-based organisations in repatriation and rehabilitation. Specifically, such organisations can much better identify recipients who are both in need of, and capable of utilising the resources expended in repatriation and rehabilitation. Second, in many cases the institutional capacity for local management is already in place. Finally, indigenous organisations, especially where they are rooted in farmer/village committees, are more likely to identify inputs that tackle the actual constraints of local people, than are those rehabilitation programmes devised by outsiders.

Prepared by the UK Support Committee of the Relief Society of Tigray

\* Quotations in this report are taken from the 'Evaluation of the Impact of the Agricultural Rehabilitation Programme, Tigray' prepared by Gerezhghier Bezebih of REST's Relief and Rehabilitation Commission and Alex de Waal for ACORD) at the end of last year.

*For further information on the work of REST, including a Bulletin put out by the UK Support Committee write to:*

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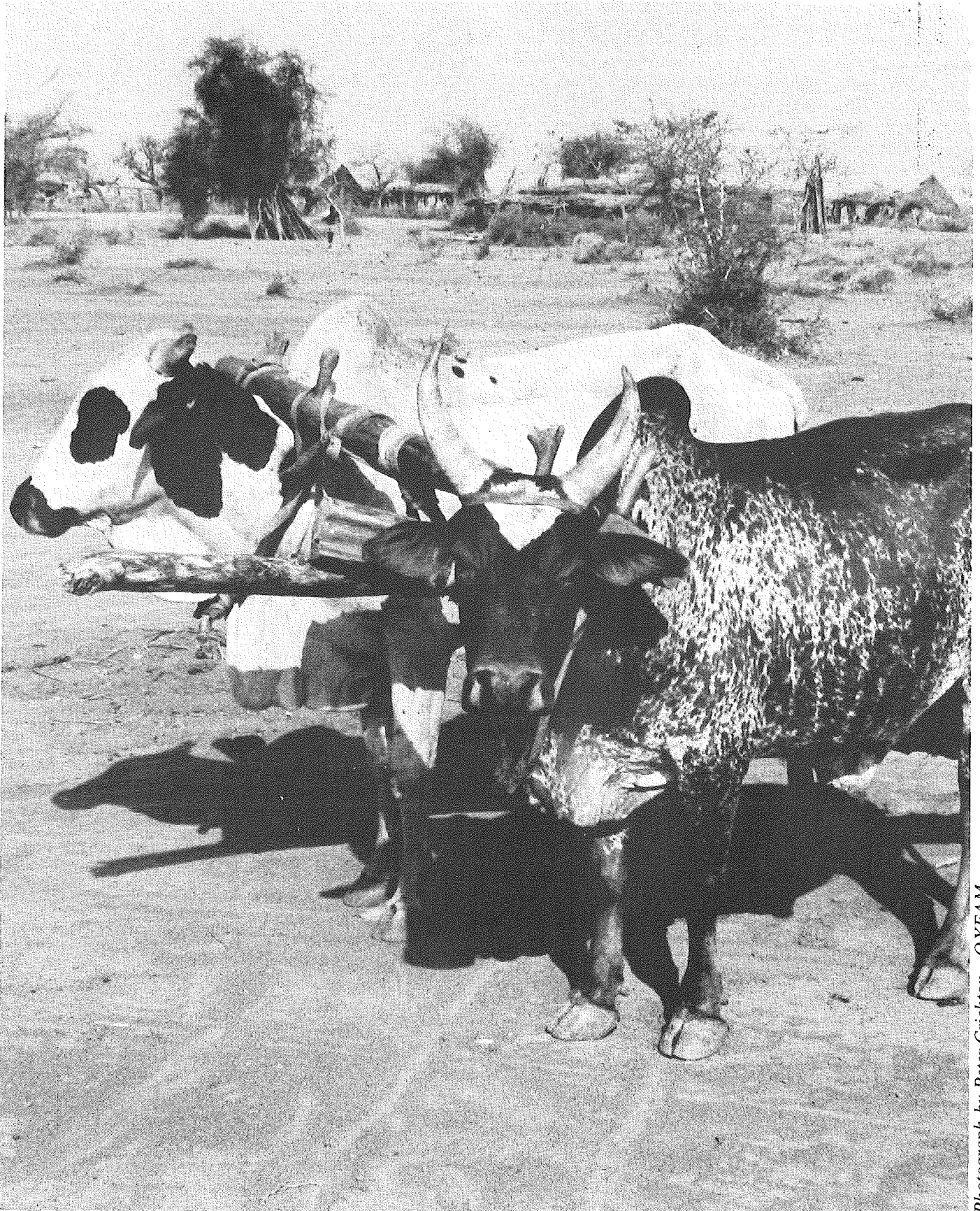
## CULTURE AND SURVIVAL: REVIEW OF SOME RECENT RESEARCH ON HMONG REFUGEES IN THE DIASPORA

### Overview

This review examines some recent reports on the Hmong which raise points of interest to practitioners working with refugees, particularly those from highland areas of South East-Asia:

1. Acceptance of an ethnic label such as 'Hmong' can obscure a variety of experience and values.
2. Refugees' recent experience is of political and military unrest, economic upheaval, flight and, frequently, camp life. This implies changes in values and skills. It means that assistance can not be orientated to a stereotypical conception of them as they were before flight.
3. Refugees are survivors. They have learned to cope with changing circumstances, and if they seem tradition-bound, the reasons will be found in their current situation.
4. During adaptation to new conditions, identity (eg. as 'Hmong'), becomes much more important than preserving a particular set of customs and values. People are much more likely to stress membership of a particular ethnic group in a third country than in their homeland.
5. Political realities encourage leaders to manipulate access to external resources as a means of creating and controlling a group of followers.
6. Conditions under which help is provided to refugees in camps or in countries of resettlement can contribute to ethnic stereotyping and role differentiation which come to dominate relationships between refugees and their helpers.
7. Attempts to disperse refugees to encourage integration and prevent ghetto formation may be countered by refugees themselves. They may prefer to live together, or be pressured into this by service provision, economic or political factors.
8. Women and girls may find themselves restricted by pressure on them to emphasise old values to ensure cultural continuity. They may be affected by the need for high fertility to make up for those who died in war

Oxen provided for rehabilitation of Tigrayans.



Photograph by Peter Crichton - OXFAM.

and flight. Attempts to facilitate the greater independence of women and girls may face great resistance.

### **Introduction**

Around 70,000 Hmong have been resettled in the West (85% in the USA) in the last decade. The label 'Hmong', like most ethnic labels hides great diversity. Hmong occupy hundreds of enclaves across South-East Asia spanning China, Vietnam, Thailand and Laos. Thailand now hosts early migrants from Laos, as well as more arrivals since 1975 who live in refugee camps. There are linguistic, political, economic and cultural differences between these groups. While over 80 per cent of the six million Hmong (Miao) live in China, the majority of Hmong refugees in the west are from Laos. Though they are so diverse, the Hmong themselves continue to stress a common identity. Their struggle to create and maintain this identity shapes their behaviour wherever they may be living, and needs to be understood by those who wish to deliver effective assistance.

### **The Hmong economy and society in South-East Asia and flight from Laos**

A common misconception is that the background of refugees can be understood by considering an idealised version of their lives prior to the process which generated them as refugees. In reality, the struggle and violence that create refugees and the conditions they face in flight and asylum markedly affect them. As it is forty years since the start of full-scale conflict in Indo-China it is only a minority of Hmong that remember an earlier life. The stereotype of closely-knit, traditionalist, richly cultured, peasant montagnards, plucked from the jungle and thrust into American life is highly misleading.

*The Hmong in Transition* (1986) contains a series of papers that show how Hmong historical experience affects adjustment in North America. The Hmong have a long history of being a migrant minority. The Hmong in Laos are relatively recent immigrants from China. Traditionally, Hmong have been dependent upon exchange relationships with lowlanders and other outsiders, particularly through commercial opium production. This was at the expense of food production, with Hmong purchasing rice from lowland peoples. Opium production may explain certain features of social organisation and Hmong mobility, since the poppy rapidly exhausts the soil. Competition to control the opium economy is one of the reasons for the continued war in the region over the last century. Opium was financing military programmes well before the involvement of the French and USA secret services in the war against the Viet Cong and Pathet Lao.

The Hmong have become less and less dependent upon agriculture since the early 1950s; and the exodus from Laos may therefore have a partially economic base (Cooper, 1986). The demands of the opium poppy on the soils, and the loss of productive forest land to *Imperata* grasslands through over-use led to land-pressure. It is not surprising that it is the people from the most ecologically

stressed areas that became most supportive of external powers. They exchanged military and political allegiance for aid, employment and external support for the particular faction in power. Groups most embroiled in the conflict on the side of the USA now constitute the bulk of the refugee population.

The war contributed directly to the shift away from farming. Rural populations were moved out of hill-farming areas into camp-like settlements under the Laos, French and American militaries, where they were supported. Large numbers of Hmong became mercenaries. So serious was mortality in adult men that by 1967-75 seventy per cent of the new military recruits were ten to sixteen years of age, and many of the remainder over forty five. Civilians also died. Half the Laos Hmong are thought to have lost their lives in the Indo-Chinese war. Such mortality made both agriculture and mercenary livelihood unsustainable and further drove Hmong to dependence on outside aid. It has been estimated that 100,000 people, around a third of the Laos Hmong, were dependent on such support in the 1960s and 1970s. With the Communist victory in 1975 and the end of this support the Hmong in camps were destitute. This probably combined with their well founded fear of reprisal to lead to their exodus. Two thirds of the Hmong nevertheless remained in Laos and these may be in the less environmentally stressed areas.

Hmong leadership has long been dependent upon external benefactors and military authorities. This was true in Laos in the decades prior to flight, and has continued in the Thai border camps and in the west. Hmong experience illustrates an important principle. Resettlement in third countries is not necessarily the watershed that it is often assumed to be (Smalley, 1986; Dunnigan, 1986).

Much of what is happening now is rooted in the dynamics of these earlier stages (Smalley, 1986). Of particular importance is the persistent effect of the life in Thai camps; in the United States, the behaviour of different groups of Hmong varies, according to the camp in which they stayed in Thailand. Very little thought has been given to the long term effects of how refugee camps are administrated. Again research points to the desirability of taking long term consequences into consideration in the design of camps and administrative systems.

### **Is there a Hmong culture?**

One of the rights of a refugee enshrined in the UN convention is the maintenance of 'culture'. Popular understandings of culture can confuse practitioners who work with refugees. A paradox for many who work with the Hmong (as probably is the case with other national groupings) is the way Hmong emphasise their identity, whilst it is difficult to perceive a distinctly Hmong 'culture'. Indeed their culture hardly distinguishes them from many other South Asians (Lee, 1986).

**Cultural change and identity maintenance in the diaspora**  
There is an array of attitudes towards culture and identity

changes among Hmong in USA. Some report the destruction of the Hmong value system and social organisation (interpreted as either a positive adaptation or a negative desocialisation); others see the Hmong becoming 'even more Hmong', strengthening their solidarity and values in the face of the threat of assimilation by the wider society. The few Hmong resettled in Australia find that maintenance of 'traditional culture' is impossible because of economic changes and the small number of people in each kin and clan group. Thus there is a case for active articulation of culture for directed transformation and adaptation (Lee, 1986).

Maintaining identity requires active effort, but Hmong, like other refugees and immigrants, seem able to change in ways that uphold identity and group solidarity. Hmong adaptation to the USA has to be understood in the context of their history as a migrant minority that has always been involved in changing relationships with the 'host' societies (Dunnigan, 1986). So-called novel behaviour in the USA is sometimes nothing other than the way Hmong have learned to behave in the past during periods when they were new immigrants.

Hmong have integrated in the States by using a strategy of inserting people into the host society to secure key alliances, as they have in Asian migrations in the past. These alliances are used by Hmong political leaders to gain access to resources that they then distribute in a process of building up patronage networks (Mutual Assistance Associations). Practitioners working with these MAAs have had to realise that they have wider agenda than simply helping people materially. Effective work with refugee-based organisations clearly requires that practitioners comprehend the socio-political processes occurring in the exiled group.

Hmong identity has developed in interaction with American hosts and donors in a manner that reinforces

stereotypes and dependence. Schein's (1987) discussion of how this happened could have important implications. She writes of how:

'Hmong saw economic security and social tolerance as linked to their elaboration of the dependent personality; members of the receiving society, by maintaining their parent-like cultural ascendancy, gained a stronger sense of self and also found a range of economic opportunities in social services and planning. American hosts derived from the presence of Hmong applicants a special vitality and experience of identity.' (Schein, 1987:96).

The distortions of stereotyped and unequal interaction leads to the development of 'mutual envy' whereby each party sees what Schein refers to as the stunted parts of their own affective life over-developed in the other group. Americans thus romanticise the 'simple traditionalism' of the Hmong. Some Hmong are drawn into reinforcing this by presenting themselves as dependents in a manner which they sense will make them more palatable to the American public. At the same time the resultant on-going experience of powerlessness clashes with their belief in themselves as resourceful survivors, and this leads to resentment to those assisting them. People who help refugees need to be aware that they are involved at a psycho-sociological level with the recipients of their services. Without such critical awareness the 'helping' can itself be counter-productive.

#### **Economic and social survival in the United States**

When South East Asian refugees arrived in the United States and Canada, they were settled in a scattered fashion right across the continent. This was in the belief that this would make for more rapid and better integration, and prevent the formation of ghettos. In subsequent years there has been considerable re-grouping by the refugees themselves. The extent of these relocations raises questions about the likely results of attempts to invest in

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controlled and scattered settlement with groups such as the Hmong. Indeed it demonstrates the degree to which such policies need to be made in the light of considerable thought about what constitutes the best form of 'integration'.

Monzel (1987) examines why the Hmong had so extensively relocated within the USA noting that such relocation had 'surprised and exasperated . . . sponsors and refugee support agencies'. The survey (27 interviews of the Denver-Boulder Hmong) suggested that the Hmong in that area were perhaps rather better off than elsewhere, and that their economic circumstances were improving. Relatively high levels of satisfaction were recorded using a simple survey instrument. Monzel argued that Hmong are less likely to move to other parts of the USA or back to Laos, than are those in other regions. Though noting kin relations and clan leaders as factors important for residential clustering, Monzel concluded that economic factors are in fact critical. In this small sample, the group that found it most difficult to adjust to life in the USA was found among the thirty to thirty-nine year olds, rather than the young or old, the groups previously receiving preferential assistance.

In a subsequent working paper Monzel (1988) reports on residential clustering in Syracuse. That study concludes that clustering is heavily influenced by social service and assistance agency provisioning. The reasons behind the siting of services by the agencies are incompletely documented, but appear to have been partly by default and partly because residents elsewhere objected to their presence. Again the study demonstrates the unexpected consequences of modes of assistance.

In the huge Hmong relocation into the Central Valley in California socio-psychological factors appear to have been much more important (Schein, 1987). By coming together, the Hmong made social life more attractive.

They could be together with other Hmong and were also able to restrict interaction as subordinates with American donors and patrons to discrete times and in ways patterned by Hmong institutions.

South East Asians have done remarkably well in North American schools, but this is generally not the case for the Hmong (Walker, 1988). Various constraints are faced by Hmong, some of which could be tackled by better service provision. Past family educational achievement, home academic environment, and continued poverty (ie. 'background'), are important. Formal education is still a relatively new experience for the Hmong; widespread education only became available in the military camps and refugee settlements of Laos and Thailand, where standards were low and few girls attended. Asian success has been partly attributed to unconstrained 'immigrant vigour', where there are numerous 'role models' of successful adults to inspire children. Hmong, especially girls, largely lack such role models. This has in no way dampened the determination of Hmong children, even if it has made success more problematic. Schools could more actively promote the involvement of parents and the Hmong community, as well as provide bicultural counselling for the children (Walker, 1988).

Hmong childrens' existing learning skills are not well suited to American classrooms (Walker, 1988). Teachers could take advantage of their other learning abilities if given better briefing. Hmong children do appear to work better in groups. The present low performance unfortunately leads to stereotyping of Hmong children's ability rather than to revision of teaching methods.

Hmong remain committed to high fertility because war losses mean population growth is seen as essential for their long term survival as a people (Walker, 1988). In Thailand refugee camps every baby boy was announced as a new soldier, and baby girl a nurse. Pressure on Hmong



girls to marry is also related to the desire of Hmong men to establish themselves socially (which requires marriage), and with a wife as young as possible. These factors can be related in turn to the continued emphasis on female roles as mothers which is compromising the girls' educational achievement. Hmong girls have the lowest age of marriage of all South East Asians, generally between 13 and 18 years old. This means they drop out from school or have to combine education with child rearing. Walker is one of the few researchers on the Hmong who have addressed the implications for women of the Hmong struggle to control their identity. Assistance to women aimed at increasing their independence from domestic roles may therefore bring conflict with wider Hmong values.

Walker concludes that the best explanation for low Hmong educational success rate is that:

'Hmong youngsters bring their cultural identity into the classroom in a way that no other literate Asian culture does. If educators understood this, they could begin to address specific Hmong vulnerabilities inside the school. As long as the survival of the Hmong is the highest priority . . . teachers, administrators and counsellors need to know who the Hmong are; without this awareness they will not be able to provide equal access to the school curriculum.' (Walker, 1988:49).

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## REVIEW

Keith Quincy (1988)

*Hmong: History of a People*

published by Eastern Washington University Press, Cheney, Washington 99004, USA. Price US\$12.95

Quincy's history belongs to a body of literature which can be read as an articulation of the Hmong's own interpretation of their history and identity. The stance of the book is one of open advocacy. For example the first chapter is an account of military campaigns and persecution of Hmong in ancient China which reads like the script to an epic war movie where valiant and honour-bound Hmong fight heroically against impossible odds and an evil enemy bent on their total obliteration. The style is so persuasive that one even finds excitement on reading of appalling deaths of Chinese conscripts. This is the tone throughout the book. It reflects Hmong ideology of their history as a series of irrational and unprovoked assaults on their very being; provoked only by the threat of their independence of identity.

Hmong History, as presented by Quincy, is a struggle between the forces of good and evil, where good is anything which promotes a 'true' Hmong identity, to the point that it involves their use as a tool by the US military. There are some accounts of conflicts between Hmong groups and 'classes', but generally he writes about the one faction deemed to have done the 'right' thing for the Hmong at a particular point in time. Economic and political processes behind the changing forms of relations within the region are virtually ignored, except for an excellent account of opium production. Perhaps the opium trade is so thoroughly explored in order to establish Hmong 'innocence' in the face of international and political economic forces. This means an objective Hmong history has yet to be written in which the changing political economy of South East Asia is used as a framework. Such an approach could explain the basis for regional and 'inter-ethnic' competition in the past, and demonstrate how the Hmong have been drawn into the tangled struggles of the Indo-Chinese war. These struggles were far beyond their control as a *people*, but as diverse groups and individuals, they were nevertheless actors who benefited as well as victims. In this they would be no more or less human than the rest of us. But it seems that on the whole the Hmong, like any other nation, feel a greater need to have a history which they can 'have much to be proud of' (1988: vii), and this they will certainly find in Quincy.

Ken Wilson

# REVIEWS

## *Refugees: A Primary School Resource (1988)*

Published by Save the Children, Mary Datchelor House, 17 Grove Lane, Camberwell, London SE5 8RD.

Price: £7.50 inc. p & p (£5.50 for bulk orders of over 5)

A teaching packet for introducing refugee studies in primary schools has been developed by Save the Children Fund (SCF). The idea behind such a programme arose from the need for an understanding of refugees by children at this level in the hope of generating a deeper understanding in later life. SCF are hoping that primary school teachers will co-operate with them in their search for the best approach for the implementation of such a subject.

The programme is presented as a single topic in a package containing nine sets of pictures, a collection of real-life stories of refugees, drawings by refugee children and other teaching aids. The most important part of the pack is the teacher's notes with guidelines on how to use the material, and descriptions of various games and how they can be played. The aim is to eliminate stereotype images of refugees perpetuated by the media and to generate a true, non-professional understanding of refugees in the children.

While I think the effort to introduce refugee studies in primary schools is a good one, and SCF have made commendable efforts to make this programme as realistic as possible, it is very unlikely that the programme in its present form would do much to eliminate stereotypes of refugees. There is, in fact, real danger that the course will create its own stereotype of refugees. The following are a few examples which I personally feel would only further compound the problem of understanding refugees.

Take the 'Islands' game, designed to 'isolate' a child or two on a mat spread in a large room in the hope that such isolation will instil in the children the sense of isolation and insecurity suffered daily by refugees. This game, no matter how seriously played, would never convey anything approaching the real isolation and insecurity felt by refugees. Worse still, the children would come away with a highly belittled sense of the danger refugees actually face. As a result, any future understanding of refugees may be impossible as the mind has been closed to the reality of the situation. In varying degrees, all the games suggested in the pack will have the same effect and are therefore quite unnecessary exercises.

Games are generally an effective teaching method for children but are inappropriate for such a subject as refugee studies. For children to feel even a fraction of what a refugee feels, a truly harsh and possibly dangerous game would have to be designed. Neither society, nor the need to learn, would condone this. There is no game that would create an awareness of the plight of refugees in the minds of children and this teaching method should not be used for refugee studies.



Although the programme seeks to eliminate stereotypes of refugees, it is itself a product of this same stereotype. Evidence of this lies in the attempt to compare refugees to wild animals like foxes and frogs, who are periodically spotted behind houses or in hedgerows, and are declared by animal rights campaigners to be out of their natural habitat. It seems that because refugees are away from their homes, in other words not in their natural habitat, the planners of this programme have been led to believe that refugees are like frogs and foxes. This is preposterous for refugees are, above all, human beings like the children themselves. Moreover, as soon as the pupils get the idea that the situation of refugees is like that of wild animals, the idea is likely to become embedded in the mind, and any future attempt to make them see otherwise is bound to fail.

The only set in the pack likely to have an impact is that of the photographs of refugees. Some of these are bad and harmful, some are indifferent, while others are good. The more like a pupil the photograph is, the better it would work. Some of the photographs portray painful situations and should not be included. Instead of arousing empathy they would only alienate the children who would most probably fear and despise the refugees and wish to have nothing more to do with them. It must be stressed that children, despite their innocence, are essentially selfish. When their own interests are not involved, invariably indifference or alienation takes over. If this is their first encounter with refugees, it is very likely that they would in future avoid them, thereby accentuating and prolonging the fundamental problem refugees face wherever they go.

Pictures or photographs that can introduce refugees to children are those that the children would like to identify themselves with, pictures showing refugees, preferably refugee children, in situations that the children can relate

## Frogs

Just about everyone knows what a frog looks like. There are plenty of them around to look at and study. But have you ever thought of the frog as a refugee?

to: those situations portraying activities the children admire and would wish to take part in. In fact, it is these kind of pictures that will tell the children the only thing they need to know about refugees: that refugees are ordinary people just like everyone else.

### **Conclusions and Suggestions**

Refugees are ordinary people, but at the same time thoroughly misunderstood. The problem lies with those who seek to understand them. Two main reasons account for this. The first is that society tends to assume that refugees are a special kind of human species, psychologically and even (at times) genetically different from the rest of humanity. Hence the unnecessary and futile search for what refugees are. The second reason is the tendency to confuse refugees with the situation they are in. This overlooks the simple fact that refugees are ordinary people in extraordinary circumstances. Their problems lie in the circumstances: the society they live in, the reaction of people to their presence, and the inhuman laws and treatment they are subjected to. It is therefore unnecessary to attempt to understand refugees. What needs to be understood is their situation.

Any understanding of the refugee situation must begin with an understanding of society. Society must examine itself and adjust by eliminating stereotypes of refugees. To prepare children to accept refugees and understand their situation later in life, they need only be taught lessons on good behaviour particularly on how to accept and tolerate strangers (not necessarily refugees). Teachers can themselves decide on the method for doing this and if necessary have 'good' pictures of refugees. This, combined with a vigorous religious teaching, would be far more effective than any technical approaches which only compound the problem.

James Appe, a Ugandan refugee writer

### ***Environmental Refugees: A Yardstick of Habitability* (Nov. 1988)**

Published by Worldwatch Institute, 1776 Massachusetts Avenue, N.W., Washington, D.C. 20036, USA. Price \$4.00

In *Environmental Refugees: A Yardstick of Habitability*, the Worldwatch Institute draws attention, in its characteristic style, to the threat posed by environmental change to whole populations in many areas of the world. The author, Jodi Jacobson, speculates that there are already ten million unrecognized environmental refugees worldwide, a figure which rivals that of 'official' refugees, and may soon overtake it.

Environmental refugees is an important issue because the environmental changes threatening people around the world are the result of over-exploitation of world resources by the expanding western economic system. Responses to the threat of environmental refugees require policy changes in western countries to avert worsening disaster. Further, there needs to be a means of formalising and making effective compensation payments to poor people made refugees because of first world resource mismanagement. To date, such compensation has been as a 'pay-off' or as 'relief' but in future it should be a genuine contribution to the displaced who are trying to establish a new livelihood. It is only in the context of the above changes that donors should begin to draw up policies for assistance for environmental refugees.

The paper identifies certain key areas for concern, within a world system generally viewed at odds with natural systems. As might be expected, drought and desertification in the Sahel are reviewed. The enormous number of the people involved, and the resulting regional and urban migrations are described, though the author does not take us any further on the question of what really is happening to the land in the Sahel. Citing the incompletely documented and theoretically rooted processes of over-grazing and deforestation, as well as macro-economic factors, the possible link between the 'greenhouse effect' and declining rainfall in this region is not noted. Other examples of serious land degradation are also provided, and are said to be also likely to produce increasing numbers of 'environmental refugees'.

In a section on 'unnatural disasters', defined as 'normal events whose effects are exacerbated by human activities', a whole range of examples are given. Poverty and population pressures are said to be driving more and more people into marginal disaster-prone areas. For example, onto 'chars' (bars of silt or sand) in the Bengal delta, some of which are washed away every year by floods and tides; and onto steep hillsides in shanties around Latin American cities. In addition to people moving into more vulnerable places, the author reviews how environmental changes wrought by people make 'natural disasters' more likely. The recent floods in Bangladesh and Sudan are attributed to the deforestation of mountain catchments in neighbouring countries, and likewise the appalling mud

slides in Rio and Medellin (Colombia) slums. Logging and mining are also said to have increased flooding, deaths and forced migration in the Philippines.

Chemical toxins and radioactive wastes are the subject of a section that deals principally with the West and the Chernobyl nuclear reactor disaster. The author could have gone further in reporting the appalling extent of first world dumping of dangerous wastes in the third world, especially Africa, though the problem is noted. During 1988 the publicity surrounding some of the worst cases has at least led to greater awareness and resolve by African governments to control the process in the future. Levels of such pollution have been so bad in many areas of the United States that millions of dollars are regularly spent to evacuate contaminated areas. (First world governments have generally continued to misinform the public about the dangers of the pollution that is occurring, but the growth of the environmentalist movement in these countries is beginning to lead to greater investigation of the process, even if people are still unable to do much to change it.)

Perhaps the most important section of the paper is the preview of the results of a major scientific study by Milliman and colleagues at Woods Hole Oceanographic Institute. The study evaluates the likely impact of the rising sea levels resulting from the world warming 'greenhouse gases effect'. The effect is mainly due to the burning of fossil fuel by industrialised countries. World warming will result in direct expansion of the water in the oceans and also lead to some melting of polar ice caps. However the degree of inundation of coastal areas will also depend on the relative rates of local land subsidence. Generally speaking such subsidence in coastal areas is on the increase, especially the fertile deltas. This is due to oil and water extraction and to upstream damming. For example, damming the Nile has reduced its sediment and freshwater contribution to the Mediterranean to a trickle. Therefore even without a rise in the sea level the salty sea is invading productive land.

Since the degree of warming likely to occur under the 'greenhouse effect' is still under dispute, Milliman and colleagues have made predictions of inundation under various explicit assumptions of sea level rises and land subsidence. The results are horrifying. The very existence of a number of island countries will be threatened: for example, the Maldives (nowhere higher than 2m above sea level), the Marshalls, Tuvalu and Kiribati. Storm surges, at times of higher sea levels, could then eliminate the entire population, or alternatively if the process was more gradual, create a whole society of 'refugees' who will no longer have a home to return to. World Watch point out that a large number of important cities around the world will require tremendous expenditures to protect.

The paper concentrates on the effects of various scenarios on Bangladesh and Egypt, two countries whose productive land is basically low-lying delta. Half the land of

Bangladesh is actually under 5m above sea level. Estimates of the loss of land in Bangladesh vary from only 1% by the year 2050 if the sea level rise is the minimum likely (13cm) and there is no subsidence of the delta. However estimates based upon higher levels of sea level rise and natural subsidence, suggest around 16% to 18% of the land will be lost by 2050 and up to 34% by 2100; the latter estimate would involve displacement of 35% of the population and loss of 31% of the GNP. Higher seas and warmer climates may make the cyclones worse, cause further salt invasion into aquifers presently used for irrigation, and lead to the loss of valuable mangrove areas. (The author does not note, however that new mangrove areas could develop in the inundated places.)

In Egypt sea level rises will combine with subsidence to have an even more inevitable and disastrous effect. If the sea level rise is at the high end of the estimated range (79cms by the year 2050) then 16% of the habitable land will be lost. The situation will be even worse if the existing rate of subsidence increases due to accelerated pumping of ground water. If this occurs the modelling suggests 19% of the land is lost by 2050 creating 8.5 million 'environmental refugees'. As in Bangladesh the existing critical shortages of land and high 'natural increase' in population mean that the displaced population can expect to face severe hardship in obtaining access to new resources.

Worldwatch cast this vision of 'environmental refugees' as a 'rough indicator of the severity of global environmental decline'; and this environmentalist stance is also evidenced by the title of the paper. In the context of concern for the actual 'refugees' created, the severity of the situation means that much thinking must be done, both in affected countries and industrialised countries, about how to compensate the poor and enable them to regain a livelihood.

**Ken Wilson**

**Weinstein, E.; Lira, E.; Rojas, M.E.; et al (1987)**  
*Trauma, duelo y reparacion: un experiencia de trabajo psicossocial en Chile*, Fasic, Editorial Interamericana, Santiago, Chile.

The provision of social, psychological and legal assistance to the victims of repression in Chile since the coup of 1973, continues to be a difficult and dangerous task. Some of the most sensitive work is that carried out by psychologists and psychiatrists with those experiencing 'post trauma stress disorders'.

Sponsored by the Christian Churches Foundations for Social Assistance (Fasic), the authors of *Trauma, duelo and reparacion* (Trauma, Grief and Restoration) have compiled a sensitive account of the place of psychotherapy

in victim assistance. Initially, they set out a simple framework for the understanding of the contribution of psychiatry to alleviate stress induced by various forms of repression, including imprisonment, torture and exile. They explain, again in simple terms, the events in Chile that caused protracted disorders in so many people. They describe the testimony approach to therapy through which victims come to terms with their experiences by denouncing them in detailed written accounts.

The power of the book derives from its clarity and the use of testimonies throughout, in which those suffering communicate directly with the reader. This publication of selected tracts of testimony, itself constitutes part of the process of therapy and, at the same time, gives immediate exposure to the complexity of disorders and their symptoms. The extent to which these are not recognised as the root cause of stress in subsequent interpersonal relations, particularly within families, is highlighted throughout.

The themes of this book are similar in approach to those presented in RPN 3, in the paper by Soren Buus and Inger Agger on the testimony method. The use of the victims' own word in the Fasic book makes them more directly meaningful. For those interested in the field of psychosocial assistance and who can read Spanish, *Trauma, duelo y reparacion*, is an important contribution to the field.

Rosemary Preston, RSP

**Nigel Twose and Benjamin Pogrund (eds): *War Wounds: Development Costs of Conflict in Southern Sudan: Sudanese People Report on their War (1988)***

Published by Panos Publications Ltd., 8 Alfred Place, London WC1E 7EB. (English and Arabic) Price £4.95

In sponsoring *War Wounds* the Panos Institute has made it possible for Sudanese people themselves to articulate the crisis of renewed civil war. Clearly the book aims to do more than just inform: it intends to set an agenda for peace negotiations, relief and reconstruction. Published in English and Arabic, *War Wounds* was launched at press conferences in both London and Khartoum. Discussion involved representatives of many organisations and institutions in the Sudan, aid agencies and human rights groups.

The writers are mainly distinguished Sudanese academics and public servants. Their strikingly humane writing is closely in touch with the situation at ground level in the areas covered. However, there are no reports that properly detail the situation in pro-SPLA areas or fully describe the role of the militias armed by the Government.

The book develops the theme that 'ordinary people' are the victims of military conflict over which they have no control and from which they have no escape. First hand

accounts provide a vivid picture of the tragic consequences. The destruction or interruption of major infrastructure and development projects is occurring, but some of these interrupted projects were not welcomed by many southerners. They include the syphoning off of Nile waters from the Sudd by the Jonglei canal for irrigation in Egypt and the Northern Sudan, and the Bentui oil over which there was so much controversy. The authors detail the manner in which the local and regional economies have been shattered, and how the war has torn the social fabric of Sudanese life. Experiences of destitution, and migration as 'internal refugees' into southern towns, and also the north are documented. In a recent British Television documentary *Voices of Sorrow* a southern chief displaced to Khartoum asserted 'We have become refugees in the Sudan. This land is our land but we have been displaced from it.'

There is a sub-text to this account of 'ordinary people' as objects of struggles in which they play a role only as victims. First and foremost, the writers are largely representative of 'Equatorian' interests, who have by and large viewed the SPLA with suspicion, and have themselves generally felt excluded from its political procedures. Furthermore contemporary Sudanese politics at national level have marginalised this whole category of educated and committed professionals of the kind who have contributed to this volume. The 'modern forces' have been undercut by the 'traditionalist' parties in Khartoum since the fall of Nimeiri, and have been peripheralised by the continued and increasing power of the military factions. However the launch of the book in the Sudan took a surprising turn for the Panos. The Sudan Government gave full backing to the launch, and deftly exploited the anti-SPLA stance of the book. This has led Bona Malwall, the only 'Dinka' writer in the book, to distance himself and run critical articles about the book in his newspaper.

The fundamental weakness of the book is that despite the power and clarity of Abu Zayd's introduction 'Why the Violence', we are never introduced to the SPLA's political and military programme. Descriptions of SPLA's activities are restricted to their blocking of government services and their attacking and abusing of hostile Equatorian groups. The writers only hint at the much more complex relationships that actually exist between SPLA groups, the army, other armed groups, and political factions at a local level. They also ignore that Equatorian personnel in the SPLA have managed, at certain times, to create much better relations with those Equatorian groups discussed. There is no adequate description of the SPLA's operations in the 'liberated zones' and their role in defending civilians against the Rizeigat, Misseriya (and other) militia. Without attention to these issues the SPLA are made to appear to be pursuing mindless violence, and therefore groups backing the SPLA view the book as biased. The book also fails to identify the political forces that are supporting government military suppression at national level, so that the reader can be realistically appraised of the likelihood of peace.



The book's detailed accounts of people's actual circumstances does point to the fact that conflict in the Sudan in 1988 erupts from a different basis to that of the late 1950s and 1960s. Complex internal and external economic, social, environmental and political factors have further integrated the Sudan, even though such integration tends only to have enhanced regional disparities and the subordinate status of many population sectors. Migration and trade, as well as the rise and decline of regional and national political and governmental structures, have made a mockery of the notion that solutions can be found in retreat to ethnic and religious regionalism and self-government.

A fuller account of the war, and the political and economic struggles on which it is based, would have required wide discussion of the different southern regions. Attention would also have had to be given to 'Northern' peoples such as the Nuba, some of whom are identifying with the SPLA. Such an account might well have led to the conclusion that there is not one war in the Sudan with one cause. In practice, novel as well as long standing (if still dynamic) factional and regional conflicts are being reworked and fuelled by influxes of arms and the patronage of the major military parties. This multiplicity of struggles is going to render peace-making even more difficult.

*War Wounds* is a powerful humanitarian plea for peace. Although framed around an incomplete description of the terrible situation in the Sudan, it can hopefully still contribute to challenging the political and military factors responsible for the continuing conflict.

**Ken Wilson**

An article by Dr B.E. Juel-Jensen, entitled 'The Travelling Zoologist, Anthropologist, or Archaeologist' on health precautions in tropical countries, has been published in *The Travel and Traffic Medicine International* 1983. This may be of value to some readers.

## PUBLICATIONS

### Human Rights

*Comision Andina de Juristas* has provided a list of Spanish publications relating to human rights. This is available from:

*Comision Andina de Juristas*  
Los Sauces 285  
Lima 27  
Peru

*The Right for Asylum in France Today* has published the proceedings from the meeting devoted to refugees held in Fresnes on 23 January 1988. Those interested should contact:

*Ligue des Droits de l'Homme de Fresnes*  
27 rue des Jacinthes  
94260 Fresnes  
France

*The Justice and Peace Service of Spiritons* has started a Newsletter for Spiritons in refugee-related ministries. The publication provides useful notes on various Catholic activities in the refugee sphere together with an update on other issues of importance. For further information write to:

*Congregazione Dello Spirito Santo*  
Clivo di Cinna 195  
00136 Roma, Italy.

### Mental Health

**Diana Miserez (ed) (1989)**

*Refugees: The Trauma of Exile*

published in French and English by the League of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies. Price: CHF 25. (plus postage and package)

The collected papers of a workshop on the psychological problems of refugees and asylum seekers, held at Vitznau, Switzerland in October 1987, shed light on the extreme psychological stress to which most of these people have been subjected. This can be as a result of torture or other forms of inhuman treatment in their country of origin, experiences during the escape attempt, or initial setbacks in the countries of resettlement.

The material in this publication could be of assistance to refugees and all those who come into contact with refugees and asylum seekers, whether in a professional or private capacity.

To order write to:  
*League of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies*  
PO Box 372  
CH-1211  
Geneva 19  
Switzerland

### Development

Information on the 19th Society for International Development (SID) World Conference, held in New Delhi, India in March 1988, can be obtained from either *The Journal of the Society for International Development* 1988:1 'Development: Realism and Vision in International Development', or from the SID Newsletter No. 35/36 October 1988, *Compass*: 'Report: Poverty Development

and Collective Survival'. The former is based on keynote addresses delivered at the Conference by leading international figures.

For further information write to:

SID  
Palazzo Civilita del Lavoro  
00144 Roma  
Italy

**The Refugee Settlement Administration (RSA)** of the Ministry of Refugees and Relief in the Eastern Sudan has brought out a new publication entitled *Showak Magazine*. Funded by UNHCR, the magazine seeks to inform all those who work with refugees in the East and thus maintain the understanding between agencies, government, and refugees. It is published in English and Arabic and at present distributed free of charge. *Showak Magazine* takes its title from the town of Es Showak, near Gedaref, from where the RSA runs twenty-nine refugee settlements and reception centres in the Eastern Region. The Magazine contains a series of lively and well-researched articles about the situation in the region, that will certainly both inform and give potential for greater debate. Such an initiative is highly commendable.

For further information write to:

Public Relations Department  
COR, Showak  
c/o PO Box 1929, Khartoum, Sudan

### Education

The Canadian Jesuit Refugee Programme has produced a package entitled *Forced to Flee: Learning Tools on Refugees and Development*. This has been designed mainly for Canadians working with refugees or on refugee-related issues. It includes such items as 'approaching the links between refugees and development'; 'media coverage: what is missing on refugees and development and why'; 'women at risk' etc. Similarly, a second package entitled *Borders and Barriers: An Education Kit: Canada's Policy on Refugees/Family Reunification* has been produced by the Coalition for 'A Just Refugee and Immigration Policy'. This deals with refugee protection on such issues as root causes, global refugee problems, testimonies, family reunification etc. Both publications are available from:

The Refugee Centre  
947 Queen Street East  
Toronto M4M 1J9  
Canada  
Tel: (416) 469-1123

# UPDATE

## GUATEMALAN CRAFTS

### Secretary of Aid to Refugees

The Secretariat is a service which complements diocesan work by answering the needs for humanitarian aid for refugees in food, housing, information, and the sale of artisan crafts.

This Indian weaving is of extraordinary quality and can readily find an international market. The promotion of crafts is important to strengthen the culture and identity of refugees (both for themselves and as perceived by purchasers overseas) as well as to generate income. Those interested should write to:

Secretaria de Ayuda a Refugiados Guatemaltecos  
Yosemite 45  
Col. Napoles  
03810 Mexico D.F.  
Mexico City - Mexico.

## SPONSORSHIP

The International Development and Refugee Foundation (IDRF) has promoted a 'Children and Community Sponsorship' scheme whereby Muslim Canadians support programmes to help needy children in the Third World. Donations received are augmented by grants from Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA). A long term commitment makes it possible for children and families to plan and build their lives with security and confidence.

Those interested should write to:

The International Development and Refugee Foundation  
1521 Trinity Dr. 16  
Mississauga  
Ontario L5T 1P6, Canada.

## HEALTH

### World Health Organisation (WHO) Initiative

In September 1988 WHO opened a new Panafrican Centre for Emergency Preparedness and Response (EPR) in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia. This new centre is intended to facilitate international cooperation on disaster preparedness planning and training; to establish a documentation centre on published material relating to disasters in Africa; and to undertake research related to epidemiology of emergencies and field implementation methodologies. Within this framework there will also be involvement in programmes for refugees in Africa.

Until now, no other institution has been able to provide these necessary facilities to WHO services in Africa. The new centre will organise workshops and seminars on issues relevant to health disaster management and will provide training sessions on long term health and development.

Training objectives are to enable staff and trainees to actively participate in groups for development and emergency preparedness; to carry out risk assessment and definition of relief needs; to design emergency preparedness policies to be followed up by training courses in their own countries; and to organise management and operational infrastructures of health services in their countries.

# UPDATE

Research objectives will undertake studies and surveys on disaster and emergency programmes; field surveys and case studies on specific disasters; impact evaluation; and studies and surveys on economic aspects of disaster health management.

All enquiries should be sent to:

**Dr Sandro Calvani**  
Director  
PO Box 3050  
Addis Ababa  
Ethiopia

## **Institute of Child Health**

A six week course in 'The Care of Children in War and Disasters' is to be held from 14 August to 22 September 1989 at the Institute of Child Health.

As more and more countries are faced with the task of caring for large numbers of children separated from their families through war, famine and other disasters, the course aims to enable those responsible for planning and administering programmes for such children to a) extend their knowledge of children's developmental needs; and b) plan and administer programmes for orphans, abandoned and street children to meet these needs.

The course will bring together health, child care and planning personnel from different countries to identify problems, discuss strategies and develop insights and skills.

Enquiries and requests for application forms should be made to:

*TCHU Short Course Secretary*  
*Tropical Child Health Unit*  
*Institute of Child Health*  
30 Guildford Street  
London WC1N 1EH, UK  
Tel: 01 242 9789

## **New Publication**

In the Spring of 1989, Canadian Woman Studies will publish a special issue entitled *Refugee Women* (Price \$6.00 per copy, 10% discount on bulk orders of 20 or more, \$1.00 per copy for postage, \$2.00 per copy abroad).

The issue will feature original essays, interviews, book and film reviews, short stories, poetry and artwork. To order, write to:

*Canadian Woman Studies*  
212 Founders College  
York University  
4700 Keele Street  
Downview  
Ontario M3J 1P3  
Canada

## **IS THERE A NEED FOR A REFUGEE HOTLINE?**

The international community deals with refugees on the assumption that they present themselves at the border of a neighbouring country or fly direct to another country from their own.

There are, however, an unknown number of asylum seekers who are not able to find safe refuge in a neighbouring country and are therefore on the move. Their position is particularly dangerous in the Middle East, where complicated relations between states mean that some groups of refugees are not 'safe' in a neighbouring country, even where the state concerned has signed the Convention. As a result, asylum seekers have become stranded in such countries en route to Europe. There are also students, for example, in East European countries who find themselves at risk of being returned to their home countries to face imprisonment and possibly worse.

In the past year large, but unverifiable numbers of such refugees are known to have been deported back to their countries of origin and sent to prison. They include an Oromo doctor, now in prison in Addis Ababa, who was sent to Ethiopia from Czechoslovakia despite the fact that he had been granted asylum in Britain. Seven Eritreans deported from Sweden to Cairo and from there to Addis Ababa are also in prison.

The UNHCR was unable to protect the people concerned in these three cases. One of the problems is that UNHCR will not take action in a case unless, and until, it is decided that a person qualifies as a Mandate refugee. This takes time, especially in countries where UNHCR is not represented, like those in Eastern Europe. In normal circumstances, it involves the completion of a form by UNHCR or an agent. In some cases the form is actually sent to the applicant. This is dangerous, as those about to be deported are subjected to surveillance and their letters may be opened and read.

Where UNHCR can have access to the asylum seeker, for example where they are held in detention, crucial delays in interviewing people can occur. Recently, an Eritrean, who had been held for three months without an interview at Larnaca Airport, Cyprus, was sent on to Cairo by the Cypriot authorities.

There must be people in many countries, with access to their government's immigration authorities, who would be prepared to take up cases of refugees orbiting around the world or stranded in hostile countries, with a view to obtaining a quick decision on asylum. The numbers of refugees in trouble at airports and elsewhere is increasing. It is urgent that something is done to assist them. We suggest a refugee hot line.

**Mary Dines**  
*Rights and Justice*  
244 Upper Street  
London N1 1RU, UK  
Tel: 01 704 9216

# LETTERS

In the last two months we have received many encouraging letters. All, without exception, approved of the new format and layout of the newsletter and many expressed the wish for RPN to continue for some time in the future. The following are a few examples of how some of our readers feel about RPN:

'Austcare has been a subscriber to the Refugee Participation Network since its conception and we would like to add our vote of support for the worth of this publication.

I have been particularly impressed with the relevance, intelligence and accessibility of the articles chosen for inclusion. My colleagues and I have found many of particular value in our work and have recommended your publication to other practitioners.

I would particularly like to commend the new format which is far superior to that previously employed. It is amazing what a difference it makes having the larger pages and inclusion of graphics.

As Australia's specialist refugee assistance organisation (representing 15 major aid agencies) and as the Australian representative of UNHCR for education and public information, Austcare would like to encourage you to keep the network active...'

**Margaret Piper**  
*Education Officer*  
*Austcare*

This next letter comes from a refugee in a refugee camp in Papua New Guinea. He has asked us not to publish his name.

'...I thank you for the RPN publication you sent me. Through this publication we can know more about the living conditions of suffering people in other parts of the world....'

**(Name supplied)**  
*Papua New Guinea*

'I would like to respond to your feedback on the usefulness of the RPN to my work as a practitioner in this field, based in London.

.....As far as recording practical experience and bridging the gap between practice and research, I feel that RPN is unique and provides very useful material for our work. I would be very sorry to see the Network close down in its operations, so soon after starting up.

As for covering topics not often covered by other publications, although this has been achieved most notably in the putting forward of the views of refugees themselves, in another way I feel the Network did not work so well - in its geographical coverage. It seems to me that the coverage has been weighted towards the Horn of Africa (particularly Sudan) and material from other countries has been scant.....'

**Cathy Squires**  
*Help the Aged*

We would agree on this last point made by Cathy Squires and are anxious to include material from other regions. Once again we would urge those of you living and practising in countries everywhere to send us your contributions. On this same note we have received this next letter:

'In answer to your enquiry concerning RPN mailing, we can tell you briefly that on the whole we think your work is useful. What we miss badly are references to Afghan refugees, all the more so as they form a quarter of all refugees.'

**Paul Bucherer-Dietschi**  
*Director of Foundation*  
*Bibliotheca Afghanistanica*

'In general, we find the contents of considerable interest to World Food Programme and I am sure that our country offices will have found the articles also of great value.

The one thing which we miss in the Network is the kind of exchange of views among the participants which would lead to discussion, debate and probable controversy which could be of help for agencies like the WFP to review their approach and relief operations. We obviously do not suggest that our approach is necessarily wrong, but the idea behind the Network was that it was meant to be an exchange of views among practitioners which would point to various improvements which could be made by those who are actively engaged in refugee work. The present Network papers do not yet reflect the idea behind the original concept. Perhaps it is too early to expect this since there is not sufficient experience among contributors to come up with original proposals or with what we would call 'discussion material'. We hope that the future will see considerable changes.....'

**B. Szynalski**  
*Chief, Disaster Relief Services*  
*World Food Programme*

This last letter from Mr Szynalski speaks for itself and we hope that it will encourage lively response particularly from practitioners.

We have also had some very interesting reactions to the James Ingram lecture: 'Sustaining Refugees' Human Dignity: International Responsibility and Practical Reality' a copy of which was sent out as a separate mailing last December. These will be used for discussion and debate in our next issue of the newsletter (RPN 5) where there will be a section devoted to food aid. If anyone else wishes to contribute to this subject, then please could we have your contributions as soon as possible.

# NEWS FROM RSP

The new format of RPN 3 stimulated encouraging and positive responses. Many sent letters of praise and recommendations. We are particularly pleased that RPN has now started to 'network': some writers are truly participating by responding to articles in previous newsletters. Provided we can secure funding for the continuation of RPN, we intend to publish a third, and hopefully fourth, edition of the newsletter each year; the next issue will be mailed in July.

In the hope of bringing new and fresh talents to RPN, we will be inviting different Guest Editors for each newsletter. The Guest Editor for this issue (RPN 4) is Ken Wilson and Sally Baden will be joining us for No. 5. Mary Kilmartin will continue to coordinate and co-edit RPN. We would particularly like to thank Anthea Sanyasi and Maria Salinas for their hard work in promoting RPN during their recent travels in Scandinavia and Switzerland. Due to their efforts we have received several contributions included in No. 4 and the promise of more to come.

RSP continues to expand. In March Brendan Mullan will join us in the new post of Deputy Director, but it is with regret that we will say farewell to Elizabeth Colson. Elizabeth Colson has completed her year with us and we will all sadly miss her wise advice and invaluable help and support in all areas of the Programme.

## Symposium

A major four day symposium, 'The Refugee Crisis: British and Canadian Responses', was held from 4-7 January 1989 in Oxford. This was co-sponsored by RSP and the Refugee Documentation Project, York University, Canada. Some 350 participants attended from all over the world and included refugees from more than twelve countries, representatives from government departments, academic institutions, international agencies and organisations, and the press. The symposium enabled people working in all areas of refugee issues to get together and share their experiences and knowledge.

## Sri Lankan Visit

The director of the UN University's South Asian Perspective Project, Pona Wignaraja, invited Barbara Harrell-Bond, RSP Director, and C.J.K. Henry to visit Sri Lanka in January to make a general evaluation of the feasibility of the programme 'Beyond Relief and Rehabilitation: Towards Sustainable Development in North East Sri Lanka'. Dr Henry, a Sri Lankan lecturer at Oxford Polytechnic, teaches the course on nutrition for social scientists for the Refugee Studies Programme.

The overall aims of the UN University programme is to find sources of direct funding for projects for northeast Sri Lanka which will rehabilitate and strengthen local institutions, develop local human resources, encourage the return of technically trained Sri Lankans, and, as far as possible, limit the presence and interventions of non-nationals who have the effect of marginalising local skills

and appropriate indigenous approaches to grassroots problems. A full report of their visit is available from the Refugee Studies Programme on receipt of £2.50.

## Training of Practitioners

RSP is organising an International Workshop from 17-21 April 1989: 'Training of Practitioners Working with Refugees'. This workshop is at the request of representatives from twenty-one agencies who met at Oxford to discuss training needs for those who work with refugees, and how to improve these training programmes currently offered. The workshop will provide a forum for agencies to present their approaches and materials for training practitioners to work with displaced peoples and refugees in different countries.

In addition RSP will hold a two-week course from 19-30 June 1989: 'Working with Displaced Peoples and Refugees'. The course will explore with practitioners some of the issues that can arise when working with refugees, and to relate theory to practice. Topics include: International Refugee Law, Trans-cultural Understanding, Psychosocial Issues, Refugee Health Care, Food/Nutrition Issues, International and National Institutions, Education for Refugees, Community Development, Monitoring and Evaluation Methods.

For further information contact:

Anthea Sanyasi, Course Training Officer, RSP

## Publications

Josephine Reynell's book *Political Pawns: Refugees on the Thai-Kampuchean Border*, (14 February 1989) price £4.95 UK, £5.95 elsewhere, details the sordid politics belying humanitarian projects for Kampuchean refugees in camps on the Thai-Kampuchean border. This will be reviewed in RPN 5. Enquiries to RSP.

Papers from the symposium 'The West Bank and Gaza Strip: the Problems of Palestinian Refugees and Non-Refugees' will be published in a special edition of *The Journal of Refugee Studies*, Vol. 2, No.1, to appear in Spring 1989. Price: £8.50 UK, £10 elsewhere. Enquiries to: Journals Subscription Dept., Oxford University Press, Walton Street, Oxford OX2 6DP, UK.

In addition, RSP has sponsored two more publications: Gil Loescher and Laila Monahan (eds) *Refugees and International Relations*, published by Oxford University Press, price £40. In this book leading experts in the field of refugee protection and assistance examine some of the most pressing issues facing the international community today.

E.G. Richards, R. Plumptre and S. Wilson, *Wood and Woodworking Tools: A Handbook*, edited by Laila Monahan, will be published by IT Publications on 27 April 1989, price £5.95. This book is aimed at development workers, trainers and craftspeople, and teachers of wood-working skills in schools or refugee camps.