CANADA'S PERIODICAL ON REFUGEES

REFUGE

Vol. 13 • No. 5 September 1993

FOCUS ON SOUTHEAST ASIAN REFUGEES

'The Boat People—Ending In Sight?'

The memories of the 'boat people' exodus have been fading away and world attention has turned to other victims of war and famine as in Bosnia and Somalia. While countries like Canada, the USA and Australia continue to select fewer and fewer from a dwindling pool of 'eligible and qualified refugees' for resettlement, as of September 1992, close to 100,000 asylum seekers were still languishing in camps and detention centres in countries of first asylum in the region: Philippines—5,984; Indonesia—15,642; Hong Kong—49,538; Malaysia—10,632; Thailand—10,172. However unpalatable it is to these asylum seekers, they no longer wield the influence they once did on the conscience of the world. Concerted efforts have been taken by governments of these countries of first asylum and UNHCR to run the final play of this long running drama.

In spite of the numerous demonstrated flaws in the screening process under the auspices of the Comprehensive Plan of Action (CPA), the screened-out asylum seekers are under increasingly high-handed pressures to return to Vietnam. Based on the assumption that employment opportunities in camps for the asylum seekers—earning C$30 a month, equivalent to a prisoner incarcerated in Hong Kong jails—has become a factor in their reluctance to return to Vietnam, the Hong Kong government has decided to terminate the employment of about 14,000 boat people who help in the detention centres (*South China Morning Post*, March 23, 1993). The Indonesian government has taken steps to make life in the camps more difficult for the remaining population as a means of pressuring repatriation. It was reported that in Galang Camp, fences had been built to restrict movements within the camp, private busi-

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Vol. 13 • No. 5 • September 1993

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Refuge is dedicated to the encouragement of assistance to refugees by providing a forum for sharing information and opinion on Canadian and international issues pertaining to refugees. *Refuge* was founded in 1981.

It is published ten times a year by York Lanes Press for the Centre for Refugee Studies, York University, Canada. *Refuge* is a nonprofit, independent periodical supported by private donations and by subscriptions. It is a forum for discussion, and the views expressed do not necessarily reflect those of its funders or staff.

Current subscription rates for one year (ten issues) are:

Canada	Can.$50
All other countries	U.S. $60

Single issues are available at $6.50 per copy.

Please enclose your purchase order or payment, made payable to York Lanes Press, with your order.

ISSN 0229-5113.

nesses and shops were all closed in early July, 1993, all self-made houses were being demolished, wells were being locked and water was rationed. The boat people were crammed in barracks separated by barbed wires and high fences, much like the detention centres in Hong Kong (*Boat People S.O.S. News Bulletin*, June and July, 1993). As well, the Palawan camp in Philippines, the only camp in the region where boat people are still allowed to go in and out freely, is facing an imminent closure and is exerting pressure on the refugees to return to Vietnam.

Instead of assuring that repatriation is voluntary and the returnees are going back safely and with dignity, UNHCR is doing its part to speed up the return of these screened-out asylum seekers to Vietnam.

In March 1993, UNHCR informed NGOs in the Hong Kong camps that services would be cut to the minimum. Community and Family Services International (CFSI), which employed about 30 social workers and psychologists and about 100 of the Vietnamese para-professionals in the camps, was told that its work would be terminated altogether starting August 31, 1993. Medical services and programs provided by Médecins sans Frontières (MSF) would be cut and MSF was told to leave by July 1, 1993. The cuts to International Social Services (ISS), which ran the bulk of the adult education program, would affect about ten expatriates and about 200 Vietnamese teachers in the camps.

The UNHCR argues that making the camps less pleasant will encourage more volunteers (and therefore more refugees) to return home. However, opponents fear that the move could spark a return to violence and mayhem since it goes against the recommendations made by Mr. Justice Kempster after reviewing the conditions at Sek Kong Detention Centre following the death of 24 and injury of hundreds of Vietnamese refugees at the camp in December 1992. Mr. Justice Kempster recommended that facilities be increased to keep boat people employed and occupied. UNHCR, on the other hand, believes the work of the NGOs is one of the reasons so few screened-out asylum seekers are volunteering to return to Vietnam.

Furthermore, in July 1993, the cash grants to returning Vietnamese boat people were reduced by one third. Asylum seekers who agree to return to Vietnam within three months of the rejection of their application for refugee status or appeal are entitled to receive US$ 360 per person after their return. For those who refuse to return to Vietnam within three months, the amount will be reduced to US$ 240 per person. The grants of US$ 50 per adult and US$ 25 per child paid before departure remain unchanged for the time being (*South China Morning Post*, July 27, 1993). According to Brian Bresnihan, the Hong Kong government's refugee coordinator, saving money was not the primary issue and it was necessary to inject new impetus into the voluntary repatriation program. Further reductions in the reintegration grants would have to be considered if the new measures do not boost voluntary repatriation (*South China Morning Post*, July 27, 1993).

It is within this context that the articles included in this issue will hopefully raise some soul searching questions with respect to the true meaning, if there is any, of repatriation. These screened-out asylum seekers have been blamed for leaving and for not returning. Given the appalling and degrading treatments they receive in the camps (at least 65 percent have been in camps for three years or more), can they really be blamed for not being able to make a decision? The orchestrated "The Boat People—Ending In Sight?" drama is evidence that the fund of goodwill and humanitarianism is becoming exhausted and bankrupt. ■

Lawrence Lam, Guest Editor

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The Final Phase of Southeast Asian Asylum? —Some Unfinished Business

C. Michael Lanphier

The situation of Southeast Asian refugees has moved into another phase, and possibly the final phase, in its convoluted history spanning more than two decades. This phase marks massive repatriation of peoples back to regions once their homelands of their parents. This phase follows that introduced with the Comprehensive Plan of Action in March 1989, which incorporated a screening process to determine refugee status of new arrivals from that point forward.

The present phase represents the participation not only of the countries of asylum but more importantly the countries of return—Laos, Cambodia and Vietnam—in a "normalization" of relation among states. The political implication in each state differs, but overall it is intended that returnees become stakeholders in the larger process of redevelopment of the country. The states of Laos, Cambodia and Viêtnam for their part become partners in a developmental process. If successful, not only will these countries take their place with others in the region as growing economies, but human rights will be an integral part of this development.

Laos

For Laos, development involves the repatriation of the majority of Lowland Lao and Hmong hilltribes people. Although the official estimated number in camps is some 51,512 persons, only 11,244 were counted as returns by the end of 1992. The schedule calls for the return to be complete by the end of 1994.

While in comparison with other countries, this number appears small, the process is in reality quite intricate, involving transitions for two distinct ethnic groups and challenges to the developmental economy .

Thailand for its part is eager to hasten the departure. It has closed several refugee camps, including the large northeastern Thailand Hmong camp, Ban Vinai, in November 1992. Then some 9,000 Hmong were transferred to a long-established mixed camp, Ban Nam Pho, now called a "repatriation centre" in the same region.

Yet the enthusiasm for return to Laos appears mixed at best. The Vientiane government is willing to provide a modest allotment to returning groups of seven acres of land, farm equipment and rice consignment. Its interest focuses upon repopulating the rural areas for agrarian development. Much less enthusiasm exists for prospective urban returnees, and no incentive is awarded for settlement there.

Lowland Laotians still in camp view the invitations to return as a joint move on the part of Bangkok and Vientiane. Knowing that they have "overstayed their welcome" in Thailand, they are uncertain that an amnesty effectively exists. In a conversation with the informal leader of Camp Ban Nam Pho, who with his wife had spent 17 years there, he resisted possibilities of joining his son or daughter, now resettled in North America, because he wished to return "home." Yet because of his involvement with the U.S. armed forces during the war, he could not be certain that even a near two-decade hiatus would be sufficient to cause retributory action to fade.[1]

Hmong, Reticence

The Hmong retain a deep distrust of the Vientiane government and are resisting resettlement. In an survey conducted among the Hmong in Ban Vinai camp, Rabé (1990) found that none of the members wished to return. Rather, they remain suspicious even if the government might guarantee personal safety and economic freedom. As the spectre of return appears closer, requests for third-country resettlement (mainly the U.S.) have augmented. Likewise, unknown numbers have disappeared, presumably into the northern hills of Thailand, where extended kin may be found and the agricultural region is somewhat similar.

The socialist Lao government intends to continue to develop agriculture as its principal economic base. As such the return of former citizens is an attractive prospect. The government appears in no haste to mount training programs for its agricultural economists and planners, however. Although the Thai university system has offered to collaborate in planning such programs tailored to specifications, university officials have not received warm enthusiasm from their opposite numbers in Laos. Nevertheless, information exchanges continue, and there is no sign of deterioration of relations. Thai and other international officials are far less eager, however, to assist underground agents in facilitating the new route for drug trafficking now passing through the northwest of Laos. Apparently a substitute for routes through Cambodia, the new route extends the flow of hard currency into Laotian coffers and makes this venture extremely difficult to extinguish.

Cambodia

Movement to the "final" phase was signalled by the commencement of return in early fall 1992 of more than 300,000 Cambodians from border camps. Strictly speaking, most returnees from this protracted exodus

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of more than 15 years were not even considered refugees; rather they were *displaced* in "temporary" camps. This form of diplomatic newspeak perhaps foreshadowed even more ambiguity upon return.

The much-delayed return of Cambodian refugees has added to the frustration felt by the Thai government in serving as a "temporary" asylum for refugee groups from the three Southeast Asian countries for nearly two decades of a retarded Western resettlement program since the mid-80s (Rogge, 1991, Tasker, 1990). Threats of closure of Cambodian camps have posed problems for international plans as well as for Cambodians who ill-appreciate their buffer position on the Southeast Asian political game board (Muntarbhorn, 1990). The disappearance of the Thai government's patient attitude toward the self-serving dual politics of resettlement and repatriation by Western states and international organizations increased pressure for repatriation, whatever the outcome for refugees.

The present phase represents the participation not only of the countries of asylum but more importantly the countries of return—Laos, Cambodia and Vietnam—in a "normalization" of relation among states.

Helton (1992) distinguishes between the desirability of repatriation and the conditions under which it occurs. There is little question that many host countries would welcome the relief of not having to continue harbouring large cohorts of refugees. An important component of a return process is the assurance against retribution: a return with "safety and dignity" (*Ibid.*). While there can be no fast guarantee of assured protection, the main safeguards are the unrestrained access of NGOs and UNHCR to the returnees and the elimination of "attendant risks": both physical (mines) and political, absence of armed hostilities which would precipitate another round of persecution.

The irony of an uncertain return appears even starker in light of the fact that the Cambodian camp situation has been the best financed and staffed of any among the current world refugees. Rogge (1990) notes that the array of NGO services has been the most extensive and of longest duration on record. This asset may well turn into a liability upon return, however.

Financing and Logistics of Return

At long last, however, this repatriation campaign may be one of the most successful yet launched by the UNHCR, with some 92 per cent of the $84.3 millions sought being pledged by August, 1992, by more than 30 donor countries and organizations (UNHCR, 1992). Projects range from the community-oriented to assistance for individual farmers. Moreover, in the late 1980s there appeared to be a fit between the timing of projects, funding and movement of peoples, so that initial movement logistics were effected with an unusual degree of efficiency.

Nevertheless, prospects for success for the massive return of Cambodians are now shrouded in uncertainty at best. By late 1992, the "peace plan" so optimistically heralded less than a year prior appeared in political tatters. The Khmer Rouge declined cooperation with the Red Cross and violated cease-fire agreements. For their part, the other forces, including the State of Cambodia has lacked instruments of governance, so that services in health, agriculture, education have virtually collapsed instead of being bolstered (Jantzen, 1993).

Political organization has further deteriorated with the vacillation of the key solidarity-building symbol, Prince Sihanouk, with respect to his participation in party and government-building. The political conditions for the returnees from Thailand certainly lack the kind of stability upon which a massive reinsertion depends.

Characteristics of Camp Population (late 1990)

Over a third of the large camps is composed of children under 10 years of age (Rogge, 1990, Thorn, 1991). Not only is the dependency ratio unusually high therefore, but the ratio represents a cohort of children who know nothing of their homeland, nor life, outside the camps. Clearly, these young persons will face repatriation as a type of immigration. Familial rôles perforce will change from camplife without a reference point for these young children.

Vulnerable Females

In a comprehensive study of Cambodian camplife, Thorn (1991) operationally defined women "vulnerable" if they fell into one of the following categories: a handicapped husband or widows with children or lone women. They form about 13 per cent of the total camp household population (Thorn, 1991). Females are heads in 21 per cent of camp households. Vulnerable women in camp are further impeded by low skill level: 78 per cent have no skills at all, while the remainder have some skills in small business. Only a third (predominantly the younger) are literate enough to read large-print text. (*Ibid.*).

For the refugees themselves, camp personnel reported that such concerns as how child care would be assumed, whether relatives would help; what kind of work one might perform were ill-considered. Some two out of three did not know where relatives might be found (*Ibid.*).

A decade or more of camplife has blurred network lines and blunted some of the harsh day-to-day household choices. Prospective returnees expect that (UNHCR, Cambodian) government will provide necessities for resumption: food, tools, medical assistance.

In Cambodia, the Women's Association of Cambodia (WAC) is attempting to re-establish networks, develop self-help groups and to set up local credit-union schemes to assist all women, although this would be of es-

pecial significance to vulnerable women. They propose a code of ideals: hard work, literacy and education; co-operative solidarity, child-rearing, family harmony. This type of constructive networking appears critical to reintegration, given the paucity of contacts between returning refugees and relatives remaining in Cambodia. Sinnois (1990) observes that the WAC's sharing experiences would allow women "from both sides" to learn from each other and to be efficient program implementors during reintegration and reconstruction phases. This optimistic scenario is predicated upon a peaceful milieu for return, however. Otherwise, the organizations and women whom they serve would be politicized, with little attention to the original purpose.

There is a significant number of unaccompanied minors (between 1,000 to 4,000, a number in dispute [Rogge, 1990]), who, lacking kinship ties and parental guidance, so important in Cambodian society, will require special assistance in any form of reintegration. Many may have survived both physically and socially to this point through the infusion of camp social services; no such extension will necessarily occur after repatriation.

A certain amount of spontaneous return has occurred, estimated from 50,000 to 100,000 returnees. These returnees consist mainly of some mature males, returning to kin and reassuming a rural lifestyle; the other group would consist of youthful males with experience in border-running and vigilante activities. These youths typically seek an urban setting for their "street-smarts" (Rogge, 1990). The latter group especially poses a serious problem of reintegration into civil society and may well constitute a new "underlife" in Cambodia.

Impediments and Remedies

Lack of arable land. Although a UNHCR land-identification mission reported finding some 240,000 hectares of "potentially arable land" in the western provinces, where most of the returnee population is expected to relocate, this allotment was both insufficient and, more important, inappropriate for distribution.

Cambodian custom calls for land being distributed at the district level, so that any centralized plans are doomed from the inception (Robinson, 1992). Upon further inspection, the available land turned out to be unsuitable for agricultural use or mined.

Yet the non-trivial result of the addition of the cash assistance option was a dramatic increase in the number of returnees, averaging some 30,000 per month since July, 1992 (*Ibid.*).

Kinship reunification. The distribution of returnees has spread well across the country, with only some 55 per cent opting for the Battambang region. The remainder have taken advantage of special trains for Phnom Penh and the east. While initial resettlement does not guarantee continuation of the trend, by November, 1992, some 35,000 returnees have located east of Phnom Penh. That number is somewhat smaller than expected from projections by birthplace, which indicated that some 100,000 returnees came from eastern regions (*Ibid.*). Nevertheless, returnees are frequently relocating with kin in hometown regions. There appears little initial problem of absorption of returnees in the more sparsely populated central and eastern regions. That trend competes to some extent with the undeniable attraction of larger cities, especially Phnom Penh.

Overall, the Cambodian final phase is a chapter still to be written, with many sub-plots, both political and social. In sheer logistical terms, it represents one of the most important movements of the era.

Reports from western city of Battambang indicate that effects of the highly orchestrated UN effort persisted beyond the expected few weeks. Returnees have continued to enjoy UN-provided benefits and appear to expect the lingering institutional presence (*Ibid.*). Their location has usually been determined by proximity to the food distribution centre, with the cash allotment facilitating initial adaptation. Whether additional "welfare safety nets" can be supplied as the allotments are exhausted remains an open question. Little evidence of replacing the UN rations was evident in the early stages (*Ibid.*).

Financing and logistics of return. Formidable challenges remain, however. Literacy rates are low, especially among women. Health practices remain tied to traditional methods for women, which fail to include modern hygienic conditions surrounding pregnancy and childbirth. Not only is infant mortality high even in hospitals (9 per 1,000) but lack of knowledge about sanitary practices leads to complications in normal aftercare.

Most adult householders in camp expressed an interest in returning to farming jobs upon return (Rogge, 1990). In light of the long absence from the land, this profile appears highly optimistic. Of further concern, the amount of land to be distributed far underreaches demand. Land mines still punctuate the countryside, to add to the peril. Rogge (1990, Ch. 9) notes that while some agricultural training took place in camps, none offered marketing techniques required for current-day practices. Occupational alternatives may therefore widen, despite the predominant interests in farming. Returnees may seek opportunities in urban areas in far greater numbers than anticipated.

Participation in the commercial economy appears limited for women to food-related areas: small shop-keeping, selling fresh foods, *etc.* There appears no easy entry to work in areas of higher commerce or bureaucracy without special training, of which most women are deprived. (Sonnois , 1990, pp. 4-7).

The informal commercial sector appears to be the only point of entry, especially for those returning to urban areas. While profiteering is possible, it is even more likely that labour will be

purchased for the lowest possible price. Nor can any safeguards for women's security be assured. Exploitation both of work-related and sexual varieties is possible if not likely.

Overall, the Cambodian final phase is a chapter still to be written, with many sub-plots, both political and social. In sheer logistical terms, it represents one of the most important movements of the era. While timed to fit the larger political agenda of the first country-wide election in Cambodian history, the social dilemmas of return to a homeland with a new generation of children who remember nothing but border camplife stand as stark challenges. Yet in Cambodia's fractious and terrifying history, this experience represents another milestone.

Vietnam

Of the waves from the three Southeast Asian states, the largest by far has been the Vietnamese, as indicated in Table 1. In 1992 the UNHCR counted some 101,444 Vietnamese in camps scattered in nine countries throughout eastern Asia from Korea to Indonesia, with half that number harboured in Hong Kong camps and detention centres. To date, they represent the largest group still detained in camps.

The proportion of asylum-seekers being "screened in" as refugees has hovered about the 12 percent mark, or about 1,200 cases per year. With the introduction of the CPA agreement in 1989, countries of first asylum, especially but not exclusively Hong Kong, have been pressing Vietnamese asylum-seekers not to disembark from their boat voyage to presumed safe harbour. If the new arrivals insisted, they were accorded the very minimum of privileges in a régime which represents detention, rather than asylum. The graphic narrative of Joe Thomas and the survey of Loughry et al., in this issue provide a well-rounded account of the recent past and current state of affairs in Hong Kong. Suffice it that the chances of gaining refugee status have diminished to the very minimal.

In early 1992, arrivals by boat dramatically ceased; by comparison, some 20,200 asylum-seekers arrived in Hong Kong harbour in 1991. Complete details to explain this change are still a matter of some guesswork. Doubtless some boats were peremptorily turned back as they attempted to enter Hong Kong waters. It is also likely that signals from traditional resettlement countries have been interpreted as unambiguously negative. Word of the multiple disincentives administered by the Hong Kong authorities must have spread widely throughout the community of would-be departures in Vietnam.

Resettlement

Overall, more than 730,000 Vietnamese have been resettled since 1975. Of this total, resettlement activity has absorbed about 8,500 refugees per year recently, a significant diminution from the earlier rates.[2] These numbers are governed by the overall CPA quota agreements as well as by local factors of eligibility determination. As some countries, such as the U.S., re-apply refugee determination criteria, and all countries select according to various criteria of suitability for resettlement, the numbers selected reflect local priorities. At present Canada has more than filled its commitment of 9,400 refugees with a total to date of nearly 12,000 refugees. The United States has committed 18,799 resettlements, of which just over 16,000 have been filled. With the dramatic cessation of arrivals and the end of the CPA arrangements in 1994, it may be expected that resettlements will taper this year and next as well.

A special problem for resettlement is the return of large number of unaccompanied minors, formally so classified as being under age 16 upon arrival. The number has varied from a year to year low of 2,000 to a high of 4,000 children. Some are attached to an adult caregiver; yet their screening is independent. Normally the child is screened on a priority basis, about 90 percent of whom are screened out and scheduled for return to Vietnam. If there is a caregiver attached to this screened-out minor, s/he immediately distances her/himself from the child, so as not to dim her/his own chances for qualifying for status. Thus the child is isolated both in departure and in the aftermath. Even though screened out for return, they languish in detention centres for months, awaiting an uncertain future without being able to affect it. Some unaccompanied minors have been in Hong Kong long enough to cross the age 16 upper limit. Their status is redefined to that of adult, even though they lack physical and psychological resources normally expected of adults to withstand the harsh conditions.

Of no less concern is whether women will be able to return, whatever the future may hold. They have found conditions in the camp extraordinarily harsh. Daily life is fraught with difficulties, from the lack of sani-

Table 1: Southeast Asian Refugees and Asylum Seeker, 1975-1992

	Arrivals	*Resettlement*	*Repatriation*	*Camp Pop'n*
	1975-92	*1975-92*	*1975-92*	*late 1992*[a]
Laos	364,889	302,133	11,244	51,512
Cambodia[b]	260,647	234,014	14,612	12,021
Vietnam	860,149	730,604	28,101	101,444
Total	1,485,685	1,266,751	53,957	164,977

[a] This count includes asylum-seekers, those who have been "screened out" as well as refugees in the camps throughout Southeast Asia.

[b] This count does not include those considered "displaced," who were not in official UNHCR camps. The latter number represents another, 100,000 persons who by late 1992 returned to Cambodia.

Source: *UNHCR, Geneva, September, 1992.*

tary hygienic products to the instrumental use of sexual favours and marriage-of-convenience in order to gain some chance of exit. The latter appears necessary in part because many women have been passed over in the (already badly flawed) screening process.

Vietnam, Development

In some cases development assistance has been specifically directed to regions producing large numbers of boat people and those to which many asylum seekers will return. This direction in an erratic economic system, where local and expatriate Vietnamese and foreigners continue alongside centralized economic planning, appears as one of the few specific sources of state assistance.

As Vietnam receives more returnees and more foreign investors seeking financial opportunities, the Vietnamese legal structure as well shows signs of needing overhaul, despite recent attempts to reform. Codes for civil, commercial and labour law as well as regulations to adjudicate disputes are being formulated. But most of all, raising of awareness of law in the context of changing notions of democracy remains a problem in light of increasing incidents of corruption and smuggling. Vietnam will have to depend upon a wide-ranging public education program to instill respect and minimize cynicism (Murray Hiebert, "Miles to go," *Far Eastern Economic Review*, 29 July, 1993, 24-26).

Notwithstanding important changes pending for commercial legal undertakings, human rights climate has oscillated from harsh to the milder and back. Observers have cited periods of relative freedom both in political debate and in treatment of dissidents, followed by periods of surveillance and oppression (Murray Hiebert, "No middle path here," *Far Eastern Economic Review*, 5 August, 1993, 26).

Returnees to Vietnam receive some US$250 per adult with promises of assistance and non-retribution for activities associated with their departure. Reportedly, much of the allotment is spent on ration cards, and some local indebtedness, so that little if any remains for providing a base for resettlement. Unemployment is high despite important attempts of the government to restore agricultural productivity and build a transportation and communication infrastructure.

Asylees complain that, while the national government has long abandoned petty harassment of returnees in favour of economic planning and other society-wide pursuits, local districts continue to exercise discrimination and exclusion against those connected with the previous government or those who are suspected to continue to foster political dialogue or sentiments considered antithetical to approved socialist ideology. Withholding privileges is accompanied by still-widespread bribery practices as means of obtaining what might otherwise be accorded as a matter of right (Murray Hiebert, "Serving hard time," *Far Eastern Economic Review*, 29 July, 1993, 26).

There have been important changes in attitude toward repatriates at the *national level* in Vietnam. While there seems to be an even-handed approach to the treatment of returnees, corresponding changes have not occurred at the *local level*, where as many as 25 security officers are reputed working in a community of 2,500 members. Local surveillance and discrimination appears to be harking back to earlier days.

While international observers periodically scrutinize the overall system, it is much more difficult to examine the local level, where the difficulties appear to be more far-reaching and requiring investigation well beyond the capacity of short-range site visits.

Yet two factors may bring an important change. Various investments continue to be made, both in terms of macro development, as the United States has implicitly lifted its ban on investment on the part of its corporate citizens and in terms of specific investment in economic development by the EC and smaller national units (including Canada's CIDA). Thereby, a widening financial base provides incentive to create jobs for all community inhabitants, including returnees. Correspondingly, returnees will invariably return in greater numbers, given the CPA timetable which terminates by the end of 1994. It would be simplest for the national Vietnam government to get on with the task of national (re)construction. Returnees can represent an asset in this formidable agenda. ■

Notes

1. Personal field notes.
2. These estimates are based upon data compiled by the UNHCR in September, 1992.

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Life in the Hong Kong Camps: Detention or Ethnocide?

Joe Thomas

Ethnocide is a process of a community losing all its internal cohesion; community structures and networks lose direction of the community. A community may lose its ability to influence its direction and affairs due to the direct intervention of a dominant group. Ethnocide is a product of a process of an extreme community reaction to an extreme external stimulus of segregation and separation of that community from a broader society.

Separation and segregation of asylum-seekers creates a phenomenon of community disorganization and demoralization. This process has both individual and group consequences. The most important observation in this analysis is the direction of change. The changes taking place are self-destructive and negative. Mostly, this phenomenon is worse than the situation they experienced in their home country.

Vietnamese asylum-seekers have been legally, socially and institutionally segregated and separated from the Hong Kong population. Since the enactment of the Comprehensive Plan of Action (CPA) in 1989, asylum-seekers have been subject to administrative detention under the Immigration laws of British—Hong Kong Government. These immigration laws are based on the British Prison Laws with certain amendments. Such detention without the benefit of legal trial counters basic principles of English Law as well as the basic spirit of 1951 Convention on the status of refugees, and International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR). Nor does the CPA, proposed by the United Nations General Assembly to control the unrestricted flow of humanity from Vietnam during the late 1980s, authorize the detention of asylum-seekers.

The eleven detention centres (generally referred to as 'camps') are situated in the less accessible regions or in nearly uninhabited outlying islands. In general, the Hong Kong public has remained largely unaware of the life or living conditions there as press and public are barred from access. Only the camp administration staff, United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) officials, a few religious persons and some social service agency staff are allowed to visit them. UNHCR and social service staff are expected to leave the campsites after office hours.

Vietnamese asylum-seekers have been legally, socially and institutionally segregated and separated from the Hong Kong population.

The British-Hong Kong government's social ostracism of asylum seekers is often orchestrated through the xenophobic public utterances of the appointed members of Hong Kong's law-making body. While it has successfully passed necessary regulations to bring migrant workers from other overseas countries to ease the acute labour shortage, any suggestion to employ the Vietnamese is met with rejection.

The physical appearance of the detention centres is designed to appear intimidating. High security fences, closed-circuit surveillance cameras, barbed wires, primary and secondary fences, high power security lights, guard posts on the perimeter road to the 'no man's land' effectively isolate the centre from contact with the world exterior to it. Complete security inspection of the visitors and the service agency staff likewise underscores the resistance of the centre administration to any intrusiveness..

Asylum-seekers find that their new living quarters consist mostly of a bunk-cubicle in a crowded three-tier system without any privacy or personal space. A family or group of up to five persons live in a space 8ft by 6ft by 3ft, assigned by the camp administration. In most cases there is no special provision for the elderly, disabled, women or families with small children to get a bottom bunk. Crammed in with all their belongings, usually only a thin cotton curtain (which they must supply) separates them from the next family. They are not able even to stand upright in their bunk space—a feature unique to this detention régime. Even Hong Kong's criminal prisoners have space to stand up in their cells. Yet many asylum-seekers have called this space home for the past four years.

In at least five centres the asylum-seekers are locked in their huts during the night, ostensibly for their own security, but with little regard for their safety in the case of a fire or an emergency. During winter all of them are exposed to the severity of the weather. When the summer heat rises to 45° C, the metallic Nissan huts are no protection against the heat.

They are confronted with new diseases. The spread of the HIV virus is a recurrent threat. In the Whitehead detention centre holding 22,888 Vietnamese asylum-seekers, Department of Health officials reported 106 new cases of venereal disease, out of a total of 400 people seeking medical treatment in 1992 (SCMP, August 25, 1992).

Joe Thomas received an MA from the University of Bombay in social anthropology. He was employed by one of the agencies serving asylees in the Hong Kong camps from 1990 to 1993. He has returned to India where he is working on a medical assistance project in Calcutta.

Deteriorating nutritional status and extremely limited self-care facilities combine to the lowering of the health status. Access to medical facilities and proper and relevant information is always a concern for the service agency staff and the asylees themselves.

> On 28 June 1990, a Vietnamese woman, the mother of small children, died on the way back to High Island Detention Centre after being discharged from the Prince of Wales Hospital where she had been sent as an emergency case earlier in the day. A number of witnesses reported that it had taken five minutes to resuscitate her when she fainted in the police truck which was carrying her back to the detention centre. Despite her repeated pleas to take her back to the hospital, the Police refused to do so. Apparently she did not have the correct referral papers (Leonard Davis, 1991).

There is no scope for asylum-seekers to organize themselves politically and gain political power to influence decisions related to their own future. All forms of communication channels with the outside world and between themselves and different sections within the camps are controlled. The service agency staff are ordered to make sure that access to the telephone is controlled or supervised. Some of the humanitarian aid and social service agency personnel unplug their own telephone instruments and carry it with them while they are away from their office.

Added to the revised guidelines from the UNHCR, in consultation with the lead agencies and Security Branch, a new clause (item 12) has been added to the guidelines for the operations of NGOs in detention centres. It states:

> Individuals who are working in the detention centres under the auspices of the assistance program should treat any information received directly from the centre residents or other sources with confidentiality (Hong Kong BO: UNHCR Reef No: AS/0142 [502]).

This clause includes matters relating even to the claims for refugee status of asylum-seekers. The new regulation effectively restricts the possibility of an asylum-seeker getting legal or moral support from outside sources. It has muzzled the few vocal, agency staff. Thus relations with the media are governed not by policies of the respective agencies but by security guidelines.

All personal mail is censored by the camp administration before it is distributed. In some of the CSD run camps, radios, newspapers, magazines and cameras are prohibited. Any such item kept by the asylum-seekers is liable to be confiscated.

Economic changes are no less severe: opportunities for employment with token or no payment at all exist only for a chosen few; most are unemployed. Those lucky enough to get a job with the agencies or with the camp administration are entitled to get a maximum salary of HK$ 180 (approximately US$ 22) per month, in accordance with the prison terms.

Prominent among cultural changes in the detention centres is the accrual of a new language with a corresponding diminution in the importance of one's own language. In discussing the impact of migration on children, David Cox observed that difficulties arise when children are obliged to switch their language—when their own cultural norms are not reinforced or even devalued by those around them. Conflict arises within and beyond the family regarding their cultural norms and those of significant others. Great confusion and suffering result in serious emotional difficulties, intellectual retardation and disturbed personal relationships (David Cox, 1990).

The immigration ordinance permits the imposition of a condition on any refugee that he or she shall not become a student in a school, university or other educational institutions. Thus, unlike the rest of youth in Hong Kong, child asylees and refugee children, who represent 42 percent of the asylum-seekers in Hong Kong, are not required by law to attend school. The camp schools are neither registered nor supervised under the Education Ordinance of Hong Kong. The instruction offered by the teachers supplied by non-governmental organizations follows no prescribed curriculum. The quality of education offered to the refugee children is questionable at best.

Religious practices are restricted or limited. Camp residents have petitioned and lobbied to retain their religious freedom. In August 1992, the Shek Kong Detention Camp management, for example, denied the Catholic groups their freedom to attend their weekly mass. Restoration of the mass privilege required petitions to camp management, UNHCR, and NGO.

Paradoxically, new religious affiliations are sometimes formed. In the detention centre context, very often Vietnamese identity is ridiculed by the service agency staff and camp administrative staff intentionally or unintentionally or as a control tactics to keep the asylees "in their place." The possibility of elder generation transferring their rituals and belief systems to the younger generation is limited or restricted. The new affiliations serve as a reinforcement of cultural identity as an integral part in sustaining self esteem.

Inter-group and intra-group relations have continued to deteriorate. New forms of group conflicts havebeen emerging and patterns of social dominance have changed. Group allegiance is formed often on the lines of districts of origin, North-South and provinces.

Tensions exist as well between those who have opted for voluntary repatriation and those who are unwilling to return to Vietnam. In several cases spouses and or siblings have different opinions regarding their return to Vietnam. This situation has resulted in one party returning without a partner. Another major source of tension within the camps is in keeping the asylum-seekers together with the asylum-seekers who are determined as nonrefugees.

Group conflict is becoming a way of life. In the Shek Kong Camp riot between two groups, on February 3 and 4, 1992, some 24 Vietnamese, includ-

ing women, children and elderly were burned to death and another 100 persons were hospitalized. In another instance, a woman, Ms. Tran, who challenged the Governments screening process in the Hong Kong High court but settled the case with the government lawyer along with eight others shortly before the judgment, was stabbed with her husband by a man with a broken fluorescent light after a row when she was returned to the Whitehead detention centre. Just before the judge was to make a judgment on their case, the group who challenged the government screening policy agreed to end the case in exchange for a new interview with the Refugee Status Review Board (RSRB). The group has been shunned and criticized by the fellow asylum-seekers for accepting Government's offer of a second appeal hearing rather than proceeding with their judicial review.

Many observers believed that the landmark case might result in a ruling that would force the administration to review the whole screening procedure. During the court hearing Ms. Tran claimed that she had been persecuted for 25 years in Vietnam for being a devout Catholic. But the RSRB rejected her claim. Only two of the eight appellants were granted refugee status.

Day-to-day violations of individuals are often under-reported. In the following incident, Tran Quoc Tuan (VRD 236/91, F/No 8821, Hut B7 Section B SKDC) fell victim to such harassment of camp management.

> There was no water supply on May 22, 1992 at the section B of SKDC. Since morning the residents of section B had been requesting the camp management to be permitted to enter section A to get water for morning ablutions. At about 8.30AM one young girl waiting with a bucket near the gate between Sections B and A, repeatedly asked for permission. The policemen became annoyed. Since the girl was inside the gate he spat on the girls face. Mr. Tuan happened to arrive the gate at that moment. With help from the service agency's staff, he wrote the following details of the event.
>
> At 8.30 in the morning on 22, 1992 when I went to the gate of section B I saw the police men was shouting at a girl. I did not know the reasons of the fight. When I went closer to the gate I saw the policemen spiting on the face of the girl. The angry girls shouted back at the policemen a foul language. He opened the gate and rushed to the girl and slapped her and pushed her down into the dirty slime and went back to his position outside the gate.
>
> In tears, the girl got up from the mud and slime and went to the gate to read the badge number of the policemen. This infuriated the policemen again. He came in rushing pushed the girl again into the puddle and dragged her out through the gate. When I saw this impulsively I felt I must do something to stop this. I went to the gate and tried to release the girl from the policemen's grip. When he began shouting at me in anger I got frightened and tried to get back to the door. The policemen chased me to the section B and I began running to escape from the police.
>
> While running I slipped and fell down, then the policemen beat my back. Responding to the wireless message from the policemen, some other police also joined him. They lifted me up by pulling my hair. They handcuffed me behind and took me to the camp administrative office. I sat there for three hours facing a wall, without permission to move.
>
> The police gathered some people from the camp to give evidence against me. They asked them to narrate the incident. They photographed and transferred me to the nearest police station. And a police complaint was lodged against me. They finger printed, photographed and questioned me again. They forced me to squat on the floor without moving, for all the night.
>
> The next day morning, I was again transferred to another police station. They read the charge sheet to me, accusing that I assaulted the policemen and obstructed his duty. They kept me in custody for another two days, waiting for the court hearing day.
>
> At the court I was asked whether I assaulted any policemen. I denied this allegation. I also told the court that I would like to go back to Shek Kong so that I could attend my school. The court also asked me to narrate the incident. The court adjoined without a decision and the next trial was set for September 25, 1992, and I was taken back to the SKDC 'isolation section'. I am at the isolation section till then.
>
> I am writing to all of you to request your help in this case . I have done nothing wrong other than feel compassion for another camp resident.

Inability of certain asylees to cope with the camp situation turns their attention to self-destructive activities. A remarkably high number of suicides and attempted suicides was reported in the camps. These attempts may represent a desperate cry for help from an acute sense of hopelessness. As an indication of the level of mental health situation, about 30 trained case workers are offering counselling for an average of 1,200 clients every month in 1992.

Some of the psychological changes noticed among the asylees include a change in value systems, deterioration individual abilities, a qualitative change in motives for social relationships to selfish or manipulative. Perception of self identity is also rapidly changing toward the negative.

Child asylees without parents or immediate legal guardians with them (about 4,500 such children are in Hong Kong), are the most vulnerable group kept in detention centres. Internationally accepted norms of children's rights are denied them. Even though the CPA and UN Convention on the Rights of the Child consider a child as anyone below the age of 18, in Hong Kong detention centres the child asylee (without parental care) is considered as child, if only below 16 years in age on the day of the refugee status determination interview with the immigration department. The psychological and intellectual impairment of children due to incarceration will come to light only years later. By then the irreversible damage would already have been done to thousands of children.

All aspects of life in detention centres are under public glare. There is no privacy for a couple to air their differences. The disagreement often takes place in the open, thus, reducing the possibility of a reconciliation. Moreover, spouses are often a convenient scapegoat to target one's own frustrations due to the uncertainties of incarceration. An alarming level of spouse abuse has been reported.

"Marriage or cohabitation for protection" is a process by which a young single woman can buy protection. Many women depend on this form of protection rather than on whatever available official protection mechanisms of law and regulations. 'Marriage of convenience' is often arranged and regarded as an escape route from indefinite detention. There are various incidents of dissolution of traditional marriages (which are not officially registered) in favour of marrying someone from a resettled country to afford a presumably assured route to resettlement. In general, culturally appropriate family planning facilities are not available for any one other than those couples judged to be "officially married." The Family Planning Association of Hong Kong decides who should be the beneficiary of the family planning services. In some camps the Family Planning service unit has announced the names of the prospective female clients over the public address system to summon them to the clinics for family planning services.

During 1990, the birth rate of Vietnamese asylum-seekers attained a high of 55 per 1,000. In 1991, it levelled to 32, where it has remained with only slight decline to 30 in 1992. By comparison, the birth rate in Hong Kong was 12.8 per 1000. Teenage pregnancy and medical termination of pregnancy cases are exceptionally high among female child asylees (especially among the children without parental care). According to the Family Planning Association of Hong Kong reports, the number of legal abortions performed in the Vietnamese detention centres increased by 127 per cent to 246 in 1991 from thirty-seven in 1989.

Any chances of going out on excursions from the camps are cherished by the residents. These occasions occurred more frequently in police-managed camps than in those under the direction of the Corrections Department, owing to a more liberal allowance of initiative to certain agency staff. After a trip from the Shek Kong Detention centre to a local amusement park, organized for the elderly from the camp—a rare luxury materialized by the generosity of the park authorities and a local parish priest—a representative of the elderly group sent the following free-verse to the program organizer, showing their feelings towards freedom.

> We have no words to avail to show our gratitude to you and CFSI, for organizing a trip for us to go out. I am only an asylum seeker, trying to compose a few words to express our love to you. You gave us a precious memory. A memory to cherish in all my life.
>
> HERE FREEDOM:
>
> There is only a little, but enough a precious moment.
> We suffered so much in our lives.
> Miseries in life, in sea, miseries in our tip.
> But today we had a chance to see, to hear happiness.
> We are old and an asylum seeker in a strange country.
> Our fragile frames was detained.....
> Suddenly we saw greenery..
> The sea..
>
> I feel like a human being...
> I am a visitor....
> Let me run up to the mountain..
> Let me run down to the sea.
>
> The shark from under the ocean waved at us
> Wait a minute shark you want to come with me ?
> Let me take a snap' of you.
> Now I feel you are better than many human beings.
>
> Shark how old are you ?
> Your circus is marvellous.
> You can look at the cloud
> You can sing and play well.
>
> I could hear the bird singing from the top of the mountain.
> The greenery is so wonderful
> The peacock dances to the tune of the water falls.
>
> Oh poor birds in the cages.
> You are like me, I have nowhere to escape.
> I do not open my lips inside the barbed wire.
> But you can.
> And the sun set... I am back in the detention centre.
>
> (Mr. Ngoc Lau, Midnight, March 23, 1992.)

Conclusion

The detention centre is not only a community of Vietnamese asylees, it is also an area of interaction between two other forces- the camp administration and the various social service agency staff. The roles and functions of all these actors are interdependent and influence the outcome of the detention culture. This exposition has focused mainly on the asylum-seekers. Yet it is obvious that their present circumstances and future are largely shaped by forces and organizations over which they have little if any control. Most decisions both on the collective and individual outcome of asylum-seekers are taken without much consultation or indeed appreciation of the immediate life circumstances.

Separation and segregation of asylum-seekers and the subsequent factors in the Hong Kong detention centres create a phenomenon of community disorganization and demoralization. This process has both individual and group consequences. The most important observation I have made is about the direction of change. The changes taking place are self destructive and negative. Mostly this phenomenon is worse than the situation they experience in their own country. ■

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The Comprehensive Plan of Action (CPA) for Vietnamese Asylum Seekers: Some Reflections[1]

Lawrence Lam

Organized by the Jesuit Refugee Service, Asia Pacific division, a meeting on the CPA was aimed at examining the Plan's effectiveness in dealing with the continuing drama of the boat people in Southeast Asian countries. Participants included NGOs (ISS, Save the Children Fund, Family Service International), academics, government representatives, and refugees/asylum seekers in Philippines. Based on observations and informal conversations with NGO representatives and refugees during the conference, the overall impression of the CPA could be summarized as follows:

1. CPA is a complicated plan and a compromising political agreement. The plan is designed to balance the interest of the various parties; first and foremost, to prevent countries of first asylum from carrying out their threat to do away with their asylum policy; to sustain UNHCR's supposedly protective role; and to maintain the interest of resettlement countries (e.g. other countries did the first screening for them; they do not have to spend as many resources in selecting; or as in the case of the U.S., fewer numbers have to be screened);
2. It is heralded and celebrated as a success to prevent clandestine departures. With the European Community and other countries providing economic assistance to Vietnam and with the implementation of repatriation—voluntary repatriation has become strangely silent in favour of an orderly return program—the last chapter of boat people could be written. This would leave UNHCR free to deal with more urgent and pressing refugee problems somewhere else; and
3. The interest, safety and dignity of the asylum seekers have not entered into the equation. It is not a fair and just program for the asylum seekers.

For the countries of first asylum, the underlying assumptions for the implementation of this plan are:

1. It is assumed that over the years, the characteristics of the new arrivals from Vietnam have changed drastically. They are not perceived as real refugees but merely as economic migrants. There *cannot* be an uninterrupted exodus of genuine refugees from Vietnam because after so many years, conditions in Vietnam should have improved. Therefore, many asylum seekers are simply taking the advantage and opportunity to seek a better life in the West. They are abusing the asylum policy. As such, the plan is designed, in the name of protecting the integrity of the system, to weed out those abusers; and
2. The countries of first asylum have been overburdened by the boat people for too long, and unless a concerted action is taken, there will be no end to the flow of refugees. These countries reasoned that with no guarantee of resettlement elsewhere, they will be left with the boat people forever. Hence, countries of first asylum need to stop being so generous toward the boat people and need to scrap their current asylum policy.

Furthermore, UNHCR and the interested governments are determined:

1. To deter clandestine departures from Vietnam;
2. To gain the agreement of countries of first asylum to maintain this policy;
3. To implement the screening process to determine who is a genuine refugee;
4. To give protection to the genuine refugees, with possible opportunity for resettlement (though not guaranteed); and
5. To implement measures to encourage voluntary repatriation of rejected refugees.

Does the implementation of the screening process fulfil its mandate to protect refugees? Many speakers noted that the processes, in reality, fail to protect refugees. It is easy to determine, based on an extremely narrow interpretation, and more frequently, due to misapplication of the criteria of the UN Convention on the Status of Refugees and 1967 Protocol, that a genuine refugee is not a refugee in need of protection.

Although the CPA does indeed calls for a broad interpretation of the Convention in light of the other relevant international human rights documents—for example, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, 1948, and in the context of humanitarian spirit—CPA has been used to justify subsequent repatriation of so-called nonrefugees, voluntary or otherwise. Further, the U.K. and Vietnam governments entered into an agreement in 1991 to institute what they called an orderly return program for nonrefugees.

During the conference, Jim Hathaway pointed out that there are two shortcomings in the determination process:

i. consistency in the criteria applied; and
ii. consistency in decision making, including the decision made in the review and appeal.

This article is based on the Colloquium, organized by the Jesuit Refugee Service, Quezon City, Philippines, October 25 to 28, 1992. Lawrence Lam is a professor of sociology and an associate director at CRS, York University .

Among the first asylum countries, we have seen acceptance as high as 47 percent (Malaysia) and 43 percent (Philippines). However, I was told by participants that Malaysia has been diplomatically cautioned about its high acceptance rate. In the case of Philippines, corruption and bribery have contributed to their high rate. For example, asylum seekers who have relatives already resettled in the West and who have received remittance are more likely to get a positive decision on their claim than those who do not. In Hong Kong, the acceptance rate is around 12 percent because political persecution may be arbitrarily interpreted as merely economic deprivation. This interpretation fails to take into account socioeconomic marginalization which, when systematically carried out by government, is a violation of basic human rights and may legitimately constitute persecution. In one case, among others, a female applicant was stigmatized by her husband's political activities and was consequently denied a family work permit, assigned to unpaid forced labour, and evicted from her home. The Hong Kong Review Board denied that the harm she had experienced was the result of an imputed political opinion or her membership in a particular social group—family. Her experience was characterised as:

> not demonstrably punitive and excessive, the period of forced labour were.... with meals, which helped feed her children, as the commune could not give her a proper job due to her husband's offence, she experienced inhumane treatment indeed, but normal practice in a communist country.

Another case in Philippines:

> while it is true that the couple is restricted - though they experienced several years of politically inspired imprisonment, there is no serious problem encountered by them physically, mentally or morally. The only cause for the escape is to obtain better living in a free world.

Not only do the common mistakes in misapplying the criteria of the Convention exist, there are many traps for the claimants. Arthur Helton noted that often, the claimant is not allowed to elaborate, and must give only yes or no answers. In particular, when questioned about the reasons for leaving, if the claimant answered that he "couldn't make a living," as in the aforementioned cases, he would then be judged as "economically motivated." There is no opportunity for clarification. Hence, asylum seekers were forced to copy other successful claims.

Other issues raised regarding the inadequacies of the CPA-screening included:

1. benefit of doubt not given to claimants;
2. lack of preparation for the screening and pertinent information made available to asylum seekers, including lack of legal counselling;
3. officers not properly trained in the task, usually being the lowest rank in the immigration;
4. lack of monitoring by the UNHCR;[2] and
5. translation problem and outdated information on condition in Vietnam.

Moreover, it was pointed out that the asylum countries are fully aware that even if there were a higher rate of acceptance, not every one of the successful claimants would be accepted for resettlement. They would consequently be creating a burden for themselves. Rather, if more are determined as nonrefugees, chances are that they could return these nonrefugees to Vietnam, in due course. For example, the U.S. does a second screening to select refugees for resettlement while other countries (Canada, Australia) assess these refugees for demonstrated ability to settle successfully.

Regarding the assistance given to the asylum seekers in preparation for the screening, the UNHCR claim that they have tried their best with their limited resources. However, it was pointed out that UNHCR is facing a credibility crisis in the minds of asylum seekers. UNHCR is wearing two hats; protecting and repatriating refugees. It was not at all clear to the asylum seekers which role the UNHCR is playing. It has ten field officers but only four could be found working full-time in the camps to assist the asylum seekers to prepare their cases. Hence, it was not uncommon for the asylum seekers to become familiar with the successful cases and memorize facts which might not be applicable to their own case. The already highly skeptical immigration officers could easily reject such claims. The participant from Hong Kong who is influential in reviewing the cases claimed that these problems are not Hong Kong's making. The review process is 100 percent legally correct because it is careful and thorough. As well, judicial reviews are available to the rejected cases.

While the impact of the psychological trauma of exodus and experience of camp life creates confusion for asylum seekers, no adequate counselling exists for them. Group counselling may take place with some listening to the translation while feeding their babies or attending other chores. Others try to interpret what is being said there within the context of what they had heard from other asylum seekers in the camp.

UNHCR defended the CPA by citing supporting evidence: no more departures (1992 -in Hong Kong, only 11 arrivals), asylum policy maintained, resettlement countries continue selecting refugees for resettlement, and an increasing number of asylum seekers opting for repatriation. They admit that there is always room for improvement, and indeed, UNHCR and the various governments are making continuing efforts to improve the screening process.

For instance, they have trained interpreters from Canada. They also sponsor a program by Jesuit Refugee Services to send lawyers to camps to prepare the cases and persuade governments to use the 'country of origin reports'.

During the entire conference, one would have expected that UNHCR representatives would have seized the opportunity to gather first hand infor-

mation from the refugees, asylum seekers and rejected claimants. There are many opportunities for interaction, yet conversations rarely progress past the initial greeting.

The refugees, including unaccompanied minors (UM) and rejected claimants who are waiting for the appeal's decision, made their presentations in the meetings. Invariably, they talked about their experience and the problems they faced in preparing for their hearing. The shortcomings—in particular, that they were not given adequate information in preparing their case—have been repeatedly reported. One rejected UM made the pledge, "I have the opportunity to voice the experience here in the meeting because I speak English, but there are thousands who are voiceless and I wish my voice to reflect and echo these voiceless people." The UNHCR representative responded, "for those who don't know refugees, it is certainly moving. For us, nothing new."

Under the CPA, the unaccompanied minors are dealt with by a special committee and the decision for the UM, if their claim is accepted, will be made in their best interest. This applies to other vulnerable groups as well, i.e. women and disabled. Not only has the plan to implement these measures been shelved, adequate counselling to the UM and preparation for the hearing are also almost nonexistent. (Incidentally, processing methods for women and other vulnerable groups by the special committee were listed in/attached to the footnote of the note for UM.)

The issues raised on behalf of UM were:

1. *Protection in the Camps.* The UM, by and large, have to fend for themselves. A female UM, in particular, has three options to survive in the camps:

i. get married and then have the protection of her husband;
ii. sleep with the 'big brothers' in the camp for protection;
iii. join the gangs.

2. The UM invariably feel confused. They are unhappy about the camp conditions. They feel that they are lost. However, they feel—from their parents or other family members letters—they have an obligation to secure a future for their family. In spite of the information given to the UM by one NGO (NARV - Nordic Assistance to Repatriated Vietnamese) about the improved conditions in Hanoi and Haiphong in North Vietnam, they still have doubts. This is especially clear in the minds of the UM from South Vietnam.
3. Before the CPA, they said the conditions in camps were bad but they know that it is a matter of waiting to be selected for resettlement. After the CPA, uncertainty about the screening and determination process became increasingly intolerable. It seems that their fate is entirely determined by others and beyond their control. For the rejected as well as those accepted, the ultimate decision as to where they will end up—repatriation or resettlement—is made by members of the special committee under the guise of making a decision in the best interest of the children.
4. For the rejected UM, based on information from their parents' letters, returning is not really an option. Their parents advise them to stay put and at times, even said that they did not want them to return. However, no concerted efforts have been made to persuade the parents to encourage the return of these UM. Of course, during the months or years, things might have changed such as remarriage, separation, etc. Generally, the preferred solution, in the best interest of UM, is to send them back to their parents.
5. In some cases, the UM claim is accepted but resettlement is not assured. Based on the special committee's informed decision, the best interest of the UM may be returning home. Also, there are cases where the so-called natural and/or biological parents who are resettled in the West, due to certain changes, may no longer want to receive the UM. For some UM, growing up with an aunt/uncle or other relative may not be in their best interest. Only Malaysia, according to the person in charge of the program, admitted that it would take into consideration these variations, keeping in mind that, in all likelihood, returning to natural parents is preferred but not as an exclusive solution. He said that sometimes a quiet approach to parents was made in Vietnam to accept the UM back and at other instances they opt for resettlement of UM with close relatives abroad.
6. Repeatedly, there are calls in the meetings and workshops to give timely and continued counselling to the UM, in addition to providing effective protection to them in camps. However, the need for protection, though acknowledged, has not been effectively adressed. While NGOs are faced with limited resources, a UNHCR official stated "They want to go to the West, they don't want to listen to and reason with us."

As the CPA drifts towards its conclusion, hopefully, the mistakes revealed will have a positive impact on the remaining asylum seekers in the camps and their safety and dignity will be protected, not in words but in deeds. ■

Notes:

1. For a comprehensive review of the CPA Colloquium, see Alan Nichols and Paul White, *Refugee Dilemmas: Reviewing the Comprehensive Plan of Action for Vietnamese Asylum Seekers*, published by LAWASIA Human Rights Committee, 1993.
2. According to the terms of CPA, UNHCR has the authority to use the mandate to give protection to refugees. It was admitted that UNHCR rarely uses this provision so as not to embarrass the host government. One speaker said that the CPA met and exceeded the international standard when compared to the experience in Turkey even though UNHCR has little knowledge on how Turkey determines the refugee status of persons from Europe and there is no international monitoring.

Repatriation and Reintegration of Cambodian Refugees: Issues and Concerns

Janet McLellan

Few countries have been as devastated by war and state abuse as Cambodia. (Asia Watch 1993)

Following more than two decades of war and international isolation, Cambodia is one of the poorest countries in the world. Life expectancy is only 49.7 years. Just 12 per cent of rural Cambodians and 20 per cent of urban dwellers have access to safe drinking water. A relatively large proportion of the population consists of extremely vulnerable groups comprising widows with families, single elderly people, orphans and the disabled. Four of every 1,000 persons are disabled. Women in particular must shoulder heavy burdens and responsibilities. They account for nearly two thirds of the population and head one third of all households (UNRISD 1993:1)

Introduction

In 1991, the United Nations initiated plans for the voluntary repatriation of over 370,000 Khmer refugees to Cambodia. By March 1993, however, four out of the five pre-conditions for repatriation had not met: peace and security, land availability, removal of land mines and long term secured funding (Anderson 1992). The holding of "democratic" elections was the fifth pre-condition.

Though the UNTAC forces were able to implement the May 1993 election procedures, peace and security in Cambodia remained fragile, despite the presence of 20,000 United Nations security forces UNTAC, fighting continued between the Khmer Rouge and State of Cambodia forces resulting in approximately 180,000 internally displaced persons (Ruiz and Robinson 1993). Over forty per cent of farmland remains littered with mines with estimates ranging as high as eight million scattered throughout the country along roads and hillsides (Donavan 1993). Land mines are planted in the country faster than they are being removed, leaving Cambodia with the highest rate of amputees in the world (Etcheson 1992). Potentially available land remains scarce and equitable allocation procedures have neither been developed nor implemented. Further, adequate funding for long-term rehabilitation, either for returnees or for the country is not forthcoming.

The issues of national security and its effects on development and repatriation have not been resolved. The key element in security is the ability to be free of threat either to the individual and to the nation state (Ayoob 1986). For over 25 years, Cambodia has been in an extreme state of insecurity which has only minimally ebbed as a result of the May 1993 elections. Persistent acts of violence perpetrated by all factions, in particular, by the Khmer Rouge, have not improved the security of country. Between the years, 1975-1979, between one to three million Cambodians were killed, one-quarter of the total population. The Khmer Rouge specifically targeted urban Khmer, ethnic Vietnamese, Muslim Chams, monks, and members of the military and intelligentsia, while numerous others died due to starvation, slave labour, and inhumane living conditions. Political purges also occurred between 1977-1979 within the Khmer Rouge itself giving rise to a new term, autogenocide. The extensive social and individual devastation with its long-term effects raises the question of how the issue of genocide will impact on future development and repatriation concerns.

The spring 1993 election results had the State of Cambodia unifying with the FUNCINPEC faction under the control of Prince Sihanouk's son, Prince Rannaridh, with an aging Prince Sihanouk as the nominal head of state. The Khmer Rouge, who did not participate in the elections, have conceded to the state structure, and it is expected that they will form a part of the new government. It is unclear, however, the extent to which the Khmer Rouge will continue to respect the government's authority and mandate. As well, there is the question of the future relationship between the Khmer Rouge and the people of Cambodia. How the Khmer Rouge will enforce and legitimate their position and the extent of their involvement remains unclear. The UNTAC forces, having completed their mandate, are preparing their departure from Cambodia. The new government will assume power on September 1993. Cambodia's political future remains unpredictable and precarious. Once the UNTAC forces leave, instability and violence could possibly re-emerge on a large scale, with harm to development and repatriation programs in place.

Despite these concerns, an estimated 349,000 Khmer refugees have been repatriated from Thai refugee camps to Cambodia. Due to the scarcity of available agricultural land, ninety per cent of the returnees chose a UNHCR aid package which offered a house/agricultural kit, 400 days of food assistance (200 for those settling in Phnom Pehn), and $50 per adult and $25 per child under the age of twelve

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(World Refugee Survey 1993). The destination for the majority of returnees was either Phnom Penh city or Battambang province, an area clustered with mines and surrounded by Khmer Rouge forces engaged in factional fighting.

The urgency and scale of the return of Khmer refugees conformed more to the tight electoral schedule than to any set of objective criteria concerning the conditions they would face in Cambodia (UNRISD 1993:4). UNTAC rationale and expenditures concerned with repatriation led to an excessive emphasis on short-term humanitarian relief aid and insufficient concern for essential forms of development assistance (ibid). In general, the repatriation of Khmer refugees was implemented without an adequate assessment of needs, priorities, resource availability and impacts.

To date, six main development and repatriation concerns have not been addressed:

1. Long-term reintegration programs
2. Reconciliation and healing of past hostilities, in particular, the effects of genocide on the population
3. Damaged and inadequate infrastructures at all levels of government
4. Non-existent institutions to channel or direct foreign aid
5. Economic and environmental exploitation
6. Lack of security within the country hampering successful repatriation.

There is a need to clarify and analyze the major issues of repatriation with particular emphasis on vulnerable groups. As it is not possible to enumerate all of them, three of these issues are briefly addressed.

Distinctions between Refugee Camps

Repatriated Khmer have come from two distinct types of refugee camps—UNHCR holding camps where residents were eligible for resettlement (for example Khao I Dang), and border camps which were affiliated with political factions (see Table 1)and operated under the military authority of these factions.

By the end of March 1993, six of the seven border camps had been emptied and closed down. The last camp, Site 2, was officially closed on March 30 though 25,000 refugees have remained there. Apparently, most are expected to repatriate shortly (World Refugee Survey 1993).

The questions remain of where these different groups of returnees have gone, do some have specialized skills gained in particular camps, and are there discernable differences between them?

Age and Skills of Khmer Returnees

Fifty per cent of the returnee population is less than 15 years old with little or no experience of life outside the refugee camps (Anderson 1992:11). Forty per cent of the returnees are between 15 and 40 years old, with a large segment being 30 to 39 years old (ibid.). Over half their lives have been spent in a combination of slave labour and refugee camp conditions. Further, many of them participated, both actively and under coercion, in the enforcement and enactment of Khmer Rouge policy. They have little experience of living in "normal" Cambodian social settings. Further, as adults, some Khmer have developed education and employment skills in refugee camps under the guidance of Western-based NGOs. Numerous refugees have received technical training, are health service providers (midwives, nurses, medics, doctors), teachers, social workers, community organizers, translators, and administrators. Only about ten per cent of returnees have ever been full time farmers.

Several issues stand out: What will be the integration of the younger Khmer, and how will they develop a sense of security and identity in a country foreign to them? Will they be expected to live and work in rural areas which are unfamiliar to them? Can the over-burdened, ill-equipped and under-funded Cambodian education system integrate large numbers of returnee students, and are there appropriate placement and equivalency tests? Further, is there an evaluation and recognition of vocational and professional skills acquired through training in camps, and are skilled individuals finding employment in their fields? Given their familiarity with various NGOs in the refugee camps, it is possible that returnees will gravitate towards NGOs, either to utilize services or to offer their skills. NGOs may create further obstacles in that a sustained dependency could result from continued services such as food distribution.

Returnees listed numerous areas of work that they wanted to go into when they returned: medical services, teachers, artisans, blacksmiths, barbers, fishermen, rubber plantation workers, miners, factory workers. Can the local economies accommodate these new job-seekers and what effects occur from this competition for scarce positions? As agricultural land becomes available (i.e. cleared of mines), who distributes the land, who is it distributed to and what is the criteria for eligibility—vulnerable groups, local farmers, returnees or internally displaced persons?

Women and Health Concerns

Seventy-six per cent of the total returnee population are women and children. A large number of the women are sole family supporters. The majority of Khmer women are unedu-

Table 1: Camp Affliations

Campsite	Political Auspices
Site K, O'Trao, Site 8	Khmer Rouge
Sok Sann, Site 2 (with >200,000)	Son Sann's Khmer People's National Liberation Front (KPNLF)
Site B	FUNCINPEC (Prince Sihanouk's faction) KPNLF

cated and illiterate. Further, none of the vocational/technical schools in the refugee camps enrolled women so their lack of skills is a major problem in fitting them into the local economies. Questions remain as to what programs or innovative educational techniques have been designed to meet the special needs of returnee women and what types of assistance or support are they given?

In each refugee camp, Khmer women established a Khmer Women's Association (KWA) and were active in initiating child care, education, literacy, health, counselling and training services for women. Have these women been able to continue both their work and lobbying for women's concerns in Cambodia? Do they receive support either from the government or NGOs and is there potential conflict between their groups and the government backed Women's Association of Cambodia (WAC)?

It is estimated that women account for at least 60 per cent of the adult population in Cambodia and head over one third of all households. Cambodian women bear heavy responsibilities in generating income and producing food while still assuming domestic and child care. Khmer women lack employable skills due to the low levels of education, and do not hold positions of social power and authority.

Several Women In Development programs have been developed in Cambodia to implement social services, health care and life skill and literacy training for women. Will these services and programs be expanded to include returnee women and will the overall mandate of them be suitable to address their particular reintegration needs, social, psychological and physical?

Those refugees who lived in the best-serviced camps would not be prepared for conditions in Cambodia. In all the border camps for example, chlorinated water was supplied and in most camps medical services were eventually regulated and reliable. In Cambodia, however, diarrhoea, malnutrition, malaria and tuberculosis remain common ailments and health care treatment is chronically impaired by shortages of drugs, medical supplies and inadequate health care buildings (Anderson 1992).

Highly vulnerable individuals who have been dependent on institutional support structures will find adaptation particularly difficult. These include individuals with physical or mental handicaps, the elderly, orphans, and women who are the sole support for their households. The question remains where these individuals will establish support or receive services: distant family or relatives, local community, pagodas, government or NGOs? Further, how and to what extent are these networks and extended kinships being reconstructed after twenty years?

Summary

There is obvious need to identify existing infrastructures at community, regional and national levels which can facilitate long-term reintegration and development schemes. It cannot be assumed that infrastructures are functioning, nor can we assume the manner and degree in which infrastructures are being rebuilt. It is this identification which will provide services for integration of the returnees. Further, there is a need to identify local, UNHCR, and international organizations, both government and NGO sponsored, to determine their relationship to returnees, internally displaced refugees, and local Khmer. There is a need to clarify whether programs are being developed specifically for returnees, or whether returnees are somehow expected to fit into organizational agendas for the local Khmer. An extended collection and analysis of material on Cambodian repatriation and development issues is essential to develop policies and guidelines on long-term refugee concerns. ■

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Vietnamese Women in Hong Kong: A Women's Perspective on Detention[1]

Maryanne Loughry, Margaret McCallin, Gwen Bennett

I spend the day doing nothing. Just eating, staying in my bunk, or walking around the camp. I put the future out of my mind.

Introduction

To better understand the situation of the Vietnamese women in detention camps in Hong Kong and the subsequent impact of detention on these women and their children, Community and Family Services International (CFSI), in co-operation with the International Catholic child Bureau (ICCB), conducted a systematic assessment of the needs of the women, and the stresses and traumas experienced by the women as well as their children.

The objectives of this two part assessment were to:

1. enable representative groups of women in the camps to articulate their concerns and needs;
2. share these with women in other camps so as to understand their situation more objectively;
3. document the psychological effects of detention on women and their children; and
4. provide relevant data to program managers to assist them in the development of suitable and relevant programs in Hong Kong and Vietnam.

The assessment provided data on the women's experiences of trauma on the journey to Hong Kong and while in detention, their perceptions of daily problems and needs, and their stress levels including the experiences of trauma and stress levels of their children under 10 years of age. It examined the cumulative effects of these factors on the women's well-being and their capacity to function while in detention as well as the possible implications for their future. The women in detention actively participated in all stages of the assessment. Thus, in addition to relevant comments within the text, interspersed throughout the report are "vignettes" which describe their lives and give voice to their needs and concerns.

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Background

The Vietnamese people first began seeking asylum in Hong Kong in 1975, and continued to land in the Territory in significant numbers until late 1991. Up until mid-June 1988, all arrivals from Vietnam were recognised as refugees and were eligible for resettlement. In 1988 Hong Kong introduced a refugee status determination procedure. Under this policy, Vietnamese are held in closed detention centres pending a determination of their refugee claim. For many individuals this process has taken at least two years. If denied refugee status, the options are limited to returning to Vietnam under a UNHCR voluntary repatriation program, or the orderly return program agreed by the Hong Kong, British and Vietnamese governments. Many of those denied refugee status have returned to Vietnam but thousands have also opted to stay for more years in the detention camps.

Living Conditions in Detention Camps in Hong Kong

Most of the detention camps are located far away from the built up areas of Hong Kong and are based in the outer islands, the New Territories and towards the China border. A camp is a series of corrugated iron of fibre huts built on concrete blocks isolated form their surroundings by 5 metre high barbed-wire fences. Between the rows of huts are small and bare passage ways devoid of grass and trees. Inside each hut are three tiered high bunks on metal frames accommodating at least one hundred people. Each dwelling space is one wooden plank assigned to two persons with a make shift curtain separating it from the others. Food is prepared at a central kitchen inside the camp and distributed three times a day.

All in detention are required to live under strict rules and regulations extracted form the ones used for prisoners in Hong Kong. The camps are managed by Correctional Services Department (CSD) officers, or the Hong Kong Housing Authority. Voluntary agencies provide basic services in the camps including primary and secondary education for children, pre-school classes and well baby clinics. Basic social work services are provided in all of the camps by CFSI. Recreational and sport activities are very limited and there are few adult programs. The voluntary agencies working in the camp and visitors to the centres visiting rooms have to comply with the prison rules as distributed by the Correctional Services Department.

The conditions within the camps are cramped and crowded with restrictive movement. They accommodate up to 20,000 people and some of these people have been in detention since 1988, five years. There are countless social problems in the centres including, theft, riot, gambling, alcohol and drug abuse, violent crimes and forced sexual relationships. The most vulnerable people under these circumstances are the women and children, especially those children unaccompanied by their parents. The women com-

prise approximately 40 percent of the population.

Methodology

The assessment was conducted in two parts, a series of discussions using the focus group discussion methodology and a questionnaire survey. Following a review of the situation of minors in detention conducted earlier in 1992,[2] it was decided to take the opportunity whilst interviewing the women to also gather information about the experiences and well-being of young children. In the course of the women's survey, therefore, those who had a child in the age group two to four years or five to nine years were also asked about the events their childhood experienced en route to Hong Kong and in the detention centres, and completed a schedule describing stress related behaviours appropriate to the age of the child. It should be noted that the sample was not controlled to select children in these age groups. There were 67 women with a child in the five to nine age group, and sixty-two with a child aged two to four.

> A woman in Whitehead detention centre spoke vividly of the on-going experience of witnessing and being a victim of violence. During the three years they have lived in detention, her family has been robbed several times, and once her husband was beaten when he tried to intervene. They have also witnessed two riots. One in particular, in which twenty four people perished in a fire, has left deep scars. Their children regularly wake up fearful, crying and recalling the screams, the noise of the people running and the terror of that night.

Focus Group Discussions

A series of focused discussions were conducted in five camps, in which 1065 women between the ages of 18 and 70 years participated. Of the total group, there were 320 single women; 232 female heads of families; and 513 married women. While the assessment was co-ordinated by the Training and Resource Unit of CFSI, the discussions and collection of information were conducted in Vietnamese by Vietnamese women, who were trained in the methodology of focused discussion groups. This was viewed by CFSI as an important factor to empower the women in the camps to "own" the outcomes of the needs assessment.

The process of the Focus Group Discussions (FGD) involved bringing together six to eight women, to discuss the issues and needs that are important to women in detention. The FGD process was thought to be the most suitable process because it gathered women together in a manner that was considered to be culturally sensitive. The process ensured that women had time to express fully their opinions and to experience the support of other women voicing similar concerns. The women who took part in the FGD were from a similar background, education level, age or marital status - for example, single women or married women from one hut. The careful selection of group members was designed to enable the women to identify with each other and hopefully feel more comfortable sharing concerns on encountered issues.

The Focus Group Discussions were conducted at two levels:

Level One

The objective of level one was to elicit the needs and problems of Vietnamese women in Hong Kong, through consulting a large and representative group of women in an atmosphere that led to open and frank discussions. The targeted participants differed across camps. Some camps based the participation on representative groups: married; single; single mothers; elderly etc. Others selected hut residents ensuring a wide cross-section of women.

All recordings of the FGD were collected by the Training and Resource Unit of CFSI for collection and analysis. Two Vietnamese research assistants were trained in content analysis and they independently considered the recordings of each FGD, with the task of isolating the dominant themes underlying the problems and needs enunciated in the groups. They sorted for dominance and repetition, striving to summarise the content of the discussions in a manner that was faithful to the original intent of the women. The themes were prioritised by frequency and the importance accorded to them in the discussions.

After the content analysis of the transcripts the problems and needs of the women were determined to be grouped under the following eight themes:

- Joblessness
- Public and personal hygiene
- Medical care
- Stress
- Provisions
- Protection and safety
- Leisure and recreation
- Education of children

Level Two

A further series of discussions were conducted focusing on the eight dominant themes. The same women were invited to participate in these new discussions to ensure that this new level of discussion built on the discussions of level one. The objective of these discussions was to focus on the major concerns (themes) that had arisen out of the earlier discussions and to further review these concerns in the hope of clarifying the causes and effects of these concerns.

In the different camps the women were invited to select from the eight major concerns uncovered from the level one discussions one or two of the concerns that they would consider important enough to include in a further round of discussions. As in the previous discussions, the women in level two vigorously described their situation, outlining in great detail their experience of the problems, the effects that they saw the problems having on individuals, their families and the community of asylum seekers in each camp.

A questionnaire survey collected data from 370 women who were randomly selected from seven camps. The women were interviewed by trained Vietnamese women using the following questionnaire:

1. Biodata questionnaire: providing background information on the women's situation in Vietnam and their present living conditions in Hong Kong;
2. Traumatic events schedule: recording the traumatic events experienced by women a)en route to Hong Kong and b) in detention centres.
3. Daily problems questionnaire: recording the daily problems facing the women in detention centres; and
4. Self-report questionnaire: a measure of emotional well-being.

Findings

The assessment revealed that the cumulative effect of the women's experience of traumatic events and the daily problems that characterize their lives in detention is such as seriously to compromise their emotional well-being.

The women are severely depressed and anxious, and their capacity to make decisions, particularly with regard to the future, is thus affected. Women with children are more affected, and the extent to which their children experience negative events is a contributing factor in determining their emotional well-being. They are concerned not only for the effect of the violence that characterizes life in detention on themselves, but also on how it influences their children.

The following summaries reflect the actual content of the women's discussion.

1. Joblessness

The women said that employment was their greatest need in the camp. Although in detention centres the daily necessities were provided by the camp management, they considered that employment was the most important because the foods and other items provided in the camp were not considered to be enough for their basic needs. The women believed that working would help to lessen stress and tensions. It would help them feel that their life in detention was more meaningful. They stated that a job would keep them busy and less preoccupied with worries and anxieties and that working could empower them with knowledge and skills which would eventually be helpful for their future.

The women believed that many of the social problems in the camps such as alcoholism and gambling resulted from the people in the camps being left too idle. The combination of joblessness and overcrowded conditions accounted for many of the camps, some of which have resulted in stabbings and murders.

The women concluded that it was essential that there be work opportunities for women in the camps. They saw that such opportunities would not help women to keep occupied but it would also help them to cope with stress and other mental problems in the camp.

2. Personal and Public Hygiene

The hygiene conditions in most of the camps was described by the women as very poor. They stated that the washing areas were dirty and there were lots of insects such as flies and cockroaches, and rats, in the living areas. The women stated that these problems were due to the inadequate supply of cleaning equipment, the limited water supply and the lack of care of communal areas resulting in the people not really wanting to care for or maintain their surroundings. As a result of the poor hygiene in the camps there were often outbreaks of diseases such as conjunctivitis, fever and diarrhoea and many of the women weaeere had skin diseases and gynaecological problems. They described these conditions as impacting on their mental health. They saw some of the women in the camps becoming depressed and ill-tempered because of suffering continual illnesses.

The continuing poor hygiene conditions, and the lack of proper maintenance of public areas was evidence to the women that there had not been appropriate measures to encourage or raise people's awareness about public hygiene in detention camps. For them, the attitude of the community towards public hygiene reflected the level of depression present.

3. Medical Care

Health care services in the camps was intensely discussed by the women. Most of the concerns were focused on the difficulties that many women experience when they want to seek medical services. The women found that the attitude of health workers, especially the doctors in the camps, was usually very negative towards patients. The women reported that they did not feel satisfied with the treatment given. The doctors usually asked too little about their problem and only gave them pain-relief pills. The women reported that the procedures for serious complaints was complicated and lengthy; many described an increased feeling of depression and frustration after seeing the doctor. One of the immediate effects of the women's dissatisfaction was a delay in seeking treatment until the condition became too significant to be ignored.

The discussions concluded that there should be better medical service for Vietnamese women in the camps, and that while recognising that the services available may not be adequate the attitude of the health workers could be improved.

4. Stress

Throughout the discussions the women asserted that all women experienced stress and depression in the camps. They felt that the longer they

The continuing poor hygiene conditions, and the lack of proper maintenance of public areas was evidence to the women that there had not been appropriate measures to encourage or raise people's awareness about public hygiene in detention camps.

were in the camps, the more they were becoming stressed and depressed. They identified three main causes for the women's depression.

Women were living in camps with constant worries and fears. They fear forced repatriation resulting in violence, and they fear that the Hong Kong police could arrest their husband at any time. The women described the camp situation as becoming worse and unsafe for them. The security management in the camps was thought to be bad and the Correctional Services Department could not guarantee the safety of the occupants. They saw that the control in the camp was not strict enough to prevent trouble-makers in the camps, and they saw that in this environment there were more and more people likely to engage in gambling, alcohol and drugs.

For the women the process of screening for refugee status was too slow and unjust. The two year wait for interviews added to the deterioration of the people's mental state because of the long periods of anxiety. They commented that a sign of mental downturn in most women was that they all felt that they were losing more and more of their ability to control their tempers. They witnessed their children dropping out of school due to bad influences in the camps, and they felt the children were easily attracted towards gang activity. They believed that as their children had no contact with the outside world, their minds did not develop normally and they became very difficult to rear. The women also saw their husbands engaging in gambling and drinking due to depression and the women felt powerless to intervene.

Furthermore, the lack of recreational activities left people distressed and in depression.

5. Provisions

The women complained that basic necessities provided in camps, specifically food, clothing and underwear, were generally not enough in quantity as compared to their needs, and very poor in quality. The food prepared by the central kitchens lacked taste and some families in the camp had to sell a portion of their food, e.g. fruits, to buy ingredients such as pepper, sugar and fish sauce to recook their food in the manner to which they are accustomed. The women felt that the women in the camps could not enjoy cooking as is the traditional practice and craft of Vietnamese women in Vietnam. In the camps the women could only recook food which was provided cooked but lacking in taste. Many women felt that they had too much time in the camps and if they could not cook they were less help to their family. Most of the women said they were not provided with enough toiletries, footwear, and clothing and they could not get any income-generating work to supplement these needs.

6. Protection and safety

In general, women believed they could never feel safe in the camps. They saw that the main cause of the security problems for all, and specifically for women, was the prison-like camp management. They described the "social ills" within this structure becoming increasingly worse. They saw that women as well as children who have always been the victims under these circumstances were living in a state of fear, intimidation, depression and potential conflict.

They felt that nobody actually supported and protected women in the camps.

Under these circumstances they believed that the men did not respect and protect women. In the family, husbands beat up their wives for no reason at all. In the camps' culture the women think that women have become a mockery to men.

Women are teased and forced to submit to sexual relationships. Single women are seen as particularly vulnerable in this condition. The women feel a loss of confidence in themselves. It is because of living in this fear that women never speak up.

They are always fearful for their safety, and for retaliation if they do speak up.

7. Leisure and recreational activities

The activities were described as inadequate due to the overcrowded living conditions. There was not enough space for recreational activities and movement within the camp was very restricted. Few materials were available, even magazines. At this point of time, these activities have become more important to lessen the suffering of the people in the camps. They thought that their mental reflexes had slowed down and they were finding it hard to concentrate. Within the camps the women noted that there was no facility available where they could go to forget the hardship that they were facing at the moment.

8. Education of their children

The women were concerned about their children's education, the lack of education materials and the skills of the teachers. The majority of the teachers were recruited in the camps, and only a few were former teachers in Vietnam. The majority of the new recruits were only high school graduates, without the skills and experience to be a good educator. As the teachers were also part of the camps, they had their own problems to worry about. Like the rest of the population they were known to experience mental and material problems, they too had lost hope and were living in the camps without purpose. As parents the women were also in the same predicament. They felt that they were not as concerned about their children's education as they would normally be in Vietnam. What preoccupied them was their screening and thoughts about their future, this is given more weight than the importance of their children's education. In this repressed environment the women witnessed that the children were already bearing the harsh living conditions, witnessing all the sufferings and social ills that pervade the camps. They had lost their innocence at a very young age, and had no realistic contact with a normal environment. The women guessed that

their children had lost their self-confidence, and harbour repressed anger as a result of what they had experienced in the camps. The women believed that their children had stunted learning and development, with no knowledge that what is real in camp is totally the opposite in the outside world.

Overall, the women described themselves as heavily stressed and having to endure a lot of suffering. They described feeling ashamed of themselves and having a very low self-esteem. They were concerned about the chaos in the camps and the message about the Vietnamese community this chaos was giving to the Hong Kong people and the world. In each instance the women related their experience of the problems to the stress and depression that was all too evident to them in the camps. They described their need for meaningful activities as a means through which they could re-establish their own identity and the roles that they were accustomed to filling in Vietnam in preparation for their future. They described feeling helpless to assist their family when it is most in need, and they avoided any discussion of returning to Vietnam where they may at least resume a more active role in providing for the family.

> In individual interviews, women will talk about their relationships with their husbands, and how living in detention has changed this. A central factor seems to be lack of privacy and personal space. One woman talked of having no place to share personal thoughts and feelings, or having no place to be alone with her husband intimately. "Your marital relationship is open to all in the hut to see." This makes couples short-tempered, and arguments begin over smaller and smaller things.

In their discussions the women accounted for the lack of concern for public hygiene, the inadequate protection of the vulnerable in the camp and the apathy towards the children's education as symptomatic of the people in the camp living in enormously stressful circumstances. They could see that the circumstances could be improved for them in Hong Kong, and they had many suggestions as to what changes should be brought about.

The women, despite their all-pervasive environment of stress and depression, became focused and energised by their experience of sharing and being listened to. Buoyed by the discussions, and recognising the need for a more thorough assessment the women assisted and participated in a questionnaire survey of a cross section of women from the camps to obtain additional data on the costs of detention on women.

> A mother of three living in Whitehead detention centre says her constant anxiety is "to keep her family in peace and happiness." She says living in the huts is like living in the middle of a market, where your children see and hear everything, and others watch all the time. She feels she has little control over her children's emotional development and well-being.

Conclusions and Recommendations:

Although the assessment was conducted with women and focused on issues that are of particular importance to them, it would be counter-productive for the results to be shared only with them. In many respects, the negative effect on their emotional well-being is due to their situation of disempowerment and vulnerability *as women*. They are not the perpetrators, but the *victims* of abuse, intimidation and neglect of their needs and concerns as women and as mothers. In this sense it is important that the community understands the severe effects on both women and children if the situation continues unchanged. "Community" is meant to convey not only the Vietnamese in detention, but the voluntary, international and governmental agencies that work in the detention camps. These organizations must not leave the population in detention to face the reality of their circumstances unaided, nor use the results from the assessment as another stick with which to beat them. The bleak picture which emerges from the assessment demands that the population in detention be enabled *by humanitarian means* to resolve the impasse that is so evident in their inability to reach a decision about their future, whilst recognising the effects of detention on themselves and their families. This latter issue was discussed in the meetings with the women, albeit often in an "oblique" manner, and bearing in mind that in the majority of cases it is *not* the woman herself who makes decisions, but her husband/partner or other male family member.

***In many respects, the negative effect on their emotional well-being is due to their situation of disempowerment and vulnerability* as women.**

1. The results of the assessment should be shared with groups of people in detention, through a process of community education, and also with the agencies working in the detention camps, UNHCR, and camp management. This information campaign needs to be carefully planned to ensure full dissemination throughout the camps as well as at different levels within the involved organisations. A high profile interagency campaign to launch the Women's Report and to disseminate the results could serve as a catalyst to further enhance the women's network as well as develop their involvement and resourcefulness. Such an interagency approach could also facilitate the design of programs to respond to the needs substantiated by the assessment.
2. The assessment results should also be shared beyond Hong Kong in an attempt to address the needs of women and their children when they return to Vietnam. It may be possible to target government bodies, women's groups and organisations already operating in Vietnam, and particular organisations assisting with the reintegration of returning Vietnamese.

3. The extent to which many of the women's concerns are in fact family issues should be emphasised. Their efforts to develop more effective strategies to cope with their experiences should be supported. This will result in increased benefit to them and their children. The women should not be expected to respond alone to the implications for intervention from the assessment. In this regard it is important also that the men are not alienated by falling into the trap of "beating" them with the assessment results.
4. The process of the Focus Group Discussion, the questionnaire survey, and the feedback of the survey results has enhanced the development of the women's groups and activities. This momentum should be used to initiate more self-help groups and further promote women's participation in the camp decision making.
5. The networks of women that were established during the focus group discussions should be maintained and supported as sources of assistance and information. They have provided much needed medium through which the women have been able to express their concerns in a constructive manner.
6. The women's anxieties about repatriation should and can be addressed by providing them with information from sources that they trust. The women themselves with the assistance of agencies working in the camps are best placed to determine these "reliable" sources, and to ensure that the information is widely disseminated and available for discussion. ■

Notes

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Immigration and Refugee Board
Convention Refugee Determination Division
Claims Process Period: January 1, 1993 - June 30, 1993

Regional Summary

	Atlantic	Ottawa	Quebec	Ontario	Prairies	B.C	National
Claims heard to completion (includes cases before 1993)	232	577	4,311	7,853	266	617	13,856
Decisions rendered	193	574	4,241	7,312	285	640	13,245
Claims rejected	*82*	*127*	*1,924*	*2,954*	*106*	*445*	*5,638*
Claims upheld	*111*	*447*	*2,317*	*4,358*	*179*	*195*	*7,607*
Decisions pending*	46	134	639	2,000	25	151	2,995
Withdrawn/abandoned	10	42	509	1,212	19	136	1,928
Claims pending**	**550**	**1,171**	**5,548**	**12,973**	**294**	**1,845**	**22,381**
(—Regional share	2%	5%	25%	58%	1%	8%)	

* *Decisions pending include all claims heard to completion for which no decision had been rendered by the end of the reporting period.*

** *Claims pending include all claims referred to the Convention Refugee Determination Division that have not been finalized (i.e. by a positive or negative decision or by withdrawal or abandonment) as of the end of the reporting period.*

Statistical Summary by Major Source Countries

	Country of Alleged Persecution	Claims — Heard to Completion	Withdrawn/ Abandoned	Decided	Convention Refugee Status — Yes	No	Accept. Rate%
1	Sri Lanka	2,548	85	2,413	1,944	469	80.6
2	Somalia	1,559	64	1,565	1,516	49	96.9
3	Pakistan	655	148	601	200	401	33.3
4	Iran	611	54	555	395	160	71.2
5	Lebanon	496	69	489	176	313	36.0
6	China	448	49	556	103	453	18.5
7	India	448	94	438	111	327	25.3
8	Russia	389	48	320	213	107	66.6
9	Israel	379	106	235	77	158	32.8
10	El Salvador	354	64	418	87	331	20.8
11	USSR	347	121	317	150	167	47.3
12	Peru	314	13	294	220	74	74.8
13	Guatamala	313	67	331	185	146	55.9
14	Romania	305	25	275	140	135	50.9
15	Haiti	269	13	274	179	95	65.3
16	Ghana	258	134	258	38	220	14.7
17	Bangladesh	241	35	237	101	136	42.6
18	Zaire	225	8	240	142	98	59.2
19	Nigeria	207	49	201	38	163	18.9
20	Sudan	204	4	206	194	12	94.2
21	Ukraine	186	25	156	103	53	66.0
22	Argentina	170	53	140	26	114	18.6
23	Cuba	166	20	135	101	34	74.8
24	Uruguay	135	33	149	13	136	8.7
25	Ethiopia	133	6	132	79	53	59.8
Top-25 countries		**11,360**	**1,387**	**10,935**	**6,531**	**4,404**	**59.7**
Total		**13,856**	**1,928**	**13,245**	**7,607**	**5,638**	**57.4**

Source: Immigration and Refugee Board, Ottawa; News Release, September 14, 1993.

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Refuge • Vol. 13 • No. 5 •September 1993

CANADA'S PERIODICAL ON REFUGEES
REFUGE

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4700 Keele Street, North York
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- Effect of Canadian regionalism on refugee resettlement

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