**Westoby, P. (2005) Narratives of Distress within the Sudanese community of Brisbane and Logan.**

**Preamble**
This paper was the first of several which gives voice to the narratives of Sudanese refugees and workers around a number of topics. However, I would like to make a few key points within this preamble.

Firstly, whilst these papers clearly focus on the Sudanese refugee community I do not intend to ‘problematize’ that community. Or put another way, I am in no way wanting to represent that community as having ‘greater’ problems than other refugee groups. My research has simply focused on this community as a result of other motivations.

Secondly, I am aware that any process of ‘representation’ by definition distorts. Not every Sudanese refugee has been interviewed. The narratives in the paper still only represent a small number of voices, and therefore provide only a limited perspective.

Thirdly, whilst this paper does explore distress, or ‘problems’, I want to highlight to readers that my PhD explored how Sudanese refugees and workers see healing, and explores dynamics of cultural, community and structural changes that facilitate or create a healing context. I am saying this simply to locate this ‘problem-oriented’ paper in a context of strengths, inspiration and hope-filled narratives of change that sit within the PhD.

Fourthly, I would like to explain that whilst this paper generally explores the kind of issues arising from what would traditionally be called the discourses of ‘mental health’, ‘well-being’ and ‘psycho-social issues’, I have purposefully not used these terms unless they are used by refugees themselves as a way of giving a fresh space for refugees themselves to voice what is distress and what is healing in their own voices.

Finally, I would welcome any feedback, both appreciate and critical thoughts, reflections, and ideas that could feed into an on-going dialogue.

**Some comments about method**
This research is the result of analysis and reflection of data from thirty in-depth interviews conducted amongst the Sudanese refugee community and key workers in the geographical locations of Brisbane and Logan cities.

These interviews were open ended but focused on the following key themes: distress, healing, culture, community and systems. In the first stage of the research I used a heuristic method of inquiry refusing to define what each of the words/concepts meant. Participants in the research could define each of the terms in their own ways. Each interview was conducted, the data was transcribed and then participants received a copy for validation processes. In the second stage of research the interviews have been more dialogical in the sense that the intention has not been so much to understand the perspective of the ‘Other’ (in this case the person involved in the dialogue) but to engage with one another’, and be conducted by the object of the conversation (what is distress and healing?).
The process of writing this paper involved conducting an analysis of each interview exploring the narratives within the transcript that focused on distress. Clearly this involves a secondary stage of dialogue. The first was that of the participants in interviews, the second is now that of me as interpreter and writer with the written text. I am hoping the dialogue will continue as you the reader engage in listening and dialogue with the interpreted text.

(The voices of participants are in italics).
The views and interpretations within this paper are only those of the author.

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Interviews with participants revealed that there were many causes of distress for the Sudanese refugee communities of Brisbane and Logan. When you read the narratives it is clear that many key themes inter-connect. For example, themes of culture and systems are woven into many comments by refugees in ways that reflect similar, differing and at times confusing reflections and analysis. I will allow for those varying themes and at times conflicting analyses to resonate with you the reader through not silencing the narratives.

Underpinning this ‘archive’ of Southern Sudanese narratives of distress is a concept that Bourdieu (1999) has called social distress. One could conceptualize the analysis of the dialogue and narratives using Bourdieu’s notion of creating an archive of ‘social distress’. For Bourdieu social distress is a way of understanding narratives or subjective experience1 within the context of structural inequality. Drawing further on Bourdieu’s work we could conceptualise the narratives of refugees themselves as social mourning to describe the experiences of people when there is a link between the social experience and structural dynamics. More often than not the narratives themselves make those links explicit. There is awareness, consciousness, even resistance of the links between their subjective experience and structural dynamics. At other times the link is not so explicit but is more implicit.

**Unmet aspirations**

For many people interviewed the issue of unmet aspirations was described as a key trigger of distress:

> .....in coming here there are so many things – people come especially with a minimum education and have been living in camps, or living in urban areas in difficult conditions – with little source of income. Then when one comes to a place like Australia – or the USA or elsewhere where the expectations are high – people assume there will be a big change in their life. But unfortunately when they arrive they find it is different. Their expectations will not be met in the way they had developed.

> They come here with huge expectations…….People come and it is very different to how they thought it would be – houses aren’t what they expected, the price of life is a big shock. They know they are going to be earning dollars, and many of them think of dollars in terms of what they might be worth in Sudan or in Kenya and then when they get here clearly it is hard to make ends meet often, and yet the family overseas expect you to send $’s overseas.

Listening to refugee narratives around the issue of aspirations, however, revealed a conflicting and internally ambivalent sense of on the one hand: deep relief, joy and celebration that they have escaped from the context of war, refugee camps and distressing first asylum contexts, yet; on the other hand this deeply disappointing sense that aspirations will not be met. Hage (2003, 25) provides a useful way of considering this through his description of societies role in distributing hope and

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1 I do not wanting to set up a conflict between the objective and subjective. I certainly do want to privilege subjectivity as the authentic voice! As Rose (1999, 95) points out: ‘we are governed as much through subjectification as through objectification’. Bourdieu’s sociology also attempts to transcend the objective/subjective debate through a double process of epistemological breaks with subjectivity and objectivity (see Swartz 1997, Chapter 3)
hopefulness. Whilst refugees escaping from the ‘entrapment’ of refugee camps or first asylum contexts are filled with an immediate sense of hope upon arrival, the realities soon overwhelm them. The above narrative describes this process as a ‘big shock’. Hope soon turns to distress as the economic realities of living their ‘transnational’ life are revealed.

Some of those failed aspirations and the sense that society has not distributed hope focus on the problems of poverty and unemployment. Here we discern that for many Southern Sudanese refugees’ societies’ lack of capacity to distribute hope leads to worry and distress.

**Poverty**

*Mostly the things that bring depression are practical and particular. It is about issues such as not being able to pay – it brings a problem to your mind all your time. Others want to buy a car, and you cannot afford to – and so you ring relatives or neighbours to get help, ‘I need to go to an interview’, and then you have no train fare. Then you get depressed. You need practical help*

This was a recurring theme: Southern Sudanese refugees aspire to make do in their every day life but are constantly struggling to survive on the minimal financial support that Centrelink provides. Again, there is underlying conflict within various narratives about the amazing fortune of coming to a country where the government does provide an income guarantee, but alternatively, distress that it is not enough to ‘climb out of poverty’. This above interview also illuminates a participant analysis that the cause of depression was that of social suffering caused by social dynamics of poverty-making. This poverty is experienced in ‘bodily form’, that is, a sense of depression, bring ‘a problem to your mind’ but would imply that the solution to the experience of social suffering is practical, not therapeutic.

**Unemployment**

The key cause of social distress was that of unemployment. As the following narratives reveal there is a complex nexus of unemployment as a consequence and cause of many other distresses experienced at individual, family and community levels.

Analysis identifies one of the key causes of unemployment as language acquisition:

*Another awful issue for our community is employment. So many people who come here have spent 20 years, 15 or 10 years in idleness. They have had so many years in refugee camps doing nothing. They have done nothing, and then coming here they have no language.*

This is a particular problem for women within the Sudanese community which is consistent with studies of other groups such as South East Asian (Beiser & Hou, 2001) and Bosnian refugee groups (Colic-Peisker, 2004). The greater difficulty for women to attend language classes leads to low language acquisition and therefore greater unemployment:
The second big issue is unemployment, which is 90% of the community in Queensland. Most of our people are women, who are here as widows. They have children, and the capacity for English is very low and it is difficult to employ them. All these women are job-less, they just stay at home and sometimes do English courses. They need to upgrade their English. The issue of unemployment has brought a big issue into the community – reaching into disagreement in the family between wife and husband. Now we have about 30 families broken down – this is the main issue.

Such narratives provide a warning. Other studies reveal that refugees who neither acquire language nor engage with labour markets at the early stage of settlement are at much greater risk of displaying depressive disorder. This has been particularly the case with refugee women. The social distress can be transformed into psychological disorder due to on-going disengagement (Beiser, 2001).

Most participants highlighted the problems of negotiating the system. Such community analysis reveals a certain awareness of ‘systemic oppression’ (Valtonen 2004). That systemic negotiation and oppression was considered to be problematic in a number of ways and ensured an on-going ‘wounding’ (Atkinson, 2002). The following narratives describe some of the dynamics of that systemic oppression.

Firstly, potential employers are not familiar with Africans generally and would have perceptions about African’s that would place applicants at a disadvantage:

We still cannot negotiate the system of how to get employed in Australia. It is even difficult for Australians, then how about us who are not known by managers: our background is not known, our skills are not recognised. No one knows me, who am I? I am not recognized... and all I have been doing. It is very difficult to employ people from Africa because of the background history of the African people – ‘they are from 3rd world countries – when I employ these people is he not going to cause big problems that will bring breakdown to this company’. This is the perception of us. They do not know us, and don’t know what to do – it is difficult for them to understand.

Secondly, the system simply is so alien for refugees who have lived in refugee camps. Participants constantly expressed distress about the alienating process of applying for jobs – addressing selection criteria etc.

and they apply for a job they require addressing these criteria, selection criteria - this is difficult.

Thirdly, the system does not really provide an incentive – it does not encourage people to work:

Then if someone gets a job, and few are used to working for 8 hours – just standing doing the job, and they are not accustomed to such things. If you look amongst the refugees the Sudanese is the majority. Here in Brisbane, Victoria, NSW.... And if you see the % age of refuges working, it is low. ................. and the refugee if he does his figures carefully will realize that it is better to keep getting Centrelink and health care cards than earning $800-$1000 per
fortnight. If they work they are losing, so it is best to keep out of a job. And that itself will cause distress. If you ask him why? He will say, “I am not being encouraged!”

Fourthly, Sudanese refugees feel that many of their people are so disadvantaged through their lack of education and experience:

They’re also distressed because they cannot get work. I guess that is a standard experience for all refugee groups. Education is also a significant issue for distress. They desire, aspire to education, but need so much support. The young ones are dropping out of school. They have a strong educational ethic, but there have been so many interruptions in refugee camps etc. that they are so disadvantaged.

Many participants felt particularly distressed that even when you managed to enter the system (gain some training opportunity), the system still set you up for failure. The kinds of training provided, or pathways (from training to work) that were made available were either inappropriate, lacked integration or simply did not exist:

Unemployment….. discrimination, lack of knowing useful pathways – doing something and then finding that it is not helpful – because it is not a useful path – so a failure of providing useful services to them.

One of the key analyses about causes of unemployment, which is consistent with many other studies, was regarding the lack of recognition of qualifications. That lack of recognition leads to a substantial undermining of ‘self’, a sense of shame and distress:

The adults are not getting jobs primarily due to the system. I have an example of a doctor who worked as a doctor for 20 years in Sudan and other countries, and now he cannot get a job. He cannot get his qualifications recognised in Australia and this leads to a lot of distress and he will feel hopeless. Even if he can make changes he can’t, he cannot start from zero again, or go and be a labourer. He starts to ask ‘have I done something wrong in coming to Australia?’, and that questioning, living with that, will make a lot of distress. His kids will be confused – my father was something, and now he is nothing and that is difficult.

For others the distress was caused by the sense of waste and frustration that resulted from these structural barriers and systemic problems:

Now we are looking at the ETRF (Education Training Reforms), and we have all these adults who were teachers in Sudan, but they have a language problem. I ask myself, ‘why don’t we re-educate, re-train them to be useful, put them in ESL schools?’, so they can be teachers here. They understand the culture, the background of these kids, they know the communication system, and they know Math’s, Chemistry: these teachers would be good. This is the system that does not allow them to be qualified. My father in law is very experienced, but he cannot become qualified here. They would be great teacher-aids.
For Bourdieu such dynamics are a result of ‘structural mismatching’ (Swartz 1997, 112) where we see a disjuncture between aspirations, expectations and real life chances. The structural mismatches caused by the disjuncture between education and training, job creation and pathway creation, and skill recognition policy and program cause serious social distress.

Some refugees gave voice to an overwhelming analysis of this structural mismatching or contradictory systemic dynamics that causes such distress:

.........for example one man from Egypt went to USA and another comes to Australia. The one who went to USA he is working, because they have a system that gives people a chance, but here we always say ‘you need experience’. And you do this to someone who has never been to school; you put pressure on this person. “You have to look for work”, and then you threaten them, ‘if you do not look for work we will cut your social security benefits.’ In USA they ask ‘can you do this?”, and you say ‘yes’, and they say “OK – lets go’. This is a systemic issue and it is putting a lot of pressure on people. Then people go to TAFE and learn good English to do just a cleaning job. How many years do you push people like this? Every time we get letters from Centrelink it is very stressful. At some time in my life when I was looking for work – I did not want to go to Centrelink, I was scared of these letters – I saw the letter and it instantly created stress.

Within this narrative we can discern the ‘performative’ pressures (Rose, 1999) (overt and covert) for refugees of being subject to a ‘case-management’ system that purposefully pressurizes people into looking for jobs without addressing the real relations of disadvantaged and economic exclusion. Wendy Brown (1995) speaks of such relations and dynamics as the ‘states of injury’ upon which our current economic system are constructed. For Lyotard such dynamics are a principal feature of neo-liberalism and the key messages are ‘adapt your aspirations to our ends or else’ (Lyotard 1984, 112).

Many narratives gave voice to the consequences of this ‘injury’ and the fear of not being able to ‘perform’. The impact was felt as:

........the on-going experience of depression;

Yes I had problems, so I left a country, and I came to a new one. To solve my problems I came here. I come with depression with all the things I left, but then I cannot find a job then I still keep my depression – the pressure of so many things, paying for education for my kids, it is my responsibility etc. – I need a job, a permanent job.

........a sense of abuse resulting in becoming welfare dependent:

The Sudanese believe in what they do for themselves. They come from the land. They believe they need to earn their food and their living. But if they depend very much on others, it is like an abuse to them, ‘you are being fed’. Seriously people always say ‘hey look you are staying at home and you are just a lazy
beggar which is the sweat of someone else’, and this impacts on your sense of self.

Many narratives expressed pain due the sense of exclusion from economic and employment opportunities due to people’s perceptions of African’s. Such narratives give an explicit voice to the concept of ‘on-going wounding’ caused by such systemic oppression:

*Employment is such a huge source of pain. They want to be employed, they want to do well, but they have expressed concerns about how people in the community perceive them and there is the whole issue of how people in the community perceive African’s and black people in general. There is not a huge history of African’s settling in Australia, and amongst the African’s they see the indigenous community as very different but the Sudanese themselves think that when they do talk to mainstream Australians who have had no contact with either African’s or Aboriginal, they are all painted with the same brush. You have Sudanese who speak very good English being asked ‘you know, do you speak English?’ all those stereotypes of black people make it very difficult for the Sudanese to feel welcomed in general. They are more obvious, and “Other”. Yes, it is true for all new arrivals, the new population of arriving refugees but the African’s are particularly obvious.*

Many participants linked the experience of unemployment and poverty to their concerns about family breakdown:

*Employment – people get small money from Centrelink and that money is not sometimes adequate to support the family. Then it brings a problem between husband and wife and kids sometimes.*

These narratives confirm Mullaly’s thesis (1997) that the dynamics of modern day oppression do not occur directly through coercive rule of law or because of evil intentions of the dominant group. These structural dynamics become manifest through systemic constraints mediated through norms, practices, ideas, policies, and assumptions of institutions. The analysis presented through the narratives indicates that this oppression is a significant cause of social distress that results in other forms of on-going wounding.

Another significant theme within Sudanese refugee narratives was that of separation from loved ones and ‘country’. Separation of loved ones is amongst the most significant causes of distress for Sudanese refugees. This would confirm Uko-Ekpo’s (1999) argument that within the Sudanese community of Australia a ‘real and meaningful integration cannot occur until they are joined by close relatives’ (Uko-Ekpo 1999, 204-5). For African’s the community network is often closely associated with a broad and cultural understanding of the extended family. To not be with this extended family network is to experience significant distress:

*Probably of those Sudanese refugees coming in the last 2-4 years, separation from loved ones is the most significant issue. There is an absolute deep need and desire to bring people here, and if you are not able to do that in a short*
period of time the distress gets compounded and what I have seen this often leads to the second big issue: family breakdown.

What is going on back home with relatives and kin, in Sudan, or in first asylum contexts such as Uganda, Kenya and Egypt will have a profound impact on refugee’s sense of well-being.

.........will not forget the past – they still have relatives back there and they will ring them sometimes. That affects everyone, or when your financial status is so low that you cannot support yourself or particularly support your relatives who are in a very difficult situation back home – that brings high stress or depression.

As this comment reveals it is often the connections between poverty and a sense of being powerless to support relatives back in Africa that is one of the key causes of distress.

The balance of war and peace back home
People’s distress is not only linked to relatives and kin’s experiences in Africa but also linked to the broader political processes going on. ‘Country’ and the stories of country are still very present even in absence. Currently (writing in July 2004) people’s sense of well-being is linked to their sense of hope about whether the peace agreement currently being signed off will hold.

We have been in war for decades, and several peace talks have been made, promises by the government, and promises by the Arabs, and all in vain. So we hope that this war will end like the other one did end. But the Arabs are playing all these games of fighting. In 1960 there was war and that war took people for 7 years in exile, and then there was an agreement signed in Addis. That agreement was that after 5 years there would be an election, and then the government and rebel leaders would stand as president, and later on people could elect one. Now they have just added one year to make it 6 years. The hope of the people is very small in this peace talk. The experiences we have had before would make us think these Arabs are playing their propaganda; it will be like 1972…. When it reaches to the time of elections then we will be deceived like in 1972 when people only had ballot options of the president or nothing. No one was allowed to compete with the president. ........

Family disintegration
Within the interviews the overwhelming cause of distress was that of family disintegration. The experience of family disintegration is particularly difficult to interpret. Where does individual, social and cultural distress intersect in terms of cause and effect? What are the self-other-community-society dynamics at play in understanding family disintegration? Whatever the complexity of interpretation and analysis, what is clear is that family disintegration is deeply distressing. All of the participants identified this as one of their top three causes of distress. Several participants described the utter despair triggered by family disintegration within the Sudanese context:
(A story of a family breakdown and the impact on the husband): ……… He went mad and lay in the road wanting to die ………. Imagine what that is like for someone who has lived in villages and with family to be alone in this big house. It will bring a lot of problems – this will lead some people to commit suicide.

………………This causes masses of distress to our community. People come to this country and they feel they cannot leave with a one way visa – until they have the citizenship, and they cannot afford to travel anywhere. So he feels trapped. Like a hostage. So the expectations of what people hoped for, all that misery in the past, but now the family is disintegrated.

Some participants provided an analysis of the dynamics of family breakdown. The following participant analysis reveals how complex the dynamics are:

The pattern I have seen is that, firstly it is not financially feasible to bring family over quickly. Both husband and wife have to send money back to relatives, then conflict begins over money, then conflict starts over women’s rights, roles, about how women can spend their money here and inevitably family pressures. Then there is confusion on both parts - for the woman, she is getting mixed information from women who have been here longer, and service providers; similarly for men, there is heaps of stress and confusion about how they perceive their role in the community: they see themselves as breadwinners, providers, fathers, husbands etc. Men often talk about having responsibilities for family overseas: brothers, sisters, children etc... And it is all compounded by the fact that reality here is very different to what they thought it was going to be like.

This analysis explores how the economics of a ‘trans-national family’, a sense of hope, and gender dynamics linked to role transformation, and economic entitlements lead to a kind of ‘settlement confusion’ that undermines any solid reference point that makes for a stable family. This analysis highlights the complex interplay of structural (economic), cultural (roles) and community (relationships within and outside Australia) dynamics that put significant stress upon the family.

Whilst the above participant analysis was complex many narratives revealed an analysis that focused on the changing gender dynamics as the cause of distress and family disintegration:

…..a big one is women – back home they might be a doctor or a teacher, but they recognise their place. The role of the husband is clear and strong. Here the role of man is reducing. Some of the women become radical in this situation and this causes much distress.

Women’s economic independence is very threatening. Even with peace coming to Sudan many men are worried that if they want to go home and help in Sudan the wives will not come. This freedom for the women is a real problem in our African context…. Complex and linked to traditions – e.g. if there is divorce in Sudan the children go to the men and of course it is different here. Here a major source of conflict is that when a woman leaves a man it is
always assumed that another man is involved. Then violence can erupt. Also there are simple misunderstandings within Australian people; e.g. when a Sudanese man says, “I am going to kill her” (referring to wife), he does not mean it – it is only an expression. “I will beat you” (to children) is also only an expression. We are like the Italians – we express ourselves emotionally. But people here take it literally.

Such narrative reveals the dilemmas around rights and responsibilities of women and men within the confusing context of cultural transition and systemic shock.

Another reoccurring analysis of the cause of family disintegration is lack of **appropriate accommodation** causing family stress:

The houses are very small that cannot accommodate big families and rooms are few and the houses are just for 2, 3 or maybe 4 people, but rarely more than 4. But we the Sudanese families like to live together in big families with the children.

So we say that if we could be given that opportunity to live together with our children and then education can happen – educating begins at home – you bring him up right and he will do right.

The other distress, which is general, is the question of accommodation, particularly in Queensland. If you want to run a good house at least half of your income gets used for your renting. Then these renting houses are causing a lot of instability. You are starting to settle and then you are told we are selling the house. Then when you go and look for one, you find that it takes a hell of a lot of time. The size of our families are large – 5, 6 or 7 people and it is hard to find a house that can accommodate this many people. If you can get a house, you cannot afford it, or you find a house that is not big enough. So it is very difficult. Especially in Queensland where the number of public houses is so very low, and the waiting time is so long. If you get a house you might find it difficult to get transport, or it is far from schools for the children and you do not have a car. OK. So this is another big cause of distress.

**Or fear of family disintegration**

One of the disturbing reoccurring themes within the narratives was not so much people’s experience of family disintegration (although people were aware of some thirty families that had fallen apart), but the fear that ‘their family was next’:

Everyone is living in fear that his or her family is next. People start lying low hoping but fearful that it will happen to them.

This theme is particularly important to understand if we consider that one of the key’s to healing is to have a sense of safety (Herman, 1994). The systemic, structural and cultural dynamics of settlement are impacting on families in a way that is clearly undermining a sense of safety. For refugee narratives to be so articulate about ‘fear’ is an indicator of on-going social distress.

**Family disintegration, unemployment and class**
Several interviews engaged in the relations of class as connected to the two main issues of family disintegration and unemployment:

The experience is different for those who come with education. Maybe they were working, and maybe their wives were also working. For these families there is less distress in terms of family disintegration and understanding the system, but in some ways there is more distress in terms of work. They find that their educational qualifications are unrecognized, or if they are, they are told that they have to go and study a few more years.

So if we summarize I would say that for people with no education the big issue is family disintegration, and with the higher educated lack of employment is the big issue.

A quantitative research study would need to investigate the correlations between the issues of class/socio-economic backgrounds and present unemployment and experiences of family disintegration. However, this participant analysis highlights an issue that is consistent with other studies in Australia. For example, Colic-Peisker’s (2002, 4) study of Bosnian’s in Western Australia would indicate that those coming from rural areas or lower socio-economic backgrounds usually come off worse in terms of unemployment and other social indicators.

**Children and youth**
The problem within family disintegration is not only about the dynamics of gender, but also the dynamics of generations. Inter-generational conflict is well documented as being a key concern amongst refugee groups (Valtonen, 1999; Liebkind, 1993). This finding is certainly true within this study:

.........*youth is a big issue for both groups* (referring to uneducated and professional classes) – *so with the educated there are fewer problems between husband and wife, but there are still problems with the youth – the bad behaviours.*

*I go there (referring to an NGO) to overcome my stress and depression, or to deal with practical issues – issues that affect me in ways I had not expected it to happen. Again, for example: if I see children are doing the wrong thing and some even going to prison, and we cannot talk to the children – then it causes great distress and difficulty. Then I need to talk to someone. These issues cause depression.*

The following participant describes the result of this inter-generational conflict in terms of the experiences of young people. Leaving home, developing a social and leisure lifestyle that focuses around an urban ‘youth culture’, spending time in public spaces ensuring encounters with police and other groups who occupy public space (such as indigenous young people) are highlighted. The public space and youth literature would confirm such dynamics (Wyn & White, 1997). Young people who come from lower socio-economic backgrounds and therefore have less access to safer and commercial space usually frequent public spaces such as city malls, parklands, and shopping centre’s (the latter whilst being a commercial private space is perceived by the young people as being public). Add to that the highly visible nature of ethnicity
and in this case ‘blackness’ and there are the key ingredients for the described dynamics:

*Even sometimes the police are getting tired of our young people. And to make it worst we don’t know if they are really Sudanese or if all black kids are saying ‘we are Sudanese’,... but according to last years statistics (...area..... number.....Sudanese youth are becoming corrupt and disturbing the police. We say this is a problem – the children go and live by themselves, and they have friends from school etc., and they meet and go to bars and get involved in activities that are not good. All people want to bring up good children who can be the leaders of the future. It is a very big shame now and a big challenge that our children are becoming corrupt and sometime assaulting police, hitting people. This is not the culture we are brought up with.*

The following participant articulates the experience for parents. The key is a sense of grief that the past is ignored by young people: they do not give respect to the efforts and experiences of the parents and do not acknowledge their pain:

*.....and a really major one is the issue of family and children, children going along paths that they don’t want them to go on. They want them, the children, (I think, I don’t know any of this for sure) to hold in some holy reverential way, the past – and they want from the children, a sense that the past and present pain has been worth while and a thanking of their parents. This is the acknowledgment they want from the children – to be valued in that – and instead they are finding that the children are not valuing that and valuing instead parties, drugs and alcohol, peer group.........*

**Youth: freedom and money**

For several participants the key causes of this inter-generational conflict are young people’s perspectives on freedom and their access to economic independence:

*We also find that many of the young people knowing that they can get more money from Centrelink if they leave home rather than staying with the family – they leave. They see young Australians doing this, living freely, so they want to. But the problem is that our young people do not know how to manage their lives or manage the budget. So it does not work. The smart ones, they will come back to the family and apologize and make a new life, with the family. But many do not do this.*

*I ask the youth about their future goals. He will say ‘I do not know’, and then a few minutes later, they will say ‘ask my parents’. I have concluded they are

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*Rose, N. (1999) and Brown, W. (1995) provide excellent accounts of how we might understand ‘freedom’ in the context of contemporary political thought. For Brown, ‘freedom is neither a philosophical absolute nor a tangible entity but a relational and contextual practice that takes shape in opposition to whatever is locally and ideologically conceived as unfreedom.....’. For Rose we must ‘recognise freedom as a set of practices, devices, relations of self to self and self to others, of freedom as always practical, technical, contested, involving relations of subordination and privilege, opens freedom to itself to historical analysis and historical criticism’ (p94). I highlight these authors simply to ensure that readers are aware of the complexities of interpreting subjective narratives of freedom. There are complex contextual and historical dynamics that would need in depth analysis to understand the aspirational meaning of freedom for Sudanese ‘youth’.*
confused. Even the simple freedom, what does this mean to them? They have a different interpretation; they have their own. Their definition is one that means ‘I have the freedom to drop out of school when it is too difficult and I am frustrated’. But when you look at it logically this is not freedom. Is this the kind of freedom we want our young people to act on?

………….the problem is that when the community members come to this freedom they do not know how to manage this freedom. Free to do what and not do. People use their own understanding of freedom, to steal, or other things not allowed by law or government. Culture shock and management of the freedom are the two big issues.

These narratives reveal the difficulties of structural and systemic issues intersecting with culture in ways that cause deep confusion and conflict. Within liberal political theory and ways of organizing state-citizen relations individual freedom is central. The state must act and distribute ‘neutrally’. In this case the organization of an ‘income guarantee’ in the form of youth allowance distributed to all young people based on certain criteria is the manifestation of such ‘neutral’ distribution. Whilst some writers (Behrendt, 2003) challenge this liberal doctrine, arguing that state institutions do not work in the same way for all cultural groups, and are not neutral, currently liberal orthodoxy is foundational. For Sudanese parents and community leaders their analysis of one of the key causes of intergenerational conflict is this domain of where the commitments of the liberal political economy and an institutional distributive mechanism intersect with culture in terms of differing perspectives of ‘what is freedom’, and how such freedom/s are managed.

Within the narratives there are numerous interpretations of the result of this ‘intersection’. Confusion, shock, dropping-out, licentiousness and corruption (stealing) are all identified as a flow-on from this. However, at the heart of it, parents and community members feel disempowered through this act of economic empowerment to young people. Their analysis is that such economic empowerment when delivered without other forms of empowerment such as emotional stability and a sense of moral responsibility is actually disempowering.

**Disempowerment and discipline**
The following brief dialogue between one of the service providers and the interviewer holds one analysis of how parents in particular are trying to deal with this sense of disempowerment through modes of discipline that are problematic:

> Even those families that are doing relatively well …..I think every family is really aware of ‘for the grace of God go I’. I think that the way of dealing with challenges with children are found wanting – it is not working. The traditional way is to challenge back and bring them into line and that is not going to work here. The children say ‘piss off’ – they’ve got ways of surviving without their parents – they can survive materially.

> Whereas currently in Sudanese families if a young person does something culturally horrifying, or steps out of line then you deal with it by casting them out. And I think that is why it is so terrifying because they don’t want to cast them out, but they feel it is the only option they have. And the community will
join them in casting them out – and they have done that. And those children
are spinning out – and no one could say they are better off in that happening,
even the children.

Again we see the intersection between cultural (cultural practices such as discipline)
and structural dynamics (economic capacity of young people to pursue independent
lives due to structural entitlements) that leads to confusion, fear, and family
breakdown.

**Youth and education**

Many of the participants narrated an analysis of the causes of community distress in
relation to young people as resulting from the young people’s experience of education:

> But here the young people are not coping well with education and this is
frustrating. Children come home when they want, and leave when they want.
They are not succeeding at school.

Several participants went as far as to say that there is a complete systemic breakdown
in schools:

> When the gap in schooling is too big for young people... ...the gaps, even the
system is not really helping. For example: where people are coming from
there is no adequate schooling, they have had no or little schooling, and then
they come here and are placed in schools based on age category. They are
placed in year 10...after never going to school. The pressure is huge, it is too
big. It is unbelievable; it is really crazy and really hard. This is one of the
things that lead’s the youth to drop out of school. What happens is when they
go to a high school; they go to class, but what will happen? They have ESL
teachers give them a task – they can speak, but not write. The youth will
develop depression and anxiety because they feel they are no good in school.
When they are given a task they cannot do it – at the end they will just leave
the class because they are not getting anything out of it. They conclude that
they are wasting their time. He/she will then join the group of ‘bad kids’. We
might call it a mental health problem – but it is not – it is system.

Whilst little empirical study has been conducted with respect to the educational
experiences of refugees within Australian school systems there is a body of anecdotal
evidence that implies that there are currently serious problems. Acknowledgement of
such problems would in turn imply that there is a need for a new over-arching
education policy and funding agenda that acknowledges the complexity of the
multiple systems involved in educating refugee children (Christie & Sidhu, 2002).
The previously quoted participant has developed quite a sophisticated analysis that
includes developing an understanding of the educational ‘gap’ as a result of being a
young refugee from Sudan, identifying and developing a proper placement system,
and implementing a more complex plethora of language acquisition (written and oral)
interventions.

The following participant outlined an analysis that focused on the role of families and
the cultural community in placing lots of pressure and expectations on the young
people:
...and that is the other big issue – to do with education – it is a major distress factor. They have had so much disruption, and then when they come here – and there is lots of pressure and focus on them from the community to be the future of the community, they should be getting the good jobs in the future. But it is distressing, the adults themselves are struggling with education and so they cannot help the younger ones, and the young ones are caught in an impossible situation – they are expected to do well in a system where most of the kids around them have had years and years of preparation. You can’t expect that after 5 minutes in Milpera and then you stick them in high school that it’s going to work.

...........there is pressure – the pressure on young people from the parents creates a lot of stress. When you make demands on the young people that are unachievable, the consequences are huge pressure. This creates stress on the youth – the young people will be put into a position where they just want to get rid of it – and they will leave home. It is an unrealistic position. Young people just want to get away – I have one here in the school now – he just walked out because of the pressure. When you look at it logically he just needed to get out because of the pressure – I hear him cry ‘I just need to get out’. Even these parents have never been to school and they are saying ‘you are not good at mathematics’, but they’ve never been to school.

Again, drawing on Hage’s (2003) notion of the role of society in distributing hope, we can discern the dynamics of a dissipating hope in such narratives. Parents who have given up on hopes for themselves locate that hope in aspirations for their children. This ‘transference’ combined with the described systemic problems/breakdown simply puts too much pressure on the young people.

The distress and shame caused by ‘problematic’ youth and the loss of honour

For the Sudanese participants the distress of ‘problematic youth’ is then reinforced by the distress of the loss of honour and the sense of shame that comes with this perceived failure.

This is a huge distress for the families – when you see your child abusing your name on the street and others say ‘here is son’.

In a short time, the children will start to walk out of the house. The children, who was looked upon as an asset, and in our culture we see our daughters and children as an asset.... He has been bringing up his daughter, he sacrifices

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3 Milpera is a specially equipped and skilled school that works with new arrived migrant and refugee ‘youth’ of high school age. This participants’ reference to 5 minutes is clearly metaphorical. Students can spend a significant amount of time at the school.


5 I have put this term ‘problematic youth’ in brackets as a way of highlighting that this is a participant concept. I am aware of the complexities of the construct of youth generally and problematic youth in particularly. See Wyn & White (1997) Rethinking Youth for important discussions about the meaning of ‘youth’.
everything so his daughters will come up good, and good men will marry them and then he can feel proud. This gives him prestige in the community as a model. Someone will say look ‘his daughters, they are good’. Then he is happy. And his hope of them becoming educated so he will be the beneficiary of this – will give him prestige in the community.

When .................hears the stories – ‘the son of ...............is doing this and that’, this is hard. But now if .................can now take the boy to Sudan, convince him to come to Sudan, then he will very happy, at least he is removing him from the situation where the boy is undermining his prestige. The issue of honour is so important ............... For societies that are less collectively oriented the idea of honour is somewhat foreign. However, honour is critical within groups with more collective tendencies. This sense of honour guides complex manoeuvres and for Bourdieu is part of a set of practical dispositions that incorporate ambiguities and uncertainties (Bourdieu in Swartz 1997, 100).

Culture
In this section of the paper we explore the narratives of distress that focus on the ‘complexity of culture. We find narratives that engage with the issues already explored such as family disintegration and ‘youth’, but this time from a more explicit cultural theme.

Cultural confusion, shock and bereavement
Many narratives expressed a sense of confusion, shock, fracture and bereavement (Eisenbruch, 1992; Schwietzer, Buckley & Rossi, 2002; Silove, 1999; Atkinson, 2002) when reflecting on culture:

*Culture is very confusing when we arrive in Australia. The culture is different from our culture. The system is also different. The society behaviours are quite different. It confuses us and brings a culture shock to the Sudanese people.*

*The whole community is really confused about this –they used to have a way of doing things, but not here. For example when a child or young person did something wrong the elders would talk to them. This is what happened in the past – the culture guided everyone. But here now, with the confusion in two cultures they do not know which the best one is. This is true for the whole community. The elders are living in the old culture, and the young ones are saying ‘the new one is better’, so they drop the old one, ‘we are free, we can do whatever we want. They adopt this new one without understanding it. The culture is central, the young ones – for example the ones born here, they might grow up understanding, but the young youth upwards it is very difficult.*

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*Culture is understood using Bourdieu’s approach within a conceptual framework of *habitus*. *Habitus* represents a deep-structuring cultural matrix that generate self-fulfilling prophecies according to different class opportunities. Our analysis of distress is therefore located within a cultural explanation that explores actors and agents actions and dispositions within the context of socialization, sense of life chances that are mediated through objective structures of society (Swartz 1997, 104).*
Analysis of this sense of confusion, shock and bereavement would indicate that the cause is a loss of reference – or ‘guide’. Culture provides a reference point through which people mediate and make sense of what is going on in their world. To lose that reference point, or to make it complex through having access to other cultural frameworks leads to confusion. Drawing on Bourdieu’s conceptual framework we can understand the confusion. For a refugee undergoing a process of acculturation there is a whole new socialization process trying to negotiate practice or dispositions in the context of a whole new set of objective structures with a new set of life chances. Such a process can only be confusing. One participant described how:

*Faith in culture brings psychological well-being. You believe that the culture has the resources to solve your problems. When you come here that resource becomes more complex.*

The analysis of this above quoted participant builds on this complexifying of a reference point, or in this case a resource for solving problems and ensuring psychological well-being. There are new life chances, new structures to negotiate and mediate those life chances. New dispositions are developed based on that analysis. The previously, usually unconscious reference point (culture), is not particularly helpful.

The following participant narrative reveals how that can become even more difficult or complex when Sudanese refugees lose respect for the host culture:

*Then they (referring to Sudanese refugees) come here and see how easy it is and how everything is taken for granted. This is the other distressing factor. They come here and see there is no appreciation of what people have here amongst Australian’s. ‘What is this country about?’? This is strong in many of the African’s community – which is hard for African’s here. How to relate to this culture here when I don’t really value what is happening here.*

In a reoccurring theme, for some participants this culture shock and confusion was linked to the management of freedom, not only of young people but other adult members of the community:

*They will take ideas of freedom, hear about women having separate bank accounts, the man is free, the children is also free to have accounts... and people are coming from a culture where only one member is the breadwinner, the man, now everybody can have an economic base. OK. This causes a lot of distress. Quickly, instead of harmony, there will be a problem. The problem, the money instead of bringing happiness, will bring distress.*

One way of interpreting this dynamic is to consider that actions of people are often strategic rather than grounded in norms and rules. These strategic actions are less complex in societies that are less differentiated and less complex (rurally based collective contexts). In arriving in a new society that is highly differentiated and complex, actors have access to many more possible strategic actions. The norms and rules are revealed to be strategic actions. As the objective realities shift (in the case above – the economic entitlements) so aspirations and expectations change, strategic actions change (actors want and choose an independent economic base) and there is a
resultant shock and confusion for those who saw their lives as governed by norms and rules.

**Cultural transition and evaluation**

Many discussions focused on the distress caused by the difficulty of making a successful cultural transition and developing the ability to evaluate the good and ‘bad’ in both their own and the host culture. The literature would argue that ‘the search of settling persons for continuity, coherence and meaningfulness, through the medium of culture can be understood as a coping strategy for an integral frame of reference (Voltonen 2004, 84). Refugees engage with culture in this search for an integral frame of reference in myriad ways. Some reject their own culture and adopt the host culture, others reject the host culture and try to live in their own cultural world, and others attempt a balancing act of integrating parts of both cultures without great conflict. Such dynamics point to the need to give greater voice to human agency within cultural production. People are not passive in the contexts of structural negotiation and processes of acculturation. They are making strategic choices and developing new dispositions and expectations based on their choices, or put another way they are strategic improvisers 7. The following narratives reflect on the degree of consciousness or unconsciousness in such choice-making and strategic improvisation.

Many of the participants argued that Sudanese refugees coming from a rural background (parents and elders) and the young people were struggling to evaluate culture in a healthy way. The following narratives reflect an analysis that some people are struggling to make strategic choices in the light of new objective structures and some in the community are making the wrong strategic choices resulting in more distress:

*Yes, the rural people cannot make this evaluation. This causes a problem with the youth. The elders do not change. Even within the youth organisations they have trouble—the new members come but the cultural influences of the parents are still coming through. For myself, I was thinking even for the youth—they must not look backwards—they must look forwards into the future. From there look forward, to pride yourself, set a good example. But that is hard because their parents insist on taking them back to the past.*

*.............when you look at the African community, you look at the numbers educated and uneducated in the community. The educated ones are a minority—there are only a few. The language the uneducated use is their own. I can take what I want from this culture—but many cannot. They only know their culture and cannot engage with this one. The old culture is dominant. They still bash their wives, they still have that, and I am not expecting them to change their minds—it is hard to change.*

*Yes, the rural people cannot make this evaluation. This causes a problem with the youth.*

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7 This is a term used by Bourdieu within this understanding of cultural production (Swartz 1997).
This following participant analysis is that young people are neither rejecting their own nor the host culture. They are evaluating and choosing – however, they are choosing the negative and destructive ideas and practices of cultures, rather than the positive and constructive:

*The key one is the intergenerational conflict – the culture shock and dilemma’s of two cultures. Some want to preserve their African culture and the younger ones want to adopt the Australian. But the problem with the youth is that they take the bad from both the Australian and Sudanese cultures instead of the good from both. They are not taking advantage of the opportunities here and this really confused us. In Sudan youth work so hard – they have no money, university fees cost, there is no accommodation at the universities, but they try. Here they have everything, but do nothing.*

**Family and violence:**

For many participants one of the key distress factors was family related violence. Whilst many participants held a similar analysis in terms of the cause of family disintegration being family violence, there were many divergent analyses of what is the cause of family violence.

For some the key issue is that of culture:

*In Sudan it is not a big problem when you have a quarrel with your wife, even if you love her, or when a child does something wrong. You can punish through caning. When you come here it is quite difficult. If you cane someone then the neighbour will immediately call the police, or anyone who sees you, then it become a big problem that might lead to the breakdown of the family. This is because of mis-understanding of our culture. We say we need to negotiate with the government so we can take the good from the Australian culture and take some of our culture and put them together… and gradually integrate them into the community. It is very difficult within a year, or a month for someone to come here and change so quickly. It takes time because we need to learn from one another – we can learn skills and culture and then it enters slowly and slowly. Then after 5 or 6 years we will have changed…….*

Within this participant analysis there is a dual analysis: on one hand the participant is arguing that people from the host culture need to engage with Sudanese ‘culture’ as it is, accepting that it is different in terms of how ‘violence’ is constructed and understood; and on the other hand there is an analysis that recognizes that if the issue is culture, then the culture does need to change and the key problem is that the community needs more time to re-invent that aspect of culture. Using Bourdieu’s cultural explanation we could argue that this participant ‘dual analysis’ reveals a process of creative reinvention where Sudanese refugees are learning about the new cultural practices that can be ‘actioned’ within the new context of structural realities (legal and other state interventions around family affairs) and a re-socialization. The previous dispositions – that is, caning as a form of punishment – learnt through socialization and internalized as ‘cultural’ – are now realized to be problematic.
Even some women who are victims/survivors of violence argue that the problem of violence is cultural - reflecting a deep seated set of dispositions that correspond to the structuring properties of socialization:

We can see this – we even see the socialization – we hear from women in the African communities this kind of understanding that ‘if my husband does not bash me once a week then I am not loved’.

The following participant analysis explores how legal (particularly police) systems intersect with this cultural construction of violence in ways that lead to on-going distress:

It is really difficult for us – when we have problems, quarrelling, disagreements, fights, we do not see it all as domestic violence, and we see it differently to you people here. People fight but still maintain the harmony in the house. After a few days the quarrel will be sorted out. If there is a problem, the man will leave for a couple of days, the problems will be sorted and then people will come back together. Here it is a problem. People involve the police, people are taken by the police, then after 2 days the man and the woman say now it is over, we have sorted it out; the woman says ‘now it is better that my husband come back’. But this is not allowed. There is now a protection order, there will be so many things that they do not understand. Then they will conclude we have come to the wrong place.

This means they have come to a place that cannot accommodate some of their customs.

For some participants the key cause of family related violence is the breakdown of traditional family structures that provide support and culturally appropriate interventions:

The breakdown of traditional roles.... I am thinking about a particular woman I am working with in the sexual assault program – domestic and sexual violence and I ask ‘how would it be addressed in your country’ – and she said ‘ell they went to the parents and everything would be fine’. And I asked ‘how do we do transfer that to here?’ She said ‘we can go to the elders in the community’. But the partner said ‘they are not relatives so I do not have to listen to what they say’. So the breakdown of traditional family structures has played a significant role.

The above narrative again reveals the difficulties of conceptualizing culture as about norms and rules. Here a new context (Australia) enables actors to act in new ways, making new strategic improvisations about ‘cultural practice’. The fact that in this case the partner has evaluated the new structural context (voluntary participation in talking with elders rather than mandatory) and decided not to participate ensures that we need to recognize agency as the central factor in ‘cultural reinvention and production’.
For other participants the key issue is men exercising power mediated and dispersed not only through acts of violence, but then through collaborating with systems that support them. The following narrative provides a case study of such a process:

*I guess the other aspect – there are a lot of African men who speak English and they can control the information. When there is a call out…. We had an example where a phone call was made because a woman had been bashed, and the police engaged the son as an interpreter. The police end up hearing what the woman has to say through either the actual husband or the son. In this case the women was taken to the police station and charged. They used a male interpreter. And domestic violence and a male interpreter do not go together. So when the interpreter was there…. We contacted her later and we found out she had been told by the interpreter – ‘don’t say anything because your son has already given evidence’.*

*So, I guess the issue for us is that police and other statutory authorities are not using professional interpreters and not using female interpreters when there are issues of sexual violence and often they are interviewing the husband about a situation that has taken place. And as a result we have had a number of women that have had orders taken out against them even thought they have been the victims of DV.*

*P. They are interviewing the husbands……?*

*I am saying this because these are some of the issues we encounter in that community. The men, they are educated, even though they do not know the Australian context, the way of life, they are very well equipped to deal with situations. When you have the perpetuators and their supporters condoning that kind of behaviour it becomes so much harder for women.*

Such a case study provides an example of when systems have either completely broken down in terms of a professional response (that is police not using professional interpreters), or when systems are actually refusing to face up to male violence and are actively collaborating.

For some participants their analysis of family violence is located within a broader analysis of violence endemic within the broader context of Australian society:

*……..it is very hard to be talking about, and advocating for non-violence when our political leaders are advocating for violence as a way of solving global problems. These things are all connected.*

Such an explanation builds on an analysis that the Australian cultural matrix is one that generates or at least legitimizes violent dispositions in terms of dealing with conflict.

Finally, some participants discussed family related violence in a way that connects the phenomenon with the on-going Sudanese experience of colonization and war:
..... it is very hard to be suddenly talking about non or no violence with a community that have lived in a context where violence is the only way of surviving. In war violence is a non-negotiable, you survive through violence, and then you arrive here and you have to change, in fact non-violence is non-negotiable. And you have to make that change really quickly or suddenly the systems will have split your family up......

....colonization is a violent process, and it is felt in the body, the family, the community......How do we deal with that overnight?

The following participants develop an analysis about the problem of violence and conflict in terms of the breakdown not so much of family structures, but broader traditional conflict resolution methods and mechanisms. The key to the analysis was the complexity of privacy and confidentiality laws and codes within Australia:

We asked the police if possible could they give us the names of the children who are doing that...’ (Committing crime), so the community can call the children and advice them. But the issue of privacy stops that.

The following participants discuss how the complexity of privacy and confidentiality laws impact and limits the traditional role of elders. The particular impact is the undermining of community approaches to violence and conflict prevention and early intervention work:

..............when you want to bring two people together (to deal with conflict) people say ‘no we have privacy’. Back home it works: there is the cultural method of conflict resolution – but here people say ‘who are you, I can live by myself?’, or use privacy. So now the youth tend not to respect the community elders. The issue of privacy is a big challenge. Sometimes people come and talk to the elders about problems that have happened, but often after the problem is gone too far and the wife has been taken away. We were not aware of it before it became a big problem.

In Sudan when the neighbour see some problems in a house they would often talk to the elders and say ‘look there is a problem, and it is going to lead into violence and I want you to sort out this problem’, and then the elders can take some action. And they will ask ladies to talk to the wife and then the elders will bring people together and try and sort it out identifying who is the problem. So it is critical to have trust in the elders.

The problem is only when the situation gets into a violent situation without the community knowing. Once it has become a police case it is very difficult even for the elders to know what to do. As Sudanese we need to go back and learn our own systems. You better look for prevention and talk to the community elder, this is what is happening in my community, “Please come and help solve the problem before violence comes.”
Some participants have articulated distress at the way the experiences of war have created attitudes amongst the Sudanese youth towards aggression and violence that in some ways have become ‘cultural’:

The other thing is also linked to war – the culture is one in which they are so used to war, fighting, it has become part of the culture and that is replaced into this environment. We need a process of healing for them. Here they cannot do what they are used to – the life here is different – they cannot just fight, be aggressive. We need slow process of healing so they can understand and talk to people quietly.

Confusion about the law
A reoccurring analysis was that one of the key causes of this distress about family, gender and generational violence is a lack of understanding of the law:

The key solution is to have some time for people to learn about what is acceptable about the law. It should be that the community should understand the Australian culture, and what are the laws, and also the Australian government should organize workshops for us – how to understand the law – how to deal with it – how do we report to the police or anyone in authority. We need learning.

‘….when we come here we are told you have freedom to practice your culture, but we gradually learn we not, particularly when our culture clashes with some of the law’, and this is a problem.

Finally for this discussion about culture I want to highlight a couple of discussions that occurred about particular causes of distress that are less ‘visible’ and common.

Culture and Burial
A few participants talked about the issue of culture and burial methods. There were substantial levels of distress caused by a sudden awareness of the Australian cultural practice of ‘burning’ the dead:

(Discussing a death in the community…….) When his relatives went to discuss arranging the burial, they said that to take the boy to Sudan it is $15,000. That is something like dreaming. If you want a burial here it is $12,000. The third option is to be burnt – which is a new thing that has not happened in Africa unless it happened in war and people are burnt in the war. This is a new thing for the community here – that option for burning will be $10,000 and the ashes will be put in a bottle. When this story was narrated to the community everyone was saying ‘God if I am going to die, let me go back to Sudan and die’, because if you die here you will be burnt – it is so costly to bury with the cost of the land. It was really very difficult.

Lost boys and their culture

8 Drawing on Bourdieu’s sociological approach I see the link between culture and violence as focusing on the role of action as strategy. Collectively violence has become a practical tool now internalized as habit or disposition that made practical and strategic sense in Sudan. Bourdieu’s conceptualization also recognized the role of power and legitimization in the development of such ‘practical tools’.
One participant was particularly concerned about the experiences of the ‘lost boys’ of Sudan in terms of their forgetting of culture:

> Without the culture people will lose themselves. Even the lost boys who come here they will lose themselves, and they will get lost into this multicultural set up and then forget their culture, and forget to know and support their families back home.

> Some of these boys are totally distressed, they know nothing – their families, their villages, and to know is very important.

Such a narrative reflects an understanding that without culture mediated through memory, knowing one’s family, kin etc. we lose our identity and sense of who we are. This lack of a reference point results in deep distress.

**Intra-Community**

There were many narratives that expressed distress around the ‘community’ within the Sudanese Diaspora of Brisbane and Logan cities. Colic-Peisker (2002) identifies two main reasons as to why ethnic communities generally and refugee communities particularly express a desire to develop a collective identity and build ‘intra-community’ links. The first is a socio-psychological tendency for people to ‘stick together’ during times of hardship, and secondly because most refugee groups come from less urban and less affluent societies and therefore the more ‘traditional’ forms of community have been central to people developing and maintaining support for one another.

For all the Sudanese participants building intra-community connections and links is critical. However, all narrated distress at some of the difficulties in making this happen:

> …………you can say the community is coming together, but when they say that there is still so far to go to really come together.

The following section builds on the participant analysis of the issues, concerns and challenges that lead to this distress.

For most of the participants one of the key causes of distress was **not having people from your own tribe**:

> For us it felt really bad not to have a group (referring to tribe) – we questioned ‘who are we?’ ‘Why are we like this?’ don’t we have tribal men and women, leaders to be with us? This causes us significant distress. It is the same here – there was only a few Zanda originally, but now there are 30 or so of us, and this makes a huge difference to our mental health.

This was particularly difficult during early stages of settlement especially for those who came early or those who were first from their tribe.

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9 The Lost Boys of Sudan refer to the large number of boys who were orphaned during a stage of the war from 1987. Many have been given or are in the process of being given refugee status in places such as the USA and Australia.
But the inverse of this is that some of the causes of distress were about **on-going tribal and clan conflicts**:

The politics of Southern Sudan has a significant impact here on the community. Smaller tribes tend not to co-operate with the larger tribes. They are afraid of being dominated. Significant parts of this are attitudes towards the Nilotic tribes. These are tribes linked geographically to the Nile – Nuer, Dinka, Luo, Chiluk and Anyuak. They are major tribes that have also spread, but their origins are along the Nile. They are tall and dark.

Other tribes – the largest non-Nilotite tribe is the Zanda (in Western Equatoria), of the Bantu race – they and other smaller tribes that join the Zanda, often do not co-operate. The Bari-speaking tribes have also historically annexed themselves to the Zanda.

In Brisbane many of the leadership issues/struggles/conflicts are still built around these historical conflicts. It is hard to break down the barriers between the Nilotic and Zanda/Bantu/Bari people.

In the interviews there were many discussions about the issue of the ‘whole community’. Do people see a need or feel a desire for a whole Southern Sudanese sense of community, or is it enough to be a part of an extended family/kin group or part of a clan/tribe/ethnic group? All participants discussed the on-going difficulties of these dynamics but still expressed a vision for a whole of community ‘sense of solidarity and significance’. The following participant reflects on the difficulties of building the cultural community during different stages of community growth over the past few years within an overall vision:

In the beginning when people came it was easy – there were only a few of us so we gathered in homes for lunches and over beer (beer is an important part of our hospitality). As the community grows it becomes more difficult. Factions develop – either in clan, tribe, and regions – but we still see a need for an umbrella – a vision of the Southern Sudanese coming together.

**Distress caused by ‘power plays’**

When discussing the dynamics of community building several participants expressed distress about on-going power plays by those who seek power within the cultural community. The following participant develops an analysis of how power might be exercised that links past legacies with contemporary contexts:

In Africa the educated people encouraged tribalism. This is the only way they can get into power when the tribe is behind you. So when you come here, and struggle, some still have this in mind.

The following participant named this power-playing as factionalism and provided a different causal analysis to that of the above participant that is more focused on the links with psychological rather than historical dynamics:
......in my observation: to begin with people arrive and are glad to be alive; then they are glad to find other survivors: there is an initial euphoria. But then there is depression – primarily due to survivor’s guilt and the temptation is to either blame themselves or blame others. As others arrive if these deeper issues are not resolved, people break into factions and everything then depends on how people work out those conflicts.

**Leadership, eldership and vision**

For several participants many of the intra-community concerns and distresses were linked to the dynamics of leadership and vision. Their distress was about the lack of, or difficulties of developing effective leadership:

*The leaders and elders need to listen, learn and deliver to the people. Our people must not seek leadership just for power, but with a vision for their people. If we end up with the wrong leaders this is a major cause of distress and mental health issues. Everyone gets frustrated, the leaders, the community.*

*What I’ve seen is that when there are only a few people here they bond and support each other, but over time as they become established, as numbers grow and people can choose who they can relate to they then form factions. Leaders can then choose to promote a faction and the expense of other factions as a way of gaining power in one, or choose not to align themselves with a faction and continue to work for a healthy inclusive community with the common good as the key focus. I’ve seen examples of both.*

For the following participant the distress factor was about how leaders constructed identity in terms of a narrow and exclusive understanding spirituality and religion:

*..................One of the problems is when a leader interprets their identity on strict religious or ethnic lines – others are committed to the welfare of all factions from a secular perspective. The role of spirituality is often critical – depending on whether people practice an open inclusive spirituality or a closed exclusive one.*

Some participants expressed distress at how the health or distress experienced by the community was often linked to how people related to the elders, and how elders related to the community.

*It is easy to say people come together but if there is no respect for elders and the elders cannot understand the younger ones or where we are all at, and then there is a problem.*

*It depends on the elders. If we cannot give them respect, because they do not understand then we have a huge problem. There is a huge conflict here. Without doing that, maybe the elders they come... they do have life experience to share with the young ones, but when there is no respect, and the elders have shut down and are not engaging with the new culture then the community is not a healing way.*
Coming back to the role of the elders – we really need them to understand that OK now we are in a different environment, and we must create a climate of understanding between the elders and the rest of the community to help people to make the changes that we need to – adjusting cultures.

For isolated Sudanese
Whilst the participants discussed the desire and dynamics of community building there was an acknowledgement that some Sudanese isolated or excluded themselves from these processes. These participants expressed distress at how the choice of some Sudanese refugees to isolate themselves from the community can lead to problems and sickness:

Those who try to live in isolation, which see things differently: we have an example of such people: they have real problems. When they reach a problem that they cannot handle as an individual they need the community.

About isolation: some people for various reasons stay away from the community – they then become stressed, alone, isolated. Sometimes when I meet these people I see their distress – they look and feel bad, sick – but they do not see that the cause is withdrawing from the community. They have withdrawn because they either feel the community is not helping them, or there are particular personal issues with someone.....

Women and isolation
Of particular concern amongst several participants were the difficulties caused by isolation for Sudanese women, and the particular difficulties in overcoming this isolation. The following narratives provide an analysis of the impact and causes of such isolation. The impacts are depression and other increased mental health symptomology. The causes are geographical isolation, fractured family units, lack of opportunities for women to be together, lack of confidence and knowledge of the public transport system and lack of English proficiency:

Also, women have formed a couple of groups........– responding to issues of isolation. The mental health issues that we see are usually depression due to this isolation: stuck at home with children, not being connected to the community.

Coming to a new country is traumatic enough, each person with their personal journey, and our sense is that being home alone all day does not help – not being able to talk to people about what you are experiencing, or simply participating in activities. That is hard.

And the way of coping with day to day trauma, or day to day distress if you want to use that word (for the men), is to get out and about to gather as a community, to fight as a community, to disagree, have feuds, whatever, but at least engaging with one another and there is a sense of similar purpose – even if it is to win, overcome that mob, overcome that tribe – it is a power struggle that the men can engage in – but the women can’t. The women are geographically separated from one another here, and my guess is, although I cannot say for sure, survival in Sudan was about survival of the collective –
about collective survival – and when you are in fractured family units here, the women structurally don’t have contact with each other, then it’s not surprising that ……..has found that their mental health is much worse than the men.

It is the women who are terribly isolated – they have new children, in houses far from each other, and don’t know how to use public transport, cannot speak English.

For McMichael and Ahmed (2003) such narratives provide a warning to those working within a therapeutic framework that refugee narratives of sadness and depression must be situated within a broader narrative of loneliness, which are in turn located within an ideology of belonging: finding oneself around disruptions of belonging, and outside meaningful social networks. They conclude that the language of emotion and suffering is derived from broader social contexts (2003, 147).

One way of examining the intra-community building dynamics described would be to draw on Yeatman’s (1994) concepts of ‘customary community’ and ‘conventional community’. For Yeatman, customary community is the ‘entrenched resonances of traditional values such as ….. notions of deserving and undeserving, surveillance and stigmatization, marked by cleavages such as classism, racism and sexism….’ In contrast, conventional community is a ‘discursive attempt to rein power into rational and agreed upon structures and protocols which are explicitly just and anti-discriminatory, and which gives voice and place to claims and participation of groups who are made outsiders by customary community’ (Ingamels, 2006). Drawing on such a framework it is possible to interpret some of the intra-community dynamics as about the struggle between people who use the discursive power of customary community vs. those using the discursive power of conventional community. All want ‘community’, but there is a struggle over the divergent discourses of ‘community’ in terms of what is wanted. The way in which various actors use ‘religion’, ‘spirituality’, ‘cultural capital’ (as traditional or religious leaders) in a struggle for power and their vision of community reflects this kind of struggle. The kinds of gender and generational conflicts discussed in previous sections also reflect such struggle.

**Inter-community**

Whilst many of the narratives focused on the issues related to intra-community dynamics there were also voices that expressed concern about the dynamics of inter-community relations.

Some narratives expressed frustration about the lack of willingness of Australians to welcome them. The first narrative refers to the general Sudanese community and the second to the dynamics of young Sudanese and other young people:

If these people (Australians) could be open to enough to allow us to integrate, to talk to us – not to build walls, but open bridges so we can learn from each other – this would bring another change to the community. For us, the way the

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10 I am using the term inter-community to simply refer to Sudanese refugees’ links, interactions and relationships with non Sudanese Australians.
western world is behaving is individualistic. Someone who knows something keeps it for himself and that makes it hard for us to learn from them.

So for us the largest challenges are about how the refugees become part of their community, have experiences of being part of the community so they are not just within the Sudanese networks. With young people we’ve developed some models such as ‘the peace initiative’ as a way of getting young Sudanese together with other indigenous and Polynesian youth – giving them all the tools to deal with violence etc. But with building links with local neighbourhoods we’ve not made much progress.

Some narratives focused on the problematic inter-community relations between firstly Sudanese people and indigenous youth and secondly Sudanese youth and the elderly:

It is also a challenge to the broader community in those neighbourhoods who are not used to seeing tall black Africans wandering around. For example, with the Brisbane City Council Chill-Out initiative\(^1\) quite a few Sudanese youth are connected to BCC via libraries and Vis Ink Facility\(^2\) so they came along to Chill-Out activities and as soon as they arrived the indigenous youth said ‘you should not be here, you’re charcoal, not black, you’re not welcome, go home’. So we see tensions with the indigenous community.

There are other stories of elder residents calling the police because they see groups of black young people on the street or in the parks – their congregating and they’re loud.

Neighbours: visiting and welcome
A recurring theme was the distress caused by not knowing how to relate to neighbours in the context of their cultural and communal heritage. The following participant analysis reflects on the differences in formal planned and informal spontaneous/fluid approaches or modes to visiting, hospitality and connecting with others:

People from the village – they are accustomed to people coming to their house any time. But here that does not happen. People come and knock and make appointments and that confuses people. You cannot just visit anytime….. you have to tell them in advance. All those things are very confusing at the start. And confusion creates stress and frustration and if that continues it will lead to depression. They still have the hope that tomorrow it will get better.

I did not know my neighbours name for two years – and that confused me.

The distress caused by the clashing of these different approaches or modes of being are named as confusion, frustration, stress and potentially depression. Such a narrative provides an interesting insight of how a form of social distress – lack of hospitality, mediated through cultural misunderstanding, could be manifest subjectively in terms of ‘illness talk’, that is, depression and stress (Coker, 2004).

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\(^1\) a Brisbane City Council youth initiative for teenagers during school holidays
\(^2\) a Brisbane City Council youth space/facility
Some participants interpreted this lack of hospitality and their experience of exclusion within an analysis of colonialism:

... White people are treated with the utmost respect when they come to Africa. White people are seen as people with power and of importance and when they come here they certainly do not find that reciprocated. They see limited hospitality extended from white people to the African communities and that is experienced as pain and distress. It is a real slap in the face and a double standard. And it makes young people angry, ‘why should we be doing this?’ it’s like a colonial past mentality. Many of the African’s connect their experience here to a sense of on-going colonialism. People here are only out for themselves despite the rhetoric of fairness and justice, and that makes them cynical.

**Safety and security**

Many participants highlighted the issues of safety and security, or lack of it, in terms of Sudanese refugee’s on-going experience of distress.

For some participants on-going distress was due to **racism**. In the following narratives we hear a participant expressing distress over personal experiences of racism and then another expressing distress that these racist experiences or encounters are not considered valid by many organizations and institutions:

*The issue of security is important for the immigrant communities, and particularly us Sudanese people because of our colour, and sometimes our background. People fear one another especially the way young white’s say things like ‘you fucking black African’s, you fucking black idiot’ when you just pass by them.*

*Racism is a big one within African communities. There are concerns and frustrations about institutions and organisations – Councils and even community neighbourhood centres not taking it seriously with a kind of ‘they were in the wrong place at the wrong time’ attitude.*

This latter narrative explains a ‘blame the victim’ mentality within some organizations and institutions.

**Practices of invisible systemic racism**

For some participants the analysis of the causes of systemic problems outlined in previous parts of this paper is that of invisible racism:

*With regards to many government departments many in the community are dissatisfied. We have to facilitate many seminars on housing, legal aid, Centrelink. The community needs so much education about these systems and structures. Schools are a big issue – our secondary students needing so much extra tutoring and tutorials. Some Sudanese see these institutions as practicing silence and invisible discrimination. It is not open. The longer you stay here the more you see it, feel it, and experience it.*
For several participants their distress was caused not so much by racism, but by a generic sense of insecurity. There were various interpretations of this sense of insecurity.

The following narratives describe various interpretations. Some say that the issue of safety is more about perception than reality:

...............is the issue of safety at a public, community and individual level. Younger Sudanese clients individually do not feel safe. In the Logan area, when there is noise around then, people on the streets, police cars and police...we here the clients saying “I don’t feel safe”. Another story: A client recently left Woodridge, literally packing their bags and running as a house nearby burnt down. As a worker I can see they’re not really unsafe in the sense that in that instance the house that was burning down was a long way away from that Sudanese client. So it is more about perception.

For the following Sudanese narrator, the issue is one of moving from a specific experience of crime and then developing a generic interpretation ‘we’re being targeted’:

With regards to community safety, the issue focuses on when there is opportunistic crime and the victim is Sudanese. It is interpreted within the community as ’we Sudanese are at risk’ A response becomes ’we’re not safe, we’re being targeted’.

Others linked the feelings of lacking safety to experiences of ‘trauma’:

I’ll take a stab at interpreting this sense of lack of safety as being linked to their refugee experience – they are distressed and it does bring back the past, it is about re-visiting the past.

Several participants talked about the distress caused by perceptions of police in the early settlement stage:

People are still afraid when they first come here. When they hear the word police, even the children are scared. But now we know the systems are different – the relationship with citizens is so different. I have been here one year and none of the police have stopped me.

Safety, racism and policy/political discourse:
Some participants’ analysis linked the experiences of racism and lack of safety to current policy and political discourses:

............when One Nation was on the rise refugees found themselves as pariahs – that outpouring of racism that Pauline Hansen gave permission for people to express. It tapped into the underlying racism in our culture and diminished ‘the Other’ – certainly refugees, who were already dealing with trauma, found themselves in a culture that undermined them. Some people protested against Pauline Hanson, but in some ways that was counter-productive because it increased the general hostility, and hostility particularly towards refugees.
Such a discourse is generated from a politic of fear that displaces the possibility of what the following participant calls love, but that I call hospitality\(^{13}\) (Derrida, 2001):

*The problem in our current context is that John Howard is practising a politic of fear that displaces the possibility of love for 4 reasons:*
- Behind the fear of others is a fear of difference and the challenge that the difference of the ‘Other’ might bring to us.
- Then there is a fear of conflict, a fear of the inevitable conflict that difference creates
- Then there is a fear of loss as a result of conflict. We will lose something of ourselves that is precious to us, so we cannot embrace the ‘Other’.

So we are afraid of difference, conflict and loss, and beneath that is a fear of change. Even if we believe in the promise of unity and diversity, and the possibility that conflict is instructive, or the prospect of winning through losing something, we’re afraid of the change that an authentic encounter with the ‘Other’ will bring.

*So it is very easy for government to exploit our fear of the ‘Other’ – to pretend to be our protectors. People will go along with it even if ideologically and intellectually they are opposed to it. It is only if we are experiencing love, feeling safe in ourselves and secure can we take the risk to reach out and embrace the ‘Other’.*

This participant analysis links the distress of a refugee to that of the distress of other citizens who are themselves able to, or unable to extend genuine love or hospitality depending on their own sense of a secure self. For Hage (2002) such a dynamic is described as a culture of worry and paranoia vs. a culture of care that either undermines or enables people’s capacity to welcome the ‘Other’. For refugees the distress of arriving and settling is then compounded by the distress of not being ‘embraced’ by Australian’s who are able to and are willing to grieve, share and engage in solidarity with, and change as a result of that embracing:

*The politics of fear undermines the refugees possibility of experiencing healing because it undermines the possibility of the communalization of trauma – undermines the possibility that we – the broader community will reach out, embrace, bear witness to, and then change.*

### Systemic problems

Whilst many of the previous narratives included some analysis of the problems of systems and structures, several participants talked more explicitly about systemic issues. The following participant argues strongly that the whole IHSS (Integrated Humanitarian Settlement Scheme\(^{14}\)) is not working effectively for African refugees generally and the Sudanese community specifically:

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\(^{13}\) In using the term hospitality I am drawing on Derrida’s conceptualization of hospitality.

\(^{14}\) The IHSS is the settlement service regime resourced by what was known as the Department of Immigration, Multicultural and Indigenous Affairs (DIMIA) to support refugees particularly within the first 6 months of their arrival.
My reflections are that the IHSS model worked for the Yugoslavians, but it does not work for the Africans. A model that worked for a group who were from Europe will not work for Africans. We, working with CSSS funding, get to work with the refugees after the first 6 months and we are still dealing with a huge amount of unmet needs: health needs and on-going psychological distress. As we address settlement issues then other issues arise. It is on going.

Mainstream assistance does not work. Africans do not understand the system. Yugoslavians adapted easily, the Middle Easterners are kind of in-between, but when you come from rural Africa, and you’ve then spent ten years in a refugee camp, learning the system will take a long time. So we’re making huge assumptions. Their health needs are different, education needs etc.

Also, for me, the African crisis has been immersed in a long-term war, twenty or so years, compared to the Yugoslavian war - so it’s not just cultural, but historical - and that makes the Africans even more vulnerable systemically. We work with mainstream housing providers for example. They call us and complain that the Africans are not cleaning up the house and are making a big mess. So we visit these families and when we walk in we find clothing hanging on lines in the house, windows and curtains shut making it hot, sticky and stuffy, dishes in the sinks. My interpretation is that they feel safe with the house closed up and everything inside. But what strikes me is how they have created a familiar place – like the refugee camps. We’re noticed that this is what they are trying to create. I’m feeling unfamiliar so I create the familiar, but that familiar space does not fit in with the system.

So it is about two systems not connecting and this is a big one with the African groups. They have real resilience, an amazing ability to survive, they’re not stupid, but the systems are so different. But I find that so many service providers focus on the deficits and see messy houses and do not understand the context, their experience.

Some participants focused on particular problems within the current system rather than holding an analysis of whole systemic breakdown. Their distress was caused by particular systemic issues. The first reoccurring issue was the problem of lack of interpreters:

"..........someone referred to me recently – I have had real trouble negotiating a time and place to get together. The interpreter I have used over the phone has been inappropriate – the wrong Arabic.

the issue for us is that police and other statutory authorities are not using professional interpreters and not using female interpreters when there are issues of sexual violence...."

Another reoccurring systemic cause of distress was that of information provision:

15 The CSSS funding is available through a program designed to support migrants and refugees in the post-6 month’s stage of settlement.
We find information being given to us in English is very difficult – how can we understand? Sometimes we are reading Arabic but people give us information in English – how do we understand?

They will be approached by so many service providers who are bringing information. They come with so much information – like a bombardment. This information will add more confusion, rather than helping, because there will be so many, with people with no background of information. So they cannot analyse the information. Some of them will take the information in a very crude manner.

Then people are getting letters from places like Centrelink, and they cannot read them, cannot understand them, they cannot analyse: question what is right or not right. This is all so foreign to them.

There is a real problem in how the current information is delivered – if at all. I get angry that we keep experiencing child protection issues, but really no one has been informed about child protection law in their own language – that is unfair. People in my community want to live according to the law, but they are not given appropriate information in the right way that enables them to know the law.

System-service delivery nexus: a field of struggle for power. 16
Many participants expressed distress at the way organizations work with the Sudanese community. Such distress and the participant analysis of the causes of that distress describe some of the field of struggle for power within the ‘refugee’ settlement industry/human service industry. Causes of that distress varied as the following narratives express. The key issues include:

The problem of lack of listening to the community:
For the following participants the dynamics of this lack of listening include firstly, a lack of listening and learning about culture and secondly a lack of listening in terms of the communities themselves determining their own needs:

*These agencies do not take the time to learn about culture. They understand refugees as refugees wherever they come from. But actually it is different.*

*As services we’re not getting time to learn about such culturally and community sensitive work – there is no time to talk about the issues.*

16 For Bourdieu a field of struggle for power is a key spatial metaphor defining the structure of the social setting in which habitus operates. Or put another way, fields denote structured spaces that are organized around specific types of capital (social, intellectual/cultural, symbolic etc.). I am arguing that refugees live or in this case are ‘served’ within a field of agencies, organizations, institutions, policies that wield different forms of capital. Bourdieu’s concept of field emphasizes that this context is in fact conflictual and we need to bring analysis to the context. The Sudanese individual or communities behaviours, actions and experiences will be mediated through the structure of the field. In this case the field is that of the ‘refugee settlement industry/policy’. Note that for Bourdieu fields of struggle are also sites of resistance as well as domination and the participant analysis developed from the following narratives reflect acts of resistance.
So many workers do not even know about the resources that exist than enable us to know a culture better. We need to step out of simply referring clients on, and start addressing their real issues, using their real strengths.

These agencies define problems the same for everyone – and therefore give uniform services, not responding to community-specific needs.

Others focused on the lack of listening as a problem in learning about the needs and the consequential imposition of inappropriate solutions:

For now organisations do not understand, or listen to the needs of the people. They then design their own solutions that are not appropriate to our culture.

Such narratives would validate the kind of analysis of ‘disabling professions’ provided by McKnight (1995) and provide a strong warning for professionals working within service agencies to engage in substantial reflexivity.

Other narratives focused on the problem of inappropriate methods of consulting with the community, or segments of the community, by not bringing the results back to the participants:

It is good if these workers give reports to elders or management committee simply so they know what is happening. This is good protocol and enables coordination, and avoids duplications. The reports could be given to the office/association and then these reports could go back to the whole community. This would make things smooth. ..................The thing is when meetings are conducted we then often hear nothing. They run meetings and then disappear.

Such a problem was located within an analysis that argued that the problem is one of services not establishing genuine partnership with communities:

At the beginning there was, how do you call it, there was a bad attitude from the community towards.......(an NGO). We saw (NGO).......as behind the issue of family disintegration – because they see (NGO).......people going to schools and talking to young people asking them ‘how are you being treated at home?’ And they would tell young people ‘you have money yourself – you are free’. The children would come back with a lot of anxiety and were not happy. This caused problems. People believed that (NGO).......would talk to the children, and go to TAFE and talk to the women, ‘you are free, you are not supposed to be mistreated – they are mistreating you’. So many problems. The community saw it as you can talk to these people – our children and our women, but let us be a part of it. If you want to work with us, and be a part of the facilitation let us be in partnership so we can rule out the question of suspicion. If you want to talk to the family, don’t talk to the woman privately, or the children privately. You come and talk to them directly and talk together. OK. So to avoid talking outside the family so you cannot be accused of us not knowing about it. Everyone is concerned with the family unit. It is like a shame when the family disintegrated. People will blame you, you will be shamed.
Other participants outlined the problem of the overall donor-service-community nexus:

*The current situation of donors giving to community services who then work for the community dis-empowers us – often does not address our concerns. It fits more with the agenda of donors and community services who in our perception are often the middle men – and so little gets to us, the impoverished community.*

The following participant had developed a sophisticated analysis of the problem of this donor-service-community nexus in breaking down communities, but also recognizes the links between a broader neo-liberal agenda grounded in competitive tendering and ‘territorialisation’ (Rose, 1999) with the local politics of agencies and creating need:

*The hardest issue is the way agencies work with associations. Now agencies are in competition and for this reason they even tend to help in breaking down the community into pieces. They’re breaking down e.g. they say ‘we’ll support you in terms of your need’ when maybe they know someone else is already working on that issue and they could have moved them on to get help there.*

*Everyone now needs a group – a database of people to prove they are helping. In the community we are trying to bring people together to solve the problems and the agencies are doing the opposite – working with groups to legitimize their projects.*

This above analysis provides a devastating description of how ‘disabling professions’ are reinforced by a political economy that manufactures need and mythologizes solutions for the purposes of agency and professional survival (McKnight 1995). For some participants the current policies are actually designed to foster exclusion and division within communities as a way of disempowering them and ensuring compliance:

;;;;current policies and politics use the language of inclusion and cooperation but practice co-option and exclusion, division. The community is seen as a threat to policy and the authorities and so they neutralize us through co-option and control.

Others argued that the problem was a lack of agency co-ordination and resulting duplication, confusion and exhaustion:

*There is also a big problem with co-ordination – no one is facilitating this amongst the services. So there is duplication and this exhausts us as a community with so many agency community consultations.*

For the following participant this lack of co-ordination and resultant duplication is built on the analysis previously outlined where there are unhealthy agency dynamics that are linked to the creation of needs for the purpose of getting funds:
However there are some negative dynamics with these organisations – so much duplication that causes confusion in the community, and also exhausts the leaders who have to participate in meetings with all these organisations sometimes doing the same thing. Seems organisations are simply going and getting funds.

I remember (a Sudanese worker) when he was leaving here on his last day saying, ‘there is always plenty of money to find out what the needs are but there is never money to really do anything about them’, and I think that is also the case. With being the flavour of the month there are a lot of people saying ‘what are the needs?’, and a lot of projects about finding ... a lot of pilots, that sort of thing. But who is doing the caring? Who is facilitating the change? Who’s actually making an impact in a profound way? Who is helping things shift if they need to shift? Or who is holding things together if they need to remain together? Who is making the decisions about what needs to shift or hold together?

One of the results of this duplication for many Sudanese refugees is confusion about services within the community:

Within the Sudanese community many are confused about which services they can visit – who is providing services. I hear of people pushing for a kind of loyalty – i.e. you can and should go to service A, and not B. Not sure where that ‘call to loyalty’ is coming from because the services all sign contracts ensuring that we do not create such a climate – our job is ensure clients have maximum choice!. We need leaders who will ensure that the community knows they can go anywhere.

The following short dialogue I had with a participant highlights the problem of being ‘the flavour of the month’ and the potential ‘problematizing’ of a group, not necessarily because they have more problems than any other group, but simply because they are able to voice their problems more articulately that others, or they are visible due to the simply large numbers of new arrivals. However, for Rose (1999) such problematizing is not only about ‘visibility’ or ‘voice’ but is linked to a process of territorialisation that ensures a ‘group’ is marked out, mapped, measured, invested with powers and overlaid with representations. For Ingamells (2006), the notion of territorialisation opens the way to asking who is being served: professionals, particular interests, or ‘community’:

I went to a mapping exercise of what was going on in the Sudanese community and it was mad. There were so many projects. Also, currently there is a lot of research going on in the Sudanese community. In a way that drives me mad – they are the flavour of the month, and I am not sure that it is good for the community. Everybody is talking about the Sudanese community – the police, the education department, us, NGOs......

P. They’re problematized at the moment!?

Maybe it is about what I was saying – they’re so good to work with because they’re so articulate – they’re big, there are a lot of them, their problems are
obvious, you don’t really have to do too much of a needs analysis because its right there. You hardly have to find out what people want because they can articulate it and won’t hold back. That drives me mad.

And as I said I do not think that it is particularly useful for the community because when you are the flavour of the month you have a lot of people doing little bits and often not coordinating with one another and often duplicating..........

Several participants have viewed the development of a plethora of agency driven projects as a problem in that they are all ‘pilot/short term projects:’

But this is the problem here – we start good projects, we try new things and then we leave it and it does not continue. Everything is just pilot projects..... but if it continued it could really make a difference in people’s lives.

This is fine, (referring to family disintegration because of violence) but it would have been better if we had spaces to talk about these issues early. This was frustrating about the (a community program) not continuing............. we’ve put another application in. But this is another example of such short-sightedness.

I sometimes; and I see this in so many areas, I said it with NGO – so many people are coming, and we see services fighting to get programs, to get money into their accounts. We saw (NGO) start something like the (community) program, really good, but it does not continue, and the agencies are not working together. Services must support projects together, and then when the community sees it work we go yes, and we do not need to create new projects, or if it is not effective then we evaluate why and create new ideas to do something effective. Often it is the same people working on the different projects that have a short life run by different organisations.

Questions have to be asked about the real agenda’s of government and agencies that are only investing in short-term or constant pilot projects.

The final part of this paper explores the concept of distress from a more interpretive tradition. I have explored the concept through three discussions. They are firstly, what are some of the embodied metaphors of distress that are common within the Sudanese community; secondly, how does religion and spirituality impact on or mediate people’s experience and understanding of distress; and finally what are the varying views on how Sudanese people, and those working with them, understand the links between distress and trauma.

Embodied metaphors of distress
Elizabeth Coker (2004) in her paper Travelling Pains: Embodied metaphors of suffering among Southern Sudanese refugees in Cairo, discusses how refugees use certain narrative styles in discussing illnesses that highlight the interconnection between bodily ills and refugee-related trauma. She argues that refugees use embodied metaphors to understand and cope with their current experiences as echoed in narratives that are non illness related. In Cairo, Sudanese refugees use embodied
metaphors such as ‘the heart’, ‘blood’, and ‘body constriction’ to discuss social and cultural losses.

From within my research amongst Southern Sudanese refugees within Brisbane and Logan the key embodied metaphor used by Sudanese people is that of ‘headache’:

‘Headache’ means we are thinking about something all the time, a problem that constantly dominated our thinking.

The key way people in the community here talk about their distress is ‘headaches’ – and it means many things – people like me tell people to go to counselling because there is nothing else we can do. We know it is about social stress – too much to do with children, language learning, work, studies etc.... – but how can we change that, so we tell people to go and get help.

Another metaphor used in a similar way is ‘lost in mind’: a way of talking about depression:

Expression ‘lost in mind’ (‘wia amum’) is very common – this is our way of talking about depression. He is ‘stuck’, that is, lost in mind, the mind is not steady and our cure for this ‘lost in mind’ is that in our community this person must not be left alone.

What is important to understand when considering ‘embodied metaphors of distress’ is that the headache whilst being a literal headache in terms of the experience of bodily illness is a way of discussing social and cultural losses. In a similar way, the ‘lost in mind’ metaphor is an embodied way to articulate the depression resulting from cultural and social loss. For Bourdieu (1999) such embodied metaphors are a way in which the body mediates social suffering which as we have already articulated conceptually links the subjective experience of distress within the context of structural inequality.

Understanding such embodied metaphors are critical both for both those working in the health and helping professions when with refugees. Questions of how we interpret Sudanese refugee narratives that include embodied metaphors such as ‘headaches’ and ‘lost in mind’ become critical to the kind of support and ‘intervention’ we develop.

The role of religion and spirituality\textsuperscript{17} in experiencing/mediating people’s experience of distress:

Within my interviews there were various divergent understandings of how people’s religion and spirituality mediated people’s experience of distress.

\textsuperscript{17}Within the fields of psychology, psychotherapy and human services there has been a growing recognition that religion and spirituality are not simply about pathology – i.e. a problem to be ignored or removed. Increasingly there is a recognition that within multi-cultural, multi-religious, and global contexts such professionals must work to not only recognize their own socialization, ethnocentric and cultural bias, but to also understand and work alongside indigenous perspectives and worldviews – within which many locate religion and spirituality as central rather than peripheral to interpreting their experiences.
For some participants people’s experience of exile is interpreted as punishment from God and the distress is caused by not knowing ‘when will God stop!’

People’s understanding of suffering in exile is interpreted as punishment from God – collective punishment. The question people keep asking is ‘why does it take so long?’

When people gather and pray about the war it always comes back to this – why is it taking so long? People still fight in the war – believing God is in control – but their responsibility to fight – they are proud – this is their motivation. There is a strong hope that the war will end.

This sense of punishment is collective – a punishment of the country – not the individual – there is no sense of personal guilt.

For other participants this interpretation is problematic:

But that idea of the curse is in the Bible – some translations say Sudan and others the whole Ethiopian area. But if you believe you are being cursed then you will believe you are an evil doer: that is why God is punishing you. That is the theological reason and that would be a real problem.

However, both narratives reflect the centrality of the theological within interpreting the experience of exile even if there are divergent theological interpretations. Such narratives serve as a warning to those working within a narrow secularist framework that they could miss much in terms of the subjective interpretation of the experience of Sudanese refugees.

For some people the current experience of distress is deeply infused with a sense of misfortune that is a result of spiritual forces at work:

The most dangerous form of sickness is one in which people feel less fortunate in life. We have a few people at this level and their interpretation is that it is because of curses. There are rituals that are used to make people healthy. I have not seen these rituals here – just the role of the elders and the feasting and dancing.

– there are still plenty of people who believe it, they still believe in misfortune – they believe that is why they are in Australia and they believe that one day when the angered spirits are appeased they will be able to return to Sudan.

One of the interesting results of my dialogue with participants around this theme is that many participants have quickly learnt in this cultural milieu not to discuss such realities. However, once a safe space is created by those engaging in dialogue, there is at least a tentative, and often an excited willingness to discuss a topic that is central to some people’s belief system.
Interpreting ‘trauma discourse’\textsuperscript{18}

Probably the most difficult part of writing this paper was giving voice to the various differing interpretations about the meaning and experience of trauma within the Sudanese community.

How do we engage with such diverging narratives and interpretations? For Summerfield (1999) there are two key discourses: one that validates the war survivors as citizens, albeit that has suffered, in the context of Sudanese interpretations of war, manhood, (and womanhood) honour, and solidarity; and the other that utilizes the concepts of Western trauma theory. The following divergent narratives and interpretations could then be understood as confusion or even struggle about these two discourses. Another way of analysing the divergence could be to understand that the differences reflect different levels of acculturation and ‘literacy’ in terms of Western orthodoxies of trauma. The implications of this interpretation are that there is no universal notion of trauma: instead there is a process whereby a refugee learns language, and in that language learning learns of the word trauma. He or she then gradually learns of the meaning within the concept and starts to interpret their distress and illness within that conceptual construct\textsuperscript{19}.

The following participant narrative reflects both confusion about the concept of trauma, but also an analysis of the meaning of trauma in the context of what was the particular ‘cause’ or event that led to someone’s death or similar experience:

\begin{quote}
The Sudanese did not want war, but they find themselves in a situation where they have to go to war and they find that war will get them a solution. What traumatizes Sudanese is not going to war, but people getting put into prison for doing things they did not do: “You are persecuting me for what I do not do”, spies who accuse you of being part of the SPLA\textsuperscript{20} or a collaborator, just because you made some criticism. This is what causes trauma.
\end{quote}

P. So you are saying it is trauma?

Not really…. It is distress. It is not trauma within the Sudanese. I have often thought we must be so careful of using the word trauma. If you use the word trauma with the Sudanese then you will not reach them. Because they are very proud of the war they are fighting to find self-determination. So anything that happens there they know it is happening because of so forth, so it does not disturb them. They don’t want war, but there is a bigger picture. They are depressed, and distressed, they are only………….

\textsuperscript{18}See Eyber’s paper (2000) research guides on “Psycho-social issues” at the Forced Migration on-line web site http://www.forcedmigration.org/guides/ for a discussion on ‘the trauma debate’ and then key texts such as Summerfield (1999) and Bracken (2002) for further study.

\textsuperscript{19}Using the kind of sociological approach that Bourdieu has developed would invite us to consider the idea of a field of trauma work: an arena of policy, programmes, and various kinds of professionals. This field as a ‘space’ is a site as struggle for legitimization, resources, etc. Part of the struggle is around science (what is trauma, how do we measure and treat?), but some of it is to do with economics (e.g. the trauma label or diagnosis comes with entitlements. For a refugee literacy in terms of understanding trauma is about access to entitlements (see Furedi (2004) for further discussions about such issues).

\textsuperscript{20}The SPLA is the Southern Peoples Liberation Army
We have different understandings of stress to you westerners. For example if someone dies it really means nothing – we are so used to it. Our response is ‘they die for a good cause’ – the biggest problem is if someone dies in a south-south conflict – we then say ‘it would have been better if they had died fighting against the north.’

Religion was again considered critical as a way of mediating the experience that could or could not lead to a traumatic reaction 21:

The fact that we respond like this is not because of numbness – we simply are used to it – our distress is linked to our experience and history. Death is so common and we understand it through our religion – it is political (a good cause) and religious – “God chooses when we all die” so it is all in the plan of God – we say “it was his/her time to die”.

It does not mean we do not get stressed – we do, but we do connect our current distress to the past – even bad dreams are not connected to the past. But I see people get distressed, burst into tears, get aggressive.

For these participants the experience of war and consequential distress was still interpreted through the prism of a moral and religious world, rather than a psychological world (Summerfield 1999).

Others affirmed the significance of political motivations as mediating people’s experience of war that leads to a ‘particular response’ rather than a universalizing ‘traumatic reaction’:

I think that the Sudanese community is unlike lots of other communities we have dealt with over the past ten years in that distress is not about past trauma. I think that past trauma has been survived in a kind of spirit of solidarity – and that is about how people participated in the war – ‘it was what we did, we were fighters’, and particularly for the men, ‘we did this because it was required by us, we did it in a spirit of duty’ – so there was a really strong ethic of endurance, and a badge of honour – I think.

Some acknowledged confusion about how to understand traumatic symptoms:

We are getting confused now – some of us, like me, do connect bad dreams to past events and trauma now…. My personal experience of torture and detention comes back and causes stress – but I interpret that as a burden I carry as part of my choices to fight in the war.

Most participants argued that for them symptoms and narratives of distress were predominantly about the ‘here and now’, including the ‘here and now’ links to experiences of relatives back ‘home’:

I think the distress of the Sudanese community is about day to day life here.

21 Within the field of trauma studies there is a distinction between a traumatic event and a traumatic reaction (see Bracken 2002, Hoffman 2004).
for me, that is all about present distress of living in Australia – not the distress of flashbacks and nightmares – even though I am sure that happens. I have no doubt that happens, but it is not the distress of past trauma causing PTSD – I imagine there is very little PTSD in the Sudanese community.

Trauma is certainly part of their experience but daily distress is predominant – very here and now. In many stories of the displacement and fleeing, loss is about that trauma. I find that many of the Sudanese refugees at some time have a need to talk about that trauma, about their stories, and have that acknowledged…. They want it to be understood, that this is what their community has been through.

P. What do you mean by acknowledged?

I think being acknowledged by workers when they first meet you – there is a sense that they expect you to understand some of the conflict, what you have been through, to be somewhat informed. Whether you hear about their personal experience or not is not so relevant, but to know about their general experience is expected. And then I guess if you work with them at a different level, at a deeper level then the personal experience is important. But I can say that some of the symptoms of distress, headaches, pains, aches, sleeplessness, flashbacks, are related to trauma. But most of this is related to current circumstances, their current distress. A lot of it is worry about family back overseas. They often say they know what it is like for people back there and there is a sense of guilt, and they internalize the guilt. ‘I’m here and I’m not doing enough to get them over here!’”. This is really big and it is compounded because many of them have left close family behind, a wife, husband, or children.

a single mother with kids. She has children around her – but she knows clearly that her sense of grief is about not having her husband here. For her, hope is about getting him here – it is clearly a social hope. To have social input is central. We also talked about children and I hear the African women talking about how hard it is to have children in Australia. It is so difficult because the family and friendship is not here – no neighbours….. all the children do is come back from school and list what they need – soccer boots, a long list…. Torture and trauma is so far away from their reality.

Conclusion

I hope that this paper has given voice to the distress of Southern Sudanese refugees in Brisbane and Logan. I have attempted to privilege the voice of refugees themselves through including substantial narrative texts. I have also attempted to interpret some of these narratives through analytical frameworks that enable the reader to engage with the concept of social distress as a way of interrupting the discursive power of therapeutic culture (Fuerdi, 2004). Therapeutic culture would lead many people working with refugees to unconsciously interpret refugee experiences and expressions of distress through a psychological rather than a cultural and social paradigm. Such
interpretations would lead to the design of technical interventions (such as counselling) as opposed to practical, social and structural interventions.

I hope the paper enables workers in different parts of the field to reflect on particular challenges for the Sudanese refugee community and to also develop a greater reflexivity and consideration of theory in terms of their engagement with those challenges.
Bibliography


