

PSYCHOLOGY ON THE FRONTLINE

# Africa and the Middle East

BY ERIN CLOUT, PSYCHOLOGY INTERN

The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) declared it to be the world's worst humanitarian crisis. Between 30,000-50,000 children were abducted in Northern Uganda by rebels to be used as child-soldiers and sex slaves. Moved by the plight of these children, Carl and Julie Gaede, psychotherapists from Wisconsin in the US, first came to work with Dr Robi Sonderegger's EMPOWER trauma rehabilitation program (sponsored by the Psychology Café®) more than a decade ago. What they experienced was both gruesome and gratifying. They witnessed some of the most severely traumatised people on earth experience true healing and radical transformation. Shortly after in 2008, the Gaede's, along with their two young children, permanently relocated to Uganda to establish their own humanitarian organisation called Tutapona (which in Swahili means, "We will be healed"). Tutapona focuses exclusively on addressing the emotional effects of war and conflict. Using the EMPOWER trauma rehabilitation program, Tutapona has now rehabilitated more than 37,000 civil war survivors.



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Over the past 9 years, Tutapona has expanded their services beyond Uganda, to work with war-affected Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) and refugees from South Sudan, Rwanda, Burundi and the Democratic Republic of Congo. Currently, Tutapona has over 20 Ugandan staff members in 4 field offices, serving refugees from throughout Central and East Africa.

Most recently, Tutapona expanded their operations to the Middle East to address the emotional needs of the Syrian refugee crisis. They currently have 3 teams and 12 staff operating in Kurdistan, Iraq and have found the need in this part of the world to be significant. "There are so many needs in this region and we hope to expand our work to have teams in additional locations," urged Carl. "We are currently exploring how to develop a team that is based closer to Mosul to work with the large number of people flooding out of this last ISIS stronghold".

Not only is Tutapona supporting the emotional needs of the refugees fleeing Mosul, they are hoping to set up teams within Syria and support the staggering amount of IDPs. Many Syrian

people have been displaced from their homes due to violence but are trapped within the country and are unable to get out. Carl and Julie are currently seeking the financial provision to roll out urgently needed mental health services to these communities right where they are.

Tutapona have been long standing partners with Dr Robi Sonderegger. Recently, Carl collaborated with a team of experts at the Psychology Café® to help develop a brand new posttraumatic growth-based program called GROW. "Both EMPOWER and GROW are different from other curriculum [treatment programs] I have seen in that they use evidence-based ways to empower and equip lay practitioners to facilitate therapy," says Carl. "Both programs are culturally sensitive and adaptable to the specific cultural context in each location. I also really like how both programs have a focus on forgiveness and reconciliation, which is quite rare."

Carl describes the impact seen from EMPOWER and GROW as remarkable, with participants developing renewed hope for their future, seeing relationships restored, and ultimately having





significantly fewer symptoms associated with posttraumatic stress (i.e. PTSD; including less anxiety and depression, fewer intrusive thoughts, and improved sleep function). Because trauma recovery and mental health improvements are validated through standardised measures, this therapeutic initiative has become the largest ever formal mental health service provided in war zone settings.

Tutapona is truly on the frontlines of trauma rehabilitation. Albeit inspiring, the work that the Gaede family are a part of in Africa and the Middle East is not always easy – especially with a young family. Moving away from friends and family, as well as giving up many material comforts, are just some of the many sacrifices the family has and continues to make. However, from their standpoint, they believe they have gained so much more than they have given up. “Our whole family considers it a privilege to live among and serve the people who have suffered so much. To play a small part in the emotional healing of communities who have been traumatised by war is a profound honour.”

As Carl and Julie continue to expand their impact across the Middle Eastern and African regions, the Psychology Café® team remains committed to

supporting their work through staff development and training, clinical supervision and financial support (\$120,000 commitment over three years – through the Family Challenge Charitable Trust).

IF YOU WOULD LIKE TO LEARN MORE ABOUT THE GAEDE FAMILY AND THE INSPIRING WORK OF TUTAPONA, VISIT [WWW.TUTAPONA.COM](http://WWW.TUTAPONA.COM) YOU CAN ALSO DIRECTLY HELP US FINANCIALLY SUPPORT TUTAPONA'S TRAUMA REHABILITATION SERVICES BY MAKING A DONATION HERE: [WWW.FAMILYCHALLENGE.COM.AU](http://WWW.FAMILYCHALLENGE.COM.AU) (ALL DONATIONS OVER \$2 ARE TAX DEDUCTIBLE)



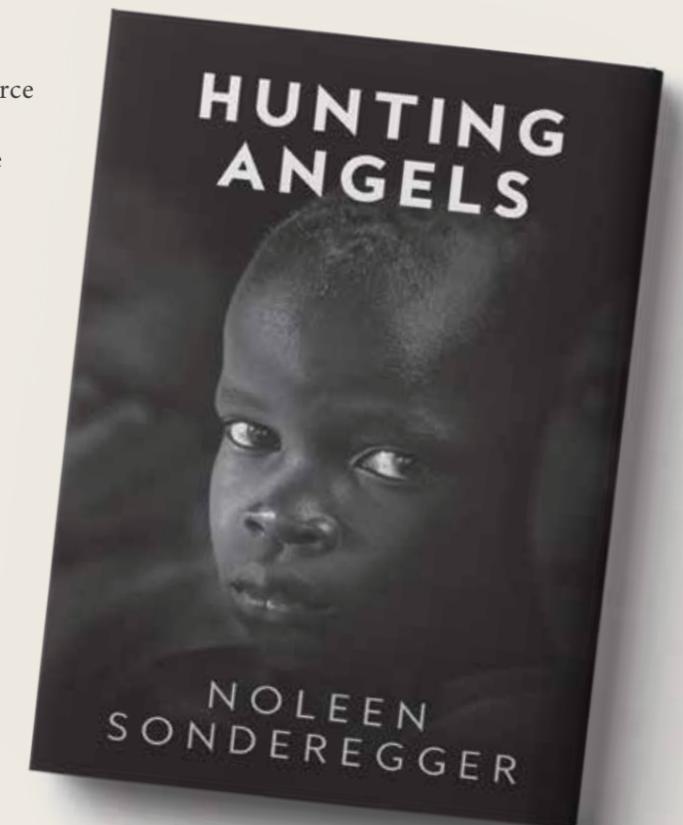
A NEWLY RELEASED NOVEL BY NOLEEN SONDEREGGER

# Hunting Angels

A savage militant cult known as the LRA (Lord's Resistance Army) plundered Northern Uganda of its most precious resource for many years. Not its gold or diamonds or other pricey gems, but its children. Over the years an estimated 1.7 million people were forced to flee their homes, taking refuge in more than 200 internally displaced person (IDP) camps.

An estimated 60,000 Acholi children were abducted in the region and recruited into military ranks or sold as sex slaves to rebel fighters. Many escaped, however the broad majority were not so fortunate, being subject to sexual violence, mutilation and torture on a scale that shocked the world.

Silvia and Amos are two innocent Acholi children whose lives are turned upside down after they are both abducted by the LRA. Like so many in Northern Uganda, they lose everything they have ever known and loved. Their lives cross paths with Grace and her young son Sante who was born into the rebel group. *Hunting Angels* is a tapestry of tragedy and triumph that will allow you to glimpse both the depravity of civil war and the courage of the human spirit. This is the story that most children from Northern Uganda never got to tell.



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