Chapter 4

Childhood diversities and life's beginnings

Preamble

In this chapter, I introduce the thirty women who participated in this study. Through the snow ball and purposive sampling method outlined in Chapter 2, I engaged six women from each of five geo-political territories: the Horn of Africa, Lebanon, the former Soviet Union, the Philippines and Vietnam. I begin with a potted history of each country, leading up to present conditions. A longer section undertakes an exploration of the social and cultural contours of the women's childhood and young adulthood. Interspersing the narratives of my informants with directions from the literature, I illustrate how they learnt to constitute what is normal, what is of value, what is reality and what it means to be a woman. This process assisted the development of my understanding of their agency during settlement in Australia. Finally, the themes raised in earlier sections of the thesis will be illustrated with the individual experiences of the six women from each region in turn. The discussion will consider the life beginnings of women in the following sequence:

Horn of Africa (Ethiopia, Eritrea and South Sudan)
Lebanon
Former Soviet Union
Philippines
Vietnam

My approach to selecting material about each geo-political region reflects my foregoing methodological and theoretical foundations, such as the argument about the heuristic value for research of exploring a culture's basic assumptions about ways of being and ways of knowing (Nye, 2000:104). In this chapter, I begin applying my de-colonising methodology for facilitating the articulation of diverse as well as shared enactments of gender. Using Bourdieu's concepts of habitus, predispositions and capital and Gidden's structuration as routine encounters of bodies in co-presence, I will sketch out public life and the social milieus within which each of the six women learnt to constitute identity, meaning and action. For a nuanced analysis of women's lives across the globe, the intersections of gender, class, religion and culture with history, geography and politics need to be explored carefully (Moreton-Robinson, 2000; Mohanty, 2003; Hatzimalotis, 1993; Ang, 1998; Lazreg, 1994; Kandiyoti, 1999). Each woman will then be introduced through her narrative about childhood and early adulthood, with my descriptions of our dialogue, to ground and facilitate the emergence of individual personalities for the reader.

Appendix 1 contains the list of topics which loosely structured the interviews. I firstly elicited descriptions of the worlds in which these women grew up, how their time was structured, who the people were surrounding them and their dreams for the future. I was also keen to hear the unique ways in which the women responded to everyday life and to its adversities, creating and recreating their worlds. As will become evident quite early in this chapter, the depictions of childhood in the countries included here furnished me with some of the most startling and rich insights of my project, changing my understanding of the human condition. My final caveat is that I do not claim to have presented more than a respecful understanding of the lifeworlds in question, and some general pointers to guide the analysis.

Table 1

United Nations World Development Indicators 2000

(Instituto de Tercer Mundo, 2001:22-58)

This table provides basic statistics indicating the life chances prevailing in the countries the women came from. These figures serve to provide some insight about the lifeworlds and contexts of emigration. The countries' profiles below will include references to some of these indicators.

Indicators % of pop.	**Ethiopia**		**Eritrea**		**Sudan**		**Australia**		**Lebanon**		**Russia**		**Philips**		**Vietnam**	
Gender	*M*	*F*	*M*	*F*	*M*	*F*	*M*	*F*	*M*	*F*	*M*	*F*	*M*	*F*	*M*	*F*
Literacy	40	26	n/a		n/a		n/a		94	94	99	100	94	94	95	98
Primary Sc	47	27	59	49	n/a		103	103	113	108	108	107			106	100
Second Sc	13	10	24	17	n/a		153	153	78	85	84	91			44	41
Tert Ed total	1%		1%		n/a		80%		27%		41%				7%	
Life Expect	43		51		55		78		70		67		68		68	
Child mortality 1000 births	173		112		115		5		35		25		44		42	
Urbanisation	16%		17.7%		33.3%		84.6%		88.5%		76%		56%		19.5%	
Women in Parliament	2%		21%		5%		26%		2%		8%		13%		26%	
HDI 1999*	0.298		0.346		0.475		0.922		0.749		0.747		0.740		0.664	

Key: M = male F = female

HDI = Human Development Index measures how far a country is from attaining certain goals – e.g. average life span of 85 years, universal access to education and a decent income. A perfect score is 1.00 (UNDP, 1999, *Human Development Report*, cited in Instituto del Tercer Mundo, 2001:58).

Horn of Africa: Ethiopia, Eritrea and South Sudan

Ethiopia

Indigenous Africans were barred from entry to Australia under the White Australia policy and the small numbers of current Australian residents tend to have come from former British colonies (Jupp, 2001:165). Africa has histories of many thousands of years, about which information is scarce in the Western world. Nevertheless, the evidence is that it has had flourishing civilisations and had great artistic and technological achievements, for example, pioneering metallurgy as early as 3000BC (Braudel, 1993:125).

Ethiopia has a population of approximately 61 million (1999 figure). In 1997, a little over 16% of the population lived in urban areas. As the table above shows, life expectancy at birth is 35 years less than in Australia; infant mortality is approximately 25 times more frequent than the Australian rate. Women have an average of six or more children and have half the rate of schooling as boys. Less than half the people are literate. The bulk of the workforce is found in agriculture (86%), with only 2% in industry and 12 % in the service sector. The Human Development Index was amongst the lowest in the world (Instituto del Tercer Mundo, 2001:228-230).

This land mass was named Abyssinia around 2000 BC by colonising tribes from the Yemen. It was a very early convert of Christianity through the apostle Phillip. Abyssinia was rich and prosperous, being a centre for trade between India and Arabia, through the Red Sea ports which provided a link for goods from the Upper Nile. By the seventh century Ethiopia was isolated as Islam spread throughout the Horn of Africa. It had a feudal system akin to the European model. Civil insurrections began from the 16th century, as did the ruling elites' identification of Europe as a natural source of assistance, with help coming from the Portuguese, Italians and British. Abyssinia was able to repel Italian colonisers in 1896, by giving Eritrea to Italy and South Somalia to England, as compensation, even though the former were independent neighbouring countries. The world powers recognised Abyssinia's

sovereignty in 1906 and Ethiopia is the only African country to have never been colonised (Instituto del Tercer Mundo, 2001).

The exiled King Haile Selassi returned in 1948 but presided over three decades of declining industry and food production and the strengthening of nationalist movements against the corruptions of feudalism. In 1975, a Communist backed military coup nationalised foreign banks and heavy industry, carried out agrarian reforms, and closed US military bases. Eritrea and South Somalia took up guerrilla war for independence with support from the US. From the early eighties, Ethiopia was plagued by drought and mass starvation. By 1989, 60% of the national budget was devoted to warfare and in the following year, the government dropped its Marxist Leninist tag with assistance from the US and Britain. By 1992, Ethiopia was the poorest country in the world as it had had civil war since the seventies on at least four fronts, and simultaneously, drought of prodigious dimensions with the death of at least one million people from starvation and another million had become refugees in neighbouring countries. Ethiopia called for international aid but the World Bank withheld the relief on the basis of insufficient progress on micro-economic market based reforms. Human rights organisations argued that Ethiopia's aid needed to be aimed at investment in seeds, tools and livestock in order to avoid famine (Instituto del Tercer Mundo, 2001).

The majority of Ethiopians in Australia come from rural areas and experience additional difficulties in adapting to a modern and urban environment, with many reported to being fearful of venturing beyond the home for prolonged periods of time (Gow, 2001:347). Ethiopian Australians continue their obligations to support relatives in desperate material conditions overseas, often in refugee camps. Unemployment was 45% in 1996 and Ethiopians surveyed consistently spoke of racist representations in the media, and of discrimination in the public sphere (Gow, 2001).

Eritrea

As the table above shows, Eritrean life expectancy at birth is 28 years less than in Australia; infant mortality is 22 times more frequent than the Australian rate. Girls have almost equal access to primary education to boys and women occupy 21% of seats in parliament compared to 2% for Ethiopia and Sudan. The Human Development Index was amongst the lowest in the world (Instituto del Tercer Mundo, 2001:228-230).

The Eritrean plain is a desert steppe extending along the Red Sea with a population of almost 4 million in 1999 (Pateman, 2001:344-345; Instituto del Tercer Mundo, 2001:228-230). There are nine ethnic groups and the majority are pastoralists or farmers and only 20% are urban workers. Approximately half are Coptic Christians and most of the rest are Muslims. Eritrea is located at the north of Ethiopia and its coastline stretches across 1000 kms of the Red Sea, providing Ethiopia's only access to the sea. Hence, its port was central to the flourishing Aksumite empire and its prosperity was shared with Ethiopia. It retained much of its independence until falling under the rule of the Ottomans in the 16th and 17th centuries. The territory was disputed amongst Ethiopia, Italy, Egypt, the Ottomans, and the kingdom of Tigray. As noted above, the treaty of Winchale in 1890 gave the area to the Italians who renamed it Eritrea.

In 1950, the United Nations declared Eritrea a federated state of Ethiopia. King Haile Sellassi's action to totally incorporate it led to the first nationalist struggle. The unification of the one million population in struggle against the Italians enabled strong mobilisation culminating in its victory over Ethiopia in 1990 by the Eritrean Popular Liberation Front (EPLF). State to state relations resumed quickly with Ethiopia and the drought ceased in Eritrea. Clashes have continued sporadically on various frontiers, preventing the repatriation of over a million Eritrean refugees. Half a million refugees live in Sudan, 40,000 in Europe and 14,000 in the US. The Australian government and other leaders lent their support to the Eritrean war (Pateman, 2001:344).

South Sudan

Sudan features deserts in the north, flatlands in the centre and dense rainforest in the south. Most people live along the Nile where cotton is grown. Desertification has affected nearly 60% of the land and only 5% of the land is arable. Sudan is Africa's largest country and the most endowed country with natural resources after South Africa. As the scene of the world's longest civil war (48 years including a brief period of peace of 11 years) it has become one of the poorest nations on earth. Among the 33 million inhabitants, the 4 million internally displaced, 490,000 refugees and 4 million dead since 1983 are mostly Southerners (Department of Immigration, Multiculturalism and Indigenous Affairs (DIMIA, 2003).

From 3000BC, the Sudanese land mass included three states which were greatly coveted by the Persians, Greeks, Romans, Arabs and Europeans (Britain and France) as the only link between the Mediterranean market and sources of slaves, ivory, skins and other goods from Equatorial Africa. Subject to Muslim colonisers from the 8th century, the three states with mixed Christian and animist populations, preserved cultural and political independence for over 600 years through a treaty with Muslim merchants. An Egyptian invasion in the 14th century marked the systematic spread of Islam. Sudan first took shape as a political entity in the early 19th century in resistance to the successive colonising armies of Napoleon, Egypt and, finally, Britain's victory in the late 19th century. Britain and France partioned Africa amongst themselves, and the British divided Sudan into closed districts, with a policy of granting privileges to the Christian south, which remained isolated and undeveloped, but not the Muslim north (DIMIA, 2003:4).

The geographical territory of Sudan has been contested over thousands of years by its current 500 ethnic groups consisting of more than 400 dialects or languages. Today's Sudanese populations includes 52% from an African culture and 39% of Arabic stock, the latter constituting the ruling group (Jupp, 2001:695). The non-Arab groups are Nilotic, making up the majority of the South, speaking languages of the Nilotic sub-branch of the Nilo-Saharan, with a common myth of origin, and similar physical and cultural attributes.

Many had long traditions of cattle keeping. According to Western texts, 15% of the South is Christian but the South Sudanese, barred from government statistical recording, claim that the vast majority is Christian. Several African Roman Catholic priests have brought the plight of the South Sudanese to world attention. The Department of Immigration and Indigenous Affairs (2003:11) report noted that Sudan's Muslim rulers have long considered Christian activity an obstacle to the unifying of Sudan as an Arabic and Muslim state.

After the declaration of Sharia law in 1983 and Sudan's bankruptcy on at least two occasions, the US suspended all credit and the IMF forced the government to raise food prices. In 1991, planes carrying food and medical supplies to the south were blockaded by the Khartoum elite, contributing to the death by starvation of 60,000 people in Parayang, 800 kilometres south east of Khartoum (Instituto del Tercer Mundo, 2001:505). In 1995, the African Rights Organisation charged Khartoum with genocide of the Nuba ethnic group. As the Sudanese government moved closer to the Arab league, in 1997 the US declared an economic embargo, and the following year bombed one of the few pharmaceutical plants alleging links with terrorism. A month later, the UN appealed to the international community for aid of the more than 4 million refugees from war and drought. In 2002, between 1000 to 2000 per day joined UNHCR refugee camps (Instituto del Tercer Mundo, 2001:506).

Lifeworld: Epistemology and ontology

As I outlined at the beginning of this chapter, I am beginning to apply my theoretical and philosophical framework to understand the social and cultural contours of the women's childhood. Hence, I will be depicting the lifeworlds of each country according to the theoretical constructs and themes which formed the content of Chapters 2 and 3.

In order to understand any African countries, one must begin with an appreciation of African assumptions about life because these differ markedly those of Europe. This encompasses questions about what it is to be human, to be part of human society and what is

worth pursuing in life. Exposure to this literature was a milestone in my journey of discovery about how the majority of the planet's population still enacts its humanity.

A recent text on black philosophy entitled *I Am Because We Are: Readings in Black Philosophy* (Hord & Scott, 1995), provides textual evidence of the ontology and epistemology which the various African civilisations have in common. The authors propose that firstly, an African epistemology begins with identity being grounded in social interaction and that an individual's good life is inseparable from the successful functioning of their community. Ethics and morals focus on collective structures rather than individual decision making. Secondly, reality is seen as inextricably relational in all its aspects, including living and inanimate objects. Thirdly, life cannot be understood without reference to religious realities that transcend the temporal. Community life itself includes interaction with a dimension beyond death, an awareness which goes beyond the particularities of that culture and has the power to transform that community (Hord & Scott, 1995:7-9; Macquet, 1972:10).

African ontology is expressed in social arrangements which are communal, based around the family clan including many times removed blood relatives, such as second, fourth, seventh cousins, all living in close proximity. There can be over one hundred people included in forming the *nucleus* of a child's or adult's web of emotional sustenance. This circle of intimacy and love extends to neighbours, who become lifelong friends sharing in the rhythm of daily and seasonal activities. Intergenerational stability exists not only with those who are alive but encompasses a sense of continuity with their ancestors and their occupation of a parcel of land. Having been in Australia for less than six months, the elderly South Sudanese grandmother Nia, expressed her sense of wonder:

> *I wish I could be as strong as the Australians. The way they live all alone like that. They must be very strong … Back there, you have so many people around and they are not only your neighbours but they become your family, and you play with their kids and go to dances and when you don't have anything you go to them and say I don't have it, and they give it to you and they do the same thing, you give them something when they need it.*

Hence, subjectivities and identities are based on membership of collectives rather than on individualism. Paradigms of interpersonal interaction are close and frequent, with long standing expectations, obligations and rights attached to age and gender as corollary of membership of the group, however widely conceptualised. The authors above suggest that regardless of the disruptions of modernity upon an African nation or culture, such traditional African ways of being and knowing still prevail as the starting point or collective and individual consciousness.

Lifeworld: Social arrangements

The following material summarises verbal reports shared consistently by members of the South Sudanese community with individuals, such as me, and through formal cultural awareness training sessions delivered to Australian community in a variety of settings. This snap shot of life in South Sudan was corroborated by the women who participated in this thesis. Prior to war, communal life in villages occurred in rhythm with the cycles of nature. The safety of this rural lifeworld can be seen in the common South Sudanese practice of the adults going to bed, leaving the children to continue their games unsupervised late into the night. Children made toys out of sticks and most of their play consisted of traditional and invented group games. Styles of interaction are characterised by intimacy within a collective and I was told by the women that there are no boundaries between people from the same tribe. The constant collectives of peers are girded about by the caring surveillance of any adult who, as a matter of course, exercises responsibility to ensure that the needs of children are met at any point in time, as if the children were their own. For example, it is common for children not see their parents for a few days, as they would stay with relatives or neighbours. They would tell their parents where they had been upon return. The absence of a child is not seen as a cause for concern, as such communally based societies operate on the unshakable certainty that parents would have been informed had there been a problem. It is impossible for people not to know where a local child might be. Such environments, which can barely be comprehended by an Australian mind, would have been extraordinarily rich for the

development of children emotionally, socially, spiritually and cognitively. The foregoing also suggests that strangers were related to each other in a different way than they are here in Australia, and probably in many First World cities. A different understanding of being a member of human society prevailed and formed the bedrock of the women's socialised consciousness.

Lifeworld: Gender relations

In general terms for this region of the world, being a woman is inextricably related to family, bearing children and central responsibility for exercising and maintaining affectionate bonds with the family and clans. The privileging of women's capacities to exercise creative love and maintenance of life, which has been a feature of traditional European societies as well, continues to be salient. The lack of access to education of Ethiopian women in particular needs to be noted again, as is their poor representation in parliament, in contrast to the 21% in Eritrea who occupied such posts. The latter is probably related to the fact that Eritrean women joined in the war for liberation alongside their men, as occurred in European nations during the two World Wars and, consequently, were able to make more claims on the state. The predominantly rural Ethiopian population lacks experience with formal education, and women are particularly dependent on men, including in Australia (Gow, 2001:348). The role of women in Ethiopia and Eritrea has been significantly influenced by European discourses and by the 2000 year long experience of Christianity. The two South Sudanese women and the one Ethiopian woman in the study are Christian and the three Eritrean women are Muslim. The prizing of having numerous children has implications for public housing availability in a nation where houses have two or three bedrooms.

Each country varies with respect to the place of women. Although the practice of female genital mutilation and infibulation is widely believed in the West to derive from African culture, it is only practised by Muslim Africans and originated in Egypt with its concern to ensure the virginity of women prior to marriage. It is not prescribed by Islam. Exposure to modernity, education and class intersect significantly on the meanings attached to a

woman's body, as will become evident when the reader is introduced to the women. Women from Eritrea had engaged in combat alongside their men and, as indicated by the figures given in the table above, a large proportion occupy decision making posts in government. Living out solidarity with fellow Eritreans in nation building is a key orientation for normal men and women. Little is known about obligations and expectations attached to gender nor in the context of how Sunni Islam was understood but close cultural and commercial ties with Arab states are part of Eritrean history (Gow, 2001).

Muslim cultures and the South Sudanese practise polygamy. The wives of one man can be friendly and, at times, the first wife chooses the second. All the children consider each other as brothers and sisters. The South Sudanese women told me that women are expected to obey their husbands in all matters, with any disagreeable behaviour from a wife eliciting discipline from the husband in the form of beatings, seen as legitimate and appropriate. Although converted to Christianity in Apostolic times, by the 6th century the Nubian churches were isolated and people reverted to African animism. South Sudanese culture became Christian again through British colonisation two hundred years ago (Instituto del Tercer Mundo, 2001:504). A system of bride price operates, through the currency of cows, seen as compensation for loss of capital embodied in a daughter's labour and child bearing capacity. The bride price is distributed amongst the extended family. The number of wives a man can have depends on his wealth, not only for the dowry but also for supporting the family (DIMIA, 2003).

Women from the Horn of Africa countries in this study grew up in habituses which were marked by the centrality of communal life, through a clan or tribe. The routine encounters of everyday life occurred within such collectives and the stock of knowledge handed down through generations held attributes of permanency sustained by occupation of their land with its modes of material means of subsistence and colonially owned commercial agricultural production. Subjectivity as a woman was marked by close interaction paradigms and women's key role in bearing children, reproducing culture and exercise of solidarity by

actively ensuring the clan's emotional, social and physical well-being. Again, the sources of this information come from cultural awareness training delivered by South Sudanese leaders and professionals as well as verbal reports by individuals, including the women I interviewed for this thesis.

Lifeworld: Colonial relations

Ethiopia has been known as the ' white Africa' for centuries and the fact that it is the only African country not to have been colonised indicates the enactment of a national identity of unquestioned equality to Europe, despite the latter's material advantages (Braudel, 1993:118-9).

Eritrea seems to have incorporated Islamic rule centuries ago, unlike Ethiopia and South Sudan. Over the last century, the evidence available is that Ethiopia has been seen as a greater enemy than any European colonial power. Ethiopia's imperial ambition after decolonisation by the British caused the mobilisation by the 4 million Eritrean population en masse. Eritrean experiences of colonial relations are complex, and European countries and the USA were used as allies in the war of liberation.

Colonial oppression and exploitation are central themes in the South Sudanese life world and psyche. Resistance began with Arabs initiating the slave trade and propagating a myth of the superiority of their lighter coloured skins, later implacably consummated by the Europeans with their technologies of war. The impact on the common imaginary of being a source of slaves over many centuries can only be raised at this stage. One can reasonably propose that it would be a devastating undercurrent of discomfirmation to one's dignity as a human being. Having been under British 'protection' for around two centuries would reinforce inexorably the mirror of inferiority. South Sudanese lifeworlds were tribal and located in rural contexts of subsistence agriculture. Modern education and literacy were slower to penetrate this society, partly due to British colonial strategic policy and as an outcome of the domination of the northern Islamic state. At the same time, Sudan has a

remarkable ancient history of either deft (e.g. negotiated independence from Islamic rule for 600 years) or bloody resistance to invasion and oppression. Colonial relations with Islamic and European forces have been sites for immense contest for centuries, and Sudan has been a very dangerous country for over three decades, with strength derived from the stock of knowledge of being the 'true Africans' as Nubians and warriors.

As I outlined at the beginning of this chapter, much of the material above constitutes my reflections on literature and verbal communications through the lenses of the theoretical constructs and themes which formed the content of Chapters Two and Three. Having outlined the *lifeworlds* and *habituses* in which the women learnt how to enact gender and membership of their culture, I will now introduce the six women from the horn of Africa.

The Ethiopian woman

Kiro

There is only one woman from Ethiopia in the study. **Kiro** is 30. We meet in a busy café that she owns and runs, providing Ethiopian cuisine and Australian fast foods. I had the impression that she had the eyes of someone who has suffered, works too hard and is habitually tired. Some Ethiopian men sit in a corner and chat over coffee, joined from time to time by others in what seems to be an oasis in a foreign city. Kiro makes welcoming gestures to everyone. She was the second eldest out of nine children in a large, affluent family, whose father worked for the United Nations in Addis Ababa. Kiro described her family life as warm and protected. She lived in a house of European architecture, in a suburb of the once beautiful Addis Ababa and heard of their father's daily contacts with the seat of world power represented by Geneva. Her family was part of the ruling elite and the stock of knowledge she inherited from her forbears reflects this participation in the international European world. Wanting to be a nurse, she was shocked and bitterly disappointed not to have gained entry into university. Undoubtedly, Kiro's location in a family of elite material, symbolic and cultural capital gave her great latitude in what she could do with her life.

Nothing in Kiro's story suggested to me that the colonial superiority of whites might be a reality for her sense of herself or her family's place in life.

The Eritrean women

Fatima, Zeinab, Naima

Fatima is fifty-years old and has been in Australia since 1998. She has beautiful fine features, dresses in traditional white clothes and we meet in her house in a low socio-economic suburb of Melbourne. The house is furnished according to Eritrean style, tastefully arranged and immaculately kept. Her husband is a much older man of dignified and genteel bearing, also in white Eritrean style, who discretely stays in the background. An older daughter comes to serve tea and sweets, her head covered lightly and two teenage boys make their appearance upon request from the bedrooms where they are studying. The house is very calm and the children behave respectfully. Fatima was born in a rural area, where her father was an executive in the Italian and then British plantations. She has 20 siblings from her father's two wives, all lived together and if any relatives' mother died, her mother would take the babies and feed them:

> *We grew up with love and that 's what I want to transfer to Australia...We did not grow up with selfishness, but we were always living together including the neighbours) with lots of love.*

Fatima was fully immersed in enacting and perpetuating this emotional web of sustenance. The values were reinforced daily by the shared adherence to Sunni Islam. Her grandfather and father were the first in their town to acquire wealth which they distributed to all relatives and neighbours:

> *So in return, because I believe life is a circle, when he retired and became sick, everybody would say, please, now can we help you? OK, we did a time table, this one would come and do this … because he did justice in distributing his money, when he became sick, people didn't tell him 'God will help you'.*

The family ethos included a strong valuing of education and her father married a second time to a teacher to bring education to the village. All of the male and most of the female

siblings have completed university. Fatima married this older leader in the Eritrean Liberation Front, on condition she finish university. She stopped in the third year on the birth of her first child. Thus, Fatima's mode of being was empowered by the material and symbolic capital of her elders, particularly the women who were pillars of the community's emotional and material wellbeing. She continued recreating the family ethos, including involvement in what she and the other Eritrean women described as self sacrifice for the noble cause of struggle for the liberation of fellow Eritreans.

Zeinab is a colleague in the ethnic field where I worked in the Northern suburbs of Melbourne. We meet in her flat in a Housing Ministry high rise building. Zeinab is also fine featured and beautiful, the flat has a similar atmosphere of scrupulous cleanliness, attractive traditional furnishings, pure sandalwood wafts sensuous aromas but a number of people drop in and Zeinab receives many phone calls. There are Islamic religious words embroidered on the wall and no other decorations. Her husband is tall, gregarious, and impresses as extraordinarily perspicacious, having been part of leadership in the Eritrean Liberation front (ELF), and still owning businesses. As his university study was sponsored by the former USSR, we exchange jokes in Russian. Zeinab was born in 1959 in an Eritrean village, the eldest daughter of seven, five being boys. Her father was an accountant in Italian companies and also brought education to his community through a second wife. He had a company car in which Zeinab was seen to ride by her peers. Her female relatives were active in helping everyone in the village. Zeinab describes life as simple but very good, with everyone caring for each other. Zeinab also came from a position of the highest material and symbolic wealth in Eritrea, enabling her to exercise self determination. She was her father's favourite child. Her life long passion has been to study and to empower her people. The Eritrean women's narratives suggest that they did not internalise a subject location as the colonised. Zeinab reflects about the Italians who were the *other*, different people :

> *Yes there were Italians. I had good relations. I had a best friend at that time that were mixed Italian and Eritrian. There was no pure Italian who I was very close to. She was my best friend and when I went to her place I would be surprised because I would see different things than what I*

> *usually saw in my home. Like the way of eating, the sitting at the dining table, with a fork and spoon. And spaghetti. We did eat spaghetti but we didn't eat it in the way they ate. We put it in a big bowl, all together and we ate with our hands. Sometimes they put the cheese. It was the first time for me to see it. We didn't have cheese. We couldn't have fridge. I saw the fridge. There was a lot of difference between but still we were very close. They didn't let me feel that I was really different from them … We can't go to their houses of course. But we can see them walking through the offices. Sometimes in our community there was like a big bar selling ice cream. So people go and have some coca cola and an ice cream. So we can see them sitting there in a very nice place and area. But we don't have good contact … Sometimes we could go and collect some toys from their rubbish bins. They lived in the very high mountains, the house was built. And the back of the house there were big holes, they put the rubbish there. So we go and look in the rubbish and sometimes we got really nice toys which were for them were really awful. Sometimes we collected things which came from Italy, it looked nice. Like some bottles. You know there is some stuff which you really feel is nice for us. But we don't feel ashamed. All our neighbours and our friends say "Let's go" and we would go and look through. Although we could respect ourselves from the best families in the village but still we did what the other kids did. We felt like we were the same.*

Naima is 32 and another colleague in youth work with refugee African girls. We meet in the parents' kitchen at the Children's Hospital, where her second child, born 14 weeks premature and weighing 450grams, is still in care. She has put on some weight but life is spent daily at her side. I left my conversation with Naima with my mind reeling, staggered at the example of humanity I had just encountered.

Naima left Eritrea at the age of two with her grandfather and extended family to live as refugees in Sudan. Both sides of her family are part of an elite, small warrior clan which has been centrally involved in the success of liberation. Her mother was a guerrilla fighter who spent two months with her daughter and two months in the trenches, in the front lines. As a child, Naima daily heard stories of friends and foes being ambushed, killed, strategic plans for taking territory and battle losses. Her free-thinking mother created opportunities for Naima to pitch herself against adversity, by sending her on errands considered unsafe for her age and gender and by letting her deal with conflict situations at school. I was told by the women that refugees are openly resented as unwelcome strangers in Sudan where they have no civil rights. Being one of the two top students at school exacerbated the effort of feeling constantly watched by a hostile audience. Two events critical to the formation of Naima's

character involved biased marking by teachers and the school Principal to favour Naima's Sudanese rival. Despite intense pressure from school authorities to back down, Naima demanded justice and won. Her mother decided not to intervene directly but rather coached Naima at home to face the authorities alone. Her dreams were to be a politician or to improve society by being a lawyer or dentist.

The South Sudanese women

Esther and Nia

Esther is a 31-year-old South Sudanese community leader with five children. She is another colleague, close to six feet tall and strikingly attractive. Her father was a local bureaucrat in a medium sized town. She has many siblings, including the children of the second wife as her own brothers and sisters. Esther speaks of an idyllic childhood, running around the lush countryside in a large group of peers, attending school and dances together when older. Esther's mother was an independent thinker, causing her husband to give up on her as too *"unmanageable and disobedient"*. She received the severest of beatings and other punishments from her husband when she contradicted him. Her husband gave up on her as *"incorrigible and hopeless"* and found himself another wife. Esther expressed ambivalence towards her mother's unruly behaviour as she and the siblings tried to convince her *"that this was not a good way"*. At the same time, Esther laughs about her mother's strong character and seems to accept this contribution to her own independence of spirit. By being the favourite daughter of the richest man of the district, Esther's intelligence was accepted and feted, and she was expected to become a doctor.

Nia is the only grandmother of this newest refugee community in Melbourne**.** We speak through an interpreter who is a close member of the community. Nia relishes the opportunity for company. She is small and hunched, unused to Melbourne's cold weather and her eyes have a constant look of anguish. She seems to be at least in her seventies but appearances are not a reliable gauge here. Nia's father died when she was ten years old and

as the eldest, she and her mother took on the agricultural building responsibilities allocated to men. In her childhood, before the war, the countryside was very lush, totally unpolluted, most South Sudanese had no dental caries until living in refugee camps and the soil was abundantly fertile. In these self sustaining communities, each household made everything. She was able to learn to do everything a man can do. She put all of her siblings through school. Even though she was different, she was still an esteemed member of her clan, challenging powerful men behaving unjustly, and greatly enjoying doing so. In response to my question about her dreams for the future as a young girl :

> N: *I had some choices. First I wanted to know how to make everything that was needed, like a man … But first of all I wanted to know how to carry God's word, I wanted for that to be first out of everything. I wanted to be wise, to have creative thoughts, come up with good ideas … I did all the negotiations when people came to attack my family.*
>
> O: *Tell me more about people coming to attack your family?*
>
> N: *In my culture they respect the men so much and we were just two older sisters. It was common for men in our village or distant relatives to come to us and say you are this or you are that, just for no reason, because we were girls and they thought that no-one would say anything back and they would win in every way. But I would stand up and say what we are doing is none of your business and if they continued I would go to the police and they would handle it in a civilised way.*
>
> O: *You always had guts?*
>
> N: *She laughed, yes, I don't like people to come with their egos …"*

Nia and Esther are Christian as are the vast majority of people calling themselves South Sudanese (Instituto del Tercer Mundo 2001: 504). Nia married a veterinarian and had a happy thirty years of marriage, until his death in the war. She bore eleven children and having learnt his skills at veterinary practice, she was given his job.

These brief personal profiles illustrated some of the features discussed in the backgrounds to the countries of these women. I now turn to Lebanon, applying the same methodological, philosophical and theoretical framework.

Lebanon

Lebanon corresponds to the ancient land of the Phoenicians dating from 3000 BC, the ancient world's master seafarers and merchants. The land was periodically over-run by Egyptians, Hittites, Assyrians, Amorites, Alexander the Great, Persians and the Romans. Christian emperors protected the area during the first six centuries. The Maronite church was founded in the 6th century and Islam is expressed through the Druze faith, with most Lebanese Muslims still Sunni. In the 11th century, Lebanon was part of the crusader states but was incorporated into Egyptian Syria. Between the 15th and 18th centuries, while under Ottoman colonisation, Lebanon developed its individual set of institutions by balancing delicately the diverse faiths and cultures. The Ottomans divided the country into self governing regions according to religious affiliation, enshrining the power of religious leaders. This arrangement continued until 1943 (Batrouney, 1995). This country only has a population of less than 4 million. Literacy rates are high (83% in 1995) with universal participation in primary education. In 1997, 27% of the population participated in tertiary studies and 88.5 % lived in cities. Lebanon ranked 69th on the United Nations' Human Development index, with 0.749. The country has a high level of external debt (Instituto del Tercer Mundo, 2001:338-340).

Following a massacre of the Maronites by the Druze in 1860, the French intervened and partitioned the country. For five years, the 'Syrian question' involved five countries including Russia, Prussia and Britain. The French established the colonialist protectorate of Lebanon and Syria in 1919, while Britain took Egypt, Iraq and Jordan. Until the first demarcations of territory as Lebanese as distinct from being a province of Syria, there has been little sense of Lebanon as a nation. Ghassan Hage (2001:559-561) proposes that a sense of Lebanese identity evolved over the next thirty years, particularly after World War II. Tensions between the two religious groups continued prior to and after independence in 1947, as pro-Western Maronite governments held office. In 1958, the US Marines were called in to keep peace in the bloody civil war. Today, 75% of the population is Muslim, mostly Sunni and Druze and 25% are Christians, mostly Maronites. The religious differences have

been problematised by their link with a fundamentally unjust social, economic and political system. Lebanon's granting of refuge to Palestinians led to Israeli bombings from the early seventies, culminating in 1982 in a full scale invasion by Israel, the destruction of Beirut and most infrastructure such as bridges and hospitals. The very complex Lebanese situation throughout the eighties can be summarised as a series of very unstable governments, occupations by Syria and Israel, massacres in Palestinian refugee camps by Lebanese militia, as well as by Israeli army, and the ending of any economic prosperity (Instituto del Tercer Mundo, 2001:338-340).

Lifeworld: Epistemology and ontology

Hage (2001) proposes that having been under the Ottoman Empire almost 400 years, Lebanese culture is very hybridised, ethnically diverse, religiously divided and allegiance is usually to one's village or locality. Hage proposes that this gap in national identity has been filled by a focus on the family as encapsulating Lebanese ways of being is the major unifying cultural discourse. For the Lebanese, the meaning of life centres very much on being part of a family, which extends to large networks of extended relatives as well as the incorporation of neighbours. The Lebanese ontology differs somewhat from the African one as it is permeated by the diverse expressions of Islam in the Sunni Druze or Shi'a sects, Maronite and Melkite Catholic and Antiochian Orthodox Christianity, as well as influences from Arabic and Western European civilisations. The structurations of the Lebanese lifeworld have revolved mostly around religion and the family for both Muslims and Christians (Hage, 2001; Batrouney, 2001, 1995). The communal base of this society is the extended family rather than a tribe.

Lifeworld: Social arrangements

Batrouney (1995, 2001) states that family is the fulcrum of the core Lebanese values of honour and shame. Extended families live close together primarily to maintain the enjoyment of the ties of intimate affection, a paramount Lebanese value. Normal life is

understood as primarily focussed on such relationships and with collaborating in extending the family's material well-being. Unlike advanced capitalistic societies and despite the modernity of Lebanon, it is not normal to ascribe priority to working life or to a career. The Australian turn of phrase 'just the family', exemplifies the cultural construction of the family as a launching pad into the wider society, rather than as the privileged site for the fulfilment of intimacy and deeper relationships in the Lebanese lifeworld (Goodnow & Cashmore, 1985:235). In the traditional lifeworld, and particularly so today in rural areas, the family constitutes an economic unit with all members involved in a range of economic production as well as domestic duties, such as the processing of foods. In rural and urban centres, the extended family lives in close proximity, if not sharing living quarters. Grandparents routinely live with partnered adult children, including single siblings. This is changing in modern Lebanon but adult children still ensure that they are able to visit their parents on a daily basis (Jupp, 2001:601).

Behaviours which keep an honourable family in good standing are respect to elders, obedience to parents at all stages of life, generosity to those in need, being hospitable to guests and strangers, proactively maintaining contact with family, participation in family enterprises, celebrations and other occasions, attaining good education, being involved in community affairs and performing religious and social duties in the community (Fakhri, 1987). The Lebanese family's involvement in extensive rounds of hospitality and entertainment is also a key contour of childhood, with a family's capacity to entertain and the status of guests being key sources of social standing and reputation (Deen, 1995:59). Visits are routine and are usually unannounced. Family gatherings for key lifecycle events are the most enjoyable and valued social activities, including food and dancing (Batrouney, 1995:204).

Lifeworld: Gender relations

There is great variation in Lebanon about the extent of patriarchal rule, mediated by class and education and modernity. Few Muslim women cover their heads in Lebanese cities today. Nevertheless, women play a central role in all families, notes Batrouney (1995:198), in maintaining inner unity and cohesion and in connecting with the broader community. Although they have responsibilities for caring and domestic duties, a minority of women have had access to tertiary education for some time and, in modern Lebanon, it is acceptable for married women to work. This was not the case during the seventies and early eighties when the women in the study migrated to Australia. Girls were completing secondary schooling at higher rates than boys in 1996 (Instituto del Tercer Mundo, 2001:236).

Trevor Batrouney (1995) writes about the centrality of honour in the Lebanese psyche. The boundary between an individual member's and the family's honour is a blurred one and often, but not exclusively still revolves around the protection of women in the family. Loss of control over a female member impinges adversely on the reputation and social standing of the males (Humphrey, 1984). There is primordial concern with the maintenance of a woman's virginity before marriage in the traditional family, and young women normally do not go out without an older female chaperone. Particularly in Muslim families, the Lebanese code of honour makes women "boundary markers of identity, reputation and morality" (Humphrey, 2001:561-567).

The Islamic judicial system in Lebanon exercises a similar influence for Lebanese Australians through its bars on inter-sect marriages and its enforcement of patrilineal authority and property rights. Arranged marriages between cousins is still widely practised in Muslim families (Humphrey, 2001:561-567). Marriage occurs at relatively young ages for Christian and Muslim Lebanese women, with an unmarried woman of 25 being a source of great concern for parents whose blessing is essential for the union to proceed. First and second generation Lebanese men often return to their villages to find a bride, reflecting their ongoing allegiance to the village rather than the nation of Lebanon (Hage, 2001:560). Many

women stay home where they will not be exposed to interaction with strangers, and in Australia, have a lower labour market participation rate than other migrant women. Unmarried Lebanese women do not tend to migrate (Hage, 2001:560).

As distinct from the Horn of Africa countries in the study, Lebanese women live in a habitus centered around the family and its neighbours rather than a clan or tribe. Women's predispositions of bearing children and creating and sustaining family life include universal participation in primary and secondary education and in family production, either through agricultural or commercial modes. Nevertheless, Lebanese culture has long been hybrid with many local and individual variations in the prescriptions attached to gender. For example, as Phoenicians were the world's first merchants and naval traders and the world's pioneering mercantile culture, Lebanon has an ancient capacity to absorb other cultures, such as Europe's modernity. This has moderated the inscriptions of women's bodies by parameters of the places and people she can frequent in daily routines. Until the last decades of the twentieth century, married women could rarely work, even if having professional qualifications. Thus, women and their behaviour are key to a family's enjoyment of the symbolic capital of honour and respectable standing in the community. Nevertheless, the intersections of religion with class and the latitude allowed to female gender are complex and imbricated with urban spaces and modernity. For example, in Australia, the several waves of Lebanese migration over a hundred years have, until the most recent arrivals, quickly lost their ethnic identity as they dispersed and adopted Australian ways (Hage, 2001:557).

Lifeworld: Colonial relations

The stock of knowledge of Lebanese culture, particularly for the Christians, includes inextricably closeness to Europe, carefully nurtured by Britain and France to ensure their assets in the Middle East, and through missionaries who kept afloat information and images of modernity (Hage, 2001:555). Lebanese proudly still say that Lebanon used to be known as the Riviera of the Middle East. Large percentages of the population are nominal Muslims

and prefer to identify with the prosperity of Europe rather than with the Arab states. At the same time, the European influence is the colonial gaze and an offensive dominating discourse. The intersection of the material privilege of Lebanese Christians and twentieth century wars in the Middle East war have been continuous sources of injury to Muslim and Arab pride. Such contradictions are also salient dimensions of the Lebanese stock of knowledge (Humphrey, 2001:565-567). As Hage (2001:556) points out, Lebanon was a semi-autonomous province of Syria for almost four hundred years under Ottoman rule and a sense of Lebanese identity slowly emerged over thirty years after the first granting of nationhood by French intervention in the 1920s. Lebanese independence as a nation only took shape after 1943 and continues to be fundamentally fractured along religious, class, regional and sectarian lines.

Some of the above themes and their diversities are illustrated in the profile of the Lebanese women in the study.

The Lebanese women

Delal, Wafa, Mariam, Ramida, Mifsud, Sosa

Delal is a big, ebullient woman, a devout Muslim. She speaks with charisma and warmth. We meet in her house in a modest low income suburb, where a concentration of Lebanese families from the same region have settled. Delal was instrumental in assisting the immigration of most of these families, whom she knew. It is a very conservative and closed community but it is a significant one and there is a local mosque. Delal came from the wealthiest family of the village. Part of the honour associated with this wealth is reflected by the fact that villagers adopted her grandfather's surname, in a manner redolent of tutelage. Delal explained her personal freedom firstly in relation to her family's wealth and she was certainly the leader in her marriage from the very beginning. Her young years were spent in a very nurturing, affirming social context, and Islam's regulation of the spaces women could routinely occupy.

> *We lived neighbour to neighbour. I had a nice life. We would go visit each other in the morning for a cup of coffee. They tried to help each other if they needed any help. I had a nicer life than here, not working. Specifically those women who were teachers doctors, solicitor. … Even my family, my relatives didn't prefer for the ladies to work (*in factories*). They preferred the ladies to be ladies in the home, like housewife. They prefer good study. But they didn't prefer for the ladies to work outside to be involved with the men. The religion prohibited. (*She wanted to study at university*). Yes, all my family were happy about that. All of my brothers studied in America …*

All six Lebanese women lived in the intimacy of routine encounters in local spaces of family and neighbours. For Delal, the sum total of growing up in a habitus marked by material wealth, symbolic capital and daily, intimate interactions and sharing in a community was the freedom to be an individual personality beyond the cultural prescriptions:

> *O: How would you have described yourself as a young woman before you got married?*
>
> *D: I was happy and I was always looking for more opening life. I was enjoying well with my family. What I needed I got. I didn't miss anything from life … Yes I am very confident. I am very happy believe me.*

Wafa is a 43-year-old Christian Lebanese community worker for a neighbourhood house. She grew up in a major city, again from one of the most respected families, the status derived from a combination of moral, intellectual and cultural attributes rather than wealth. Her mother helped many in the community and she and her husband were sought after because of their perceived wisdom. Coming from an educated family, Wafa began studying law at university but stopped when she married. Wafa's mother frequently reminded her daughter not to forget that whatever she does, people look at her differently because of her family. Even in urban Lebanon twenty years ago for Wafa, and in the country for Delal, tertiary education and employment were expected to stop when a woman married. The fulcrum of life was not earning an income but rather maintaining the constant and intimate relationships:

> *W: But that's life over here, probably she didn't mean to but if people ask me for anything now, I don't have time for them. But in Lebanon, people are not that busy, life is not so hard over there, you are more relaxed and comfortable and you know there are always people to give*

you time and attention … You only have to step out into the balcony and you would have someone to talk to, and ask them to come over for coffee.

Mariam is a timid woman in her late thirties. Mariam seems to have always had a rather sensitive, and at times, nervous temperament, describing herself as a shy girl. There were four girls and four boys. Her father worked as a security guard in a factory and her mother was a nursing aide. Mariam was the most educated, finishing university in accounting. She was careful to point out that this university was affiliated with a French university in Lyons. Our interview was mostly in French, which she seemed to relish the opportunity to speak. It was very clear to me that Mariam valued education and cultural pursuits greatly, with her favourite leisure activity reading good literature. She spent some years as a high school teacher and as an accountant, earning more than her father. However, there was little scope for fulfilment for an unmarried woman. Mariam bore a huge stigma by being unmarried and working. Difference seems to have meant pariah status as indicated by the inner struggles she describes:

M: *I was a shy girl. I did not go out too much. I liked to stay with my family all the time after work, but our neighbour, who were our cousins and uncles and aunties who visited us and we visited them and the neighbours. In Lebanon you do not have houses, you have apartments. And everyone else everyone looked after each other. We would go to the balcony and we would go and have coffee. It was very social.*

O: *Were you a confident person?*

M: *Yes with respect to my work and education, but not with respect to talking to men. I was not sure how to relate to men …*

O: *Was it a problem you weren't married?*

M: *It was a solution for me.*

O: *You were happy about that?*

M: *No it was a solution for me. Everyone knew I was shy, not bad but they thought I was a boring girl. I avoided going out because I felt shy about being single. There was no grief in me about it, because I was living with my parents and they were very good to everyone. I was also happy with my work. In Lebanon we do not have the freedom, that we have here, because*

> *the girl has to be a virgin when she marries otherwise she is not good. And if one girl is over 30 and she is not married … She's a bad girl. She has to marry anyone. … I didn't go like my sister, with her husband everywhere. She was happy. Because she is younger than me and she is married. I felt a little shy about that. … some people did talk very badly about me. And some people were very good. It was not their business. In Lebanon, most people are curious and talk too much. … I was still working a hotel, I make all the accounts for the hotel. There were three bosses. If a girl over 30 not married, she has a little bit of problem with relatives and relations, with me, with women there was no problem. Men would harass me. She is over 30 and she's not married we can pass the time with her no problem. So when I finished my work at 2.00 I hurry home. I went with my cousin because she worked in a bank near my work …*

Ramida is in her late forties and lives in a solid brick house in a recently gentrified inner suburb, surrounded by an orderly Mediteranean style garden with fruit trees and vegetable patches. The house looks prosperous, with a beautiful, cool tiled floor and Middle eastern rugs. I come with an interpreter and we are greeted by an older man who scrutinised us suspiciously and listened to our conversation for some ten minutes before leaving, having decided that we were respectable women. Ramida makes a small apology for her husband's behaviour, saying that he is very religious, much more than she is. Ramida also grew up in rural Lebanon and was one of 11 siblings. Her father was a farmer and she describes her childhood as a little hard because she had no education, as only the boys were educated. When she said she had a happy childhood she added that this was because she did not know any better. She still regrets not having an education and when she was 14, an older relative came over from Australia to propose:

> (She made a derogatory remark at this point and we laughed …)
>
> R: *I feel sorry, because I was so young …*
>
> O: *Why do you feel sorry?*
>
> R: *Just joking* (we laugh but I am not convinced). *Before marrying I would have liked to be educated. I feel sorry about not having an education, but now it is too late for me, I have too many things to do like looking after the house, raising a family, it's hard to study …*

She followed her husband who had migrated to avoid lack of employment during the late sixties. She bitterly watched her male siblings being accorded the privilege of schooling denied to her by virtue of her gender. The strength of her grief is evidenced by her raising it as the first issue in our conversation, after the passage of a lifetime of thirty years of marriage and the bearing of ten children. Ramida said she had no choice but to resign herself to her destiny as a woman and obey her parents' agreement to marry an older male, as is not uncommon in Lebanon. She illustrates poignantly the Lebanese honour resting firstly on men's employment, as the essential ingredient of male dignity. Children are extremely valued in Lebanese culture, as expressed in the proverb "every child comes with its own fortune". They are seen as an essential definition of a good and happy marriage. As will be illustrated in the following chapters, the dialogue with Ramida was fraught with tense allusions to forbidden topics which she could not fully share.

Mifsud is in her early thirties and meets us in a modest rented flat in the same suburb as Ramida. We speak through the same interpreter but she breaks into English as her confidence increases during our interview. She also fairly quickly removes her hijab and reveals a glamorous hairstyle. She grew up in Tripoli, from a nominally Muslim family living a modern Western lifestyle. Her father was an international Middle East truck driver and mother a dress-maker at home. She said they had a lovely life and had everything, except for her mother's vigilance about not letting the unmarried girls out. There were seven or eight apartments around them with their relatives, so they were used to have visitors everyday. She married at 15 and studied dress-making but after seven very happy years of marriage, her husband was hit by a train and was in a coma for 12 months. He had been a thoroughly modern Lebanese man, living a European lifestyle including freedom in dress codes (Mifsud wore mini skirts), leisure (nightclubbing) and relating to Mifsud as an equal with the right to exercise self-determination. Their decisions were made on the basis of joint deliberation.

Sosa is the youngest woman, in her late twenties. The interview takes place in a noisy child care centre, where her young child is playing, waiting to go home. Sosa has a casual and carefree attitude typical of her age. She is a nominal Christian who dresses in a youthful style, having been in Melbourne since she was 21. She grew up in a rural village, her father being a gardener. With three brothers and three sisters, Sosa stayed home after finishing primary school, contributing to the economic and other needs of the family and, at the age of 21, was still unmarried. She said her life was very happy and nice at home. She migrated to Australia primarily for the adventure.

Russia

Until 899, Russia was made up of many principalities from the House of Rurik in a feudal system with local animistic religions. Prince Wladimir baptised his people into the Greek Orthodox church in 988 and religion became a central part of life and culture. The fortunes of Russia and its capacity to meet challenges from invaders and from its own geographic and cultural dilemmas has tended to correlate with the existence of moral leadership over the centuries, exercised by both monarchs and monastics (Zernov, 1976:9-10). Similarly, tsars who operated on the basis of absolutism and cruelty, instituting serfdom, such as Ivan Grozny, had disastrous impacts on dismantling previous gains. The history of Russia is one of constant turmoil, with invasions from European neighbours and subjugation to the Tartars for 250 years from 1237. The subsequent centuries saw Russia expand its territories, increasing education and experiencing flourishing trade. The technological advances imported by Peter the Great need to be balanced by his invention of secret police, perfection of absolutism and censoring of the church's capacity to critique the monarchy morally. He began imperial conquests (Brown *et al*., 1994:532), continued by some tsars and consummated in Soviet times through the carving up of territories by the Western powers and Stalin at the Yalta conference in 1945 (Shaw & Pryce, 1990:1882; Instituto del Tercer Mundo, 2001:458).

Lenin's communism took root in Russia despite the fact that it was not an industrialised country and hence did not have a theoretically defined proletariat. Totalitarianism was implemented quite quickly, along with the frequent senseless purges and mass elimination of people with any skills or intelligence, including peasants with deep agricultural knowledge (Shaw & Pryce, 1990:191-196). Brutality and terror reigned during the years of Lenin and Stalin, and KGB surveillance was extended by children being enlisted to spy on their families and neighbours (Holland, 1985). During the Stalin's strategically engineered famine in the 1930s, rural families were required to give all of their produce to the collectives as part of the reign of the Terror (Shaw & Pryce, 1990:104-5). An example of this process includes Pavel Morozov, a young boy who reported his parents to the authorities for hiding a little food for the family. The parents were executed and the State made Pavel a model of Soviet heroism, consummated through his untimely death with the additional mystique of Proletarian martyr. Conservative figures estimated that 20 million people, including 10 million of the peasant class, died in the Stalinist Great Purges (Shaw & Pryce, 1990:196, 930-937). It has been argued that Russia was the most ravaged country by the second World War II. Until the fall of communism, the Soviet Union occupied a sixth of the earth's surface (Instituto del Tercer Mundo, 2001:456-460).

Lifeworld: Epistemology and ontology

As I am a quasi-insider, and have participated in various incarnations of the Russian diaspora in three continents, including some close contact with contemporary Russia, my material here is likely to be more detailed. My formative socialisation was in the Russian language, imbibing traditional interaction paradigms and pre-revolutionary epistemologies. Hence, I have a deeper affinity with the meanings of this culture. Russia has always been rather incomprehensible and hence feared and, at times, despised by Europe. Much of this lies in the Eastern epistemology and ontology of this spiritually based culture, akin to the non-materialistic orientation to the life world in India, for example. Because of its central role in Russian history, it is pertinent to deal with the Orthodox church briefly here. Orthodox

Christianity expresses itself in emotional, artistic and pietistic ways. An example is the story of Princes Gleb and Boris, sons of prince Wladimir, who upon the threat of the armed take over of their principalities by their brothers, forbad their own soldiers to defend them so that no lives be lost in defending theirs. They subjected themselves to death unarmed and became the first Russian canonised saints who served as moral inspiration towards a sense of shared identity. The specific Russian approach to Christianity has been to emphasise humility and meekness (Massie, 1980:18) and mysticism, in contrast to the rationalism of the Western church, according to the French historian Fernand Braudel (1993:534).

Russia in the Russian language is feminine and conversations are often interspersed with the word *Rodina*, again in the feminine. The literal translation is *' the female land where I was born'* but the more accurate substantive sense is *'she the land who gave me birth'*, reflecting a cultural sense of a symbiotic bond with Russian soil. Russian ontology has also privileged cultural pursuits and education with a missionary zeal that is atypical of the European approach of even dedicated scholars and idealists. Isaiah Berlin (2001), born in Russia, who spent most of his illustrious career in Europe and the USA and whose writings are mostly critical of Russia and its culture, describes this particular penchant:

> that objective truth exists, that it can be discovered, and that life , individual and social, can be lived in its light - this belief is more characteristic of the Russians than of anyone else in the modern world. To take ideas with complete seriousness itself transforms them ... Others have invented ideas or come upon them, delighted in them, paid serious attention to them or played with them, conceived them as expressions of their own creative self assertive personalities or regarded them with scientific detachment as part of their professional task, while their private and inner lives were, at times, lived in a different province and at another level … the separation of public metier from private life, the notion of man as an actor who plays now this role, now that - has never been a central Russian idea in theory or practice. The emphasis is not a true account of the facts for their own sake, but the conception of pursuit of truth and dedication to its application to the present or immediate as a sacred moral duty, to be defended with one's life (Berlin, 2001:71-73).

Berlin may be describing a historical Achilles Heel for Russia, where serfdom and gross material inequities were tolerated at a time that Europe was experiencing the industrial

revolution and modernity of democracy. Although there were very few churchgoers in Russia, the words *spiritual* and *morality* were central in Soviet discursive spaces. A classic introductory text *Marxist Philosophy*, by Afanasyev (1980) and translated in English indicates:

> The CPSU Programme holds that the paramount tasks in the ideological field in the present period are "to educate all working people in a spirit of ideological integrity and devotion to communism, and cultivate in them a communist attitude to labour and the social economy; to eliminate completely the survivals of a bourgeois views and morals; to ensure the all-round, harmonious development of the individual; to create a truly rich spiritual culture (Afanasyev, 1980:368)

and:

> The world's most progressive, humane and noble morality is communist morality … It is common knowledge that the distinctive features of people of labour have always been straightforwardness, honesty, willpower and courage; they fulfil their obligations to one another, to the family and old people … (Afanasyev, 1980:376-7).

The late twentieth century Soviet Russian general predisposition to believe in the virtue of a state ruled by working people and a shared ethos of working to build up the nation was fractured by fundamental fissures in the national psyche, covered in the next section.

Lifeworld: Social arrangements

In the totalitarianism of communism, the spaces one could inhabit were dictated by the state and conformity in thought and speech were circumscribed by collective memory about challenges resulting in sudden visits in the middle of the night, heard in the corridors of large apartment blocks, and consequent disappearances, which could not be alluded to. A family's fall from belonging to Soviet society could then be mutely witnessed. This process is well exemplified by the novel *Children of the Arbat* by Anatoli Rybakov (1988), which documents the baffling imprisonment of a dedicated and talented young communist student during the 1930s. The novel unfolds a torturous process of reasoning which interprets a benign conversation by the young man as indicative of a lack of perfection in dedication to Stalin, and hence dangerous subversiveness.

The parents of the women in the study grew up with direct experiences of brutality and tragedy. Subterranean fear and suspicion are probably still part of the collective sub-conscious. However, from the sixties until Perestroika, people were housed, education was amongst the highest in the world, health services were available to all, heating and food were affordable, people went yearly on holidays at resorts belonging to their workplaces (Brown *et al*., 1994:491), and Soviet achievements in the arts, sciences, space exploration and sports were internationally acclaimed (Brown *et al*., 1994:488-501). According to the stories of all of the women, the Soviet lifeworld was almost totally regulated, national discipline reinforced by the ubiquitous presence of the military and police, known as the militia, and there was little open-ended time (Brown *et al*., 1994:454-456). Families were often dispersed by the war or by the government's determination of where people were to live, particularly after studying. People lived in close proximity to each other, in multi-storied apartment blocks or in the country. Russian childhood consisted of a routinised schedule of school with demanding levels of homework, daily attendance at free local clubs where they could pursue any art, sport, or hobby of their choice, and the very important belonging to Komsomol Pioneers (Brown *et al*., 1994:445-453). This focussed on the development of active and socially responsible citizenship, with the wearing of uniform in public and visibly behaving in a manner fitting for the future leaders of Soviet society. This predisposed women to have a very disciplined, formalistic attitude to life, with unquestioned obedience during childhood, embracing duties and developmental opportunities.

Lifeworld: Gender relations

The meaning of being a woman has usually included being intellectually and morally equal to men. Girls have always had equal rights to education and women attended universities from the earliest centuries. Women were predisposed to exercise ingenious agency daily in obtaining essential goods and services for their immediate family, which often included the elderly, siblings and cousins (Brown *et al*., 1994:446). Russian women have been esteemed as being the backbone of the country, reflected in the mythology attached to the 'Babouchka'.

Grandmothers play the central role in the raising children. The power of women, exemplified by the solid figure of the very portly grandmothers, with their scarves and feet firmly planted on the ground, refers to the strength to love and endure extreme hardships by holding on to hope, either for eternal salvation, or for the flourishing of a better society.

Men's power in public life has certainly been privileged and patriarchy has ensured that women have the burdens of domestic labour and restricted economic and political capital. Women became quite disgruntled with the lack of fulfilment of communism's early promises of gender equity. However, the symbolic meaning attached to having a female body has not been the automatic sexualised and dismissive one seen in Australian and other cultures. In line with the traditional cultures represented in the study which have not been built around individualism and free enterprise, Russian inscriptions of gender include an apprehension and awe of the mystery of a mothers' boundless love. At the same time, the 'Babouchka' can also be a term of derision, epitomising superstition and irrational thinking. Respected women are educated women. The symbolic capital and dignity accorded to having a woman's body did not depend on bearing children, but in a world where the male population had been depleted by wars, marriage and family life were primary in the enjoyment of life. Gender did not proscribe agency in the public sphere, but domestic duties were certainly exclusively women's purview. Women have had to endure the widespread alcoholism of mostly men, and there is an unspoken burden of the concomitant domestic violence. Women also had systematically limited access to material and political capital (Brown *et al*., 1994:450-2).

Lifeworld: Colonial relations

Russian stock of knowledge has long consisted of two competing discourses: that is, one based on the assumption of the superiority of European culture, exemplified by Peter the Great, and the traditional one based on the ontology of the Orthodox church. For example, three years after the Tartars first laid waste to Russia in 1240, European crusaders from Sweden and Germany hastily convened in order to destroy the last two outposts of Eastern

Christianity of Novgorod and Pskov. This threat of the European intention to permanently impose Latin Christianity was seen as entailing the extinguishment of the Russian identity, and prompted the first unification of disparate Russian principalities to successfully defeat the much stronger Swedish and German armies. This was the first basis for nation building. It is argued that that dialectical materialism is the culmination of the imposition of a Western epistemology and ontology (Zernov, 1976). The removal of the Iron Curtain and the collapse of the Soviet Union occurred in tandem with a flooding of information and images of Western affluence and glamour. The ostensible *failure* of Communism has been accompanied by world-wide cacophony about the superiority of capitalism and, by implication, the Eurocentric colonial gaze was proven to be correct. The women's narratives in Chapter 5 will describe how many Russians felt during the years when the Soviet lifeworld was soundly vanquished by capitalistic systems.

The Russian women

Larissa, Varvara, Zina, Anastasia, Karina, Antonina

Anastasia is in her forties, a gentle, thin and tall woman, living in a modest house she is purchasing in a north-western suburb of Melbourne. I know her from the Russian Orthodox church founded by the first waves of refugees early last century. Many Russians arrived during the nineties and visited the church but less than a dozen families have stayed. She was a Moscow University lecturer in nuclear physics, with a PhD. She describes her parents as high ranking professionals. The close family life included spending the summer months at her Kuban Cossacks grandparents' home near the Black Sea. The days there were beautiful and her childhood was happy, surrounded by the warmth of the extended family. Her narrative refers to the Brezhnev years as settled and comfortable times. Anastasia spoke of the many activities she enjoyed as a child:

> *Yes, it was different to here. Everyone knows each other, there is always something going on, some social event or some games, company, neighbours organised some sport. Kids were always busy. There was always a lot of homework. There were very high educational expectations. During the*

year there was no free time. Everyone was involved in sport, everyone. It was free and no one was not involved.

Larissa is a plump, warm, effusive woman in her early forties. We talk in a rented house in a modest northern suburb of Melbourne. Her husband came upon the invitation of a university seeking his research skills. Larissa's predispositions were oriented to the pursuit of Russian classical music. She was the only child of an aeronautical engineer who built planes in Moscow. Lacking living space, Larissa and her mother lived with her mother's sister and her family in the country, two hours away from Moscow. Larissa's father joined them on weekends. Larissa said that they had a very large and very close family, emphasising the strength of the affectionate bonds and sensitivity to each other. She describes her childhood as constant work, with her being continually tired because of the rigours of her work schedule.

O: *What did you dream of when you were young?*

L: *Well I was totally involved with music. I could not imagine a life other than in music. All my consciousness was fully occupied with going to Conservatorium. I could not conceive that I would not get into the Conservatorium. I had a serious nervous crisis and could not sit the exam. When I didn't get in, I just got sick.*

O: *You couldn't have sat again?*

L: *I felt I was not capable already … I suffered very grievously. My Mum made me sit for the entry exam into teaching and I went, not caring if I passed or not. I think it was for the best because the level of education was very good, we learnt pedagogy, and many subjects, there were very many subjects that are very useful for a woman's life. For example, if a child is not feeling well, you have the frameworks to orient yourself to problem solve how to meet a child's needs. All these subjects are linked, for example, if a child is healthy, h/she should study well at school. If he doesn't, then you ask yourself why?*

O: *Did you want to perform in music?*

L: *I just didn't think about it, I just wanted to learn to play well.*

Karina is in her late forties, a slim, highly strung woman with piercing blue eyes. We met in church and found that we were neighbours. Hardship is the most salient feature of Karina's

life story, quite unlike the other women. I know for certain that only Karina's parents were not Party members. Her mother was orphaned during World War II at the age of 14, with no relatives alive. She lived alone in communal housing, worked in factories and studied at night to compete high school, gaining entry into university. There she met her husband who also had no relatives after the World War II, apart from his parents. Her father was a mechanical engineer and a man of great intelligence: he made his own radio and television set from beginning to end. They lived in a large industrial town near Ukraine:

K: *Houses had no toilet, no water, had to go down the street to find water and to heat it. Heated house with coal, had to chop wood to heat the house. Then in 15 years time, gas pipes were installed and my parents put it through the house. It made life easier. I remember Mum carrying water in winter, then warming it and bathing us. Housework was very hard … my parents worked very hard as well …Yes, not enough clothing, shoes, food very basic, potatoes and cabbage, meat only on special occasions, sausage only very rarely.*

O: *Was it so hard for everyone?*

K: *Yes, for all who were only lived on their salaries. Those who would steal lived better. But we lived very poorly.*

O: *Did other families like you, professionals and intellectuals live very poorly too?*

K: *Yes.*

It is known that all strata of society read classical literature, attended ballet, opera and theatre regularly as they were affordable for all, and participated in the intellectual life of the country, to varying degrees.

K: *Before perestroika life was good, had a lot of values, we all read an enormous lot, we were surrounded by very interesting people and the environment itself was interesting … very intellectual. We socialised very often, two or three times a week we visited each other.*

O: *But were you not as tired as we are after work?*

K: *Probably even more so. But we had more energy than here, I think because everything was more organised there.*

O: *Was it a normal way of spending leisure time in Russia? Here most people just watch TV or have a barbeque.*

K: *No, in Russia we did not do that, it would be a bit empty. But everything was different, there were a lot of prohibitions, like a book, so everyone made sure they read it. Here you can do what you like.*

O: *What did you want from life at that time?*

K: *How can you say what you want from life? My years at uni were the most fabulous, most interesting, the most enlightening, and the most knowledgeable. You always have very good company, very intellectual social life because everyone reads and is very involved with knowledge. We lived in college. It was the seventies, very good years, no repression, peaceful, people were well off. There was always everything in the shops.*

Zina lives in the southern beachside part of Melbourne, where the majority of Soviet born Russians have settled, beginning with the first exodus by Jewish Russians. These suburbs have been the home of the Jewish community for many generations and the Russians have added their own flavours, opening many shops and restaurants. I was referred to Zina through a Russian community service organisation. She greets me in the apartment she and her husband are purchasing. She impresses as a very energetic, ebullient woman in her mid forties. Born in Moldava, her mother was an international lawyer and her father a whaler. Because of his high earnings, the family lived "*very, very well*" said Zina. She enthused about her parents' intensive focus on the children's development, being taken to dancing classes, hobby classes, English classes, many ballets, and being enrolled in an English school offering more intensive instruction. She believes that the key to her successful life is the time that her parents gave her. Zina was always oriented to life beyond Russia:

O: *What did you dream for your life?*

Z: *Normal one. I wanted to get married, have a good husband and a good job. Have children just have a normal life. I had little dreams that I never thought would be realised. For example, I wanted to go overseas, see how people live there. I always wanted to go to Moscow Uni but I thought I couldn't possibly because only the most privileged, children of Ministers could get near it. I really wanted to, but no way. I was always obsessed with wanting to know how other people lived, out of Russia I suppose, or the privileged in Russia and I wanted to learn*

> *English. I was fascinated with the English language from the first day. I used to pore over books of English, and gather them.*

Both Zina and her husband have degrees in computer technology. Reflecting their family's material affluence, possibly accessible only to senior members of the Party, they were unusually, and prior to Perestroika, able to buy a small apartment upon getting married, with a balcony *"which was real luxury"*. Zina may be an example of the many mixed marriages where a partner becomes eligible for migration under the Jewish resettlement program operated by the Australian and Soviet governments since the 1970s, of having a Jewish mother, but who does not identify personally as such (Goldlust, 2001:545).

Varvara was referred to me by Zina. We meet in the house she and her husband are purchasing in an inexpensive but leafy north-eastern suburb of Melbourne. She is reserved throughout our interview and gives very little away. Her comments are measured and she shows little emotional expression, apart from a polite friendliness. Born in Ukraine, her parents were professionals in agriculture. With degrees in mathematics and mechanical engineering, she taught mathematics at university. Little else is known about her childhood, as she was rather diffident about her life in Russia. She is in her early forties and has two children. As we were parting outside, some parrots flew by and she marvelled at such beauty that she could never have imagined in Russia.

Antonina was also referred to me by the Russian community service**.** I meet her in a rented flat in the inner northern suburbs. She is in her late twenties, a very pretty slim woman. Her husband is an English born academic, also a youngish attractive man, who takes their little three-year-old outside for a walk to enable us to talk. I was not able to ascertain her parents' specific occupations, but she and her sister were able to travel to Europe frequently before the collapse of the Soviet Union. This suggests that her parents had access to the material and political privilege available only to the higher ranking officials of the Communist Party.

The Soviet lifeworld is very different to all of the countries in the study. Russians from the Soviet Union often use the expression 'from a different planet' to emphasise the gap between

the predispositions of people from Western and capitalist systems and those emanating from a communist ones. The women in the study were at the peak of professional and educational achievement in the former Soviet Union and illustrated their energetic participation in the recreation of the central values of their country. Australian immigration research noted the very high levels of skills and talents including English proficiency brought by people from the former Soviet Union during the 1990s wave of immigration (Christa, 2001:642). Zina and Antonina clearly came from affluent families, whose parents were trusted to travel overseas at a time when the Iron Curtain was still in place. These two women's dispositions were formed in the context of such capital and their aspirations as young women related to the attractions of lifestyles offered by Europe and Anglo-Saxon countries.

The Philippines

Between the 2nd and 15th century AD, family clans arrived by boats from Malaysia and Indonesia and settled in isolated communities ruled on the basis of kinship ties and customs, rather than formal administration. Between the 11th and 13th centuries, the coastal areas were raided by Muslim, Japanese and Chinese merchants and some southern islands adopted Islam. Ferdinand Magelland claimed discovery in 1521 (Instituto del Tercer Mundo, 2001:338-340). Contested by the Dutch and British, the Philippines was colonised by Spain from 1521. Favoured as a trading route by its Asian neighbours, 85% of Filipinos today are of Malay stock, with 10% consisting of ethnic minorities. There are 87 dialects with Tagalog and Cebuano spoken by approximately a third of the population (Marginson, 2001:349). Spanish was forbidden for Filipinos to ensure their submission and thus Filipino languages and cultural identity were preserved. Beginning from the late 18th century, independence movements began and the Filipino revolution occurred in 1896. The US stepped in to seize control and a brief US-Spanish war was signed off in Paris in December 1898, with the careful exclusion of Filipino representation (Instituto del Tercer Mundo, 2001:338-340). Between 1899 and 1911, more than 500,000 Filipinos died in the struggle against the

occupying troops of General MacArthur. During Japanese occupation of World War II, peasant based and socialist nationalist movements grew but the son of General MacArthur reinvaded in 1946. Independence was formally granted but the Philippines has continued as an America neo-colony. Melba Marginson (2001:350) refers to consequent Filipino hybrid cultural traits as often operating at the disadvantage of people, namely deep religiosity, attachment to the family, a propensity to consumerism, English language proficiency and "a colonial mentality". She draws on the work of Filipino historian Renato Constantino who proposed that the institution of mass education by the US government has led to the propagation of US values and "a highly Americanised ideological structure that reproduce appreciation of foreign models and the perception that life abroad has to be better" (Marginson, 2001:350).

A similar analysis is given by the Instituto del Tercer Mundo which traces the American implementation from the early twentieth century of a system of haciendas with Filipinos as share croppers on minimal wages, with consequent impoverishment (Marginson, 2001:350). President Marcos' dictatorship between 1965 and 1986 was backed by the US government and enshrined the interests of the landowners. Corruption led to a ballooning foreign debt and, in response, the Marcos government assisted the establishment of the sex industry, encouraged Filipinos to work overseas and actively promoted Filipinas as sexual commodities (Marginson, 2001:350). Between 1991 and 1996, migrants to Australia from the Philippines were the highest group after the UK, with 70% in the 25-44 age group being women. This attests to the preponderance of arrivals under intended spouse arrangements. 49% had tertiary qualifications in 1996 compared to 30% of the total Australian population. However, 24 % had no income compared to 11% for Australia. Marginson (2001:350-353) refers to the gendered nature of First/Third World relations and gendered immigration laws which identify women in terms of family related attributes rather than skills, locking them into low status jobs.

Subsequent popularly elected governments have diluted original policy promises of agrarian reform as landowners continued their occupation of political seats. In 1990, the Philippines was distinguished by the extreme poverty of its population, with 39% under the age of 14 and NGO estimates that only a third of basic needs are being met. Internal refugee camps were established by the government in order to provide subsistence for over a million homeless people. The popular demands for food self sufficiency and ending of corrupt agricultural policy have been unheeded as they contradict the mandatory structural adjustment policies of the World Bank, which included increases by 70% in the cost of food and the removal of trade barriers. It is now estimated that two thirds of people live below the poverty line (Instituto del Tercer Mundo, 2001:348-340) and the table of Human Development Indicators shows that infant mortality is almost nine times more frequent than in Australia (Instituto del Tercer Mundo, 2001:58).

The lifeworld: Epistemology and ontology

Filipinos are primarily from Malay stock but have absorbed aspects of the many cultures which have either traded with them or invaded them. Filipinos, like other Asian people, have a Confucian ontology and understand being part of society in terms of the requirements and obligations to honour and respect those around them, including the need to dedicate oneself to care for the extended family, which can include several generations on both sides. Filipino personal identity is on the basis of 'kapwa' or fellowship with others in one's group in a shared identity. Treating others as equals is a primary value and not to have any *kapwa* is the worst insult indicating that one has reached rock bottom as a human being with any worth (Enriquez, 1994, cited in Soriano, 1995:100). Such modes of being are reinforced and given an eschatological dimension by deep Catholic, Buddhist or Muslim piety, and the conviction that God is taking care of things leads to the attitude of "bahala na" – come what may (Sorinao, 1995:102). Thus, Filipino culture has long been hybrid, incorporating the influences of groups who came and stayed in this strategically situated archipelago in the Pacific, a gateway to Asia (Instituto del Tercer Mundo, 2001:348-340).

The lifeworld: Social arrangements

Studies on South East Asia show a system based on the rule of residence, where kinship ties among blood relatives, friends and people adopted in fictitious kinship, form a culture of informality and warm reciprocity (Karim, 1995). Such values and morality are expressed through affectionate relationship styles and modes of intimacy where the sentimentality of consanguinal ties in local groupings are recreated in public and other spheres of life with the routine usage of titles such as aunt, uncle, brother and sister. Nations including significant islands such as the Philippines, Malaysia and Western Indonesia are characterised by such patterns of fluid, interlocking social networks. "Pakikisama" meaning 'to go along', is another rule of conduct to ensure equality and harmony in social interaction. This means deferring to group consensus as part of the privilege of being accepted in the group (Mendez & Jocano, 1991; Gorospe, 1998, cited in Soriano, 1995:101). According to Mendez and Jocano (1991), 95% of Filipino's decisions are based on subjective factors, and social interaction is quite centrally preoccupied with ensuring the protection of the self esteem of others and one's self (maintaining face) and avoiding any hints of lack of harmony (Soriano, 1995:102).

> Thus the sanctions of shame, dishonour and ridicule are used to impart the message that what is detrimental to one is detrimental to others (Enriquez, 1994, cited in Soriano, 1995:102).

The lifeworld: Gender relations

The informality of family also includes egalitarianism between people in different roles, particularly between siblings of different genders. There is broad agreement in the literature that about the egalitarian quality of Filipino family relationships (Soriano, 1995:105) Bilateralism refers to the complementarity of relationships between genders and across generations, without ascription of hierarchy to difference. Both sexes are valued for their roles and space is given for individuals to push the boundaries of their gender roles to accommodate to the requirements of a particular context (Karim, 1995). Papanek and Schwede (1988), Winzeler (1974) and Van Esteerik (1982) provide evidence of the valuing of

Southeast Asian women by their societies in women's control over finances, pioneering land development, domination over farm management systems, land inheritance and substantial matrilocal residence. However, Errington (1989), in her theoretical overview, is careful to point out that these patterns do not apply in regions where Islam, Buddhism and Confucianism have imposed male-centred structures of domination. Confucianism has infused the Filipino assumptions and Christianity also imposes specific prescriptions about the meaning of womanhood. Women's equal access to tertiary education suggests that gender relations may be bilateral along certain dimensions. Gender relations have been complicated by colonial discourses as outlined below.

Filipino women, however, have had a traditional expectation that they need to marry up to improve their material station in life. Together with the pressures of poverty and colonial discourse, marriage to a Westerner is thought to be inherently beneficial (Cooke, 1986, cited in Soriano, 1995:105; Marginson, 2001).

The lifeworld: Colonial relations

Robert Tolentino provides cogent evidence that the location of women in the Filipino lifeworld is deeply imbricated by the colonial domination of the US's global power. The IMF and World Bank prescriptions for the industrialisation of Third World countries included cost-benefit analyses identifying in the Filipina body the perfect attributes of the labour required for the maximisation of multinational profits. These include the supposed nimble fingers, youth, strong bodies, 20/20 vision, docility of a female workforce without industrial knowledge and a population kept in desperate poverty by the global policy regimes and their government's collaboration (Tolentino, 1999:48-55). Tolentino traces the history of the Philippines as America's first colonial experiment, with priority accorded to the development of an efficient postal system to replicate the successful expansion of consumerism in America during the 19th century through mailed catalogues. Challenging Filipino epistemic and ontological foundations, the US imposed its armed strength and displays of astounding material goods, images of the good life of democratic capitalism, with

its superior hygiene, modern urban infrastructure of running hot and cold water, sewerage, hospitals, paved roads, aeroplanes and rail (Tolentino, 1999).

According to many Filipino theorists (Mary Soledad Perpinan, 1987), ubiquitous marketing has ensured that Filipinas' attention would be focussed on the materialism as the only route of escape from the rigours of subsistence living. According to Tolentino, the Filipina body has become the chief engine of the Philippine economy, and work opportunities are opened only in spaces where the powerlessness of women can be maintained in enterprises which can shut down at any time and where women beyond the age of thirty are not required. When she is no longer able to work in corporations, her body is still anchored in dreams of modernity and she then steps into the only other avenues promising deliverance, such as the highly sexualised ones of servants, entertainers and mail-order brides. Tolentino gives a poignant example of how the female body is reconstituted in the respites between work shifts. Companies run beauty contests and incentives for workers: "raffles are held to determine the lucky employee who will be given the use of a Timex watch for nine months" (if the watch is lost, the employee has to pay the full price of the watch) (Tolentino, 1999:48).

Gender roles have fluidity but are imbricated by the domination of American and multinational colonial powers, which dictate not only the opportunities open to women in the labour market, but also formulate each woman's productive worth in correlation to age. The sexualisation of productive spaces for Filipinas and the active promotion of Filipinas as sexual commodities by the defunct Marcos dictatorship (Marginson, 2001), are a cruel juxtaposition to the dominance of ethics in Filipino predispositions. Symbolic values promulgated by world powers gain potency by the constant backdrop of the absolute poverty of the Filipino lifeworld, as indicated by statistics above. Access to education intersects more significantly with class than gender. Absolute poverty is a primary fulcrum for the routine exercise of agency through the encounters of everyday life.

The Filipinas

Linda, Teresa, Melba, Mary, Bernadette, Nenita

Linda meets me at a Western suburbs university where she is completing a qualification in community development. She is an attractive, cheerful and engaging person with fashionably dyed hair. The interview was held over two occasions and was of almost six hours' duration, as she visibly enjoyed the opportunity to talk. She is in her late thirties and shares her story with enormous enthusiasm and generosity. Her life tumbled out through very articulate, detailed choices of words focussed on the emotions and meanings of the events and people. This was my very first interview and within the first three minutes, I was arrested in one of the most meaningful discoveries of this thesis: namely the very culturally, emotionally, socially, and spiritually wealthy lifeworlds of a society that I had, as a person with little previous contact with Filipino people, understood largely in terms of its material poverty, a representation having currency in Australian popular culture.

Linda was one of 50 grandchildren whose parents had built their houses around their mother's compound. The grandmother was a wealthy and most respected member of the broader community. She owned land; the village was surrounded by coconut plantations and other fruit trees and then by a ring of rice fields. The rivers were clean and were the sites for daily bathing and communal washing of clothes. As sketched out above for the Horn of Africa, all villagers shared each other's joys and sorrows. Children in the village performed all chores together, rising at 6.00 am and walking to school, enjoying putting the chickens in trees for the night. Children could sleep over at an aunt's place for a few days without alerting the parents beforehand and without any disquiet by the parents. The children slept together on a mat in the lounge room by choice and Linda slept with her father even into her teens. The family played together after the evening's chores were finished, including grandparents.

The refined sensibilities and empathies typical of this village life were exemplified for me by Linda mentioning that *"when your brother who goes to school in a near by town during the week and returns home, all your friends are excited for you, wow, your brother is coming back!"* Similarly, when police informed the immediate family at midnight that one of the brothers was killed in a car accident, within minutes, all the lights in the street of the town they had moved to went on and everyone came and sat with the family: *"we were all shaking together until the morning"*. All the neighbours and friends stayed for forty days. Linda's descriptions suggested to me a communal life of admirable emotional wealth.

Linda's family were more religious than most other families and she experienced conversion in her teens, always participating in church-based youth groups. Thus, her mode of being as a child and young person show her excelling in practising the values of spirituality and generously shared affection with those around her, submissiveness to authority, filial piety and the dutifulness. Linda referred to the Americans affectionately as *"our Big Brothers"*.

Bernadette chooses to be interviewed in the office of her small private practice as a psychologist in a fashionable, gentrified suburb. She is forty, well manicured and speaks in a formal professional tone, siting behind her desk throughout the interview. She grew up in Metro Manila and in Kenso City, affluent suburbs of the capital. She was the sixth of ten children. Her mother was a teacher and her father an accountant. Financially well off, the parents were involved in the Catholic Church and its charities. Their large extended family lived in close proximity. Bernadette studied psychology. Her dreams were to have a successful career, working with the largest of companies. She thus worked with a big hospital and then at the Asia Development Bank as an industrial psychologist. When asked about her aspirations in life:

> (Her tone is very measured and formal, a sense of self-importance emanating from her body language…)
>
> *B: The people contact and … getting an income to support the lifestyle I wanted to have.*

O: *Which was what?*

B: *To be as comfortable, if not more than my parents. Society still has the socio-economic system, yes, so you can't go to Target and buy yourself something that you will see ten thousand other people wearing laugh so it's quite structured.*

O: *You mean the reality of social stratification?*

B: *Yes, if you are of a certain level of profession and of a certain level that goes with it and you have to buy from certain shops, otherwise you would wear the same thing as your staff. So it's the culture there … I've always been able to provide myself with what I needed especially since I was working*

As well as participating in the intimacies of family life, Bernadette was principally energised by living out her membership of the upper middle class, particularly in material terms. Her story suggested that she was an emotionally fulfilled young person, confident of her place in the world and able to pursue whatever intention she had.

Teresa is a vivacious, witty woman in her fifties who meets me at the offices of a Filipina activist feminist organisation. She was born and lived in Manila, in the most affluent of areas. Her father was a lawyer and her mother a prominent public figure, a professor and diplomat, enabling Teresa to spend part of her childhood in Europe. The parents and four children were politically active against the Marcos regime. Teresa boasts of having attended her first political protest in grade one. She tells an anecdote when her mother was at a cocktail party at the US Embassy and speaking to an official she said *"we are talking now, but I know two or three of my children are outside protesting right now"*. Teresa became a teacher of Spanish, with her students including senators, company directors and other public figures as well as high school students. She was very well known as Seniora, teacher of Spanish, and would often be greeted in the streets by former students. Her husband was a commerce graduate. The family had a very high and enjoyable profile in Manila public life. Thus, Teresa's young and adult life was preoccupied not only with the enactment of the family ethos, succeeding in the life cycle (education, marriage, career), but she also operated at the

level of self actualisation through political activism which was a very risky and dangerous enterprise during a dictatorship.

Mary meets me in her immaculate modern home in a new development near the western suburbs side of Port Philip Bay. She was referred to me as were all the Filipinas by a colleague well known as a Filipina activist. She is friendly and eager to chat. I know little about her childhood, except that she came from a large city, lived with a very large extended family and became a nurse. She worked some time also as the secretary of the Director of a large bank. She lived with a man for over three years until she suddenly found out that another woman had just given birth to his child. Very wounded, she broke off the relationship and came to Australia on a visit, where she met her husband-to-be. Again, Mary presents as a woman who was able to pursue life in a contented manner, attaining a profession she valued and enjoying what the Filipino lifeworld had to offer, until her relationship broke up.

Melba is a middle-aged sole parent with two school aged children. She presents as a tense, suspicious woman and meets me in a very sparsely furnished Housing Ministry home in a low income outer Western suburban area. Several times during the conversation, she receives a phone call to which she replies *"it's ok, I'm fine"*. We have an extended discussion about the tape recorder and I offer to do without it. She then urges me to use it and later reminds me to turn the tape over. She grew up in a rural area living from subsistence farming. Although the family was poor, they had enough to eat, her father provided them with good things like education and her childhood was happy because *"we were all together"*. Her father was murdered when Melba was in her mid teens, by a political gang. She then left school and worked as a servant at the convent school she probably attended. Her life became difficult due to inadequate income, forcing a move to Manila to work as a domestic near a US army base, where the wages were highest. She said that she felt unsafe from the time that her father's protection was removed.

Nenita is a gentle, self-effacing woman in her mid thirties. We meet in a modest apartment in Melbourne's Western suburbs, where she lives with her Filipino husband, young child and mother. She grew up in a provincial town with three siblings. She did not know most of her relatives who lived quite a distance from them. From the age of nine, her father went to Iraq and Libya to work. He sent the family money and as their mother cared for them at home, the children's needs were met. The children were required by their parents to study hard and stay home, living very quietly. I include my reflections during and after the interview:

> (Given her later repeated comments about being able to eat everyday, she is understating the situation. To have your father go overseas, in a country as foreign as Iraq and Libya, there must have been a lot of hardship at home. I wonder what he experienced over there, how was he treated, what kind of job did he do? Growing up with him being so far away in a very strange land, there is a lot that is unsaid here. I get the impression that the content of her narrative to me constitute her conclusions, her resolution of difficulties.)

Nenita was engaged to her childhood sweetheart who moved to Australia. She obtained an accounting qualification and worked as an accounts clerk for four years, waiting to get married. Nenita seems to have been predisposed from childhood to attain economic security as her childhood had unusually limited social life and leisure. This was undoubtedly motivated by a sober appreciation of the sacrifices made by her father to escape from poverty.

Vietnam

Vietnam has a population of almost 78 million and its written history of 2000 years is preceded by another 2000 years of aural or legendary history, much of which corresponds to Chinese annals. These four millenia tell the stories of a Vietnamese people struggling virulently and inexorably against colonisation. Chinese occupation began in 111BC and continued until 938 AD. The country was liberated briefly through the leadership of two sisters in 39AD and by a scholar from the South in 544. Many insurrections were recorded

against the colonising efforts with the Chinese armies definitively defeated in 938, heralding some 900 years of self rule. A Confucian model of government was established with absolute power vested in the Emperor and a mandarinate system provided the administrative foundations of Indochina. Buddhism became the national religion and present day Hanoi was the capital until the 18th century. During this period, not only were the Chinese repelled on several occasions but some of its southern territory was conquered. The Tran Dynasty until 1400 saw the emergence of Vietnamese script, the crystallisation of Vietnamese cultural identity and brilliant military exploits, with the smaller Vietnamese armies defeating three assaults from the Mongols, totally destroying their navy. In an interregnum period of three decades China again attempted to eradicate Vietnamese identity but, in 1438, a land owner organised guerrilla resistance, ushering in the Le Dynasty for a century, with prosperity, achievements in literature and the writing the Hog-Duc legal code (Instituto del Tercer Mundo, 2001:567-569).

During the 17th century, Dutch, Portuguese, Spanish and French traders and missionaries arrived and a Jesuit priest produced a romanised script. The Nguyen family from the south took over with the aid of French missionaries, named the country Vietnam and proceeded to implement Western reforms, including Christianity. Succeeding emperors were hostile to the West and persecuted Christians, giving a pretext for a French invasion in 1858. Resistance continued for the hundred years of French occupation, including the formation of communist movements, all brutally repressed. The indomitableness of Vietnamese resistance saw the French routed after ten years of war. After 15 years of occupation by 580,000 American troops who dropped more bombs than during the entire Second World War, causing permanent environmental destruction, the Vietnamese were victorious again (Instituto del Tercer Mundo, 2001:567-569; Thayer, 2001:721-722).

The lifeworld: Epistemology and ontology

The Vietnamese hold an eclectic moral theory which is a combination of three earlier traditions: Confucian moral paradigms, Buddhist-Taoist metaphysical reflections and Vietnamese indigenous kinship social organization. The Confucian society is organised in tiers, beginning with the Emperor who alone can fathom the will of Heaven, then the relationship between the Emperor (setter of example to the idealised gentleman) and his mandarins and, thirdly, interactions between the mandarin (for idealised gentleman) and the people (those whom he administers) (O'Harrow 1989 cited in Karim 1995: 59). Both Confucianism and Buddhism are based on patriarchal power with Buddhism relating to public and ritual power.

Confucian ontology encompasses the primordial necessity in life of practising proper degrees of respectful attitudes and relationships according to the status of those around one. Filial piety, obedience and gratitude to one's parents are to be practised at the cost of any sacrifice (Coughlan, 2001:728-731). Many Vietnamese adopted Catholicism, constituting another layer of hybridity without repudiation of traditional values. Whether in rural or urban settings, and from the uneducated to the elite strata, children learn unswervingly the sacred duty of obeying older members of the family, caring for the younger and considering the interests of the family above individual preferences (Nguyen & Ho, 1995:222). This Confucian recipe for a successful life is clearly opposite to the sanctity of individual rights. Ancestor worship adds an eschatological dimension to Vietnamese enactments of family, as those who have gone before are spiritually alive and current family obligations include the continuation of the family lineage into long term future (Nguyen & Ho, 1995:223).

The lifeworld: Social arrangements

Family life is central with adult married children traditionally building additional rooms onto the family home and the grandparents holding total decision making power. In urban areas, modernity has been reflected in the growth of women in professional roles and many

new couples choosing to form a nuclear household (Ngyuen & Ho, 1995:224). In line with Eritrea, South Sudan, other Asian countries and some Lebanese families, parents also traditionally arranged marriages as they chose the family with which they were happy to unite through the couple. Given the above reflections and the concentration of the population in a relatively small geographical are, time on one's own is rare in the Vietnamese lifeworld. Children and adults observe daily regimens of duties, chores and other tasks and life is approached in a very disciplined, structured and formalistic manner.

The lifeworld: Gender relations

As Harrow (1995) and others (Nguyen & Ho, 1995:221) point out, Confucianism content focuses on men only, hence relegating women to an almost incidental position. The metaphor of the male as mandarin gives him a formal mandate for the superior role of teacher in the family; the wife is the inferior student who needs to obey and venerate the male. Female childhood socialisation focuses on learning the four virtues and three obediences. The virtues are: "cong"- proper work, "dung"- proper demeanour, "ngon"- proper speech and "hanh"- proper manners. Submissiveness for women occurs when she is firstly obedient to her father, secondly to her husband and, when her usually older husband dies, she is to obey her eldest son, all older males in the household (including brothers) and their older female relatives. The mother in law is more often than the husband the enforcer of submission (Nguyen, 1990:34, cited in Hartley, 1995:222).

Although Karim (1995) claims that Vietnamese women predominate in the market and control the family's finances, with both parties dissimulating their extra earnings from each other, this was contested by the Vietnamese women in the study and other literature. Women's powerlessness resided in the traditional obligation of going to live in the husband's family, where she was likely to be given extremely burdensome work schedules even if no abuse occurs. Urban families are able to escape this requirement. Vietnamese folklore has a mine of sayings about the poisonous relationships between the female in-laws and a man's wife (Karim 1995:167).

O'Harrow (1989) proposes that Vietnamese women accommodate to their straitened circumstances by developing a rich inner life into which they can escape in a social setting where one can never be alone. There she also nurtures an imaginative life of the dream lover and in this inner realm, she knows herself as pure, feels comfortable with herself and safe from the predators she can identify clearly. O'Harrow (1989) argues that there is a discrepancy between the public rhetoric and the real practices of power between genders in Vietnam. He argues for semiotic analysis to produce more accurate understandings of gender relations. There would be, undoubtedly, much theory and research authored by Vietnamese women academics in Vietnamese, and such literature is likely to be more reliable in reflecting the complexities of Vietnamese gender relations than the strategy proposed by O'Harrow.

The lifeworld: Colonial relations

As an ancient civilisation, the existence of a distinct Vietnamese identity is attested to by the struggles which have occurred against very much more powerful predators. Although invaded by the Europeans and Americans materially, it does not seem to me that Vietnamese people absorbed to any degree the inferior status conferred upon them by colonisers. The refinements of Vietnamese culture, not only with respect to formal areas of scholarship but also in terms of social organisation, social relations and daily ethical practices, could have been buffers against the self-erasure required for the colonisation of the Vietnamese mind. Vietnamese community life is very energetically rebuilt in Australia (Bao & Cahill, 2001:733-737). I may be justified in proposing that the energy invested in maintaining cherished traditions may be a mute assertion of pride in Vietnamese cultural identity.

The Vietnamese women

Anh, Wai Ling, Mai Ho, Tahn, Sen, Soo

Anh is in her mid fifties and lives in a light and airy house in the inner West, overlooking a river. She came from a wealthy family in Saigon and had nine siblings. Coming from the

upper class, she was most influenced by her philanthropist grandfather who fed and clothed large numbers of poor who would come to his house on a daily basis. She spent most of her spare time with him on his rounds and says that she developed his love for the poor. She loved and admired her grandfather whom she considers her role model, absorbing his values She chose dentistry in order to provide an essential service. Her husband was also a dentist and Anh graduated shortly before the US defeat of 1975.

Wai Ling is in her early forties. We meet in her office in a Vietnamese community agency. One of seven siblings, she came from a wealthy educated family in Saigon. She said that from childhood, she and her siblings with whom she shared a bedroom, decided that they must study very hard in order to have a good life. She said that her motto from childhood is never to waste time, *"unless you trick time, you will lose it"*. She exemplified filial obedience in accepting her parents' refusal to allow her to marry a man she says is still the love of her life and by becoming a lawyer, because her father said the family needed to have one. All of her seven siblings are doctors and other senior professionals. She was only able to practice for a couple of years when the communists took over.

Tahn is middle aged and impresses as a stressed and unhappy woman. She lives in an immaculately kept new house in a beachside suburb in Melbourne's West. She was one of ten children. Her family was well off and her mother did not work. Tahn only had primary school education. She said she was a very happy young woman because she was very loved by all her family including siblings. She was fifteen when communism came to Vietnam and while all her siblings had to work in paddy fields, she stayed home as she had poor health. Her dreams for the future were to work in a factory or in an office, without occupying any roles of responsibility, and to have a family. She met her husband at the age of twenty two but his mother opposed their relationship. He left for Australia alone, much to Tahn's grief. She seems to have been particularly protected by her family due to her weak physical constitution.

Mai Ho lives in the western suburbs with her two children and husband. Mai Ho is a young and fashionably dressed looking woman. Her husband is also of unusually trendy appearance for Vietnamese middle aged people in Australia, with hair in a pony tail. Mai Ho grew up in a large tourist beach side town near Saigon. She had eight sisters and one brother. Her father was a jeweller while her mother stayed home. The family were of average material means. Mai Ho left school in Year nine, worked in a factory and then studied embroidery. Her dreams were to have a family and be able to buy her own house so that they did not live with parents. Her husband came from one of the wealthiest families in the district.

Sen is 67 and has an aura of simplicity and dignity. She lives with a son in the inner Western suburbs, does not speak English but feels she has no need to. She was fated to experience living in her home of Vietnam through a variety of incarnations of war. Her father died just before World War II and from the age of 13, she began her childhood of ducking enemy fire. Sen is the second grandmother in this study. Her life was one of suffering from her early years. She said that the family of seven children needed to cook rice at 4.00 am and leave the house before dawn in a small boat to escape the French. The days were spent by this family on foot escaping from French powered boats and plane or helicopter gunfire. After the French, her life of fear continued as the Viet Minh was engaged in guerrilla war. She describes her childhood as very unhappy because there was constant fear of armies which killed, raped, had tanks and planes while their own protection consisted of the power of their legs and wits. When asked what her dreams were as a child: *"my dream was that I and my family members were still alive"*. She developed then the implacable resolve to leave this country which seemed so prone to war.

Soo is a professional interpreter in the Community Services field in Melbourne. She is in her early fifties and acted as an interpreter for most of the Vietnamese interviews. She was the eldest of five children, her father was a builder and mother a dress-maker. The family were comfortable financially. They moved to Saigon and Soo obtained a tertiary qualification as an

English interpreter. She worked at the US Embassy for seven years. She describes herself as a very confident young woman, able to drive her scooter everywhere and transport her sister on the back. Her aspirations in life were to find a good husband and to be of help to her parents and siblings. She met her husband at the US Embassy. He was an architect from the Philippines. They had a very successful 30 year marriage, as he was a very affectionate and generous man. They had two sons before his contract in Vietnam ended and the family moved back to his home town in 1973. Settling in the Philippines was quite easy for Soo and she bore a girl. Her husband had a lucrative job and the family were able to buy a large house surrounded by a garden. Soo worked again in1984 as an interpreter at an UNHCR Refugee Centre.

That's my happiness. I am happy to be of help to any person, to help the UNHCR to understand their situation. Also I worked at the Displaced Persons' Centre run by the Sisters of Charity, a Vietnamese convent. I have beautiful memories of working together.

Concluding reflections

The theoretical constructs of Schutz, Bourdieu and Giddens appear to have been useful in illuminating the characteristics of the lifeworlds the women inhabited, and within which they learnt to constitute meaning. Given the remarkable diversity in assumptions across the globe about what it means to be human, to be part of society, what is worth pursuing and what constitutes knowledge, the methodological and theoretical literature I have drawn upon to as a scaffold for hearing the narratives seems to have had heuristic value. Indeed, without such background, it would be difficult to understand how migrant women may or may not act in a foreign land. It would also be difficult to design policy and service systems for assisting the settlement process.

The African Muslim women were expected to marry and have children but were also able to pursue intellectual and other interests alongside the men. The only evidence given to me of oppressive relations with the men of their society was the intense negotiations Fatima and Zeinab needed to engage in to give priority to their study rather than the care of their husbands. They are women from the elite rank of Eritrean society, and the mediation of class in terms of family wealth, prestige, education and political prowess gave them unusual latitude. They are not typical Eritrean women and their husbands and other family members also had unusual values and practices. Kiro and Esther were also from the upper class of their societies and their fathers had modern education and employment in bureaucracies. Their claims to tertiary education were not questioned, as distinct to the lower participation rates in secondary and tertiary education of girls and women in the statistics given above for Ethiopia, Eritrea and South Sudan. Only Nia, the grandmother, was from a rural, peasant family. Understood in terms of Heiddegger's (1978), Gadamer's (1975) and Ricoeur's (1966, 1967) concepts about the agency involving the projection of self according to one's inner world of possibilities, constituted through the language of our society, Nia's story showed that she had latitude in negotiating her own identity and challenge male power structures and expectations while remaining an esteemed member of her society.

Ricoeur's theory of the voluntary states that I know myself in the first instance as the one who says I will, I move my body, I consent. The women's stories show that for them, gender, class, culture and historical events enabled the development of emotionally secure and unique personalities. Certainly childhood in communal societies lays solid psychological and ontological foundations and men's predominance in economic and public power would have a different impact on women's sense of themselves and how they might carry out daily living, in comparison to socialisation within nuclear families of individualistic, free market societies. The crises of these Horn of Africa countries for approximately 50 years would also have contributed to pushing the boundaries of the human resilience of these specific six women. Another noteworthy pattern in the narratives is the absence of experiences or possibilities of life as an individual, separate from the extended family.

This group of Lebanese women reflect in the overview of their young lives their enactments of their culture's definition of women as centrally about family life and other affective ties with neighbours, about marriage and the joy of children, satisfying the needs of marriage and assuring the social standing of the family. Just as with the African countries, class in the form of material wealth and symbolic capital greatly impacted on the parameters of women's self-determination. Delal's family wealth gave her the capacity to be the leading decision-maker in her marriage and Ramida had no choice about not obtaining the education she coveted, nor about following an older husband to Australia at the age of fourteen. Wafa was able to begin law studies, reflecting her family's symbolic capital, but according to the prescriptions prevailing in Lebanon for Christian and Muslim women up to the ninety eighties, she abandoned university upon marrying. The lack of a husband was the key problematic for a competent professional such as Mariam and a modern young woman like Mifsud. Reflecting openness to individualistic reasoning, Sosa from a poor rural family decided to marry an Australian Lebanese stranger to attain not only marriage but also the benefits of modernity.

The Russian women also represent the cream of society professionally and some also had privileged backgrounds, denied to the majority of Soviet citizens. These women's agency was constituted by the possibilities opened up by a high level of education and by their willingness to participate in activities which give access to privilege allocated only to members of the Party. The Lebanese, Filipina and African women disabused a frequent belief in affluent countries that non-European countries are sites of unmitigated poverty. The evidence of the extraordinarily rich social practices and human values characterising these ancient cultures are an important counterbalance to the assumption that migrants are people with no history. This material also illustrated international materialist feminist theorists' call for a more nuanced analysis of women's agency within historical and geographic specificities.

Not all the Filipinas lived in rural areas but all exhibited the Filipino predisposition towards an informal, warm interaction paradigm. They came from the broad spectrum of class, culture and spaces in the Philippines. Childhood was spent in fortuitous milieus for all, except for Melba and Nenita, who lived in the shadow of absolute poverty. Teresa and Bernadette came from the top layer of Filipino society and Linda and Mary illustrate the emotionally, socially and spiritually sustaining Filipino pattern of social relations. Except for Melba, these women were fulfilled in emotional, social and professional terms prior to migrating, with belongingness to the extended family quite central in this sense of wellbeing. This was an attribute that all of the women in the study reported about their life prior to migration. The personal tragedies encountered by Linda sapped her resilience and forced her to take action to avoid the ubiquitous Filipino poverty, curtailing her aspirations as a journalist. The women's predispositions were hybrid and contradictory, with the privileging of values and ethics derived from a Confucian filial piety, South East Asian conformity to group life, and pervasive commitment to Catholic practice, counterposed with an equally strong aspiration to escape absolute poverty, and for to the material goods and citizenship rights of democracies, promulgated by the inexorable material domination of US economic and military proprietorship of the country.

The Vietmanese lifeworld is characterised by the ancient history of this culture. The women illustrated growing up in a habitus with refined expectations and obligations attached to the vertical and horizontal positioning of those surrounding them. In this hierarchical and authoritarian society, gender roles are clearly demarcated, an order that women are predisposed to see as unquestionable. Order and duties constitute the understanding of what it means to be part of human society and what is worth pursuing in life. Class determines women's access to education but women have always exercised energetic agency alongside men in production, whether in subsistence agriculture, family commerce in markets or in private enterprise. Modernity has imbued urban spaces and the presence of French and American colonial powers together with neighbouring communist states created lifeworlds of war as a constant backdrop during the twentieth century. The geopolitical struggle of

capitalism with communism and attendant ideologies have represented a threat to life for the women who lived in the second half of the twentieth century. The women showed that family members are expected to join in the struggle for the family's material prosperity and, at times, survival. Women's sense of self related to the realities of relationships with their family and what they could accomplish for it. Confucian ethics, order and dutifulness constitute key symbolic capital. Material prosperity is highly valued and is imbued with significance as the outcome of the exercise of proper ethics of hard work and diligence. The women from the upper class, Anh and WaiLing, had strong connections with the male figureheads of father and grandfather respectively. All the women, except Tahn, reported being young women who felt ebullient or competent in life.

Although there has been a lot of information in this chapter, I trust that a profile of the women is beginning to emerge for the reader. The next chapter will trace the upheavals which dislocated the women at different stages of their lifecycle, culminating with their presence in Melbourne.