Chapter Three

Understanding women's lives: The space between narrating and theorising

Preamble

The critical task for this thesis is to develop a theoretical map which, in the first instance, enables me as researcher to understand previously unknown aspects of women's lives. At the same time, I need a scaffold to bring some order into the *messy* world, helping me to avoid losing direction in my chosen project of developing useful knowledge for social work education leading to emancipatory practice by and for (future) social workers. Western academic and public intellectual life has admitted - in an unprecedented way - a deluge of writings from people from all over the world and many of these are seriously reflecting on the implications of such knowledges. Women in countries once labelled as *undeveloped*, *primitive* or even *backward* may, in fact, operate from stronger footings than women in Australia, where one in four women has experienced sexual or physical abuse (VicHealth, 2004).

My first theoretical construct is the *life-world* and I have chosen the writings of Alfred Schutz (1970, 1972), Pierre Bourdieu (1977, 1988, 1990, 1999) and Anthony Giddens (1984, 1991) to help me elucidate its theoretical and empirical meaning and usefulness. I consider the contributions of these authors to be sufficiently androgynous and refined to lend themselves to refraction through critical gender- and cross-cultural lenses. I will discuss how feminist

and international writings enrich the conceptions of these major social theorists. Agency and its habitus, predispositions, routine encounters of bodies in daily spaces of co-presence and within fields of power inequalities will be illustrated by examples from unexpected corners of the world.

My second theoretical building block is *subjectivity,* and I use the work of Todd Sloan (1996), who has usefully distilled this complex literature for a social work audience. Again, this being an eminently Western concept, I will refer to international examples which may disrupt or further develop the theoretical underpinning suggested by the Western approaches.

Except for the Russian group, I was not able to follow Gayatri Spivak's advice (cited by Bulbeck, 1998:1) to "learn her mother tongue" as a pre-requisite to feeling solidarity. Hence I turn to *post-colonial theory* for my third theoretical building block. The term 'post colonial' is problematic:

> When we first began to use the word 'postcolonial' we used it ironically … it was the exact beginning of re-colonisation … It is very frightening to me, this celebration of globalisation in a world where non-alignment is no longer possible and the divisions are becoming exacerbated (Spivak, cited in Bulbeck, 1998:188 from Stephens, 1996:35).

The Australian life-world is the context where people's daily actions are oriented to the strictures of a capitalistic economy and its provision for civic life through state-funded public infrastructure and community services. My second research question concerns the efficacy or otherwise of such services in sustaining immigrant women's agency during resettlement; I will, hence, draw on basic *welfare state* concepts and theorising as the last dimension of my theoretical edifice. This chapter will, therefore, encompass the following four sections:

Life-world theories: Agency and structure integration
Subjectivity
Postcolonial insights
Australia and its welfare state

Life-world theories: Agency and structure integration

Given the profound - and indeed absurd - error of investigating human life by looking at an individual in isolation, I have adopted life-world theories as my necessary starting point for theoretical illumination of my research journey into the experiences past and present of migrant women. Before unravelling how the women in the study were able to be agents in their Australian contexts, we need to look at what they did and who they were in a previous time and space. I prefer to use the term *world* rather than context, circumstance, position, or situation, as *world* evokes the *unplumbability* of the meanings, rules and subtleties of a culture in its geography, with the weight of its history and the contemporary preoccupations of a people. World is a more accurate reflection of the reality of social life because of the latter's elusion of definition, demarcation and delineation. The Australian Oxford Dictionary (2004) includes these definitions of world: "particular division, section or generation of the earth's inhabitants … with reference to the place or time of their existence … the universe or all that exists … outside oneself … all phenomena". In specialised domains of life, such as the arts, sports, academia, the descriptor given is "all that pertains to the sphere or department." *World* also means human affairs, their course and conditions and active life. To *be worldly* is, among other meanings, to be well acquainted with all that pertains to life beyond one's self or one's own family. It also captures the notion of the inter-penetrability and interdependence of meanings in that world. A behaviour that is valued in one world, for example competitiveness, is frowned upon in another.

Agency and consciousness

Alfred Schutz (1970)[1] defines action as constituted, firstly, by an act of attention and, secondly, by the intentional adoption of an attitude or response towards an object, objective or purpose, existing in the objective time and space world outside of one's own inner consciousness. In the Weberian tradition, Schutz (1972:xii, xvi-xvii) shows that our approach to reality is organised by our values and the subjective meanings imbuing our behaviour and our time-space consciousness. A 'wide awakeness' to life is the basic regulative principle of conscious life and from it comes attention (Schutz, 1972:xvii). Attention makes us search for meaning either by looking outside ourselves, or by thinking about our inner experiences (Schutz, 1970:68).

Alfred Schutz belongs to the traditions of European social theory making and builds on the contributions of Karl Marx and other founders of the phenomenological and critical traditions, notably Simmel, Husserl and to a lesser degree, the early Heidegger. Marx rejected the long-standing Platonic privileging of abstract ideas and proposed instead that human consciousness emerges from and depends upon material reality, defined as social relations within which we engage in work, family and group life. Consciousness is a social product in the first place (Marx in Tucker, 1970:436-525). This thesis is not concerned with women's in-depth consciousness, nor with a deconstruction of it; the level of my analysis is in integrating the pieces of their lives they choose to 'let me in' on. Marx' concept of the dialectic has been thoroughly integrated in much contemporary social theory, with life understood as entailing movement, struggle, the inseparability of values from facts, the ubiquity of the dimensions of time and space and the inter-connectedness of all social

[1] Schutz' work has been seminal in much modern social theory (e.g. Habermas, Marcuse in Skinner, 1985). Indeed, during the last three decades in Australia, people's consciousness has been systematically massaged by neo-liberal ideas, resulting in significant cultural alterations and rewritings of what constitutes 'worth' and 'common sense'.

phenomena (Ritzer, 1996:45). Indeed, as the previous chapter on non-Western ontologies and epistemologies illustrated, many cultures would be puzzled at such statements of the obvious.

The life-world: Agency and structure integration

The theory of the life-world fills out what I and countless others have found to be a valuable framework for social research because of its high verisimilitude to lived experiences. The world of daily life signifies an inter-subjective world, which existed long before our birth and which was handed down to us by our predecessors as an organised, meaningful world for us to experience and interpret. Together with our own experiences (which include learning from the experiences of those around us), this is *knowledge at-hand* and it functions as a scheme of reference of what is natural and normal. Our concept of the natural includes the material world, a real world common to us all (Schutz, 1970:72). What we focus our attention on in the *messy world* is organised by levels of relevance according to our purpose at any point in time. Schutz proposes a pragmatic basis for choosing what is relevant in the stock of knowledge. Although his privileging of purposive action is probably entwined with his own location as a male in an emerging individualistic (Western) culture, if the concept is understood in a general way, it has usefulness across gender, cultures and time. The act of choosing to focus on particular items in the gloriously complex natural or social world logically implies meaning construction. This is probably part of the human condition itself and Schutz does not prescribe what items are relevant or the constituents of purpose.

I found in Pierre Bourdieu's work refined insights about the gendered life-world. Although he has only recently – and few years before his untimely death - written directly about gender, his work cannot fairly be accused of being andro-centric. Rather than give a rendition of his principal concepts as he enunciated them, I will present them through a feminist and cross-cultural exegesis.

Habitus is the first example of the usefulness of Bourdieu's rather androgynous concepts. He (1979) lived for a number of years in Algeria and immersed himself in the Kabile culture from the position of a learner, as distinct from the vantage point more often taken by anthropologists and sociologists, which is that of superior knowledge. This approach enabled him to hear the Kabiles' ways of reasoning in various circumstances and, in the process, Bourdieu was able to generalise some rules about the local people's constitution of meaning and behaviour. The symbolic and material features of one's environment are interiorised in the form of mental maps, or *habitus*, through which women and men orient themselves about the parameters of what is possible for them in a particular space and time (Bourdieu, 1977; Fuchs, 2003).

The embodied nature of consciousness is clearly pre-supposed by the concept of habitus; the body's gender evinces a range of meanings, interpretations and knowledge shared by one's cultural group. A girl's/woman's material location within relations of domination also evoke accumulated wisdom, morality, norms, symbols and conventions about the constitution of normality and appropriate behaviour towards those around her. The sum of these constitutes a *predisposition* (Bourdieu's second key concept) for acting in the world. These internalised parameters are enduring and trustworthy and they have been tested as wisdom by one's community over centuries and, possibly, millennia. A *predisposition* does not determine nor predict how one might feel or act. Rather, Bourdieu's (1977, 1988, 1990) approach is to identify some of the material and symbolic features which are likely to constrain or enable a person's sense of his/her possibilities and he has given due space to human creativity and ingenuity, despite widespread misinterpretation of his work as structuralist.

Agency, consciousness and relations of domination

The meanings and values of a community are coined as *material* and *symbolic capital* by Bourdieu. To understand action within a series of transactions or choices, we need to know what constitutes capital and how the 'trans-actors' are located within this web of values.

Bourdieu's concept of *field* refers to the layers of power relations which exist in all social contexts, incorporating the sedimentations associated with the possession of material objects and symbolic values. We can see here the applicability of international feminist contentions that oppression is a constellation of international, national and local structural/personal intersections of race, gender and class (Barrett & Phillips, 1992; Gunew & Yeatman, 1993; Beall *et al*., 1989). Bourdieu's and Schutz' concepts provide heuristic tools for illuminating women's lives in particular historical, spatial and material moments. As outlined in Chapter Two, they promise to be useful in the post-colonial feminist project of theorising based on the experiences of women themselves (Mohanty, 2003; Sandoval, 2000).

The epistemological and ontological standpoints I chose as the bases for my methodology cohere with the theoretical ideas appropriated here; the transferability of Schutz' and Bourdieu's constructs can be illustrated by feminist literature from the Middle East about women's strategic use of the hijab; Marnia Lazreg shows that the veil has been imbued with the meanings of protection from the male gaze; as a platform for claims for public support when sexual harassment occurs (a power Western women do not always have); as an expression of religious commitment and identity politics in immigrant countries; as a political tool during struggles against colonising forces with women:

> "… mov(ing) in and out of the veil, as actresses playing roles in different costumes" (Lazreg, 1994: 127-135).

In Malaysia, the hijab has also been part of a counter-discourse to Western representations of womanhood as the sexual nymph (Nagata, 1995:104-13). In the context of living under the extremes of Sharia Law (e.g. in Iran, Saudi Arabia), women's agency is expressed through struggling for state remuneration for housebound women, monogamy, custody rights and protection in divorce laws (Kandiyoti, 1999). Islamic feminists also use their close readings of the Q'uran to counter local and national abusive patriarchal practices; indeed, an Iraqi Shiite colleague, who was jailed during Sattam Hussein's rule for inciting university students to wear the hijab, told me that the prophet Mohamed defined a wife's role as largely

educational and nurturing and that she was to be freed from menial labour. Her activism in empowering fellow Iraqi women in Australia draws on her status of a religious teacher at the local mosque, where she continues to give voice to her exegesis of Islam.

These examples suggest that the theories I have chosen afford malleability and allow space for human ingenuity. I am attempting to move towards a much more nuanced and sophisticated analytical framework, which presumes that, in the first instance, I have much to learn from the women who have joined in this study. In addition, Anthony Giddens' concepts contribute in the filling out of the parameters through which I might be able to more appropriately represent the narratives.

Agency and structure integration: Giddens

Anthony Giddens' approaches *agency* by looking at the *processes of (en-)acting*, as distinct from looking at a person's inner cogitations and motives as chief propellants of action. For Giddens, perception is what agents *do* (Giddens, 1984:46); a person's major point of reference is *her/his body in active engagement in co-presence with other bodies, in various locations of time and space*. Being an agent involves being seen as an agent, which involves sustained control of the body in situations of co-presence, in the every day routinised and bracketed encounters (Giddens, 1984:50, 67). Giddens' privileging of the body in mediating the social relations which individuals sustain in daily life is consonant with the Western radical feminist focus on the ubiquitous male gaze as well as with writing from most parts of the globe. In giving more saliency to the body than other social thinkers (and somewhat in common with Foucault, 1966), his theories can be useful in legitimating within Western academia, previously silenced and subjugated diverse ways of being and knowing.

Giddens' theory of structuration shows the role of human agents in enacting and creating the social, political and material conditions of the society they inhabit; Deleuze and Guattari's (1987) metaphor of a *rhizome* is very much in tune with Jacques Boulet's conceptualisations (Boulet, 1985) of social life evolving as a multi-layered or multi-levelled holistic process, with

many partly-mobile partly-conditioned (rather than determined) relationships, inter-connections and assemblages which partly randomly partly deterministically and endlessly evolve, play and interconnect (Mansfield, 2000:Ch.10).

Giddens' theory is useful for helping me encapsulate what the stuff of life consisted of for the women in the study, before being dislocated, in terms of how and where time was spent, what they did and with whom they did it and what it all meant. And all of these may have actually differed from their own and others' expectations about what they ought to have been doing with their lifetimes and in what places/spaces they should have done these putative 'other' things. Indeed, the spatial and social locations a woman inhabited/inhabits or frequented/frequents will impact on her sense of identity and security as an esteemed or honourable member of the human race in general and as specified by the particular places/times she inhabits.

Giddens' concept of *ontological security* refers to the basic requirement for personal stability and sense of safety or wellbeing. It derives from a successful orientation to the life-world which is experienced as a 'natural, given reality', a 'solid reality' and as 'normality'. The stock of tacit, discursive and practical knowledge learnt through socialisation is unshakably legitimate and again, the parallels with the previously introduced concepts of Alfred Schutz and Pierre Bourdieu are obvious.

Although the above theoretical constructs provide useful footholds for my understanding of the women's narratives, I need to reiterate that they are chiefly *heuristic devices*. Anna Yeatman uses Foucault's argument about the inherent exclusivity of categories such as equality and freedom, posited as a-historical universals (Yeatman, 1995:43-49). Within such discourses, women, children and indigenous and other colonised peoples have been interpellated as not fully human. She takes issue with identity politics because:

> … we cannot know who we are until we act and our action always takes place in a particular context of relationship to and dialogue with particular others. What the action means will depend on the narratives I and others retrospectively give it. Since we are

> assigning meaning interactively, that is an interlocutory relationship to each other's narratives, it is all too likely that this meaning will be both contested and changing (Yeatman, 1995:55).

The three International Conferences having taken place during the UN Decade for Women consistently saw NGO Forums and countries from the South or East prioritizing *not* gender relations and sexual freedoms, but instead arguing towards galvanising action against the impact of the power of the World Bank, the IMF and its allied corporations and nation states and for dealing in structural ways with the poverty emanating from such policies. They argue that these relations of domination operate at the level of *questions of life and death*. The rejection of Western feminist preoccupations with the dismantling of patriarchy as the major key to emancipation has been well documented and I have dealt with this in earlier passages of this thesis.

Subjectivity

The assumption that a sense of self or identity is central in and for symbolic or material action is a Western one. Indeed, as Habermas has pointed out, in non-capitalistic affluent countries, knowledge, norms and individual personality are immersed and immanent in social life which is experienced as natural and as a whole (Sloan, 1996:53-54). Certainly, the existence of voluminous theorising about the *self* is a function of the fragmenting reverberations of advanced capitalism on human experience and the notion of subjectivity may be an artefact of history and may soon give way to other forms of understanding human existence. At present and increasingly, though, creative intellectual and artistic energies are still consumed with exploring, uncovering and expressing the subjective (Mansfield, 2000:177-178). As Australian academic Parlo Singh points out (1994:95), the project of modernity has been so thorough that there are virtually no spaces or identities which have not been infected and the search for pre-modern non-subject-centred authenticity may be an illusory quest. Furthermore, whilst probably having been raised in a cultural context where the focus on subjective was not as central, the immigrant women have

come to settle in an eminently Western capitalist society where attention is primarily centred on the individual and subjective and they will have to work on incorporating at least certain of its elements.

Hence, some of the following discussion on subjectivity is relevant in assisting me to interrogate the narratives but the chief problematic is that such debates are thoroughly implicated in the binary dualisms which typify Western culture. Again, the concepts discussed below need to be understood, in a general sense, as themes rather than definitions and they will be explicated through the same gendering and cross-cultural refraction I engaged in above. As well, some of the discussion may feel partly redundant, but I think it necessary to achieve a fuller saturation of the meanings inherent in the concepts used as parameters for the interpretation of the narratives of the women I spoke with.

Agency and identity

I will be relying on the framework provided by Todd Sloan (1996) in his useful text on subjectivity mainly written for a social work audience. Whilst there is a temptation to neglect – if not ignore - this vast area inhabited by somewhat rarefied-sounding French, post-modern and psychoanalytic Lacan-inspired feminist debates, this has not so much to do with my disagreeing with their discourses than with the nature of my research. Indeed, I am talking to women in Australia, around the turn of the twenty-first century and there is no question that they are able to identify themselves as really alive and as objectively relating to the social and material world as subjective and capable human beings, so that much of the '*angst*' which seems to pervade some of the discussions surrounding the subject seem to miss the mark by far.

At one extreme of the continuum of discourses on the *self* lies *essentialism* and, at the other, propositions that there is nothing beyond *language games*. Both are improbable in their extreme formulations and I instead propose that the aliveness, the *being there of existence*, or Heidegger's (1978, 1982) *Dasein*, is a starting point for understanding the women's *capacity to*

act. The women may or may not have had any notion of their real selves, in the terms of Rousseau's naked, natural sensibilities, or of Kant's privileging of reason and morality or truth as the unifying point of reference for all experiences. Again, I recognise the cultural and historical specificity of this kind of self-reflection, but this does not intend to discard the possibility that *some* women in the study may feel and think in such terms.

Another heuristic starting point is to attribute to subjectivity a meaning akin to *experiencing*, which then evokes an ongoing process of self-definition and self-creation in complex social contexts (Sloan, 1996:7). Sloan proposes that, throughout history, the coordinates of human existence have always been structured to require conscious management of who we are, where we are headed in relation to the realities we confront. I do not think that most women-writers of colour will find the basic proposition problematic, except that they may start their theorising from a different angle altogether. At the end of this study, I will attempt to propose more cross-culturally appropriate and hopefully more nuanced theoretical constructs about subjectivity and agency for women.

The equation of the human capacity to act with the self-determining actor is redolent of Protestantism, individualism, self interest, quintessential reflections of modernity and imperialist conquests, with white women implicated also in wielding oppressive power over other women (hooks, 2000:26, 36, 49, 54). There are multiple bases for subjectivity and for women's exercise of agency through per formative enactments of gender (Bulbeck, 1998:15). I noted in Chapter Two the presently more frequent availability of non-European psychology. Fanny Cheung *et al*. (1996), for example, noted that a Chinese personality is assessed in terms of the following dimensions of normality: somatisation as expressions of personal grief; family orientation; harmony (inner peace and contentment as well as interpersonal harmony), Ren Qin (relationship orientation based on reciprocal, courteous rituals, nepotism, etc), defensiveness (externalisation of blame and self-enhancement) and graciousness (patience, acceptance of self and others and self-sacrifice) – characteristics which would not unequivocally do well in personality and subjectivity ratings in the West.

A considerable body of literature now exists in China and other Asians academies based upon an integration of confucian epistemologies and paradigms (Yuen, 1993, 1999; Chu, 2003).

In summary, by listening to the women's stories, I will be interested to hear diverse as well as shared paradigms about human – 'subjective' - normality or healthiness, as the background to their constructions and enactments of meanings. This exercise is, of course, limited by the fact that I operate from a Western paradigm and that the interview is framed to elicit their individual ('subjective') perspectives.

Agency and interaction paradigms

According to Sloan, there are two domains relevant to interacting in the life-world, paradigms of interaction and degree of individuation (Sloan, 1996:69-73). There is widespread theoretical convergence about the notion that the self is always self in relation to the other or to the self as the other (e.g. George Herbert Mead, and the later symbolic interactionists (Cohen, 1996:121-132), post-modernists such as Lacan (1968) and feminists Kristeva (1982) and Irigaray (1993). During socialisation or en-culturalisation, a girl learns to feel and understand a set of emotions as approved or disapproved by significant others and she will rely on managing these in manoeuvring in the social world. Personality styles vary in their capacity for relatedness, empathy, self-understanding, trustworthiness, modes of expression and communication of feelings and other capacities that make intimacy and friendship/caring possible. These capacities are related to the enjoyment and meaningfulness of life itself (Sloan, 1996:77). It will be important to identify the presence or absence of opportunities to experience these dimensions of life in the country of origin and in Australia and to learn from the possible contrasts between the two sets of experiences.

The prestige and academic advancement attained by the authors of the above theories may be viewed with irony in cultures where people do not feel the same obsessive need to hide from each other within their '*personal spaces*' and behind increasingly high security walls. To

believe in *independence* has been dubbed an *exercise in magical thinking* by Maivan Clech Lam (1994:879). *Interdependence* is assumed not only as an existential and ontological reality but as a *right* by most non-Western cultures, underpinning histories of political activism concerned with extending women's claims for material support from the state and from men for their roles as mothers, wives, daughters and producers (Leacock *et al*., 1986; Bookman & Morgan, 1988; Rowbotham, 1992).

In Western Samoa there is no word for *self* in the English/Western sense as there is no absolute reference point for identity outside the social context. Many Indigenous and First Nations people, such as Aboriginal Australians and Maori, see themselves not as unique subjectivities but as the embodiment of their social networks and relationships with the living and the dead as well as in close interdependency with other species and nature surrounding them (Muse, 1991:226, 222, 225). Similarly, Japanese ways of being entail five selves, including four which are constituted interactionally and one being equivalent to the Western self. The Japanese approach to living life incorporates fluidity and the acceptance that different situations and relationships evoke the incommensurability of being human (Allison, 1996:139 cited in Bulbeck, 1998:62). This is distinct from societies with a stock of knowledge based on fixed denotations about the self (such as the *functioning personality*), with some of the action and 'feeling' repertoires for responding to life's contradictions being translated into a pathological vocabulary often under the legitimating umbrella of established and accepted/dominant scientific paradigms.

Relationships within communally-based societies must not be presumed - in a totalising manner - to be necessarily more loving or nurturing. Indeed, whilst in teaching or tutoring roles, many international students from Asia have reflected to me about the value of the Australian model of parenting based on friendship. Consequently, the paradigms of interaction a woman acquires for and through her membership in family, culture and society are particularly relevant for understanding the migration experience, not only in terms of how she experiences being without the relationships she had at home, but also in terms of

the challenges of meeting a world where people relate to each other within alien forms. Secondly, the extent to which a woman was allowed or able to develop individual difference from those around her at home will bear significantly on how she came to be in Australia and what this means to her. How she feels about herself may impact on how she is able to act in building a new life for herself/her family; on the other hand, she may equally have experienced sufficient variety in her earlier '*passages*' and have acquired a varied set of strategies and adaptive capacities which will carry her forward in the settlement process.

Subjectivity: Beyond Western binaries

Val Plumwood has deconstructed the hegemony of Eurocentrism according to five dimensions; *back-grounding* includes world history and geography discourses which begin with the European at the centre and the rest of humanity at the edge. *Radical exclusions* or *hyper-separation* refer to the setting up of a permanent mythical chasm of difference between us and the alien, with entailing dualisms and valorisations between white/black, modern/traditional, secular/religious, and so on. *Incorporation* or *relational definition* means seeing the other only in terms of his/her relation to ourselves, and *instrumentalism* defines the other on the basis of the interests of the powerful. Finally, *homogenising* or *stereotyping* the alien ensures their erasure as individual subjects with claims for equal respect as we accord to ourselves (Plumwood, 1993:48-67; JanMohamed, 1986:89-90; du Cille, 1994).

Plumwood (1993, 2002) proposes strategies for transcending such sterile modalities and Isabelle Gunning's *World Travelling* encapsulates similar cross-cultural understanding skills (1992:189-248), suggesting three strategies:

(a) to understand the cultural pressures which created us;

(b) to look at ourselves as others might see us, including our historical relationship to the other; and

(c) to see the other as she sees herself in her own cultural context.

My approach to the research and writing of the thesis is an attempted *enactment of solidarity* by giving turns to the diverse worlds women come from at *being pivotal points*. I will be shifting back and forth between each woman's country of origin, Australia and the academic world within which I write as the often assumed centre of the universe. The Third World, or South or East will not be in the background and I hope to not unwittingly adopt an attitude of deference to or of romanticising the women's cultures.

Subjectivity and language

Thus far in this chapter I have sketched out some parameters for understanding consciousness as it emerges from the life-world, and the role of habitus, pre-dispositions, relations of domination, routine encounters in time and space and ontological security as heuristic devices for framing and interpreting the women's agency. Adopting another vantage point, I have surveyed literature about subjectivity and have shown how some taken for granted tenets may be disrupted by perspectives from the majority of the world's population. I now turn to reflecting on the role of language in the constitution of the social and of the relationship, including the research relationship.

Language or the symbolic order as formulated by the theorists of the *linguistic turn* (Lacan, 1968; Wittgenstein, in Heaton & Groves, 1994) is the only vehicle for meaning construction and is, in itself, meaning. The '*durée of experiencing*' can only become comprehensible by entering the objective space-time of thinking, only possible through using language shared by others inhabiting the life-world (Schutz, 1970:62). Symbols of *self-in-relation-to-others* are connected to broad, deep and long experiences in the world of others. Any deep experience is meaningful because it has multiple referents that link the self to the world in a communicative action (Sloan, 1996:111). In contrast, Bulbeck (1998:65) refers to Ann's work (1987), and notes that in French, Spanish, Russian and English word frequency counts are topped by 'I' and 'no', thus signifying a collective thrust away from the relational and from being identified through positionality within a relational 'system.

Being woman and being womanish can, indeed, mean something quite opposite to the Anglophone frequent denigration of women by encasing them within an individualised and sexualised body, problematising the relational reality of, for example, their motherhood and family life. The previous chapter illustrated the rather different African and African-American valorising of these relational realities. Much literature in the development area criticises the imposition of family planning as coercive population controls, diverting attention from the continued neo-colonial infliction of suffering by the World Bank, the IMF, multinational corporations and the leading nation states. In fact, having large families is widely seen and experienced as the maintenance of the most precious and fulfilling part of life in Middle Eastern, Latino, African, Asian Australian, Indigenous and Pacific cultures.

Hence, the word *woman* does not automatically conjure up a pejorative or sexualised meaning everywhere; being *womanish* denotes generosity, boundless love for one's family and culture, strength and the capacity to embrace all for the thriving of humanity. This is the perspective of eco-feminists such as Maria Mies & Vandana Shiva (1983; Shiva, 2000). Alice Walker, a black feminist, is particularly eloquent:

> "Womanist is to feminism as purple is to lavender" (cited in Anzaldua, 1990:370).

Sexual interdependence does not necessarily carry the meaning of '*site for women's oppression*'; in Vietnam and in Arabic speaking countries, for example, sexual interdependence is a *right* and entails enforceable obligations upon men to support mothers with children. Emancipation is understood as involving both men and women collaborating to support each other. This is not to deny the existence of generalised patterns of material and symbolic injustices and violences inflicted on women across the world, but we need to appraise how meaning is encoded in a country's language if we are to understand the reality a woman conveys through narrative form. Furthermore, from the perspective of many non-Western women, their Western sisters quite often will appear to do rather crazy and silly things as well … Understanding my narrator's sense of who she was/is/might be will

require me to identify how she negotiated relations of domination in her country of birth and, consequently, interprets the altered position migration places her in Australia.

Subjectivity, immigration and alterity

Leaving one's life world and coming to another entails varying degrees of threat to a person's ontological security, with one's previous hold on reality being questioned or made redundant in the new culture. The anxiety associated with this can be profound and can be a significant driving force in migrants' actions and pursuits in attempting to build a life that is meaningful.

Anthony Giddens' (1991) concept of *modernist reflexivity* can also be understood to encapsulate the process of negotiating subjectivity in new locations. Modern societies are marked by the central preoccupation of people in reflecting upon themselves in order to adjust their perceptions and behaviours with the publicly pronounced, 'scientifically' validated modes of being. This is another layer of mystification for immigrant women. This alternative stock of knowledge, backed by the hegemony of the host culture as well as by scientific paradigms of expertise, may represent a source of continuous, painful negation of the women's previous tacit selves and hold on reality, and of the ancestral traditions which fashioned them. The modernist project may also be taken into stride with alacrity by some women who prize Western influences, with a corresponding erasure – or de-emphasising - of some aspects of their previous identity. However a woman might negotiate her new positioning(s), she will be faced with representations of her and her culture containing varying degrees of distortion.

For over two decades, Elizabeth Povinelli (2002) has worked as an anthropologist with Indigenous communities in Arnhem Land, Western and Central Australia. She tackles issues of relations of domination and Australia's mythical belief in a conflict free inclusive multicultural society by focusing on instances of encounters with '*abhorrent alterity*'. Her analysis shows that there is a strictly circumscribed space for tolerance of the *other*, where

'*they*' can differ from '*us*' only up to a point. The virulent rejection of the Indigenous owners of Australia by the white invaders and their progeny has to do with their alterity being seen as abhorrent. This logic underpinned the *White Australia Policy* (McMahon *et al*., 2000) and the relative tolerance vis-à-vis of migrants who come from Christian countries and, conversely, the enduring racism directed at people who display Islamic symbols:

> "… now the putative pre-ideological truth of a feeling roused by an encounter with fundamental alterity is critical to 'the formation of a national popular collective will' that the state can use to reproduce 'a superior, total, form of modern civilisation. As if they deeply understood these thoughts, state and public figures trumpeted the national shame of allowing such practices of savagery and barbarism, of ignorance and superstition, to take place within its borders. The phrase ' such practices' acts to expand the field of shame and cast a pall over unnamed subaltern practices where no national-poplar collective will would be possible and over entire continents where such practices are imagined to occur" (Povinelli, 2002:27).

These nationalist-populist calls entail an ethical imperative for citizens and consequent delimitations to the *altern's* access to the distribution of rights, sympathy and material resources. Elizabeth Povinelli is concerned about the deeply compromised ethics of Australian public life, as I am. *Abhorrent alterity* is an expression of imperialism in demonising isolated behaviours, as a corollary for the required erasure of the abuses of the human beings involved on a much broader scale. This has been theorised by Edward Said (1979) as being part of '*Orientalism*' and the colonial desire, an aggressive civilisation feeding on imaginary representations of the other to fill its psychological malaise. Rey Chow (1991) and Trin Minh-ha (1989) have written particularly lucidly on these themes which will be expanded in the next section of this chapter.

This discussion is pertinent here because the migrant women will be associated with practices such as female circumcision, arranged marriages, the disparaged religion of Islam, the putative submissiveness of Asian femininity, socialisation into the equally denigrated communist systems and the mendicant status of immigrants or refugees. All of these

representations within the Australian imaginary will constitute (and most likely be experienced as) assaults on the women's dignity.

Post colonial insights

Colonialism with its attendant capitalist imperative, has not operated monolithically, but rather its formations have been historically and geopolitically contingent (Young, 2001:79). At the same time, colonialism exhibits the central characteristics of invasion and appropriation of territories for the purposes of subjugating the inhabitants, their culture and material possessions, through varying degrees of violence. A woman's sense of her self and her society and the layers of meanings which contributed to her - actively or passively - coming to this country would be shaped by these colonial subjugations. They would also be alive in influencing her struggles, sufferings, energies, aspirations, and resignations in the course of her (re-)settlement in Australia.

Colonial powers need the subaltern cultures in order to define themselves, proposes Edward Said (1993:31-43). Chinua Achebe, more savagely and more effectively in my view, continues by suggesting that the West has great anxieties about the precariousness of its civilisation and consequently has needed to project its own psychological demons onto Africa, which then can be subjugated in perpetuity. Achebe uses the term "wilful tenacity" with which white media, public discourse and education pejoratively define Africans systematically and continuously (Achebe, 1977). This tenacious misrepresentation by mass media has intensified in recent years in Australia, experienced as profoundly shocking by migrant women from the respective countries.

Colonial imbrications of the person as a subject

Women's unconscious, conscious, discursive or tacit experiences of colonialism imbricate deeply the cultural, symbolic and material resources at their disposal during settlement in Australia. Settling into a new country constitutes in itself a deep, relentless encounter with colonialism.

Said (1993) and Gayatri Spivak (1998) identified a number of typical dynamisms in colonialism; the colonised territories are constructed as peripheral to the coloniser's life world (Said, 1993:40). The culture that matters because of its inherent superiority resides in France, or Britain and the assumption is that the incursions of the mighty into the outer reaches of the globe are a '*spilling over*' of this unquestioned largesse. This engenders a permanent sense of inferiority, not only amongst the colonised, but also amongst the expatriates, cringing culturally under diminishing labels, such as the 'pieds noirs' ('black feet' of the French born in a colony). Subjugated cultures involve the erasure of native history and knowledge and the erasure (Spivak, 1987, 1990, 1993) is expressed in the elisions and denials in the language of Western knowledge-based discourses. The unspoken script is that natives are lesser people and have lesser rights and morals. Subjugation of cultures occurs through the power to give and withhold attention, which renders control of mass education and media vital.

Spivak's analysis of the subtleties entailed in becoming a reader of British literature is a useful parallel to the process of integrating into the host or 'mainstream' community. A migrant needs to first take the action of *deference* to the ruling narrators. This involves an undoing of institutional and cultural differences as the reader/migrant learns to adopt the 'inside' of the hero in a text, or of the normal Australian citizen represented in public life. Spivak calls the imbibing of British or European literature by non Europeans "*deliberate, canny, wholesale epistemic transformation*" (Spivak, 1993). This is also the operation of Nandy's (1991) *Enemy Within* .

Albert Memmi (1974), Tunisia's anti-colonial revolutionary, drew attention to the fact that the emergence of the post-colonial person is a long drawn-out and painful affair with "the concealed persistence of un-freedom" (Gandhi, 1998:6-7). Colonisation leaves a material legacy in its infrastructure of economic, political institutions, government administration, wealth and land distribution, laws, roads, hospitals and educational systems which replaced the country's original foundations (Said, 1993:207). Domination continues through the symbolic privilege accorded internationally to its knowledge which necessarily places non-western civilisations into Said's "*dreadful secondariness*" (1994:253).

Memmi said that the residue of colonialism will only decompose when the colonised admit their participation and partnership in '*the tango of colonisation*' which:

> "chained the coloniser and colonised into an implacable dependence, moulded their respective characters and dictated their conduct" (Memmi, 1968:45).

Memmi - as do many other writers – speaks about the power of the 'desire' or longing of the colonised for the coloniser's superior civilisation:

> "… (how) could the colonised deny himself (sic) so cruelly … How could he (sic) hate the colonisers and yet admire them so passionately" (Memmi, 1968:45).

The compulsive voyeuristic gaze towards Europe is theorised at length in post colonial literature (e.g. Nandy 1991 and his evocative title *The Enemy Within*). Leela Gandhi states that the crisis produced by this self-division is as psychologically significant as the visible contestation in the overthrow of colonial occupation (Gandhi, 1998:12). I would argue that it is much more *psychologically* damaging as it is the Achilles' Heel through which the colonial power continues its reverberations long after the 'formal' cessation of the regime of colonialism. The recognition of this phenomenon underlies Fanon's advocacy of violence as the only path to liberation in *The Wretched of the Earth* (1964).

Diasporic life

Diasporas are primarily experiences of disruption for first-generation migrants, but may endure over more generations. Schutz' essay on *The Stranger* depicts the subtle difficulties in developing the cognitive and attitudinal skills needed in order to become part of the new group (Schutz, 1976). The suffering of migration includes being positioned in disadvantaged symbolic and material spaces; facing distorted representations of one's culture or identity; finding oneself devalued and perhaps pitied by what appears as an entire society; and dealing with the silent institutionalised racism. Many migrants are cowered by the overwhelming difficulties of economic and psychological survival and are not able to reflect critically.

Nevertheless, migrants *do* contest and continually negotiate their identities in the course of having to provide for their families. Leaving one's homeland permanently means living in Anzaldua's *borderlands* (or *La Frontera*, 1987) for the rest of one's life. A migrant woman who chooses to resist engagement with her new environment will necessarily be drawn into Giddens' modernist reflexivity, by chronically revising her social and material activity to ensure non-contamination by Australian influences of what has become an essentialist nationalism. Women who do approach their new environments in a more pro-active manner are compelled to forge hybrid identities including contradictions, change and the stresses of choosing between competing allegiances (Moya 1998). I certainly did anticipate that the women I spoke to would show novel as well as well-trodden responses to such challenges.

Hybridity: The spaces from which the women speak

Lorde (1984) and Moraga and Anzaldua (1981) are some of the women who have theorised and celebrated new identities, "*the mestiza*" born out of inner and outer struggle with the communities to which they partly belong. They proclaim a new consciousness, along the lines of Donna Haraway's cyborg (1991). I will be seeking to uncover the conditions under

which the women in my sample forge a variety of personal responses to their position as migrants and - hence – become able or unable to act as they would intend.

As outlined in the previous chapter, a key methodological and theoretical dilemma for me is on what grounds I can contend that my rendition of the narratives constitutes an articulation of any merit. Homi Bhabha's (1994) *The Location of Culture* provides some very useful insights for me. He brushes aside static concepts of class and gender as artefacts of the history of social thought and puts his finger on the current awareness of the subjective experiences of specific locations. He states that it is important:

> "… to focus on those moments or processes that are produced in the articulation of cultural differences. These 'in-between' spaces provide the terrain for elaborating strategies of selfhood- singular or communal- that initiate new signs of identity, and innovative sites of collaboration and contestation, in the act of defining the idea of society itself (Bhabha, 1994:1).

This implied that my interviews needed to be understood as instances of the dynamic, continually moving forward emergence of new subjectivities. I have captured moments of each woman's ebb of flowing life, an emergence of novel facets of their senses of the world, their relationships, of themselves and of existence. Their conversations with me may constitute experiences of Bhabha's "incommensurable cultural temporalities" from which "newness enters the world" (1994:227):

> "The social articulation of difference, from the minority perspective, is a complex, ongoing negotiation that seeks to authorise cultural hybridities that emerge in moments of historical transformation" (Bhabha, 1994:2) .

As an academic from migrant background myself, I am particularly receptive to hearing and speaking from the 'Third Space'; this is a *split space*, which may open up thick knowledges closer to the multi-vocality and multi-layered nature of lived experience. The women and I met in an identification that is affective and ethically based in solidarity with all human instances of suffering and a positioning in a world that is "mapped as a difficult world" (Bhabha, 1994:46). The identification is on the border, in between, in an act of memory recall

about the women's actions and reactions, at a distance (Bhabha, 2001:48). Along similar lines, in her search for a discursive space from which the subaltern could speak, Spivak (1987) states that to *speak is an act of conscious, strenuous retrieval*. Bhabha's concept of the *secular space as the space where people can speak about their differences*, such as spiritual devotion versus atheism, is an equally useful conceptual circumscription for my discussion (Bhabha, 2001:51).

Beyond modernity

Migrants are located at the borders forever and are to remain unarguably hybrid, which, however, presupposes the possibility of a *pure nationalism which transcends social constructedness*. Appiah notes that when it is not the tribe that is invested with new uses and meanings, it is religion:

> "Every human identity is constructed … invented histories, invented biologies, invented cultural affinities come with every identity; each is a kind of role that has to be scripted, structured by conventions of narrative to which the world never quite manages to conform" (Appiah, 2001:223-226).

In his analysis of *Afropop*, Neil Lazarus shows that the scrutinising of African popular music for its *purity* to its roots and the deploring of contamination by the use of Western instruments and technologies, serves to marginalise this music by giving it only ghettoized airplay. Premised on a monolithic European and Anglophone mainstream, it ignores the hybridity of all cultures as a consequence of the movements of peoples and the vagaries of history (Lazarus, 2001:233-250).

In a recent edition of *Signs* devoted to Development Cultures, Obioma Nnaemeka shows that the way forward is to operate from:

> "… a third space where the immediacy of lived experience gives form to theory, allows the simultaneous gesture of theorizing practice and practicing theory, and anticipates the mediation of policy, thereby disrupting … (both) the academy and activism as stable sites" (Nnaemeka, 2004:377).

She proposes a multi-polar feminist theory that is grounded in local and Indigenous ways of being and knowing as well accommodating global dialogues and exchanges. Françoise Lionnet, Oboma Nnaemaka, Susan Perry and Celeste Schenck, the editors of this issue of *Signs*, express in the introduction their "full support for the rich, textured, human face of development cultures worldwide" (*Signs*, 2004:292).

On the other hand, the availability of abundant writing about development cultures is not the same as allocating textual spaces expounding non-Western knowledges as equivalent, thick material to inform us about the human condition, destabilising our cherished assumptions. Neither has feminist scholarship provided insights about the subjective ways in which women experience migration, as Louise Yelin concludes at the end of an extensive literature search (Yelin, 2004). This is left to artistic expressions through literary or other genres, which, in turn, precisely describes the gap I wish to contribute to, as such understanding needs to inform practice and policy development.

World musicians put their music forward as international music, of relevance to the world now and to its 'mainstream', as an example of the future. This is an appropriation, an authoring of the experiences history has taken people through and applying their agency to it (Lazarus, 2001:248):

> … for what makes it world music is precisely its latent tendency to contribute to the dismantling of the subject of Western popular music, a subject whose identity rests squarely upon the political economy of empire ... the proposal is not that we listen to world music for what it can tell us about life over there', but rather, that we listen to it for what it can suggest to us about radically different ways of living over here, ways of living which are unimaginable under prevailing social conditions.

Nevertheless, hybridity is usually felt as puzzlement and as a painful, shameful sense of loss and authenticity by migrants. I have listened for how the women negotiate such complexities through their narratives and through their silences and how these issues mediate their sense of capacity to author their own lives.

Australia and its welfare state

As my key research interest concerns welfare state formations, the thesis' second research question asks how contact with publicly funded infrastructure influenced women's agency as self-determining subjects in rebuilding life in Australia. Thus, welfare state theory is the final pillar of my theoretical framework. Approximately half of the time the women and I spent together involved explorations of such themes.

Australian colonialism

Most of the migrant women in the study have grown up in countries which had – either – suffered the full material onslaught of colonialism - or - had had shades of experiences of colonialism, particularly in terms of the "soft" or virtual colonialism of Western culture through the neo-colonialism of globalising capitalism (see, for example, George Ritzer, 1996a). The complexity of the situation for migrant women, however, is that they come to a previously colonised (and only superficially de-colonised) nation (and, for Indigenous peoples, still colonised country) which has only ambivalently admitted the implications of its brutal past (apart from some groups or individuals inhabiting the more remote parts of Australia, such as the Northern Territory where there is time and space – if often not the intention - to reflect and understand the owners of the land). There is still debate about whether we, as citizens, need to stop and consider the issue of forcible conquest.

James Jupp amongst others, has documented that from the earliest era of the penal colony, settlers originated from many countries (Jupp, 1991). The multicultural backgrounds of early settlers are also subjected to the (Anglo-Celtic) Australian virtuosity for mass denial and amnesia. All these diverse lives were dominated by the hegemony of British culture from the beginning and their identities and the identity of their families were shaped by a variety of positive or painful experiences of racism and exclusion. *Reading Labels on Jam Tins* (Bunbury, 1993:101-129) offers narrative eyewitness accounts of hardships in settling the continent and includes a little known occasion in 1934 in Kalgoorlie and Dingbat Flats where Australian

men burnt and looted the shops and residences of Italians, Chinese and Slavic neighbours and co-workers at the mines. The fate of the Chinese gold mining settlers during and after the 1850s is better documented and recognised (Kennedy, 1982).

While Australian culture continues to elude articulation, at the same time, migrants experience the contradictory flavours of recent resurrections of xenophobic Anglo-Saxon sameness, what some may view as rather puerile and fantastic notions of *"mateship, fair go, egalitarianism"* and paltry official expressions of celebration of our colourfulness. While highly contested and conditional, at a certain point in Australian history, social stratification was flatter than in other countries of the world, and still today, amongst women, the degree of mutual support and altruistic, disinterested affection and loyalty encapsulated in the term *girlfriends* differs from the much stronger emphasis elsewhere on women seeing each other as competitors for men's attention. Germaine Greer and others have provided evidence that these cherished and unique Australian virtues actually derive from having been educated by the Indigenous owners of this land (Greer, 2003).

If the positive aspects of the life-world elude capture, how much more difficult would it be for migrants to gain affirmation from Australians that their experiences of racism and exclusion are real and not imaginary? A significant proportion of Australia's population denies current and historical racism and is indifferent to the direct and indirect human rights abuses by the Howard Government, not only with respect to Indigenous Australians, concentration camps for Asylum Seekers and helping to destroy Iraqi civilians on the basis of a demonstrated lie. The Howard Government was returned to office with a staggeringly increased majority (Manne, 2001; MacCallum, 2002; Brett, 2005).

The women who told me their stories speak of a time prior to these events, but the latter are overt manifestations of an unspoken aspect, a subterranean dynamic in the Australian life-world, which migrants feel but many settled Australians deny the reality of. The women have had to pitch themselves against this dark side, which reaches into their very identity as

has been elaborated by post-colonial theorists. Another source of perplexity for migrants is that Australians are actively pursuing their (cultural and economic) colonisation by the US as a perceived superior icon.

Australian civil society

The Australian life-world revolves around the fulcrum of economic survival and labour market participation, with leisure time also constructed by the economy in largely consumerist terms. This capitalist habitus (and hubris) also promotes an instrumental rationality above all others. Thus, spaces for non-instrumental or non-consumption based exchanges are shrinking in Australia; the street as a place where people meet to talk to each is left to cars and presumed 'dangerous' individuals or groups. Migrant women have to negotiate a hegemonic order when seeking employment, housing, education and learning to live in times and spaces dictated by the economy. Such divisions or organisation of the meanings of the Australian life-world and its daily and interpersonal encounters seem normal to Westerners, but can be profoundly at odds with the rhythms of life in other countries.

Habermas identified that there have been three key modes for making sense of the world, all involving discussion and interaction with others (cited in Sloan, 1996:50-53); the spaces available in a culture for the development, preservation and transformation of ideas, ethics, values, beliefs and the understanding of human experience are a key characteristic of a society. The women in the study all derived from societies that allocated much more time and space to social interaction around traditional forms of social organisation, communal life or aesthetic expression than is given in Australia, both in terms of space/place and time.

In the first instance, the prevalence of functional communicative rationality typical in Australia would impose an additional layer of struggle and suffering for women who undergo the experiences of Schutz' *Stranger*. Secondly, the absence of opportunities for collective meaning making would not only mean a significant loss of personal nourishment

and sustenance, but also a deprivation of the enjoyment of life. I am aware that I have presented this in a rather stereotypical form, but it is in order to point to a key dimension involved in the maintenance of personality integration which is also central in the recreation of the *meaningfulness* of life. This also points to the assistance migrant people need in order to achieve some quality in resettlement.

The Australian welfare state

Affluent capitalistic states have replaced kinship and community informal systems of care and support with and institutionalised, publicly funded and often bureaucratically organised infrastructure. Historical events, including the harshness of a penal colony, the cyclical depressions and mass-unemployment concomitant with laissez-faire capitalism, labour activism and the World Wars fuelled political processes over a century and a half of Australian white settlement, culminating in the welfare state. Located firmly within a free market economy's needs for labour, production, reproduction of the labour force and consumption of goods, the welfare state in its classic form was expressed by Asa Briggs during the Keynesian decades post World War II:

> ... a state in which organized power is deliberately used to modify the play of market forces in three directions (Briggs, 1969).

Governments – however reluctantly by those who ran them - accepted their responsibility to guarantee people a minimum income, to provide support for social contingencies and to develop optimal quality public services deemed the mark of civilised, democratic societies. Discourses of citizenship rights were universal on the basis of human rights and labourist legitimacy, but exclusive and particularistic for women and people of non-British stock and of colour. Francis Castles successfully argued that Gosta Esping-Anderson's three fold classification of welfare states did not accurately encompass Australia's model of the "*Wage Earner's Welfare State*" (Castles, 1985; Esping-Anderson, 1990). Empirical evidence over three decades showed Castles' hypothesis to be largely borne out as the provision of employment under secure legislated working conditions, did give Australians a respectable standard of

living comparably to the residual, liberal states such as the USA (Castles, 1996, 1998). As noted in the brief literature overview in Chapter One, this affluence was contingent upon apportioning the most miserable locations from which the huge productive powers of migrant and Aboriginal workers could be extracted. By the late ninety nineties, Francis Castles returned to England, having bitterly concluded that, after two decades of neo-liberal hegemony, the wage earners' welfare state was no more (Castles, 1998, 2004).

The women in the study came to Australia when most of the relatively adequate network of services provided by the state (such as education, health, transport, employment services) as well as by non-government organisations (migrant resource centres, local government family and community support services, neighbourhood houses) were functional. In 2005, the modified context of citizenship is indicated by the title of Adam Jamrozik's (2005) new edition of his text *Social Policy in the Post-Welfare State. Australian Society in the 21st Century*. The welfare state assumptions about citizenship rights and expectations, roles and obligations of governments, the private sector and the non-profit sector, were discursive and material features of this host society up to the end of the 1990s when the interviews were conducted.

Literature on the welfare state is the fourth pillar of the theoretical framework of this study and will inform a good deal of my analysing the data.

Conclusion

The theoretical framework is based on my feminist and cross-cultural interpretations of the life-world ideas of Anthony Giddens, Pierre Bourdieu and Alfred Schutz and theoretical constructs about subjectivity. I have attempted throughout to indicate the relevance of this material to my interlocutory engagement with thirty immigrant women during the late 1990s in Melbourne, Australia. Post-colonial literature will continue to be a rich source of illumination of the narratives which follow. The women came from the mid-1970s, during

periods where migrant and other support services were in place and often on a quasi-universal basis. The exploration of the impact of contact with the welfare state on the agency of migrant women will be discussed in terms of the principles and assumptions of citizenship and government in modern democracies, as well as according to professional research-based knowledge about the constitution of quality services.

This framework is intended to be a shifting scaffold, offering diverse vantage points in response to the particular tales I have been hearing. It, therefore, makes no claim to being exhaustive.