Chapter Five

Displacements and landings: Uncoupling of the life-world

In this chapter, the women relate the processes, often shocking, at times inscrutable, during which they were displaced from their familiar worlds. I present the women's narratives of their journey to Australia under sub-headings referring to events over which they had largely no control, such as war, changes of political regimes and absolute poverty. The women were, for the greater part, subjected to such events and their narratives are about how they chose to react and respond. I will attempt to unpack some of the multiplicities of meanings encompassed in what is referred to as *agency* (Trinh Min Ha, 1989), even if I have only been able to hear the broad brush strokes of these segments of the women's lives, often many years after they occurred. Hence, experiences are modified as memories through the multiple ways in which humans attempt to re-arrange them to soften the pain and – possibly – to enlarge those past events which helped them restore their sense of self and of control over their lives.

Why do women migrate?

War starts this section, which moves from the most compelling reason for migration to the least, forces women to leave their homes, sometimes on foot, fleeing with "*our two hands*" as the elderly South-Sudanese woman said. ***Changes in political regimes*** occurred in South Vietnam and Russia and they entailed an abrupt end of security for ordinary families and their capacity to subsist economically, despite having some of the highest professional

qualifications in the world. In the ensuing disorder and rule of criminality, human life is cheap and living becomes dangerous. Crushing ***poverty*** and the import of a phrase used by Nenita: "*being able to eat*", convinced some of the Filipinas to sacrifice their lives to ensure their parents were not destitute in old age, by naively marrying Australian men who appeared to be "*very good*". Avoiding a future of poverty for their children also motivated Vietnamese families to become refugees. The (presumed but highly displayed) ***attractions of the Western lifestyle*** in a country represented abroad as "*sunny Australia*", according to many, brought a minority of women who exercised their own agency by choosing to come and skilfully completing the manoeuvres required by Australian immigration procedures. The ***intersection of gender, personal tragedies and culture*** was a dynamic compelling some women to unwillingly migrate.

War

War in Ethiopia only impacted on Kiro's young life, when her 17 year-old brother's conscription ejected her from the warmth, comfort and security of her location at the top of Ethiopian society. The first disappointment in her life was failing to gain entry to university to do nursing, crushing her self-concept of being a good student. She stayed home for a year. She said matter-of-factly that her father then sent her to Kenya to protect her brother. There was a period of intense family anguish as the prospect of conscription loomed. Her mother had experienced the death of two sons in the past and Kenya's rampant lawlessness, particularly towards the powerless, was attested to by Kiro, Naima, Esther and other women from South-Sudan who are not included in the study but who I had come to know through my work and who had lived in Kenya as refugees. The possible hazards were assaults in public places for the theft of jewellery under the uninterested gaze of police, vandalism and random killings. My interview transcripts record the following:

O: [I said again that I did not understand] *What was the threat to you and your family?*

K: *Just that the army would take my brother. Didn't have anyone in Kenya, but my father sent us in there, but the lady was not happy … It was very bad, really, really bad. Because we were by ourselves …*

(I'm saying "really traumatic" in the background, I felt then and hear now that we connected on a deep emotional level and I was feeling the pain that showed on her face and in her voice).

K: *We were young and we never been by ourselves. It was really bad for my father and mother who were really worried. My father used to send us money, we stayed in a hotel for a week, because we had money and then we met some Ethiopian people. It was really, really bad for us because even the words we didn't understand what they say, but there were so many Ethiopians over there and they really helped us a lot. But it was a really bad time because we were innocent, we didn't know anything.*

My lack of information – and understanding - about how an affluent father could have to resort to such an insecure location for his children was obvious, but I felt constrained from probing because of her intense pain at the memory of these times. Some unskilful language, such as using the term *homeless* which connoted stigma and which she rejected, also blocked the flow of the narrative. I thus prioritised creating the interview as an authentic encounter between human beings rather than efficient means for collection of data. Trinh Min Ha (1998:53) interprets the interview as the French term '*entrevue*' - the seeing of one another and '*entretien*' - the mutual beholding of one another. My dialogues were quite consciously carried out as a moment of affective connection as the context of discussion. This accounts for a gap in the data about how she became dislocated, but perhaps allowed me a more important inkling of the agony of having no refuge.

Kiro's survival relied upon the African *I Am Because We Are* (Hord & Scott, 1995). She was able to continue being a young person with limited capacity for self-direction because of the continued operation of community life among those named as strangers in affluent market-based societies such as Australia:

> *Ah no, we have caregivers, it was almost like being homeless but we had people who were looking after us. They were helping us because we didn't know anything and they were helping other Ethiopians refugees. We rented a room from Muslims and they wanted me to cover up, it was hot weather and I didn't have any experience, I took off my shoes and she wasn't happy. She told us many bad things, and I didn't understand. I used to cry a lot, because I miss my family. I wanted to go back but I couldn't.*

Kiro lived in constant fear of being caught as an illegal and she dressed in the Kenyan way whenever needing to go outside. On the other hand, she unhesitatingly said that the hardest part of that time was hearing ghastly stories, such as the one about a man who had to travel for nine days in the desert:

> *"His voice was so sad when he told his story. He travelled nine days in the desert, to just get into Kenya, so that is really horrible, he used to blink … other people had very horrible experiences, that's the worst part - hearing all that … like if you are by yourself and they catch you they can do anything, rape you, they don't even look."*

The valuable insight for me was that Kiro's empathy for other people's pain seemed more harrowing to her than her own. Her participation in others' misery is another example of the operation of the communally-based African ontology, in which distance between strangers seems lacking in comparison to individualistically-based European cultures associated with the ideologies of the 'free' market. After two-and-a-half years, she was able to be sponsored to Australia by her husband's brother. Having to separate from her brother then constituted another painful dilemma and she resisted coming to Australia for some time, being finally convinced that this was the only way of bringing him to a safe country eventually.

Her response to these tragic events has been essentially a spiritually-based one; she thought that it is from her experiences during this period that she derived the meaning of life. She said that they got "*used to it*". Her brother used to work as a rickshaw driver and her parents wrote and sent food every week. She noted that so many people get damaged by hardships, such as prostitution or contracting HIV/AIDS or when there is absolutely no food. Kiro used this gruelling adversity to deepen her sense of the mystery and sacredness of life. She was the only woman in the study who was homeless on her own, without any supporting family.

The other African women's dislocations were mitigated by being in the company of several or numerous close family members, as will be indicated in the following stories of the Eritrean and South Sudanese women.

Naima, whose mother was a guerrilla soldier, said that they were "*on the run*" a lot of the time after finishing school. The routine of school provided a safe structuring of time and space and, as a child, she was sheltered by her grandfather and family. Forced to leave Sudan with two uncles, she experienced the grief of leaving her grandfather, who had filled the role of a father. They spent three or four years moving between Kenya and Egypt, often hiding because of their illegal status. Having lived as a stranger for all her life, these years intensified the experience of the stranger acrobatically attempting to adjust to different life-worlds, disrupted again and again. As this period coincided with her transition to adulthood with the typical search for identity, she was particularly emotionally traumatised. As Naima spoke about this period, the memories evoked great pain and I was constrained from probing further. Like Kiro, Naima infused the events with spiritual meaning and named and recreated these realities as sources of her indomitable sense of identity and ability to communicate with people across differences.

The other four women from the Horn of Africa moved about in larger family and clan groups. South-Sudanese Esther and her extended family, taking in seven generations, left their village when the war became "*irresistible*". Her tone of voice lowered and became almost inaudible as she spoke of the three month walk to Ethiopia with a hundred clan members, usually undertaken at night, stopping to spare the young and elderly the forty degree heat of the day. This period was very difficult because they had to carry everything, such as bedding and other necessities for living. Esther's dislocation began in 1988 and lasted seven years. Because she had finished high school in Ethiopia in English, she worked as an interpreter with the United Nations High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR). During her young adulthood she continued exercising her resilience and leadership skills, finding fulfilment in being able to rise to the needs for the survival of the clan as they were created

by changing circumstances. Engaged in 1988, Esther's fiance Michael returned to Melbourne. He supported the family financially and in 1993 Esther, a younger sister and brother-in-law crossed the border into Kenya at night and on foot. This was again a very dangerous journey; they lived in a refugee camp, where the hardship was alleviated by the men taking responsibility for chores such as queuing daily for hours for water. They then rented an apartment in Nairobi for two-and-a-half years, with Michael's support sent from Australia. Esther accepted the hardship, because the war was beyond their control; she often felt like a victim and, in 1990, she reflected on her life and saw that God had been protecting her from a great deal of strife. She then stopped feeling a victim.

The elderly Nia became displaced from 1986, after the death of her husband of thirty years and she was also very active in ameliorating the conditions of her family in refugee camps:

> (her voice is sounding sadder) *Here I can go to the doctors whenever I want but that's not just that. The things I used to do over there are not possible anymore. I've always been the sort of person who wanted to do things, to be active, even in the refugee camp I had my little coffee shop and a garden with all sorts of vegetables and fruit and I made a little bit of money to provide for my family.*

There were additional personal tragedies; Nia was in charge of three of her grandchildren, one of whom perished in a fire accidentally lit and another suffered severe burns along the length of his body. UNHCR staff made a special effort to bring her to Australia. Nia thinks that she will never be happy again; her eyes have a ongoing look of anguish and pain.

During her early adulthood, Eritrean Fatima partially completed a degree in English in Syria, where she lived as a refugee. She played a central role in the political struggle for liberation and also worked as a volunteer at UNHCR camps, using her skills as an educated person and continuing her identity and role of belonging to an elite family. She and various members of her family lived in a number of refugee camps for more than a decade, as her husband held a senior position in the Cabinet of the Eritrean Liberation Front (ELF):

> *The difficulty started when the war started and you hear that entire villages were killed or raped. For seven years, the hardest part was not knowing what was happening to my family. My mothers and my brothers were with me. My father died when I was young. My bigger brother was looking after the whole family.*

The shocking twist of fate for the families who fought for the liberation of Eritrea from Ethiopia was that, when independence came in 1989, they returned home, only to find that the larger faction, which their movement had joined in forming government, began a systematic reign of oppression and killings. Fatima's voice lowered and took on the quality of a whimper as she spoke about being jailed twice; her voice was trailing off and expressed a lot of suffering.

> F: *There were many, many shocks … Everyone was happy when independence came and so they went back home. That's why we all wanted to come to a country like this (Australia). I was living in hiding in Eritrea … (my husband) had a very hard time, put them far away in the desert and locked them up.*

[I told her about my grandfather being locked up in a cupboard. The interview was halting, with lots of silences.]

> O: *Was there a lot of fear?*

> F: *Always, until you came here. It was the policy of the president to find certain people. I was active and people came to me even if they don't believe in what I say, they came to me... I was saying "why are you fighting? We should learn from the Europeans, not to fight. We are like the fingers on a hand, we are different but we don't have to fight". So I was always talking about that, against fighting … From 1975, people are getting arrested. Fear was for everybody. Fear was because you were opposing the war. We were the ELF. They did not tell us that the PLF is bad. They always argued we should join with them. So it was a shock to us. It was allies. They make a meeting to make unity and they conquered all the villages. They gave seats to all the villages and the next day we heard that they started killing everybody. It was such a shock ... When I was a cadre I talked to the ruler. He said to do democracy. They took him at night and killed him. When we sat down with the boys and they said "where is he?"* [moaning sound] *whenever there was a meeting, then they would kill people.*

Only Zeinab did not live in a refugee camp, saying that she and her peers felt Sudan was their country. These privileged young people heard of war in Eritrea and participated in supporting their people, but the war was more remote for her and her friends. Zeinab was able to have a traditional wedding, with days of celebrations, rituals, giving of gold and expenditure on guests. With an affluent husband in the ELF Cabinet who had postings in European and Middle Eastern capitals, and a wealthy father employed by a multinational company, she was able to lead an affluent life, albeit with huge difficulties. Apart from the frequent relocations and enrolment in different universities, she had experienced female circumcision and had a great deal of pain during pregnancy in the middle of the university semesters. She bore two children and over five or six years obtained a degree in Management by doggedly pursuing her goal in universities in Khartoum, Cairo, Damascus and Khartoum again. She fought with her husband repeatedly, as she needed to live away from him for extended periods, reminding him of his original promise to allow her freedom to study:

O: *I get the impression that you were very independent the whole time?*

Z: *Most of my life.*

O: *Did you make your own decisions?*

Z: *Yes, I was strong. Even if he disagreed with me, I was always dominant. My decision had to go.*

O: *How did you make your decisions?*

Z: *Usually I know I am right. I feel I am mature. I feel like I am doing the right thing. I can't do something which hurts me. Maybe it wouldn't be good for the other side, like my husband, my family, who doesn't like to be alone. Still I have to have my own benefit. Not only my own benefit, but it will be of benefit to the other family ...*

Zeinab is another variant of the women exercising enormous resilience but from a privileged positioning; she came to Melbourne through the sponsorship of her mother. Her husband had disappeared for a few months, captured by the EPLF, but a year later she joined him on her first visit back to Sudan.

Except for Nia, the women from the Horn of Africa derived from the upper echelons of their societies, distinguished by their fathers' education and professional status and their family wealth and power. Zeinab's father worked for a German multinational company in the Middle East, Kiro's father had daily contact with Geneva and Fatima's father's material and symbolic wealth have been described. Esther's father, while less materially affluent than the Eritrean representatives, was a leader of a large clan and had a professional position, and Naima's father and other male and female elders had enormous symbolic capital as chiefs of a warrior tribe. Significantly, the women had affirming relationships with their fathers who promoted their access to tertiary education. This was atypical of their countries' gender-based differences in educational participation, as indicated in Table 1. Kiro's father had confidence in the competence of his daughter, as he sent her to protect her brother who was only one year younger. Fatima and Zeinab had politically and materially powerful husbands as well as brothers who protected them during their time as refugees. Esther also had the protection of male relatives and an income from her fiancé, a political leader living in an affluent and safe country, clearly a great asset for people who are fleeing threats to life. Nia became a refugee when the protection given by her husband ended with his death; she then lived in the family clan with her now adult children. Thus, the gender relations exemplified by the women in this study were marked by collaboration, affirmation and mutual support; women participated as agents in the struggle for survival and in the wars of liberation or resistance. The men in their close entourage were a vital source of protection. I found that Kiro reported the greatest degree of trauma experienced during her years of homelessness and she was the only one of this group to be unaccompanied by a strong(er) male. She said that her life significantly improved when she met her husband in a refugee camp and she

was finally able to finally escape danger by migrating to Australia through the sponsorship of another protecting male, her brother-in-law.

The women from the Horn of Africa continued to live within the material, personal, emotional and spiritual wealth embodied in their extended families and, in Kiro's case, the reciprocity between fellow Ethiopian community members. The dislocations did not involve a questioning of their basic subjectivity. Anthony Giddens (1991) writes about personality integration being dependent on shared social definitions of what is normal and natural human and material reality. It is this which constitutes a person's *ontological security* and which is threatened when a person is plunged into a social context with divergent assumptions about what is normal and of value. The women's sense of themselves as members of human society and who they are within these intimate webs, was not questioned during this period. The pre-war familiar routines of time, work and the circumstances of encountering others in situations of co-presence (Giddens, 1991) were disrupted, but they were not taken out of their life-world's of stock of knowledge. Moreover, their internalised *habitus,* with the meanings of the vertical and horizontal connections with their people and culture and those who went before them, was not fundamentally ruptured or de-legitimised (Sloan, 1996:7). The geographical land to which they belonged was also never far away (Schutz, 1972); hence, they were able to exercise agency by relying on the *predispositions* acquired in their youth. Their privileged levels of education and contact with modern nations gave them a consciousness with a wider realm of possibilities (cf. Heiddeger's concept of *Dasein*, 1978) than their more numerous compatriots and, they were therefore able to exercise great ingenuity in their battle for survival.

These accounts of dislocation can also be seen as examples of the development or further enhancement of *hybrid identities*. In particular Kiro and Zeinab, who had frequent contact with European modernity throughout their youth, *imbibed* additional layers of cultural diversity. Zeinab studied in Middle Eastern universities (in Alexandria and Syria) as well as in Karthoum and spent several months in London and Rome on separate occasions with her

husband prior to migrating. The English proficiencies of Fatima, Zeinab, Naima and Esther constituted in themselves some imbrication of modernity, as is evidenced by Zeinab, who worked for the British Embassy in Khartoum prior to migrating and whose unusual *individualistic agency* was exercised even against the expectations of her parents-in-law. Naima's accounts of Schutz' *stranger* experiences as she and her male cousins were on the run in different African countries, illuminate how a woman's creation and recreation of her identity, through experiences of foreign knowledges and ways of being, are assisted by the integrating capacities inhering a spiritual source of meaning. Kiro's and Esther's final reflections about the spiritual import of their suffering reflects the same *meaning making* by drawing on knowledge schemata imbibed during the socialisation of their consciousness as a world of possibilities, rather than a restrained set of obligations only.

Only one Lebanese woman, Wafa, came to Australia as a refugee during the Lebanese war in the early eighties. Beginning with the first air raids on Beirut, she and her husband were periodically homeless. She gave birth to two children in the context of daily bombings. After four years of turbulence and constant fear, they - very reluctantly - accepted a relative's invitation to come as refugees to Melbourne:

> O: *How did you feel about leaving Lebanon?*
>
> W: *The first time it was very comforting (her voice was low and slow, she sighs) Oh yes, a big relief, because we had a very big problem living in the war and feeling unsafe. When they had the car bombs all the time, when my husband went to work, and he was due back at 2.30, you might hear on the radio that there was a car bomb somewhere and you never know if he would be the one. Everybody would feel the same way ...*

Wafa's class and educational privilege was noted in the previous chapter. Her cultural and material capital was reflected by having relatives who lived in affluent European countries such as France, in which she spent time visiting a cousin to obtain some respite from the war. This experience of safety helped her to decide in favour of making the permanent move of migration. As already discussed, Lebanese culture has been traversed by European and

Ottoman colonialism and, augmented by her adherence to the Maronite Christian faith, Wafa's world view was *modern* and *hybrid*.

One Filipina only came to Australia to flee imminent jailing by the Marcos dictatorship; Teresa's and her family's political engagement became dangerous at the time the children started primary school and they could inadvertently disclose at any time their parents' activities. As a member of the elite strata of Filipino society, Teresa came to Australia reluctantly, but with a sense of buoyancy and bravura. Migration encapsulated - in a sense - a badge of honour, testifying to the authenticity of one's strength and capacity to challenge an oppressive government. She and her husband and children spoke fluent English, she was a diplomat's daughter and a teacher of Spanish. Her husband was a lawyer in international law and all of her family members were affluent in the Philippines and in Australia. Her identity was quite modern, having spent some years as a child in a European country where her mother was an Ambassador and her knowledge system was, therefore, successfully *hybrid*. She did not imagine the shift could be problematic.

Accounts by Vietnamese Australians of the horrors of war outline the contexts in which many of the women in the study grew up. Young men who were to be drafted into the army tried to evade through any means available and the nation hated war. Young people wrote poems and stuck posters on the walls, lamenting the cruelty of war and its creators and expressing a passionate wish for peace (Hawthorne, 1983:29-30). As I was not willing to continue evoking these horrors from my conversation partners, it may suffice to quote from Hawthorne to offer some of the sense the context of war must have created in the women I talked to. A resident of a town close to Saigon that had not experienced war until the Tet offensive of 1968 (Hawthorne, 1982:33-34), describes the horror after the first experience of bombings:

> '... when the sound of gunfire slackened a little, we opened the back door and called to our neighbours, and all of us ran at the same time. The guns followed us and people were shot down but it didn't deter others from running out … We ran blindly through the

> middle of gunfire, and trampled one another... and if one in front tripped or was shot dead, the one behind ran over the corpse … we saw many communist guerrillas – most of them still very young, perhaps children – digging their own fox holes ... and looked at us with pale bewildered eyes … I saw with my own eyes the body of a young mother lying there ... and on top of her, her dead child, its mouth still closed firmly around the mother's nipple … Further away was an arm belonging to somebody, spattered with blood and covered by hordes of flies and blow flies … The stench of rotting flesh permeated the city ...'

A 16 year old Vietnamese boy (cited in Hawthorne, 1982:53-4) graphically conveys the nihilism accompanying war:

> *'My friends and I, all with the innocent faces of youth, run along to see those bodies … One body has a face with the eyes open, as if the soldier still felt hatred for the living. Many bodies are still bent, the teeth gripping into the clothes, hurt still etched on their faces. The arms are curved as if to try to hold on to life … later I come to hate war. I see generations growing up, and dying, with no chance for pleasure in their lives. I see how war makes people indifferent, so that they do not behave like human beings. I see that the war has made my life insignificant, and taken away the future. I start to hate war, and I hate it, and I hate those idiot people who fight for an ideology. Why can't they fight for something better? ... Everyday I go to school, with the sole aim of getting a certificate, so I can deceive myself that I have some kind of future. My parents, seeing us grow up, have a great fear that we're growing up to be slaughtered. But they know they cannot do anything, so they leave it to God.'*

Change of political regimes

Communism in Vietnam ushered in the confiscations of private property, family homes, imprisonment of people employed by the previous government and the rewriting of history. Imprisonment and torture in re-education camps, the denial of the ability to earn a living particularly for the educated and those with religious faith, denial of access to basics such as education, grinding poverty, and the cultural re-writing were particularly abhorrent for many in the South.

As already indicated, the Vietnamese were people who had experienced many wars over the centuries and were generally not predisposed to leave their country which they greatly loved (Hawthorne 1982). Hawthorne provides several harrowing accounts of the deterioration of

civil life and of the life in re-education camps. Re-education camps consisted of writing all the details of one's life story and all those one knew, over and over for years so any inconsistencies could be detected, hours of indoctrination, daily meetings of confession of thoughts, work clearing the jungle infested with leeches and millipedes with tools fashioned from scraps of metal, malnutrition, eating rats, growing vegetables fertilised with their own wastes, and common diseases of dysentery, malaria. One of Hawthorne's interviewees (1982:170) concludes:

> 'But despite all the worries about food, most people did not worry chiefly about this. They would get used to it eventually. The communists try to say that the lack of food is the main reason why people are leaving Vietnam, but this is wrong. We are not economic refugees! The reasoning of the communists is an insult! We escaped because of a lack of freedom. We had never wanted a luxurious life ... At 4.30 the loudspeakers were turned on full blast … if you stayed in the house, you would have to undergo criticism and self criticism for not having participated in the exercises. For every block there were at least 10 public loudspeakers ...'

The new society was built on suspicion. Wives and children were told it was their duty to spy on their families and mistrust was engendered by men going to study sessions suspected of being members of the secret police. Although there was profound economic and political disruption, Vietnamese citizens were not dislocated from their fellow citizens. Indeed, my conversational partners' reports of the strength of resolve they derived from daily gatherings of neighbours showed that community solidarity usually strengthened in the face of an oppressive new order. The processes of leaving the Vietnamese life-world occurred over a couple of decades for some. This began with the decision to escape, a goal adopted with the unanimous support of the surrounding family and neighbours, according to Sen, Anh, Wai Ling and Mai Ho.

For Anh, who as a recently graduated dentist had not worked for the previous regime, the period of dislocation lasted 15 years. As the only income earner with her position of Chief Resident in a Saigon hospital, she could become the basis for the escape of her nine siblings, who had, in various ways, been collaborators with the US-based regime and had spent time

in re-education camps. Costs included not only buying boats and paying for passages into other countries, but also bribes to get family members out of jail, as they were caught on several occasions and for several reasons. When the last one of her siblings was out of Vietnam, Anh was able to be sponsored to Australia herself. Although the fifteen years were filled with ongoing anxiety, Anh excelled in exercising the Vietnamese values of filial piety, self sacrifice, duty and extreme hard work. She was a very powerful agent during this time and was affirmed universally to be such. She provided a free essential public service during business hours and had a private practice in the evenings, yet treated those without means for free, thus sustaining her identity as a person who loves the poor. She utilised her connections outside of Vietnam to procure equipment and medicines in short supply, as well as being the backbone of her large family's escape to perceived freedom. These years were very fulfilling, both personally and professionally.

Wai Ling's family made the decisions about her career and about who would be her husband and - it seems - assigned her the role of pioneer to lead the family out of Vietnam. She escaped five times by boat, taking her two children and a younger sister. The boats were attacked by pirates and she was sent back to jail four times, only to attempt again until she was successful. Again, discomfort about the trauma of this period precluded me from probing for more information. Fuelling her determination were the nightly gatherings of all the neighbours and '*everybody agreeing*' that this was the only way to give their children a future.

The grandmother Sen's dream for the future when she was a girl was that "*all of my family are alive*". Again, borrowing from Hawthorne's work (1982:20), Ngoc-Dien's account corresponds to Sen's childhood:

> *"I was born on a dark night in 1949 and my mother had to carry me within a few months to run away from the war. Life at that time was full of misery. Everybody was on the alert, ready at any moment to run at the news that the French troops were about to sweep through. At a word, all the people hastened to small boats, rowing furiously into the swamps to hide. These swamps were ridden with snakes and mosquitoes … once, when we returned, our hamlet was no longer there.*

> *Instead, in front of us, were heaps of smouldering rubble. It was as if an apocalypse had come. All the people were desolate and hopeless. Many more began to join the Viet Minh movement to fight against the French."*

The fall of Saigon brought financial hardship and the intolerable confiscation of the small businesses Sen had built up. Interestingly, all the women spoke of themselves as the owners and operators of businesses and of carrying out great challenges, rather than referring to joint undertakings with husbands. The years under communism were mitigated by her happy marriage and family life; she worked to send her children abroad, staying behind and financing their escapes by boat. The first left in 1976 and the last in 1990. Sen did not elaborate on the years of struggle and waiting for news, except to say that only her prayers brought her children safety. She spoke very matter-of-factly and briefly of her own efforts. In a self-effacing way and in tune with the Confucian assumptions about a person's proper place in life, she was not able to say whether she had contributed anything good to her children, but she tried. She also said that the neighbours and community kept her going, as they would gather every night and agreed to sacrifice for their children.

Mai Ho eloped with the son of the wealthiest local family and joined him on the two or three failed boat escapes to Australia. Upon returning home after bribing their way out of jail, her family supported her actions. This almost theatrical shift out of the family home seemed to represent a glamorous and utterly romantic beginning to married life. Indeed, at the time of interview when both were in their late thirties, their fashionable and unconventional dress style suggested that youthful adventurousness may have been part of their identity.

Immense disruption of life and of people's life-worlds occurs by a change of political regime - ultimately linked to global geo-politics - as was the case with all of the countries in the study and the mass migrations of the twentieth century, particularly after 1945. The four Vietnamese women discussed above rejected the conditions imposed upon them and consciously pitted themselves against the apparently inescapable objectivity of the might of the new government. They developed projects and adopted strategies to – almost

unperturbed by circumstances and repeated failure - bring into reality peaceful and prosperous conditions for their families and they sacrificed their individual safety and ease with no evidence of demurring. Their narratives illustrate a similar pattern as with the African group of women, of being able to exercise enormous agency in pursuit of their shared family goals. Only Anh and Wai Ling had family backgrounds of elite material and symbolic privilege, while Sen and Mai Ho came from poor families. Nevertheless, their Confucian *habitus* and *predispositions* to rigorous self-discipline, sacrifice and endurance of hardship for the benefit of their family were the grounding for their startlingly tenacious agency. While the previous chapter noted the disempowered location of women in traditional Vietnamese society, there was no evidence given that their location in a rigid, hierarchical social system impeded these women's admirable human resilience. The 'outside' obedience and submissiveness attached to gender in this culture – both in horizontal and vertical relationships - were consistent with 'inner-resilient' personalities and subjectivities imbued with an inner consciousness of what is possible, which seems, indeed, quite vast.

Chinese and Japanese psychology offer useful schemata for understanding the resilience shown here. These women may exemplify the operation of a '*polished heart-kororo*' (Lebra, 1992; Cheung *et al*., 1996), where a stable personality learns to accept things as they are, is sensitive to the needs of others, shuns the privileging of her own desires and learns as a child to independently carry out the obligations incumbent upon members of society. The history of Vietnam, its traditions, kinship systems, property rights and change of political regime intersected with the Vietnamese discourses of gender (Kandiyoti, 1999:232), culminating in such expressions of intense effort and agency in successfully pursuing life's ambitious projects. The narratives also illustrate that sexual interdependence is not necessarily the site of oppression (Anzaldua, 1991:170) and Maivan Clech Lam's (1994:879) proposition that a belief in the existence of independence is "an exercise in magical thinking".

These Vietnamese women did not give much evidence of having hybrid identities or of deriving from hybrid knowledge systems. Although some had had experience of some of the

material benefits of modernity and possibly the greater flexibility afforded to gender roles and obligations attached to women's bodies, this knowledge was, in my estimation, fairly superficial. The women's stories provide much more robust evidence that they acted on the basis of their deep integration of Vietnamese ways of being, of enacting gender, membership of society and their stock of knowledge about how time should be spent and what is worth pursuing in life. The other two Vietnamese women came to Australia under different circumstances which will be discussed in other sections.

The collapse of the Soviet Union occurred extremely rapidly. Anastasia's story illustrates the rather bizarre process. It was only at university where she studied and later taught nuclear physics that she heard for the first time the proposition that Lenin might not have been a good man and that Soviet Russia had a very gruesome past. Stalin was known only as a great leader "*who had made some mistakes*". This generation grew up believing that they were very lucky to be in Russia. She said that the past was not mentioned, even in the intimacy of the family, except at the time of national grief about Stalin's death, when Anastasia's grandmother made one enigmatic comment: "*one less mouth to feed*".

> *"All of a sudden, people realised they were not told the truth for a long time and people lost trust in everything and you got the feeling that this country is really bad and if you go outside, the other countries are perfect. This was the feeling conveyed by all the media, where there was not a single article or item critical of America. Everything was perfect in America and in Europe and it was only Russia that was bad. This was Russian media, which previously told the opposite message. Now Russians were told that even the poor of Europe live better than any Russian. It started very quickly, like a flood, when Gorbachev came and perestroika started …*
>
> *This makes you lose faith in your own country. In Australia everyone says how lucky they are to be Australians. Everyone says this. In Russia very few people think like that about their country now. Four years ago, I went back to Russia and told a friend I wanted to come back and she said, "don't! You are so lucky to have escaped; you don't know what problems we have here" … It's like they took away your very homeland ...* [teary, low voice choking tears] *It's like, it's like they did it on purpose. They spoiled everything ... People don't like their own country and it's not true, absolutely not true."*

Karina who had described a childhood of great hardship as a member of an ethically committed, intellectual family, became a very senior computer analyst. Team leader in a research institute, her work consisted of developing data bases for processing data from the fields of geology, metallurgy, mining, architecture, sanitation, land surveying and so on, on a needs basis. Her husband also was a senior computer analyst. Karina continued her story with incisive details:

K: *We did not know about gulags until 1985 when articles started appearing, and books and people published their memories. It was like the sky had fallen on top of our heads. People were walking around with a look of loss and dismay. People were reading every single minute, at a tram stop, exchanged articles and talked about them. It was a colossal intellectual upheaval. Everyone was in total horror. We had lived all our lives in Russia and did not know the full extent of gulags that we knew existed somewhere in the past, but of no great proportions. We were taught that the country always lived in the right way and nobody could imagine that there had been so many horrors, so many crimes, so many people were destroyed! We had studied history but we only heard about the heroism of the working class, nothing of what happened in the 1910s. The workers killed the tsar and Lenin started a new, light filled life. Lenin started building an enlightened future for all humanity. What was behind those words we did not understand or find out about for many, many years. When we became students we started thinking what is an enlightened future? And then we asked: what is the value of this future? And information started appearing and we started learning about the cost of human lives. But it was only in the eighties that we started hearing statistics. People were in shock. Nobody could imagine what happened in the KGB, all government activities were secret, there was no social welfare at all.*

O: *Did you think the West was bad?*

K: *We didn't know much about the West. All of a sudden everyone started buying anything imported. They started making things badly in Russia.*

After a few years, similarly described by Anastasia and Larissa, Karina decided that events pushed towards the need to leave the country:

O: *What impression did all that have on you and your circle of friends?*

K: *Well we saw that the destruction of Russia was underway. We were going to die under the wheels of destruction.*

O: *It all happened over a ten year period?*

K: Yes.

O: So what did you conclude about all this?

K: After perestroika, when the age pension stopped, if people did not have children to support them, many suicided. People who had worked all their lives, were very successful in contributing a lot to their country, starved. A lot of ex-soldiers came to my flat and children asking for food. The non-educated became very wealthy and were able to steal from their country and send it abroad... My brother-in-law was killed in the army at the age of 18 during military service, and they wouldn't let us see the body. My friends died at 40. Young people suicided after graduating because there was no food and no jobs. When perestroika started, doctors and teachers started taking bribes. In 1994, public transport became expensive and old people could not use it because they weren't able to pay. Then if they did use it, because they looked poor and couldn't wash, bus and tram drivers wouldn't pick them up. People's values were those of intelligent people and those were the ones who got killed … People with fabulous values and qualities and skills stayed and they are totally oppressed.

O: What exposure did ordinary people like you have to criminal activity?

K: Before we left Russia, about 8 or 9 people were killed in one year in our apartment block … criminals from outside ...

O: What made you decide to leave?

K: Nothing specific, just read an ad in the newspaper that you can immigrate to NZ and I rang and they sent me an application form. It was 1995, I was 40.

O: You lost faith in Russia?

K: No, I never lost faith in Russia. It is a great country and will surmount everything.

Karina's decision to migrate was a continuation of her agency as a Russian intellectual; she is the only one to express outrage about the social injustice which emerged for the elderly, the young and other vulnerable groups. Antonina, in contrast, was preoccupied with her personal circumstances in seeking a route out of teaching in a rural village. During her frequent trips to England, where her older sister was living, she met a British academic of Russian language and literature. Over two or three years, they decided to get married and she moved to England.

Larissa's response to the collapse of her society was in tune with her dual dedication to musicianship and to the meticulous care of her husband and three children. She did not refer to the broader issues of perestroika, but rather focussed on the impacts on her husband. As his salary, as an academic in the science field, dwindled and at times vanished, he used the building skills he had developed as a hobby to construct *dachas* (holiday homes) for the wealthy. "*Because he built as an intelligent man*", he was in such demand that his working day was 18 hours seven days a week. Life for the family continued as normal with serious educational and musical pursuits. Out of anguish at his furious pace of work, however, Larissa assessed that he could not and should not maintain such an oppressive lifestyle and spent three years talking to him about migrating. She continued her '*directorship*' of her family, monitoring everyone's wellbeing with professional adroitness and motherly care.

Zina and Varvara lived in Estonia and Latvia and experienced the at first subtle, then direct discrimination and threats engendered by the nationalist awakenings in those countries previously occupied by the USSR. In the late eighties, there were more frequent incidents of violence and when her three-year old was assaulted on the street, Varvara and her husband decided to leave. Russians returning from these Baltic states often had nowhere to settle, as a permit was required to live in major Russian cities. Both couples were young and very qualified computer analysts. They both stressed the dangers that surrounded them, with some embellishments aimed at uninformed Australian residents, reputed for their naivety amongst ex-Soviet expatriate community. An example of such inconsistencies was Zina's description of her husband needing to hide in his parents' apartment upon fleeing from Latvia, although he had grown up and studied in Moscow. Such strategic framing of information is doubtless an extension of the stock of knowledge required for survival in the Soviet Union. Similarly, Zina exercised her competence in manoeuvring Soviet systems of Byzantine complexity by succeeding in obtaining a visa to Australia under the Jewish resettlement program, drawing on a remote Jewish relative, even though she does not identify as being Jewish.

All of the Russian women and their husbands were active at the highest ranks of their professions. I know that the parents of Larissa, Varvara, Zina and Antonina were materially affluent and had access to certain benefits open only to those trusted by decision-makers in the Communist Party, such as overseas travel and money to buy relatively large apartments. They were brought up in caring families and had good relationships with their husbands. The *agency* that they demonstrated in responding to the collapse of their political regime can be seen as illustrating Ricoeur's (1967:215) notion of self-consciousness as constituted primarily by "he (sic) who says I will". He elaborates that there are three dimensions to the capacity to will: decision making is constituted by issues of "needs", "motives" and "values". The Russian women were able to analyse the needs of their families in the unfolding national drama and the implications for their maintenance of their prized lifestyles. Willing also involves "moving my body" (Ricoeur, 1967:215) referring to "skills, emotions and habits". The women's narratives demonstrated their successful adaptation to the Soviet social context or habitus of self-discipline and prudence, astuteness in assessing situations in terms of possible benefits and dangers, endurance of hardship and a predisposition to be equally active as men in the public sphere in pursuit of professional achievement. Women also had the responsibility to participate in the public sphere in order to obtain goods and services for their families. The final realm of Ricoeur's (1967) concept of the voluntary is "I consent", which refers to a person's character and to accepting what one cannot control, which here may point to the suppressed collective memory of the dangers of challenging the Soviet order. The women's various responses reflect their individuality as musicians, intellectuals, pragmatic appreciators of material comforts or searchers for a soul mate.

Varvara's dislocation seemed to involve a smooth transition, taking up the opportunity available only to the elite of having several thousands of dollars to not only pay for fares but also to have cash on arrival. She was reluctant to elaborate. Zina and Varvara were pushed out of the Baltic states, but they identified an opportunity in line with their lifelong prizing of Western lifestyles of material comforts and democratic freedoms. Antonina had had long

standing contacts with countries outside the communist block. She was in search of a partner and serendipitously met a British scholar of Russian. Larissa and Karina decided to come to Australia out of their continued enactment as erudite and cultured women, assessing the costs of remaining to be a greater threat to the family's wellbeing than the pain of leaving the homeland they loved. These Russian women also illustrate that their enactment of gender is akin to the concept of '*womanish*' articulated by Gloria Anzaldua (1990:370), eco-feminists and black feminists (Mies & Shiva 1993; Sizoo, 1997). *Womanish* encapsulates generosity, boundless love for one's family and culture, and strength. The narratives of only half of the Russian women (Karina, Anastasia and Larissa) included expressions of deep concern about the wellbeing of Russia and Russians. Soviet society and culture was thoroughly modern, but the existence of the Iron Curtain and the diametrically opposite assumptions underpinning the collectivism of communism ensured that the women's identities were of limited *hybridity*.

Poverty

Absolute poverty is the Filipino life-world's constant backdrop. The preponderance of overseas workers, documented briefly in the previous chapter, provided daily material proof to the families left behind about the impossibility of a life free from crippling poverty in the Philippines. This country's imaginary, however, is also infused by consumerist discourses and visions of affluence promulgated by the many multinational and North American enterprises which provide a chief source of employment for the poor majority. The place of women in this international division of labour was covered by the evidence presented by a range of authors and by some of the testimony of my conversational partners in Chapter Four.

Nenita's father had to work in the Middle East, an extreme measure which suggests severe poverty. She glossed over this issue:

O: *How did you feel about coming to Australia?*

N: *Excited* [laughs], *because we heard that in Australia it's good, there is a nice and comfortable life ... And then my husband was here. We were boyfriends before and he said I will come to get you and so I was excited.*

O: *Is he happy in Australia?*

N: *Yes, he never goes home, he says Philippines never gave me a job. He says he has a nice life here, he can drive his car. In Philippines only the bosses can have cars".*

Melba's father's murder by a political gang gave her the responsibility of caring for her younger siblings. With little social and no material capital, she sought employment in US army bases. Linda and Teresa said that it was commonly known that these were sites for sexual job roles, as distinct from the national naivety about the parlous circumstances awaiting many mail-order brides. Melba saw work as a domestic as a better option than what she called back-burning work in paddy fields. The dislocation from her family and community began then and – unusually - she did not return to the village more than once, suggesting the possibility of feeling uncomfortable back home. Melba was very guarded and evasive about this part of her life and I – reasonably - did not probe. However, as she reached the end of her twenties, she seemed to become quite desperate. She met an Australian tourist briefly and wrote to him that she was carrying his child; the man was middle-aged and seemed to welcome the prospect of having a child. She failed the medical examination and needed to undergo treatment at an Australian clinic, paid by him, prior to being granted entry as a spouse. I felt it would be an abuse of my power to ask her what her medical condition was.

Thus, for Melba, the death of her father and her leaving of the village began a long, torturous period of grasping for a secure future. Once she obtained interest from a prospective husband, the process again was agonisingly suspenseful and humiliating. She is a clear example of the helplessness of uneducated women in carving out a life in the context of commodifying discourses about the bodies of Filipina women.

Linda's successful study of journalism was aborted when her sister's financial support, as an economist in a bank, ceased upon the latter's inexplicable disappearance in Manila. Having recently also lost a brother in a car accident, the ebullience of this young woman was further eroded as she had to look for work. She moved to a nearby island, joining the millions of nimble, young Asian fingers capable of maximising production in factories. A year or two later, she went to Manila in search of her sister and found that she had been kidnapped by a sex and drug ring. Nevertheless, Linda needed to rebuild her life around earning an income to sustain her parents, siblings and herself. Respectable young women lived in hostels and immersed themselves in the carefree enjoyments of church-based youth groups. In the communally-based society, when a tall Australian man, at the gate of the factory with the General Manager showed admiration for Linda, the cause was taken up with excitement by the hundreds of co-workers.

Linda recoiled from this man, who, with gross clumsiness, asked her by way of introduction if she had a boyfriend. Leaving home and marrying this man represented an abhorrent possibility for her, yet she still did so. Linda articulates most eloquently her lack of control over the destruction of everything most dear to her life:

L: "I was so scared that this guy is going to marry me and he's going to take me away … because that's what they do. I mean these guys just say, "I want that, and I'll take her home, I'll take her back", because that's what Americans and other foreigners do that. They just say, "I want that, I want that" that sort of thing, so he picked me, and "Oh, no, my mum, my dad!"

O: I want that ...

L: Yeah.

O: "That", not "Her", "That". Why did he say, "That"?

L: Well I'm just saying that probably because …

O: That's how, yeah …

L: That's how if a person … that's how I perceived it because they were … a lot of the marriages were not based on love.

Linda felt that she hated him and, at the end of the day, she protested about his presence at the factory gate, yet got into a taxi with him because he wanted to know where she lived. She went out with him to discotheques only in a group, even though she did not like such entertainment. When he was leaving, a month or so later, she refused to see him off at the airport, saying she was sick *"but he really wanted me to come. So I went there and pretended to wear a jacket so that he would think that I was cold. It was really stinking hot ..."* In the taxi, just before leaving, he handed Linda some notes of unspent currency and she reacted with revulsion, but upon prodding in the ribs by her girlfriend, she took the money. She felt happy because it made the girlfriend happy and because she did need the money.

He kept writing and asking her to marry him. Linda told me that she did not decide, but followed the persuasion of her friends, her boss. Her parents did not advise her; she told him that she did not love him, but his appeal as a non-drunkard was *"something Filipina girls would kill for"*. So she just agreed for him to come on the next plane. The night before, she did not sleep, praying to God that He would intervene if he was not the right man for her. She married in a registry, quite out of tune with her religious life, in a casual dress. As soon as they spent the first night together, she saw differences that were alarming. In the three months before she was able to fly over, she agonised about not coming but she did. Again, she acted against reason and her every instinct, preferring instead to put her trust in other people's superficial observations. She said that she did not make the decision herself:

> *"Well I was a mixture of confused … I was like a lost kid really because, well going back home, I mean that's what I said, we lived in that compound and we're a very close knitted family … I just relinquish it."*

Linda came from a background of very high symbolic capital, with a familial and personal background excelling in the hybrid Asian and Catholic Filipino ethics of filial piety, obedience and respect towards elders and communal sharing of love which also embraced neighbours. A series of personal tragedies exposed this ebullient young woman to the precariousness of absolute poverty and her arrival in Australia encapsulates the

powerlessness of even a well-educated woman from an exemplarily cohesive family to avoid the compelling impact of her country's absolute poverty. Melba, Nenita and Linda had little choice but to exercise their ingenuity to escape the threat of destitution for their parents, their families and themselves. The confluence of the multinational ownership of employment opportunities, the politicisation of social reproduction through consumerist discourses, Filipino disempowerment over centuries of colonial rule, the existence of mass poverty and the Filipino ethics of inter-subjectivity all intersected with narrow options for the enactment of gender. Although Nenita, Linda and Melba had varied family backgrounds, their life's trajectory was very much determined by the need to ensure basic subsistence. Such precariousness propelled Linda and Melba to dislocate from a familiar world, greatly loved and enjoyed by Linda, whilst Nenita had been socialised to work towards escaping poverty. Whereas the African women relied on their men for physical safety and protection with no evidence of corresponding restrictions in how they enacted their gender, these Filipinas relied on marriage to escape imminent threats to their family's physical survival. Melba and Nenita exercised their agency with consistency towards the goal of escaping from Filipino absolute poverty. In contrast, Linda was gradually forced to adopt this goal and as she said, this meant the relinquishment of everything she valued.

Lack of employment options was the primary determinant of these Filipinas' life chances and it circumscribed the spaces they could frequent in routine encounters as members of society. The workplaces available for poor Filipinas were imbricated with foreign companies' concomitant discourses about what is possible and worth pursuing in life. Even though such consumerism is contrary to Filipino ways of being and their stock of knowledge about the primacy of ethics, the absence of material options for the poor facilitated the absorption of contradictory (neo-)colonial discourses. Linda describes this process: "*Well, I was a mixture of confused … I was like a lost kid really*". Due to hundreds of years of colonisation, Filipino culture is the most hybrid of all those included in the study and this may be a complicating and confusing dimension, impeding clear decision-making by desperate women.

Marriage to a stranger from an affluent country, such as Australia, represented an ethical act of self-sacrifice and moral responsibility for Linda and Melba. All of this is obviously quite contrary to understandings prevailing in Australia and elsewhere in the affluent West about Asian brides being motivated by greed and material ambition.

The lure of Western lifestyles

Two of the Lebanese women came to Australia because their husbands were not able to make a living in their rural towns. Unlike the majority of the women in the study, they exercised agency in choosing to come to a land of better opportunities. Delal reasoned that, even though her family was the wealthiest in the district, her father's properties needed to be divided between 12 children. In keeping with her project of expanding her material and cultural horizons, the 17-year old bride convinced her soldier husband of the benefits of joining his brothers in Australia:

> D: *Yes, I am always very confident. I am very happy, believe me. I planned for more future. Always the person to be opening for more. You listen from far, you like to see. Because I listened, I understood, I heard. I asked why I am not gone? I looked at other peoples, other countries, other situations ...*
>
> O: *How did you know that there was a different life from Lebanon?*
>
> D: *Mostly I read too much. I heard it he newspaper and sometimes the movies...*

Sosa came as a 21-year old when Mariam's brother-in-law came to her village in search of a wife. She married him after two weeks, certainly not on the basis of love, as she laughingly admitted. Rather, she had always wanted to *" come and live in a nice modern and rich place like Australia"*. Being 21, it is possible that she and/or her family may have been concerned about her marriage prospects. The decision was based at least partly on a youthful sense of adventure.

Delal and Sosa made their decisions as resilient women, out of their experience of life in a very comfortable and comforting life-world. These two women did not seem to have been engaged in a period of *dislocation* but rather one of *transition*, in the pursuit of their own imagined futures, whereby the *locus* of their imagined future was less than relevant for their sense of achievement and – hoped-for - wellbeing. A small minority of women made choices to abandon their comfortable lives in the Philippines and Russia on the basis of the lure of Australia's greater affluence. They initiated their own dislocation/transition.

Having moved to the Philippines from Vietnam with her husband, Soo seemed to have enjoyed the best of what life can offer as she had a good family life, professional fulfilment in her work as an interpreter for refugees and lived in a compound around a Catholic church to whom belonged the more than 30 families she had daily close contact with:

> *"The people in that compound said aren't we lucky to be so near the church! I said, yeah, we are lucky. All of us, we called each other brother sister. Faith was important. We all supported each other. Christian brothers and sisters. They loved me very much and cared for me. They were many, just like my brothers and sisters. More than 30 families surrounding us, but the compound was one hundred people."*

Unusually, Soo and her husband fully owned their three bedroom house in the Philippines, surrounded by a garden with trees. She said she was happy again after three years of grieving her husband's death. A friend visited Australia and met a Vietnamese widower, who asked to correspond as a pen pal. After a year of exchanging letters, he proposed, but she was unsure about marrying a stranger:

> S: *My friend and sister-in-law said that he was a gentleman and an intelligent man and why don't you take another step?*
>
> O: *What were you feeling and thinking?*
>
> S: *I was unsure, because I think this is not an easy decision to make. I think if this man is a good man then my life will be beautiful again, but if he is not as good as I see him, as other people see him, then I may make my heart broken. That's why I was a bit reluctant.*
>
> O: *So what made you decide?*

> S: *My children* [very softly]. *They didn't say anything, they said it's up to you Mum; we don't know anything, we don't know anything. But I thought if this man is a good man, my children can go to Australia (Soo's emphasis) and study in Australia and be Australian citizens, and they will work in Australia, they will have a better standard of life. I was thinking of the future of my children so I tried to take one more step.*

The lure of Western lifestyles projected in Vietnam over a hundred years of French domination would have been internalised in childhood and may have influenced her choice to study English at university. Working for the US embassy defined her as a successful, professional woman where enjoyment of occupational benefits occurred against the backdrop of the poverty of others. Although she occupied privileged locations in Vietnam and the Philippines, the assumption that things would have to be better in a '*white*' country won the day.

As an Australian resident, with personal and professional critiques about the strengths and paucities of individualistic, free enterprise societies, of the losses entailed in migration, and in the light of my recent discoveries about the human wealth embodied in communally-based life-worlds, I responded to Soo's narrative with a strong inward protest. I judged her decision as being contrary to logic and an example of the operation of the deferment exercised by colonial subjects, having imbibed Nandy's (1991) "enemy within" (Fanon, 1967; Memmi, 1974). Confirming my biases, Soo continued to tell me that her new husband became abusive within a week of the family's arrival. She lived in misery for three years, totally isolated in a new country, until she was able to part from him.

Unfurling the narrative about the disintegration of the Soviet life world, Anastasia gave a wryly amusing insight into the power of the discourses of superior Western lifestyles:

> *In Canada, in a Russian church where all the Russians gathered, everybody talked a lot about being lucky to have escaped ... Nobody said anything good about Russia. I felt more Russian then than ever. In Canada, Igor and I just couldn't bring ourselves to inventing dreadful stories about Russia to gain refugee status. Just couldn't do it. Everybody else did invent stories and made jokes and laughed about it. You just have to make a nice story, like writing a good story. Others invented stories like people were trying to kill them and they had to change addresses. They*

> *rehearsed their stories really well so they could convince the judges. A man said that he took part in a mutiny on a war ship. That is so ridiculous, because if you did that you would just end up in prison. There was a good sportsman who said that he couldn't train because of his political views and could not participate in good competitions. In Canada he came second in a national race and they were all scratching their heads how he could do this amazing achievement, given that he had not trained professionally for so long.*

Secretiveness was meticulously cultivated in Soviet society, as a matter of life and death, and while I did not expect the women to disclose their financial status, I did not hear any evidence of severe hardship propelling migration for Zina, Varvara or Antonina. Antonina and her sister visited and lived in England several times and Zina's account of her childhood referred to her lifelong prizing of Western affluence and freedoms. Their *dislocation/transition* may have been burgeoning for years.

Bernadette's quip in response to my question about how she decided to migrate from the Philippines, where she had a solid career as an industrial psychologist, also suggests that life in an affluent country represented an exciting prospect for additional material successes: *"as they say, New York! New York!"* Her family had already settled here, probably in pursuit of the same ambitions for a comfortable, middle-class life. As she was unmarried in her late twenties and all her friends had settled into married life, her social circle diminished and she felt the need to join her parents and siblings.

Delal, Soo and Bernadette derived from privileged sectors of society in terms of wealth and education; they acted to relocate their lives in Australia in tune with their long standing valuing of modernity and on the basis of an assessment of their long term needs. They had the requisite skills for undertaking the process of migration as they had developed resilient and fulfilled personalities in their societies of origin and had internalised chosen aspects of Eurocentric knowledge and ways of being. In terms of *character*, as a factor in Ricoeur's conceptualisation of the *voluntary*, these three women were oriented to *skills development* and *active engagement* with the public sphere to ensure their own and their families' material and emotional comfort.

The strictures of gender roles

Ramida reluctantly married at the age of 14 and followed her husband to Australia. Almost forty years later, as reported in the previous chapter, she still grieves at her lot as a woman, predestined for marriage rather than being given the right to basic education. There was no discussion of the period prior to migrating, apart form mentioning that, of course, she mourned leaving her country and family.

The most dissatisfied women were those who were forced to come to Australia as a direct consequence of an indirect or mediated outflow of gender issues and relationships. Anastasia's husband belonged to the early Russian entrepreneurs who adopted a capitalist discourse with strident vigour, including involvement in dishonest businesses and people. His hapless wife Anastasia was unable to formulate the dynamics clearly, until she was two years and thousands of miles away from Russia. She resisted his demand to leave Russia as strongly as she could, but reluctantly followed her husband: "*I had to follow my husband as I could not live as a single mother*". She was brought up to be obedient to others and, although able to express a contrary opinion, was not taught to make independent decisions. She says that she did something she felt strongly against for the sake of her husband: "*I did not realise he was being selfish*". She was very distressed at leaving Russia and continued to feel deeply grieved at losing her homeland and extended family during their two years in Canada and for much of her time in Australia.

Tahn, as a sickly child and young person from a modest family, had probably poor marriage prospects in her Vietnamese environment. After the fall of Saigon, her family had to undertake agricultural work, which she was spared; she felt very loved by her family and was contented in this circle of intimacy. Having resigned herself to losing her only male friend due to the opposition of his mother, she was overjoyed to receive letters from him from Australia, rekindling their relationship. She eagerly grasped at her only marriage proposal, without knowing her husband very well.

Three of the Lebanese women came to Australia because of the utmost necessity for them to be married, at a particular historical point in Lebanese society. For Mariam and Mifsud, the unions were so inappropriate to their needs that they became mentally ill. Mifsud's *dislocation* began with a series of personal tragedies, with her husband being hit by a train and the death of both her parents in quick succession. The life-sustaining relationships of intimate affection needed to deal with such crises had disappeared and, emotionally quite unwell, she was forced to join her only sibling in Melbourne. Lebanese inscriptions of the female body precluded living as a single woman independently of family. She had to marry precipitously in order to stay here and her husband turned out to constitute the final obstruction to any source of personal healing she so desperately needed to recuperate from her losses. Her narrative will be resumed in the next chapter, in the discussion about the impact of professional services in Australia.

Mariam, the accountant stigmatised as unmarried, became vulnerable when her parents died and she passed to the tutelage of her eldest brother. Without protection, her authoring of *singleness* as a *blessing* was overwhelmed:

> M: *In Lebanon, most people are curious and talk too much … and after the bombardments ... at night time my brother said to me some people want to see you. I was a little bit desperate … I said OK. And after we meet each other in the night time, me and my sister; he liked me more than my sister, because maybe she is too young for him. He was 41 and 10 days before, when he asked for marriage, I said yes why not. But after 2 or 3 days when I slept, how I would marry one strange man I don't know him very well and I want to go to Australia and not living in Lebanon and I don't have any relatives in Australia. I changed my mind and after my brother said to me 'why, why? because people speak no good about you. You have one man who asked you to marry and you are not married. They will say it was not good, you have to marry!' I said to him OK; in 10 days we are married.*
>
> O: *What were you feeling as you were getting married?*
>
> M: *I felt very good, because everyone was happy for me, my sisters, brothers and cousins. It has to be done. I had to be married.*

The next chapter will present evidence for my proposition that the factors mostly contributing to the erosion of the women's personal integrity and competency as subjects who have the capacity to be authors of their own lives were conditions exposing them to patriarchal domination. Anastasia, Mifsud, Mariam and Tahn felt unable to find spaces within their culture for the *difference* of being husbandless. Education and intelligence were not sufficient buffers against deleterious experiences related to gender relations for Anastasia, a university lecturer in nuclear physics.

Concluding reflections

International geopolitical vectors are implicated in all of the women's accounts of their processes of dislocation and uncoupling from the safety of the familiar. War and revolution are clearly, in terms of the "push-pull" migration theory, the strongest "push" factors making life intolerable at home. The "pull" of affluent countries is the classic promise of employment for impoverished people in developing regions, even if the work is "3-D work": "dirty, difficult and dangerous" (Castles & Miller, 2000:115). Push-pull models are simplistic, however, and Castles & Miller (2000) survey a range of more nuanced hypotheses for explaining why people migrate. The future promises to feature greater mass migration because of demographic pressures, economic flows and investment of capital creating links between North and South and the social networks that migrants remain connected to and bring with them to the receiving country.

Current migration literature documents that it is not the poorest people who leave their country, as migration requires some capital. Global movements of resources and people reflect the global single economic system and the social relationships embedded therein (Portes & Borocz, 1989, cited in Castles & Miller, 2000:83). Trade and other links established during colonisation continue, albeit under the rubric of loans, aid and foreign investment. Castles points out that urbanisation and industrialisation, which displace people from their subsistence rural lives as part of development, create additional pressures pushing people

out of a country where opportunities for social, education and employment opportunities are shrinking. The *pull* to join relatives in countries such as Australia is then an accessible option (Castles & Miller, 2000). Since the seventies, the Philippines have had an economic policy of exporting labour, mostly women, returning significant remittances to their families (Castles & Miller, 2000:114-115; Marginson, 2001) and these women also play a role in family formation in the receiving countries.

The hegemony of Eurocentric lifestyles and knowledges involves insidious and subtle cultural re-writings, limiting the options people might be able to imagine. Such virtual, and/or material domination has a particular *lethality*, because it is expressed through global capitalism, where the control of the means of production is *multinational* and its discursive domination has not abated, but rather is penetrating life-worlds more and more thoroughly. Not only has it replaced almost all state commanded communist economies, but in affluent countries, such as Australia, the consumer logic now imbricates the socialisation of children very thoroughly (Hamilton & Denniss, 2005; Edgar, 2001).

The women I am concerned about were born mostly after World War II, during or after formal decolonisation. The Russian women, whilst not coming from a colonised country, were susceptible to the hegemony of Western lifestyles, which operated as a dynamic with parallels to what post-colonial critics name as "the strategic evocation of constructs", essential to justify and rationalise expanding material appropriations (Said, 1993:273; Alatas, 1977). For example, notions such as '*bringing civilisation*' and the '*lazy native*' can be substituted for the '*uncouth Russian*' or the necessarily '*derelict Soviet society*' (see also Said, 1993:267.)

Shifting my focus somewhat away from the structural and macro-contexts within which the processes here discussed have occurred, I would like to focus on less tangible elements which play an important role in interpreting the migration and displacement experiences of

– in this case – women; in this context, *hope* has been recently theorised in trans-national migration studies:

> "… [a]s a complex affective and intellectual practice, hope encompasses both momentary embodied affects and more consciously and collectively articulated emotional trajectories, to practically and psychologically manage temporalities of change and flux. Objects of hope emerge as shifting referents in a play of loyalties, attachments and desires" (Mar, 2005).

Although raging against the forces of history is in some sense pointless, I believe that it would be poor research to record these events dispassionately, as a mere background to the subject of this thesis. In line with the requirements of Sandra Harding's (2004) call for *strong objectivity*, I need to subject my perceptions to *objectivity maximising techniques*. Hence, it seems appropriate here for me to state that the shaping of my worldview by Eastern Christianity and my commitment to social justice and inter-subjective ethics have influenced my understanding of the narratives throughout. I found post-colonial literature to be intellectually fulfilling and exciting, as it resonated with my corresponding new appreciation of the human wealth embodied in First Nations cultures and the life-worlds labelled as *Third World*. I found myself eager to apply these lenses to the women's narratives and this was a source of bias I needed to be conscious of and articulate, as illustrated by my subjective reactions to Soo's account of her reasons for emigrating.

The women who were most exposed by their location within a set of political vectors were the Filipinas, who were materially poor and Anastasia, who was materially and symbolically privileged. Chapter Four pointed to critical literature about the discursive re-creations of the Pacific Rim as a site for the maximisation of profits of multinational companies. Although the Filipinas developed as agents in communal life-worlds which, according to the evidence presented in this study, created resilient, strong personalities, foreign control of employment opportunities limited their capacities to imagine responses to adversity (Lim & Dissanayake, 1999).

The contributions of cultural theory are pertinent here in illuminating the hermeneutic requirement to look 'behind' (Ricoeur, 1966) a person's narrative. One of Stuart Hall's (1996) key contributions is his extension of the concept of *ideology* beyond a deterministic interpretation in the Marxian sense, as encompassing *all of the practical knowledge providing us with the categories within which we make sense of our objective positionings in society*. This is similar to Gramsci's "common sense" within which the masses organise their lives (Gramsci, 1971). Ideologies are systems of representation of varying and partial definitions of the putative total system, thus inscribing identities and meanings to the actors according to their location within the process as depicted in the discourse (Hall, 1996:39-40). The ideologies are connected with material and political interests, but not with any determinacy or in a fixed relationship, but rather, their points of reference shift in time and space. An apt expression of the process is that such patterns of thought "operate within terrains of struggle" (Hall, 1996:42). Such discourses have obvious material impacts as they are the tools for people's decision making. Laclau (1977, cited in Hall, 1996:41) points out that the cogency of meaning in language derives from its grounding in historically established logics, wherein any set of propositions evoke a chain of interconnected connotations reverberating off one another. Hall (1996:43) cites Volosinov, who theorises meaning construction as fields of "intersecting accents", with the ascription of salience to varying social, economic or political interest being *contingent*. Hall continues with Gramsci's "common sense" as constituted through processes which are *fragmentary, episodic, and layered with intuitions and knowledge derived from contemporary expertise as well as ancient prejudices* (Hall 1996: 43; see also Showstock-Sassoon, 1987). Nevertheless, to avoid misunderstanding of my post-modern position, I need to point to the ubiquitous influence of economic and material conditions, as the constraining parameters for thought, and which may contribute to the emergence of novel social formations, including in individual lives.

The foregoing discussion encapsulates the central concept and method of 'articulation' in cultural studies, useful not only for epistemological explorations of meaning making, but

also for understanding the complexities of agency within a given constellation of material and discursive factors (Daryl Slack, 1996:112-117). The method of *articulation*, according to Daryl Slack, can be exemplified by understanding how a person may construct a coherent sense of self by joining seemingly contradictory fragments and practices, to form a unity which makes sense in the context of a set of contextual vectors in which s/he is located at a point in time. The method of articulation was developed to counter reductionism and the determinacy associated with Marxian thought, drawing on Althusser's ideas of social relations as complex totalities which incorporate relations between levels that may contain contradictory as well as consistent meanings, in a process which may be also, simultaneously, contradictory and coherent (Daryl Slack, 1996:117).

The constructs of *cultural theory* contain many parallels with the theorists I have examined initially: Bourdieu, Giddens and Schutz. Cultural theory emerged from post-colonial thought and is logically connected with the critical, trans-national feminist literature that also informs the research of this thesis. In a more recent article "The Meaning of New Times", Stuart Hall (1996:223-237) reflects on the globalised materialism of culture, which has become the sphere through which people engage with the world and within the parameters of which identities are forged and expressed. Hence, even for people who come from contexts of poverty, the need to configure one's sense of place in the world has to include the world beyond the locality. It also tends to include reference to the possession of material goods for their symbolic value beyond pure utility. This implies that the grounds for affiliation and sense of belonging have vastly expanded and that gendered negotiations within power relations also have access to an expanded repertoire of possibilities and strategies (Hall, 1996:236).

In contrast, the stocks of knowledge derived from their respective life-worlds served the women from Africa and Vietnam and some of the Russians well, as they practiced and expanded enormous ingenuity in the face of adversity. They showed that their agency thrived in challenging circumstances as some audaciously pitted their strength against brutal military forces. The women from the Horn of Africa and Vietnam had been politicised by the

very history of their countries and, together with their immersion in and resilience derived from their communally-based life-worlds, they were able to exercise formidable agency, sometimes surmounting gruelling challenges. Some of the Russian women, notably Zina, Larissa, Karina and Varvara, also relied on their high levels of formal education and perspicacity drawn from manoeuvring the contradictory Soviet system to take their families to a country where they could maintain their desired lifestyles at the higher echelons of society.

Research about a representative sample of refugee women carried out in Australia in 1991 begins with generally accepted international statistics - that 20-30% of all refugees have been tortured or severely traumatised. The Victoria based African Women's Association estimated that 100% of women in refugee camps experienced repeated rapes. A study by Pittaway (1991:20, 26-27) found that 40-70% of Vietnamese female boat escapees had been raped and almost all of the Latin American sample experienced high levels of torture and trauma. Pittaway (1991:27) extrapolates this finding to state that, out of the 10,592 women who entered Australia as refugees or as Special Humanitarian entrants during the years 1987-1990, 3280 to 4555 had experienced high degrees of torture and trauma. Definitions of *high levels* are listed as: sexual abuse and exploitation in the country of origin or in camps; severe physical abuse; being forced to witness the torture or killing of family members; and living in conditions where starvation and death from lack of medical services was common. *Medium levels* of torture and trauma include: physical abuse; prolonged detention in camps; forced separation from family; living with prolonged harassment and persecution by the military or police; and lengthy periods of living in dangerous conditions. *Low levels* include: regular harassment and surveillance by authorities; being denied the right to work and attend school; having to leave the country without personal belongings; constant fear about relatives' wellbeing; inability to contact relatives; and living in limbo while finding a country to grant permanent residence. In Pittaway's representative sample, 27% had experienced low levels of torture and trauma; 30% fell into the medium category and 36% into the high levels.

The women in my study who came as refugees only referred to such sufferings in a general manner, if at all. This is doubtless a function of the brief nature of our encounter and of the privileged features of the group that I had access to. I did not speak to any women from Latin America who experienced wholesale abuses. Personal tragedies and a constellation of factors intersected with cultural gender prescriptions to significantly curtail the self determination of Linda, Mariam, Mifsud, and Tahn. Including Anastasia, the process of being un-coupled from their cherished life-worlds was a deep disconfirmation of themselves as subjects of their own stories.

As outlined in Chapter Two, we reconstitute ourselves in the stories we tell about our lives through a dialogical context. Indeed, there is no way of being other "than simultaneously understanding our position" (Sloan, 1996:7) and we "choose the positionings we articulate in an interlocutory moment" (Yeatman, 1995:55). Self-representation is as much a discursive construction as the construction of the 'other' (Lal, 1999:115) and the act of speaking is a *creative act* in itself, as well as an act of self-recreation (Ricoeur, 1991) in the unfolding of worlds and truths which are always *equivocal and partial* (Maturana & Varela, 1987). Clifford and Marcus (1986:1-8) name ethnographic writing as being inherently incomplete, containing unavoidable expressive tropes, rhetoric and exclusions, while informants themselves strategically select the form and content for disclosure or concealment. The research encounter is framed within a fundamental power imbalance (1986:1-8); I heard fragments of these women's truths, as expressions at a moment in time, of their memories about contested desires for the present and future (Hatzimanolis, 1993).

The themes of suffering and hardship were present in the lives of those who had come from life-and-death struggles of civil war, from changed political regimes and from experiences of absolute poverty. The history of Russia during the twentieth century featured remarkable sufferings, particularly during periods of Soviet repression and the World Wars, but of the Russian group only Karina spoke about such hardships.

The majority of the women in this study can be considered to have derived from the middle class in terms of wealth and tertiary education. They came from families which had the highest levels of material and symbolic wealth and had mostly supportive and caring fathers and husbands, who were reported to be unusual in the context of their own culture in terms of the latitude they allowed their daughters and wives. This also applies to the symbolic capital inherent in the young lives of Delal and Wafa which, together with their education, influenced their capacity to exercise assertiveness over life's events. Many of these women came to Australia because of the attractions of modernity, freedom and affluence, but only Delal, Sosa, Bernadette and Nenita named these as motivations.

All of the women reported having happy, fulfilling and loving family relationships prior to the dislocations covered in this chapter. This applied to Naima despite having always lived in a war zone, to Karina despite the sufferings of life incurred by her parents' ethics, and to Melba until the death of her father. Ramida said that she was happy till the time of marriage at the age of 14 and Mariam enjoyed the affectionate context of family life, despite the stresses attached to singleness in Lebanon at that point of time.

The next chapter will continue the women's narratives by describing their initial *landing* in Australia and the early stages of settlement, with a close analysis of the factors which constituted the suffering as well as the alleviation of some of the stresses associated with immigration. The next chapter will also discuss how the women were able to rebuild their lives and how contact with the welfare state and informal, civil society and its individual and institutional actors impacted on their capacities for self-determination.