Chapter Six

The topography of migration: Suffering and overcoming

This chapter covers what happens to the women when they arrive in Australia. This chapter will recount how they fared in the spaces of their permanent relocation, as distinct from the experiences covered in Chapter Five, dealing with their time living in transit. Arrival in the country of destination has a certain finality, in terms of separation from one's previous world and commencing a diasporic life. The experience always entails degrees of hardship and the first of the two sections of this chapter will recount the issues the women encountered in the foreign spaces of Melbourne and depict their strategies to maintain a coherent sense of self, hold family together and continue to pursue their desires/aspirations.

In this chapter, *firstly*, I explore the dimensions of hardship, suffering and challenges confronting the women by being positioned in particular ways in Melbourne society. The presentation of this material will be a continuation of my hermeneutical approach and theoretical analysis commenced in Chapter Three. The *second* section traces what the women were able to do and develop through contact with Australian public spaces, which includes all of the publicly funded systems and organisations ensuring the welfare of citizens in modern market-based economies. In this Australian life-world or informal civil society, migrant women come into contact with people acting as volunteers, with neighbours or with members of one's own ethnic community. I will be drawing on three bodies of literature to illuminate and explore the women's narratives: *theoretical constructs* derived from the framework developed in Chapter Three; *Australian research* on immigration; and literature on

social citizenship rights to publicly funded infrastructure typical of modern, democratic states. Of most relevance for this phase of the women's journey are trans-national women's and post-colonial writings on hybridity of spaces, identities, knowledges and enactments of gender; issues of representation and of what Edward Said (1979) coined as 'the dreadful secondariness' and the 'deferment' inherent in the status of a migrant to a foreign culture. The three sections of this chapter are:

Sufferings
Facilitating processes: Contact with Australian public infrastructure
Facilitating processes: Contact with Australian civil society

Chapter Seven will conclude the narratives by asking the women how they feel about how life has turned out for them. This chapter will describe how the women were participating as Australian citizens at the time of the interviews. I will then also recapitulate the key insights from the narratives and conclude with final theoretical reflections, especially geared towards incorporating elements of welfare state theory and practice.

Sufferings

The sufferings women referred to and which structure the several section below are: being in foreign spaces, immobilisation and the losses of migration. Struggles in the public spheres include encountering negative representations of their culture and blocks to the resumption of their former modes of participation in the labour market. Unrelieved suffering compounded by isolation led to psychiatric illness for a small group.

Being in foreign spaces

Issues around spaces, location in an unknown *habitus*, being positioned in particular relations with the inhabitants of the new locations and needing to find places and times for being, doing and living as one has always understood normality and meaningfulness to be, encapsulate the key problematic of living in *diaspora*. Emerging literature on social

geography, built on the foundational theoretical work of Bourdieu, Lefèbvre and De Certeau, such as *Habitus: A Sense of Place* edited by Hillier and Rooksby (2002) and *Reanimating Places* edited by Mels (2004), provide useful theoretical explorations of diasporic existence and agency, such as questions of belonging, home, strangeness and strategies for self expression and survival as an agent with others in routines of co-presence.

The first shock was experienced by the women when encountering the foreign landscapes of Australian cities, marked as they are by a thorough modernity of architecture, vast suburban expanses, with houses mostly on quarter-acre blocks surrounded by gardens and a lack of people on the streets, except for shopping centres during business hours and a handful of entertainment and business districts. The absence of *people* on the streets is quite distinct from the teeming streets of the world's large cities and of the rural contexts in the countries included in the study. Linda's eloquent description of her landing in Melbourne airport on a wintry night encapsulates many of the themes of relocation in a diametrically different landscape.

L: *Well when I first arrived, he told me to wear a jumper because it's winter. A jumper in the Philippines is different.*

O: *It's made out of cotton, is it?*

L: *Yeah … I wore my flowery summery dress, skirt and short sleeves, so when I arrived, it was warm in the airplane, and I didn't know. But when I get out of the airport there in Melbourne, I never felt in all my life. It went right through my bones and my knees, and I said, "Where's your car?" and was shaking and I was, "Oh my God, is this winter?" I never felt that all my life, never! And I said, "Where's your car?" I was gone. I run.* [laughter] *I said, "I'll see you there". I had to run. My knees were just … I mean it was … The day before, I was wearing shoes… that was the first time in my life that I felt that, that cold like three million times colder than ...., but one thing I noticed that the coldness was even … makes this … you know, how it is so quiet when it's so cold?*

O: *Hmm.*

L: *And I felt so eerie. I felt like it was so eerie like no one, and I was… suddenly I was like, suddenly I was in a totally different world, and I was in an airplane the night before and it*

> *was warm, you know cheerful place with all these people walking back and forth and now I'm here and it was like, "Where is everybody?"* [plaintive little girl voice]

The sudden elimination of human contact is described by women through metaphors of coldness and emptiness, akin to being flung into outer space. The realisation of her dreams, Tahn expected that the moment of reuniting with her fiancé after four years would be "*bright lights, sunshine and happiness*". Instead, it was dark, cold and there were no people on the streets. She said that on arrival at Melbourne airport, she felt like "*I fell out of the sky*". Some women's immediate experiences of arrival augured what the next years would hold for them.

Schutz' work on the *in-group out-group* (1970:85-93) shows that one normally places oneself at the centre of one's environment in order to interact with it. This is impossible for the newcomer. For the women, the wide spaces in urban Australia and the comparatively empty streets constitute an additional layer of disruption to their sense of normal reality; that is, the unquestioned assumption that society means people. Such alien materiality would significantly intensify the *stranger* experience involving a threat to what Giddens (1991) refers to as *personal ontological security*; as much tacit knowledge about being human and what is real meeting with jarringly dissonant responses in the new country.

Many women cried when arriving here, shocked at the isolation. Wafa:

> *Back home there was family life and neighbourhood where you know everybody, <u>it's full of life</u>. When you come here, the streets are empty and all the doors are closed, and you don't know what is behind those doors and everybody is strange to you and if you don't have your own network of family ...*

The illustration by Khaled, a new Lebanese male arrival, quoted in a book on Australian Muslims, *Caravanserai* (Deen, 1995:93-94), is particularly eloquent:

> … if you walked down a back street in Australia at seven o'clock at night, you'd almost die of fear – it's very, very lonely. In Lebanon it takes you an hour to walk down a street that would normally only take ten minutes to walk ... because every few minutes someone greets you, asks about your day, insists that you come in for a coffee …women

have the subhiyat, or women's gathering during the day. After they have done the housework in the morning, they visit one another, they sing and dance at each other's house, drink coffee, eat cakes and come home before their husbands.

One of the earliest arrivals from the former Soviet Union, Zina, her husband and young child had a rough landing:

Z: [the interview was in Russian] *The first three months here were torture* [she uses the English word and laughs].

O: *Torture?*

Z: *Well we came and there was no-one. No-one! They gave us some lodging and we didn't even know which shop to go to. Mum remembered that there was a friend who left 20 years ago and we thought we might ring her, maybe she might meet us at the airport. The lady met us and then she told us where to rent another flat, across from her flat. It was such a horrible flat but we had to take it after 3 days. We were very disappointed that she did not help us at all. The first week was a nightmare. We were left alone, didn't know what to eat. They had two suitcases, a mattress and a child. No-one told us where to go and whom to ask. Nothing was organised at the time. At social security after signing up no-one told us anything.*

O: *But there were all sorts of services at that time!*

Z: *But no-one told us! It is good that I was able to catch a few English phrases and so I found out for myself. It is because we came through that woman ...*

O: *When did you begin to regain your confidence?*

Z: *Immediately. Every night I would take myself in hand, like a yoga, and tell myself that if you don't get a hold of yourself now, then you're gone. I worried about my child. I understood that if I don't get positive immediately, then I will never get on top of things ...*

Although Esther does not mention it directly, this was the first time she was in a white country and experienced the impact of the 'modern' landscape when the plane landed in transit in Perth:

E: When I compared myself to the people in this country, I felt that I was really under their shoes because I didn't have English and I didn't have skills.

O: So, just when you first you looked at all these people?

E: *Yes. Just looked at them and then I thought I'm nothing.*

O: *Just by looking at them?*

E: *Looking at them and the things they do and they drive the car. I couldn't imagine that I would drive a car one day. It seemed like a biggest step to drive a car. Africa is a country which has light and cities and buildings. So there was nothing really new except it is very clean here. So my shock was: how am I going to get some work? Will I be able to learn something which will give me value? So that was my job. So when I analysed it, I said no, I'm not going to get anywhere. So I closed my mind and was happy where I was. I stayed in the house, made my house clean and did cooking.*

O: *So you forgot your English?*

E: [Laughing] *I forgot my English. Sometimes Michael used to tell me "you are very brilliant and you used to send me letters written in English. What happened to you now?"... Because even when the telephone rang I would tell him "come on, come on you answer"…*

Some of the women had such difficult experiences during the initial phase of settlement and a number of women remained isolated for a couple of years, some becoming clinically depressed. Their circumstances will be covered in the sections below. The majority of women overcame such initial culture shocks through various forms of engagement with the world beyond the home. Only one Russian woman, Larissa, had remained in the initial state of significant alienation at the time of the interview, four years after arrival: "*Here we will never live. We will probably endure, but never really live.*"

The new space was a modern, affluent one. Some women liked Australia from the beginning, such as Karina and Antonina, who had spent some uncomfortable years in New Zealand, and Varvara, who came into a vibrant Soviet expatriate community around the Bayside suburbs. Many women had honeymoon periods because they were reunited with family or fiancés, such as Bernadette, Nenita, Melba and Teresa and, as discussed in the previous chapter, they had hybrid, modern identities and had been predisposed to prize Western material comforts and freedoms.

The new space was also *safe* and physical and psychological dangers were absent. Women who came as refugees were clearly very glad to be here. The previous chapter presented or referred to fragments from eyewitness accounts by Vietnamese Australians from various walks of life and it gave moving details about life during the war and the atrocities endured when the communists took over (Hawthorne, 1983). Such contexts are fair predictors of experiences of immense relief upon initial arrival. Four Vietnamese women, Wai Ling, Anh, Sen and Mai Ho, who struggled for years against all odds to arrive here, often by boat, said that coming here was *"like heaven at first."* Anh noticed how quiet and clean it was and that people smiled, unlike Vietnam, where people were (or seemed) constantly stressed and anxious.

The release from ubiquitous danger and hazard was also blissful for Naima and Fatima:

> N: *the greatest feeling is the security here. The ultimate goal is to reach somewhere secure from the system there. The secure life is what you want. You don't have to think: what will I eat tomorrow, is the war coming? Here you can say how can I improve my education, how can I contribute to this country … The good life I would define as shelter, food, not having to think what is going to happen to me … when September 11 came, how people in USA felt, that feeling we had back home … It's hard for Western people to understand what that fear is, anytime you can collapse, anytime a killer can come, you are not just looking for shelter and food. You are looking for peace … You don't need to whisper ... It's a fear! I can express my opinion without fear. I may be wrong, but here no-one is going to shoot me!*

Despite Wafa's remark above, she was also enormously relieved to arrive to a safe country.

Immobilisation

Diasporic life often begins with an immobilisation of one's previous engagement with the world as an agent with a particular identity and a competent grasp of the stock of knowledge required for functioning in society. Schutz (1970) writes that the *stranger* becomes the person who needs to question everything that seems unquestionable to the receiving culture. Because the history of Australia is not part of their biographies and Australian residents often have only vague familiarity with the countries many migrants came from, both parties

lack the shared symbolic cues enabling communication. As Schutz expresses it in his essay on *The Stranger* (1976), migrants do not know of the articles of faith, the myths, the histories and a-priori assumptions that define a lifestyle as self-evident truths and that hold: "the rationalisations and institutionalisations of the world together, other gods reveal codes of morality, of the good life, of the sacred, other propositions of the right and of nature" (Schutz, 1970, 1972). The cultural pattern of Australia is experienced as a central labyrinth; Fatima from Eritrea, who had completed three years of university in English:

> F: *At first we cried a lot when we first came here. Because of the stress. The children had to go to school. The first month it was like you came to heaven, because people accepted me … but after I cried and cried. The first stress started here. At camp I saw many killings and terrible things, but I helped people and I felt OK. But here, I cry because I can't do anything. The English …*
>
> O: *But you speak English!*
>
> F: *But not enough! It's hard to pay bills … After that, I want to study to get qualifications. I like to study and every mother would like to do more than housework, that's why am stressed. I like to read and I can't …*

Lack of English is not only the first logical barrier to venturing outside the home but its potency resides in arresting one's agency as a competent adult. This is a dynamic which, one could reasonably propose, would be universally experienced by migrants from any country, with factors such as class, culture, education and reasons for migrating being associated factors. A rapid loss of confidence ensued and most of these women had a year or two of mild or more severe depression. Russian professionals of the highest calibre from a complex country, where life skills needed to be quite sharp to survive, felt helpless and dependent and I was told that many Russians become housebound because of the fear of 'appearing foolish'. Women from elite strata of their own countries found the lack of competence an additional humiliation, particularly since migration was, in itself, an audacious exercise of agency aimed at least in part at maintaining their material and symbolic privilege. Immobilisation is also due to poor public transport systems and a lack of money in a country developed around reliance on cars. The compounding effect of language, lack of money and

transport create an immobilisation which, in itself, is the most debilitating aspect of the women's sense of dignity as competent agents. Several refugee women, Fatima, Esther, Nia as well as Zeinab (who did not live in a camp), said that the first time they experienced real stress was in Australia. Nia:

> *The things I used to do over there are not possible anymore … But here, all I can do is sit and wait for the fortnightly money from Centrelink, which is to just give you enough to buy food and pay the bills. There is nothing, really to keep you active …* [her voice is sounding sad and tired] *In camp you could do other things, it's part of life to be active. But here there is nothing you can do, just sit home, all day and all night. I feel my shoulders are going to fall off just sitting here. Even if there are relatives you could visit, they don't live near you and I have no car. All you can do is go to the shop and buy something, which is nothing.*

Nia is the grandmother from rural South-Sudan and although Australian welfare service providers and members of the public might expect an overwhelming relief at being in a safe country, for this elderly woman, life was centrally about being able to participate in public spaces. This is unlike Sen, the Vietnamese grandmother who is contented to live at home with a son and have marginal contact with the outside world, always mediated through her children. Younger women, who still did not speak English at the time of the interview, were the most vulnerable and prone to depression. This included some of the women for whom I needed an interpreter, as I will indicate below, but also Larissa, who, as the partner of an eminent scholar, was not eligible for free English classes and could not afford the private ones.

Losses of migration

Loss of home

The first loss of migration is the loss of what was home, the familiar and loved environments and familiar systems of meaning, styles of interacting and personalities. Mary, the Filipina nurse who is happily married and has a supportive extended family, still misses her orchids and being able to dance, which made her feel young and alive. Women from each country

speak of life here being very much quieter than at home, and those who do not adapt successfully, still use descriptors such as *"so dead"*. Linda:

> *… sometimes I can hear music here in Australia that brings me right back, and sometimes even on summer days here, I can hear the leaves of eucalyptus trees making the noise in the wind … just like takes me back because you hear lots of those and all these big mango trees and in summer … well, it's always summer there because we only have two … It gives me … it brings me right back, and I sort of suddenly detach myself. I can forget that I even, you know, at times like that, it makes me remember and at the same time like, "What am I doing here? I'm supposed to be there!"* [voice brimming with tears]

Linda and Anastasia continued to have the greatest grief of all the women about losing their landscapes:

> [long silence as Anastasia fight back tears, then with a singsong tone] *We had a good life, you could go to the museum, to children's plays, there were lots of interesting things going on all the time you could go to with your children and here everything is so expensive. The schooling system was better because it was from 8.00 to 1.00 and it gave kids the time to play, do their homework and then go to hobbies, like music and dancing, available very cheap in walking distance.*
>
> [I told Anastasia about a Russian film made at the end of Perestroika, titled *A Town Called Zero*, where an employee is sent by his firm to a town where he is faced with surreal situations, such as the CEO's secretary being stark naked and no one perceiving the abnormality there. The theme of the film is about people being lied to by Communists and perhaps being lied to again by the West.]
>
> Anastasia fought back tears and said: *it's like that everywhere.*

Losing Russia is a sadness for Karina and Varvara but it is accepted as inevitable and irrevocable and, simultaneously, diasporic life begins. Zina and Antonina do not feel such loss and their narratives only contained criticisms of life in Russia, strengthening the possible validity of my surmising that they grew up with a *habitus* where Western lifestyles were desired.

The Vietnamese women did not speak of missing Vietnam and all categorically stated how glad they are to be here. Apart from ensuring the basic necessities of life, such as housing,

income and work, however, a priority for the Vietnamese migrants is indicated by the energy with which Vietnamese communal life is recreated in Australia and their touchingly poetic self-expressions in writing or music, lending support to Ngo Tung Bao and Desmond Cahill's (2001:737) proposition that deep sadness and nostalgia are a part of the Vietnamese Australian psyche (Chau Nguyen, 2005; Lopata & Mckenzie, 1997).

Of the Lebanese women, only Mifsud still misses her life in modern Lebanon; Delal is able to visit Lebanon frequently and has recreated Lebanese life by assisting most of her village to join her in Melbourne. Her motivation seems to relate to Hanifa Deen's (1995:71) reflections in her lyrical pastiche of Muslim Australian lives in *Caravanserai*:

> for those who have experienced the throb of a whole society acting as one – and the energy and emotion this generates – in Cairo, Lahore, Kuala Lumpur, Ramadan and Eid in Australia are never quite the same.

Mariam, Sosa and Ramida appreciate the advantages offered by Australia for reasons which will be unfurled below. Nenita, Mary, Linda and Teresa still feel the sense of loss of home but Melba and Bernadette did not at the time of the interview. The African women's sense of home had been marred by sustained experiences of the horrors of war and having spent years in refugee camps they seem to consider their former countries as part of history. At a training workshop I attended for ethno-specific workers, a series of images of Australia were displayed around the room that participants were asked to comment on. Pointing to a topless woman sun-tanning on a beach, the South-Sudanese worker identified it as a dead woman's body. Such frequent traumatic encounters would act to erase a sense of attachment to their land, particularly for a period of time for the newest arrivals. For the Africans, home meant the extended family and a foremost priority for them was to bring the rest of their clans here. All the Eritrean women had a majority of their families here but Kiro did not, relying on the Ethiopian church community for her sense of family.

The men's experiences

A diversion in the discussion is necessary here, to bring into relief the experiences of the men in these women's lives, a theme which will be picked up again later. Parents feel ashamed as they experience role reversal when having to resort to the assistance of their children who adapt more quickly (Deen, 1995:23). This would have been felt more acutely by the fathers and other male adults in the family. The women did not speak much about their husbands or other male relatives, in good part because my focus at the early stage of this study was a – however legitimate - rather stereotypical, Western-feminist one, of wanting to 'hear the women's voice'. Propriety also limited the extent to which I could access sensitive material and, as I discussed in the methodology, the unspoken rule of the dialogue with me as a stranger was that only safe topics would be broached. This is doubtless a loss for the informational dimension of the thesis. Literature points to the dilemmas faced by migrant men as their roles and self-esteem as agents who competently manoeuvre the public sphere to care for their families, are more frequently than not, significantly curtailed. Apart from the loss of previous occupational or professional roles, migrant men often have to work in demeaning workplaces, with documented abusive working conditions and high levels of occupational injuries reported by Australian empirical research (Collins, 1991). They suffer a loss of dignity in front of women and children and, in addition, the community that had been the site for defining and expressing their status as competent agents is gone. Community life operated as a mediating layer through which life's challenges were resolved amongst peers, other men or those esteemed as elders, which clearly included domestic and other family relationship issues. Men now find themselves in an individualised or 'atonomised' space and women and young people have access to benefits from the state *independently* of the husbands and fathers, who therewith loose their status as 'providers'. Esther reported that South-Sudanese men's feelings of threat are so deep that they bar their women from access to information such as English classes, finding out that the state deposits income into their individual accounts as wives and carers, and vigilantly ensure that the women have to rely on their husbands for transport out of the home. This pattern was

corroborated by other South-Sudanese informants who were not part of my study. In this context, Esther's marital relationship manifests itself as quite extraordinary and is a central factor in her narrative of her settlement process, as will be shown below.

Hanifa Deen (1995:100) articulates the subtleties of migrant men's pain aptly and the efficacy of this diasporic strategy:

> To these men the mosque is a wonderful solace, a balm to wounded pride and their feelings of shame and alienation. They have been made redundant and now depend on small children ... everything is failing them, but the mosque is there and God is there.

Loss of familiar ways of being

The difficulty is that strangeness reaches deeply into the subterranean/subcutaneous levels of what we consider as *normal* reality. The fissure reaches into our very connectivity with other human beings, as this is subject to different cultural styles. Furthermore, a culture's schemata for interpreting the world coincide with its *normal* means of self-expression. Normal self-expression is also denied to the newcomer. This section will also explore the women's strategies for responding to the new interaction and communication paradigms extant in their Melbourne world. They vacillate in hesitation as they search for the proper sense of distance with others (Schutz, 1976).

In the cultures included in this study, except for the Vietnamese, it is part of daily life to show affection through touch. In Australia, the more reserved/distanced style of human interaction, with much clearer demarcations of personal space, ownership, interpretation of what constitutes 'appropriateness' of behaviour, speech and what is one's business or not, were often experienced by the women as coldness or aloofness. This was part of the narratives of the Filipinas Mary and Nenita. Mary speaks of her cheerful willingness to become an Australian Filipina but the hybrid life does not meet her deeper needs:

> *O: What about your husband's friends, are they Australian?*
>
> *M: Yes, I did make friends. They are very nice. They treat me like them.*

> O: *So even though you made some friends they are not really friends you can talk to?*
>
> M: *No, not really. Not my emotions … They do not understand me, what my feeling is. My husband tell me: "my friend is your friend'. But it's different. I am brown and they are white* [the word 'white' was said with a clipped, terse inflexion, which at the time sounded like the snapping of a branch].

One extreme reaction to the challenge of incorporating hybrid knowledge and social styles is to be very negative and retreat into separatism. Larissa discussed her extreme discomfort with this issue. She articulately describes the Russian way of being as quite contrary to the Australian norm. As already mentioned, the Russian phrase "*of course*", delivered with a particular inflexion, has a sense of: "*it is part of nature, of the nature of being a human being, of personhood, of normal, empirical social reality*". Contrasting the approach to neighbourliness of individualistically-based free-enterprise societies, where decency draws a boundary around knowing about or 'meddling' in each other's personal affairs, Larissa from Moscow said:

> *we were too busy to socialise endlessly, but of course, we knew what was happening in the lives of all of the neighbours around us, so we could help when necessary.*

This expectation of neighbours is similar to the Filipino (Soriano, 1995), Vietnamese, African and Lebanese (Batrouney, 1995) cultural contexts. Larissa said that Australians are dreadful egoists, only thinking about what they want in life. She said that in Australia her family learnt what it is to be Russian. They spend evenings singing Russian songs which they never did at home. The banter among peers with frequent put downs was experienced with horror by her children. She said that, in Russia, a friend is someone you love with all your heart and are inseparable from, whom you would never treat insensitively. Because her second boy was bullied at primary school, she home-schooled him, as she is a teacher. She sent her eldest daughter back to Moscow to finish her last two years of high school. Larissa certainly showed that she had made the least positive adjustment to resettlement of all the women. Some of her views did not seem to be shared by her husband, who works as an eminent science academic and has opportunities for greater contact with people. He did not contradict her but his facial expressions often betrayed patient restraint. Her youngest child

was quite at home in Australia and, as Larissa was the very firm director of this family, it is not clear how much scope there was for expression of contrary views, which would not have been based on a weight of experience. I felt this family had quite a dilemma as affectionate ties and loyalty towards the mother and as the great need to maintain unity in a foreign land, would have militated against questioning of Larissa's authority. Furthermore, her authority was founded on profound expertise about the Russian stock of knowledge, acquired through very serious study of the arts and of pedagogy. A great deal of this talented woman's emotional energy was directed at rejecting hybridity, grasping moments of memory retrieval for pointers of true Russian-ness and coaching her family about this mode of maintaining personality integrity. Larissa's response is understandable, as she had devoted her lifelong strenuous agency to specialise in formal Russian musicianship. As a rather single-minded specialist, she had not been predisposed to consider diverse life forms.

Bernadette, Linda, Melba and Teresa have accommodated to the different interaction paradigms operating in Australia by learning to understand them accurately. The African women had friendships outside of their ethnic group, as did the Vietnamese women who spoke good English. Karina approaches the question of different interaction paradigms, values and modes of being, with her intellectual predisposition to learn about a different and interesting way of being, citing many instances of Russian brutality and of the greater humanity shown in Australia to those who are vulnerable, such as migrants, people with disabilities, the unemployed. Such an approach was also adopted enthusiastically by Zina. Anastasia and Varvara seem to understand that each culture has its strengths but privately feel unable to connect beyond the level of acquaintance. Anastasia is the only woman of this group to have connected with the Russian Orthodox Church. Accepting the turn of events which have transplanted her to Melbourne, she found a continuation of her identity through discovering the ancient Russian spiritual tradition which had been lost – or was marginalised - during the Soviet years. This provides continuity to her ontological foundations and she is thereby open to the new cultural forms operating in Australia. Only

Zina had non-Russian friends, which she expressed as evidence of not only her comfort but indeed delight with her new life in Melbourne.

Apart from Wai Ling, none of the Vietnamese women discussed how they manage these issues of difference; however, the buoyancy of the recreated Vietnamese community life in Melbourne and the women's subtle comments revealed to me that the Vietnamese stock of knowledge was vigilantly guarded and prized as constituting a source of wisdom and strength. The two women who developed careers in the social welfare field, Wai Ling and Anh, have examined these differences in a manner reflective of their levels of education and have appropriated some non-Vietnamese communication patterns. For example, Wai Ling said that she learnt from her own experience that strict obedience is no useful preparation for the modern, contradictory and constantly changing world. She appreciates the value of Australian parenting styles and adopted the approach of being a friend to her children, communicating with them from a relatively less hierarchical position, trusting them to make autonomous decisions and giving them freedom to go out and mix socially as other young people do. Wai Ling's adaptation was the chief cause of friction with her husband, upon his return from seven years in a re-education camp and five years after her arrival. His traditional parenting and gender expectations conflicted with Wai Ling's growth as a hybrid and independent author of her own life and leader of her family.

Wafa has also found serendipity in her location in a culture based on individualism with spaces and supports for women's independence. As a Maronite Christian, her culture was infused with European mores; she said that the immediate benefit of being here was to be free of her in-laws and the gender expectations which had hampered her intellectual aspirations. In the face of strong disapproval from her husband, she initially obtained casual work, a driving licence, bought a car and then gained employment as a Lebanese community worker, followed by tertiary studies. Her husband was unable to find work commensurate with his status of a customs officer in Lebanon. His parents ensured his former post was kept open for him and he returned to Lebanon under their strong insistence, particularly after

suffering a heart attack while working as a taxi driver in Melbourne, an embarrassing indignity kept secret from acquaintances in Lebanon. Wafa resisted pressure to join him and, over the ensuing ten years, as he came and went periodically, continued to work and independently carve out a life that is meaningful for her and her children. She appreciates the spaces allowed in Australia enabling her to find her individual mode of self expression.

One of the highlights of Ramida's life were the eighteen years she worked at a local factory with the *"blondies, the Australians, they liked me and wanted me to be like them, but I couldn't"*. She explained that she liked them too but she could not go out with them and dress as they did. It should be remembered that the Lebanese women's narratives mostly cover a period prior to the resurrection of xenophobia by the policies of the present conservative Coalition government, the international events surrounding the 'war on terror' and, importantly, the even more recent racially inspired riots at Sydney's southern beaches. Finally, the only religious member of the Lebanese group, Delal, approached the issue of different interaction paradigms as a source of interest in befriending Australian born people. Indeed, this openness to difference as a source of *enjoyment* has operated as the hallmark of multiculturalism at the individual and community level in Australia.

Loss of identity

Teresa came from a background of among the richest cultural and material capital possible:

> *Well, I was Seniora X for 15 years, teacher of Spanish, and I had a lot of students and students who were university presidents, or senators, a mixture of students, and a lot of students because I was teaching for 15 years. I would walk down the street and people would say, "I was your student"…. The same with my mother, we were very well known. And all of a sudden, we come here and we don't know anyone and no-one knows us. The feeling is like drowning actually, or like being in a void …It's overwhelming, the idea of not having an identity, it's frightening actually, and its really depressing …*

She says that she was treated in a much nicer way in the Philippines and, suddenly, she was confronted by the thought that she might not be the person she – and others – thought she was. She recalls an incident when she was subject to a racist taunt by a group of men, which

she challenged immediately. They were shocked and shamed into silence, Teresa noting that, for them, she was just a fat Asian lady whom they did not expect to be able to challenge them as an equal. Her action as an educated, competent and sophisticated cosmopolitan woman, whose identity is so developed that she could orient her life to the pursuit of causes beyond mundane self-interest, was effective in meeting such assailants. Nevertheless, Teresa named the loss of identity as the chief source of her ongoing depression over the years of settlement.

None of the Russian women reported such severe threats to their identity, even when losing some confidence by not having good language skills. Some women who were isolated, experienced such severe assaults on their sense of self and the integrity of their personalities that they became ill and I will let their voices ring in further section below.

Struggles in the public sphere: Negative representations

Major surveys of Muslims, including by Gary Bouma (1994, in Jupp, 2001:599-601) and by the Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission (HREOC, 2003), reported that, after homesickness, 'Australian culture' was felt to be the source of greatest difficulty. This referred to not only different values about dress, the lack of spaces in a secular country for religious practices, but, particularly, to negative representations consistently projected in public spaces through media, news coverage, films and the racist attitudes and behaviours of people. Events involving the Middle East since the Gulf War have led to an exponential growth in the frequency of racist attacks (Poynting et al, 2004). Muslims and 'people of Arabic appearance', a racist descriptor routinely used by police in news reports, are in 2006 the chief target in Australia of what Elizabeth Povinelli (2002) conceptualises as 'abhorrent alterity'. The narratives of the Lebanese women in this study do not reflect the research evidence about the consolidation of Muslim and Arabic pride in response to widespread discrimination against Middle Eastern people in Australia (Humphrey, 2001:561); nevertheless, they did experience these issues which were mostly un-named undercurrents until the time of the interviews.

Having traced how the women from each country exercised ingenuity as a self-respecting agent in successfully immigrating with their families, the frequency with which interpersonal encounters now include negative representations of their identity and culture is a chief problematic of settlement for some. This is the dynamic referred to by international, critical-materialist feminist writers such as Narayan and Harding (2000), of the intractable operation of racism and other forms of discrimination within the invisible foundations of a country's institutions and social arrangements. Australian multiculturalism research documents the shallowness of 'tolerance' as indicated by the absence of immigrant representation in decision making positions (Vasta, 1993; Scutt, 1992; Bertone, 1992; Castles, 1995; Chan, 1996; Parella, 1993; Kalantzis, 1989; Castles *et al*., 1990; Castles, 2001:810). Multicultural theorists point out that multiculturalism stops short if our Constitution and legal political system are not adjusted to reflect the reality of the cultural diversity existent since white settlement (Castles, 1995; Gunew & Yeatman, 1993).

Giving birth a few months after arrival, Teresa had a struggle with the nurses who tried to prevent her taking her baby to bed:

> *So I told them that I always had my four other children in bed, one until he was 10, and all of them are quite alive …*

The Filipinas were the ones who most articulated their struggle against the attempted erasure of their identity by the negative representations abounding in public spaces. Nenita:

> N: *Just in the shops, when I am waiting to park my car, and if he see me that I am Asian, I don't know if it's true, he see me, then he just stay there. I stay too and he stays, and when I leave, he leaves too and when he passes me he does the rude sign … I think they are Australian because they look Australian and they are bald … short hair teenagers... happened twice in the shops … so I said to my husband, it's the first time someone do that to me, I feel that someone has thrown hot water on my face … it's all right … it was the first time … so, its just outside, you see plenty of teenagers do that, in the station, in the car park, or in the street…Oh, just like when in McDonald, they laughing, when I hit the pole when I reversed, they laughed …*
>
> O: *What do you think that meant?*

> N: *Maybe, I think that because they are not Asian, they are white …* [the same snapping branch tone on the word 'white' as with Mary]
>
> O: *So what do you mean by Asian and white?*
>
> N: *I don't know, because I never heard some … but I hear on the radio and TV that mostly they discriminate the Asian, so I said that maybe …*
>
> O: *So how does it make you feel?*
>
> N: *I feel sad, because I didn't have a good life in the Philippines either, so when you come here and some people treat you like that, I think I'd better go home and stay there because there you are happy … but if you know how to deal with people it's not really hard …*

The Filipinas are angry that there is never any mass media coverage of the achievements of the Philippines. Linda said that the racism is "*everywhere*" and she lives with the awareness that an attack can occur at anytime:

> *… so like when you walk on the streets, like if a person looks at you, you wonder whether this person is wondering whether, "What an ugly person", or "I wonder whether this person, this girl use to dance or what", or this sort of thing.*

It is here that migration is often a relentless encounter with colonialism because the migrant is, by definition, required to adopt a position of deferment to the culture that dominates a parcel of land (Said, 1994). Migrants experience a nebulous erasure as they hear that the language in the new country contains not only absences of meanings but indefinable denials of their knowledge and identity as agents with dignity (Spivak, 1987, 1993). A vicious cycle is set up as each group reacts to the other in an unexplainable manner, often interpreted as hostile, reinforcing previously beliefs about the other culture as detestable (Poynting *et al*., 2004).

Although my research is based on feminist principles, I need to emphasise here that, in the context of losses associated with migration and labour market issues, it is men rather than the women who experience a double jeopardy. I referred earlier to the indignities suffered by men through role reversal in relation to their children and to their wives, who may obtain work while they do not. I continue the analysis of negative representation in the public

sphere by drawing on Australian research and social theory as it applies to both men and women, having alerted the reader to the potentially more debilitating effect of such issues on the sense of wellbeing of the women's husbands or other male family members. The relevance - obviously - is that this is a layer of complexity the women in the study need to negotiate within their homes, as this would lead to family violence. Vietnamese and Lebanese men were the first to be made redundant during restructuring of the Australian economy from the late seventies onwards. The high level of education amongst the majority of migrants who work as process workers, taxi drivers or labourers was noted in Chapter One in the overview of Australian immigration research. Vietnamese people, in parallel with the Ethiopians and Lebanese referred to above, reported through surveys experiences of racism of some form, including professionals, who were only able to practice within their own ethnic communities (Jupp, 2001).

The challenge of giving diverse cultures socially just spaces and symbolic and material resources has been responded to in liberal democracies by recourse to a 'consensus at the centre' paradigm, with appeal to a mythical majority or mainstream and with recourse to rational and moral argumentation, or the judiciary system for serious conflict (Mouffe, 2002:94). Mouffe points out that this is not giving any spaces for involvement in the democratic process by the diverse citizenry and such a vacuum for people who are socially excluded is readily filled by a fortress mentality and by extremist groups on both sides of the political and cultural spectrum. Such lack of spaces constitutes the real threat to democracy. She draws on Wittgenstein who has taken the now accepted postulate that there is no objective truth outside of language, to expound that language is, in itself, an articulation about forms of life. African-American feminist thought and Chicana and Mestiza writings also subvert the notion that there is a 'Master Metaphysics' (Anzaldua, 1990, 1999, 1983; Collins, 2001) and this is in full accord with my rationale expounded above, about the need to start my research by studying the *life-worlds* within which women learnt to constitute meaning and agency. Mouffe (2002:96) then extends the argument by quoting Wittgenstein (Wittgenstein, 1958:242):

> So you are saying that human agreement decides what is true and what is false. It is what human beings say that is true or false; and they agree in the language they use. That is not agreement in opinions but in forms of life.

Social processes and institutions governing societies are therefore constituted not only by specific forms of identity and values but are also the expression of sedimentations of judgements about the forms of life a society has accepted over time. This theoretical excursion explains how social exclusion, on whatever basis, operates and why fulfilment and empowerment by marginalised groups is often found in separatism (for example, second-wave feminists and certain ethno-specific gatherings). The migrant women in this study, and migrants in general, have to exercise their skills and wits not only to obtain the material wherewithal to sustain life for their families but also need to deal with such Gordian Knots.

Few women turned to separatism in this non-representative sample of most privileged and resilient women. Perhaps those who need to do so are not readily accessible to researchers. Linda resolved these issues ingeniously as will be shown in a later section of this chapter. The most painful experience of migration for the upwardly mobile and aspiring industrial psychologist Bernadette, was her family being thrust into the pejorative migrant role:

> *They were professionals as well, and when they came here they felt like they were Beggars. Taken into Springvale Migrant hostel … And having to queue for their Christmas dinner when they had had a housemaid and cook back in the Philippines … a month later they were feeling so bad, so poor, having to queue for their Christmas meal …* (there is a lot of pain here, just the worst possible humiliation, the words beggars and queue uttered with deep bitterness). *And they made sure that our experience was different.*

Being professionals and having servants defined this family's sense of identity and expectation that its social station should have immured it from co-location with poor people, "*beggars*", a term voiced with an emphasis, that denoted to me utter denigration. Bernadette's responses to such issues of representation and identity will continue below.

Except for the dentist Anh, the Vietnamese women demurred from commenting in response to my prompts about racism or negative representations. Soo, Mai Ho and Wai Ling seem to

have accepted as natural that they need to occupy a humble position with respect to other Australian citizens. All the African women vigorously rejected negative reflections of Africa and were part of a significant group of angry women in this study, except for Esther, who at the time of the interview was in the process of developing a critique to counter her initial few years of self abasement and still tended to defer to white people around her. Naima, Zeinab and Nia expressed frustration at being thought of as 'refugees' rather than as people. Kiro's narrative did not include any allusions to feeling like an 'other'; she, instead, felt included by Australian society.

The Russians are aware of the negative portrayal of all things Russian in Australian mass media and public discourses. They were part of the first wave out of a defeated Communist system and they began with the expectation that they had come to a superior society, according to the propaganda of the Perestroika years referred to by Anastasia. They did not maintain this attitude of deference very long but they seem to feel that, in public, it is not acceptable to say that anything was positive about Soviet life. I asked Varvara whether the family listened to Russian radio and TV news and her retort surprised me:

> *In what way*? [I thought that was a strange response, seemed to betray some suspicion that I was asking a trick question. She answers carefully, choosing her words] *Well you just listen to this in the way, in a way you are still worried what is happening there, anything that happens there, you always discuss, you can't help but it is all very closed in ourselves* [tone very earnest, slower, most intense tone and emotion here. I understand that the events in Russia are griefs and worries they keep to themselves. My impression is that some Russians fear it might be unacceptable to Australians to still care about things in Russia.]

Larissa is scathing about the distorted understanding of Russian life prevailing in the public arena; Karina and Anastasia are saddened by this but Zina represents Russians who have a blanket negative perspective on Russia. Antonina is likely to be embarrassed and unclear about these issues.

Struggles in the public sphere: Blocks to resumption of former occupations

The loss of the meaningfulness of their previous work and their positioning within society were also a chief source of enduring suffering. Zeinab cried for three months; she was shocked and is still angry that her family and eminent Eritreans had to do *"rubbish jobs"*. Having had a car pick her up for work every day and having occupied the upper strata of society, she refused to accept that the eminent members of Eritrean society had no other options. The very educated women found this a great loss; Anh realised what she had lost at the culmination of her 15 years of struggle to achieve resettlement of her family in Australia:

> *I see my family, but what about my job, what about my life? Also English … here very terrible, nobody can understand my English.*

She had never done any housework, having always had servants and had to learn to cook and look after her children. She said that, to add to her injury, money sent to her brother for her to buy a house, was invested in Pyramid, a Victorian Building Society, which had a meteoric rise and spectacular collapse, with total losses of the life savings of many citizens. Soon after arrival, all her jewellery was stolen in a house burglary and for this privileged woman, loss of wealth was felt to be catastrophic: "*So in that year I lost everything …* [laughing] *absolutely everything!"*

Anh also lost her source of identity as a dentist who was a powerful agent in Vietnam, able to benefit others and marshal resources for the aid of the weak. Both she and her husband became depressed as material comfort was a poor replacement for being contributing participants in society. Similarly, Mary's marriage, extended family and friendship network were supportive but her suffering revolved around being unable to continue her nursing career:

> *Yes, for me it's so hard. I cry too much. I'm going crazy. My husband is always there and very supportive of me and everything. And also my relatives... my aunty is calling me "don't give up, that's the lifestyle here, you have to do it …" I have to thank my aunty … what am I going to do?*

> *What am I going to do? Why am I here? … To get a job. For me it's the hardest. I said, my God, I am going crazy. What's wrong with me? I know how to communicate, what's wrong with me? And my aunty said "nothing is wrong with you. You know this country is different to our country. It was the same for us when we came here … and then one day you find a job".*

The loss of professional life lasted a number of years for Teresa and Linda as it did for Esther, Fatima, Karina, Larissa and Antonina. They were either caring for children, were unable to obtain professional employment, or were struggling with health issues. Some women immediately set to work to recapture their former work sphere, including Anh, Naima, Zeinab, Zina, Varvara, Wafa, Mary and Bernadette. It was not an issue for Melba and Nenita, who were very grateful to be in Australia with their husbands and with married life representing the fulcrum of their lives. Zeinab's and Naima's ongoing frustrations lay with not having the opportunity to mix with people at their levels of education and with the non-recognition of their considerable skills.

In the process of realising that there was little scope for contributing their expertise to Australia, the Russians undertook training programs which were of a risibly lower level of sophistication than their previous qualifications and they began to accept –phlegmatically - that the deficit resides in the Australian system rather than themselves. Larissa's critique of these issue, however, is trenchant; she, at first, suffered the blow to ontological security many others experienced, being too afraid for a while to go out without her husband: *"I felt I wasn't even a person."*

> *No, life here is a different thing - one, there are completely different understandings, completely different values, of course when I arrived here, my life had been entirely concentrated on Russian art, and when I landed here, I realised that it was all for nothing. The most horrific is to understand that here you are of no worth with respect to anything; you do not mean anything in society.*
>
> *Of course, I think it is still an issue now, because I don't know still how to teach here. I had a student, a boy from Boris' class, they live far from here, but there was a different approach to everything and it broke our relationship. We started to misunderstand each other, the boy was musical enough, capable, he could have learnt. But they have a different system of education here, they don't believe in work here at all, but until you start working, you will not learn anything. He*

> *just started being rude and offensive, and of course I still didn't speak very well and did not understand what he wanted. I had the English to say what I needed to but here it seems, there was a need to explain things about life, to convince him of the need to work, but I didn't have the language skills, so it was very hard.*

Larissa was, at the time of the interview, prone to excessive negativity, unable to identify anything of value in Australia. In a British publication about visual culture in post-Communist Russia, Condee and Padunov (1995) confirmed my informants' narratives about the central place of 'high culture' in Soviet society. This refers to formal literature, film, music and so on, which occupied central public spaces, with usually greater accessibility and affordability than food, produce and, certainly, consumer goods. The authors trace the process whereby such capital had been replaced by 1993, with the visual consumer culture typical of Western societies. Poorly dubbed commercial films and pop music displaced programmes considered 'art house' in Australia but that had previously been daily fare on television and radio. Gradually, the cult of patronage of the arts by Western or home-grown entrepreneurs emerged and *high culture* became inaccessible for public consumption (Condee & Padunov, 1995:130-172). This literature supports the validity of Larissa's critique and she has the right to maintain her rage but, unfortunately, as many waves of migrants before her, she has not found a way out of the attendant unhappiness.

Fatima dealt with the challenges in a more pragmatic and positive way; she very quickly recognised that living in daily proximity to the Eritrean community in the high-rise public housing estate was not helpful to her family in this new environment. Having resumed her traditional role of being involved in fellow Eritreans' lives and providing assistance, after three months she moved out to a rented property some distance from the inner city, reasoning that her children needed quietness and some respite from other people in order to achieve at school. It is indeed indicative of great sagacity to, within three months, re-evaluate and take action to alter the communal pattern of living which had, in fact, been her lifelong sustenance, not only in emotional and social terms but also existentially. Choosing to be isolated in the context of the above quoted distress at her lack of English illustrates Fatima's

unusual fortitude, deriving from a lifetime of symbolic and material capital accumulated and perfected through adversity. In contrast to Larissa, she promptly incorporated *hybrid* knowledge and ways of being, suggesting that it is easier to become 'Australian' when this coincides with the family's best interests.

The earlier arrivals accepted as inevitable the necessity to have to work for decades in factories, including Wai Ling, Delal, Ramida, Nenita, and Mai Ho. Karina and her husband are the only Russians who worked in manual unskilled positions.

Unrelenting suffering compounded by isolation: Becoming ill

Most of the women went through a year or two of depression but five became clinically ill through a combination of being deprived of their previous sources of sustenance, experiencing personal tragedies and being forced into situations which were inherently debilitating, such as abusive marriages. For all of them, isolation was the common breeding ground for despair and psychiatric illness.

Having seen Linda's impressively rich emotional and spiritual family life, she also exemplifies the dark side of being embedded in family and community. As she admitted, one does not develop the confidence and individuality to make good choices. As I outlined in Chapter Four, the chief Filipino values of *kapwa* (fellowship in shared identity with members of one's group), *pakkikisma* (deferring to group consensus even at the expense of individual self interest), shame and face (Soriano, 1995:100-102) did not equip this family - and particularly this very competent young woman - for events beyond the normal routines of group life. The family's helplessness in the face of their older daughter's disappearance and reluctance to offer their views about Linda's unwelcome courtship, illustrate passivity in the face of complex issues out of the loop of the familiar. These events and their responses show also the Filipino *bahala na* (come what may) (Soriano, 1995:102), which is really an expression of a solid conviction that all is in God's hands.

Linda's settlement process could not have been more torturous. Her husband bought her only one set of clothes the day after arriving. She did not ask for anything, so that he would not think she married him for his money. She wore that one set of clothes until she got her first job at a factory some months later, wearing his clothes when hers were in the wash. He did not give her any money, went food shopping with her, would only buy very bland food, never took her to Asian grocery shops, returned to the shelf any item of food she recognised as familiar. His insistence on daily steamed broccoli, a vegetable she had never seen before, was particularly cemented in her memory. He was emotionally totally undemonstrative, spoke little and behaved with what felt to her as indifference.

In a text *Families and Cultural Diversity in Australian* (Hartley, 1995:100-101), produced by the Australian Institute of Family Studies, the chapter on the Filipino family ways show that the meanings imbued into the words neighbour, husband, love, family, human interaction, referred to forms of life that were different in Australia. Neighbours are included in daily life rituals of affection and care extended to kin, ritual kin and neighbours are reciprocal (Soriano, 1995:101). Hence, the Filipino *damdamin*, or feelings which guide all social relations, did not meet with the corresponding expected, *normal* response from those around Linda and probably many other Filipinas. The only conclusion that Linda could make was that no-one cared about her. This emotional vacuum was excruciatingly painful and she became clinically depressed within a number of weeks and, being a very slim Asian, lost weight to the point of appearing quite skeletal. Although quite pleasant and welcoming, her in-laws never asked her directly how she was feeling, despite her obvious ill health. Such emotional distance in the vast and empty suburbia of a foreign land and without a friend, was a lethal cocktail for mental health. Despite her clinical depression, she obtained work at a factory to go home within a year. When she appeared anorexic and uncharacteristically withdrawn, her family looked very confused but neither Linda nor her parents opened up, shielding each other from grief. She returned to her husband and became pregnant. This was the operation of the need to maintain a semblance of harmony and conviviality at all costs and

save face (*pakkikisma)*, to spare the family guilt and shame in front of their community, as referred to in numerous references above.

A political theory perspective on the loss of personal agency, or variously interpreted as depression, is offered by Mouffe, drawing on the previous discussion and on Nietzsche. The latter defines nihilism as "situations in which an individual's material and interpretive practices fail to provide ground for a reflexive interpretation of agency" (in Warren, 1988:17) and Mouffe (2002:97) concludes: "it indicates a failure of meaning that draws into question the very possibility of a goal–directed, meaningful action. Individuals become nihilistic when they are unable to constitute their social relations and identity in order to form a will to act".

Teresa also became clinically depressed for several years; as well as the demoralising loss of identity quoted above, without any source of information, she had to look for a school on foot, find rental property, learn to shop, learn to clean the house and how to look after children. She cried all the time. Her husband could not resume his profession, an unexpected contingency, only obtaining unskilled work of insecure tenure. This was a critical blow to this previously ebullient family as they realised they would be stuck in poverty. Her husband became abusive:

> T: *It was really bad because the kids are used to having a maid and so did I. I took over the role of the maid.*
>
> O: *It must have been another shock to the system?*
>
> T: *Yes, because didn't know how to organize the day. Before I left, I asked a friend who was organized without a maid, to write down what to do, step by step, and I lost that list. Had the depression and the feeling of isolation and so when I realised I lost that list, I felt now I can't do anything. I mean, it was no big thing, but at the time I couldn't do anything. Fiascos happened like one time I bought, I don't know how to calculate amounts, I had only cooked for parties. One time I made a dish and we had to eat it for 5 days. I made enough for the whole of Melbourne. Saw, oh very cheap chicken Maryland! so I bought a lot and then I forgot all about it, and the smell …! so in the middle of the night I crept out and chucked out kilos and kilos. Only in the last years I have learnt to cook right amounts.*

This account certainly underscores the loss of skills and talents ensured by the excluding practices of non-recognition of overseas qualifications and experience by Australian institutions. Teresa arrived pregnant and, after giving birth, had post natal depression. To compound the irony of life, her 18 year old son, the brightest child and his mother's favourite, sustained brain injury in a car accident. When asked what depressed her the most, Teresa said that it was "*the identity thing*", and, associated with chronic unemployment, Teresa lost hope of regaining the life they once enjoyed and in which she had made sense of her life according to her place in the web of meanings in society, on the basis of the nurturing encounters of daily routines with numerous people who knew her and affirmed that she was, indeed, Seniora X, member of this family, and so on. The interpretive practices Mouffe (2002) refers to as important in *the will to act* depended on the African, Filipino, Lebanese and, to a lesser extent, Vietnamese women's groundings in a dense web of daily intimacies in a community, encountered frequently. Even though Teresa had a very broad inner world of possibilities (see Chapters Four and Five), she needed to rebuild her diasporic identity by finding nurturing spaces in Melbourne. Her process of 'settlement' will continue under the section on facilitating processes, where she will recount the stark difference contact with public infrastructure and civil society through government funded services made to her life.

Tahn, Mifsud, and Mariam experienced mental illness due to their entrapment in abusive marriages; of all factors, domestic violence seemed the most immobilising of women's agency, despite brave attempts to overcome this. Within a few weeks of getting married, Tahn found out that he was not the "*dream man*" that she thought he was and he became emotionally and physically abusive. Being pregnant, not knowing anyone but his family, and with no English compounded cruelly her subjugation. Her husband said that there were no English classes, while his mother and sister attended the free '510 hours' which the government provides for new migrants. The mother- and sister-in-law were often verbally abusive and Tahn seems to have become mentally ill during her pregnancy as she told me a rather incoherent story of going to church in her hospital gown, without underwear on. Tahn says that most Vietnamese women live with domestic violence and she would like to

publicly expose the plight of migrant brides. She indignantly pointed to a family lawyer in the Vietnamese community who is himself violent at home. Mothers-in-law are complicit in their sons' abuse and Tahn was warned while in hospital and exhorted on other occasions to *"keep quiet and be a good and obedient wife"*. These critical inscriptions of Vietnamese women's bodies have been documented or referred to in Chapters Four and Five, for example, by Hawthorne (1982:21), "an old saying goes like this: "When you have just one son, you can say you have all; but when you have ten daughters and no son, you still have nothing!".

Filial piety and honour prevented Tahn from telling her parents about her circumstances when she visited Vietnam six years later, only with her daughter; she did not want to "*break their heart*". Her plight was identified by the Maternal and Child Health nurse after giving birth; she told the nurse that her husband had sponsored her, so he is in charge and has all the power. Her story – which also took a more positive turn - will be resumed under the section 'Contact with public infrastructure'.

When Mariam came to Australia, she found that her husband and his family with whom the couple lived for the next three years, were rough people who gambled, drank, partied and verbally abused the shy new arrival. Without any family at all and with a background of some personal fragility and vulnerability, Mariam could not have met a worse fate. She was two months pregnant on arrival and did not know of any services. Reflecting her state of embattlement, she comments about attending classes to improve her English, *"to understand in case people are saying something bad about me"*. There she felt happy for the first time, making friends amongst fellow migrants. When her in-laws derided her efforts, however, saying that she would never obtain work here, she submitted and stopped classes, despite losing her only positive human contacts. She spent the next three years in misery, being left alone all day as the husband and sister-in-law went out to the TAB (gambling) or visiting friends without taking her along. She suffered two miscarriages and the death of a sister in Lebanon added to her depression.

The second Lebanese woman who suffered clinical depression as a result of the strictures of her culture's gender roles was Mifsud, who greeted us with a hijab that, as I have mentioned before, she threw off when she felt relaxed with the interpreter and me. The older man she had precipitously married was a conservative religious Muslim, who controlled her every action. She could not dress as she liked, go out, socialise, make friends and was given no money or information about this new country, how to use transport or access to English classes. Without English and totally housebound, Mifsud became mentally ill. The impact of poor professional services on Mifsud's situation will equally be presented in the next section of this chapter.

Facilitating processes: Australian publicly funded infrastructure

The narratives illustrated that the families' settlement was significantly assisted by, firstly, access to publicly funded systems and resources which constitute Australian social citizenship rights according to Turner (1993:1-18) and Salvaris (1995). The second facilitating factor named by the women was the indispensability of being or becoming connected with a community, whether from their own ethnicity, local residents or other people who constitute Melbourne's civil society, such as volunteers or professionals who cross the boundaries of formality and become friends. This continues the women's narratives about their journey in the spaces created and encountered during their diaspora and their creation and recreation of their lives into hybrid ways of being and knowing.

In the light of the difficulties of migration, the move to Australia could have been felt by the women and their families to have been an unmitigated error. While the philosophical principles and empirical evidence undergirding the construction of the welfare state as it existed up to the mid-nineties have been subject to repeated strokes of national amnesia, the women's stories do provide evidence of the indispensability of such public infrastructure in

enabling them to recapture the life energies which had been eroded or buried by a variety of global, national and personal disasters.

Government policies

After 16 years of assisting child after child to escape from Vietnam and surviving through their financial support, the Vietnamese grandmother Sen arrived here, very starkly experiencing the benefits of Australian citizenship:

> *When I came here, I had no way to make a living and when I came here, the Australian government and people were very good to me and even supported me with my necessities, so I felt I was in heaven. Then I received social security of $300, which increased gradually. I felt very grateful to the government … but I never thought they would be able to sponsor me, so I am very thankful that the government enabled me to be reunited with my children … the government here respects human rights and is very caring.*

Sen does not speak English but relies on her children for all formal dealings with the broader community, very contented to live life as she always has, in the private world of her family and her contentment with what she has achieved in life primarily resides in having been able to facilitate her children's escape to a better country. Sen's sense of having captured correctly the key principles of how to lead a good human life, her understanding of the laws of the universe, have been affirmed as she sees how effectively her beliefs and ontological foundations have worked out. She can, with satisfaction, reflect that her cosmology has been correct all along and this includes primarily a *moral code as the generator of meaning*. Having lived her life according to what she and her culture see as the inviolable principles of being good to one's neighbour, acting honestly, morally, with integrity, self-sacrificial love not only for her family but towards the entire human community she is a part of, she can reflect with deep satisfaction about her meaningful participation in the broad mystery of life, both eschatologically and retrospectively in line with revered Vietnamese ancestors.

The reader is reminded of the recent history of the Coalition Government's interventions since taking office in 1996, reversing the previous bi-partisan support of multiculturalism

and the unprecedented turning away from the shores of Australia the boat *Tampa*, holding asylum seekers rescued by the Norwegian captain from imminent drowning as the Indonesian craft carrying them was sinking. The new 'border protection policy' ensued, with the establishment of detention centres in the middle of deserts or on Pacific islands, run by a multinational prison operators, in conditions akin to those in concentration camps. The widespread claims of abuse of human rights have led to a strong campaign by communities, young people, scholars and public figures (Burnside QC; MacCallum, 2002), trying to restore dignity and compassion to the attitudinal characteristics of this country. The success of Sen's efforts relies quite centrally on the Australian government's immigration policies of the eighties and nineties, accepting refugees and boat people and offering them a modicum of initial support. A government perceived as compassionate, implementing social policies of universal income support and access to housing, free health care, funding of ethnic elderly clubs and migrant resource centres played a central role in elderly migrants being able to reflect with satisfaction upon a lifetime of struggle. Were the Vietnamese migrants of this study part of the boat people of 2002-2003, shut up in detention centres, their evaluations of their life's achievements, would have been compromised, if not annihilated. This point most dramatically illustrates the indispensability of government policies and citizenship rights in facilitating migrant women's agency; more broadly, it illustrates how personal resilience needs to be complemented by structural and collective measures and supports, lest the former would risk being eroded because of the ongoing nature of the obstacles encountered by individuals (Deveson, 2003).

The African women were able to develop a basic sense of wellbeing primarily because Federal immigration policy allowed for family reunion, particularly based on refugee visas. The virtual recreation of a Lebanese village was possible during the eighties and nineties, a time of liberal family reunion policies. The Russians who arrived later and were unable to sponsor their parents or other family members, live against a background of sadness, particularly given that grandparents have a central role to play in the upbringing of Russian children.

Naima had a twenty-four week premature baby, weighing four hundred grams. The infant's amazing growth into a four kilogram baby six months after the interview was seen and felt by Naima as miraculous help from Allah and as an affirmation of the transcendent value of her life of integrity, faith and love for God and humanity. The little girl was able to survive because the world's best medical expertise and technology was available according to need and it was virtually free. Were such services not part of government-funded infrastructure, by perhaps being on a user-pays basis, the birth of a premature child and, secondly, her death because of her parents' lack of economic resources, may have been seen, at least in the darker moments of grief, as perhaps retribution from Allah. It would certainly have undermined Naima's sense of competency and agency; she would have, however subtly, lost some of her aplomb and self-determination. Such ill-fortune would have cast a negative pall over her life and it would have been owned by her extended family as well.

Melba's extensive struggle for survival was greatly assisted by the change in immigration policy with respect to overseas brides in situations of domestic violence (Marginson, 2001; Easteal, 1996; Cahill, 1990). She was able to remain in Australia with her children and eke out a life of some dignity through the availability of income support, public housing and universal health care. All the women, except for Larissa and some of the politically astute Africans whose critiques will appear below, believed that Australian governments are very compassionate.

Income support

The provision of income benefits to migrants and refugees, prior to the introduction of the two-year waiting time for non-refugee or humanitarian entrants, was crucial for all of the women in enabling them a civilised life and preventing homelessness, malnutrition, possible suicide and mental illness, criminality or activity on the black market. Research by the Welfare Rights Unit and the ACOSS presentation to the Senate Inquiry into the two year waiting period for newly arrived migrants (Australia, 1998) indicate that these are features of

life for many skilled, sponsored and even eminent international professionals, for whom arrangements with sponsors or employers break down.

All of the families from the Horn of Africa and Russia refer to income support as the primary facilitator of their settlement; when factory work was not available for the Lebanese and Vietnamese heads of family, income support was also nominated as of primary importance. The women showed that income support was the indispensable basis for them to be able to work furiously at building their lives. Instead of encouraging dependency, income support prevented them from being overwhelmed by life's contingencies. Recent arrivals usually engage in a frenetic pace of work, such as punishing schedules of non-stop study of English, casual work as cleaners, little sleep, children adopting responsibilities earlier than their Australian peers, lack of sleep and no holidays. Karina:

> K: *Without income support we wouldn't have survived. Well, it was very hard because there was not one free minute. I learnt English till 2.00 in the morning; Sergei was 6 and went to school. My daughter spoke English already.*
>
> O: *It must have been lonely*
>
> K: *Did not have time to feel lonely. We immediately started working.*

Free English classes: Australian Migrant Education Program (AMEP)

The availability of free 510 hours of English through the universally available AMEP program was usually the first step into interaction with the Australian community. The benefits included learning English, being with fellow migrants, talking to committed supportive teachers, having their feelings of vulnerability validated and normalised. The AMEP classes were settings for the beginning of empowerment away from self-blame and feelings of inferiority and the engendering of hope and vision by hearing from others that the initial hardship is time limited and that a satisfactory life will or can ensue. The classes were a primary site for the formation of friendships and community networks with fellow migrants as well as with the Australian staff and volunteers. This initial free service gave

women an experience of the alien life-world as a *benevolent* one, countering fearful or distorted assumptions and interpretations, encouraging more forays into the wider community. Students were usually surprised at the generosity of the service and of the genuine interest of staff.

Lebanese women arrived in the country when AMEP was just starting, or was about to, and had pressing needs to work at factories. The Russians, some of the women from the Horn of Africa and the two Vietnamese professionals worked very intensely at learning English. Naima, Kiro, Fatima and Zeinab quickly moved into tertiary vocational study; Wafa laughingly said that she was kicked out of AMEP classes because her English skills were fluent and as she was bored, she misbehaved. This in itself would have been an amusingly validating experience, reconnecting her with the competency she had always had. As was shown above, the women who were subjected to prolonged and continued domestic violence were sequestered in the first place by being denied access to the AMEP. Delal could only challenge racism when she had acquired adequate English skills:

> *If you speak English even if you in train somewhere you speak Arabic "Wog speak English". Bad boy come and touch my head for scarf like this. He said: "Woggie". One day I said: "you, where you come from; where is your dad, your mum? You're a woggie too. Because you look four generations, Australians all woggies" … one day I say I hope I explain very good English to show him where I come from, where I am and how is my family. They think I come from the street of gypsy people or hungry people, the poor people. If they saw my family there they say to me why do you come here? You have a rich family. I grown up and had two servants.*

Affordable tertiary education

Accessible tertiary educational institutions, such as TAFE and, less frequently, university, were one of the most positive 'hand-ups' for the women, regardless of their migration circumstances. Study was in itself empowering; learning skills, receiving qualifications formally accredited in Australia, meant that doors could open into the world of work. Only Larissa, who did not qualify for any citizenship rights as a skilled migrant, did not study. Zeinab, Fatima and Naima were able to recapture some dignity by enrolling in tertiary

education. Wai Ling was able to shift out of factory and cleaning work after eleven years, by enrolling in free TAFE and then university degrees. Anh's husband's depression and abusive behaviour lifted when he enrolled in the affordable Social Work degree. Anh and Mary began life again by embarking on new career pathways through the low cost and easily accessible TAFE courses.

Affordable or no cost tertiary education, again, did not encourage complacency but was the indispensable basis for lifelong self-determination. The Herculean efforts dedicated to study are not typical of Australian-born students; Kiro successfully completed her 510 hours and re-enrolled in a TAFE course as a stepping stone to a nursing degree. With inadequate English for tertiary study, she showed astounding tenacity:

K: *They sent me to Swinburne TAFE and I was there and did that course 1 year full time, very good. But I was suffering because I didn't understand what the teachers were saying. I was sitting there all day, keeping quiet. I never keep quiet, I'm not that type of person, I knew the things, I know how to do it, but I can't speak, so I was crying. It was bad, it was bad. There was the student union and they sent me there and there was a counsellor named Helen. She was fabulous, really good person. Each day she was with me, all the time she was with me, all the time she just made an appointment, don't worry, if you want to cry just cry, tell me what you want. She was going through all the things with me.*

O: *What did you talk to her about?*

K: *Everything! I miss my family, I need this, I need that, I don't understand school, they wanted a 1000-word essay and I ask: do I know 1000 words in English? No! I was asking the teacher: how do you imagine me to write 1000 words? So they sent me to school support in English. That was good and when I came home I would have to write what I did all day in English and my brother-in law corrected and gave me other things to do. I was always listening to the radio, all the time, the TV on all the time, I can hear it but I couldn't understand it, I was angry, I was crying, I don't want to be … when I was on the tram home, I was crying all the way and people would ask me. I was angry and said don't ask me. O my God, it was really horrible! It was too hard and I know the subject is not hard because I did it before … but the language is too high for me and I was thinking I am dumb.*

O: *Could you speak English with people you were comfortable with?*

K: *Yes.*

O: *So do you think you lost your confidence?*

K: *Because I don't know them much, I was not a scary person before, but I didn't want to see those classmates, I'm scared, I'm really scared. Before they come in I go in and after they go I go. Always I'm scared because I don't understand.*

O: *Do you think maybe all the things you've gone through since leaving home finally caught up with you?*

K: *Maybe, but mostly it was the English. When I got my results in Swinburne I was so horrified, I didn't want to eat. I know all the subjects, why? I was always blaming myself. Things got better after six months and I received better marks. I saw that the young people don't know what I know, they can just talk. So I got good marks, and kept on asking. I finished that one. Still I'm crying but I was beginning to know what was going on. It's my nature too, if I don't understand something I have to know, I can't sleep otherwise. I have to know. But that's just my nature. So I keep asking. All the people were very helpful in Swinburne and not one Ethiopian there.*

Similar levels of excruciating effort were expended by Anh and Karina in learning English and studying at university level.

Employment opportunities

Many of the earlier arrivals, including the women and most of their professional husbands, went to work in factories. Delal and Ramida, as young Lebanese brides, went to work in a factory within the first week of arrival; the young women found the long hours of standing, with prohibitions about talking and looking up from their machines, very arduous and dull. The women's families back in Lebanon were horrified that they needed to work under such conditions. At home, they had the double shift of cooking and keeping house for several men, including their husbands and their brothers. In keeping with the inquisitive and enterprising spirit manifested in her youth, Delal worked consistently, kept house for a number of men, had eight children and, as already referred to previously, helped to bring out her entire village, usually housing families in her own home upon arrival for a few months.

Nevertheless, Ramida, Mai Ho, Nenita and Delal enjoyed being able to earn an income, mix in the public arena and befriend Australian women. Their co-workers helped them learn English. Mai Ho and Nenita began to feel more comfortable in Australia when they obtained work; being with other Asian migrants helped with the alienation of being surrounded by a sea of white faces. Participation in the public sphere has its own imperatives for communication and competent task performance, thus propelling Mai Ho to overcome her fear of not being able to speak English. Mai Ho said she was also empowered by receiving a salary which enabled her to go out socially and mix in pubs, like everybody else.

Wai Ling, the Vietnamese lawyer, who arrived as a single parent with three children, found work in a factory within the first week and a cleaning job at night. She was among the first arrivals in 1979 and linked up with the small community around the only Vietnamese priest. Obtaining Public Housing accommodation in an inner city high-rise, her first 11 years were spent feverishly studying English in her spare time and working at two or three unskilled positions. She reported that her children were a great consolation because they took responsibility for their education and household chores and even tried to earn some money while still in primary school, feeling sorry for their mother. She also involved herself in organising activities for her Vietnamese Catholic church community.

Her husband joined them in 1990, having spent about a decade in a re-education camp; they lived together for five years before divorcing. The children then urged their mother to return to university, despite her trepidations about her poor English. She began a Diploma Studies in Community Services at TAFE and continued on into university. She obtained work in welfare in 1993 and is still studying for a Masters. She sponsored her relatives during those years and got more involved in her community, organising many youth activities, women's groups and regular festivals. She says that she has always done two or three jobs at a time, not one. Her pace of living life stemmed from her youth, when she and her siblings set up their rooms so that they could study:

> *… otherwise, if you don't study you are wasting your time and your future will be like all the people, with nothing. If I set a goal, I try to reach it … my motto in life is to: never, never waste time because time is very valuable. If you don't trick it, you will loose it.*

Fatima, Naima and Zeinab acted immediately to regain their professional lives. Obtaining employment at the Local Council in a family day care scheme was an enormously facilitating springboard for Fatima, sparing her the waste of time and debilitating loss of confidence most migrants endure as they seek to claw their way into mainstream of society. Obtained within a few months of arrival, employment in a role far below her education and skills nonetheless gave her the opportunity to travel interstate to a national local government conference. In contrast to the deference developed by most migrant women through prolonged experiences of marginalisation, Fatima was buoyed enough to express her views in plenary sessions, a daunting task for many non-migrants. For Fatima, it was a resumption of the intellectual and moral leadership she exercised in Eritrea and she was able to recapture her normal functioning at the level of self-actualisation as dedication to the betterment of society. For example, although it was not obligatory to train to do Family Day Care, on the basis of her own assessment of the need for a quality service, she chose to train energetically. Self-expression as a social advocate has constituted a lifelong source of meaning and energy for rising above adversity and beyond mere survival.

Most Lebanese, Filipino, Vietnamese and African husbands have been restricted to either factory positions or insecure and unskilled work. As former professionals, the stresses of such demoralising work led the husbands of Anh and Teresa to become abusive at home; Wafa's husband had a heart attack; Kiro's and Esther's husbands are still willingly sacrificing their career prospects to enable their wives to study at university first. Zeinab's and Naima's husbands have their own professional businesses and Mai Ho's husband was repeatedly evasive when I asked him where he had worked in the 15 years of their residence in Melbourne. At the time of interview, he was seeking to work with Vietnamese youth with substance abuse issues.

Karina's highly skilled computer analyst husband spent two years digging roads, leaving home at 5.45 am; Karina worked as a home carer and, after the evening meal, both cleaned offices until midnight, only to get up again at 5.00 am. Their primary school child behaved responsibly, doing homework and going to bed on time. Other Russian husbands spent some time in junior or voluntary positions in their field, before attaining a more satisfactory level. At the time of our interview, Karina's husband was working as a computer analyst in the public service. Only Zina's husband has a level of seniority commensurate with his level at home.

The barring of entry into the workforce by closed-shop professions entailed protracted pain and suffering for people; Anh tells the story of her seven years of study for admission to dentistry only to encounter blatant discrimination. After taking advantage of all the free tuition available through AMEP, she and her husband decided that she ought to attempt to gain recognition as a dentist while he worked in a factory, which was profoundly demoralising for this former dentist. Life was filled with the stress of poverty, anxiety about the children's education, conflict with neighbours at the public housing high-rise who complained about her daughter's piano practice. Anh had the extraordinarily laborious task of mastering dentistry textbooks unaided but, after six years, she received a high grade at the theory exam and attempted the practice exam:

> *The examiners discriminated against Asians very easily and they were all Australians. I still don't want to go back to be examined because I was so depressed afterwards … I could concede that I failed one subject due to my poor communication. But with one subject, it made me feel very, very depressed. It was tooth extraction. At the time of the exam, the examiner brought in a Vietnamese patient rather than an Australian one, so I was very grateful. I had to extract two teeth from the lower jaw and did it very gently and perfectly. The patient felt completely numb and he was very happy. I closed the wounds very well. Then when I failed the surgery I saw the counsellor and she said that the examiner said that I didn't know how to administer a local anaesthetic. It is unfair because if that was true how could I take the tooth out without pain.*

She was not allowed to appeal or speak to the examiner, who was well known for failing Asians. A Filipino dentist went to this examiner's office in the university and assaulted him

on behalf of all other people whose life chances had been ruined; the man returned to the Philippines. Thus, Anh understood that she would never be given entry and became very depressed; she stayed home, helping her sister-in-law sewing as an out-worker. Her husband noticed an advertisement for courses in Community Services at the local TAFE and having a shoulder injury as well, she was advised that she would not be able to practise dentistry even if she passed. She was then able to make a creative switch and see serendipity in the turn of events of her life as she began working with Vietnamese migrants at a local large welfare organisation. Again, the financial and physical accessibility of TAFE were indispensable in Anh's rebuilding of her life, incorporating and integrating her life-long identity. Similarly, as she began work, her husband was able to enrol in Social Work at university and again, the affordability of university was critical. He has now stopped his difficult and abusive behaviour at home and is able to pursue a vocation he aspired to in his youth.

The workplace itself, however, was also usually the site of racism and discrimination. Kiro fought back racism without anger, by just flicking it off; I asked whether members of her community speak about racism:

> K: *They all talk about it except me* [she laughs]. *They talk about it, most of them they say they don't give us jobs, they just treat us like garbage. They do talk about it, mostly they are not happy and most think Australians are racists. Most of them are unemployed. Some are educated people.*
>
> O: *Why do you think you don't have problems?*
>
> K: *Because I don't think in that way. Just think positive.*
>
> O: *What if something negative happens?*
>
> K: *I just don't put into my mind; I just want to be happy.*

The women who grew up fighting for their rights as refugees in Sudan were particularly skilful in overcoming racism at the workplace; Naima named this racism as "*ignorance*", maintaining her integrity as a competent agent:

O: *Any mistake it's got to be you?*

N: *Because he doesn't know … I was in a computer class and my knowledge of computers was higher than hers, and my communication skills were better. I used to help her to communicate with Arabic people. She used to quarrel with them and I used to say why do you need me now? They speak English. That's why I am hired now, for my skills … The media shows only poor people from Africa and they think there are no computers in Africa …*

Women used a number of ingenious strategies for dealing with workplace discrimination; Linda was the only Asian in her first administrative position with a Local Council. Her women co-workers often made racist remarks about table-top dancing, scapegoated her for any errors or equipment malfunction, excluded her and set her up regularly. Linda's manager was very supportive of her personally but unable to change the culture of the large organisation. Linda changed her situation by putting in place parameters around her work schedule and obtained her own equipment to avoid opportunities for blame. She also reasoned that Australians need education about the Philippines, as they were victims of distorted media coverage. She said that she had no choice but to prove to them on a daily basis that their racist assumptions were wrong. Her strategy was to always being "*straight to the point*" in speaking about work issues, not keeping grudges and projecting a persona of integrity, even in the face of unjust treatment. When her co-workers accidentally read her Curriculum Vitae, they realised their error and Linda rationalised that this is part of the process of breaking down stereotypes; racism is due to lack of information and misunderstanding and, as the only Asian person in a workforce of several hundreds, people need time to be exposed to her whilst Australian people are also very reserved about developing relationships. She ended up having "*a really good time there*", affirming to herself the efficacy of her sagacious assessment of the situation and choice of strategies.

Linda recuperated her former competence as an agent but with greatly enriched skills in dealing with people and a deepened generosity which was already outstanding according to Filipino standards. She exemplifies the creation of life from the 'Third Spaces', so-called by the trans-national feminists (Narayan and Harding, 2004; Lavie and Swedenburg, 1996). She

remained faithful to her Filipino values and extended her stock of knowledge by incorporating Australian-based wisdom, exemplifying the *transcending of binaries,* such as East-West (Plumwood, 2002; Minh-ha, 1999; Gayle, 2002; Baca Zinn and Thornton Dill, 1999; Root, 1996; Bhabha, 1994; Ang *et al*., 2000). From then on, in other situations where she would be the only Asian, she took risks and opened up to her Australian classmates and developed friendships that are still enduring. Linda expresses awareness of the self-reinforcing dynamism of racism and of relationship-building by saying that she has a more positive identity than most Filipinas who expect to be treated badly. She urges other Filipinas to open up to Australians.

Bernadette, the psychologist, looked from a great height at the negative Australian definition of her persona on the basis of ignorance about her country; she actively and scornfully rejected the 'othering' mirrors held up to her as a Filipina woman. Part of her agency of resistance to oppressive self-representations involved refusing to enact the role of the migrant and instead working as a volunteer in a Migrant Resource Centre, thus obtaining information and support from colleagues on an equal footing. The most valuable assistance she found was in her colleagues' respect and validation of her experiences of settlement in a new country "*as normal, not isolated*". She never did ask for assistance from any service provider or government income support. Similarly, when employed in a women's support organisation, although outnumbered by the other staff, she maintained the strength of her analytical discourse by wryly commenting on the personal and political aspirations of some committee members, contradicting the feminist mission of the organisation as they deflected resources from women in need. Bernadette also had a protracted struggle with the Psychologist Registration Board, which did not accept her qualifications as equivalent to Australian ones. Her interchanges with these gatekeepers to clinical psychologist practice were marked by her interpellations of their discourses as contradictory and suggestive of discrimination. She did not co-operate with the mendicant position required of her and, after a few years of practice, including her media exposure as a public advocate, she was invited by the Psychologist Registration Board to re-apply. Bernadette exemplifies another approach

to living in diaspora: primarily, her approach is to refuse the deference expected of migrants by the dominant host society and to exercise her will to enact the equivalence of the Filipino education and stock of knowledge as *fully equivalent to that of people in the Australian public sphere*, who had the power to determine her entry into or exclusion from professional circles. Already a *hybrid*, modern, cosmopolitan and upper-class woman, she had a background of considerable material and symbolic capital to assist her agency in evading the humble status allocated for migrants.

Industrial laws

Some fought back with quiet dignity, in a modest manner; the unassuming Nenita, once she had learnt about the Australian legal system, her industrial rights and the assistance available universally, was able to stand up to the verbal abuse of her immediate manager at the factory by telling him that she was an educated person. After three complaints to senior management, the harassment ceased. Clearly, access to the industrial protections which were law in Australia was only possible to an educated and fluent English speaker, not the majority of migrants occupying Nenita's job roles.

Government funded community services

The Australian community services workforce is subject to frequent criticism and derision by academics, media and policy experts, as well as scrutiny by Treasury officials keen to trim 'waste,' especially supported in this by the reigning ideology of economic rationalism. The women gave empirical evidence of the benefits derived from their contacts with the universal Maternal and Child Health Nursing Service, community development workers, social workers in Family Support agencies, Neighbourhood Houses, ethno-specific workers, Migrant Resource Centres and employment counsellors at local labour market programs, all of these government-funded services. Contact for these particular women radically released them from oppressive conditions and enhanced their capacities to act for themselves.

Tahn's family violence was identified in the course of a routine universal home visit by the Maternal and Child Health Nurse after the birth of a baby. She learnt that her situation constituted domestic violence, learnt about her legal rights, was connected with an ethno-specific worker who, over time, enabled her to move into a women's refuge where she received her own income for the first time of her life, participated in counselling and enjoyed the support of other women. Her back pains stopped; the husband asked for "*forgiveness*" and, predictably and understandably enough, she returned. She says that things are better because she can tell him that it is illegal for him to put her under his supervision. Tahn seems to be speaking very firmly from a position of *victim*, repeating over and over her sister-in-law's *"heavy words"* and her husband's cruelty. When asked what enables her to cope, she says that she has decided to stay with him, in full knowledge of her rights to leave him and that her situation is based on "*my free choice to sacrifice myself to give my daughter a better life*". When I asked her whether she has any choice, she insisted that she does. She says that she cannot go to classes to learn English because she has to look for work and cannot find a job, because she cannot speak English. When then asked why she does not go to the local Vietnamese women's group regularly, she again cites looking for a job and adds that the group helped her emotionally and finds the information about services empowering, but she still feels that "*I have my own BRAND under the husband*".

The metaphor of a *brand*, which connotes the impossibility of removal, suggests fatalism and being trapped forever; she was unable to articulate any plans beyond the circular mantras. Tahn illustrates the difficulties of escaping domestic violence which entails corresponding ostracism from her ethnic community. The Vietnamese workers Tahn encountered lacked the complex skills required to successfully manage the double jeopardy of domestic violence and cultural issues.

Mariam's misery was described briefly above; after two years of isolation, she met a Lebanese ethno-specific worker at the local neighbourhood house, with whom she discussed her situation. Without telling anyone, she managed to take action by saving her social

security payments, taking a cab to a distant cousin's house and flying to her brother's house in Lebanon, with the intention of never returning. Her brother protested, her husband rang her every week and her sisters pressured her to return. Mariam returned after two months and says that his behaviour improved. At the time of the interview, she had a two-year old child with developmental delay. She was not depressed anymore because she had a son, had some independence by having a car to visit her sisters-in-law, could attend church weekly and sometimes went out with the local Arabic women's group at a local neighbourhood house. Mariam's story shows the role of education as a critical facilitator of women's capacity to alter adverse circumstances and create a life that is more life affirming and satisfying. There is no doubt that her years as a professional in Lebanon gave her the symbolic capital to take the actions which led to an improvement of an intolerable marriage. Mariam's story also illustrates the catalytic contribution of a local ethno-specific community worker; although life as a sole parent is not felt to be possible by Mariam, her contact with the ethno-specific worker had a lasting impact in empowering to recapture her competence as an agent, to the point of actively befriending her sister-in-law, reversing her previous positioning of victim of her ill treatment. In a private but significant way, Mariam is gaining strength to be the author of her responses to circumstances not of her choosing. This would not have been possible without the cost-free availability of ubiquitous neighbourhood houses, a service model of partly feminist origins.

Other community services

Services offered at no or low cost at grassroots levels in Australian suburbs do not feature very highly on the agendas of policy and decision makers in government; on the other hand, modest social infrastructure *did* spell the difference between hardship turning into social and health breakdowns rather than into a springboard for positive citizenship. Playgroups are a distant reality for the daily planning preoccupations of bureaucracies, let alone the even loftier corridors of Treasury and Finance, where the most powerful people make decisions about resource allocation. Antonina, who spoke good English and had an English academic

husband, would not be usually identified as a disadvantaged person deserving access to public resources:

> *First year was very hard* [emphatically] *…very, very, and with Marina, she was only 7 months. We lived in Box Hill, far from the centre, I just …* [body language expressing hardship and struggle] *in a year, we moved to Brunswick and it was better. Nobody told me about anything. Natasha [a church friend] told me about playgroup. I rang the Council. Playgroup gave me English socialising, and it was good for Marina.* [Laughs] *… at least you can get out of the house, at least for three hours … it's very hard to sit at home all the time … without people* [quieter voice].

For Antonina, an educated and privileged woman in many senses, the modest, unfunded local playgroup was the first indispensable facilitator of the renewal of her life energies. Research evidence about the significant debilitation and loss of skills of women caring for children at home has provided the justification for decades of funding for employment support services as well as Neighbourhood Learning Centres, providing articulated learning pathways back into participation in the public sphere.

Mai Ho had worked at shoe factories for 14 years and heard about a leadership course for migrant women designed and funded under the Lady Mayoress program in partnership with the local Migrant Resource Centre (MRC), advertised through the local schools' newsletter. The leadership course was her first engagement with the community as a contributing citizen. She then joined the women's group at the MRC and found out about various services and laws. She bargained for entry into a computer course at Certificate 2 level, not having done Certificate 1, but, despite trepidation, she was buoyed enough to complete the course saying it was "*beautiful*" to do it. She feels for the Vietnamese women who are housebound out-workers and she is now ready to assist others.

Teresa arrived with her profoundly deaf son at a time when Victoria's system of supports for children with hearing impairment was of the highest quality in the world. Not only was the special school free but so was a taxi service to the school across town. Her boy was a young adult at the time of the interview, studying at tertiary level and working casually. Similarly,

when her oldest son acquired permanent brain damage in a car accident, the availability of free universal health and rehabilitation services and financial support through the Transport Accident Commission for home renovations were critical in his survival. The free public health system, including physiotherapy, speech therapy and support for the family, were indispensable when her husband suffered his two strokes. Teresa's skills in accessing such formal supports were central in her regaining a sense of competency as an agent. She named the existence of universal services, without stigma attached and based on citizenship rights, as the foundations for her sense of belonging and growing identification with and loyalty to Australia as her new home. She is profoundly grateful and marvels at the civility underpinning such government and taxpayer-funded infrastructure.

Linda's story encapsulates most of the key insights of this study, including the inestimable value of the welfare state in providing a variety of supports relevant to particular life transition stages. Linda had been attending the Maternal and Child Health nurses regularly for about a year, putting on a cheerful face and not opening up about the realities of her life. The well-researched problematic of Filipina brides in Australia and her anorexic appearance ought to have alerted the nurses. The government of the day's policy of easy entry of family members via family reunion was critical in enabling the overcoming of an Asian taboo to speak about family problems. Linda's mother was the one who spoke to the nurses, who then swung into action superbly, according to Linda. They offered to drive her to appointments, rang her husband to tell him to take Linda to services, linked her with a Asian psychiatrist with whom Linda could connect and, once the medication had begun its salutary effect, Linda began to eat, sleep and be able to rationalise. The confidence began to creep back as she reasoned that she now had a baby who needed her.

Linda is quite clear that, if she had not had those first contacts with services, it would have been too late; she was so suicidal that she was often taking whole handfuls of tablets and planning daily to lie down on the railway tracks. Now that she is studying Community Development, she can identify that the nurses were practising *empowerment* with her and

were engaged in active outreach. Ill again when her second child was born, the nurses referred her to Tweddle, a free stay-in hospital for mothers and new babies with early settling difficulties. A team of social workers and nurses looked after the baby and Linda for a week and the workers' authoritative interventions with the husband led to some changes in his behaviour. Linda seemed to have inspired a team of workers around her who would ring her outside of working hours, just to inquire how she was and to ensure that "*I didn't go astray*". At a time when Local Government had its own family and counselling units, Linda found a social worker who spent two years in weekly marriage counselling with the couple- both saying they learnt a lot from her. Upon leaving the position, the social worker's good practice ensured that the hand over and connection with the new worker was a real one; the couple had counselling for approximately three years, then a free service part of most Local Councils, prior to mass privatisation of public services in Victoria during the mid-nineties (Webber & Crooks, 1996). There is now a quota on free sessions in the much diminished welfare system.

The skill level of workers was crucial, such as the authenticity of workers' involvement with Linda as a fellow human being, and it represented the beginning of Linda's feeling she belonged as an Australian Filipina:

> *… especially that I probably had and subconsciously have this feeling that you know, I'm not an Asian, I'm a Filipino, this person is a professional Australian, fair-headed person, and they really treat me… they treat me like a person, and I like it. I like it. They don't care whether … they don't care what my race is, and they were so genuinely interested about my life and genuinely enjoyed helping me.*

Labour market programs

Linda re-reconnected with her natural resourcefulness and initiated her own re-entry into the labour market; using the Local Council directory, she found out about the Australian training and education system and labour market programs advertised locally. She obtained her first job through the support of JobShare, a wage subsidy program, part of the Australian Federal Government's employment assistance system, which was totally privatised in 1997.

A second time, attending the universally available SkillShare, which gave one-on-one support on a needs basis, enabled her to fill a locum position at a university as the secretary to the Head of Department. The boost to her self-esteem of filling that position successfully propelled her into a permanent career pathway, "*people would knock on my door before coming in, even lecturers and professors!*"

Being useful to the country which provided the services that were there for her has been key to Linda feeling at home in Australia. At the end of the interview, when asked what sense she made out of her life, she commented on having wasted a lot of time while she was depressed. It emerged then that she was depressed for nine years and that this really lifted when she accessed labour market programs enabling her to work in the public arena. Notably, she was in contact with the local community, had women friends and an active social life and she found that expressing herself in the public sphere was releasing, because she experienced Australians listening to her, dispelling the private fears of being part of a despised minority and the threats of misrepresentations. This successful engagement in the public sphere was essential for her successfully developing a position and identity within the context of a diasporic life.

Gender and citizenship

Although lonely at first, Wafa saw life in Australia as a welcome escape from her in-laws; the reader may recall her initiatives which blossomed into a full professional career, managing the household and her children's education. Her husband remained for long periods in Lebanon and she resolutely resisted all pressure for her to return; she is still amused at her audacity and very pleased with her life choices. She feels Lebanese and Australian in unconventional and unique ways and does not feel the need for clear definitions of her identity.

Ramida bore 10 children and, now that her daughters had left home, was feeling depressed with only males in the house; she illustrates an interesting theme about her cultures' gender role constrictions. Her most difficult period involved her youngest daughter's refusal to wear the hijab and beginning to wag school under the influence of her Italian and Greek girlfriends. Haunted by the ever-present phobia of a girl losing her virginity before marriage, Ramida decided to send the sixteen-year old to Lebanon to hopefully marry her safely to a suitable relative and she is now comfortable and happy as her daughter did get married, is pregnant and, when she turns 18, the legal age of marriage under Australian law, she will return here. Ramida still seemed perturbed about this issue as she pursued the question of gender roles in our conversation and we discussed how religions deal with women's roles and sexuality. She finally asked whether it is only in Arabic countries where girls are not allowed to go out. She took the leading role in clipping her daughter's wings, yet the issue still evinced considerable disquiet in her: "*It's the mother's responsibility that she might lose her virginity and she wouldn't be any good then*".

Having referred earlier in this chapter to her successful employment in local government, Fatima told me that she understood that to enable her children to gain entry into university required a lot of her time and she decided to put her career on hold for this. Although a feminist acculturated in Australia, where individualism is valorised above all, may conclude that Fatima was restricted in her freedom to be self-determining, the evidence suggests rather Fatima made choices on the basis of her cultural understanding of personhood and womanhood. Her language is full of moral reasoning and as feminist research theorists point out, self-reflections reveal how a woman acts to preserve the integrity of her personality and her place in the web of important relationships (Anderson & Jack, 1991:18-23). The act of speaking is a creative act in itself according to Continental philosophers, such as Heidegger, Gadamer, Ricoeur and Wittgenstein, as discussed in Chapter Two, and feminists (Minister, 1991:34). Hearing Fatima's logic of self-determination faithfully required careful and ethical listening for the realities she was pointing to, while holding in tension critical perspectives on differential formations of relations of domination:

O: *So are you happy with your sacrifice?*

F: *Yes, I know I sacrificed my education. I chose.*

O: *Could you have chosen differently? Could you have said I won't, I will study first?*

F: *No, no, impossible. Because I succeeded in entering into university because of my brothers and sisters. Even if I do not have a house, I could sit under a tree and study. Why should I deprive them of that? So to show them I am responsible for you, I do everything and please, you study.*

O: *So you are saying that you could not have chosen differently because you feel so strongly about this issue.*

F: *Yes, I told you, my choice. I choose. I want to continue because I have a credit for 6 months. I am so anxious, so active, care so much, to finish my certificate* [quiet voice, full of emotion] *… then I looked at all the housework, and all my assignments … the course was one year! The ones who say they do that and help their children, they are lax. When I was studying, I would cook on the weekend for three days. The other two days of the week they would eat sandwiches. That's why they are succeeding and I saw them grow strong before my eyes. There was even a child who was not well, after coming to with me he became strong. Because, you have to prepare everything in the morning for your children; so I succeeded also in Family Day Care. Because I believe where there is a will there is a way. I believe nothing is difficult if you want to do something.*

O: *But here there are blocks you did not have before.*

F: *Yes, but you have to prioritise, you choose what you will work on.*

The reader may recall that Esther had become housebound out of a sense of overwhelming intimidation; she had made a friend in the free AMEP English classes, whom she met after a period of two years by chance. This fellow migrant had bought a car by beginning to earn casual money through doing household services. Esther decided to advertise her ironing services in the local paper and, within two years, her confidence had grown to the point of completing a TAFE Certificate in Aged Care, working in a nursing home and moving into employment as a Community Development worker to establish playgroups for South-Sudanese mothers with young children, in partnership with local venues such as child care centres and community houses, under the auspices of Local Government. A central part of

Esther's life revolves around being a role model and pioneer for other South-Sudanese women. As described in Chapter Four, South-Sudanese men feel that their family life and their authority as men are under threat. Esther and other informants, including professionals who work with this ethnic community, confirmed that there is a widely-held belief that Australian governments want to break up South-Sudanese families, cause the women to rebel and take their children away. There is a surprisingly high level of knowledge in this newest refugee community about Australia's Stolen Generations of Indigenous children. Such feelings of embattlement and fearfulness probably relate to the divergence between the South-Sudanese social systems, largely based on subsistence agriculture, and Australia's modern, market-based social structures and individualistic value systems. Esther's chief voluntary and paid work is to empower women and model that, even though she drives a car and moves about independently, she maintains a strong family life with five children, a secure marriage and extended family reciprocities.

Vietnamese women say that life is much more favourable for women here because in Vietnam, as Mai Ho expressed it, "*women always walk behind the man. Here it is the other way around*". The women expressed appreciation of the freedom to earn an income independently, live independently, choose one's own career, the laws that protect women from abuse, such as sexual harassment at work, and of the services available for women, such as domestic violence support. When I asked Wai Ling, Anh and Soo to comment on literature, cited in Chapter Four, about the bilateral gender relations existing side-by-side with hierarchical gender expectations, they said it was inaccurate and that they, like everyone else, had to manage the tensions in their everyday lives.

Location in Australia did not have any particular impact on gender roles for Russian families. Five of the Russian women had very warm and positive relationships with their husbands and within their families; as Varvara said, "[w]*ithout that, you can't go anywhere*". The Russian families pulled together in rising above the challenges of migration in a very orchestrated teamwork effort, apart from Anastasia, whose marriage broke up.

The entire Horn of Africa group said that they had unusual husbands, who gave their wives more latitude than is typical in their cultures; as already mentioned variously, Kiro's husband put his study on hold for seven years to support her growth. In the most patriarchal South-Sudanese society, Esther's husband pushed her to develop her professional and intellectual skills while he helped at home. She names him as the first source of her success in moving towards fulfilment, saying he is very unusual and opposite to the typical South-Sudanese male. For over twenty years, Zeinab's husband allowed her to have free reign in making decisions to pursue her studies, preventing his parents' traditionally accepted interference. Similarly, Fatima also said that, while they were living in a camp, her husband was unlike other men by looking after the children, a practice he carried out in full view of the men and women in the cramped conditions.

Impact of poor professional services

The absence of useful or quality supports left women in pointless treadmills or actually blocked the attainment of what they needed; a lack of skills amongst professionals to address the barriers faced by migrants was the key factor. We met Mifsud briefly in the section about women who developed psychiatric illness; in hospital during the first acute episode, she said the hospital staff were very supportive and understanding of what she was going through. They always used interpreters to communicate with her and she participated in counselling but no staff spoke to her husband;

O: *Did they understand that the way he was treating you was making you sick?*

M: *100%.*

O: *But they didn't talk to him?*

M: *I did not explain much because it is my personal life. You look bad if something is not going well in your life, it makes you look bad.*

O: *Did they connect you to the Lebanese community or anything?*

M: *The interpreter told me about services but I didn't go because I could not go, I was too sick.*

O: *So what did you do during the day? Did you listen to Lebanese radio?*

M: *24 hours.*

O: *Is it important to you?*

M: *I feel like I'm in Lebanon.*

O: *How would it be without radio?*

M: *I feel happy when I listen.*

O: *Did you have any contact with the Australian world, anybody, shops?*

M: *No, only Arabic people because I could not speak English.*

O: *Did you see anybody else apart from your husband?*

M: *My sister came for half an hour, that's it. My girlfriend came too. Later I saw a psychiatrist.*

O: *Did the specialist help you?*

M: *My husband went with me and he told him everything. I don't know what he said.*

O: *Was there any interpreter?*

M: *My husband was interpreting.*

O & Interpreter: *Shocking, shocking!* [We all laughed]

M: *The specialist told my husband that I was physically OK, it's just my mind.*

O & Interpreter: *Shocking, shocking!* [More laughter]

She started going to an Arabic doctor by herself and said that she would go and cry, cry, cry. The doctor would check her and say there is nothing wrong with you; but she would go again and cry, so he asked her, why are you upset?

O: *Didn't you tell him why you were upset?*

M: *I told him, but he knows my husband, so he told me I need a holiday.* [we all broke up laughing here] *I went back home and told my husband, I need a holiday. So my husband said, don't go back to this doctor if he tells you that.* [we kept on laughing. She offered us coffee.]

O: *So eventually you got better?*

M: *This doctor is mad,* [more jokes about holidays] *... I kept going to him. I had my holidays two and a half years ago. Syria, Lebanon, I came back feeling much better.* [Laughter]

O: *But until then, after being in hospital, how long before you felt OK?*

M: *My husband stayed with me away from his work for 5 months. For about 2 years, on and off I felt better and worse.*

O: *Doctor gave you medicine?*

M: *Yes. They made me feel better but I could not feed my son … The doctor told me double the dose, and it didn't make me feel better, just sleepy. The child came in 1994, he is 5 now. My life was different because I had to look after the baby.*

O: *Did you know what to do?*

M: *I knew how to look after a baby. He is all I have, so I was happy to look after him. I was very unwell physically and mentally after the baby. After he was 2 yrs and 7 months and I went to Lebanon, only then did I feel better.*

O: *Do you think you had Post Natal Depression?*

M: *I told the specialist and he agreed I was depressed. He said he could not treat me for depression, I would have to look after myself … he was an Australian specialist.*

O: *With an interpreter?*

M: *My husband was the interpreter* [we laughed with dismay]

O: *So what kept you going during those two years?*

M: *I felt I was defeated, that I was not strong any more after the birth.*

O: *So how did you cope?*

M: *I just stayed at home, would go up Sydney Road for a walk, Kmart and Coles. I had one girlfriend only. Now I have a lot, my life is different and I am is happy. I went to Lebanon, still on my tablets. Every time I didn't take a tablet, I thought something terrible might happen to me. I was happy in Lebanon, I bought a car, I had my baby, stayed with brother and then my sister in Syria.*

> O: *So all of the sudden you felt well, did you, without your husband you felt great?* [we laughed]

Mifsud's account of services delivered without professional interpreters suggests possible malpractice and the hospital staff also showed a paucity of skills in treating her in isolation from her living conditions. It is not clear how much she explained her situation to her Arabic doctor but Mifsud got herself better by relying on lay wisdom about dealing with life's perplexities, that is, "*have a holiday and a baby*".

Mary's hardship around the loss of the profession she loved was linked to the poor quality of employment support services of the time. The privatised JobNetwork system had pleasant staff but kept referring her to factory positions because 'she had no local experience'. The evidence suggests a very minimalist level of service, with no information about the available bridging courses for overseas nurses, no effort in investigating options for a nurse with full English fluency, no advice about other study options nor about interview techniques with Australian employers who expect assertive self promotion, compared to the self-effacing norm of civilised Asian people. She saw an advertisement for a course in Aged Care Support at the local TAFE by accident and was then able to change careers.

Concluding reflections

The women were able to overcome the traumas of the circumstances which propelled them to leave their home countries and the challenges of resettlement by using the stepping stones provided by the Australian systems of public and social infrastructure available to all citizens. These were indeed indispensable facilitators of the women's energies in re-creating a life they valued and in becoming participating citizens.

Facilitating processes: Community connectedness

The first facilitator of agency was the welfare state and the second factor required for living a life with a modicum of wholeness and fulfilment was to be connected with a community, the

latter going well beyond one's own ethnic community. Having a good marriage was, logically enough, a crucial facilitating factor in women's capacity to pursue their life goals, as we have seen in the preceding sections. The women from the Horn of Africa countries and many of the Lebanese and Vietnamese attributed their feelings of being settled happily to having their extended families here with them. The Russians, here without grandparents or other close relatives, lived with a continued sense of grief and of not being whole.

Connections with one's ethnic community

The young and flippant Sosa summarised her advice to all new migrants as "*you need to socialise again*". It is well documented that ethnic groups are powerful in enabling their (new) members to reconnect with their pre-migration identities. Nenita was able to say that she draws strength from living like she did in the Philippines, by going to a Filipino church and having church-based friends. All the women who stay home listen to their ethnic radio program and say it is absolutely vital. The group they join or attend, however, needs to be related to the strata of society to which one belonged. Teresa:

> *Afterwards, it was expanding my territory … In the west, Filipinas are militant, in the South, they just have parties. At first, it was OK but then I got more depressed, because I thought these are not my kind of people. What am I doing here, they were talking about being silly and things that didn't mean anything … Oh it was just great, and so I started coming to CPCA and met Rosa … It was 4 years after arriving. I was very happy because they did things I believed in, some came from the university I studied at, Rosa taught in the same school where I taught, very high standards. It was oh, I know I'm familiar with this place where these people come from, I can understand what they are saying and … it felt good! And from there, that's where I got the idea of working as an interpreter … it was Rosa's idea … I work with VITS (Victorian interpreting Telephone Service) and On Call and All Graduates. Your name just gets around … Even if it takes me one bus and one train and one tram ride, still I come to meetings on time because you are interested.*

Mary drew on the encouragement of the Filipinos around her during her first few years of almost total despair and frustration. All of the Russian women, except Karina and Larissa, refer to the importance of being surrounded by fellow Russians or Russian speakers in

warding off deep depression. As an early arrival, I asked Zina what the Slavic Baptist church did for her:

> *Everything! I will be grateful to them till my last breath. They weren't able to help us materially but they helped us emotionally, morally, which is more important I think. Without them I wouldn't have survived. We weren't working and on weekends we just cried hysterically because there was no one to go to. No grandmother, or cousins, no one. No one, no one … All the people speak Russian and were former migrants, Russians from all sorts of countries, and so they understood how we felt. They used to tell us don't worry, everything will be all right. We used to go to their house like it was our own … One family would invite two or three families every Sunday, for us to get to know each other. They helped us by telling us where to go to get things. You can't repay that, that's giving you back family.*

Zina's positive contacts with the local Australian community were a springboard for recapturing her enormously competent agency and its benefits have rippled throughout countless Russian families including their children. She became a resource person for the growing Soviet expatriate community; hearing about a playgroup in a local Neighbourhood House, she joined and when it folded, she decided to begin a Russian one. Zina was a key initiator of the recreation of a Russian community in the inner Bayside area of Melbourne. Varvara marvelled at her family's smooth settlement by moving immediately into the thriving Russian St Kilda community, where Russian is spoken on the street. She said that they were never alone and there was not an undue break with belonging to the Russian world in which she and her family had had a place of belonging as esteemed and valued members. Antonina said that her life began again when she began as a voluntary Russian teacher at the Saturday Church School, involving one morning a week:

> *O: What does Russian school give you?*
>
> *A:* [Very enthusiastically] *Oh it gives me a lot! In the first place to socialise with people, just being with Russians, hearing children speak Russian, it was inconceivable in NZ. Secondly, it is my profession and it gives me moral support to be able to practice my profession. … I think it would have been much, much harder without Russian school.*

Lakemba Mosque in Sydney has been the locus for Muslim women's revival of self-education about Islam and beyond; Deen (1995:104) saw no contradiction between this

women-driven religious revival and the men continuing to make all the decisions, including the Qur'an verses the women's groups could read. Many women were not allowed out without men but it remained a source of immense support for the women themselves, in a round-about way confirming the experience of other women in the sample, even in rather more complex ways.

Regaining one's sense of mission

Many of the very energetic women became the key person in their communities to whom people could go for help. Women whose lives had previously centred on the service of others were able to surmount the difficulties of settlement by resuming their lifelong personal projects. This was certainly an important dynamic in sustaining Wafa, Delal, Anh, Wai Ling, Zeinab, Fatima, Kiro, Naima, Esther, Teresa, Linda and Zina in the continuation of their pre-migration identities as women dedicated to causes beyond their own families. The crux of suffering for Nia, Antonina and Larissa relates to being cut off from spaces where they might resume pursuits which are intrinsically meaningful and above the pursuit of economic or material comfort. As Deen (1995:74), again, suggests:

> We don't have "privacy" as the Westerners know it … It is not a precious commodity with us … Some will jump to the conclusion that the individual becomes less important in our tradition. Not so! But the individual cannot survive without the group.

Connecting with the Australian community

Women spoke about the springboard back into a sense of integrity as whole personalities provided through Australian neighbours, teachers, service providers or volunteers who became personally involved and became friends. Teresa, who came with a background of the richest material and symbolic capital possible, began to feel a little human again when the family moved into a street where neighbours knew each other, amenities were within walking distance and she could join local activities: "*Because I wasn't a leader of a corporation I was just a mother and a housewife, so I thought if you're just that, you might as well do that well too*".

Linda spoke about how much her confidence was built by the development of friendships with Australian women in the playgroups; she was so amazed that Australians were interested in her and her culture and she was profoundly moved when her only Australian girlfriends unexpectedly came to her house with lots of clothes for her second newborn. She was touched because they were so genuinely excited for her. These friends formed the basis of her beginning to live again; she was helped through her difficult second pregnancy by the friends coming over to do little jobs around the house and even give her massages.

Success in study was usually excruciatingly difficult for women whose English was less than fluent. Here, the personal, voluntary engagement by Australian teachers and student counsellors or volunteers with the daily agonies of the students, were the indispensable stepping stones, without which the women would have 'drowned'. Kiro's struggles with study were possible only because the teaching and student support staff at TAFE crossed what is widely espoused as the professional boundary by becoming personally involved as friends. Similarly, Fatima's family were enormously assisted by the volunteer involvement of a local primary school teacher who befriended all of the extended family. Such kindnesses served to reverberate throughout the lives of women as being accepted by a new community of different but caring people.

Conclusion

I hope that I have presented a faithful rendition of what the women shared with me in our conversations. The women continue to live in the tension between the marginal locations accorded to migrants, the unspoken denigration of their cultures based largely on ignorance and their daily experience of the effectiveness of their stock of knowledge in enabling ingenious responses to life's contingencies. It was an act of memory retrieval and a digging deeply into themselves, yielding unexpected resources. At the same time, without the human connectedness of good family or community and in total isolation, the most resilient personalities could become ill.

Welfare states formally intend to recreate certain functions provided by natural social embeddedness that have been disrupted by the requirements of industrialisation and, more recently, of a consumerist society where needs are manufactured by capital, media and ensuing social pressure. We do not hear very often that welfare state services are potent springboards to life; critiques of the welfare state – both from the Left and the Right (Beilharz *et al*., 1992), have been misdirected, possibly because their proponents have lacked grounded experience of what life is like for ordinary, small people, as well as for the marginalised groups so readily identified as 'disadvantaged'. I noted in the women's accounts the exponentially beneficial relationship between the very modest investments of public funds into services, such as neighbourhood houses, English classes, a community worker, a playgroup and local employment program, and the quantum leap they were able to make in rebuilding their lives. The next chapter continues this theme by reflecting on how the women are now contributing to Australian society. Such enormous strides usually depended on the medium of a positive connection with another human being, whether a professional, a friend or neighbour. A lack of skills or negligence on the part of professionals had sometimes disastrous impacts on women's lives and their families, over protracted periods of time. The critical factor in poor quality services, in my view, resides primarily in a lack of understanding about the incommensurability of diverse ways of being and knowing. To apprehend another person's subjectivity ethically and with the same respect accorded to oneself is quite difficult. To do this while rejecting all that the term *alterity* evokes requires unusually sophisticated knowledge and self awareness, going well beyond the notion of *empathy* so freely bandied about in text of the helping professions and beyond.