The Dual Practice of Social Work and Registered Migration Agent Work: A Heuristic Study

A major thesis in fulfilment of a Master of Social Work.

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Declaration

I certify that except where due acknowledgment has been made, the work is that of the author alone; the work has not been submitted previously, in whole or in part, to qualify for any other academic award; the content of the thesis is the result of work which has been carried out since the official commencement date of the approved research program; any editorial work, paid or unpaid, carried out by a third party, is acknowledged; and, ethics procedures and guidelines have been followed.

Sherron Anne Dunbar

Dated: September 2009
Table of contents

ABSTRACT .................................................................................................................. 8
ACRONYMS ............................................................................................................... 9
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS .............................................................................................. 11

Chapter 1  The journey taken – a heuristic statement ........................................... 12

Chapter 2  Ontology, epistemology and methodology: Navigating new understandings ................................................................. 21

Introduction .............................................................................................................. 21
Qualitative or quantitative?......................................................................................... 21
The heuristic approach ............................................................................................. 23
The ‘generative themes’ for this study ...................................................................... 26
Diary writing ............................................................................................................. 28
Peers’ voices: Interviews ......................................................................................... 29
Writers’ voices: Contributions from several literatures ............................................ 31
Clients’ voices ........................................................................................................... 32
My voice as a dual professional, a researcher and a writer .................................... 34

Chapter 3  The chorus of voices of my colleagues/participants............................. 36

Choosing the participants ....................................................................................... 37
Common historical context ....................................................................................... 37
Language, religious beliefs and practices, and cultures ........................................... 39
Education and professions ....................................................................................... 40
The significance of family ......................................................................................... 41
Imagination ................................................................................................................ 42
International engagement ........................................................................................ 42
To come … .................................................................................................................. 43

Chapter 4  The banality of evil ................................................................................. 44

Introduction .............................................................................................................. 44
East Timorese asylum seekers’ voices ..................................................................... 45
Chapter 5 ‘Where, after all, do universal human rights begin?’ .......................... 67

Introduction .................................................................................................................. 67

Eleanor Roosevelt’s privileged voice ........................................................................... 68

Small places .................................................................................................................. 69

Small helping places: Springvale Bureau and RILC – the community-based loci of my practice ........................................................................................................... 70

Amnesty International ................................................................................................. 72

Human rights: perplexities and complexities ............................................................... 74

The particular injustice and human rights breaches of homelessness and of displacement ........................................................................................................ 76

Voices of clients ............................................................................................................ 76

Writers’ voices on social or civil justice ...................................................................... 79

Human rights and social justice in social work and RMA work .................................... 81

My colleagues’ voices .................................................................................................. 83

Victoria’s Charter of Human Rights and other helpful ‘legalities’ ............................... 85

Chapter 6 Welcoming The Stranger, The Other .......................................................... 89

Introduction .................................................................................................................. 89
Dedication to the drowned SIEV-X passengers ................................................................. 89
The human figure of the stranger amongst us ................................................................. 92
Theories of migration ......................................................................................................... 93
My voice .......................................................................................................................... 94
Participant colleagues’ voices ......................................................................................... 96
White invasion of and long-term settlement in Australia ................................................. 98
Migration to Australia and creating a multicultural society 1970-2008 ....................... 99
Welcoming The Stranger with reception and settlement services: Receiving immigrants, and their settlement experience ................................................................. 105
Inclusion and citizenship as signs of welcome to The Stranger ..................................... 107
Globalisation .................................................................................................................... 110
Finally, the ‘-ism’ discourses of fear and rejection of The Stranger .............................. 112

Chapter 7  ‘Well-founded fear …’ .................................................................................. 114
Introduction ....................................................................................................................... 114
My memories of some refugee voices ............................................................................. 115
Lived refugee experience ................................................................................................. 116
Convention definition of refugee ................................................................................... 122
Australia – Refugee and humanitarian visas ................................................................. 124
Colleagues’ and others’ voices – Personal and vicarious experiences of displacement... 127
The creative voices of people writing with and about refugees ....................................... 129
Fear: well-founded or not? .............................................................................................. 131

Chapter 8  Babel – a confusion of languages ................................................................. 133
Introduction ....................................................................................................................... 133
My voice .......................................................................................................................... 135
Writers’ voices ................................................................................................................. 137
Australia, a potentially multilingual society; and multiculturalism ............................... 141
Culture and faith/religion ............................................................................................... 144

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Chapter</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Pages</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td><strong>Two professions: dual or duelling?</strong></td>
<td>156</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Clients’ voices and perceptions</td>
<td>156</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Participants’ voices</td>
<td>158</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>My voice</td>
<td>158</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Writers’ voices ... dual or duelling professions?</td>
<td>161</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>The writers’ voices and social-work definitions</td>
<td>161</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>The writers’ voices and social-work pioneers</td>
<td>163</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Who or what is a ‘Registered Migration Agent’?</td>
<td>164</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Writers’ voices comparing and contrasting the two professions</td>
<td>165</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Writers on advocacy, advocates, and para-legal advocates</td>
<td>166</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Writers’ voices: Professional values and ethics</td>
<td>168</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Writers’ voices and a critical structural approach</td>
<td>170</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>The all-pervasive, encompassing influence of neo-liberal Ideology(ies)</td>
<td>172</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>What does all of this tell me about the social worker and the RMA?</td>
<td>175</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td><strong>New insights ... new learning ... discoveries</strong></td>
<td>179</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Introduction</td>
<td>179</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Part One: The case of W and K, including a tribute to Aung San Suu Kyi</td>
<td>179</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Introduction</strong></td>
<td>180</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>W and K before we met</td>
<td>181</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>My life at the time I met W and K</td>
<td>183</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Meeting W and K and our RMA, social work and personal relationship</td>
<td>184</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Perspectives on the narrative</td>
<td>187</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Critical theory-based structural approach ................................................................. 190

Part two .......................................................................................................................... 191

What have I learned from the heuristic research approach? ................................. 191

Where did I take the themes distilled at the start of the research? .................... 194

And what have I learned to discern as differences, similarities, overlaps and boundaries between social work and registered migration work? ......................................................... 196

Bibliography ..................................................................................................................... 199
ABSTRACT

Social work and registered migration agent work can be mutually enhancing. Both can be influenced by a critical theory approach within the global context of neo-liberal philosophies and related practices.

My practice in both is enriched by my use of my imagination.

My thesis emerges from remembered and familiar voices – my own, those of people (clients) who have trusted me as social worker and as migration and refugee law advocate, voices of 21 of my peers and of those of writers and thinkers.

The qualitative heuristic approach taken to research my dual professions allowed me to make important discoveries, especially for social work practice and, in a more limited way, for registered migration agent work. I identify and start to fill metaphorical theme ‘pots’ common to both professions: of human violence, of human rights, of justice and social justice, of the age old phenomenon of human migration, of cross-cultural communication amongst humans, and of the professions of social work and migration and refugee law advocacy.

In the process, I discover a host of additional themes, including those of borders and boundaries, of citizenship, of civil engagement, of compassion, of globalization and cosmopolitanism, of memory, of passion, and more.

The case study I choose allows me and two of my Burmese clients to illustrate some of the depth and breadth of this rich dual practice.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Acronym</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>AASW</td>
<td>Australian Association of Social Workers</td>
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<td>AAT</td>
<td>Administrative Appeals Tribunal</td>
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<tr>
<td>ABC</td>
<td>Australian Broadcasting Commission</td>
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<tr>
<td>ACOSSS</td>
<td>Australian Council of Social Service</td>
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<tr>
<td>AHRWG</td>
<td>Australian Human Rights’ Working Group</td>
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<td>AI</td>
<td>Amnesty International</td>
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<td>AIMA</td>
<td>Australian Institute of Multicultural Affairs</td>
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<td>AMES</td>
<td>Adult Multicultural (formerly Migrant) Services</td>
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<td>AusAID</td>
<td>Australian Agency for International Development</td>
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<tr>
<td>BIMPR</td>
<td>Bureau of Immigration and Population Research</td>
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<tr>
<td>CCT</td>
<td>Compulsive Competitive Tendering</td>
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<td>CPA</td>
<td>Comprehensive Plan of Action</td>
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<td>DIAC</td>
<td>Department of Immigration and Citizenship</td>
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<td>DILGEA</td>
<td>Dept. of Immigration Local Government &amp; Ethnic Affairs</td>
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<tr>
<td>DIMA</td>
<td>Department of Immigration and Multicultural Affairs</td>
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<td>DIMIA</td>
<td>Dept. of Immigration Multicultural and Indigenous Affairs</td>
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<tr>
<td>EOCHRC</td>
<td>Equal Opportunity Commission and Human Rights Commission</td>
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<tr>
<td>GFC</td>
<td>Global Financial Crisis</td>
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<td>GIA</td>
<td>Grant in Aid</td>
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<tr>
<td>EFL</td>
<td>English as a Foreign Language</td>
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<tr>
<td>ESL</td>
<td>English as a Second Language</td>
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<tr>
<td>IAAAS</td>
<td>Immigration Application Advice and Assistance Scheme</td>
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<tr>
<td>IDP</td>
<td>Internally Displaced Person(s)</td>
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<td>IFSW</td>
<td>International Federation of Social Workers</td>
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<tr>
<td>IMF</td>
<td>International Monetary Fund</td>
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<tr>
<td>IOM</td>
<td>International Office of Migration</td>
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<td>JAS</td>
<td>Justice for Asylum Seekers</td>
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<tr>
<td>LOTE</td>
<td>Language(s) Other Than English</td>
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<td>MARA</td>
<td>Migration Agents’ Registration Authority</td>
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<td>Migration Institute of Australia</td>
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<td>MRT</td>
<td>Migration Review Tribunal</td>
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<tr>
<td>ODP</td>
<td>Orderly Departure Programme</td>
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<tr>
<td>RAC</td>
<td>Refugee Action Collective</td>
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<td>RACS</td>
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<td>RCoA</td>
<td>Refugee Council of Australia</td>
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<td>RILC</td>
<td>Refugee Immigration Legal Centre</td>
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<td>Acronym</td>
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<td>RRT</td>
<td>Refugee Review Tribunal</td>
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<td>RAR</td>
<td>Rural Australians for Refugees</td>
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<td>Registered Migration Agent</td>
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<td>RTT</td>
<td>Residential Tenancies Tribunal</td>
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<td>SBS</td>
<td>Special Broadcasting Service</td>
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<td>SCAAB</td>
<td>Springvale Community Aid and Advice Bureau</td>
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<tr>
<td>SIEV X</td>
<td>Suspected Illegal Entry Vessel number 10</td>
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<tr>
<td>TIS</td>
<td>Telephone Interpreting Service</td>
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<tr>
<td>TPV</td>
<td>Temporary Protection Visa</td>
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<tr>
<td>UNDHR</td>
<td>United Nations Declaration of Human Rights</td>
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<tr>
<td>UNHCR</td>
<td>United Nations’ High Commission for Refugees</td>
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<tr>
<td>UNWRA</td>
<td>United Nations Relief and Works Agency</td>
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<tr>
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<td>Victorian Civil and Administrative Tribunal</td>
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<tr>
<td>VCROSS</td>
<td>Victorian Council of Social Service</td>
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<tr>
<td>VFST</td>
<td>Victorian Foundation for the Survivors of Torture</td>
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<tr>
<td>VIARC</td>
<td>Victorian Immigration Advice and Rights Centre</td>
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<tr>
<td>WTO</td>
<td>World Trade Organisation</td>
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</table>
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The people who shared their life stories with me as social worker and migration and refugee law advocate have been a large part of my life over at least the past three decades; many of those stories have encompassed suffering along with courage. So to those numerous ‘clients’, I express my deepest gratitude.

The experience I gained at Springvale Community Aid and Advice Bureau and at Refugee Immigration Legal Centre is inextricably part of my life. I offer special acknowledgement to Merle Mitchell, my long-time mentor. I thank also the Royal Women’s Hospital social work department.

To my peer participant colleagues I here acknowledge with gratitude the glimpse they gave me into their poignant and intimate early life experiences where their values and motivations were shaped.

Marjorie Quinn, my RMIT supervisor, has been ready to listen and to share her learning, particularly in international and cross-cultural social work and ideas. My deep gratitude also goes to RMIT’s dynamic and familiar city campus.

And Robert Walker I thank for helping me make it to the finishing line as skilled and knowledgeable copy-editor.

Professor Jacques Boulet and Borderlands have helped me to conceive of a creative way of reflecting on the two professions. The heuristic process of discovery he guided me through continues.
Chapter 1 The journey taken – a heuristic statement

By the year 2004, I had come to realise that I had met and come to know to varying degrees, not hundreds but thousands of people through my work as a teacher, social worker and registered migration agent (RMA), since my first year of teaching at a high school in 1966. I have been fascinated in and by the people I met in my various places of work – as a high school teacher in Queensland and London, a middle-level teacher in Germany and a teacher of English as a second language (ESL) in Melbourne, a social worker amongst children in need of care and protection, amongst migrants and refugees and Australian-born residents, including urban Indigenous Australians. It was hard, late in 2003, to leave Springvale Community Aid and Advice Bureau (the Bureau), after 19 years involvement with numerous children, adolescents and adults as a social worker and migration and refugee law advocate; it caused me to want to try and make sense of what sometimes seemed like a chaos of precious – and sometimes harrowing – life-work/work-life experiences with people.

I began to raise and formulate questions about issues with which I had lived for all those years without explicitly wondering about them: how did I combine the two professional practices of social work and registered migration agent work? Why is it that I still don’t seem to get enough of the people I encounter through these two work roles that I have loved practising and still do as I write?

All these people, the good, the destructive and the violent, gave me something different because they were, indeed they are, just that – different from each other, though with the same basic human needs. The more people I got to know through the avenues offered by the human services agencies I worked in and for, the more I wanted to know about them. The more I wanted to try to understand them and me, the more I reflected on and recalled the voices and stories of the seemingly countless people I had assisted; and the more I realised that it is their being fellow humans in their seemingly limitless diversity that continues to intrigue me. The diversity I am referring to here is multi-dimensional: people’s shapes and the colour of their skin; their customs and habits, their cultures, their languages; their abilities and disabilities; their ages; their values, their hopes, their different ways of looking at the world; their loves and hates, their disappointments and their hopes, their struggles – their voices and their stories, the ways they live, and die.
But something else increased my fascination: I am intrigued by people who have been dis-placed, moved from one place to another, from one status to another; people who might be the ones that our society shuns and expels because of their race, their actions, their abilities and disabilities. Amongst them are Indigenous Australians who have lost their country and languages and cultures, the migrants and the refugees who find a new place in Australia, and others oppressed as minorities – offenders, substance-addicted and behaviour-addicted people, people with disabilities, non-heterosexual females and males, home-less people. I experience anxiety with some people whose behaviour is unpredictable or predictably violent but have only twice as a social worker been threatened with extreme violence. I continue to feel ambivalence towards fathers and mothers who have violated their own children but can usually, but not in every case, link that with possibly similar violence perpetrated against those parents when they were children. I am interested in their stories, their living contexts, their cultures and how they lose them and the bits they hold on to.

It is now that I have made time to reflect that I realise too that the path my own life has taken has always been affected, influenced or determined and changed by the trajectories of the lives of the different people I have lived amongst, worked with and for. When I was a child, then a teenager and later a young adult in Queensland in the late 1940s, the 1950s and 60s, I was constantly restless, constantly wanting to get out to see different parts of the world and meet different people; I sensed that somewhere beyond the south-east corner of Queensland was a world of enticing new experiences and of people living their lives in ways I did not yet know.

More questions formed in my head: what external events, what dominant ideologies, belief systems and philosophies had helped to shape me and the ways I have lived and worked? I had long been aware of the probable impact on my professional practices of my own personality and psychology, my personal and family-of-origin experiences, the culture I was born into. Though I met the requirements of several formal education and training courses, I had not yet identified any particular theories as having been dominant or particularly helpful in allowing me to explain my experiences, let alone my feelings! When discussing my social-work practice with social-work students, either those on placement or at university, I was in the habit of declaring that mine was an eclectic approach with a bit from here and a bit from there. As well as exploring my
work history to further my own knowledge and understanding of myself as a social worker and registered migration agent, I wondered if I might be able to uncover new learning, new knowledge to offer to social work. What might I now be able to contribute to people’s learning from my three decades of experiences during the second half of the 20th and the beginning of the 21st centuries?

Australian social work academic Karen Healy (2000:9) could have been expressing herself on my behalf when she wrote: ‘My intention is to use practice to interrogate theory and vice versa’ and much earlier, Donald Schön already seemed to anticipate this, writing that:

‘The relationship between academic and practical knowledge needs to be turned on its head. We should ask not only how practitioners can better apply the results of academic research, but what kinds of knowledge are already embedded in competent practice.’ (Schön 1995:4)

I also asked myself whether the two professions, social work and registered migration agent work, which I continued to practise, sometimes simultaneously sometimes in different settings, were compatible. Or was it really not feasible to practise in the two roles simultaneously, the one perspective in conflict with the other? It seemed to me that, while reflecting on my past and ongoing work and life experiences, exploring these questions might allow me to come to know better the worlds of the diverse people that had so energised me.

Most of the people I had met since the late 1970s had long gone; they had come to me as clients, asking for assistance in whatever organisation or agency I was working with and not as subjects of a research project. I needed a research approach that allowed me to remain central to the reflection while recalling and remembering at least some of the numerous people social – and RMA – work have introduced me to. What method would allow me to remain central to the process as I told my story, while still being able to introduce significant other voices? The latter include the voices of clients remembered, those of some of my peers, those of thinkers and writers who could help me to understand and to, perhaps, come to some answers to questions I was raising. Here, Hannah Arendt joined me, assisting me to explore narration and the narrative:
'Arendt is therefore right in affirming that life-stories never have an author. Biographies and autobiographies result from an existence that belongs to the world, in the relational and contextual form of self exposure to others.' (Cavarero 2000:37)

As I read and progressively asked social work academics known to me about appropriate research approaches and methods, I came upon something called ‘the heuristic approach’ (Moustakas 1990 and Janesick 2000); and from the outset I understood it to be a process that might well allow for my own discovery through new insights and ideas about my life and work.

There would have been other ways of exploring and carefully analysing the data I eventually gathered through my own diary entries (my voice), interviews of peers (peers’ voices), direct social work and RMA service case studies (clients’ voices) and through wide reading (writers’ voices). This would have afforded, for example, a more focused and planned use of ‘triangulation’ to come to conclusions through analyses of each set and of different combinations of these rich data. My decision not to fully ‘exploit’ the data in my analyses may have, in the end, proven to be one of my study’s losses and shortcomings. One glaring example of this is that of a relatively brief analysis of the responses or voices of the 21 peer professionals I had worked with and then interviewed; I could have been more overt in my exploration with them of their attitudes to the features I had identified for my self as being common to the two professions; I could have been more rigorous in recording those peers who are sceptical about the compatibility of social work and migration and refugee law advocacy. But in the end, I chose to adopt a more emergent positioning, allowing thematic foci to emerge almost freely as I read, listened, worked, reflected and discussed my growing understandings.

Indeed, ‘chaos’ and ‘chaotic’ were words I used at the very beginning of this process to try to explain how I felt about the overwhelming number and variety of experiences provided me by people; many I had met, but many who remained distant and who I had never met, through death or geographical distance between us – usually relatives and friends of the people I did meet and assist.

Trying to clear a pathway through that chaos and as I approached the end of my paid working life, identifying the values and interests that informed and inform my work-related trajectory, decisions, choices and actions seemed like a possible first step. I was
not motivated to gain a higher qualification for the sake of professional promotion or financial gain, but hoped to glean new understanding and insights through reflection. I wanted to explore the meaning of my long and fulfilling professional working life amongst so many women, men and children, deriving from numerous ethnic, cultural, ability, experiences and language backgrounds and contexts that themselves held a great deal of fascination for me. There were also the cultural, historic, geographic, and political factors, amongst others. Finally I realised that, in undertaking such a study after the long years of my professional life, and wanting to help preserve important historical and human experiences for the professions I had worked in and, more generally, for future generations; that I would be able to identify influential concurrent and interrelated historical change processes that had happened over that time.

Indeed, as I started to more systematically reflect on my work history, I realised that in teaching, social work and migration law advocacy practice I always had tried to become acquainted with and to understand the contexts, structures and processes that had helped to shape my students and clients and, by implication, myself. I wanted to try to see how the trajectories of my life and that of the students and clients were interwoven and how we most likely wrought change in and on each other; I wanted to explore my own fascination in what has so often been termed ‘The Human Condition’ (Arendt 1958) – more the way human beings manage to survive, or perish, as individuals within groups and interdependent with other human beings in families, communities, organised societies, within a world and history of peoples.

Another way to gain clarity in my seeming chaos involved a shift from my initial focus in the many people I had met, to themes and issues that had nurtured my enthusiasm and, at most times, passion. Being unable to re-call many of these people because of their overwhelming numbers and the relentless passing of time, hopefully I could gain some understandings through exploring the meanings and importance to me of six themes which seemed to reverberate throughout my memories and the discourses I seemed to participate in across time and areas of practical involvement. Through conversations with supervisors and others in reflective groups I was part of, I was able to formulate them as:

- human violence
- human rights
• justice and social justice
• never-ending migrations of peoples
• communication across and through a multitude of human languages and cultures; and, finally
• the two professional activities I had been and continued to be involved in, social work and para-legal migration and refugee law advocacy.

Always responding well to visualising ideas, I imagined them as thematic ‘pots’ that would hold the many aspects of what I knew and had experienced about each of these domains, describing each pot and ‘filling’ each one with text fragments, revealing some of the accumulated and ever-differentiating knowledge and associations I had made to that time, in late 2004. This process resulted in an avalanche of semi-structured thoughts, ideas, memories, references; but at least they had allowed me to loosen the accumulated tangle of thoughts all wanting to be expressed at once, by giving me a sense of analytical control, even if many of the fragments I filled the pots with constantly revealed their connections with fragments in any or many of the other pots …

I realised that, as much as I was interested in the voices and narratives of my previous and present clients in the paid or unpaid work I was doing and for their own unique importance and value, I also wanted to converse about social work and migration/refugee advocacy work with at least some of my practitioner-peers and seek out new ways of nurturing my own practices and understandings. I embarked on a reading program including different authors from different areas of endeavour with their inevitably diverse perspectives – social work academics and practitioners, philosophers, lawyers, historians and sociologists amongst them. Ever since I was a teenager I had been fascinated by German people, their history, culture and language, an interest strengthened by several years of living and working in Germany, and I wanted to somehow incorporate that long-standing interest in my research; so I found myself turning to twentieth-century German thinkers and writers, the voices and lives of those who had emigrated to the US around WWII having particular appeal.

As time went by, I identified the steps I needed to prepare for this research and writing and bring them to fruition: while having to continue working full-time throughout the process, I would read as widely as I could, I would interview 21 peer-practitioners to
establish if something of what had motivated them was in any way like those factors which had motivated me and I would continue to re-call as many episodes and memories of my past practice in both professions.

Finally, I decided to also select one client’s story in the form of a synthesising case study, to illustrate a number of related matters: what roles a social worker and a RMA can play, how a client can remain actively involved in the change processes facilitated by social worker and RMA, how communication is effected across different cultures and languages, what structures encase and influence the life courses of clients of social workers and RMAs, and how I had been affected and changed through the process of reflection, reading and writing that began in about 2004 and continues as I now write. For that purpose, I chose the story of one of the last clients I had assisted while at the Bureau in Springvale, a choice partly made because we had made our joint stories public through: active advocacy; targeted distribution and consciousness-raising through jointly-run seminars with social work students; and participation in an Austcare photographic exhibition exploring refugee/non-refugee relationships to which we had been invited.

My former client is from Myanmar-Burma; and neither her story nor her country’s story of searching for justice has yet been completed. Hers and her country’s are continuing stories both of human violence and suffering and of human resilience; but the more I reflected on Burma’s and the client’s suffering, the more I realised that, in some way, I too am implicated in this suffering, partly as an un-intentional perpetrator in light of the fact that I am a citizen of a country which, in so many ways, continues to benefit from the inequalities persisting between poor and affluent countries, and partly as an advocate in my attempts at redressing this inequality.

This thesis, my attempt at organising in a comprehensible and transparent way my varied historical and contemporary experiences and understandings as they occurred in all their complexity over time as well as synchronically, is organised in the following way:

- In this first chapter I have tried to invite the reader into my ongoing journey. This is followed by

- A second chapter, in which I turn to considerations of method and methodology, along with an exploration of the ontological and epistemological
foundations which revealed themselves to be implicit in my mode of engaging in my professional and advocacy work; they had therefore to become explicit in their underpinning of my attempts at researching it.

(Maybe unusually, I do not include a discrete chapter, often referred to as a ‘literature review’, on the many writers and theoreticians who have assisted me in my search and growing comprehension. Their contributions are embedded throughout.)

- In Chapter Three I offer a brief profile of the 21 colleagues I had the privilege to interview: their more explicit voices, as well as the insights and knowledge of writers in subsequent chapters. I did this in conversation with the voices of my interviewees’ and those of former and present clients, as well as with the voice of my own ‘reflective self’, focusing on the themes I have distilled and briefly enumerated before.

Indeed, the main body of this thesis focuses on an exploration of the themes emerging from the metaphorical and conceptual ‘pots’ I have identified as informing my dual professional practices. Thus:

- In Chapters Four to Eight I address those themes.

Throughout and at the conclusion of the process reported in this work, I have gained new insights into and understanding of myself as a social self, of my professional roles and of the two professions. The latter have their respective strengths, their potential overlaps and mutually reinforcing capacities, as well as sometimes tension-laden contradictions. I will share these insights in

- Chapter Nine, which, together with the case study, allowed me to bring all aspects of this study together.

Indeed, as I began this project, I had not yet realised that a theoretical approach I had already been attracted to when initially involved in social work teaching in the mid-1990s would provide a way for me to form the new insights I was seeking through this heuristic process of discovery. The critical approaches (Allen et al 2003) to social work practice, theory and education have provided a general framework able to both integrate the disparate moments of social work practice and theory – interpersonal and ‘macro’ approaches – and offer a suitable context to reflectively transform the theory-practice tension and make it productive rather than disempowering.
I offer this work as an example of where this approach may lead both professions individually and in combination.
Chapter 2  Ontology, epistemology and methodology: Navigating new understandings

Introduction

Having set out the broad details of my personal engagement with the issues I hoped to investigate, I now explore the ontological and epistemological foundations and discuss considerations of methodology and the methods I eventually chose to add to the accumulated empirical base of my own long-term experiences derived from my professional and life-practice and as referred to in my heuristic statement above. Despite not having studied philosophy systematically, the epistemological and ontological foundations implicit in my mode of engaging in my professional and advocacy work inevitably became explicit as they permeated my approach to research for this paper. Becoming aware of them and making them explicit assisted in setting the compass for discoveries about past and present experiences and for guiding my way through conversations with writers and colleagues/practitioners in my attempts at finding affirmation for the meaning of what my life and work had allowed me to be part of.

Qualitative or quantitative?

Intending to reflect on three decades worth of parallel and ‘dual’ work experiences with numerous and diverse people within multilayered and dynamic contexts, I quickly found that any positivist attempt to measure and quantify – let alone generalise or replicate – my accumulated experiences would be neither appropriate nor even possible. I work through my intellect – my cognitive capacities – as well as through intuition and compassion – my heart – and the ways in which I embody my intentions and relating. I particularly desired my mode of researching to be consistent with the way I worked in my professional practices. The social research literature I read in 2004-05 raised ongoing differences and tensions between proponents of quantitative and qualitative approaches and their underlying philosophies and applications (Alston & Bowles 2003; Borrell & Boulet 2004; Bryman 2001; Denzin & Lincoln 2000; Fook, 1996; Heinemann-Pieper et.al. 2002; Janesick 2000; Porter 1998; Riessman 1994; Fook (ed), 1999). Deconstructing the ‘quantitative-qualitative divide,’ Hammersley
Dunbar, S.A. (2009) (1992:39) rejected the notion of a dichotomy between the one and the other, preferring to consider ‘a range of positions sometimes located on more than one dimension’ (Hammersley, 1992:51). Riessman’s (1994) argument for diversity and mixed methods in qualitative social work research attracted me; she invited another nine social work researchers to join her in reporting in their separate chapters on their various and varied research experiences; but none of the highlighted approaches described seemed to offer what I needed.

It was a Borrell and Boulet (2004) article (published in a modified form later in 2007 as a chapter in a book on research into problematic gambling), ‘A critical exploration of objectivity and bias in gambling (and other) research’, that helped me to broaden and deepen my understanding of research methods. It explored recent research into the social and personal dimensions of problematic gambling, using a foundational, philosophically inspired framework to present and critique current research approaches and, most interestingly for me, their ‘ontological and epistemological premises’ (Borrell & Boulet 2004). This contribution attracted me because, throughout my social working years, I had become very familiar with clients’ stories about problem gambling issues, a familiarity which provided me with a practical or ‘real-life’ way of comprehending those authors’ brief theoretical discussion; it was also in keeping with my preferred way of learning – from practice to theory. I also came to realise that the research approach I would adopt needed to be in keeping with the world view and values on which I base my own life and work.

I knew I would be unable and unwilling to approach this research, as an ‘(assumed) objective and (value) neutral scientist’ (Borrell & Boulet 2004: 2) when re-calling, observing, describing and trying to understand the phenomena of my own and other human beings’ interactive behaviour and interrelationships. Further, a positivist and/or quantitative research approach would not fit the more intimate exploration of people’s understanding of their experiences that I wanted to engage in. Indeed, such an approach would not bring out the meaning they attach to the facts and events which constitute their lives. I was not going to, nor did I want to, count or measure people’s voices, their narratives and their influences on me. I needed to find another way of exploring that ongoing work-experience or people-experience, and how I might allow the
remembered voices of so many people to be heard through mine and thereby possibly discover new knowledge(s) (Pease 2002; Fook 2002:33-44).

I wanted somehow to capture the essence of my often passionate professional practice with other human beings whose individual and group behaviour always had deeply interested me. Hence, following Borrell and Boulet (2004), the ontological premise upon which I prefer to base my life-related and work-related decisions and actions and through which I view the nature of my and others’ being and existence, is humanistic; and as a worker and a researcher I value the subjective basis upon which human meaning-giving rests. I believe I can construct meaning out of my immediate experience and the observed/shared experience of my clients and my colleagues. That would locate my epistemology – my understanding of the nature and basis of knowledge and understanding – within the ambit of interpretism. However, my appreciation of elements of a Marxist or ‘structural’ mode of understanding the social world – including processes of inequality, exclusion and oppression – suggested that Borrell & Boulet’s ‘critical-dialectical structural(ist)’ approach would support my intention of bringing together the subjective and objective in a mutually constitutive relationship. As they formulate it: ‘The social world ... is constituted through structures or structuring processes and social forces of which individual human agents are mostly unaware’ (ibid 2004:3). Creative syntheses of both epistemological approaches have been solidly tested and have proven their explanatory and discursive power (Borrell 2008; Burr 1995).

**The heuristic approach**

Having discounted the appropriateness of a positivist and quantitative approach, I began to consider what qualitative methodological approach I might adopt for this study. I continued reading and talking with social work academic colleagues. The idea of a ‘heuristic’ approach came to me partly through discovering and immersing myself in two small methodological texts – Clark Moustakas (1990) and Valerie Janesick (2000). Both expose significant episodes in their own life journeys as much as they do their ideas and emotions, and treat them as central to their understanding and application of the heuristic approach. Heuristic research, I began to understand, is a study that entails a process of discovery – as so powerfully expressed in the
exclamation ‘Eureka! I figured it out!’ ‘eureka’ indeed being the past perfect form of the verb *heurin* from which ‘heuristics’ also derives:

‘*Heuristics is a way of engaging in scientific search through methods and processes aimed at discovery; a way of self-enquiry and dialogue with others aimed at finding the underlying meanings of important human experiences.*’ (Moustakas, 1990:15).

He alludes to and quotes Michael Polanyi in the introduction to ‘Heuristic Research’

‘*Polanyi’s philosophy and scientific journeys gave heuristic ideology added significance in concepts of tacit dimension, indwelling, and intuition as well as the particular understanding of validity in qualitative understanding*’ (Polanyi 1962, 1964, 1966, 1969, in Moustakas 1990:9; Schwartz 1974).

Or as Polanyi himself formulated it: ‘*Our personal knowing is our personal indwelling... the universal principle of knowing ...*’ (1974:44).

I decided that this approach would be most adequate as it seemed to be consistent with my way of living, working and learning from experience. One of the most compelling arguments I read for the heuristic approach was Valerie Janesick’s (1990); what attracted me to her and her writing was that she had so obviously learned from her varied and creative work as a dancer, choreographer, academic, researcher and educator – possibly a unique professional combination. Hers is not cold, dry writing, but seems to emanate as much from her heart and her imagination as through her intellect; she likens the qualitative research process to dance, having experienced and obviously loved both creative activities. She also highlights the contribution made to qualitative research by Clark Moustakas (Janesick in Denzin and Lincoln 1990), commending to the reader an ‘heuristic methodology’ which, she argues, allows the researcher to explore his/her lived experience. This approach would allow me to weave my teaching and training experiences into the fabric of my social work and registered migration agent work.

I also set out to prepare for the writing of a very strong autobiographical text, though realising that some readers would find this approach limiting, limited and unconvincing. However, as this whole undertaking was a way of my seeking meaning and discovering new meaning in my professional work experience as I approached retirement from the paid work force, telling and reflecting on my story seemed
appropriate. At the stage of my professional working life that I reflect on, I was not envisaging any further independent research activities; this study is not planned to be a stepping stone to promotion or to further formal research. I also realised that, no matter what method, methodology or approach I chose, some limitations could be identified. As I have already stated, I hoped to find some meaning in the chaos of experiences I had had and, hopefully, to add to social work knowledge.

The methodical steps Moustakas commended from his own experience studying his loneliness provided me with a guide. First I set about ‘identifying with the focus of the inquiry’ (Moustakas, 1990:15); this was not hard to do because I remained passionate about and active in the two professions. Simultaneously, and to the time of this writing, I have engaged constantly in what he terms ‘self-dialogue’. In late-2004, I began diary writing in earnest as an ongoing form of self-dialogue and self-questioning, both writing by hand and using the computer. Diary keeping has also allowed me to experience what Moustakas refers to as ‘in-dwelling’ – the process of turning inward to seek a deeper and more extended comprehension of the nature or meaning of my experience of practising the dual professions. As mentioned, Polanyi (1975:44) had already suggested the term ‘indwelling’:

‘Our personal knowing is our personal indwelling ... personal participation ... the universal principle of knowing.’

And Donald Schön adds:

‘our knowledge is ordinarily tacit, implicit in our patterns of action and in our feel for the stuff with which we are dealing. It seems right to say that our knowledge is in our action ...the workaday life of the professional practitioner reveals, in its recognitions, judgments, and skills, a pattern of tacit knowing-in-action.’ (1995:4)

Wanting and needing to be able to reach a deeper understanding of myself and my sometimes all-consuming professional practices and motivations of/for my work as both paid and volunteer practitioner, I decided to set the central research question as: ‘How do the dual professions of social work and registered migration agent work both complement and contradict each other?’ This personal search for new and further insights and understandings is the central and essential feature of this study, rather than finding answers to any question I might have posed. I anticipated the phases of this form of research to move through what Moustakas identifies as ‘initial engagement,
incubation, illumination, explication’ and finally, ‘creative synthesis’ in the writing stage and through ‘tacit and intuitive powers’. Finally, I was not to recognise until I was involved in writing the final draft of this study that my social work practice, and often my RMA practice, might well be identified as ‘heuristic’ (Webb 2001:57).

The ‘generative themes’ for this study

Having adopted Moustakas’ heuristic approach and having embarked on a process of continuous self-dialogue mainly through diary-keeping and in dialogue with my academic supervisor, I took the next step – ‘initial engagement’ (Moustakas 1990:27). At a supervisor’s prompting in an early conversation, I identified what I believed to be some of the main themes and values that have informed my work and that have helped me to remain, for most of the time past, fascinated in and by my work and the people I met and meet. It was also an attempt at clearing my mind of the rather confusing, sometimes even inhibiting, multitude of insights and knowledge I had gathered over the years through my reading, my working, my discussions and general involvement in the fields of social work, education and migration agent work. I developed what Freire (1994) referred to as ‘generative themes’ to help me organise this knowledge resource, using them, different from his practice with poor and exploited peasants in Brazil, to retrospectively and reflectively group my always provisional understandings of what I had been involved in. They constituted metaphoric vessels or pots into which I could pour associated thoughts, experiences, moments of sense-making, references to literature which had impressed me, direct descriptions of events, and moments of high emotional and cognitive insight. Whilst probably suggesting analytical categories which were too distinct and apparently segregated from one another and from the holistic account I wanted to offer, at least they offered me systematic outlets for what I previously referred to as ‘constipation.’ In fact, they proved to be useful discursive tools assisting me to hold the analytical and synthesising tasks associated with working on a thesis together and render them fruitful, mutually and dialectically.

The question my supervisor asked me to respond to towards the formulation of these generative themes that we metaphorically named ‘pots’ from the onset, was: ‘What interests or values seem to have nourished my work with people?’ and without any hesitations I articulated:

- Violence

- Human rights
- Justice (retributive/restorative) and social justice (distributive)
- Human migration
- Human language and inter- and cross-cultural communication
- Social work.

As I worked my way into the study, I identified other common generative themes that I might have selected, including: human spirituality and religions; the human family; the hegemony of Western thought in the 20\textsuperscript{th} and 21\textsuperscript{st} centuries; the concept of change; human culture and cultures; I also highlight other additional themes that I have identified in the Abstract of this work. Taking into account word count limitations, I chose to include some of these as sub-themes in the conceptual ‘pots’ and to allow some to emerge as my thinking developed.

I felt I could now embark on a critical reflection on and further exploration of my dual professional experiences. I am a visual thinker and found it satisfying to use my imagination in creating ‘pots’ that might best hold each of the themes. Once I had visualised each ‘pot’, I set about ‘filling’ it with fragments of my personal associations and ideas, memories and related literature I had already read. The following are excerpts from the early texts:

- **Violence pot**: This dark aspect of human beings, our propensity to commit and perpetrate violence against one another, has fascinated me for a very long time. This pot is tough and ugly; it is made of a heavy metal and it is painted black. It swallows up whatever disappears into it … What I did not realise at this time was that I would identify the amazing resilience of many human beings, along with their compassion for suffering others.

- **Human rights pot**: This is the most important pot that I have chosen to begin to fill. It is a beautiful pot, but very fragile. There are however plenty of craftspeople who can cooperate in mending and repairing it as it is roughly handled by other people, and still others who want to destroy it altogether. It is also a pot that is not aesthetically pleasing or acceptable to some people of our world. Many people resent and fear the largeness of this pot and would prefer to be able to create their own, each nation a pot for itself …

- **Justice pot**: The image I have of this pot is of one that is copious, that is small at its base and at its opening, that is fragile and fine in appearance but that is made of a material that has withstood violent treatment and attempts to smash it to smithereens. It is gleaming white …
• **Cross-cultural communication pot:** None of the work I have done or the related experiences I have had would have been possible without our being able to communicate with one another. So this pot is a large, bright vessel, for a multitude of living and changing languages, with English being the one that I am most familiar with and German the one that I love to keep learning ... The beauty of the scripts that are the written form of spoken words, as the sounds and music of so many languages, sometimes almost overwhelms me and I stop listening for the meaning and can hear only that sound, rhythm, beat and pitch. Indeed the poetry and music of the languages ...

• **Migration pot:** I imagine this being a clay pot or jug that can be used by people, usually women or children, to carry precious water, often across long distances. It can be filled through the opening at the top of its neck. This water-carrying receptacle is used by the world of people no matter where they are born ...

• **Social work pot:** This is a curious pot, because it has two distinct but jointed halves, top and bottom: the one half is wood and seems to have been carved and lined with a waterproof material; the other half is almost opaque glass and contains words that form ideas ...

After writing into the pots some of my knowledge of the related issues at that time, I wrote further texts in which I considered the relationships amongst these themes, the consonances and dissonances I identified amongst the ‘pots’, which mirrored my seeking to identify the consonances and the dissonances between my dual professions, between the great ideals which were said to inspire many of our endeavours to create the good life for all and the often rather pitiful realisation of these ideals in practice.

I noted that the more I reflected and wrote, the more conscious I became of my interaction with clients. I commented about this to my supervisor a number of times in the early stages of this four-year process. I seemed to be able to be involved and yet simultaneously watch myself and my client in operation; and I started to note both my apparent strengths and weaknesses. I began to try to allow silences when with clients. This was again brought home to me when I noticed after the first three interviews I held with participants in this study that I not only spoke a lot, but also interrupted my interviewees in my eagerness to acknowledge what was said.

**Diary writing**
All the while, as suggested by Moustakas (1990), to help myself become immersed in this study just as I had been immersed in my professional practices, I was writing a diary of many of my interactions with social work and RMA clients. This writing allowed me to reflect on those encounters. I shared the early diary entries with my supervisor; he thereby started to become acquainted with some of my clients and with some of the ways in which I worked.

**Peers’ voices: Interviews**

In the second half of 2006, I interviewed 21 social work and registered migration peers, in an attempt to listen to and include those familiar voices and test whether my emerging hunches and understandings of the tensions and commesurabilities between both professional ways of being and doing made any sense and were shared by them. I strongly believed that their social- and RMA-work experiences and their insights into those experiences would help me to expand my own thinking and knowledge. I refer in different ways in the text to these persons as ‘companions’, ‘friends’, ‘colleagues’.

Voices, people’s voices, communicating with me, responding to my questions and I to theirs in any one of many many languages … voices of people who might be able to help me to search and research by telling me their stories …

*I wish you would write about what it is in people that makes them want a story ... One can’t say how life is, how chance or fate determine people’s lives, except by telling the tale.* (Arendt, Letter to Mary McCarthy in Cavarero 2000:129).

As well, my own voice would unashamedly be audible in the conversations I envisaged – ‘*We are not robots who collect pure information*’ but ‘*humans with emotions, values, social biographies and institutional locations*’ (Riessman 1994:135).

I thought of seeking out colleagues in and across the dual professional area(s) I had come to know over time, of asking to interview them in order to hear their tales of how they had come to the professions they were practising. After a few decades in the field of migrant and refugee social work and migration and refugee law advice advocacy, I was familiar with many active participants in vibrant networks of like service providers; it was important for me to be able to hear their life and work experiences to compare and contrast them with my own life. I identified people I still had contact with, even though I had withdrawn from the dynamic Springvale position. I listed 25
people, hoping to be able to interview at least 20 of them. I made initial phone or face-to-face contact, established where and when they would prefer to be interviewed (their home, my house, a workplace or other) to avoid inconveniencing them. Because it took quite some time to arrange interviews of 20 people, I approached only 23, two of whom were unavailable to participate. Knowing all relatively well, I anticipated more of a conversation than an interview; they were familiar with my work and style and I with theirs. I had worked with some for as long as I had been a social worker.

Such familiarity, of course, meant that I was in danger of assuming rather than exploring their thoughts, opinions and experiences, which led me to offer too much of my own input during the first few interviews, not noticed till I began transcribing them. On the other hand, I knew little if anything about my colleagues’ early lives and professional choices. As my initial research design included the selection of three distinct sub-groups all working with migrants/refugees – one group of individuals practicing in one of the two professions and one group practising the dual professions. This proved well-nigh impossible: for example, some colleagues who had been registered as migration agents had let their registration lapse, the field of RMA having become more and more that of lawyers, not social workers.

Not wanting to lead my interviewees to identify their enthusiasm for human rights, justice and any other of the generative themes I had identified for myself, I invited them to share with me some of their early stories and important feelings and opinions about their past and current activities. The interview, with its ‘inherently interactive quality’ (Gregg 1994:52) was to be semi-structured and ‘non directive’ (Porter 1998) – with questions about their birth place, position in their family, their parents’ influence, their education, influence of various significant others, their choice of trades or professions, motivations for their choosing work in the human services and migration related service, migration and international travel experiences where relevant, the languages they knew, the main aims they had in doing their paid or voluntary work. I needed to consider the special and inevitable complexities of interviewing people I already knew as colleagues (Alston & Bowles 2003:112-120), so I prepared an outline of the research project in English, a consent statement and ethical statement documents which were accepted by the RMIT University’s Ethics Committee on the 7th November
2005. I planned to tape and transcribe the approximately 60 minute-long interviews. A profile of the group I interviewed is offered in Chapter Three.

My two supervisors, social- and RMA-workers and social work teaching colleagues and friends also provided important ideas and insights. Metaphorically speaking, I carried the thematic ‘pots’ with me, almost at all times and to each of the above-mentioned people, collecting in them what they had to share with me. This part of the research process was to be one that revealed to me much more than I had anticipated: my generous peers, who had experienced the same world and historical moments, phases, events and developments that have shaped me and all the clients I have become familiar with. Without exception, we are all contemporaries and influenced by the same dominating and fluctuating ideologies, hegemony and philosophies.

**Writers’ voices: Contributions from several literatures**

While continuing to work as social worker and RMA worker, and thus remaining firmly placed in the practice I was trying to better comprehend, I was seeking out writers who might expand, differentiate, confirm my understanding of the themes I had identified as informing and guiding my work. The range of the writers’ disciplines I have chosen is true to my critical-eclectic approach to knowledge and understanding; the voices of varied critical theorists, historians, investigative journalists, linguists, lawyers, moral and political philosophers, political scientists, journalists, novelists, policy-makers, politicians, social workers and social work academics and theorists have helped me to expand my thinking and understanding.

Rather than offering a conventional literature review as part of this thesis, I decided to engage the voices of the writers as relevant for the respective themes revealed in the ‘pots’ and from listening to my colleagues’ voices and the past and present voices of my clients. I consider as more appropriate my way of introducing the written words of writers into the ongoing conversation with myself, clients, colleagues as they converge on the themes central to the chapters normally referred to as ‘data chapter’.

I thus accord all voices the chance to enter the dialogue without any of them being privileged, as writers usually are in the propositional approach to research. The voices are not cast in oppositional or contradictory positions, as seems often to be the case in research including workers and their ‘clients’. The voice of the author can so easily be
silenced in that process. In this, I have been inspired by the approaches to ‘living theory’ and ‘inclusionality’ as proposed by Jack Whitehead and Alan Rayner (2009). I hope that I have succeeded in allowing the reality and importance of human beings’ voices through such dialogical writing. I hope that multidimensional and concentric narratives will emerge, specifying and differentiating the themes as we go along in our discursive dialogues.

**Clients’ voices**

The voices of my clients from the past and the present, as they told/tell me and lived/live their stories are of central importance to this work. I can invoke my memory of them and of the events in which they were involved, always being intrigued by both their diversity and the common humanity we share. The longer I worked within both professions, the more I understood that the divide embodied in the teacher/learner and social worker/client discourses is a false one; we are all together in this, however different our opportunities have been and are. Hartman (1992) and Pease (2002) drew my attention to the hackneyed social work concept of ‘empowerment’ from the (for me new) perspective of marginalised knowledges (see also Linda Smith 1999; Ashis Nandy 1989; Edward Said, 1973 and many writers writing in the ‘post-colonial’ mode). They aroused in me an interest in knowledge that is developed by and with oppressed people, usually under conditions of hegemony of the knowledge of the dominant sections within a community or society.

I have little trouble in recalling many, but in no way all, of the clients I have met; as a community social worker at the Bureau in Springvale, I got to know at least two and even three generations of many families. As a community-based agency, it attracted many local people with whom I had inevitable informal contact outside the Bureau in the shopping centre, on the train, at funerals, and at different social functions.

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1 Of the variety of terms used for the persons assisted by social workers – client, customer, patient, consumer, service user, participant - I have chosen *client* as the most frequently used in my varied workplaces; they all were and are the people with whom I was involved - sometimes for years or sometimes for short intense times – in a magistrates’ court, preparing for a Social Security Appeals Tribunal hearing, taking a recently arrived Iraqi man in my car to an understanding local GP, or being ill myself, sitting at the computer on Saturdays with East Timorese family members recording their stories.
Visa application processes involving people from poorer countries and refugees and their family members could extend from nine months to six years. Interactions were sometimes dramatic and unforgettable: the sinewy Vietnamese man lying face down beating his fists on the floor and screaming and sobbing for his disabled, suffering brother; the shortsighted white-haired Ethiopian imploring me to ensure his daughters would not have to be separated in order to get to Australia; the wonderful old woman from Serbia, shortly before her death with her small, black triangular head scarf, black knee-high socks over thick stockings, work-knarled hands, crooked black walking stick, uncomprehending of my efforts to explain the complexities of the refugee status claim process; the young, German-speaking blond mother, patiently waiting at home for her death by Motor Neurone Disease complications, sitting in front of loud colour TV images … I can see them and many, many more in my mind’s eye, and hear the way they pronounced my name and addressed me.

Even before beginning the research I would often write a kind of diary entry, highlighting for myself a case and its remarkable features, not to be kept but, at that moment, to help me to remove myself at least a little, to observe the interaction. In addition, because the Springvale Bureau undertook extensive policy advocacy, it was important to note systemic problems raised by clients: the mothers who came in December and January, unable to pay school fees; women fleeing violent partners and taking interim refuge at the Centre; people who were unlawfully in Australia with no access to free medical treatment when needed. These are some of the cohorts of people I saw and whose experiences became the ‘data’ used for broader advocacy and reform. I used to run monthly ‘working with interpreter’ workshops with interpreter and role-play client in situ, and we often selected themes derived from actually occurring casework issues for the sessions. Major international and local events, like the outbreak of a war relevant to certain groups of clients or the closing of the local Nissan factory making hundreds of workers redundant, meant a temporary increase in the numbers of clients affected and thus became relevant signposts to understand and act upon people’s real-life situations.

At the conclusion of this thesis I will offer a case study to exemplify the at once interactive and complementary roles of social and RMA work. It seems to me that a case study offers the opportunity to holistically re-integrate the various fragments
which have been detailed and isolated for better analysis. It offers a useful synthesis that should allow the reader to imagine praxis as it happens: simultaneously, contradictorily, at various levels of constitutive relevance (personal, interpersonal, organisational, societal). Other characteristics of the case study that appealed to me and add to the reasons for its inclusion are:

‘rhetorical and logical functions – (i) the revelation function ...the making visible of phenomena (not otherwise clear to the reader)... and the aesthetic appeal by providing human interest to the reader and (ii) the logical – it may suggest hypotheses, interpretations, empirical uniformities for future quantitative investigation ... ’ (Platt 1988).

The case should be typical and exemplify the dual professional roles; it should also highlight the generative themes and possibly have an affinity with either the work or the life of at least some of my research colleague participants. The particular case study I chose exemplifies many aspects of both RMA and social work – on- and off-shore visa application advocacy, social work and welfare support to people excluded from mainstream entitlements, advocacy through a variety of ways, co-operation between client and social worker, empowering strategies in a situation where applicants have little power vis-à-vis bureaucratic, legal or political decision makers, essential understanding of a body of Australian law, the separation and combination of the roles of social worker and RMA worker. I leave it to the reader whether the case, which I consider to be in many ways typical and exemplary, illuminates the more analytical/interpretive parts of this work.

My voice as a dual professional, a researcher and a writer

I have already discussed the heuristic approach I have adopted and how I hoped that, by re-membering, re-telling my active professional life story I would become better able to ascribe meaning to it (Arendt in Cavarero 2000:69). As a researcher I have worked reflectively and analytically with the data I gathered from my past and ongoing experiences of working with service users, from conversations with peers and colleagues, from writers and from my own life experience.

One of my initial hopes for this research was to find or develop an encompassing body of theoretical understanding through which I might explore and better comprehend
social work and RMA practice and myself as a practitioner of both, as well as become better able to pass on such understanding to others. I was especially interested in overlaps and tensions between the two working modalities associated with the respective professional approaches, but this interest gradually shifted my attention to the many-layered contexts in which my dual practices occurred and which, I became more and more aware, influenced and conditioned both. In particular, this applies to my awareness of the importance of the underpinning philosophy, ideologies and world views associated with the dominant neo-liberal hegemony of the last decades. This awareness grew progressively as I reflected about my past experiences, and throughout the interviews I held and the reading I did. My reading of more critical materials related to social work and globalisation (Dominelli 2007; Dominelli 2004; Boulet 2003; Webb 2003; Fook 2002:19-23; Ife 2001; Payne 1995:159-174) had a great influence on me. In recent times this reading has included accounts of the collapse of the economy and the ever more threatening global ecological ‘meltdown’ that led to further migratory pressures. This information certainly influenced my ongoing attempts to better understand both my past and present practices.

The next chapter profiles the 21 colleagues/participants whose voices I have sought in this investigation; people who in this broad context shared my journey within the dual professions.
Chapter 3 The chorus of voices of my colleagues/participants

From a number of possible designations, I have decided to refer to the 21 human service workers and migration/refugee advocates interviewed for this study as ‘colleagues/participants’ (alternatives I considered included ‘participants’, ‘interviewees’, even ‘friends’). A striking feature of most of my colleagues’ stories is their apparently rich childhood reservoir of fantasy and imagination, seemingly presaging their adult ‘compassionate imagination’ (Nussbaum 2004), later revealed in their choices of unpaid and paid work activities. Their own multi-faceted diversity, and awareness and acceptance of ethnic, cultural and linguistic diversity, characterises them all and provides my research work with an exceedingly rich chorus of poly-lingual voices. My affinity with my colleagues/participants became clearer as I considered our conversations; I realised that I approached each of them as I do each of my clients. As I met and listened to them, I imagined the contexts, the structures that helped to make them who they are: family, education, place in history, culture, migration status, social status.

Here, I would like to introduce that group of colleagues/participants to the reader, revealing some of what I have come to realise as our common features. In this study I espouse a broad view of social work by including some as participants who are not social workers but work in other areas of human services. Ife notes the tendency for Australian social work to be very narrowly defined with a focus on very particular professional qualifications, and many others working in the human services (Ife 2001; Leinhninger & Midgley 1997). Kennedy and Richards (2007:6) suggest that ‘human services’ covers generic titles including ‘project-, support, community-outreach liaison, community development, residential care, welfare workers, youth, aged, family, child, family violence and refugee workers ... ’ It was through my own Immigration Department-funded social work positions such as ‘settlement worker’ with both Australian German Welfare and Springvale Community Aid and Advice Bureau that I came to migration and refugee law advocacy work, as did another eight of my colleagues.
Choosing the participants

Working in and around the professional fields of social work and registered migration agent work for over 30 years privileged me with opportunities to become active in related and dynamic networks of committed service providers in local, state, federal and international government and non-government agencies as well as in academic settings. Cooperation rather than competition was a feature of these working networks, in spite of the very likely divisive compulsive competitive tendering (CTT) regime and de-institutionalisation (Green, 2003) imposed during the neo-liberal era under the Victorian coalition parties and their Premier, Jeff Kennett (1992-1999)\(^2\).

As mentioned before, 21 of the 23 work colleagues and friends I approached were able and willing to share their stories for this research. Common to all the 14 women and 7 men is the fact that all offered their professional and/or personal voluntary services to people in Melbourne’s multicultural communities, either as mainly human service or legal workers or as a combination or succession of both. We talked about their early lives and the ways those experiences influenced the formulation of their values and their work choices. I had collaborated with every one of these people in a variety of settings and ways, some throughout the period I am researching.

Common historical context

All the participants, including myself, grew up in the second half of the twentieth century and experienced the repercussions of the Cold War between the Superpowers, the USA and the USSR and their allies, from the end of WWII to the very early-1990s. They made both fleeting and significant references to seminal Cold War and post-Cold War historic events that directly affected our lives. The events noted by them included the Diaspora of the persecuted Jewish people from Europe from the 1930s onwards; the missionary and humanitarian aid work undertaken by Australians in the Pacific Region

\(^2\) Compulsory Competitive Tendering was not an original idea; it represents classic neo-liberalism or as it is more usually referred to in Australia, is one expression of economic rationalism. Borrowed from Thatcher’s Government in the UK and Reagan’s in the US throughout the 1980s, CCT involved a mandatory exposure of government services to competition through a process of public tendering. Moreover, contrasting the Kennett legislation with the Thatcher experiment, the Australian model was more extreme in its application (O’Connor 2000).
after Japan capitulated in 1945; Australia’s anxious, regulated migration programmes since WWII; Albania’s 1945 to 1992 Communist regime; the desperate struggles of the Palestinian people for self-determination, especially from the end of the British mandate in 1948, and their subsequent diaspora and continuing persecution; the end of British rule in Burma in 1948 and subsequent post-colonial jostling for power by military and civil forces; the Greek civil post-WWII phase from 1946-1949 and the exodus from Greece into the USSR; the mass-migrations of people from Italy and Greece after WWII to countries like Australia and the US which wanted their labour resources; the grisly fall of post-colonial Cambodia to the ‘Communist’ revolutionaries under Pol Pot in 1975; Egypt’s shifting alliances between the US and the USSR during the Cold War period; the jumbled and bloody internally warring Somali peoples’ struggles for independence from the European colonial powers of Britain and Italy and from neighbouring tribal peoples; and the attempts by Australia after 1968 to lure hard-working but mainly unskilled Turkish migrants from both Turkey and West Germany to Australia.

Common to all of us, to me, my colleagues and all of our clients, is the fact that we have been affected by particular financial and economic ideologies and systems, including capitalism and neo-liberalism and their competitors in the ideological and theoretical-‘real life’ realms, the degradation of the world’s natural environment, the demise of colonial empires, the seeming promises of the sixties-seventies, the re-emerging conservatism of the ’80s and ’90s with the advent of globalism and the post-9/11 War on Terror, all deeply affecting both ourselves and the work we did.

Significantly, special personal and family concern for and action to redress the situation of oppression experienced by the Aboriginal peoples of Australia was raised by four of the eight participants born in Australia. Three of them have close relationships with siblings who live and work in and with remote Indigenous communities.

Almost all my colleagues could be described as acting locally while thinking and understanding globally (Ife 2001:165; Boulet 2003:228 - 245) with RMA and related work with migrants and refugees requiring these human service providers to think in terms of national and – always complex and related – international people movements.
**Language, religious beliefs and practices, and cultures**

Though our conversations were in English, the participants could have expressed themselves in one or more of a large number of other languages. All the participants attached great value to language and communication. Of the 21 participants, 19 speak a language other than English on a daily to regular basis and all 21 are proficient at and enjoy working with interpreters. To highlight the linguistic richness of this group, I here list their languages and show how they acquired them: through parents and grandparents outside and within Australia. The languages are: Albanian, Arabic, Burmese, Greek, Hakka, Hebrew, Chinese, Italian, Japanese, Khmer, Macedonian, Portuguese, Russian, Somali, a suite of Slavic European languages, Tetum and Turkish. I met eight participants who had learned and become proficient in at least one extra language, by choice, motivated by the need to communicate with people who were significant in their lives: Palestinian-, Lebanese- and Egyptian-Arabic, Bahasa Indonesia, Bengali, French, German, Greek, Pacific Islander, Malay, Mandarin-Chinese, Thai, and Vietnamese. Through their personal experience half of the participants know what it is to learn English as a second language, whether in childhood, in adolescence or in adult years. One participant had memories of her teacher-father tutoring adult migrants in the evenings in their house and her not wanting to miss these fascinating events. Two devised make-believe languages to emulate the migrants whose voices and tongues they heard in their own communities. In writing about their study of ‘expertise development’, Fook, Ryan and Hawkins (2000) identify a ‘prior-to-formal study stage’, which the participants generously allowed me to have a glimpse of when telling me their stories.

I want to identify here how migrant Australia of post-WW II shaped me and other interviewees as it was to do with other people migrating into Australia. I recognise in the seven colleague/participants born in Australia over a period of two decades, as in myself, a readiness for the changes that immigrants would introduce. And we still seem to be ready, evident in the sort of long-term cross-cultural work we have chosen to be engaged in. Two of the participants were children of a parent who had converted from one to another religion in order to be able to marry. In both cases this had caused overt psychological distress in their convert parent, severe enough for participants to comment on and for appropriate assistance to have been sought. Participants’ migrant
parents also experienced disappointments and rejection, with their children, the participants, apparently faring better and consciously setting out to improve conditions for new arrivals.

More than half of the participants made some mention of the significance in their lives of their grand-parents’, parents’ and/or their own religious and spiritual beliefs, including Buddhist, Christian, Islamic, Jewish and humanist traditions. Related central values and commended ways of treating themselves and other human beings with respect were voluntarily detailed by three participants. Both of the participants who grew up in Communist societies highlighted the communal values and responsibilities readily accepted and practised by their grandparents and parents, providing the children with models of social behaviour they still emulate; the excesses of individualism in the post-communist period disturbing them.

**Education and professions**

All 21 participants and I have been privileged in having access to formal education in our childhood; even those from the oppressive societies of Albania and Burma have valued education in our adult years. Eleven participants shared their memories of parents’, grandparents’ and significant teachers’ strong positive influence in the shaping of their own positive and humane view of people, whilst the strong motifs of both forced displacement and of chosen migration featured in the stories of 15 participants. The world, and the ‘world of people’, seem to have captivated the imaginations of my colleagues as they grew up; seven of those who witnessed civil brutality in their home country sooner or later became involved in helping oppressed people, risking their own lives in doing so. One of my peers who had been born into a country of chronic and acute political repression was only five years old when she accepted the responsibility of delivering messages to and from anti-government activists; she was so small and appeared so innocent that significant adults involved her in their own clandestine political activity. Twenty participants have an expressed global view of helping. The majority worked at some time in an international context: that is, in the world outside the local and familiar sphere. Even those five young people who first believed theirs was to be a money-focused profession (accounting, economics) had since rejected that moneyed professional and life path. Architecture, medical laboratory work and fitting and turning were the chosen careers of three displaced people who,
since they arrived in Australia, turned to work in the human services. Acting and theatre work and anthropology have been the professional choices of two.

Categorising them by profession is not really possible. Some of those who had been registered to provide migration information and advice were no longer doing so at the time I interviewed them but were still working amongst migrants and refugees. A number of interviewees have multiple qualifications including social work and law, while at the other end of the spectrum is a participant with solid trade skills and experience, now working as a migration agent mainly amongst people displaced by the ongoing animosities and brutalities of the Middle East. A constitutional lawyer spends his non-paid working life in local and international community development amongst resettling refugees from the bloody excesses of the war between the South Sudanese and the central Sudanese government. The social welfare and community development worker from the bludgeoned East Timorese community is by choice a religious leader in her communities in Melbourne. The formerly practising university-qualified architect now works specifically with migrant and refugee women who have experienced domestic violence, as both a registered migration agent and a qualified trauma counsellor.

What is common to all is that theirs are shifting and changing community-helping profiles in the context of shifting and changing societal events which adversely affect people.

The significance of family

A repeated wish of the four female participants, themselves displaced by wars, was to help other parents and children separated by civil turmoil and war to reunite. All four now work in various capacities amongst resettling families in Australia, with particular emphasis on support to mothers and their children. Another three non-refugee participants initiated comment about their concerns for separated family members and the importance of family reunion migration programmes. The importance to participants of both family members present and family members absent was marked amongst all the participants who had been forced to escape civil violence themselves.
Those participants who referred to their own parents’ experiences of displacement expressed particular concern for their surviving and now ageing parents’ welfare, drawing learning from their parents’ and grandparents’ lived example and wisdom.

**Imagination …**

Two participants born in Australia within monolingual families, always encouraged by their parents, played rich fantasy games in which they spoke their own imaginary language. Another, also as a child, was able to imagine herself replicating her mother’s humanitarian work amongst injured, internally displaced children and women. One of the men, through refusing to conform with the dominant Anglo-Saxon culture and reading widely, was able to imagine himself no longer constrained by the narrow confines of a parochial secondary school curriculum and population in Victoria.

He reports having visualised himself acting to redress social wrongs he identified even as a young boy. Another male was able to imagine himself living a life that included people of very different cultures to his own, in spite of the fact that he was given no encouragement by parents, aunts and uncles to do so.

**International engagement**

While all participants at the time of my interviews with them were engaged in work in Australia, four were simultaneously actively involved in overseas humanitarian work amongst Bangladeshi, South Sudanese, Thai and Filipino/Filipina peoples, helping those displaced by environmental disasters, by war and by greed in the huge illegal trading and exploitation of human beings – the sexual slave trade of the 20th and 21st centuries and people smuggling. Further overseas experiences included rehabilitation amongst prostituted women in Indonesia, the establishment of community medical services in Malaysia and help to Albanian refugees from the 1996-99 Kosovo war. The retired former politician/justice department community activist now heads a UN committee in an honorary capacity in anti-people trafficking initiatives in the South-East Asia region. One of the participants, being employed as a local coordinator by International Social Service (ISS) for a number of years, had combined on- and off-shore humanitarian social work. All of this chosen experience ensured my colleagues/participants’ ability to maintain a broad global view of the world of people while being involved in caring for suffering individuals and their communities.
To come …

The voices of all my colleagues/participants will be audible again in later chapters. They continue to share more details about their values and their work as I address the several themes which have arisen from my own reflections about my work as a dual professional worker and from my ongoing reading. In addition, and central to all my professional experiences, are the multi-lingual voices of the people I have assisted, and they too will feature throughout the text in conversation with all other voices I have engaged with. The combination or ‘chorus’ of these diverse voices and perspectives leads me along a seemingly never-ending, fascinating path of discovery and I invite the reader to join me in reading this account.
Chapter 4 The banality of evil

Introduction

So ‘capacious and hydra-headed’ (Castelli 2004) is the topic of violence that I found it initially confronting and hard to think about and reflect on; yet it remains the dominant feature in the lives of my clients. In critically reflecting on the concept and its manifestations I have found it important to consider the integration of interpersonal, institutional and structural violence. This may be on an individual level, as in client Maria’s situation, or it may be to do with collective violence such as that perpetrated against the East Timorese by Indonesians between 1973 and 2000; or, for that matter, by the predominantly white invaders on Australia’s Indigenous peoples. Each level affects and is affected by the others. Bufacchi (2005:193-204) designates as too narrow the definition of violence as only ‘an intentional act of excessive or destructive force’; he suggests that ‘those who see violence in terms of violation of rights champion a broader concept of violence’ with a combination of both views being preferable.

The term ‘critical approach’ characterises the way in which I have come to practise social work. And, having chosen to work at the Springvale Bureau in a paid capacity as a migration/refugee law advocate and subsequently for RILC as a volunteer migration advocate, I have elected to optimise the possibility of providing RMA service equally through that same critical approach. ‘Critical theory concerns itself with moving from a society characterized by exploitation, inequality and oppression to one that is emancipatory and free from domination’ (Mullaly 1997:108). Being a RMA allows me to practise this body of increasingly controversial administrative law3 in its international, global context while remaining in Melbourne and working amongst diverse people. Helpful for me as a practitioner are formal but critical social work approaches, embracing a ‘variety of different theoretical positions’ (Alway 1995; Cheek et al 1996, in Pease et al 2003:3). They opened possibilities for me to at least pursue some reflective analytic thinking about all the above forms and contexts of

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3 Harper Fitzroy Legal Service (2005:758) ... Administrative law is, broadly, the area of law which enables challenges to be made to administrative decisions (by departmental bureaucrats acting for the political Minister) or other acts of government such as (in my example, the denial of a migration visa).
human violence; indeed, ‘[c]ritical theory has involved a variety of analyses that have endeavoured to link the concern with subjectivity, with the structural focus on the social and political context of people’s lives.’ (Thompson 2000 in Pease et al 2003:3).

I will start this chapter and all subsequent chapters with the clients, by re-calling and re-imagining some of their experiences of violence. Their lived experience and mine contemporaneously continue to teach me about our shared human condition. These same voices in chorus with those of writers and of some of my colleagues help me to explore the phenomenon of violence that has permeated the whole of my social work and RMA experience. Sub-themes will emerge that, in turn, will expand my understanding and knowledge.

I now allow my memory to call up a few of the numerous people I have attempted to assist:

**East Timorese asylum seekers’ voices**

> From 1994 to the early 21st century I met many ethnic-Chinese East Timorese who escaped from their country via Denpasar, Bali. In helping them as both a social worker and a registered migration agent at the Bureau and RILC over the next decade, I was told repeatedly about members of the Indonesian military arriving at people’s homes in the dead of night, and taking people away to the Dili-based prison, where interrogation and torture were applied. One of the most unsophisticated but nevertheless terrifying and harmful forms of torture occurred in inauspicious, filthy duck ponds, where detainees were semi-drowned. This controversial practice is now referred to as ‘waterboarding’ and is associated with notorious Guantanamo Bay. Acting with the East Timorese mainly as a RMA, I recorded harrowing descriptions of this cruel maltreatment, not at first being familiar with it and having no knowledge of related language.

**Maria’s voice**
Maria visited her baby son’s grave every week, on Friday. She talked to him and she arranged the fresh flowers and offered her prayers for strength to go on without him. One Friday, her violent, estranged husband and father of the deceased baby emerged from the bushes near the grave and stabbed her wherever he could strike her, until her screams brought a gardener to her rescue. She survived his savage knife assault, bearing numerous psychological and physical scars, but over the years regained some confidence. Maria was supported by staff of both the Springvale Bureau and the Community Legal Service for a number of years as she healed physically and psychologically and spent time in court rooms when her husband was tried. She had no other relatives in Australia, so seemed to find the welcome and caring safety of the Bureau very important for a number of years.

Common to the East Timorese asylum seekers and to Maria is their experience of having been victims of calculated violence, of which Hannah Arendt commented: ‘No-one engaged in thought about history and politics can remain unaware of the enormous role violence has always played in human affairs, and it is at first glance surprising that violence has been singled out so seldom for consideration’ (Arendt 1974:87). A chance remark in 2007 by a work colleague about Hannah Arendt’s phrase, ‘The banality of evil’, took me to a different vantage point from which to consider the notion of violence as an evil perpetrated by often very ordinary folk, in mostly very ordinary ways. The irony just discernible in Arendt’s phrase (Kristeva 2001) deflated a curiously remote grandness of the opinion I used to have of violence. Never diminishing the terrible reality and enormity of suffering of the immediate victims of violence, Arendt’s quirky but consequential expression has allowed me to reframe the concept: human violence is often manifest in mundane, every-day destructive situations ‘in small places’. The ubiquitous duck pond in East Timor is turned into a torture tool. I suppose that the Indonesian and collaborating East Timorese torturers either believed in the benefit to society of what they were doing, or maybe simply followed orders from superiors; and Maria’s own home and ultimately the humble little garden grave is the
scene of violence by a man against his wife. These human events can and do become the stuff of social work and RMA practice.

Arendt’s phrase continues till now to be evoked when seeking to understand particular instances or forms of violence. George Pitcher uses the phrase ‘Evil, but chillingly ordinary’ in his article for the Telegraph on Austrian Josef Fritzl and evil⁴, first published in 2008 and reprinted in The Age (23rd March 2009). ‘JF did unspeakable things, but the fact that he is one of us is that which is truly terrifying ... But whichever label we give Fritzl, we cannot avoid the disturbing conclusion that evil is an intrinsically human quality’.

**My voice**

The phenomenon of humans’ violence against other humans, against animals and against the natural environment, has always at once intrigued, angered, frightened and repelled me.

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*I recall vividly another dilemma I found myself in, some time in the early 1990s; Mr. S. was a client of the Springvale Legal Service and, as often happened, his lawyer asked me if I would write a social work character report for the court. This man and his family of wife and daughters were already known to the Bureau because of the chronic financial problems they had and the apparent family violence. Other Bureau staff members visited their house on a number of occasions to give money to his wife for food. The family had no car and lived in a relatively remote section of the suburb. When I established what the charge against the father was, that of rape and incest, I felt both repulsion and anger along with concern*

⁴ Austrian Josef Fritzl was sentenced to life imprisonment on the 14th March 2009. He had been found guilty of multiple crimes including the forced imprisonment for 24 years of one of his daughters, of countless counts of rape, of assault, of fathering her eight children – one miscarriage, seven live births and the death by his neglect within 24 hours of delivery of one of the babies. A number of women have since come forward in South America and in Italy to reveal similar violent incest histories.
for all members of the family. His manner was always subservient and I found the opposite possible reality – his violent dominance over his wife and children – distressing for his family. I conferred with the Bureau management and decided not to provide the requested reference/report.

In reality, all members of this family were oppressed, including Mr. S. in his debilitating poverty and violent sexual addiction. What I learned once again from this situation was that lawyers were able to take the client’s instructions and work to represent him well in court. The man’s solicitor, my colleague, did not talk of her emotions and certainly did not express revulsion, in my presence at least. Martha Nussbaum provides full argument in favour of our being ‘wary of these (disgust related) emotions because they are associated in troubling ways with a desire to hide from our humanity ...’ (Nussbaum 2004: dust jacket introduction).

I had been intimately aware of my policeman-father’s childhood, his being disabled by the maltreatment of his stepfather and colluding mother, my always-estranged grandmother, and by his subsequent work experiences. The violence experienced at home by many of the 1960s London comprehensive school children I taught as locum teacher shocked, angered and baffled me. It was reflected in violent classroom and playground behaviour, amongst students themselves and by students against teachers.

In Germany in the 1970s, I was an observer of the post-1968 student ‘revolution’, of the conscious but often jumbled and frenzied violence against the early neo-liberal State, led by the reluctantly middle-class, privileged, well-educated Andreas Baader-Ulrike Meinhoff urban terrorist (Rote Armee) Red Brigade groups; their ideas and actions were always thought- and debate-provoking⁵.

⁵ At that time in Germany, I was introduced to the work of the then recently established Amnesty International (founded in London in 1961, advocating mainly for prisoners of conscience and, at present, for the reality of the inhumane and degrading treatment and torture by numerous governments and their agents and agencies against people suspected of being
Social work practice in Melbourne from 1976 till the present re-introduced me to the suffered reality of domestic violence against children and women (Ferguson, 2003, Goddard & Stanley, 2003). Amongst many other battered women and children, one of my favourite and most loving aunties had been helped by my father, and I felt anger at the perpetrator then and at our apparent community inability to prevent violent assaults in families. Refugees I meet and help through my two professional roles continue to share with me ‘stories of pain, inhumanity and often incomprehensible cruelty’ (Beckman 2002-2003 in RILC 2008: 38). I recalled their stories particularly when asylum seekers arrived unauthorised and by boat in Australian waters and when political squabbles fanned by irresponsible media exaggeration erupted.

Much of both my social work and RMA work experience was gained at the Bureau and the Community Legal Centre in Springvale, the former established in 1970 and the latter in 1972. Their approaches to addressing the phenomenon of violence were practical and holistic and, thereby, compatible with my values. Violence was considered to be a community matter rather than a personal matter; although of course, individual people were affected and were also agents. Local preventative measures include: the development of the adjacent Springvale Neighbourhood House in 1983; the progressive development of the practical Bureau’s and Legal Service’s Victorian Magistrate’s Court Intervention Order support service; and the establishment of the innovative Noble Park Family Mediation Centre (established 1985). These are some examples of close and active cooperation with local councils to support children and families. There was also broad and active lobbying of the State Government for the introduction of the early Victorian Family Violence/Intervention Order regime, and active and multi-focused participation and lobbying in State and National community cohesion initiatives. Multi-faceted support to newly-arriving communities – as with the East Timorese after 1973 – always evolved out of and then into stronger working partnerships. Maria and the East Timorese whose voices are heard here in my writing so fleetingly, have added to my social work and RMA experiences and have been part of the policy advocacy data that could and did add to further political and social change.

As a person who considers herself a global citizen I have met in Victoria survivors of appalling human-caused disasters. These range from Australia’s early and planned institutionalisation of the maltreatment of Indigenous peoples (Clendinnen 2008; Reynolds 2000; Dodson et Al. 1997; Clark, C.M.H 1968; Dodson 1993; Gaita, 2003) to the politically orchestrated and purposefully implemented Holocaust in Europe from the 1930s to 1945; from the confusingly designated and ideologically meandering Great Proletarian Chinese Cultural Revolution 1966-1976 to Pol Pot’s also ‘revolutionary’ and planned genocide in Cambodia from 1975 (‘Year Zero’) to 1979; from Rwanda’s Hutu and Tutsi ethnic and tribal genocidal blood baths of 1994 to the ongoing Burmese Generals’ callous imposition of suffering on the people of Myanmar and their indifference to such suffering. I have been exposed to the results of human violence perpetrated on other humans, and am constantly seeking to deepen my understanding of it and of the contexts in which it is being perpetrated.

Only as I neared the end of this research process did I become more acutely aware of the past and present impact of economic/social/political ideologies and systems on all of our lives and their potential impact on the instances of violence I was attempting to better understand. From the 1970s, I witnessed Germans agonising over their country’s Nazi past; then, in ‘West’ Germany, over the communist/socialist reality of ‘East’ Germany in the context of the cold but latently violent tension between the Communist USSR and an increasingly dominant global capitalist framework. Then there were the post-WWII wars of independence by nations formerly under European colonial domination, and after that there were internal and often bloody struggles. Ex-colonial states became implicated in the global Cold War and in the economic and political domains. Communist/socialist thought was demonised and feared, due to their ideological and factual juxtaposition to the interests of those benefiting from the free-market/liberal democracy structural arrangements.

In what seems like a last instalment came the sometimes almost comic 1989 fall and dissolution of the USSR, marking the formal end of the Cold War. This seemed to usher in the audacious and seemingly supreme (re-)emergence of what have become known as ‘neo-liberal’ and ‘economic-rationalist’ capitalist ideologies and market practices and, at present, their thunderous collapse in the course of the so-called ‘economic meltdown’ since 2008. (However, latently the associated processes of this
meltdown have been present as undercurrents to the capitalist system since its inception) Ferguson 2004; Wikipedia ‘Neo-liberalism’ as at 18/11/2008).

In sum, this brief account should have conveyed my gradual, if non-systematised, recognition of the importance of historical process, structure and context for a more adequate and complete understanding of the phenomenon of violence.

**Writers’ voices**

Trying to understand the phenomenon more adequately I have, for a long time, been seeking out the voices of writers on violence. Specific social-work literature on violence tends to highlight family or domestic violence against children and women and violence perpetrated against social workers themselves. New social-work voices, however, can be heard considering the violence of war and civil strife and its traumatic effects on communities of people (Ramon et al 2006, Bourke, 2006) and on the combatant survivors of wars (Wheeler & Bragin 2007).

As already mentioned, Hannah Arendt proved to be of particular interest to me in this search; as a political philosopher Arendt (1967, 1969, 1970) seems to have undertaken what I would call a heuristic exploration of human evil and violence. Her life-long study took her back through history to the Greek philosophers and, via her doctoral thesis on St. Augustine (Concept of Love in St. Augustine, 1929) and on Emmanuel Kant amongst many, forward into 20th century Nazism and Stalinism (The Origins of Totalitarianism 1951; Kapuscinski 2008) and through to the 1968 student uprisings in the West and the Black American civil disobedience movements (Reflections on Little Rock, 1959). A feature that attracts me but may be the basis for criticism by others is that ‘Much of her writing is impressionistic and combines theory and history ... and politics.’ (Waldron 2007:10).

In her personal quest to discover as much as she could about human violence, Arendt also found that the crime of the existence of the concentration camps was of such criminal magnitude that they could neither be punished nor forgiven, an opinion which has since been disputed by proponents of ‘radical forgiveness’, including Gobodo-Madikizela. During a lecture tour in September 2007 at Monash University she shared ideas from her work based on cross-cultural studies of guilt, shame and blame in post-apartheid South Africa and post-World War II Germany, positing forgiveness as a
necessary healing step to create the possibility of opening up a path towards reconciliation.

More specifically looking at professional social work literature, ‘Social workers are traditionally concerned with people in positions of disadvantage whether this is defined in individual or structural terms’ (Benn 1991, in Miller 1991) and it is this ‘disadvantage’ that constantly needs to be explored, better understood and discussed by social workers and social-work thinkers and writers.

Contemporary English-speaking social work academics writing about disadvantage have found value in the thinking of Iris Young (1949-2006) and her attempt at categorising structural disadvantage and oppression into five classes: ‘exploitation, marginalization, powerlessness, cultural imperialism, structural violence’ (Young 1990, Chapter 2), with violence being a common feature (Allan et al 2003; Dominelli 2004; Mullaly 1997:151, citing Payne in a discussion of structural social work; Young 2002:260). Young posits that ‘Violence begets violence ... Victims ...responding with revenge only to inspire seemingly endless cycles of retaliation ... conflicts between nations, between ethnic groups, strangers, family members ... share the same dynamic.’

Giants of political theory, like Karl Marx, had long been considering societal oppression prior to Young’s works (Callinicos 1999:78 – 92) and social work critical theorists have expanded the notion of oppression arguing that oppressed people may internalise and then, in turn, perpetrate oppressive and dominating behaviour (Dominelli 2004; Bishop 2002:73; Allan et al 2003:67-68; Mullaly 1997:151-152; Frieire, 1972, reprinted 1974). The area of domestic violence against children and women is the subject of a plethora of social work literature, often with feminist analyses of the abuse and exploitation of ‘power over others’ in patriarchal contexts (Allan et al 2003; Bunston 1999; Dominelli 2004; Goddard & Stanley 2003; Walsh & Weeks 2004).

Social workers are interested in how people are affected by violence and the threat of it and the all-pervasive sense of fear within societies that it generates. The current Global War on Terror, the apparently intractable conflict between Israelis and Palestinians in the Middle East and many other persistent crises have been identified as deserving a special social work response (Rossiter 2005; Healy 2000; Ramon et al 2006).

My professional colleagues’ voices
How were the colleagues I interviewed able to help me deepen and broaden efforts to understand human violence better? Through their chosen professions, all of them assist people having experienced or still experiencing violence in different forms. While none of the participating colleagues disclosed personal experience of family violence, 8 out of 21 referred to their own direct experience of civil conflict as children and as young adults; and 2 expressed their intimate familiarity with and experience of war or civil conflict conditions through parents and grandparents.

All, without exception, have helped people experiencing family violence, usually against children and women and usually in their small places – at home. So compelling did one colleague find working amongst migrant and refugee women who (had) experience(d) family and intimate violence that she gave up her original professional practice in the field of architecture, in order to increase her knowledge and skills in working with those violated.

My East Timorese colleague treasures her now-deceased father’s calm wisdom in assisting her to see the Indonesian persecutors as fellow human beings and to come to forgiveness of their persecution, never failing, however, to be able to name the persecutor and her/his actions; she grew to play an active role in the re-formation of the nation state of independent East Timor and the restoration of its internal relationships.

The specific violence inherent in the exclusion of people from society for a host of reasons was the expressed motivating force behind the choice of three colleagues to specifically embark on work in the human services. All interviewees have chosen to work amongst and beside oppressed people, allowing me the conclusion that respect for and interest in other human beings and the human condition – including and sometimes triggered by the direct or indirect experience of violence – figured centrally in their lives and professional endeavours and choices.

The violence of war – inter-national, civil, revolutionary – and its cruel banality

The experience of the wasteful and destructive institution of war is a subject of concern and of interest to both those who experience it and those who try to extract sense from it. As a German-Jewish refugee to the US before and during World War II, Hannah Arendt experienced the almost indescribable horrors of the Holocaust and reflections and speculations about war: thoughts about European Jews’ lack of a self protective
army to a complete rejection of war and instead a focus on political life, they all surge through her writings (Owens 2007).

Personal war experience was also the experience of my young adult client Nouria. War raged constantly throughout her childhood and adolescence in Afghanistan from 1982 to 2001. While she lived the war, I was trying to keep myself informed about it through the press and other people who had fled from it. Her life in Afghanistan and Pakistan was full of violence; mine was always comparatively safe.

It was International Women’s Day about a decade ago. I had been invited to speak to a small group interested in human rights at a community centre in Noble Park. I had invited 20 year-old Nouria to accompany me to tell her story. She was alone in Australia, her father having arranged to get her out of Afghanistan after one of her sisters had been raped and murdered in front of the family. Nouria was a very bright student, but the trauma she had experienced was almost overwhelming her. She had indeed been granted asylum by the Australian Immigration Department, but she had received, via various means, unconfirmed news that her parents and siblings had been killed in the assault on the Taliban Mazar e Sharif in 2001.

Before we went to the hall, I took her to a reclaimed wetlands area in South Springvale and we walked slowly and talked. She stopped at one point and said: ‘Listen, Sherron, birds! You know when I was a child living in Kabul we were too frightened to even go outside and if we did, all we could hear was the sound of gunfire, explosions, tanks approaching ... I never heard any birds, it was never as quiet as it is here.’

Writers write about this sort of experience. A Hazara Afghan writer, Dr Khaled Hosseini (2003 and 2007) gives a beautiful, fluent, almost poetic prose account of different aspects of the war that Nouria experienced. The words of the interpreter and then my words have

never been sufficient to capture the essence of the suffering of the people of Afghanistan.

Apparently wracked by grief and guilt at not having been able to save her family members, Nouria ‘disappeared’; and until this day, I have not been able to establish where or how she is. I had provided her, as had her human rights lawyer, with possible referrals (e.g. to the Foundation for Survivors of Torture) but her own sense of guilt at possibly being the lone survivor of her immediate family seemed to stop her from taking up these suggestions for help.

Afghanistan itself remains at the centre of world news, and violent internecine and international conflicts continue as I write. As I recall numerous interviews since 1984 with mainly Pashtoon, Tadjik and Hazara Afghans, I am aware of the need to remain as well informed as possible about a war in which Australians have been directly involved since 2001. The personal and the political are inseparable – I have an obligation to know what roles my country, Australia, is playing in the world.

‘There exists a very large body of literature on war and warfare, but it deals with the implements of violence, not with the violence as such.’ (Arendt, 1974:87).

As well, the state of war and what we term ‘war’ vary greatly – ‘civil-, guerrilla-, limited-, total-, gang-, tribal-, cold-, race-, trade-, liberation-, propaganda-, class-war, wars against terrorism, war on drugs’ (Oxford Concise Dictionary of Politics 2003: 564, 565). The special ferocity of recent civil and inter-ethnic wars overall – like those experienced by the Irish (1960s to 1998), Hutus and Tutsis (1994), those of former Yugoslavia (1991 -2001) – is explored by anthropologist Anton Blok (1998). Amongst the related ideas he considers are those of the apparent heightened intensity in the conflictual animosity between people who previously lived close to each other (cf. civil wars). He also alludes to Levi-Strauss’ classifications of ‘clans, sub-clans, moieties and tribes’ that have helped to guide me some way in understanding the conflicts people emerge from and into my world. Starting from a different perspective, Law Professor of International Relations, German born and educated Adda Bozeman, explored some of the many culturally different perceptions of conflict and conflict resolution,
including those associated with the spirit-world, non-material facets such as dreams and demons, especially South of the Sahara. It may be that ‘latent conflict is acceptable as part of communal-tribal life’ (Bozeman 1973). More pragmatically for my own involvement, Australia has, since the end of the 20th century, formally funded programs of community capacity building and has initiated processes to help rebuild or foster cooperation amongst peoples and groups where previously inter- and intra-ethnic tensions have existed.

Of the violence of poverty

‘Addressing the structural issues and oppressions of poverty remains neglected with a tendency to stay focused on the individual’ is Dominelli’s (2004:72) verdict about much social-work practice. At the same time, direct case work can have the advantage of our being able to work with and learn from people, knowing their identity and some of their histories. Berger (2008) highlights starkly and simply the magnitude of suffering caused by people not having sufficient resources or access to them and by their remaining anonymous in the sometimes baffling magnitude of related statistics.

‘The poor are collectively unseizable. They are not only the majority on the planet, they are everywhere and the smallest event speaks of them. This is why the essential activity of the rich today is the building of walls – walls of concrete, of electronic surveillance, of missile barrages, mine fields, frontier controls, and opaque media screens.’ (Berger 2008:92).

The violence of poverty causes oppression and suffering to an estimated 1 billion people living and dying on less than $1 a day; some 30,000 children are dying every day. Even in ‘wealthy’ Australia, the Australian Council of Social Service (ACOSS) estimated in 2006 that 2 million Australians exist in unacceptable standards of living. They have trouble getting the bare necessities and access to items deemed ‘rights’

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6 Currently as at April 2009, the Immigration Department still funds the Settlement Grants Program ‘to assist humanitarian entrants and migrants settle in Australia and participate equitably in Australian society as soon as possible after arrival ... Community development projects focus on building the capacity of newly arrived communities to work together towards common goals ... promote their culture to Australian society in a positive way...’

www.immi.gov.au This was an important component of my Immigration Department funded programs from 1980 through to 2003.
within the context of the second generation of widely accepted human rights: stable housing, secure work, adequate income, education, health care and community services. The every-day suffering of poor people is constant, tedious, repetitive and indeed, banal. ‘Banality’ could also refer to rich people’s and rich countries’ inability to see beyond the statistics of poverty to the people who suffer it. The International Federation of Social Workers (IFSW) continues to advocate for the alleviation and eradication of poverty (AASW, statement released 17th October 2007), whilst the operations of global bodies like the International Monetary Fund (IMF), the World Bank (WB) and the World Trade Organisation (WTO) highlight the stark reality of persistent inequalities amongst world nations and their people but simultaneously seem not to be able to effect real change for the poor of the world; to the contrary, they are regularly identified as ‘perpetrators’ in the ‘production’ of poverty worldwide (Oyen 2005).

Voices of clients Kylie, Helen and the Cambodian children, and poverty

Kylie seemed withdrawn and shy when she first approached the Springvale Bureau for financial help. She had lost all of her teeth through an untreated gum disease exacerbated by multiple pregnancies; her main worry at that first encounter was being unable to pay the school fees for her children who were attending ostensibly free state schools. Poor nourishment, constant financial stress as her husband tried unsuccessfully to find and keep unskilled jobs, lack of access to affordable and skilled dental treatment and a host of other conditions, seemed to have trapped the family in a cycle of deprivation. Access to immediate emergency relief funds, and welfare dental care, the Community Neighbourhood House, access to extra work, access to skills’ training and to more affordable accommodation helped her and her husband in the course of a number of years to improve their family’s living conditions. She also participated in the policy change actions taken by the Bureau, the local Community Health Centre with VC OSS and
ACOSS in their 2-decade long but partially successful campaign to improve access to dental treatment services for people on low incomes. Just as Kylie’s strengths were acknowledged, so too were those of Bureau volunteers.

Ethiopian Australian Helen was distracted with grief. She had just learned that her sister in her home country had died leaving four orphaned children. Helen’s sister had not had enough money to pay travel to stay and access treatment in Addis Ababa. Helen had been sending as much money as she could to help her own mother and her siblings, but it had been insufficient. Helen’s grief was compounded over and over by her guilt at not having been helpful enough from her privileged position as an Australian citizen.

The three orphaned children, two boys and a girl in their teens, arrived from Cambodia to live with their uncle. I had assisted the family over a two-year period to overcome Australian Immigration Department visa migration application rejections. All three were slight and wary. All were still illiterate though they had all worked hard physically to help the village people who had taken them in after their parents’ early deaths from untreated disease. Within a few months in Australia, they had started formal education and were putting on weight.

The debilitating experiences of poverty are common to Kylie, Helen and the three Cambodian children and, of course, to between approximately 70 and 80% of all the people I have assisted in both professional roles. The evil and violence of that poverty is inherent in the deprivation and suffering experienced by poor people. It is banality in poverty; it resides in its ordinariness, its familiarity and everyday-ness to poor people – as it seems to be to those in the privileged parts of nations and of the world, in spite or
possibly because of the many well-intended anti-poverty campaigns (Again, see Oyen 2005).

Returning to Dominelli’s remark with which I started this section, whilst there is a danger of remaining stuck within a merely individualist mode of operating in social work and RMA work, in Kylie’s case, through person-to-person dialogue, her consciousness was raised through her learning of ways to identify specific needs for change – the expansion of access to quality and affordable dental care to low income and Social Security payment recipients – and she was motivated to participate in local action for change whilst also being supported through personalised forms of intervention. Whilst not going into any detail here, the oppression of poverty and possible means of change have been explored for the developing and wealthy worlds by many, including Paulo Freire (1927–97), whose work has equally been examined as to its application for the ‘developed poor’ (Freire 1972; references to Freire in Mullaly 1997; Ife 1998; Jessop & Rogerson 1999).

Of violence against children and women

‘The nagging, unacceptable and ceaseless phenomenon of violence against children and women by both intimate people and by strangers is universal and can now through global electronic media continue to be exposed’ (Watts & Zimmerman 2002).

As already mentioned, social work literature is saturated with the shameful phenomena of family and intimate violence (Frazer 2003, 2004, 2008; Reese & Pease 2006; Walsh & Weeks 2004; Ferguson 2003; Dunbar, 2001; Cowburn & Dominelli 2001; Pease 1997; Stanley 1997; Riessman 1994; Evans, 2005). Rather than provide here the grisly details of some of the murders and attempted murders of women and children I have been directly or indirectly exposed to as a social worker and/or an RMA, I will simply note a little of their lives as a way of remembering and honouring them. Even as I write in 2009, chilling events involving the vile and violent maltreatment and deaths of named and individual children and of unnamed and anonymous child victims of civil conflicts and of wars, continue, including:

- The young Australian-born woman and mother of three children whose husband’s violence had left her with a broken jaw encased in a wire contraption and her face and full body bruised and parts
of it broken. I was shocked by her appearance, knowing the story of assault it told, and privy then to her plan to resume co-habiting with him should he return to her and the children, and that she herself was violent towards the eldest child;

- the Turkish-Australian woman not long in Australia whose little boy aged 5 and little girl then aged 8, now adults and parents themselves, cannot comprehend their father’s cold brutality in murdering their mother;

- the Canadian woman whose Australian husband could not accept the Family Court’s decision to allow his two children to reside with their mother, after they had spent almost a year in an unofficial women’s refuge, was stabbed to death in front of the children;

- the Eritrean-Australian woman and mother of three young children who committed suicide rather than face the ongoing sexual and other physical violence perpetrated against her by her husband in spite of intervention orders;

- the Portuguese-Australian, Ethiopian-Australian and Chinese Australian women whose estranged husbands assaulted them by stabbing them with knives or stiletto heeled shoes and leaving them physically and emotionally scarred;

- an anonymous adolescent woman ‘falling’ through the Bureau doors as the agency was about to close one Friday evening. She was ‘stoned’ but determined to try to pull herself together to be able to make her way to the nearby Rhino Bar. We offered to get her medical attention, but she refused; we gave her sweet coffee and an opportunity to clean herself up a bit. However, she insisted on teetering on her high high-heels to the club where she danced on table tops and earned the money she needed to purchase her illicit drugs of choice ... Had there been a safe using facility established in the area as many people in the community, but not the most shrill, wanted, she would at least have been able to ‘shoot up’ in a safe place. At a public meeting held in the Springvale Town Hall ten years ago, one angry violent resident shouted, ‘Why don’t we line them up and shoot them?’ The Bureau with its extensive youth work, legal and family support services, cooperative and partnership relations with local, regional, state and federal agencies, while not able on that occasion to support the young woman in her making some safe life changes, invited her to return (which she did) and continued to use that and similar cases to lobby and work for change.

(The Bureau had a genuinely open-door policy that has been modified in recent times, partly because of corporate changes including occupational health and safety, a slight increase in the feeling of ‘them and us’. Funding and contract rules tend to be given precedence in a neo-liberal context over the importance of unconditional trust and
respect as expressed in what I shall later discuss as an attitude intending to provide and share ‘les petites bontés’ or ‘the small goodnesses’’ (Levinas).

Baby Brendan died of brain tumour complications before he was two. Though the police were not able to link the two events, he had been admitted to the Royal Children’s Hospital within the first four weeks of his short life with serious and irreversible brain damage and having ingested a damaging amount of alcohol. The young parents denied having harmed him and seemed to collude in their silence. I helped his grandparents to obtain care rights for him and subsequently his younger sibling who suffered similar maltreatment at the hands of his parents, in spite of community attempts to prevent this.

Whatever happened in the privacy of the apparently normal home of the young couple and their babies still remains something only they know.

The glaring question which remains with me still is: Why did the young mother and father collude to abuse their first and second born neonates; and why did they abuse the power they had over the two, who were totally dependent on them for survival? They were not poor, they were each employed, they seemed to have networks of extended family members and friends, they were not substance addicted, they were not diagnosed with mental illness ...

As I write, my ongoing and 33-year-long dual social work and RMA case experience continues to be littered with child victims of more powerful adults’ violence and with women survivors and victims of their male partners’ intimate violence against them – in the context of ‘hegemonic masculinity’ (Cowburn & Dominelli 2001). Still, the incidence of such violence is simply staggering:

‘Violence against women and girls continues unabated in every continent, country and culture. It takes a devastating toll on women’s lives, on their families and on society as a whole. Most societies prohibit such violence – yet the reality is that too often, it is
Here, I widen Arendt’s ‘banality’ to incorporate the notion of the every-day nature of this sort of violence and its results, whereby hearing about it becomes routine and repetitive, indeed, part of what we feel is ‘normal’. It was Jocelyn Scutt, in her seminal *Even in the Best of Homes* (1983), who first lifted the veil so that we might become really conscious of the magnitude of violence in families across all strata and classes. So outrageous is this violence that even pregnancy does not protect a female from assault; on the contrary, Walsh and Weeks (2003) and the Australian Bureau of Statistics Personal Safety Survey (1996, 2005) found that pregnancy may be a time when women are particularly vulnerable to abuse. The Family Violence Provisions of Australia’s *Migration Act 1958* acknowledge and seek to deal with the fact of reproductive and family violence against non-permanent residents and often newly-arriving spouses; victims fleeing spouses’ violence may still qualify for permanent resident status even when not co-habiting with the maltreating spouse for the required time.

The multiple and varied oppressions of ageism, racism, sexism, homophobia, discrimination against people with disabilities, against drug-addicted people, religious discrimination and caste discrimination all involve breaches of human rights and all involve violent acts.

**Compassion**

In spite of efforts to do so, social workers simply can’t directly feel what our clients do; but we can ‘enter imaginatively into the inner life of another’ (Kadushin 1972), based on our human gift of empathy. And as well, June Allan’s (2003:66) brief mention of ‘structural empathy’ (referring to Jessup & Rogerson 1999:172-174) also deserves more emphasis. Mulally (1997:16) quotes Mishra (1989) when suggesting that we should regard compassion as a traditional commitment of humans and thus of engaged social work. Other such commitments include social justice and the preservation of the dignity and autonomy of individuals.

To my relief, what all of the colleagues I interviewed revealed through simply describing their active lives was their apparent ability to feel for other suffering human
beings, and what I have come to describe as their ‘compassionate imagination’ (Nussbaum 1998, 2004); imagination, one of the emotions identified by Nussbaum through her classical philosophical and current studies, can take us beyond our immediate circle in feeling compassion even with people remote from us – something I need to be able to, do particularly in RMA work.

My colleague, Lebanese-born M., was impressed, as a little girl and then as an adolescent, by her mother’s caring teaching work with school children who had various psychological, psychiatric and intellectual disabilities, often caused by the ongoing civil wars.

When M. spoke with me in the community centre where Arabic-speaking women gathered to give each other mutual support, she recalled her social work studies, influenced by French-speaking Canadian academics, that then enabled her to work with mothers and their children, all internally displaced. Once she arrived in Australia she could think of nothing more urgent than converting her qualifications to Australian social work specifications and seeking work again amongst women and children who have escaped from war. She knows and feels their suffering.

L., a tertiary-educated architect and multi-lingual interpreter/translator, took the path of counsellor and RMA to immigrant and refugee women subjected to family violence.

Their keen sense of the injustice of people’s suffering was also apparent in conversations with others, and I will explore further when I address the concept of social justice.

Being born in Indonesian-occupied East Timor, E. witnessed and experienced the deliberate, heartless and relentless violence of the military, the police and community-planted spies; at a crisis time in her late adolescence when she was in Australia, she recalls her beloved grandfather reminding her that even those agents of the Indonesian State were human beings who loved and missed their
absent children; she had asked for a way to understand the perpetrators and perhaps to forgive; she found herself trying to see them as fellow human beings.

J. had been involved for the whole of her long professional life in criminology, justice studies and practice, at local, state, national and international levels, added RMA qualifications to her big repertoire, feeling outrage at government laws and policies, and compassion with the victims of those policies. Having been a politician, she continues to pursue her individual and structural change interests and action at local and international levels.

Though still intrigued by violence, I find in human compassion a welcome antidote to its destructiveness. I listen to Arendt’s voice; I note her apparent ambivalence towards compassion and its often misplaced emphasis (Carnovan 1992; Ignatieff 2003:11). However, the theme of motivational human love features very prominently in Arendt’s politico-philosophical writings, from her very first major writing – her doctoral thesis on *The Concept of Love in St. Augustine* (1929; Baehr 2000; Kristeva 2000; Williams 1998). Broadening the notion of compassion from the individual and interpersonal into the public sphere, Martha Nussbaum considers the place of compassion in law-making and in judicial decision-making (Nussbaum 2004). It seems, however, that there are always at least some voices which are courageous enough to also highlight the ‘atrophication of compassion’ in civic and political society (Beckmann 2002-2003 in RILC 2008:42), especially where gross injustices are ignored. On the other hand, others view the possibility of civility surviving in the face of the violence of injustice as uncertain (Cameron 1970). More recently, Zimbardo (2007:21,22) suggested that we need to consider the ‘banality of heroism’ as a balancing social and personal force to the banality of evil and violence in our explorations, a notion worth considering and which I have indirectly picked up in my encounter with the philosopher Emmanuel Levinas and who I will converse with below and in further chapters in this work.

For ‘helping’ professionals, people in general and populations of violence-affected people in chronic conflict zones like Northern Ireland and currently Israel and Palestine, the phenomenon of desensitisation to unremitting human violence is real and

serves as self-protection (Ramon et al 2006:445). I witnessed it amongst many displaced people: for example, amongst Cambodians who had fled Kampuchea in 1979 and were resettled in Australia throughout the 1980s. Each Cambodian refugee had experienced so much cruelty and suffering that silence about those times seemed to reign amongst my clients. Saturation media coverage of violence of all kinds and levels may well have the same desensitising effect on us as viewers.

La petite bonté

‘L’enjeu est esthétique. Il permet de se laisser transformer par la petite bonté et de s’engager au profit de tous ceux qui sont repoussés à tort dans un tiers monde.’ (‘The challenge is ethical. It allows one to be transformed by the small goodness and to become involved in the advancement of those who are rejected and excluded into a Third World.’ http://espacethique.free.fr)

In my search for related literature on compassion I found the Lithuanian-French ethical philosopher Emmanuel Levinas (1906 -1995) (Mautner, 1997; Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy, 2007). Born in the same year as Hannah Arendt, having to flee the German Nazis and knowing the German language he took a particular interest in the ethics of our face-to-face relations with ‘l’autre, autrui / the Other’ – the Other Person – and the innumerable Others behind that One’ (Davis 1996:51). ‘La petite bonté’ – the small goodness or ‘the tiny giving/gift’ offered by one human being to another, he argues, is essential to a functioning society where we acknowledge and take responsibility for The Other (Davis, 1996:51; Kapuscinski 2008: 34-35). While considering this idea, I realised that the ‘giving’ that I did through three decades of voluntary work constituted ‘les petites bontés’; and that they, in fact, gifted me in the very act of my helping the clients, the Others (Titmuss 1971; Boulet, Healy & Helton 2008; Gobodo-Madikizela 2007; Simmel 1908, 1950 in Boulet, Healy & Helton 2008). Levinas sees violence itself as always failing and never achieving its true aim, rather than just being ‘wrong’ (Davis 1996:51).

Finally, evidence of the reality of human resilience is also encouraging in the face of loss or trauma through violence (Bonnano 2004; Kemplet 2004); but I will not pursue that here.

Conclusion
Violence amongst human beings is manifested in many different ways and on many levels, individual, institutional and structural. One way of critically considering violence is through Hannah Arendt’s critique of violence as an evil that is characterised by banality. My social work and RMA work experience of violence has been mainly through clients’ experience of physical violence at home and at war and more indirectly, through the structural/personal violence as inherent in and consequential to poverty. Their lived experiences and their narratives have been and continue to be of fundamental significance to my work in both professional roles. Global trends, often referred to as based in a neo-liberal or neo-conservative set of philosophies and ideologies at the end of the 20th and into the 21st centuries, loosely and variously form the foundation of the violence that has occurred in that time. In spite of the destructive power of violence, human compassion – expressed through interpersonal, civil and political means, along with human resilience and determination – helps to counter and withstand the destructiveness of violence.
Chapter 5 ‘Where, after all, do universal human rights begin?’

Introduction

‘In small places, close to home – so close and so small that they cannot be seen on any maps of the world. Yet they are the world of the individual person; the neighborhood he/she lives in; the school or college he/she attends; the factory, farm, or office where he/she works. Such are the places where every man, woman, and child seeks equal justice, equal opportunity, equal dignity without discrimination. Unless these rights have meaning there, they have little meaning anywhere. Without concerted citizen action to uphold them close to home, we shall look in vain for progress in the larger world.’ (Eleanor Roosevelt 1948)

It is easy to be seduced into reifying human rights and attaching them mainly to distant civil and political rights of people ‘somewhere else’, living in nominal democracies or under overtly repressive governments, such as Myanmar-Burma, Palestine, Zimbabwe, North Korea, ... some of a more extensive list. But human rights are those attaching to all of us, no matter who, no matter where.

This chapter, dedicated to a consideration of human rights, justice and social justice and their relationship to social work and RMA work, is of central importance to the lifeblood of my work; yet it has proven to be the hardest to write (Falk, 1999 and Flynn, 2005). So to attempt to make my way through the complexity of related ideas, I return to my companions – clients, peers and writers – to help me through. I am encouraged by the words of Bray and Preston-Shoot in the foreword to Kennedy & Richards (2007:v):

A third challenge is how to address the relationship between professional values and ethics, human rights and legal rules ... practice is best able to address its competing imperatives ...when knowledge of professional ethics, human rights and legal powers and duties are brought together to inform decision making ...

and it is that bringing together that I seek to do in both professional practices.
Eleanor Roosevelt’s privileged voice

I want to start by highlighting a summary simplification of the sometimes lofty and remote concepts of human rights and of the related justice and social justice language by Eleanor Roosevelt’s plain yet profound and arresting words quoted at the beginning of this chapter. She sets us the challenge of ensuring that every person is protected in all every-day aspects of their lives and living, no matter how lowly s/he is and no matter where in the world s/he lives.

Eleanor Roosevelt (1884-1962), US First Lady, played a significant role in the preparation for and the launching of the 1948 *Universal Declaration of Human Rights*. This astonishing human achievement, that assumed and necessitated international cooperation, is revealed in one of her biographies (Wiesen Cook 1999). Of particular interest to me is the recording of her working friendships with far-sighted white, also ‘privileged’ pioneer social workers like Jane Addams (1860-1935) who was a member of an influential women’s social reform movement of the time and who helped to keep Eleanor Roosevelt informed about how poor and oppressed people were living (Wiesen Cook 1999).

Influenced by the ‘Settlement Movement’ initiated in London during the late 1800s, Addams founded Hull House in Chicago and became a protagonist in the Women’s Movement-inspired peace movement before and during the First World War. She was blacklisted for her efforts. Whilst the US Settlement Houses initially followed a similar orientation as their UK examples, gradually they turned into a ‘cradle’ for US social work, increasingly focusing on the psychodynamic foundations of clients’ individual pathology and – not without opposition from Jane Addams and her followers – gradually turning away from giving equal attention to structural analysis and the need to change the structural context within which ‘private’ issues occur and which condition them to a large degree.

The inevitable yet healthy tension between the foci on the individual-personal aspects of disadvantage/poverty/etc and on the structural conditions under which they emerge (if acknowledged and debated) continues into today’s social-work practice whilst being virtually absent in the context of RMA practice (Dominelli 2004:255; Boulet, Frederico & Wedel 1989).
Small places

‘Close to home’ ... even these memorable words of Eleanor Roosevelt, rest on a glaring and erroneous assumption – that people do have access to a home, a home country, to a citizenship status with accompanying rights and responsibilities. Through my varied work experiences across both professions, I have found that the reality is other, with growing millions of displaced people unable or unwilling to find a government able or prepared to afford protection, a safe home, which therewith becomes and remains elusive; ‘...home is no longer that of a fixed and safe place, there to leave and to return to, and giving form to memory and anticipation’ (Moorehead 2005:289, influenced by John Berger and Barbara Hardy).

The United Nations High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR) reported in 2007 that:

‘While the number of refugees worldwide has reached a 26-year low, UNHCR’s annual global count of uprooted people rose last year to nearly 21 million, according to a report recently released. The “2005 Global Refugee Trends” survey attributed the rise to the refugee agency’s expanding role in caring for the world’s internally displaced persons (IDPs)’.

Add to that number the estimated 100 million people worldwide that are homeless and the more than a billion who have inadequate housing, and the extent of the problem (and of the implicit assumption in Roosevelt’s quote) becomes rather clear (Inter Press Service, March 2009).

As social workers and human rights workers, even in countries of privilege, we are well placed to persistently and consistently support the goal of people attaining equal dignity without discrimination; both professions allow us to address the lack of respect for human rights even at lowly levels and in ‘small places’ and minute instances of poverty and abject poverty, of violence and of suffering, from metropolises to remote settlements and places of harsh living, including prisons, immigration detention centres, and shelters in all parts of the globe.

My social work experience has taken me even closer than ‘close to home’, particularly with children and women clients, into the places where they are at home amongst people who are living together in various formations: in fragmented tribal groups and extended families, in collectives, amongst groups of people of like interest and purpose,
in nuclear families, in involuntary and voluntary institutionalised residential settings, in psychiatric and mental health residential institutions, and boarding houses accommodating deinstitutionalised people.\footnote{Deinstitutionalisation refers to a social policy implementation process that occurred in Victoria in the 1980s. As a result of the global forces of economic rationalism and, more broadly neo-liberalism, people with mental health and other disabilities were moved from large residential institutions into largely unprepared communities (Green 2003). The Victorian State Government of the day pioneered these only partially-successful reforms in Australia, and the policy had devastating effects, including a dramatic increase in homelessness amongst mentally disabled people and people with very complex psycho-social needs.}

Social-work practice can start in the small places and in small ways within larger structural contexts that defy national boundaries and borders, to achieve change in the larger world; and many social workers recognise the value of working at the two levels simultaneously as well as of working on changing the ‘intermediate’ institutional processes connecting them (Boulet, 1987). RMAs, particularly those working in community legal centres, also work with people at various levels, gaining an understanding of their clients’ experience of government laws, policies and decision making, and of lobbying and advocating for law and policy reform (David Manne, Coordinator and Principal Solicitor RILC, Annual Report 2007-2008: 9).

**Small helping places: Springvale Bureau and RILC – the community-based loci of my practice**

The majority of people I have met in both professional roles have experienced problems that are the result of their human rights being ignored and/or breached. Many of my clients’ multi-lingual voices in this thesis emanate from day and evening social work and RMA client encounters, weekdays and weekends, at Springvale Community Aid and Advice Bureau (the Bureau) – itself a small place close to the community in which it is situated and which it (mainly) serves – and at the community-based Refugee Immigration Legal Centre (RILC). No single voice could represent the diversity of people who founded, funded and managed this place, visited as clients, worked as volunteers and/or paid staff at both of these community-based organisations. Volunteer staff and clients in both are diverse and from a diversity of backgrounds; all their voices and their stories are of paramount importance to the agencies; clients’
experiences guide the service delivery, community education and community development projects and the policy advocacy undertaken (see Ellis 1996, exploring HR in community legal work, and Hoban, 2008, Annual General Reports from the Bureau).

RILC embraces three levels of practice and policy in its service delivery – international, national and local (Hoban 2008:3). The Bureau, on the other hand, has traditionally worked at national and local levels, and exploits the links created by its migrant and refugee clients and staff. One of the founders and former manager of the Bureau, Merle Mitchell (see Mitchell, 2005), was also an active executive member of the Victorian Council Of Social Services (VCOSS) and its Australian-wide equivalent (ACOSS); in her clear, plain-English style, in one of her many public presentations, she outlined what had in fact been the foundation of the Bureau’s practice (Emergency Relief Conference – March, 2004):

There are a number of basic rights to which every person in our society is entitled. The ACOSS emergency relief handbook lists these as:

- An adequate income or income security to cover basic needs;
- Life in safe, secure, affordable housing;
- A physically and mentally healthy life;
- Development of intellectual capacities and skills;
- Freedom to raise children in a safe and secure environment with support from family;
- Friends and a community;
- Participation in the community free of discrimination on the grounds of race, sex, age, disability or marital status;
- Access to appropriate information and resources to enable them to make their own decisions and to work out or choose solutions to their own problems; and
- Work.

If these are universal, we should be able to apply human rights to our lives and to our life situations, no matter who or where we are, who or where we are moving to or from:
whether crossing national and political boundaries or moving about within them. Indeed, ‘*Human rights are essentially discursive*’ (Woodiwiss 1998 in Ife 2001:2) and ‘*[rights] are constructed through human interaction and through an ongoing dialogue about what should constitute a common humanity*’ (Howard 1995 in Ife 2001:6).

**Amnesty International**

*Amnesty International Australia’s vision is of a world in which every person enjoys all of the human rights enshrined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and other international human rights instruments. Amnesty International is concerned solely with the impartial protection of human rights.* (Amnesty International)

Though I have never worked for Amnesty International (AI), I include a brief but important consideration of this international and national human rights non-government organisation and global network. It has had a profound influence on both my personal and professional life, on my extensive social work and para-legal advocacy work, including that related to migration and refugee law. Originally a human rights organisation advocating for the humane and lawful treatment of and due process for and ultimately the release of allegedly tortured prisoners of conscience (Belton 1998), it focused mainly on breaches of what I will explicate further as the ‘first generation’ of human rights: the civil and political rights of individuals as citizens. My active involvement since 1976 has revealed to me how this international civil organisation has been prepared to adapt its structure and focus in line with changing world events and to step into areas where breaches in the first and second generation of rights were occurring.

During the past 30 years, its mandate has extended to include, for example, the oppression experienced by Australian Aboriginal peoples and other Indigenous peoples continuing to live marginal lives in countries settled by (mostly) European settlers, as well as tribal peoples in nations dominated by westernised democratic arrangements and their associated power groups. The by now usual way for us to appreciate the full span of the *UN Declaration of Human Rights* is through the prisms of the three

... the debate around the universality of needs, claims and rights continues to be – in my view anyway – somewhat absent from the local discourse, apart from the work of Ife, and it may be useful to reiterate some previous contributions. Drover and Kerans (1993:11), reporting on a Canadian conference in the early 90s, are critical of an unqualified adherence to and promotion of universal rights as they are based on “respect due to an abstract, generalised, disembedded and disembodied other”. They see such universalism as “substitutionalist” rather than “interactive” and – with

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8 This set of concepts were first proposed in 1979 by French jurist Karel Vasak at the International Institute of Human Rights in Strasbourg (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Three_generations_of_human_rights and Ife 200:25)
Benhabib (1989 – suggest that it rests on a “paradigmatic” assumption of the human as – generally – white, male, propertied adults and “people who define themselves or are socially defined in other ways are understood as lacking”’

Whilst advocacy and other forms of activism surrounding, for example, the elimination of the death penalty, speaking out and taking action against violence against women and children, and continuing to energise local/global perspectives and working relationships is essential, the ‘assumptive worlds’ underlying the formulations and enactment of human rights need careful reflection.

**Human rights: perplexities and complexities**

All the rights within the Declaration are to be inalienable and inviolable and it holds up the ‘rule of law principle’ which protects every person regardless of their position in society (Ozpolitics website). This is one of the prized principles – along with access to a legal service, access to courts, habeas corpus and anti-discrimination – that RILC lawyer colleagues insist is embraced by and apply to immigration law (Manne 2008). This renders my ongoing involvement with RILC stimulating, knowing that the case work I am involved in both assists the clients I happen to service and effects change in the generic body of immigration regulation, law and policy, based on fundamental human rights.

Again, I highlight Hannah Arendt’s ideas: in preparing for *The Origins of Totalitarianism* in 1951, only three years after the ratification of the Declaration, she expressed some pessimism about human rights ever being extended to stateless people, those displaced as refugees. She wrote as a philosopher, academic and refugee herself, and could imagine human rights being effective, but only as long as they were enshrined in law (Arendt 1951). For her, human rights were also inextricably related to ‘civic engagement’ engagement happens in ‘the public sphere which is not distinct and separate from the private, but an extension of it’ (Stanford, *Encyclopaedia of Philosophy* 2006). Being the practical and insightful woman she was, she foresaw human rights as a potential both for human advancement and for failure. And Ife (2001:33) adds:

*The struggle to articulate and realize human rights can be seen in terms of different constructions of what are defined as universal themes, and hence a critical paradigm*
based on discursive rationality (Habermas 1984) becomes a particularly useful perspective.’

While I know that some view the ideals of the human rights and of related social justice as being beyond reproach, others are uneasy about or disagree with aspects of them; and ongoing discussions and the discourse about their complexities and legitimacy are many; as Ife (2001:3) suggests:

‘The field of human rights is fraught with conceptual ambiguity; it raises some of the most fundamental questions of social and political philosophy …’

The dominance of Western thought over that of the Middle East, the East and the South, the need for a global view rather than a limiting parochial vision, the awareness and avoidance of cultural relativity and social exclusion, the separate but possible cooperatively negotiated roles of political and civil society (Boon and Fine 2007; Carrozza 2003:38; Reichart 2002:208; Polisi 2004:1-7; Ife 2001:59/74; Ignatieff 2001), the tensions between the view of human rights as at once a universal phenomenon and, at the same time, as applicable to individual humans (Charlesworth 2008; Cox & Pawar 2006:30-32; Dominelli 2004, Boulet 2003; Carozza 2003:58; Reichert 2003, Ife 2001) and ‘the seeming inability of United Nations organizations and instruments to ensure protection and support of the most vulnerable peoples on the earth’ (Bowen 2006: 53); these are each and all serious possible and actual shortcomings that also act to motivate discussion and debate, reform, and movement forward into change.

Human rights are not meant to be a fixed set of ideals, something the notion of ‘universal’ seems to suggest. The need for related political and legal institutions to try to ensure the culturally and socially relevant implementation and ethical integrity of these rights is highlighted in the present epoch by Robert Fine (2007), Jacques Boulet (2003) and in the many works of Jim Ife and, earlier in the 20th century, by Hannah Arendt, as mentioned, in her uncompleted Origins of Totalitarianism (1951).

The plethora of related and ratified instruments that exist apply to all human beings; though, in reality, not to all, and certainly not to those most oppressed. Nation states’ authorities in particular define who is in and who is out of the orbit of these developing and changing Universal Rights, whether they are signatories to the Declaration or not.
The particular injustice and human rights breaches of home-lessness and of displacement

Structural and personal violence is inherent in the lack of people’s access to adequate and safe housing or shelter. This represents the reality for many millions of poor people; and a full acknowledgement, analysis and understanding of this form of structural and personal oppression seems not to be adequately appreciated by us, social workers in the West. In my own experience, observing the issues and related professional commitment and activity being relegated to ‘welfare’, it became increasingly essential for me as a social worker to listen attentively, and with the compassion and the political maturity that Arendt constantly propounds, to the voices of homeless people and people facing homelessness. There are, however, occasional rallying calls for social workers’ involvement and activism in this area – for example, that of Carole Zufferey (2008:357-371) who reports on a social constructionist examination of 39 Australian social workers’ experiences of working with homeless people – whose often inadequate practice she saw as having been dominated by ‘the contemporary political and economic climate, the managerial requirement of organizations, and the personal and professional tensions these political and organizational contexts created’ (Zufferey 2008:356).

It is equally essential for RMAs to listen to the voices of the world’s displaced and thereby initially at least, homeless people.

Voices of clients

Here, I have invited clients to allow me to recount fragments of their stories about this ubiquitous state of oppression:

Many of the people I have worked with have been robbed not only of their homes but also of the significant people who make home. For example, baby boy Markus – both of whose parents died of illicit drug overdoses early in the 1980s, before community measures to try to prevent such overdoses had been introduced - was never to know life

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Social Constructionism relates to how individuals shape their world through meaning, language and ways of knowing and thinking.
with his own father and mother. There are multitudes of children who are born in refugee camps and gathering places such as the poor outskirts of big cities like Khartoum, Istanbul, Cairo, Nairobi, Islamabad; children who will never know their parents’ homes; there are displaced children of displaced families; and there are ‘unattached’ and ‘detached’ minors with no parents but maybe with some other relative(s) (see also Moorehead (2005) for a grim depiction of the lives of numerous displaced people waiting for change in Cairo, Egypt).

Mr. Yu, unlawfully in Australia from Malaysia, HIV positive, whose ‘home’ was part of the large factory where he worked by day if he was well enough to earn enough to pay his rent obligations; physically disabled Aisha and her two hyperactive traumatised children whose temporary home was the women’s refuge they were staying in until they found relatively safe longer-term accommodation; Somali women and their children forced out of Mogadishu again, unable to gain access to the already overcrowded UNHCR camps (of Daadab in North-East Kenya) and whose adult daughters in Australia are desperate to help them (still as at March 2009); and the young psychiatrically unstable woman caring for the seven orphaned children (2 to 10 years of age) of her deceased sister and brother-in-law unable to return to South Sudan or to Uganda, still seeking out some space in Khartoum to wait out the processing of an Australian orphan dependent relative visa application, proposed by their Australian citizen aunt (as at March 2009).

In 2009, media coverage of Somali pirates hurtling out into the Indian Ocean on boats to board the larger sea vessels of the wealthy West which ply those waters for recreation, fishing, political surveillance and humanitarian transport purposes, has probably alerted the world
again to the long, long years of war and civil strife in Somalia. From 1991 to today, I have been meeting children, adolescents, women and men who have been forced by relentless violence to leave their towns and villages and areas, to scatter via African countries like Kenya, Ethiopia, South Africa and Egypt to the four corners of the earth. At times in that period, the UNHCR has declared it safe for people to return, so some do, only to have to repeat their displacement again and again and again ... One of my colleague participants, who is one such displaced person, has had the courage, strength and extraordinary abilities to support her extended family members, her husband and their children, and members of her own community of displaced Somalis through times of joy and of deep and grief-wrenching personal and community tragedy (What a woman she is!). According to 2006 statistics, there were an estimated 4310 Somali-born people in Australia, of whom most are settled in Victoria, and who are sometimes having great difficulties in their settlement process, to the point of being ‘seen’ as aspirant ‘terrorists’.


All of these clients, whether they were aware of the idealised and abstract International Statements of Human Rights or not, had been deprived of the most basic of their economic, social and cultural ‘second generation’ right – adequate accommodation. I quote the full text including the details I have already referred to:

‘Every woman, man, youth and child has the human right to a secure place to live, which is fundamental to living in dignity, to physical and mental health, and to overall quality of life. The human right to housing is explicitly set out in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, and other widely adhered-to international human rights treaties, declarations and covenants. Despite widespread recognition of the human right to adequate housing, the UN Centre for Human Settlements estimates that over 1 billion people worldwide live in inadequate housing and 100 million are homeless.’
Again, statistics without accompanying human narratives may remain meaningless to us and can render homeless people anonymous and faceless, but they do offer an idea of the extent and spread of the issue and, together with some knowledge of the details of personal stories, provide a more adequate picture of what remains a reality.

What are the reasons for all of this inequity? What causes homelessness? Are they linked with basic greed and a reluctance to share, on an individual, national and international scale? Are they part of our faith in the unregulated financial market that encompasses housing as an investment commodity, something to get rich quick on? Am I going too far in asking whether such forces are compatible with our readiness to allow for the proliferation of ever more ‘smart’ and destructive weapons and armaments, which can specifically aim at destroying physical objects and/or human lives; and with our determination to exploit natural resources wherever in the world they may be? In all of these instances, we are implicated in ongoing wars that cause the ceaseless displacement of people (Ferguson 2004; Choudry 2008; Wikipedia on ‘Neo-liberalism’ as at 18/11/2008).

Indeed, how much do we care?

Writers’ voices on social or civil justice

Justice and social justice are closely related to human rights, and the two concepts form the foundation of my work. The concept of social justice is used extensively in social work discourse: ‘Most social workers if asked to summarise the value base of their practice would probably use the term “social justice” rather than “human rights”’ (Ife, 2001:21), while the term ‘justice’ is more frequent in the discourse and practice of law and, hence, more frequently heard amongst immigration and refugee law advocates. Though definitions of both justice and social justice abound, I begin here with Mick Dodson’s (1993, in the Annual Report of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Justice Commissioner) hard hitting and characteristically down-to-earth, concrete presentation of social injustice against the Indigenous Peoples of Australia and what its reverse would imply for all of us:

‘Social justice means being entitled to the same rights and services as all other citizens … [they are] denied to Aboriginal and Torres Strait islander people by governmental and colonial racism’.

79
And he highlights the deprivation of second generation rights as follows:

‘Social justice is what faces you in the morning. It is awakening in a house with adequate water supply, cooking facilities and sanitation. It is the ability to nourish your children and send them to school where their education not only equips them for employment but reinforces their knowledge and understanding of their cultural inheritance. It is the prospect of genuine employment and good health: a life of choices and opportunity, free from discrimination.’

His words appear to me to be infused with the ‘seeing’ of and the compassion for our common humanity, that Raimond Gaita (2003:83-85) describes as being inherent in justice as a virtue; and Dodson’s practical expression avoids its descending into empty rhetoric.

In contrast is Iris Young’s (1990:50) more elusive and abstract definition. She speaks of ‘defining social justice as “the elimination of institutionalized domination and oppression”’ and suggests that contemporary theories of justice do not, in fact, conceive justice so broadly but ‘…[r]estrict themselves to an interpretation of the concept as the morally proper distribution of benefits and burdens among all society’s members’ (Mullaly 1997:140). Different perspectives on social justice might include one that aims for ‘the greatest good for the majority of the people’ – a utilitarian, equal opportunity or libertarian view, expressing ‘justice as fairness’ (Rawls 1971) – or ‘a radical egalitarian perspective’ (Halladay 1988 and Nielsen 1984 in Rose-Miller, Mary 1994:22,23).

John Rawls, in A Theory of Justice (1971), addressed the complexities and dilemmas inherent in society’s attaining a balance of individual rights and societal rights through ‘fairness’, a moral dilemma always at the core of any form of social-work practice – how can we ensure fairness to both the individual and to the group? For Rawls, the subject of justice is:

‘... the basic structure of society,... understood in the way in which the major social institutions fit together in one system, and how they assign fundamental rights and duties and shape the division of advantages that arises through social cooperation.’

Martha Nussbaum (with Amartya Sen), in turn, extended Rawls’ thinking about justice and fairness in life in The Quality of Life (1993) and Frontiers of Justice (2006). They
introduced the 10 ‘capabilities’ approach – real opportunities based on personal and social circumstances: for example, being able to live to an old age, being able to earn a living, and more – and they go on to argue that basic justice is and should be attainable for non-human animals, in trans-national justice and for people who have disabilities (see also A. Sen 1992 and 1999).


‘... [human] rights not only provide a universal moral framework for the legitimation of a social justice perspective, but they also are relevant for the model of empowerment based practice.’

Here, I shall use various social perspectives of justice to develop a better understanding of the relevance of human rights and justice to social work and RMA practice. This can be otherwise termed ... ‘the legal, judicial, social, economic, and other aspects which constitute the basis of a society’s upholding the dignity of its members, ensuring security and integrity of person.’ (Cox & Pawar 2006:31). It must be recognised that ‘Justice should not refer only to distribution, but also to the institutional conditions necessary for the development and exercise of individual capacities and collective communication and co-operation’ (Young 1998:39). Robert Fine (2007), in his contemporary analysis of the concept of cosmopolitanism, considers justice’s relationship with human rights and concludes: ‘cosmopolitanism imagines a world order in which the idea of human rights is a basic principle of justice and in which mechanisms of global governance are established for the protection of human rights.’

‘Cosmopolitanism’ may thus be understood as a normative ideal which expresses the existence of human rights in the form of an intellectual realm and against which all existing societies are judged, assuring that abstract ideals meet the practice and concrete reality in all its cultural, social, physical and ‘place’ specificities.

**Human rights and social justice in social work and RMA work**

Some social-work writers allude to the differences and relationships between human rights and human needs (Boulet 2003:242; Lundy 2004:ix; Ife 2001:76-88), with social workers cautioned about the pitfalls and possible limitations of the ‘needs-based’ approach (Ife 2001:76-88). Social work’s values and ethics, and its practices, can be fully compatible with the Human Rights Declaration. With their readiness to take a global view, (Dominelli 2004), Reichert (2003), Ife (various); and, to a lesser extent, Cox & Pawar (2006:30-32)) present cogent arguments for not seeing any contradiction in identifying diversity and the necessity to adapt to particular circumstance within a universal framework.

‘Social justice’ is a term that is referred to and/or discussed and disputed in Anglo-Saxon social-work literature over the past three to four decades (Dominelli 2004; Fook, 2002,1999, 1997,1996, 1993; Ife 2002; Rossiter 1994:23). This is certainly in the context of the debates and proceedings of the International Federation of Social Workers. Craig (2004) in Lundy (2004) describe in more detail the aims of social justice as:

- achieving fairness and equality of outcomes and treatments;
- recognizing the dignity and equal worth and encouraging the self esteem of all;
- the meeting of basic needs and maximizing the reduction of inequalities of wealth, income and life chances; and
- the participation of all, including the most disadvantaged.

Correspondence with some of the expressed ethical and values statements in social work is obvious, although there is also truth in the claim that ‘Social Work’s commitment to social justice has at times been more rhetoric than reality,’ (Reeser & Leighminger, 1990:70 in McGrath Morris 2002).

We can readily apply that weakness as much to at least some of our own practices as to that of the profession generally; at its best, ‘...social justice provides an umbrella for the core values that form one of the distinguishing features of social work ...dignity, respect for the human person, choice and citizenship.’ (Brown 1988 in Miller
This statement might well refer to both social work and to migration and refugee advocacy work undertaken with ‘oppressed people’ – those who experience persecution, exclusion, racism, and extreme discrimination. I realised through this research that migration agent advocacy could be seen to be divided into two not always discrete areas: the one where people have some control and possibility of choice in their lives; and the other where decisions including those about migration are forced upon them.

Tesoriero (1984:8) saw tensions inherent in social work’s social justice purpose, suggesting that, because social work has ‘to do with the redressing of social injustices in society, it is at the least marginal, and at the most, deviant’ in society-at-large, an extraordinary claim to make; it denies social workers’ and social work’s ability ‘to see’ – to see the injustice in the very conditions and suffering of clients and client groups (Gaita 2003).

**My colleagues’ voices**

‘Respect for human rights is one of our world’s most fundamental and universal values. As a signatory to the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights and the other international standards and covenants, Australia has a responsibility to protect, respect and ensure the basic human rights of all persons within its jurisdiction.’ (Dixon (2006).

Dixon is a member of the Australian Human Rights’ Working Group (AHRWG). Her early life and learning experiences and her developed humanist and humane values are the foundations for her long professional, political, Justice Department career and her current United Nations-auspiced international advocacy for trafficked people.

Remembering hers and the voices of the other 20 social work/RMA colleagues I talked with, brings me back to the realities of our work and reveals something of what motivates us to help other people to resolve life problems. All 21 participants of the AHRWG work for and amongst people to help address some of their practical and psychosocial problems and/or migration-related matters. While not all participants specifically referred to the concepts of human rights and social justice per se as they described their paths to their current work roles, all referred in some way to particular rights they believed people should have, and they were prepared to work with them to attain those. In that way, they go at least some way in fulfilling the political and civil...
responsibilities to their respective communities (Arendt, 1964, *The Vita Activa, Labor, Work and Action*). The matters that concerned them (and I just list them as I extracted them from my interview notes) were all their clients’ deprivations and what was oppressing them. They all worked towards: clients’ rights to affordable and safe housing; their rights to access appropriate training and paid work; the rights of family members to – somehow – be reunited with one another subsequent to enforced separation; the rights of women to live without fear of abuse by intimate partners; the right of all, no matter what language preferred or what migration status held, to information about and access to health services; the rights of victims of crime to protection and to fair community compensatory initiatives; the paramount importance of constitutional protections for every person; the social and economic rights of people, no matter what their migration status wherever in the world they are; the rights of peoples to freedom from violent government repression; and the rights of the poor of the world to a fairer share of the world’s resources.

All expressed people’s rights to fair access to effective resettlement and migration and reception programmes, two of them speaking openly and passionately of their own privilege and their determination to continue to use their privileged positions in society to help improve conditions along with the marginalised people in our world. Both of those two are true to their determination, and both work in social work, settlement and visa-related processes, valuing both the rights of the individuals they encounter and the communities/collectivities the latter belong to.

My peers’ human services activities and work are compatible with what Ife (2005; 2001:164) expresses when he urges the identification and development of social-work practice to extend ‘across the first, second and third generations of human rights ...[and the] need for more extensive human rights’ discourse amongst social workers for all levels – micro, mezzo, macro – in social work...’.

This brief review of writers’ and colleagues’ voices, or at least of their the social-work rhetoric and discourse of human rights and social justice, seems to suggest that all three generations of human rights are situated at the core of social-work practice; and yet that the reality of on-the-ground practice is, both in my and their experience, often rather different. Human rights’ lawyers, including RMA lawyers, champion people’s citizenship rights in a generic sense and have the expertise in and access to formal legal

process to correct perceived breaches; whilst social workers, given the nature of their practice and their education as well as the value base of their profession, may focus much more on the aspects of social and individual as well as material deprivation, and often seem unaware of the legal configurations in which their refugee/migrant clients are ‘caught up’, thereby forgoing important possibilities to better assist them. RMA workers, on the other hand, seem inclined to emphasise or over emphasise the legal constructs surrounding their ‘cases’ whilst remaining less informed about the personal/social aspects and issues the latter are also embroiled in.

**Victoria’s Charter of Human Rights and other helpful ‘legalities’**

I will now finally examine some of the legalities and legal developments which have assisted me over the years in working with my clients in both of the relevant working environments I engage in.

Earlier this year, in April 2009, I opened an email sent to me at work. ‘Have your say on a Human Rights Act for Australia …The National Human Rights Consultation Committee is in Victoria during April to hear your views about whether or not Australia should have a Human Rights Act’ (Victorian Equal Opportunity & Human Rights Commission 2009). One of the announced discussion points was ‘why Federal Government departments and services should be required to develop a human rights’ culture …’; another was the constructive use of electronic communication in an early 21st century parliamentary democracy, its residents and citizens being prepared to move on into constructive change for the benefit of even those in ‘small places’, on- and off-shore. It certainly spurred me on to examine more closely which existing and evolving legal frameworks had assisted and continue to assist me in the work I do with refugees and migrants through both professions. The changes in relevant pieces of legislation certainly have had a significant impact on the clients I had assisted and continue to assist. They also meant changes in my own extensive advocacy work. The following representative but incomplete list offers summary details of significant changes. This is probably a crude way to show some of the many ways that civil and political society – especially in the Victorian context – have addressed some social justice issues for children and adult residents. This is especially for those I have worked with and who are at the centre of this research. If anything, the list can also be read as a message to social work educators to review their curricula as to their adequacy for the task of
preparing future social workers for their informed engagement with the groups of clients I have worked with.

The State of Victoria’s Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Act of 2006 is being enacted and certainly affects the way we provide social work and RMA services. As the introductory text to the legislation states: *Human rights are essential in a democratic and inclusive society that respects the rule of law, human dignity, equality and freedom.*

Anti-discrimination laws established at Commonwealth and State levels, such as the Racial Discrimination Act 1975, the Sex Discrimination Act 1984, the Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Act 1986, the Disability Discrimination Act 1992, the Age Discrimination Act 2004 (Kennedy & Richards 2007:226) and The Equal Opportunity Act 1977 in Victoria, have played increasingly powerful roles in the protection of the rights of my clientele. The latter (Equal Opportunity Act) involved the establishment of the Equal Opportunity Commission, with a major restructuring occurring in 2006 through the introduction of the Victorian *Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities* 2006. The Commission is now referred to as the Equal Opportunity Commission and Human Rights Commission.

It has been my experience that in the area of child protection, communities and governments have continued to try to improve the protection of vulnerable children. Efforts have ranged from the Children’s and Young People’s Act 1999 to the Children, Youth and Families Act 2005, implemented in 2007 and the installation the Office of Child Safety Commissioner (with whom I have had contact in a child death investigation when working at The Royal Women’s Hospital). This list now also includes the 2008 Domestic Violence Protection Act and the new Safety Orders. A major addition to the law has been the possibility of ‘pre-birth reporting’, and therewith more opportunity to use family support as a protection option. *The UN Convention On the Rights Of the Child*, to which Australia became a signatory in 1991, equally sets out a number of children’s (human beings under 18) rights and the nation’s obligations in respect of those rights (Fitzroy Legal Service 2005).

The *Crimes Family Violence Act* (Victoria) 1987 was, in its way, revolutionary. Until 1987 in Victoria, family violence was viewed as a private ‘civil’ rather than a public ‘criminal’ matter. The legislation included the right of mainly women and children
victims of family violence to access Intervention Orders in an effort to ensure protection from the perpetrator of the violence. Since then, there have been constant efforts to increase protection from possible and likely assault; and in September 2008, ‘The Victorian Law Reform Commission ... recommended a major overhaul to better protect victims of violence under the 1987 Act.’ Further, under the Family Law Act 1985, a Family Mediation Centre was established in Noble Park (relocated in Moorabbin) adjacent to and in the same municipality as Springvale, with the Bureau playing a key role in establishing the centre and in its ongoing management.

‘Mediation ...is a cooperative problem–solving process’ (Harper, Fitzroy Legal Service 2005) that provides a dispute resolution process alternative to that of the litigious court process, and it has played a very positive role in some of the family disputes resulting from the trauma of forced migration in the lives of several of the clients I worked with.

Until the early 1990s, monies had been available in the form of Special Benefit Payments, administered by the Department of Social Security; these were removed and an amount of Emergency Relief monies was distributed to Emergency Relief agency networks, including Springvale Bureau, to be distributed to eligible asylum seekers. The scheme was very poorly run and funds rorted/abused/stolen. The Commonwealth Government then set up the still existing Asylum Seeker Assistance Scheme (ASAS), the administration of which the Immigration Department handed to Red Cross Australia (Refugee Services). Again, knowledge about the availability of these resources has been an advantage in my work with many of my refugee and asylum-seeking clients.

In conclusion I now mention the Migration Act 1958 amendments (in 1989 and 1994) and subsequent regulation changes, all of which were effected in the spirit of the ‘retreat from the welfare state’, moves associated with neo-liberalism and economic rationalism and which I have referred to earlier. The same can be said about the increasingly restrictive nature of Social Security/Centrelink-administered benefits and pension changes via The Social Security Act 1991 and the Social Security Administration Act 1999, which represent the basis of the payment system provided through contract by Centrelink.

Further comment could be made about areas covered by the Residential Tenancies’ Acts (1997), The Victims of Crime Assistance Act 2000, and several Acts relating to
people who are victims of work and other accidents and resulting disabilities; they all illustrate how important knowledge of these legal frameworks is for the everyday human rights and social justice related issues of the people who have come into the orbit of my professional activities as a social worker and an RMA.
Chapter 6 Welcoming The Stranger, The Other

Introduction

Writing this chapter about migration and RMA work, I invite the archetypal figure of The Stranger or The Other to represent for me the migrant or traveller arriving in our midst and I choose to welcome that person. As in other nation states, however, a tension exists within Australia’s regulated migration program as it seeks to balance the country’s own perceived needs with those of non-Australians wanting and/or needing to enter and reside in it: The Stranger/The Other is thus often viewed with ambivalence and even fear. The RMA and the social-worker roles are of welcoming people who seek help, the social worker ideally without bias or discrimination ... ‘in developing and enriching the themes in Emmanuel Levinas’s philosophy, particularly in ‘Totality and Infinity’, Tischner says that the Self not only has to relate to the Other, but must assume responsibility for him and be prepared to bear the consequences of such a decision, such an attitude’ (Kapuscinski 2008:70)\(^{10}\). Emmanuel Levinas has argued for the ethical respect each of us has to have for The Other with whom we have face-to-face contact (Mautner 1997:314) that involves each of us responding to The Other (Stanford Encyclopaedia of Philosophy 2007), showing respect and willingness to act responsibly towards The Other. As I mentioned in a previous chapter, ‘la petite bonté’ – the ‘small goodness’ – that is inherent in a potentially empowering (for both parties) social worker- and RMA-client relationship is one of our civil responsibilities (Arendt 1958).

Dedication to the drowned SIEV-X passengers

I want to maintain the dedication I first decided to make in a 2004 draft of this thesis to the group of 353 mainly Afghan and Iraqi ‘boat people’ who drowned as unwelcome, unwanted strangers attempting to enter Australia; I consider them within the much larger populations of people who have died in the past three decades escaping violence and trying to reach places they believe will afford them and their children safer and better lives. Their horror happened between the Indonesian Sunda Straits and the

\(^{10}\) Josef Tischner (1931-2000) was an eminent Polish priest and philosopher. The first chaplain of the Trade Union Solidarity, he was an exceptional moral authority (ibid p.65).
incongruously named Christmas Island, off the north-west coast of Australia on the 19th October 2001. Their vessel, cynically named SIEV X – Suspected Illegal Entry Vessel Number Ten – was as anonymous as these drowned children, born and still in utero, and adolescent and adult women and men. The names of the at-first anonymous deceased, oppressed and displaced fleeing their home countries, have since been identified and have been honoured in different ways, amongst others by the three social worker authors of the report, ‘The People’s Inquiry Into Detention’. Two of the social workers, Linda Briskman and her main research assistant Susie Latham, initiated the inquiry, which was auspiced by the Australian Council of Heads of Social Work. This achievement marked a significant milestone in what I have previously referred to as the largely ignored relationship of Australian social work and Australia’s migration law and policy. Their challenging findings were reported in Human Rights Overboard (2008). Through their personal and professional activism, both Briskman and Latham demonstrated the personal in the political and the political in the personal. I felt I was witnessing ‘structural social work’ at its best:

‘The ultimate goal of structural social work is to contribute to the transformation of society ... to carry out this task, the social worker should possess the following attributes ... an awareness that social work is a political activity that either reinforces or opposes the status quo’ (Mullaly 1997:163).

I treasure the encounters I have had before and since that fateful time with surviving Afghan and Iraqi ‘boat people’: the resettled refugees, the asylum seekers, those with humanitarian claims, and their later migrating family members. I have been able to welcome them to this country, and meet and work with them in Melbourne. As a migration agent and as a social worker, I have listened to and recorded countless distressing and remarkable fragments of life stories of suffering that the deceased on the SIEV X might have shared with us, had we helped to prevent their drowning (Kevin 2004, Leach & Mansouri 2004, Marr & Wilkinson 2003).

The compassion that was lacking in the then Howard Coalition Federal Government’s political approach (1996-2007) ironically fuelled compassionate human rights and social justice counter-activity and resistance11 by a wide variety of people of political,

11 ‘Resistance’ seems to be the appropriate concept that identifies the phenomenon of different interest groups, individuals, grassroots and mainstream society members undertaking protest
religious and civil society – Emmanuel Levinas’ petites bontés in meeting and recognising one’s self in “The Other”\textsuperscript{12}.

Motivated by both a sense of unacceptable injustice and by the increasing energy of the protest movement I immersed myself in different ways as social worker and member of a number of reform lobby groups including the Refugee Council of Australia and Justice for Asylum Seekers, being both encouraged by and supporting the Springvale Bureau and RILC. Our efforts culminated in major related social and political reforms, but not until a change to the Labor Party in Federal Government in 2007. People in these groups were not prepared to let the government deny or limit human rights in relation to ‘refugees, anti-terrorism, and sedition offences’ (Kennedy and Richards 2007:245; Burnside 2007). Nevertheless, the changes have been made only in regulation and not embedded in law. Also unacceptable to the anti-Pacific Solution action the energy of which attracts others from a diversity of parts of society; the energy they generated seemed more than merely the sum of the parts whilst not really fitting the notion of a ‘movement’.

\textsuperscript{12} From 1999, an increase in the number of asylum seeker-carrying boats illegally entered Australian waters, the Howard Government reacting with the introduction of a host of deterrence measures including the so-called ‘Pacific Solution’, with the establishment of detention centres on Nauru and Manus Island and of the Temporary Protection Visa regimes. Immediately, opposition was voiced by established organisations like Amnesty International, the Refugee Council of Australia, already functioning units of established Christian Churches. Gradually, protest and lobby groups formed to work for the recall of these deterrence laws, regulation, policies and measures. Amongst them were such refugee action coalitions and collectives as Rural Australians for Refugees (RAR), Justice for Asylum Seekers (JAS), Refugee Action Collective (RAC), Actors for Refugees and others. Opposition politicians, as well as Liberal Party opponents to the measures, writers such as Arnold Zable, musicians such as Kavisha Mazella, journalists like Peter Mares, David Marr, Marian Wilkinson and particular outspoken lawyers like Julian Burnside, Mary Crock, Marion Le, David Manne were of one purpose. As I write this final version in April 2009, more people are trying to get into Australia unauthorised and by boat. Tragedy has struck again with the explosion on one of the boats carrying 33 people that killed five of the passengers and crew and took 2 injured to hospitals, on the 17\textsuperscript{th} April 2009. It was the seventh known boat to have arrived carrying unauthorised intending entrants to Australia. To date, 1 May 2009, another two boats have been intercepted.
lobbyists are the maintenance of excised territories for the purposes of migration\(^{13}\) and the further development of the Christmas Island Detention Centre; however, ‘the new government risked replicating many of the most harmful aspects of this Pacific policy on Australian soil. It retained the excision provisions. New arrivals were to be condemned to remote, inaccessible detention on Christmas Island’ (David Manne, RILC Coordinator’s report, *Annual Report 2007-2008*:6). The horror of deaths by drowning of people fleeing conditions in their home countries and being treated mainly as unwanted, disposable commodities in about all the world’s oceans continues as I write\(^{14}\).

The human figure of the stranger amongst us

In keeping with my RMA and social work ethos, as well as taking account of the generative concept of migration, I consider here human beings’ lived experience of the phenomenon of human migration. At first, a stranger, the new migrant\(^{15}\) may eventually be deemed a citizen and allowed gradually to lose the mantle of The Stranger as she becomes now ‘one of us’; there is a sort of arduous and unclear right-of-passage to be experienced or endured for the metamorphosis to be allowed to occur. The mantle is passed down to the next strangers in line ... as my Celtic grand- and great-grand-parents did for me.

German philosopher Emmanuel Kant (1724-1804), who had a significant influence on Hannah Arendt, raised many questions relevant to the idea of the stranger, amongst others: *Does a stranger have a right to hospitality? And if so, is it a moral or a judicial*

\(^{13}\) In other legislation in 2000, Parliament empowered the Minister for Immigration to declare parts of Australian territory to be outside the ‘migration zone’, introducing the concept of ‘excised offshore places’ and ‘offshore entry persons. Christmas Island, and Ashmore and Cartier Reefs and the Keeling (Cocos) Islands are no longer part of Australia’s migration zone for the purposes of applying for an Australian visa (Crock & Saul 2002:29).

\(^{14}\) I here only record the drowning in early March 2009 of several Africans trying to make their way to the Italian port of Lampedusa and on the 5\(^{th}\) April 2009 the brief news item about the discovery of 100 dead and alive people being smuggled in a container from Afghanistan to Iran through Pakistan; such events are now almost commonplace so that it is easy to miss the media reports.

\(^{15}\) In this study I use the terms ‘migrant’ and ‘stranger’ interchangeably with specific reference to the newly arrived migrant.
right? (Arendt 1968; Shabani 2007) In his own response to the question, Kant even argues the responsibility of a sovereign authority to grant temporary rather than permanent resident status to asylum seekers – temporary protection or permanent protection, a hotly debated issue in the post-1999 Australian context – until the election in 2007 of the Rudd Labor Government, when ‘Temporary Protection Visas’ were abolished ... for the time being ...

Variations on the two questions, hospitality and permanent or ‘provisional’ and temporary resident status, are currently raised by many politicians and policy makers in most receiving countries. Shabani (2007) advances the discussion of the hospitality question by viewing it from a global perspective, inclusive of both wealthy and poor states rather than from that of a particular affluent nation state only. He suggests that the concept of ‘hospitality’ is not simply a kind gesture but is, in fact, a ‘human right’ by virtue of our potential as ‘world citizens’ (ibid. p.89).

As we move on to the 21st century, we find Papastergiadis (2000:13,14) writing about ‘The Stranger in modernity’, commending us readers to the 19th and early-20th century German philosopher and sociologist, Georg Simmel (1858-1914), describing him as exceptional in identifying the significance of migration, with an appreciation of ‘both the predicament and the sensibility of the stranger’. Papastergiadis recommends that we now move beyond Simmel to address the complexity and shifting patterns of inclusion and exclusion of the migrant/refugee-stranger in our pulsating and churning globalised world.

Theories of migration

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16 The ‘different forms of migrants’ (Papastergiadis 2000:62) that I refer to in this work are many and varied and I include all those who choose – in the later 20th and early 21st centuries – to move from one place to another to stay a short while or indefinitely: travellers, tourists, visitors, business people, adventurers, mercenaries, international students, missionaries, humanitarian aid workers, people with skills wanted/needed in various parts of the world, entertainers, family members seeking to reunite, people seeking specialist medical treatments ... and those who have little or no choice – those fleeing poverty and from environmental degradation, fleeing persecution, trafficked children and adults, indentured skilled and unskilled workers – Australia has devised visa categories for some of these people and more and offers a certain number of ‘places’ in each of those in each financial year.
‘The significance of migration was recognized by Marx, Durkheim, Simmel and Weber ... the failure to develop a more subtle understanding of the exilic forces of modern society, and a more complex vocabulary for referring to the different forms of migrants, is surprising’ (Papastergiadis 2000:62).

Various theories of migration have been classified by Castles & Miller (1988: Ch. 1) in ‘three models: the neo-classical economic equilibrium perspective, the historical-structural approach, migration systems theory’. With these models, authors seek to explain multiple historical, political, sociological and psychological factors inherent in the ceaseless migrating movement of individuals, the scattering or diaspora\(^{17}\) of peoples and the making of the world we now live in (Castles 2004, Spellman 2002, Braziel, J.A. & Mannur, A. (editors) 2003; Castles & Davidson 2000, Castles & Miller 1998). Of the three models mentioned before, I favour the second, the critical, historical/structural approach as most relevant\(^{18}\) and, I would add, does not discount privileged countries extending humanitarian and compassionate consideration to acceptance of any of the above categories of migrants.

**My voice**

My personal and professional life is deeply and extensively affected by this phenomenon. The roles I have played in welcoming newly arriving people to Australia, as an English language teacher (1970-1989), a social worker (1976 to the present) and as a migration advocate (from 1980 to the present) – all in both paid and unpaid capacities – have happened in the context of Australia’s Black and White history and have also profoundly shaped who I am now.

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\(^{17}\) The term Diaspora - in Ancient Greek, a scattering or sowing of seeds - refers to any people or ethnic group forced or induced to leave their traditional homelands, the dispersal of such people and the ensuing developments in their culture. Often a Diaspora accompanies, or is the only way to avoid, genocide, the systemic killing of a people ([http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Diaspora](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Diaspora)).

\(^{18}\) This approach has its intellectual roots in Marxist political economy and stresses the unequal distribution of economic and political power. It perpetuates uneven development, exploiting the resources of poor countries to make the rich even richer – Castles & Kosack 1985, Cohen 1987, Sasses 1988 in Castles & Miller 2\(^{nd}\) ed 1998.
My own father (1921-2007) used to talk to us about the Aboriginal children he called Piccaninny children, with whom he spent his first years of childhood, on Lake Nash cattle and sheep station on the Queensland-Northern Territory border, where his father was employed as a cook and general rouseabout, and his mother as a house maid. My father learned his early language amongst these children, speaking as they did, as they played in the dusty paddocks.

And I’m not alone in this, as a powerful writer’s voice joins me... ‘The Queensland Gympie-Maryborough steam train used to shunt into and out of Maryborough from the Baddow stop on the through-line when I was a teenager at boarding school. Through the spindly scrub gum trees some way off I used to see dark figures moving around outside what looked to me like small insubstantial huts. In my early teens, in the early 1960s, I asked who these people were, but did not go on to ask why they were apparently excluded from the other Maryborough residents. I was to find the answer as I grew older...’ (Reynolds, 1999, 2000)

Ironically, Indigenous Australians, who should have been familiar to me as Australia’s First People, were till the late 1960s also Strangers to me as I was blind to them and their presence

Visible to me as a child, however, were a few migrant children I met at school:

In about 1956, a New Girl, a New Australian, came into our primary school class. The name she was known by was Mary, Mary Sherman. I was fascinated by her. She spoke another language when she was with her parents and she ate distinctly different food. Another girl, Myra, was from a country called Poland and she ate chocolate sprinkled on her sandwiches, something I found incredible. But in retrospect, I believe that the school welcomed these children,

19 One of my peers and contemporaries is the historian and writer Henry Reynolds, who, in “Why Weren’t We Told?” (2000), describes the startlingly familiar time and context in which I grew from childhood into young adult years, only really awake to my own racist ignorance after I had spent some years outside Queensland and Australia in the late 1960s and 1970s. His uncovering of the concealed history of massive violence against the Aborigines in Australia is confronting, chilling and conscience raising – a call to wake up to the need for Reconciliation.
assuming that they would learn English simply by being immersed in Australian-English language.

As a child, I had no personal experience of being an outsider, unwelcome, different. I was one of the majority White People; however, even when I was a child, I did want to know what it was like to be in the skin of The Other; so I used to play imagination games\textsuperscript{20}. What was it really like to live in a household where Polish or Hungarian, not English, was spoken and different foods were prepared?

Since that time and as an English language teacher and later a social worker, I have worked extensively in reception and settlement work helping to orient people to Australia’s new ways of life. My positions were funded by the Australian Immigration Department – with German-speaking people in the early 1980s and in Springvale from 1984 to 2003\textsuperscript{21}.

If there is substance in Lundy’s statement (2004:12) that ‘the structural approach to social work practice starts with an understanding of global events’, RMA work will aid that process. As it assists people accessing visas, settling and living in Australia; we cannot but know at least something of these global events.

**Participant colleagues’ voices**

Reflecting on and exploring the themes identified by my colleagues added to my thinking about the experience of migration and the figure of The Stranger. I realised that my peers and I have a lot in common; amongst the 21 colleagues I interviewed, 16 have, at some time in the past, for two decades provided free legal advice, advocacy

\textsuperscript{20} Like a number of my colleagues/participants in this research, I was intrigued by the sound of languages other than English, so used to respond to some trusted people in ‘my own language’ hoping that observers would be impressed and would want to know about my non-Australian origins.

\textsuperscript{21} Some of my contributions in this regard have been acknowledged in Melbourne Immigration Museum’s exhibition ‘A Worthwhile Enterprise’; in the migrant hostel in Springvale; through an interview reported in the local Leader paper in Brunswick in March 2009; in two small research reports on sharing information with new arrivals and the inequities of housing services for refugee women.
and assistance to off- and/or on-shore visa applicants at community-based agencies. All have been working in non-fee-charging capacities at some time and two offer a mix of fee-charging as well as the gift of non-fee-charging services. All have worked with migrants and on- and off-shore refugees and temporary residents of many classifications. One participant registered as a refugee/migration agent with the specific aim to advocate for and assist Temporary and Permanent Protection Visa applicants early in this century – from 2000 – concerned that mainly Iraqi and Afghan people fleeing persecution ‘illegally’ were then being persecuted again by the Australian Government with its deterrent policies.

One of the common themes in their responses is expressed overtly by three: ‘I wanted to establish a place that was there to welcome asylum seekers’, and ‘My parents’ culture (Greek) is well known for its welcoming the stranger, and I want to do the same.’ A third, RMA and social welfare worker, spoke about his many years’ experiences of being welcomed into families and communities as he set out as settlement worker, ‘to welcome newly arriving migrants and refugees to Australia’. In all the responses, either similar or identical statements were expressed or implied. Amongst the 21 participants, 9 had experienced being welcomed to life in Australia as migrants and resettled refugees, and 20 (including the latter) had been actively engaged in reception and settlement work, paid and/or voluntary.

Five of my colleagues have first-hand experience of not being welcomed by their countries of migration or first asylum (not Australia). Four expressed concern for their migrant parents who, they felt, had not been welcomed on arriving in Australia but were only sometimes tolerated and often actively shunned and marginalised. All of my colleagues wanted to help to ensure that the people they assist do not experience this form of rejection, most notably in the workplace but also in mainstream community settings.
White invasion of and long-term settlement in Australia

The historical context in which my clients, my peers and I have shared our varied first- and second-hand migration and settlement experiences have been driven by the world’s migration movements (Spellman 2002; Papastergiadis 2000; Castles & Miller 1998; Mayadas & Elliott 1990 referred to in Ramadan & Link 1999:149; Dominelli 2007). Social work practice and advocacy in migration and refugee law in Australia at the end of the 20th and early 21st centuries is also influenced by the world’s and Australia’s migration history and the relationship between the two; it is now well over 200 years since mainly European settlers began to force the Indigenous Peoples of Australia out of their way (Clendinnen 2008, Reynolds 2000, Jupp 2002, Manning Clark 1979).

Historically, the original occupants of Australia were simply expected by the majority of the new arrivals, if not to welcome, then to make way for the new European arrivals and their hubris (Clark 1979, Jupp 2002); viewing the world from their arrogant and dominant perspective, the colonising British ‘boat people’ expected to be welcomed into and be allowed to take over this assumed empty continent, this terra nullius (or ‘land that was nobody’s’, or, given the then prevailing ideologies, ‘land that was left un-used and therefore there for the legitimate taking …’). Inga Clendinnen (2008) presents the violence of Australia’s past, post-1788 afresh: she narrates parts of our story, that of Australians today, including the original Indigenous Australians and the post-1788 migrants, by ingeniously imagining herself as witness to particular historically-recorded atrocities against Australian Aboriginal people since 1788. Her writing is poignant and hypnotically poetic; she invites us, 21st century readers, to imagine that we can observe, feel and react to the suffering of Aboriginal people of then and now – that is, by engaging our ‘compassionate imagination’ (Nussbaum 2006) we get to know and to face up to these cruel historical realities.

This unlovely historical context continued and, to a degree, continues: the violence of White occupation of Australia was reflected in the violence of the White Australia Policy introduced in the 1880s and developed at the time of Federation into the Immigration Restriction Act of 1901. (White) Australians wanted controlled immigration programmes that excluded people generally considered to be inferior, or at least likely to cause disruptive riots and uprisings (Jupp 2002:8).
As did and do New Zealand and Canada, Australia pursued parallel active settler immigration and settlement programs through the 20th century (Hiebert et al 2003; Immigration: Federation to Century’s End, 1900-2001, 2008). The Australian Government announces each financial year ‘an aggregation of three broad categories of immigrants – family, humanitarian and skills’ (Parkin et al 2006:347,348). Through my travelling and personal life, I recall the 1970s as internationally and politically turbulent years; they witnessed Australia’s welcoming the first of thousands of non-European Asian displaced people along with refugees fleeing from the then-USSR (late 1940s-1989) along with the skilled migrants who had been arriving mainly from Europe and afterwards from the entire Mediterranean area. The ‘populate or perish imperative’ following WWII implied the acceptance of thousands of refugees and workers from the UK, Northern then Southern Europe; the post-White Australia Policy era from 1973 involved the broadening of migrant recruitment and active multicultural policy initiatives (Zubrzycki, 1995). The 1980s economic restructuring and demand for skilled workers influenced migrant intake, and modest migration intakes from the late 1990s under the conservative Coalition Government have unfolded into a shift of focus on Temporary Work Visa programs (Hiebert, Collins & Spoonley 2003:9-12; Jupp 2002).

In the structural/historic context of the Cold War from April 1975, the Communist forces of North Vietnam invaded and took the US-occupied city of Saigon, thereby expelling the anti-Communist forces of which Australians had been part (Spellman 2002, Jupp, 2000). This momentous event reverberated throughout the world,

For the past few decades, General Skilled Migration (GSM) has been the largest component of the Australian Migration Program (Kamand et al 2008:348). It is volatile because it depends on Australia’s current economic and financial needs; as I write in May 2009, the Global Financial Crisis has lead to a decrease in the number of skilled migrants to be invited to migrate to Australia. Not unique to Australia but nevertheless central to its migration policies are its student, skilled and business visa regime that are openly formed and revised according to the vicissitudes of the Australian economy and market, to benefit its economy. Intake numbers and quotas are subject to frequent and quick change. Temporary Visa holders, still people with basic human needs, are issued visas which define what they are and are not entitled to for the life of the visa (Spellman 2002; Castles & Miller 1998).
especially the revelation of certain weaknesses in the US as a superpower and its aspiring hegemony.

There were other Indo-Chinese including Lao people fleeing from the invading Communists in 1975 and Khmer people fleeing the Vietnamese ‘invaders’ or, for others, ‘liberators’ of 1979 who had ousted the chillingly violent ‘revolutionary’ Pol Pot regime.

Cambodian-born M. experienced the violent deaths of her husband and her four young children after 1975 under Pol Pot. As soon as the Vietnamese government in Phnom Penh fell in 1997, she returned to Cambodia to help other people in her home province, in memory of her children. The experience she found so overwhelming that she left the province and promised her second husband and children from that marriage that she could never return to Cambodia again. Her grief was palpable but she was ready to welcome and assist other Cambodians whose experiences she knew through experience.

A Lao-born woman died of lupus complications here in Melbourne. I learned what I could through reading and asking questions of the hospital social workers and the woman’s grieving husband. After her death, her husband came asking for help to find a carer for his toddler, while he entered the Buddhist temple near his house to complete the required mourning procedures. Though not about lupus but about epilepsy experienced by a Lao Hmong child in the US, the humane and detailed book by Anne 23

The Orderly Departure Programme (ODP), begun in 1979, was the result of remarkable and focused international negotiations between Vietnam and countries prepared to resettle displaced Vietnamese people who had fled the Communists; out of this developed the Comprehensive Plan of Action (CPA), 1989-1991 and 1992, to continue to deal in a relatively orderly fashion with the ongoing spill of human beings into the seas and lands around Vietnam (Jupp 2000:188). Hundreds of thousands of people, who had been opposed to Hanoi’s Communist regime, established in 1975, were to create the Vietnamese dispersion of the 20th Century. Australia’s Prime Minister, Malcolm Fraser, acted with authority, compassion and humanity agreeing to the resettlement of Vietnamese and by 1996, 172,000 Vietnamese-born Australians had been granted visas through Humanitarian and Family Reunion migration programs (Jupp 2000:188; Petro Georgiou at RILC AGM November 2007). Racist community antagonism to the arrival of these refugees and their families was, at times, intense.
Fadiman (1998) helped me to increase my growing understanding of refugees’ experiences.

A relatively little-noticed event was simultaneously brewing then erupting on an island in the Indonesian archipelago – East Timor, one of the last vestiges of the Portuguese Empire that had flourished for over 500 years, with the first displaced East-Timorese arriving in Australia in December 1975 as unauthorised ‘boat people’. The year 1975 was also momentous for the Lebanese, as the civil war erupted, reverberating into 2008 in the troubled Middle-East context; Australia accepted many Lebanese via Cyprus from 1976 (Batrouney A & T 1985; El Hage 2007).

As a student social worker in 1976, based at a local high school now home to Foundation House, a well-known local service for people dealing with trauma caused by torture and other violent events during their refugee trajectories, I cycled to homes to ‘visit and welcome to Brunswick’ Muslim and Christian families arriving in the municipality of Brunswick from the war in Lebanon. The hospitality extended to me, a complete stranger as they were strangers to me, by these families and my first experiences of eating tabouli and drinking short sweet black coffees and my learning where the different places of worship were and spending time with clients in them, these were my first introductions to post-1975 Lebanese migration to Australia. A new understanding of Lebanon’s history and of the machinations of the war remains a precious reward. I now live in Brunswick and remember the families and frequent their Sydney Road restaurants and mourn with them in their sadness each time bloody fighting resumes in Lebanon; and, as a social worker, I now assist adult Australian Lebanese women still of child-bearing age at the Royal Women’s Hospital who were children of those displaced adults ...

In South America the military juntas had been established where the US Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) was implicated, presumably in efforts to stem the feared spread of communism. After the assassination of President Salvador Allende in 1973, hundreds of thousands of Chileans had to escape persecution, and Australia resettled
numbers of South Americans who escaped from their respective countries and entered Australia on humanitarian resettlement visas.

Four Chilean young men approached my workplace in about 1986-87, asking me and my then social-work student to assist them to seek a review of an application for Refugee Status. We did just that, each of us advocating for refugee status applicants for the very first time in our lives, using AI journals and annual reports to improve our background knowledge, and we spent many hours with the four, interviewing, writing and helping them to prepare relevant documentation. We advocated for them before the review board member. They were granted refugee status.

A short time after the decision was handed down, two of the students returned to inform me that the other two had lied about their experiences. I suggested they inform the Immigration Department to have the claim investigated. I did not see them again so do not know what happened.

Nevertheless both of us, social worker and social-work student, though aware of the dilemmas inherent in the processes of granting asylum or no, have not been deterred by this event; I have continued to advocate on a case-by-case level and she as a high profile refugee women and girls academic international advocate.

Throughout this period in the 1970s, Australia’s needs for unskilled and skilled labour continued to grow, attracting migrants from mainly the UK, Western European countries, Yugoslavia and, gradually, Turkey; but the planned annual migrant intake was reduced in 1975 from the 100,000-plus that it had been since World War II, to 70,000. Sometimes, acrimonious debate and discussion about Australia’s optimum population and migration numbers continued; but in general, Australia’s workforce needs tended to dictate the ebb and flow of the intake. Underpinning all the teaching, social and RMA work that I was involved in post-1976 was my energetic participation in those recurring and huge public debates, feeling that I had to try and understand and to influence the shape of related social developments.

Nineteen hundred and seventy seven, under the conservative government of Malcolm Fraser, saw the launch of Australia as a multicultural society (See Springvale-based stories in Markus & Sims, 1993). The emphasis was even at that stage placed on the
need for Federal and State government-funded programs that would help to foster equal opportunity, access and equity, maintenance of diverse cultures, the provision of both ethnic specific and culturally aware services, the encouragement of self-help to foster self-reliance in migrants (Jupp 2002:87). Arguments for (Lopez 2000:22-28) and against (Coray 2005) abounded, while still others argued against the principle (Papastergiadis 2000:157). The reality is, of course, that multicultural communities have existed for centuries and in most organised political communities (Kymlika 1995,1998); what is different about the 20th and 21st century multiculturalism of countries that regulate migration is that government strategies and programs are introduced and administered; what is different in Australia is that ‘from the outset it was motivated by an increasing acceptance of the permanence of cultural diversity and of the need to reduce immigrant disadvantage’ (Hiebert et al 2003:11). This regulated migration program that includes more than a nod to reception and settlement services, is in stark contrast to the less regulated inflows of migrants and displaced people to European countries in post-colonial times and especially after the fall of the so-called ‘Iron Curtain’.

The shocking events of Beijing’s Tiananmen Square in 1989 changed Australia’s onshore asylum system for ever, with most of the 30,000 people from the People’s Republic granted visas by the Hawke Government at some stage to come to study in Australia as overseas students, eventually being granted first Temporary then Permanent Resident status (Jupp 2002:191).

More than 200 People’s Republic of China nationals came to the Springvale Bureau to ask for assistance to complete their Refugee Status applications in 1989. Though I worked mainly with individuals, offering extra evening and weekend services, Springvale Bureau organised group sessions, where we guided people through completing the forms, then sat with them to take instructions for submissions. The stories they told us of their older family members’ experiences during the Cultural Revolution still haunt me. They suffered simple but deadly devices: shaming by forcing public denunciation of a former academic now in a tall dunce’s cap; pushing people through windows of the universities they taught in and incarcerating for lengths of time before death. So extensive was my involvement with a particular Mandarin language interpreter with this huge cohort of people that he suggested we set up a fee-charging
migration agency together. My response was an immediate rejection of the idea. As I listened to the horror of some of their parents’ experiences and wrote them down for an Immigration Department decision-maker to peruse, I sometimes felt overwhelmed by anger and sadness that we humans persist in such individual and systemic violence ... in small places, familiar and banal.

Increasingly, over the past three decades, overseas students have been encouraged to ‘purchase’ primary, secondary and tertiary education in Australia (Castles and Spellman 2002) and, whilst many have returned to their countries of origin, a great number also applied for and have been granted Permanent Resident status in Australia and they have remained. Recent media reports have begun to reveal what we social workers and community lawyers have known for at least the past eight years – that many of these students are exploited and vulnerable (Gloz & Smith 2004; Rodd, 2008); skilled workers continue to be encouraged to come to Australia under its Permanent and Extended Temporary Skilled Visa regimes 24.

Australia has recently been attracted to, until the threat of global recession, the misnamed ‘Gastarbeiter’25 or ‘guest worker’ programs in Germany (e.g. several visa sub-classes have been created for that purpose, including the ‘451’ and the latest, as at 3/1/2009, Pacific Island specific programs, inviting Islanders to work in the fruit-picking industry), a move roundly condemned by Aziz Choudry in his 2008 address Free Trade, Neoliberal Immigration and Guestworker Programs to the International Migrant Alliance Founding Assembly. The potentially exploitative nature of these

24 The vulnerability of these programs and the people in them is again highlighted through a recent Federal Government announcement that the programs need to be reviewed in light of the effects of the Global Financial Crisis.

25 What seemed, at the time, (i.e. post-WWII in the late 1940/s early 50/s) to be a practical move, was to entice labourers from countries like Turkey and the former Yugoslavia to move to West Germany to take up well-paid but mainly unskilled hard jobs in the rebuilding effort. As Gastarbeiter, guest-workers, they were initially expected to finish their work sometime and to pack up and go home. Of course this did not happen; as human beings, they wanted involvement with their families and inevitably mingled with Germans leading to mixed marriages. “In Germany there was no question of assimilation in the early years. Guestworkers were controlled by a network of bureaucracies.” (Castles and Miller 1998:203)
programs has been regularly confirmed, as in recent cases of Chinese ‘guest workers’ being exploited by their employers and others missing out on the most elementary necessities in their daily living conditions.

**Welcoming The Stranger with reception and settlement services: Receiving immigrants, and their settlement experience**

True to Australia’s often innovative and always changing multicultural policies, and to maximise positive and constructive settlement and integration processes, the Australian Federal Government, through various schemes, funds reception and settlement services to certain newly-arriving groups of people, including off-shore refugees and some humanitarian entrants (Jupp & Kabala 1993; Jupp 2002, Ager 1999:10,11; Castles &Miller 1998:205-209; Cox 1975, 1987; Bowen 1977). Some pre-embarkation cultural and survival information, medical checks and required treatments are provided. Post-arrival services include: information about English language tuition, access to classes and to other formal education; access to employment, income security, housing and child care; migration advice and assistance in relation to immediate family reunion;

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26 I use the term the (Australian) Immigration Department when referring to that variously named Australian Federal Government Department. During my involvement with it from the early 1980s, it has embraced different responsibilities under the banners of Department of Immigration, Local Government and Ethnic Affairs (DILGEA), Department of Immigration and Multicultural Affairs (DIMA), Department of Immigration, Multicultural and Indigenous Affairs (DIMIA) and the current Department of Immigration and Citizenship (DIAC), according to the way the Government of the day sets up its portfolios and departments. The various Ministers of Immigration have been well known to all of us funded settlement and ethnic specific workers through our close and cooperative work with both departmental officers and with the Minister and his/her staff (Martin, 1999). Each has made his (or her) own impression on the portfolio and department. They include: Liberal Ian Mc Phee December 1979 - May 1982; Liberal John Hodges May 1982 – March 1983; ALP Stewart West March 1983 - December 1984; ALP Chris Hurford December 1984 - February 1987; ALP Mick Young February 1987 – February 1988; ALP Clyde Holding February 1988 – September 1988; ALP Robert Ray September 1988 - April 1990; ALP Gerry Hand April 1990 – March 1999; ALP Nick Bolkus March 1993 - March 1996; Liberal Philip Ruddock March 1996 – November 2001; Liberal Amanda Vanstone October 2003 – January 2006; Liberal Kevin Andrews January 2007- December 2007; ALP Chris Evans December 2007 – present.
access to medical and trauma/torture rehabilitation services; and group community capacity building; and some other services (Cox 1987, Galbally, 1978).

The three generations of human rights (as introduced in Chapter 4) are represented in these varied services available to individuals and to ethnic communities, and constant efforts are made in various ways to settle new arrivals in regional areas as well as in the more popular cities of Sydney, Melbourne and Perth (from information provided and constantly revised by the detailed Australian Immigration Department website and the website of the Refugee Council of Australia. Since the immediate post-WWII period, specialist migration program and settlement committees have been involved in advising government on both migration and settlement service policy (Jupp 2002:69), currently still under the Immigration Department’s National Framework for Settlement Planning, developed in 2003, in response to recommendations in the Review of Settlement Service for Migrants and Humanitarian Entrants (DIMA 2006).

Government seeks to regulate and raise some revenue from non-refugee migration and settlement costs through imposing processing charges, preclusion periods from Social Security/Centrelink payments and the payment of assurance of support security bonds, limiting migration potential for people who are viewed as potential ‘burdens on the state’. Nevertheless, those migrants also have access to some welfare services and entitlements.

One of the glaring human rights breaches and anomalies within Australia’s migration program is the reality of the exclusion of most people with disabilities – ‘dear Stranger, adult or child, we welcome you if you are able-bodied!’ Since the late 1980s, I have participated in a number of Senate enquiries into this situation and there are now some exemptions for resettling refugees.
statutory health test; and, because the latter was disabled, she was not to be permitted to remain in Australia, which meant that her carer-mother was not to be granted a spouse visa, though all three were living in Australia, mother and daughter on different temporary and bridging visas.

In a similar and relatively recent event involving a German doctor working in regional Victoria, the doctor had his application for permanent resident status refused on the grounds of his young son’s Down Syndrome diagnosis. A swift media campaign was followed by an as swift damage control reaction by the Immigration Minister, Chris Evans; the matter was thereby silenced before it could lead to action for systemic change.

Inclusion and citizenship as signs of welcome to The Stranger

Recognition and understanding of citizenship as the essence of the nation state (Castles & Davidson 1988:2) and of the fact that ‘The nation state ... highlights [its foundation] on equality before the law’ (Kristeva 2001:135 on Arendt’s The Origins of Totalitarianism) are both essential for a human rights-committed and espousing social work(er) (see Ife 2000:97-102).

Attaining Australian citizenship theoretically opens access to full voting rights and obligations and should mark the new citizen’s access to the three generations of human rights and thereby full legal inclusion in Australian society, since ‘Formal distinction between strangers and locals is mostly defined in terms of citizenship’ (Papastergiadis 2000:69). The disturbing reality is, however, that excluded minority groups having only part access to full citizenship in Australia, as raised by Kymlicka (1998) and by social-work academic Linda Briskman in her brief analysis of inclusionary and exclusionary citizenship (Briskman 2003:102; Dodds, 2002). Such exclusion manifests itself also in other parts of the world (Joppke, 2005; Jordan Duevell, 2003). There are numerous narratives by people, even in Australia, who are barred from attaining citizenship and who, without it, are excluded from first and second generation human rights entitlements and benefits. Human rights RMA workers and some social-work
agencies that champion human rights and social justice may assist to reverse these situations.

Sometimes, as often as ten times in a year, a new group of successful applicants for Australian citizenship would be invited to gather in the early evening at the Old Springvale Town Hall to have Australian Citizenship formally and publicly bestowed on them in a ceremony presided over by the mayor of the local council. A local school band would play rousing tunes. I attended many of those lively occasions to congratulate the new citizens on behalf of the Springvale Bureau and to invite them to participate in the life of the area and to use the facilities available to them. Other locally-based speakers gave similar short addresses. It was almost a truism that resettled refugees were always the majority amongst them, wanting the security citizenship seemed to afford them (Adelman 1999:83-110).

Two citizenship vignettes:

(1) I met Australian-Vietnamese An in a women’s refuge. She said she believed she had been born outside Australia and then brought into Australia by a resettled Vietnamese refugee who relinquished her for informal adoption shortly after they arrived in Australia to a family in another Australian state; the adoptive parents changed her name and somehow never had to present ID papers for her. A troubled young adolescent, she became homeless. The full precariousness of her situation only came to light when she conceived and delivered a child by a violent partner, a Vietnamese-Australian, who disappeared well before the baby’s birth. An was unable to provide satisfactory identification documents to

Centrelink to prove that she was who she claimed she was. She was illiterate, spoke limited Vietnamese and poorly structured and expressed English. Because she did not know her original name, the Immigration Department could not check records to establish when she was brought into Australia and by whom. Unable to prove her identity and her status in Australia with relevant papers she might well not have existed. Was she an unauthorised and illegal resident? Had she been trafficked into Australia? Was she psychiatrically ill? Was any of her story to be believed? I was contacted because of the work I was known to be prepared to do in sorting through immigration with income security matters – no matter what their status in Australia.

(2) South American Jose and his siblings were brought by his widowed mother to Australia. His mother was murdered by her own brother in Australia when Jose was in his teens. The siblings were scattered and Jose was looked after for a while by extended family members in Australia before he ran away. An adult, he was eventually convicted of criminal activities that resulted in lengthy jail sentences. On being released from prison, he received notice from the Immigration Department that he was to be removed from Australia because he had failed to apply for Australian Citizenship and was still ‘only a permanent resident’. Though he had no relatives at all in South America, he was forcibly returned there. He remembered me as a social worker/migration advocate and came to plead for my assistance shortly before he was deported/removed from Australia. I could halt that process.

Pleasingly, Michel Foucault takes us into the virtual and normative rather than the formal/legal notion of citizenship (Rubenstein 1995, 2002, 2005) and into the international rather than the nation-state related issues:
‘There exists an international citizenship that has its rights and its duties, and that obliges one to speak out against every abuse of power, whoever its author, whoever its victims.’ (Foucault 1984).

He addresses us, readers and international citizens, in the form of a lofty call to arms to assume responsibility for other international citizens who are suffering governments’ shortcomings and abuses. With imagined international citizenship transcending the confines of the Nation State, the notion of The Stranger could become obsolete. Legal citizenships are familiar to us RMA workers, as migrants and refugees seek assistance to move from one country to another in a globalised world in which Nation State citizenship still defines who can be included in and who excluded from citizenship and its attendant rights and responsibilities.

Though it is not writ large in social work publications, citizenship is raised by various social work academics. Ife (2000:97-102) considers the role of citizen in relation to human rights; Briskman (2003:102,103) considers the position of Aboriginal Australian citizens nonetheless excluded from many of the rights of dominant white Australians and certainly from those ‘rights’ associated with their previous forms of ‘ownership’ of their country; Dominelli (2004:232-237) identifies the interdependency and reciprocity of citizenship in societies; and Camilleri (1999:34-36) raises a discussion about a ‘resurrection of the notion of citizenship as a source of renewal of the welfare state’.

A world conference, organised and held by the International Federation of Social Workers in Switzerland in 2004, was given the title ‘Citizenship and Social Work Education in a Globalising World’. In her opening address, the then IFSW President, Australian Imelda Dodds, reiterated a core challenge for social work and the conference: ‘...how to deal with the global phenomena of exclusion and discrimination in relation to non-citizens’ (see also Kymlicka, 1999).

Globalisation

The 20th century was the century of the sovereign Nation State, one that ‘established new benchmarks in the scale and variety of human migration’ (Spellman 2002:151). Spellman (ibid p. 147) also identifies the period 1945 to 2000 as the era of global migration – the time during which I have been professionally and personally active in
social and RMA work. Increasingly, the centrality of the Nation State has been questioned, if not denied by some, whilst others maintain that even in the midst of what has come to be considered as the ‘new’ central ‘fulcrum’ of action and attention, the ‘global’, the Nation State remains – has to remain – at least a balancing focus. Indeed, the concept of globalisation seems to have brought us some advantages (Fine & Boon, 2007), but it does not sit easily with traditional state-based citizenship because of some people’s increased mobility and ability, or indeed of having to criss-cross political borders for purposes of work, travel, trade and shopping, education, family visiting (Bauboeck, 2005; Castles & Davidson 2000; Abercrombie et al 2000:47; Papastergiadis 2000:76-80; Castles & Miller 1998; Moorehead 2005).

Ife (2001:17) highlights Brecher & Costello 1994, claiming that ‘One of the characteristics of the current experience of globalization is that is has been almost exclusively economic.’ People’s relationships are changed through this irregular and regulated mobility in many ways (Dominelli 2004); one example is that as internet-facilitated relationships increase and resultant extended family members are scattered across the globe, social work with families needs to review its methods to include the influence and support given (or not given) by absentee family members. Increasing numbers of ‘immobile impoverished people,’ suffering the non-existence or erosion of public welfare across the world, are victims of unfettered globalisation within the neo-liberal, free market context and operating paradigm.

Social workers from various parts of the world can communicate easily with and learn from each other. As a social worker in a position of multi-faceted privilege, involved with migrants, refugees, smuggled and trafficked people, with scattered family members, I benefit from extending this experience through involvement with and increasing understanding of international migration movements and law. I view the local within the global context and seek to understand their interrelations. To avoid being an impartial observer, I opt for social-work and RMA positions that allow me to have some influence on government policies; I use my democratic political voting rights and through voluntary human rights RMA work contribute to civil society. I have the added advantage of playing a small role in assisting people in these regular and irregular global cross-border movements.
But it is also a hard slog … and this thesis is one attempt at dis-assembling and re-assembling the fragments of my experiences and of holding them together in a meaningful and sustainable whole.

Finally, the ‘-ism’ discourses of fear and rejection of The Stranger

As I write now in early 2009, Middle Eastern or Arab or Indonesian Muslim terrorism has replaced feared German and Japanese Fascism of the 1930s to the 1950s, itself replaced by the fear of Communism that characterised the Cold War to 1989. The suspected ‘Other’ or ‘Stranger’ has assumed different ethnicities, cultures, appearance, names. The ongoing experiences that I continue to have in personal and professional involvement with people from all of these ‘suspicious’ Other groups help me to maintain my belief in our ‘common humanity’ (Gaita 1999). Often, biased ideas and related fears are so insidious they become ‘the defining threat facing the western world’ (Marr & Wilkinson 2003:143); they enter our individual and community psyches without our raising questions or objections or without our having to be coerced into the ideas – Foucault’s ‘technologies of the self’ (Foucault 1980 in Dominelli 2007:8). Immigration policies and practices are blatantly influenced by what and who the current identified enemy of the state is. At any one time, the profile of the acceptable resettling refugee in Australia is always a sign of the prevailing dominant ideologies.

In the current global situation, it is the wealthy and powerful – or more broadly, the ‘better-off’ – who benefit from being ‘citizens of the world’; at the same time and by contrast, migrant workers and people who are either fleeing persecution, natural disasters, environmental degradation, lack of survival resources, or seeking a better life for themselves and their families, are more likely to be excluded by being discriminated against, coerced, moved on or repatriated, denied basic human rights, punished and incarcerated (Baringhorst 2004; Spellman 2002:178; Alt & Fodor 2001; Castles & Miller 1998:178-180). There is an obvious and puzzling paradox in countries of the West as vocal defenders of human rights, wanting to protect democratic principles and uphold the rule of law, simultaneously introduce sophisticated mechanisms of immigration control to keep out the ‘Unwelcome Stranger’ (Borjas & Crisp 2005); ‘Festung Europa: Europa schliesst die Pforten ab’ (‘Fortress Europe: Europe shuts the gates’) as the German Blaetter des Informationszentrum Dritte Welt Nr. 169 No. 1990 expressed it in a special issue devoted to global migration issues. As
Zimbardo expresses it in a recent publication: the moulding by leaders of ‘the hostile imagination’, turning The Other into the Enemy, is achieved through propaganda, stereotyping, dehumanisation and the construction of The Other as a threat (Zimbardo 2007:11).

Indeed, transforming our relationships with unwelcome strangers into compassionate and supportive ones remains a political, professional/ethical as well as a personal task for social workers alike.
Chapter 7 ‘Well-founded fear …’

Introduction

In this Chapter, I want to capture something of the love and the passion I still feel after 30 years working with former and current refugees and asylum seekers and their families, all affected in some way by violence and by the protections afforded by one or more of the charters. The title of the chapter is a phrase from the 1951 Convention definition of ‘refugee’. As with all other chapters, I have written a number of drafts of this one, hoping that, at each writing, I would uncover, through reflection, new insights into my professional ‘life, labor, work and action’ (Arendt 1958 The Polis and the Household, Vita Activa). I want to consider how the world and the refugees themselves define who a refugee is.

*The Universal Declaration of Human Rights* (1951) Article 14:1 stipulates that everyone has the right to seek and to enjoy in other countries asylum from persecution (Ife 001:206, Appendix I *The Universal Declaration of Human Rights*) and the *Refugee Convention* (1951), Article 1A(2),1957 Protocol, Art 1(A) (2) (Crock 1998:135) states that:

‘A refugee is a person who owing to a well founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality or membership of a particular social group or political opinion (i.e. the five Convention reasons), is outside the country of his nationality or of habitual residence, is stateless and is unable or owing to such fear, is unwilling to avail himself of the protection to that country.’ 27

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27 Some of the suite of conventions and treaties signed by Australia that pertain to the protection of refugees include the *Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees* (1951), *The International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights* (1966) and the *Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women* (1972).

‘The Convention Against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment (1984) (Torture Convention) … prevents Australia from returning people who have suffered torture or other forms of ill treatment to the place of their suffering’ (Crock & Saul 2002:17).

We can add to the work and protection mandate of the United Nations' High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR) that of the more localised initiatives in defining, assessing and assisting refugees of the Organisation of African Unity (1969) and the Organization of American States.
Again, we will hear some refugees’ and other displaced people’s voices, those of my now-familiar colleagues, and of writers and academics, always through my also by now familiar voice. In this chapter I will:

- allude to the desperation of people who try to flee civil strife, environmental destruction, poverty, hunger, lack of access to health services, to education and to work; people who find themselves outside the five Convention ‘well founded fear’ categories, but who suffer the results of global exploitation, greed and privilege – sometimes referred to (by the end of the 20th century) as neo-liberal philosophy and policies;
- consider ‘fear’ as a subjective and objective condition and its possible effects on people’s mental health;
- expand on the important theme of attaining a balance between an understanding of the over-arching political, historical contexts and structures and of people’s lived experience within these contexts; and
- highlight some of the separate and joint roles of social workers and legal advocates working with refugees.

My memories of some refugee voices

Refugee and asylum-seeking clients themselves, UNHCR, Amnesty International membership, Human Rights Watches, SBS World Books, various media, Peters World Maps, specialist books and journals, the World Wide Web – all these and more help inform me about the always current, never-ceasing events in refugee-producing and neighbouring countries of first asylum. Parts of the refugee stories are still being told to me, mainly in my RMA role at RILC, but also even now as a social worker at The Royal Women’s Hospital in Melbourne, where I always acknowledge and often explore some of a woman refugee’s history relevant to an understanding of her current life situation. In the past, when working full-time in the area, the refugees and I as an


advocate and support person sometimes worked together, for a few months to a number of years, for the purposes of preparing and presenting visa applications for on- and off-shore refugee and humanitarian visas to the Immigration Department or Refugee Review Tribunal. Often I provided what I termed ‘holding counselling’, as a client waited to be assisted by my then Foundation for Survivors of Torture and Trauma therapeutic counsellor/advocate colleagues (I referred to the Foundation House in the previous Chapter.). Traumatic displacement experiences were exacerbated by grief and by the loss of family members still caught in home countries or in countries of first asylum. The making of refugees can happen without warning and very quickly, but finding effective long-term protection is more often than not a slow and complex bureaucratic process that the refugee has no option but to endure.

**Lived refugee experience**

The first voices, all still familiar to me, in this chapter are those of some refugee women themselves; they have lived the forced displacement experience that I have not (Dunbar, 1994). Without realising it when I first began work amongst resettled refugees and asylum seekers, I worked in a ‘reflexive way’ by trying to ‘put myself in the picture’ ... by thinking and acting with the people they were [I was] serving, so that their [my] understandings and actions were inevitably changed by the new experiences with others’ (Brechin 2000:35-44 quoted in Robert Adams et al 2002:3). The step of putting myself in the picture also required me to call on my own rich and vivid imagination.

I have been privy to many hundreds of their stories since 1975. In recalling some of the multitude of life stories people have shared with me, I realise that they emanate from a multitude of ‘small places’, from which those same people were forcibly separated, their human rights having been breached through violence perpetrated against them where they lived. They might or might not be accorded social justice (Frazer & Briskman, 2005) along the way as they moved through countries of first asylum, sometimes being afforded the protection of the UNHCR but sometimes without any
support, then perhaps to countries of resettlement. The rule of law\textsuperscript{28} may or may not prevail in the way they are treated if applying for asylum. Affluent countries like Australia tend to see themselves as primarily resettlement countries, not as countries of first asylum. Australia has been happier to greet the authorised resettled refugee within our regulated migration program than to have to deal with the on-shore asylum seeker; and the rather shameful recent history of our dealings with ‘boat people’ (Taylor, S., 2000) with which I have dealt already, eloquently speaks of the consequences of such attitude (A. Smith, 2000).

In an effort to recall and reflect on the stories of some of these women and men to offer the reader a sense of the diversity of source countries, I list alphabetically\textsuperscript{29} what parts of the world the refugee people came out of and into my life, however briefly. It is apparent that, as the decades have passed, so too have the world’s dominant political ideologies and regimes. World War II (1939-1945), the Cold War (1946-1989), The

\textsuperscript{28}The rule of law, also called supremacy of law, is a general legal maxim according to which decisions should be made by applying known principles or laws, without the intervention of discretion in their application (Wikipedia, ‘Rule_of_Law’).

\textsuperscript{29}Afghanistan (via Pakistan, Iran, India and others), Albania, Algeria, Angola, Argentina, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Bangladesh, Burma (via Thailand, Malaysia, Bangladesh, India), Burundi, Cambodia, Central African Republic (via Kenya and South Africa), Chad, PR China, Chile, Colombia, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Cuba, Czechoslovakia, East Timor, El Salvador (via Mexico), Nicaragua, Eritrea (via Sudan, Egypt, Saudi Arabia), Ethiopia (via Sudan, Egypt, Kenya), Ghana, Haiti, The Republic of Hatay, Indonesia, Iran, Iraq (via Jordan, Saudi Arabia), Kosovo, Laos, Lebanon, Liberia, Madagascar, Mongolia, Morocco, Nepal, Nigeria, Northern Ireland, Pakistan, Palestine, Papua New Guinea, Peru, Philippines, Poland, Romania, Rwanda, Senegal, Serbia, Somalia, South Africa, South Sudan, Sri Lanka, Sudan, Syria, Turkey, Uganda, Ukraine, Uruguay, the USSR, Vietnam (via South-East Asian countries), the former Yugoslavia, Zimbabwe (Rhodesia). The countries shown in parenthesis are but some of the numerous countries of first asylum from which resettling refugees then move/moved on to Australia; these are lists valid at different times in the past thirty years. I want to avoid the tendency to overlook the countries of first asylum (Chatelar 2005), where people live for sometimes very long periods, children being born and family members dying there. For example, it is not uncommon for me as an RMA to meet Eritrean permanent residents and Australian citizens whose relatives have been in Sudan since the early 1980s or have moved back and forth over the Sudan border several times. I have worked in both professional roles with people from all of these places and more and they have helped me to become familiar with the world of people.
Global War on Terror (2001-the present) are like huge theatres that encompass multitudes of concurrent and overlapping conflicts and smaller wars and theatres that are closely situated and linked. Refugee-producing countries like Vietnam (from 1975) and El Salvador (from about 1980), Romania (1945-1989) and East Timor (1973-1999), eventually re-form and re-construct themselves as no longer refugee-producing places, at least for another few decades and until the next civil and political upheaval occurs.

Women and girls always constitute the majority of refugees and other displaced people in the world, and they have been quantitatively over-represented in my work, as it was stated at the Beijing (Third) International Women’s Conference organised by the UN: ‘The discrepancy between the public relations statement “women and children represent 80 per cent of the world refugee population” repeated ad nauseam and the “voluntary” return (at the barrel of a gun) of a number of these same refugee women and children painfully demonstrates the limits of the rights and protection framework put forward in Beijing, and the obstacles faced in its translation into practice’ (Callamard 2003:196). Amongst the multitude of haunting and disturbing oral snapshots presented to me by off- and on-shore refugee women I have worked with are these:

- **The Vietnamese boat-person mother who held up her pointed round hat night after terrifying night on the high seas beyond Malaysia to catch whatever precipitation she could to moisten the parched lips of her three feverish children** (I have told her story earlier; she became and remains a tireless welfare worker and RMA amongst Vietnamese families for which she has been awarded formal community accolades, and she now enjoys the love of her four children and her many grandchildren).

- **The Christian Ethiopian women on Khartoum streets identifiable by the blue orthodox cross often tattooed on the forehead, illegally selling tea and subjected frequently to beatings, sexual harassment or rape** (most often as single parents they persist in spite of...
harassment in their determination to support themselves and their dependents).

- The women who walk long distances daily to fetch water or to purchase food when in the town- and city-like camps on the Somali-Kenya border or in the city of Nairobi. Many live to be able to recall those terrifying days as they continue to effect the reunification of their scattered family members, defying the red tape and the set backs.

- The multitude of displaced Horn of Africa girls and women who work as house maids in the homes of wealthy local and Middle-Eastern residing families and are vulnerable to sexual violence (often-times without any male protection in male-dominated societies, they can do little to improve their conditions but many eventually escape or tenaciously work out alternatives; in some cases reported to me, the employers are generous and fair.

- The Shia women lacking birthing support in Saudi Arabia’s Rafha Refugee camp after the Iraq War of 1991. Refugee women reported being forced to queue in the hot desert sun to get to see a doctor for a few minutes. They more often than not did deliver their babies in spite of the apparent hatred of their Saudi camp minders without adequate medical care.

- The octogenarian widowed woman left in her almost completely destroyed old farmhouse-home during the Bosnian war in the 1990s to care for a lone surviving orphaned child and to tend the surviving livestock (surviving extended family members in Australia had to fight to ensure the woman’s eventual safety).

- The Eritrean and Ethiopian women who fell/pregnant as a result of a jailer’s or local military man’s rape (if they live to deliver the babies, they may leave them to be cared for by their own others and sisters, and try to call for the babies if they reach safety).

- The Kosovo Albanian women subjected to the chronic and war-fuelled violence of their in-laws in Montenegro and Kosovo (desperate and dependent on local humanitarian agencies if there are any and in some instances killed by their abusive in-laws – male and female – so deep is the feeling of ethnic superiority).

- The very young Afghan refugee women in Quetta or in the Peshawar camp, forced into arranged marriages with old men.

- The very little refugee girls on the road sides in Guatemala, who are bought as prostitutes and sometimes murdered and their bodies dumped on the road side.

- Again, the grandmothers from Chile and Argentina who wept as they described the disappearances of their beautiful young daughters and sons.

- The bright, very young tri-lingual East Timorese schoolgirl spying on unsuspecting Indonesian military for her father.

- The woman, a PRC national, desperate to be reunited with her now five-year-old daughter living unregistered with the child’s maternal grandmother in a village since being clandestinely taken there by terrified parents who already had one girl child, four years older (reunited after a six year separation).

- The Uighur woman who fears returning to China where Muslims are now suspected of being terrorists (granted a visa to allow her to remain with her husband in Australia with their children).

And so it goes on ...

These are some of the experiences shared with me by always distressed women, in my dual social worker/RMA role. I want to include and honour all of them; their experiences are now part of me in my own personal life memories.

Here I want to pause, this time to recall the confusion and bemusement I observed in many clients, men and women, when they read Australian Immigration Department.
letters of rejection of protection/asylum claims and of refugee resettlement visa applications they had sponsored. They could not understand how they are not formally seen as refugees; they cannot understand why their relatives, having fled their home country, were not officially classified as refugees. It was enough that their relatives had suffered the violence of war or civil conflict, in which they had lost family members and had escaped their country – did that not make them refugees?

The legal Convention definition of a refugee seems to them too remote, cold and incomprehensible; the fact that there are resettlement quotas imposed by the Australian and other resettling countries on the numbers of people from different parts of the world makes no sense to people concerned for the welfare of close relatives (still) living in impossible situations

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30 I note the obvious humane and cultural changes and improvements that the Rudd Labor Government has introduced since 2007 into the Immigration portfolio – the appointment of creative Secretary of DIAC in Andrew Metcalfe; the introduction as pilots and now institutionalised case management and complex case systems, where social workers have played key roles, revamping and humanising the DIAC website, and immigration-related media with less overt emphasis on compliance. What is still the case is the respect accorded to NGOs even where the latter have explicit policy-changing advocacy agendas.
Convention definition of refugee

The Convention definition of a refugee (see above in the introduction to this chapter) is constantly under scrutiny and being (re-)interpreted in world affairs, sometimes applauded and often found to be wanting. Amongst the limitations of this definition has been the creation of the refugee as a ‘generic and essentialised figure’ (Malkki 1992 quoted in Callamard 1999:197); ‘the limiting un-gendered and de-sexualised figure’ of the refugee definition (Callamard 1999:204) – a political artefact meant to exclude certain aspects pertaining to one’s identity or to one’s experience of persecution while highlighting the Convention reasons (Hathaway 1988,1991; Goodwin-Gill 1983); the limited Convention reasons for ‘deserving’ the refugee status which exclude the newly-emerging and latest reasons (e.g. ecological, globalising/economic) for the world population’s displacement.

An additional concept central to the notion of the ‘Convention Refugee’ is ‘Non refoulement’ (Article 33 of the Refugees Convention) - a key principle of this definition, meaning that refugees should not be forcibly repatriated to the country of their first nationality while the persecution conditions prevail (Burn & Reich 7th edition, 2005:441,442; Crock 1998:123; Crock & Saul 2002:55,98; Mares 2001:116; Mares. 2002:171; McLean 2003:458; Moorehead 2005:27; Zitter 1999:48) and a principle often ignored or flouted by governments of rich countries where people seek asylum.

The refugee declaration is a product of post-WWII, 1940s and 1950s. It is US- and Euro-centric and Cold War-thinking by nature, and the world has seen massive changes since then, including de- and neo-colonisation, the end of the Cold War, challenges to the imperial stances of the US and the West generally, technological and communication revolutions, mass-mobility, and more. The three formerly designated ‘durable solutions’ – voluntary repatriation, local integration (settlement) and resettlement in a third country – have been under review to try to be relevant to the changing world of displacement. The increasing complexities for the world’s displaced populations (Suvin, 2005) have caused major revisions of the conceptual frameworks and classifications. Some of the people omitted from the original classification and now included are the Internally Displaced People (IDPs); and many refugees have been
‘warehoused’\textsuperscript{31}, an indication of how much the refugee discourse could well be seen to reflect our dealings with commodities, so devoid of the ‘human’ it is.

There has been in the 21\textsuperscript{st} century a marked shift from providing legal asylum to trying to provide different forms of protection within and beyond national boundaries to displaced people ‘within a security paradigm’. Refugees themselves are perceived as posing a threat in the form of political and social instability; and certain countries seek to get rid of unwanted asylum seekers or even previously ‘regular’ migrants (most recently, the Burmese Rohinga in Malaysia and Thailand, Northern and Central Africans in Italy, Haitians in the US).

Other violent forms of displacement are often inextricably linked with the making of a refugee:

- \textit{Trafficking}, or the illegal and highly profitable transport and ‘sale’ of human beings for the purpose of exploiting their labour and/or their bodies, easily comparable to the earlier forms of slavery (see thinkweb.hrw.org/en/news/2000/02/21/international trafficking women and children2000/02/21; Graycar 1999; Moorehead 2005:37);
- \textit{Smuggling}. People smuggling is the organised illegal movement of groups or individuals across international borders using the services of trans-national people – smuggling organisers – usually on a payment-for-service basis (Immigration Fact Sheet 73).
- \textit{Relentless poverty}, environmental degradation, natural disasters (exacerbated by inappropriate human exploitation of the world’s resources and scientific experimentation);
- prolonged illicit \textit{Drug wars}.

All contribute to people’s suffering and displacement (Jupp 2002; Spellman 2002:151-224; Castles & Miller 1998) and they are not considered in the 1951 post-WWII Refugee Convention definition. My own social and migration advocacy work in

\textsuperscript{31} ‘Warehoused’ – a term that has come to mean the long-term or indefinite holding of refugees in countries of first asylum, with poor prospects of their being repatriated or resettled in a third country. Palestinians in the Lebanese camps and in the occupied territories are a stark example of this concept, especially poignant because of the US and other western countries’ interests in maintaining their political/ideological allegiance with the state of Israel.
Melbourne has introduced me to trafficked and many more smuggled human beings – women and men, adults and adolescents – and their stories are horrendous testimonies to the inhumanity meted out to other ‘lesser’ human beings.

With its explicit and core support of the values, principles and acceptable practices upon which the human rights and social justice approaches rest, social work can and does contribute to work with and amongst refugees and other displaced people at different stages of mostly long and harrowing experiences and processes: attending to people’s survival and welfare needs; supporting community development processes; participating in individual and group therapeutic service; being involved in the reconstruction of communities – these are some of the forms of social work that may be relevant to displaced people. If social work is motivated by ‘moving from a society characterized by exploitation, inequality, and oppression to one that is emancipatory and free from domination’ (Mullaly 1997:108), then it is likely to be nurtured by critical social theory.

Social workers need to think clearly in this area of highly emotive work. (Kennedy & Richards, 2007).

These writers also describe refugee law as being ‘one of the most contentious areas of federal law in Australia’ (ibid:137) – all the more reason for sound knowledge and understanding in service providers working in this field. Aiming to work from a critical theory base, I strive ‘to incorporate multiple perspectives on the situations I deal with’ (Brechin 2000:35-44 quoted in Adams 2002:3); knowledge of migration and refugee law and policy opens up multiple new perspectives to me as a social worker, an issue I have referred to in previous chapters.

The 20th century can be seen as the time of division of the globe into nation states, each assigned the roles of protection of its citizens and simultaneously that of becoming gatekeepers determining who could become new residents and citizens (Adelman, 1999:30). I just happen to have been born into one of these privileged states – an accident of birth.

**Australia – Refugee and humanitarian visas**

The terms ‘refugee’ (someone already granted that legal status) and ‘asylum seeker’ (someone seeking that status) are often confused, and many journalists help to
compound the confusion through poor knowledge of the issues. For social workers and RMA workers, however, to be able to assist individuals or to be involved in policy advocacy, it is important to know the differences and to understand how people of the two groups fit into our society.

Australia, being a signatory to the UN Refugees’ Convention and Protocol, has an obligation to accept and process refugee status claims from people who arrive here in both authorised and unauthorised ways and apply for asylum (also referred to as refugee status or a protection visa) on shore (Burn & Reich 2005). Since 1989, Australia has offered no alternative humanitarian assessment of claims by on-shore applicants; it is left to the Immigration Minister of the time to use his discretion to acknowledge humanitarian claims, but Australia is now planning to re-introduce what it calls formal complementary protection. That will then cover non-convention claims, such as women who claim fear of female genital mutilation in their home country.

Through Australia’s off-shore refugee resettlement program, heralded in the Federal Budget in May 2009, a maximum of 13,750 refugees may enter Australia under its Special Humanitarian Program, including 6,000 persons who have been assessed as being ‘Convention refugees’ (visa sub-classes 200, 203 and 204) and 7,750 persons who have experiences similar to a refugee (visa sub-class 202). For most of the years I have worked amongst refugees in Australia the quota hovered at about 4,000 refugee entrants and 6,000 humanitarian entrants. The humanitarian visa has been described ‘off the record’ as a form of humanitarian family reunion visa, allowing resettled refugees to then bring some of their family members from displaced situations, who would then arrive in Australia on permanent resident visas.

In the past decade, in its effort to maintain control over the movement of people into Australia and make it harder for the non-specialist to comprehend changed laws and regulations, the Coalition Government introduced certain confusingly designated ‘off-shore-on-shore visas’. Examples of these are Secondary Movement Offshore Entry (Temporary) Visas sub-class 447, and Secondary Movement Relocation (Temporary) Visas sub-class 451. The Immigration Minister also acquired the power to grant an off-shore visa to an on-shore protection visa claimant. Many of these rather obfuscating changes were probably developed as a political ploy to avoid having to address more fundamental changes to the basic, rather draconian regime set up by the conservative
government in the late ‘90s and early 2000s to avoid ‘illegal/unauthorised’ entry, as I have indicated in several instances before.

To help avoid disempowerment of refugee visa applicants and their nominators and sponsors, it is essential for RMA advocates and social workers providing support to keep them well informed of processes and decisions and the consequences of those decisions. Though this is difficult to do, particularly where ‘removal/deportation’ is unavoidable, clinging to false hopes is debilitating.
Colleagues’ and others’ voices – Personal and vicarious experiences of displacement

Once again, I can invite some of the research colleagues’ voices to be heard. Those personal experiences influence their work choice and approach. Research participants from each of these five now diasporic peoples – Burmese, Jewish, Lebanese, Palestinian, Somali – are included in my study. Seven participants have personal and immediate experience of displacement, while at least another four live the experience of immediate generations past, having been displaced by war and civil strife, or by poverty and unemployment. Three are from communities who have resolved intra-country and inter-country conflicts within their lifetimes. The one Palestinian-born interviewee knows the relentless harshness of being of that nationality (Ramon et al 2006) – his family fled from Palestine into Lebanon after 1948, then escaped to Saudi Arabia, from where he migrated to Australia. Each of these participants had a different and special story to recount and holds varied memories of their experiences as children and as helping other adults and victims of civil/intra-country or inter-country strife (Ramon et al 2006).

All of this has taken place post-WWII:

‘Despite the fact that two world wars and a global economic depression during the period 1914-1945 severely cut short the movements of peoples across international borders, the twentieth century established new benchmarks in both the scale and variety of human migration’ (Spellman 2002:151). The 21st century has continued to produce multitudes of displaced people, including forced migrants, many of whom would not fit the UN Convention definition of ‘refugee’, such as Internally Displaced People (IDPs), who are people fleeing civil war, grinding poverty and life-long unemployment, people from ecologically damaged and threatened regions, and who are unable to cross into another country. ‘On a world scale, emigration has become the principal means for survival’ (Berger 2008). This is a truly ominous statement, and is the context of the lives of the participants and their families.

The research participants themselves knew and shared not only their own stories but also the stories of their own communities. Among them is a refugee sur place, caught in Australia at the outbreak of the civil war in Somalia in 1991 and forced to seek asylum in Australia. (‘Sur place’ is ‘the phenomenon of asylum seekers who become
refugees by virtue of events that occur in their countries of origin while they are in Australia’ (Crock 1998:153). Here is a small sample of the stories I have been privileged to hear:

- True ‘home-less-ness’ remains a feature of the participant whose parents fled Palestine to Lebanon but had then to leave for Saudi-Arabia and, finally, for Australia.
- Also highlighted amongst the participants’ life experience is the fate of the doubly persecuted – forced to flee because of political beliefs and affiliation into the supposed cradle of their political allegiance, Greece to the USSR, only to have to flee further chronic discrimination, to Australia.
- Another colleague treasured the story of her parents’ escape with their own eight and another two children who were endangered from East Timor, via Djakarta then Russia, and via Portugal finally to be accepted for resettlement in Australia.
- Another participant was keenly aware of the intergenerational memory of her Jewish grandparents’ persecution and escape from a probable concentration-death-camp fate in Nazi Germany and, with another participant, the intergenerational memory of Jewish persecution of grandparents and of her mother’s marrying into a non-Jewish community being central to her parents’ and her own story.
- The protective drive parents have to provide their children with a safe place to grow up in, as evident in the decision by those participants who were also parents and who reluctantly migrated from the violent civil unrest of Lebanon.
- There is also the young, newly politicised man in the late 1990’s, who fled definite punishment by the Burmese military junta into Thailand and was then accepted under Australia’s Humanitarian program into Australia.
- There is the story of the erudite, now tormented Moslem Egyptian father who fled his family and home country and converted to Christianity.

In that small sample, only three participants (ex Burma, Cambodia and Somalia) were eventually and formally recognised as UN Convention refugees. Post-WWII impoverishment and unemployment drove two participants, parents of Italo- and Greek-Australian children, to seek an alternative life in Australia. Research into the chosen and the forced movements of third- and fourth-generation ancestors of the remaining participants would certainly reveal more diaspora and migration stories.
The creative voices of people writing with and about refugees

Appreciating that ‘artists’ voices are often the most eloquent critical voices in addressing the ongoing effects of violence on individuals and communities’ (Castelli 2004) and seeking out a sort of respite from formal writings, I have appreciated creative literary works like those of K. Hosseini (2003 and 2007) and Arnold Zable (e.g. Café Scheherazade 2001, Jewels and Ashes 1991) along with Zable’s artistic sometime performance companion, songwriter and performer Kavisha Mazzella. They seek to avert the risk of displaced people being lost in the anonymity of being what Moorehead (2005) so aptly terms ‘Human Cargo’ (See also Keneally, 1990). One local example of the numerous beautiful and artistic works created is the literary texts and quilts that 19 traumatised Iraqi asylum-seeking women created in a project initiated by the Melbourne Mercy Hospital for Women and the Northern Migrant Resource Centre (Between Memory and Hope, 2004). Likewise, Leach and Mansouri (2004) captured ‘the voices of refugees under temporary protection’, showing how out of the terrible violence of their lives, beautiful, small, creative healing pieces emerged for us to contemplate. Drama and poetry have been nurtured by people’s related displacement experience, and examples of their creativity and the healing they experienced through it abound.

Reading Hannah Arendt has come only as part of my preparation for this thesis, though I had heard of her through my German language knowledge and living experiences. I have listened to many German people, both non-Jewish and Jewish, in private life and through work, telling me about their WWI and WWII experiences. Reading Arendt’s letters and texts about the experience of her escape as a refugee from Nazi Germany and eventual resettlement in the US via France has provided me with another perspective from which to consider people’s war experience:

‘These were years when Hannah Arendt learned firsthand what it meant to be “a stateless person”, bereft of occupation, home, and language...’; she wrote acerbically ‘about the seemingly constant pressure for a refugee to display optimism, which was itself enough to lead to the refugee’s suicide’ (Baehr 2000:xiv)

And in her Letter to Karl Jaspers, she talked about her ‘Infinitely complex red tape existence’ (1946). However, her own apparent determination and resilience that I have
identified in many clients seem to have energised her to make the very most of having to live out her life as a displaced person in the US.

Complementing and adding to this more personal literature, I have been influenced by some of the practitioner/writers I have worked with (Burn and Reich 2005, Crock, 1998: 160). Furthermore, working with so many women and knowing the injustices they have experienced in ‘small places’ at home and in the big displacement movements of people, I seek out academics and writers who consider gender-related issues in their research and work (Pittaway 1991, 1998, 2005). Broadening my knowledge and understanding of individuals and communities of specific ethnicities and nationalities has led me to more specific studies and writings. These include those of Melbourne-born and Melbourne-based psychiatrist, Dr Maurice Eisenbruch, who has been working with Cambodians and has produced numerous reports, workshop and seminar documentation, and biographies written with and by Vietnamese and Vietnamese Australians (e.g. Nguyen, Thuong Thu 2004 and Loewald 1987). Finally, like many, I was angered and distressed by the Howard Government’s treatment of asylum seekers and found the writings of journalists informative – always offering glimpses of the ‘human story’ behind the often sensationalist headlines (Peter Mares 2001 & 2002; David Marr and Wilkinson 2001, John Pilger in many books and articles, Caroline Moorehead 2005 and many others).32

Fear: well-founded or not?

I return to the title of this chapter – ‘A well-founded fear...’ – and the possible and likely effects on the refugees’ and the asylum seekers’ mental state. That a Convention refugee has experienced raw fear has been accepted: fear of what has been done to him/her and fear of what is likely to happen if forced to return to that place. And those fears are ‘a terrible experience’ (Levy 1999 in Ager 1999:237-257).

‘There is no strict legal definition of ‘well-founded fear’ in the Refugees Convention or in Australian law. However, there ... are two elements in any interpretation of the term: the first element is ‘subjective’ ... be afraid to return to country of origin ... and the second element is ‘objective’ ... must show good reason for fearing return to country of origin’ (Kamand et al 2008:515).

The trauma caused by persecution is followed by the trauma of their escape (Westin, 1999), forced separation from the people and the places they know, the ugliness and sometimes horror of camp life or of migration detention. Besides physical ill-health that comes out of neglect and abuse are the mental disorders that are caused, including mood disorders (depression), acute and post-traumatic stress disorder, adjustment disorder, anxiety, unexplained somatic complaints, behavioural problems, aggression, substance abuse, psychosis. Lists like this may seem to trivialise the serious consequences of persecution. Each condition needs to be taken seriously and each person’s condition considered and treated with compassion and knowledge; and the implications for social workers and for RMA’s are legion, with the former probably being better prepared for dealing with those, whilst often feeling ‘out-of-sorts’ with the legal implications and possibilities. I shall very explicitly deal with the particularities of each of the professions, their overlaps and tensions in one of the further chapters of this investigation.

I would like to conclude this chapter with a more fulsome story, illustrating the consequences of some of the trauma experienced by some of those who fall between the cracks of an unforgiving system; again, therefore, invoking the need for a strong emphasis on critical and structural theorising and understanding.
Heng was a young child when Pol Pot began his cruel regime in Kampuchea/Cambodia in 1975. He witnessed unspeakable atrocities involving the people around him; his father and all his five siblings were murdered in his presence. He and his mother were eventually accepted into Australia as resettled refugees from one of the Thai camps. A few years after her arrival, his mother conceived a child by a man who did not want to marry her or to take any responsibilities for the baby. By the time the baby was born, Heng was about 16. His mother and he lived in a badly constructed block of units, all on ground level in a suburb in Melbourne. Heng reacted negatively to the arrival of the baby and threatened to use his knife to gouge the baby’s eyes out; prior to the delivery, he had tried to burn the unit from inside, but found it hard to ignite the brick walls. He was involuntarily admitted to a nearby psychiatric hospital for adults…!

I was involved as a local community social worker and spent time at the hospital advocating for the engagement of an interpreter, providing some background seemingly unknown to the staff (there have been significant changes to mental health services since that time), consulting with Dr. Maurice Eisenbruch, a specialist psychiatrist in the Cambodian communities, arguing for his transfer to a more appropriate facility.

I lost contact with this family but fear that Heng might have been lost in a mental system which at the time, late 1980s, was not particularly attuned to the needs of a young Cambodian male.
Chapter 8  Babel – a confusion of languages

German Late-Medieval (ca. 1370s) depiction of the construction of the tower.

Babel: a Biblical ancient city (Babylon) where the building of a tower intended to reach heaven was begun and a confounding of the language of the people took place (Genesis 11, 1-9)

‘None of the work I have done or the related experiences I have had would have been possible without our being able to communicate with one another. So this ‘pot’ is a large, bright vessel, for a multitude of living and changing languages, with English being the one common to me and all the people I have met. The sounds and music of so many languages, sometimes almost overwhelms me and I stop listening for the meaning and can hear only that rhythm and pitch of the language.’ (From my ‘Cross-Cultural Communication Pot’ 2004; see Chapter 1 Heuristic statement)

Introduction

Having found phrases and longer statements that might have helped me to order my ideas and thoughts, I cast about for a way of labelling a chapter that is to be about a diversity of language and communication, cultures, faiths and religions and, in a different but related sphere, about the concepts of voices, narration, narrative and
discourse. ‘Babel’ symbolises for me the multitude of living and changing languages we humans use to try to communicate with each other. We seek to make effective inter- and cross-cultural communication within and across this confusion of languages. My reading for this theme has been shaped by my own long-standing interest in language and linguistics and my work amongst language students, clients, peers and interpreters.

Throughout the past three and a-half decades I have had confirmed my long-held belief that each language is legitimate and invaluable, and as a mother tongue or first language uniquely allows self-expression. I know too that language structures our thinking and communication. In a globalised world where a constant movement of peoples is happening in spite of political borders and boundaries most parts of the world are actually or potentially multi-lingual and, relatedly, multi-cultural (Jandt 2004). A dominant people may try to impose a mono-lingual and mono-cultural regime, creating a form of oppression for the dominated. However, maintaining one’s own language usually becomes part of the multiple aspects of people’s resistance and opposition to such imposition.33

The previously discussed theme of human rights existing even ‘in small places’ is also pertinent here: in the places where people converse with each other in intimate, family or community contexts. As a social worker and as an RMA worker, I encourage the people I am assisting to use the languages of their preference including languages of deaf people. To be true to critical social work principles, I make reflexive efforts to step into others’ cultural perspective, perhaps to glimpse the world from different vantage points and to understand something of the inherent value of those other cultures which can be viewed themselves as structures of meaning making. I know of the necessity of according diverse people the human dignity of expressing themselves without fear, in the language of their choice, whereby they might narrate their own ideas and stories. My responsibility is to ensure they are not silenced in Australia in their expression of those ideas and the telling of those stories.

33 Just as White settlers in Australia have done with Indigenous languages, so with the Indonesians imposing Bahasa on the East Timorese from 1973, South Sudanese Christians having to speak Arabic rather than their own many Indigenous languages, including Dinka, Nuer, Shillouk and many others, and the people of Darfur having to use Arabic instead of Fur, my clients have highlighted for me this widespread form of oppression.
So, in this chapter I want to explore as social worker and RMA worker the central importance of sensitivity to language and culture in communication in my work practice (Webb 2003). I want to explore some historical, political and policy contexts of mono-, multi- and poly-linguist ‘systems’ and experiences within associated cultures and belief systems. I want to consider the concepts of narrative and of discourse, of dominant and subjugated knowledge in societies. Once again, I use my own voice and call on writers’, clients’ and participants’ voices that help to form and inform mine.

My voice

I grew up monolingual but, like some of my interviewee peers, imagined being able to express myself in the way the few migrant children in my classes in the 1950s and 1960s did. I had no choice but to learn Latin and French, for a frustratingly short time and, for the last two years at high school, German. I loved all these classes. As soon as I was able, I went to live in (then) West Germany, to immerse myself in a German-speaking community to learn how to communicate in at least one vibrant, living language other than English. I would have chosen Arabic had I had the opportunity to do so.

I have no doubt internalised the ‘linearity of the English textual rhetoric’ (Bowe and Martin 2007; Clyne 1987; Kaplan 1972), but believe that my current style has been markedly influenced by the German ‘digressive’ approach to producing text (Bowe & Martin 2007): moving around the topic and elaborating on it before moving on to the next ideas34.

Languages come alive for me when living people speak them and communicate with me. Once back in Melbourne in the late 1970s, some years after living in Germany (where I also became very familiar with nationalistic ‘Südetendeutsche’, who had fled from their German area in then Czechoslovakia at the end of WWII), I worked with mainly older German-speaking migrants from Germany and from German language enclaves in Europe. When I began my employment as an Immigration Department-funded settlement social worker in Springvale in 1984, I started working extensively

34 This linearity – point after point after point, then from them the conclusion, is unconsciously expected by many government bureaucrats, e.g. in the Immigration Department, causing manifold misunderstandings and confusion in applicants and decision makers alike.
with interpreters on a daily basis and eventually also ran annual working-with-interpreter workshops, always in a little team including a Translating and Interpreting Service (TIS) interpreter and an appropriate paid Bureau volunteer who played the role of a non-English-speaking client. In my employment, I worked with interpreters on the phone and in situ, in the latter case with individuals, family groups and in information sessions to groups of new arrivals of different ages and in many different locations; I often worked with a team of interpreters as I addressed and responded to multi-lingual groups of people. Some of those rich and always compelling experiences are reported and also addressed by me in the now roving exhibition, ‘A Worthwhile Enterprise – The Migrant Hostel in Springvale’ (2008). Without interpreters for spoken communication assistance and translators for written documentation translation, I would not have been able to communicate with over 80% of my social work and RMA clients. On very isolated occasions did clients refuse to work with professional interpreters.

During one fascinating semester at Monash University a socio-linguistic class conducted by Professor Michael Clyne whetted my appetite further; but, giving priority to personal and family matters, I was unable to continue that study at that time. I chose to take up Council of Adult Education introductory Islamic studies, wanting to continue to broaden my understanding of so many of my clients. A rewarding ACOSS-auspcied social study tour of Japan in the early 1990s involved me in some basic language and cultural orientation sessions as I investigated the parlous status and state of non-Japanese citizens, including asylum seekers, living in Japan unlawfully. My personally motivated travels to Bangladesh introduced me to a strong people and the startling rapidity of the sounds of Bengali and Hindi languages and to the profound poetry of Rabindranath Tagore.

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35 Tagore (1861-1941) was a poet, visual artist, playwright, novelist, educationist, social reformer, nationalist, business-manager and composer whose works reshaped Bengali literature and music in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. He became Asia’s first Nobel laureate in Literature in 1916 (http://www.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rabindranath_Tagore). Some of his major writings emerged from experiences of the murderous 1972 war of independence by the Bengali Muslims of what is now Bangladesh from their Pakistani Muslim brothers and sisters of West Bengal.
Writers’ voices

Again I seek out Emmanuel Levinas, who believed language to be crucial to the relationship each person will have with The Other (Encyclopaedia of Philosophy 2006/2007:3); and, again, I consider Hannah Arendt’s bi-lingual German/English voice to expand my thinking. Arendt wrote in both languages; though German, her mother language, remained her preferred one, as in ‘Labour, Work, Action’ in ‘The Vita Activā’ (Baehr 2000:167-181). Remarkably, in her newly-acquired language, English, she conducted profound topical and academic lectures as she explored The Active Life, consisting of a vita contemplative (encountered in philosophical and religious thoughts) and a vita active – the facet of life she believed had been ignored by Western thinkers.

Professor Michael Clyne’s research work and his many writings have interested me over a long time, as he has applied his learning and knowledge to practical projects: for example, in schools and on the factory floor; and as he advocates for a formal appreciation of the value of multi-lingualism, for example in Clyne 1982 and Kipp & Clyne 2005. His work is erudite yet practical and research recommendations always feasible, assuming political will on the part of policy makers. I know him to have had a strong involvement in advocacy for bilingualism, pluralistic language policies and second language programs in (especially primary) schools and to have sat on many relevant committees. Multicultural Australia’s language advocates have included another Melbourne-based linguist and promoter of interpreter and translator education: Uldis Oezolins (2001). Having enjoyed some common work experience with both of these personally familiar practitioner-academics, I feel that their voices were and remain familiar and illuminating.

The 1970s were the innovative early years of the then ‘Telephone’ and now ‘Translating and Interpreting Service’ (TIS). This service is unique to Australia, offering interpreting and translating services which grew out of people’s in-community needs and not through needs of (inter)national trade and diplomacy. This world-

36 The Department of Immigration and Citizenship (DIAC) provides the TIS National interpreting service for people who do not speak English and for the English speakers who need to communicate with them. TIS National has more than 30 years of experience in the interpreting industry and has access to over 1300 contracted interpreters across Australia, speaking more
unique universal interpreting and translating service encouraged Len Roberts-Smith QC and co-members on the West Australian State Advisory Panel for Translating and Interpreting (SAPTI WA) to publish *Working With Interpreters in Law, Health and Social Work* (1990). I continue to use this as a trusted companion of many years to complement my own extensive practice experience, to facilitate numerous ‘Working with interpreters’ training workshops in the fields of welfare and community law.\(^{37}\)

More remote but nevertheless instructive for me as both dual-professional and researcher have been some of the writings of North American Stella Ting-Toomey (1999) *Communicating Across Cultures*. Her research and writing are motivated by her interest in the cross-cultural experiences and needs of international business people and students, migrants and refugees. She tends to write guides or ‘how to communicate across languages and cultures’ booklets, rather than expound about linguistic, language and communication theories; she thus speaks particularly to me as a practitioner.

Finding some of the ideas of yet another German-American, a Professor of International Relations, Adda Bozeman (1980 and 1976), I was able to begin to extend my knowledge for my long-time involvement with people from the African continent. Their experience of bloody civil conflict and war have occurred in many parts, from the extension of European empires from the 16\(^{th}\) century, into the chaotic post-colonial times following WWII and then on into the unstable present, characterised by many as ‘neo-colonial’. Her US International and Foreign Affairs work, following her own experience of WWII in Germany, helped to inform her ideas about different cultural approaches to entering, perpetuating and, perhaps finally, resolving war.

While continuing my professional practices and my reading throughout the research period, a surprisingly revelatory heuristic process, I have stumbled across the works of exciting writers including female feminist thinkers like European Professor of Linguistics, Julia Kristeva’s (2000) *Hannah Arendt* and Italian Professor of Philosophy than 120 languages and dialects. TIS National is available 24 hours a day, seven days a week for any person or organisation in Australia requiring interpreting services ([www.immi.gov.au/living-in-australia/help-with-english/help_with_translating](http://www.immi.gov.au/living-in-australia/help-with-english/help_with_translating)).

\(^{37}\) I avoid the expression ‘using interpreters’ which implies, rather than professional cooperation, the exploitation of an inanimate hand-held tool, which interpreters are not.
Adriana Cavarero’s (2000) *Relating Narratives*. Of added importance to me is that both have been influenced by and have extensive knowledge of Hannah Arendt, so they have provided me with both secondary literature and exposure to new theoretical discussions of language. Their special interest in narrative theories and in the narration of our own and others’ stories has been of value to me. Cultural studies research academic, Professor Sara Mills’ (2004) has helped me to extend what I have read by social work-specific academics including, Allan (2003,) Fook (2002) and Mullally (1997). Though each, in their respective texts, makes relatively brief reference to the concept of ‘discourse’ and with it ‘language’, I maintain that the concept of discourse is of major importance to social work. The cumulative effect of these and other later readings has alerted me to how ‘the dominant discourses’ that prevail in our societies shape our opinions, decisions and action. Fook quotes Weedon in further developing ideas about discourse:

‘According to Weedon (1987) Foucault sees discourses as being made up of all the ways of thinking and producing meaning ... as well as expressed beliefs and ideas [are] related social practices, particular forms of subjectivity, the power relations which are inherent in the knowledge and the relations between different forms of the knowledge.’ (2002: 64)

Feminist social-work writers Roberta Sands and Kathleen Nuccio (1992: 489) highlight the concept of ‘logocentrism’ – the ‘belief that there is a fixed, singular logical order (Derrida, 1976) that can be found in the “real”, “true” and “unmediated’ forms” (Grosz, 1989). Accessing the hidden or not-visible meanings of discourse may be effected through a process of ‘deconstruction’ – ‘a way of analyzing texts that is sensitive to contextual dimensions and marginalized voices.’ They further point out that Foucault has also identified the following:

‘... at any time multiple perspectives or discourses are present but only a few are heard ... The discourses that are heard or are allowed to be heard are those of the powerful in a society; the silenced are also meaningful and important’.

Of growing relevance to current social-work practice is the amorphous neo-liberal and related discourse: neo-liberal approaches tend to commodify former ‘relational social work...’ making it through changed discourse ‘consistent with Fordist principles and managerialist imperatives embodied in competence-based practice and the
instrumentality of risk assessments’ (Dominelli 2004:106). Thus, accountability to employer and funding bodies may take precedence over accountability to clients.

The dominant discourse of race and ‘colour’ has long omitted the existence of a concept of ‘whiteness’, rather highlighting and considering traits and characteristics of black and coloured people and, to the detriment of all of us, destructive racist views and behaviour (Carter, 1997; Quinn, 2003; Rodriguez, 2000; Ting-Toomey, 1999; Ying-Yee, 2005). This thinking error has been unmasked by the more recent ‘discourse of whiteness’ (Hage 2003:49-56; Rodriguez 2000). This shows how different ways of thinking can just be taken for granted with no questions asked about their worth. Once again, creative imagination (Nussbaum 1998:92) and shifting perspectives from that of me myself, as White, as Christian, as English-speaking, help me to broaden my view of the world.

Numerous advocacy writings, including those arguing for increased language services, have been part of my long immersion in mainstream and ‘ethnic’ welfare and in law networks in Melbourne. Some of those writings, however, fail to be reflective about the contexts, especially the wider political-economic context, in which social work, RMA work and migration politics generally operate. Callinicos, on the other hand, asserts that, ‘Perhaps the most important novelty about social theory since the 1960s has been the importance of language – conceptualized in often divergent ways’ (Callinicos, 1999:265). The reality that language is the basic medium of human communication (including cross-cultural communication) is being confirmed across the (critical) social sciences:

‘The interpersonal communication processes we use as social beings primarily involve language in its many forms’ (Jessup & Rogerson 1999:163) and ‘... culture is a system of inherited conceptions expressed in symbolic forms by means of which people communicate, perpetuate and develop their knowledge about attitudes towards life’

38 Victorian Hurriyet Babacan’s A Multicultural Timeline of Australia provides historic information about how mainly Victorian-based multiculturalists influenced the development of related education, language, welfare, community relations laws and policies; I worked at one time or another with all of them, through extensive and very active committee membership as a Springvale Bureau representative; my contributions were always based in and on the experiences of the Bureau’s clients.
Human languages have emerged, developed, evolved, some have become extinct: “On the other side there are multitudinous, disparate, sometimes disappearing languages, with whose vocabularies a sense can be made of life, even if, particularly if, that sense is tragic” (Berger 2008:89).

Human beings continue to devise ways of communicating through and across languages; ‘Communication is itself fundamental to human interaction allowing the ‘transmission of ideas and exchange of ideas” (Craig, 2000) amongst us humans.

Craig proposes two communication models, of which I prefer the ‘constitutive model’ which seems compatible with my social-work perspective, personal and political, ‘... at the interface between the personal and socio structural’ (Jessup & Rogerson 1999:163): ‘Communication is viewed as an ongoing process that symbolically forms and re-forms our personal identities, our social relations, our common world of meaningful objects and events, our ideas and feelings, and our routine ways of expressing these socially constructed realities’ (Craig 2000:1-10). Language and communication and an understanding of both are as essential to the social worker (Fook 2002:56-69; Ife 2001:167; Jessup & Rogerson 1999 in Pease & Fook 1999:161-178; Mullaly 1997; Payne 1996) as they are to the lawyer/para-legal worker/RMA and the people they help, in the office and court room or tribunal and other settings (Hale 2004; Roberts-Smith 1990).

**Australia, a potentially multilingual society; and multiculturalism**

The term ‘multi-culturalism’ emerged in the 1960s in anglophone countries in relation to the cultural needs of non-European migrant ... [it] now means the political accommodation by the state and/or dominant group of all minority ... [it] is opposed by mainland Europe’ (Mc Lean & McMillan 2003:354-356). However, it is of central significance in the Australian social and political context. From a critical theory perspective, multiculturalism allows for efforts by people of different minority ethnicities along with dominant ethnicities, to aspire to justice for all (Rawls 1971). Related government policies provide structures in which I practise social work and RMA work, and in which my clients and I live our lives. Support and services to facilitate communication across languages have been established across Australia: ethnic community language classes, languages other than English (LOTE), interpreting and translating services, English as second language (ESL) programs for children and...
adults, ethnic community language press and electronic media, etc. In spite of the wealth of languages known to the majority of my clients and participants, Australians seem, on the whole, not to value that fact (Clyne 1982 and 2005; Jupp 2004:94-97; Singh 2001); English mono-lingualism could be considered ‘the culturally enforced norm of White Australia politics’ (Clyne 2005), with Indigenous languages continuing to disappear as I write.

As multiculturalism was officially accepted by the Australian Federal Government in 1977, policy activist influencers and formulators took up its cause – Jeannie Martin (1923-79) and Jerzy Zubrzycki (1920-2009).

‘As with Australia’s western counterparts, the issues of civil rights, ethnic identity and multiculturalism have engaged the attention of policy makers over the past twenty years, and overall Asianisation of the population has been growing apace without substantial backlash’ (Spellman 2002:190) in cultural pluralism, language and literacy matters. Sociologists Jeannie Martin (1923-1979) and Jerzy Zubrzycki (1920-2009) of the Australian National University were outspoken and highly regarded leading advocates of the policy of multiculturalism/cultural pluralism (see, for example, the 1995 Global Cultural Diversity Conference Proceedings, keynote address by Zubrzycki, “The Evolution of the Policy of Multiculturalism in Australia 1968-1995”).

In Australia in the 1970s, multiculturalism rather than Anglo-conformity became official policy and remained so until the conservative (if not right-wing) Howard federal government re-discovered the advantages of coded racism in the late-1990s and raised political qualms about the policy. However, a permanent shift in migration policy, anti-discrimination law and public consciousness has been achieved and Australian academic and professional sociology can take part of the credit. Martin and

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39 Australia’s official (brand of) multiculturalism is unique, differing from other countries’ like Canada – see Lopez in Jupp 2002:84; Zubrzycki 1995: paragraph 2; and see my previous remarks in other chapters.

40 Zubrzycki’s death in May 2009 has prompted widespread tributes and a resurgence of interest in the copious writings he has purposely left to posterity.
Zubryzcki concluded: ‘What we believe Australia should be working towards is not a oneness, but a unity, not a similarity, but a composite, not a melting pot but a voluntary bond of dissimilar people sharing a common political and institutional structure - cultural pluralism’ (Martin & Zubryzcki 1977 Australian Ethnic Affairs Council in Jupp 2002:86).

Lo Bianco & Wickert (2001:27) acknowledge Prime Minister Fraser’s legitimising multi-cultural differences and, thereby, cultural diversity within the overarching frame of common Australian citizenship and English as a common language. Federal and State governments have since developed structured and formal language policies (Jupp 2002; Lo Bianco 2001) and services. My RMA work immerses me constantly in residence and citizenship status matters that are affected by and in turn affect multiculturalist policies and practices. The notion of Australian multiculturalism, in

Fortunately for me and my work, formally-acknowledged Australian Multiculturalism has been markedly self-conscious since its founding, which involved Whitlam’s Immigration Minister Al Grassby (Labor) and PM Malcolm Fraser (Liberal). Being a student then a qualified social worker in Melbourne has afforded me access to related familiar and directly experienced information, networks, personal and professional contacts. Throughout the 1980s till 1996, when the Howard Government toppled the Keating Labor Government, quality research was undertaken by individuals like Ronald Henderson, who researched the links between population and poverty, then by the Australian Institute for Multicultural Affairs (AIMA) 1979-1986; and from 1988 to 1996 by the Bureau of Immigration Multiculturalism and Population Research (BIMPR). Howard’s Council for a Multicultural Australia has now been superseded by Prime Minister Kevin Rudd’s Australian Multicultural Advisory Council, established in December 2008. Through my work with the Bureau, I participated in and contributed to various research projects, refining my professional insights into the prevailing migration and settlement policy context and enhancing my social and RMA work practices. Melbourne and Victoria have been particularly active multicultural sites.

I became very familiar through participation with the ideas and with key multiculturalists – including Sir James Gobbo (Italian and ethnic communities networks), Alison Goding (social worker, interpreting and translating services to schools), Stephanie Lagos (Greek community and migrant resource centre movement), George Lekakis (social worker, Migrant Resource Centres and Victorian Multicultural Commissioner), Walter Lippman (Jewish Welfare, and founder of the Victorian Ethnic Communities’ Council), Eric Lloga (Albanian community and ethnic communities’ rights and responsibilities), Merle Mitchell (Migrant and Refugee Rights in
its various facets, has undergone continuous change since the 1970s; Hage (2003: Chapter 4) describes these changes as both ‘de-scriptive and pre-scriptive … as a mode of governing ethnic sub-cultures and as national identity … as welfare and as structural socio-economic policy … as social and as cultural policy’ … and influenced by Australia’s responses to ‘the Muslim question’ post-9/11/2001. All this in the long shadow of Australia’s initial White Australia policy, under PM John Howard, perhaps as the new/old White Australia paranoia.

Most recently, ‘the Rudd Government has made some tentative steps towards détente with multicultural Australia’ (Ingram 2009). Rudd’s vision, in my view, is that multiculturalism now includes all segments of society. This sits well within the context of Hage’s interesting notion of ‘global multiculturalism’ (2003:108-119) which he considers has been dominated by the multilingual middle-class ‘jet setters’. The old notion included only the working class and often monolingual unskilled migrant of the latter half of the 20th century – a time when rights, access and equity, and social justice were the dominant goals within a multicultural framework.

**Culture and faith/religion**

Definitions of culture are numerous and range from the simple and sometimes simplistic to the complex. Abercrombie et al (2000) note that the concept has been used in recent times in different ways – contrasted with the biological or ‘nature’, with structure (e.g. Talcot Parsons), with the material and means of production and profit making (Marx) and as ‘a way of life’. I choose to use Ting-Toomey’s definition:

‘Culture … a complex frame of reference that consists of patterns of traditions, beliefs, values, norms, symbols and meanings that are shared to varying degrees by interacting members of the community’ ([http://oak.cats.ohiou.edu/~eg515298](http://oak.cats.ohiou.edu/~eg515298)), something I can relate to my social and RMA practice. Far too early deceased Iris Young (1949-2006) wrote of ‘culture’:

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mainstream Australia), Robert Walker (Child Migrant Education and multilingual community libraries) and many more (See also Lo Bianco, 2004).
'Culture is ubiquitous ... with the symbolic meanings that people attach to other kinds of people, to activities, gestures, or institutions ... often significantly affect the social standing of people ... and their opportunities’ (1990:23).

An understanding of religion and its practices are important and should be incorporated into social work education and practice. As a major part of his studies of how people make meaning, anthropologist Clifford Geertz included the religious practices of Islam – in Java Indonesia and in Morocco (Eickelman in Shweder & Good 2005, Chapter 9). At the core of most cultures are spiritual and religious values, beliefs and practices or formal rejection of them. Even a cursory perusal of social-work related literature shows interest in linking these areas. Just one example is The Journal of Religions and Spirituality: Social Thought. Al Krenawi and Graham (2000) make a case for the need for social workers to understand Islamic theology, prayer and ways of living – of particular relevance to us social workers and RMAs in Australia.

My colleagues’ voices

The stories shared with me by my peers augmented what I had experienced of them in our previous cooperative working relations and within active professional networks. Common to all of the 21 of them is a readiness to communicate in languages other than English, to work with interpreters and to communicate in the other languages known to them. This is in a world where an estimated 6,000 languages are used by between 6 and 7 billion human beings (Göteborg University, Department of Philosophy, Linguistics and Philosophy of Science, 2009). The language mosaic my colleagues offered me is a varied and extensive one: of the 21 interviewees, 13 spoke or understood languages other than English from their childhood (including Albanian, Arabic, Burmese, Greek/Macedonian and Russian, Italian, Khmer, Hakka Chinese, Portuguese and Tetum, Hebrew, Pacific Islander, Somali, Turkish, Yiddish). Nine had chosen of their own accord to learn a language or languages other than English, because of intercultural marriage, personal interest, or for academic purposes (including Bengali, Chinese, French, Greek, Japanese, Kosovo-Albanian, Malay, Mandarin, various Slavic languages). All participants indicated the necessity for each of us to be able to communicate in people’s preferred language and all of them work with interpreters to communicate with clients in languages other than English in their roles as social workers and/or RMAs. Eight participants communicate in languages other than English
in their workplace and there were at least four poly-lingual participants who were born in pluri-lingual societies and communicate through them in Australia. Three participants are themselves accredited, registered and working interpreters and translators.

With their knowledge and acceptance of languages comes an implied acceptance of the validity of different cultures – ‘cultural competence’, or ‘cultural literacy’ (Webb:2003) – in the Australian multicultural context, where cultural ethnic groups encounter, influence each other, merge, clash, metamorphose, stagnate, become extinct. The value to some of them of different religious beliefs and practices was raised and explained by four participants espousing Christian, Buddhist and Islamic faith and practice traditions. Two peers identified that one of their parents’ conversion from one to another religion had had difficult and life-long consequences. Most of my peers identified the values they now hold as being based in religious and parents’ and grandparents’ teaching and lived example.

Clearly my colleagues, all of them, had appropriate life histories for the work they did.

**Clients’ voices**

People present me with little pictures. ‘The little story or the little stories’ are all part of the ‘big contextual stories’: walking through the desert to try to escape the bombs provided to the warring factions by outside ‘super-powers’ dropped in South Sudan from the big droning Russian-made Antonovs is one such story. That small scene happened because of the great, complex contextual frameworks, most often not fully comprehended by or even visible to the people most affected.

Let me start this section, however, by referring to a section of the Human Rights Universal Declaration:

> ‘Everyone has the right to freedom of opinion and expression; this right includes freedom to hold opinions without interference and to seek, receive and impart information and ideas through any media and regardless of frontiers’ (Article 19 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and Article 19 of the Civil Covenant (Robertson 2000).

Many of the people I assist in my RMA and social-work roles have experienced persecution because of assumed breaches of their (first generation) human right to hold
and express opinions – even within the family. That means, to use their language for what it was meant to be used for: to communicate and have ideas. So facilitation is required at times:

Maria was born in China of Russian-speaking parents and grew up bi-lingual, speaking Russian at home and Mandarin at school. She eventually married a Mandarin-speaking man who had migrated to Australia. Her own parents were accepted into Australia as well. The many members of the extended family lived both together and within very close proximity of each other near Springvale. Some spoke English, Russian and Mandarin, but some of the key older relatives were mono-lingual. I met with them to assist them to discuss and resolve some of the family conflict that had arisen. We worked with two interpreters – a Mandarin and a Russian speaker – and met in a meeting room, so large was the group. Everyone in the large group understood everyone else, but were only able to speak either Mandarin or Russian.

It is clear that a language conundrum is sometimes also caused by inhumane government policies, and again require skilled facilitation in the Australian RMA and social-work context:

Ethnic Chinese East-Timorese children and adolescents who arrived in Australia between 1973 and 2000 were often linguistically isolated from their parents’ and grandparents’ generations, because the children were forced by the occupying Indonesians to accept schooling in Bahasa Indonesia. Though they were forbidden by the Indonesians to communicate in one of the Timorese languages, Tetum, usually not known to the older people either, the teenagers did, using that language, now a taboo language, as a way of planning uprisings and protests. Portuguese language was known to some also, from colonial times. Once in Australia, the children began to learn English, but remained
isolated from older Hakka-speaking relatives.

We social workers and RMAs working with them and with a number of interpreters simultaneously struggled mightily to allow important but elusive concepts to survive across multiple linguistic barriers.

Where once I ‘conducted interviews’, I have increasingly been able to become involved rather in dialogue and conversation, allowing me not only to extend assistance but also to be gifted with new knowledge in a mutual learning process. One of my many repeated initial questions is, ‘If you were still in your home country and this happened in your life, what would you do (in e.g. domestic violence, ill health, relationship conflicts)?’, in order to increase my understanding of my clients’ experiences and expectations and of legitimate optional ways of facilitating change or behaving and conducting rituals.

**Narratives: Clients’ stories**

‘Every nation has its secret history. Perhaps unsurprisingly for a land of immigrants, a fair slice of Australia's history resides in stories transported from the never-ending cycle of war, poverty and strife across the oceans. Yet these stories do not get much of an airing. They remain within families, whispered in the dining rooms of ethnic clubs and confided by grandparents in their final years to their grandchildren. (Wright 2009 ‘Finding the stories of migrant nation building’ The Saturday Age 23rd May 2009)

**Arendt** ...*was always drawn most to the narrative: a narrative inextricably linked with action, which is in the end always political* (Kristeva 2001:95 in Chapter I Life as a Narrative)

As a listening social worker and RMA worker, I too seek out clients’ narratives ...

In spite of all that has been achieved, even though many migrants and refugees arrive in Australia already bi-, tri- or poly-lingual: Ethiopians speaking Amharic, Oromofa, Tigrinya; Malaysians speaking Malaysian, Hakka and Malay; Congolese speaking Swahili, Tshiluba, French and at least one other tribal language; Burmese speaking Burmese and a host of Indigenous languages and Thai; Bangladeshis speaking Hindi and Bengali; Afghans speaking Dari, Pashto, Hazarage or even Urdu; Eritreans

148
speaking Arabic, Tigrinya, Ble – their multilingual skills and knowledge are rarely if ever acknowledged or valued within the dominant language and discourse of English; their related cultural knowledge is subjugated to the dominant white Anglo/Celtic/European story or stories.

All of the many people I have assisted have begun by telling me something of their ‘story’ and, according to what their objective is, they then tell more. My work has been replete with people’s spoken and written stories, their personal story at the very heart of my work. People respond to my prompts and questions and gradually warm to the telling. Often I simply listen, particularly to the pleas that people express and the emotions that burden them. Often, the story is told in one language, retold by the interpreter, then re-interpreted by me in English as I write whatever submission or written text that is needed: a complex and fascinating linguistic and meaning-creating process, prone to many re-iterations and added layers of understanding.

Not long after my arrival in Springvale in the mid-1980s, I was approached by a Pashtoon Afghan ‘leader’ (now sadly deceased). For about a year he came to my office weekly and together we prepared letters to be submitted to the then Department of Immigration and to the then Immigration Ministers. I worked on an old typewriter; he preferred to speak in English and I modified his expression to avoid grammatical misunderstandings. Even at that early stage, I felt the privilege was mine. I listened and learned and augmented my understanding of Afghanistan, Pakistan and Iran and their people, complementing my learning through conventional means. This experience and learning have continued through the subsequent 21 years of my work amongst Pahstoon, Hazara, Tajik and Sikh people. Equally fascinating is what it tells me about the earlier ‘story’ of my own civilisation ...

When the massacre on Tiananmen Square, Beijing in the People’s Republic of China occurred in 1989, Springvale CAAB supported me and assisted in working with both individual asylum seekers
from that community and with large groups. We assisted about 250 people in those early days and kept abreast of all the changes the Federal Government introduced. I worked extensively with Mandarin-speaking interpreters and with one in particular, himself an educated historian. My knowledge of the Cultural Revolution expanded, which in turn improved my casework to more and more people. I was able to engage in more than question and answer but enjoyed discussion with my clients, all eager to share their stories and their country’s tumultuous and tragic 20th-century revolutionary history.

Though there have been and remain, language-sensitive enthusiasts and activists in education, law, welfare and trade, incidents such as the following occur repeatedly:

Being in court for another matter altogether, I witnessed a Cambodian man in the Dandenong Magistrate’s Court who was there on a speeding charge. I watched him in court being questioned by the Magistrate with the man’s friend who had accompanied him trying to act as interpreter, as directed by the magistrate! The friend’s English was poorly articulated; but because I have so much experience through teaching and social work and RMA work with English expressed in many different accents, I could ‘hear’ what the friend was trying to express and could also hear that the magistrate was mis-hearing then mis-repeating or quoting the responses of the defendant. The prosecuting policeman made a number of allegations about the defendant’s uncooperativeness. I could hear that the defendant was trying to explain the circumstances of that event. He lost his license for a considerable period even though it seemed that he depended for his livelihood on having a license.

True to the principle of ‘access and equity’ in this self-identified multicultural society, he should have been offered an interpreter. This is a local example of the dominance of
the power-holding English-speaking authority figure and decision maker, silencing the Khmer and/or Chinese language-speaking defendant through muzzling him. All I could do was raise this with my lawyer work colleagues later as the Cambodian defendant could have appealed against the sentence but more than likely did nothing, ignorant of his options. Always involved in policy and practice change advocacy, my legal service working colleagues may have used the short summary report I provided them with to highlight this apparently discriminatory legal practice, possibly based on professional ignorance and the magistrate’s covert racist attitudes in relation to his assumptions about the dominance of the English language and the dismissal of the value of non-Australian English

The texts that clients and I together composed were then forwarded to whatever government bodies they were meant for – Department of Immigration, Department of Housing, or of Social Security – and I realized very early in my RMA work that it was essential to put the person’s story as accurately and as vividly and as heart-felt as possible, but to avoid hyperbole. My Springvale clients had a very high success rate in achieving desired outcomes in long legal and bureaucratic processes.

‘Our own cultural narratives help us to organize our thinking and anchor our lives, but they can also blind us to the unfamiliar and unrecognizable and they can foster injustice’ (Laird 1998:22).

Deeply-held family values, initially and crucially imbibed with mothers’ milk, continue to underpin my related beliefs; and the same is happening in the lives of my clients. My clients and I need to seek to articulate those values and beliefs in order to understand each other. Maybe what I have experienced is a process of being awakened to the legitimacy and the beauty of other cultures, and thereby also to the legitimacy and the detail of my own:

‘We dream in narrative, wrote Barbara Hardy not long ago – dream in narrative, remember, anticipate, hope, despair, believe, doubt, plan, revise, criticize, construct, gossip, learn, hate and love by narrative’ (Moorehead 2005: 288).

More profoundly even:

‘Our self-narratives are embedded in larger social discourses, negotiated over time within relations of knowledge and power (Foucault 1980) which gain acceptance as
‘truth’. These narratives can be subjugating; they can cut us off from a fuller range of possibilities for ourselves and our lives’ (Laird, 1998:32).

The narratives auspiced over and over through colonisation by the dominant West about its success in civilising the peoples it invaded and conquered in other continents both created and resulted in power and oppression being wrested and then exercised by empire-building Europeans until WWII and later by their descendants. In my professional roles I meet both inheritors and victims of the power of former colonial regimes and of their domination and dominance. Meeting those legacies during his travels, Kapuscinski (2008) described his own work as ‘literary reportage’ Although he was personally not an outgoing but a modest man, he believed in the importance of his work, which included attempting to understand the world: ‘Without trying to enter other ways of looking, perceiving, describing, we won’t understand anything of the world’. The European mind, he believed, was often too lazy to make the intellectual effort to see and understand the real world, dominated by the complex problems of poverty and far away from the manipulated world of television and other media – which, as we all too well know, have become the massage (and the message) of their owners and controllers (adapting Mc Luhan (1967) Adage For Our Times.).

Cross-cultural social and RMA work and subjugated knowledge(s)

Mullaly (1997:116) reminds us of the obvious but often taken for granted or forgotten situation that:

‘Most social work activity is manifest in language and discourse, whether counselling, writing reports, reading research and journal articles or articulating analyses of personal and social problems.’

If there is validity in Gaita’s statements about both our thoughts and feelings being made by language and simultaneously being expressed in language (Gaita 1999:85), then the social worker must needs ensure that her clients are en-abled to express themselves, their stories, opinions and feelings in whatever language they prefer; this is more than an access and equity matter – it fulfils a human and existential need.

When considering social work practised in both the international and national spheres, we have tended to Eurocentrism, ethnocentrism and domination by the West (or the prosperous North), evident in our neglect of Muslim Arab societies (Al-Krenawi &
Graham 2003). There seems to me to be a marked cultural bias, a dominating discourse in English language social-work literature even on the subject of the concepts and value of narrative and discourse. If true, that is an irony because the very same literature decries the disempowerment and marginalisation of people and their languages. It may be that many English-language social-work theorists on the whole are seldom well versed in linguistic and socio-linguistic theories. It is an irony as there are strong and valuable arguments expressed for the acceptance of multiple ‘knowledges’ (Lundy 2004:37) and for trying to avoid ‘the subjugation of knowledge’ (Pease 2002) by a/the dominant group of the knowledge(s) of another/others (Fadiman, 1998).

Apparent to me is the notion of effective communication being of more interest to the practising social worker than to the migration agent; however, recently the Migration Agents’ Registration Authority (MARA) or the Migration Institute of Australia (MIA)-recommended changes to an assessment of the English language competence of the RMAs with, however, no reference to cultural competence being desired.

Trying to ensure that the social worker-client (individual or group) relationship is one that rejects a power imbalance between the two parties is an essential aim of critical social work. In Australia’s multicultural context, clients need to be able to communicate in their preferred language, the one that allows them to best express themselves.

‘The knowledge historically used by social workers has been that of “expert” knowledge derived from objective, scientific, and professional sources and has reflected a Eurocentric, patriarchal and bourgeois bias rather than the lived reality of oppressed persons’ (Leonard 1994; Mullaly 1997:117).

To allow for expression of this ‘lived reality’, communication will be either in the client’s and social worker’s common non-English language, or will be facilitated by a registered professional interpreter or by another competent and appropriate bilingual person. Where the social worker espouses the principles of access and equity, of social justice and human rights, their clients have to be able to communicate in their preferred language and they would be severely disadvantaged if not (Freire 1972:60-95).

‘Human existence cannot be silent, nor can it be nourished by false words, but only by true words, with which men transform the world. To exist humanly is to name the world, to change it’ (Freire 1972:60,61).
Law and cross-cultural law

There is, however, substantial thinking and writing in the field of general cross-cultural legal practice. As mentioned before, of particular interest to me in relation to cross-cultural foreign policy negotiations and the law are the works of German-born US citizen Adda Bozeman. She cautions us against assuming that the values and norms of Western law are universally accepted as basic values and norms in other cultures. From her extensive international field work and academic erudition she recommends intercultural research and comparative studies in communication (Bozeman 1973). Recent writings and discussion by Shabani (2009) have shone light for me on thinking about the law, people displacement, multiculturalism, and cosmopolitanism. And, as repeatedly referred to, critical social and structural theory has helped me to more adequately appreciate the influence and impact of the several layers of the complex social context in which social and RMA work occurs. Of local interest and importance are small studies and reports by the Springvale Community Legal Service, for example, in comparing customary law of the South Sudanese with Victorian and Australian law, and in considering access by Pacific Islander young people to Australia’s justice system (Taylor 2007 and 2008).

Excitingly and as previously referred to, Israel-based Bedouin social work academic, Dr. Alean Al Krenawi, alone and in cooperation with Canada-based John Graham, has raised the topical and fundamental issues of social working in polygamous communities and amongst blood-feuding families (Al-Krenawi & Graham 1995). The work covers social-work practice with Bedouins amongst their own peoples and in societies where Bedouins have had to take up residence. This is of particular relevance to a diverse migration country such as Australia, where reproductive and family laws engender such passions.

*Polygamy is still an acceptable family reproduction practice in different cultures and religions. Many Christian/African animist South Sudanese and Muslim Somalis, resettled refugees in Australia, have internalised the fundamental belief in the societal efficacy of the practice. South Sudanese Charles or Somali Mohammed may live with one wife and simultaneously father children by another or other women, in Australia and/or*
in Africa. Being in the first wave of arrivals, they thus accommodate Australian legal practice and more deeply held family beliefs and values. The Australian-born generation may suffer the often harsh and extreme sanctions and penalties by defying the family’s original culture and faith, as for example in arranged marriages.

It is really hard, having been brought up espousing certain cultural beliefs based on legal and human rights-linked assumptions, to do justice to specific and general examples that I have personally experienced, and to avoid discrimination and racism. It represents a vast and treacherous area of race, culture, gender/sex and even age and class that I can’t even begin to deal with in the confines of this thesis …

I shall now move on to my final data chapter, where my findings of the relationship between the two professional capacities in which I have practised for so long will be brought together and hopefully be made sense of. That chapter, in turn, will prepare the stage for a final concluding one in which I shall attempt to re-integrate the analytical narratives of the preceding and following data chapters and summarise my various learnings from my life journey and from this thesis project.
Chapter 9 Two professions: dual or duelling?

By January 2009 I had come to realise that my practice of the two professions, social work and human-rights oriented RMA work with refugees and their families, were definitely compatible. Clearly I had used my imagination to practise in ways that allow the two professions to complement each other. I felt consonance, not dissonance (see Chapter 1, Heuristic statement).

Clients’ voices and perceptions

This chapter differs from the previous ones; it starts with what I imagine might be clients’ perceptions of me, ‘The Other’ (Kapuscinski 2008), as a ‘service provider’ for them.

- I am in an office at the Springvale Bureau, or at St Albans or Broadmeadows Migrant Resource Centre, or perhaps with RILC in one of the offices they had in Fitzroy, then Prahran, later St Kilda, followed by Footscray and back to Fitzroy. The client who is with me wants to re-sponsor his parents from overseas and he obviously believes that I am a lawyer. I explain with the assistance of the interpreter that I am a social worker and am also a registered migration agent and, as such, am legally able to help him with his particular migration or refugee law problem.

- Or I am sitting in a room with a woman who is crying; she knows me in this agency as both a social worker and someone who can help her with her migration problems in the agency and she fears for the safety of her child whom she had failed declare. She had left her child with a sister in the home village and that sister has recently fallen ill and died. So I use my social work skills to calm her, address with her her own current accommodation problems, and explain how we might be able to reunite her with her child, in time. My roles in this matter are complementary: she sees me as the social worker who is helping her to get her child to Australia, a helper who seems also to know something about immigration matters.

- I am sitting with a Somali-born Australian citizen of a dominant tribe. He is a Somali language interpreter. He thinks: ‘This white woman, Sherron Dunbar,
thinks she knows Somali people but she can’t even speak Somali and certainly
does not have a chance at understanding us Somalis. I am an educated man, I am
the eldest son of my esteemed aged father and one of his wives. I won a tertiary
scholarship to study in Australia, so I had already learned a lot about this culture
before the outbreak of the ongoing Somali war in 1992/93. Dunbar has no idea
about the responsibilities I have to my family and to members of my tribe in
Australia and in East Africa. She does not understand how I define family. She is
so arrogant she thinks that her way is the right way; I know the Somali people and
the tribe this client belongs to and I know how a woman should be protected by the
males of her tribe, even in Australia. That young pregnant woman should not have
left her husband in Sydney – she should have given him more time to show who he
really is because she is going to have his child. I had a responsibility to help to
protect her so I went around to see her. This code of confidentiality that
interpreters in Australia sign is a sham – it does not cover what is important to us
extended tribal families and it puts more importance on individuals than we do on
our family and our tribe.’

In the remainder of this chapter I will (not necessarily in this order):

• give a brief summary of how I chose the two professions, define and describe the
two with the help of academic writers;
• consider values, ethics, and codes of conduct of the two professions;
• highlight some of the contradictory and complementary features of my practice of
the two professions;
• consider how my preferred critical and structural approaches to social work
practice influence my Registered Migration Agent practice;
• consider the impact of neo-liberalism on social work and human rights’ registered
migration agent work.
Participants’ voices

One of my 21 research participants/colleagues, who also practises the dual professions, chose to acquire multiple professional qualifications in his determination to support and help people who are marginalised, including people who have mental illnesses, homeless people and asylum seekers, only some of whom are entitled by their migration status to formal assistance programs. He chose to pursue graduate and postgraduate degrees in psychology, social work, community development, law, education, and registered migration law advocacy, all the while practising what he learns and drawing further learning from his practice. He found each of the separate disciplines of social work and law inadequate, but together he finds them complementary and beneficial to many people. Social-work education disappointed him in its apparent conservatism but he respects its preparedness to listen to people’s hearts, to listen and act with compassion. He expressed his opinion that immigration law can be cold, but that knowledge of it is essential to empower people in the face of systemic and structural oppressions.

A number of non-social-worker participants are not impressed by social workers’ apparent failure to activate genuine change. To them, social workers seem to opt in practice for the status quo, even while declaring themselves to be change agents. One of the legally qualified non-social-work participants working with and for newly-arriving resettled refugees considers migration law to be in need of complete reform.

Two of the social workers/migration advocates described dilemmas that arise where clients disclose information to the social worker that they then want to be withheld from the Immigration Department, especially to protect and reunite family members. The majority opinion, but by no means a unified one, is that social welfare work and migration roles can be compatible, particularly in working with refugees and in family migration matters. One social worker/migration agent finds dilemmas and difficulties arising in relation to spouse and fiancée visas, where violence has allegedly been perpetrated against the newly-arriving spouse.

My voice

People in all their diversity still fascinate me, and I use my ‘imagination’ (Merleau Ponty 1964) to try to put myself in their place; I enjoy trying to view the world from
what I can only imagine are their different vantage points. My rich imagination and ability to visualise is an important tool in both professions. I need, however, to sharpen skills of ‘discernment’ (Payne 1997:96) to try to ensure a realistic appraisal of a client’s situation. In this regard, my preference is often towards the ‘intuitive-emotional domain rather than the rational calculative’ (Harris & Williams 2003). I am an experienced social worker but no expert as I continue to learn from ever-new experiences and through diverse people (Gadamer 1992:355 in Rossiter 1996:31); I am an experienced RMA worker who has over the years chosen to specialise more and more in refugee and family visa matters.

It is probably worth returning to some of my previous and present experiences as I enter into this chapter. As a very young woman, having taught high school students in Queensland and London and noting and being angered by the deprivation many children experienced in school and society, and experiencing something of a political awakening in Germany while teaching middle-level young adults there in the 1970s, I chose to divert to social work in 1976. Working in the early 1980s amongst German-speaking migrants in Melbourne who had been in Australia for up to three decades, and with younger, very skilled German-speaking migrants, I began to become familiar with and very interested in Australia’s migration and refugee laws and programs, which my ESL teaching with the then Adult Migrant Education Service (AMES) had already made me aware of and intrigued by. I also experienced to my dismay ‘a type of casework with individuals and families that focused on coping, adjustment and restoration of the poor, rather than a change of social conditions’ (Mulally 1999:27) in the US Charity Organization Society tradition.

My social work experience and knowledge grew as I became immersed in welfare rights - as well as social-work; I had ample opportunity to practise with the diverse people who worked with and/or sought assistance of the Springvale Bureau and the (Monash University-linked) Community Legal Service. Knowledge of migration law and an understanding of clients’ resident status and related entitlements and disentitlements were essential in that part of Melbourne, where Koori people, newly-arrived migrants, resettled refugees and temporary residents first settled on arrival in Australia post-WWII. Though I was supported in practising as both social worker and RMA worker, I became increasingly uneasy during my last years there till December
2003 about the fact that I seemed to be more and more viewed by clients as an RMA worker and less and less as a social worker; I had not realised the importance to me of social work.

Since 2003, I have practised or taught social work in various paid social-work teaching and RMA positions while remaining involved in volunteer RMA work with RILC. Social and welfare work had given me opportunities to learn with people how we humans can effect change in our lives, as community members. I expanded my understanding of systemic and structural matters, like those of poverty and the effects of colonisation. Through extensive RMA casework and membership of bodies such as the Refugee Council of Australia and the Australian Council of Social Services, I expanded my understanding of people of all shapes and sizes and of the effects on people’s lives of particular bodies of administrative law – especially those related to the second generation of human rights. Increasingly I realised that in my RMA work, as with social work, it is the clients who are of particular significance to me. My overall practice bias is towards listening to people’s stories and assisting them to relay those stories to others for particular purposes and supporting them in the work they do to change their life stories. ‘For Arendt, this is an imaginary role – life itself never fulfils a destiny, but rather consists in the unmasterable exposition of uniqueness, from which there results a story that the protagonist had never planned and that was always without an author’ (Cavarero 2000:141 in a chapter entitled The World is Full of Stories). Each story, no matter how unremarkable, interests me; but having to mould the stories to fit bureaucratic guidelines often emaciates and distorts them. And frustrates me.

My own brief but intense experience of being a social work client about 10 years ago was revealing and disappointing, until my complaint about the way I was treated was taken seriously and a senior social worker assumed responsibility. The junior social worker’s apparent limited knowledge and skills and perhaps inadequate supervision were unsatisfactory and concerning, and adding to my – by then – rather strong doubts about that profession. Indeed, I don’t know if I would have stayed with social work if I had not been introduced to RMA work. Social work alone felt ‘flimsy’ whilst RMA work seemed to provide extra depth and a larger context.
Writers’ voices ... dual or duelling professions?

Writers associated with Elizabeth Reichert led me to reviews and comments, including a statement that could apply to me as social worker. In Lisa Schechtman (2004) I found:

‘...many social workers chose their profession because of its mandate to treat clients in context; that is to incorporate cultural and societal understanding into all social work activities, and then to apply private concerns to national and international issues’.

It is at this conjunction of cultural and societal, private and communal, civil and political, national and international conditions and matters that I meet social work and RMA clients, from ‘their small places’ (Roosevelt) and ‘civic spaces’ (Arendt); but I also meet them as I see they are and am not afraid to let them disclose their pain; here I am exercising ‘compassionate imagination’. The older I become, the more, sometimes to my surprise, people seem to be prepared to disclose of their lives; and I am not afraid to reveal myself to them when it seems to be appropriate through mutual disclosure.

One striking difference between my social work and my RMA work is apparent where, as migration law advocate, I start with the client’s first concerns which are often about matters existing overseas such as a family member’s situation in a camp in Uganda, or problems at an international border; and only then move to his/her private and personal concerns. What I have somehow learned, over time, is to work comfortably with the tensions between what we call in social work the ‘macro’ and the ‘micro’ dimensions of intervention and professional relating.

The writers’ voices and social-work definitions

There is no one single definition of the generic term ‘social work’; it is a practical discipline (Pincus & Minehan, 1973), with practice in this context being ‘meaningful, situated, morally accountable action’ (Craig 2000) and that is based on and produces a multitude of theories. Recent and current English-language writing social-work theorists are concerned that social work is in crisis, in the contexts of neo-liberalism’s encouragement of the ‘contraction of state activity, the marketisation of (human) services’ (Kennedy & Richards 2007:53) and must review and reform itself in a world of rapid social change (Dominelli 2002, 2004, 2005; Allan et al 2003; Mullaly 1997; Ife 1997; Payne 1996).
In my opinion, social work might always see itself in crisis as it adapts itself to prevailing ideologies and societal changes of the time. Therefore, political awareness and flexibility appear to me to be essential characteristics of social work.

Traditional social work values can provide a constant foundation. Those values include: the worth and dignity of each human being; the significant relationships that sustain each human being (in, for example, families and tribes); social justice; and compassion. Rather than grasp a fixed definition, we seem to worry about an elusive concept of social work (Kennedy & Richards, 2007:4).

The term ‘social work’ has different connotations and emphases in different national and cultural contexts (Zierer 2007; Ife 2001:4 from Tan & Envall 2000; Payne 1996:159-172). For example, in the Latin American practice tradition, social work has a much more radical social change inclination, a social justice and overt human rights thrust (Ife cites Aguilar 1997; Cornely & Bruno 1997 and Queiro 1997) and the influence of Paulo Freire rendering the social worker a ‘popular educator’ (Wilson 2004). In contrast, the social work approaches in the US and, to a lesser extent, in Australia are individualised and therapeutic. Another ‘cultural’ example is that of the community development focus amongst social workers in the ‘developing world’ (Ife 2001:4).

One of the latest developments amongst social workers has occurred with the establishment, growth and development of the European Union (EU), with increasing evidence of cross-fertilisation of social work education and theory and practice developments (Dominelli 2007 & 2005). The formation and expansion of the EU has forced various culturally different social workers from historically different political ideology contexts (e.g., pre-1989 communist and socialist societies) to learn more about other cultural forms of social work while deepening the understanding of their own social work practice traditions (Pawalek 2006/2007; Hackett, Kuronen, Matthies & Kresal (2003); Matthies, 2005).

Western writers express the need now to wake up to, acknowledge and learn non-Western/Christian, non-neo-liberal approaches to life and social work (Al Krenawi & Graham 2003; Cox & Pewar 2006; Dominelli 2004); as time goes by, social work becomes ‘indigenised’ in the former colonies of European empires (e.g. Hong Kong, Malaysia) and in parts of Africa and in Australia and Canada that had imported British
and North American social-work ideas (Wilson 2004). Overall, some tension still exists between the social work which leans towards the psycho-dynamic approach and that which espouses the political-sociological approach (Pease, Allan & Briskman 2003:19; Mullaly 1997:28; Payne 1996:7,8; Pease (ed), 1999). Social work definitions selected by Payne (1996) are many and varied and the Australian Association of Social Workers (AASW) identifies as essential in social work the lofty ideals of ‘social justice’, the ‘enhancement of the quality of life’, and the development of the ‘full potential of each individual, group and community’ in Australia (AASW, Code_Of_Ethics).

My valuing of the relationship between social work and social policy rests – I can now see – on the critical/structural approach I discovered and feel connected with. One of the legitimising outcomes of the casework I undertake is the ultimate ‘identification of and change in inadequate social policies and structures.’ (Ehrenreich 1985; Mendes 2007). However, the tension between social workers’ ‘duty of care’ and our social control role with offending spouses and adults is real and constant (Rossiter 1996:33).

The writers’ voices and social-work pioneers

Social work has a fine history in the calibre of its founders and later internationally recognised practitioners. Important pioneers of international social work include American friend of Eleanor Roosevelt and Nobel Peace Prize laureate Jane Addams (1860-1935), Mary Richmond (1861-1928), also German Jewish-Christian convert Alice Solomon (1872-1948), Belgian medical doctor and social worker Dr René Sand (1877-1953), Russian-Ukrainian-French Andrew Mouravieff-Apostol, and others, as commended by the International Federation of Social Workers. Most of them experienced and worked in times that were harsh for ordinary people: the Great Depression of the 1920s; the simultaneous and subsequent rise of Fascism and Nazism; World War I and II; and the nightmare reality of the Holocaust. They and others worked to make international co-operation materialise amongst social workers and amongst nation states; theirs was always at once a ‘mixed local, national and international perspective and approach’, with an understanding of the way individual human beings are unavoidably affected by never-ceasing global movements, shifts and events. They have left us with a rich legacy, all aware simultaneously of local and international living individual and community problems and issues (Healy 2000, Ch 2).
Their approaches are fully compatible with the critical and structural approaches that are not necessarily identified by them as such.

**Who or what is a ‘Registered Migration Agent’?**

Ife’s observation that ‘*all social work must be concerned with the global, and all social work is in this sense international social work*’ (2001:74), provides me with a convenient conceptual link between my two professions. The peculiarly Australian profession of a ‘Registered Migration Agent’ is defined by the ‘The Migration Agents’ Registration Authority’ (MARA); it is a clear, rational, legal, nuts-and-bolts, utilitarian working definition:

‘“Registered Migration Agent” is a specialist term, as a person who gives immigration assistance by using knowledge or experience of migration procedures to assist a person in making an application for migration to Australia or in proceedings relating to an applicant. A Migration Agent must be registered with the Australian Migration Agents’ Registration Authority and must pay an annual registration fee with non-fee charging agents paying greatly reduced fees. The related law is found in the Migration Act 1958, Part 3 – Sections 275-332B Agents and Immigration Assistance and in subsequent Regulations in 1997 and 1998’ (Burn & Reich 2005:35; Crock 1998; Jupp 2002; Vrachnas et al, 2005).

‘There seems to be little analytic literature about the Australian profession of RMA, though allusions are made to it as a legal and historical feature’ (Jupp 2002; Crock 1998)

and some references are made to immigration and refugee law and social work (Kenny, Fiske and Ife, 2002). Arguments for the need for agents to be sensitive to language and cultural needs of the clients are made by lawyer-researcher Matthew Albert (2003); there is, however, a growing body of relevant, current and valuable literature that addresses the relationship between social work and the practice of law generally, including that of Kennedy & Richards (2007), Swain (2002), Zifcak (2002) and Ife (2001). There is also an abundance of literature on human rights advocacy work *per se* (such as Bateman 1995). Registered migration agents include lawyers and non-lawyers, and there are those lawyers and non-lawyers who work for commercial profit and those
who work in the employ of a community-based government agency or non-government agency on a not-for-profit basis. Some agents use their profit-making business arm to fund their low-cost or pro-bono services to low- or no-income people and the Australian Federal Government supports some of the work undertaken by RILC through its tendering/contractual systems.

**Writers’ voices comparing and contrasting the two professions**

A *segue* into considering the complementary features of the two professions might emerge from a consideration of the social-work practice implications of workers’ involvement with torture victims (Engstrom and Okamura 2004); these writers remind social workers that their Code of Ethics requires them to serve their client populations competently and to promote social justice and human rights. They also encourage social workers to enhance their working knowledge of multi-cultural and multi-linguistal populations so as to have ‘*a working understanding of immigration, immigration policies, and the acculturation processes and stresses*’ (p.8).

Social workers find themselves in a dilemma about how to refer to the people they help: ‘*clients, customers, consumers, service users; patients, experts by experience*’ (McLaughlan 2008; Kennedy & Richards 2007:8; Ferguson & Lalavette 2004:304; Ife 2001:168-169) knowing that each label reveals a particular ideological bias. That dilemma does not concern RMAs; a utilitarian definition of ‘client’ is to be found in Section 306C of the *Migration Act* 1958. What, at first glance, is curious about that definition is that the definition of the ‘client’ includes directions on how to act if the agent dies.

Practising lawyer/barrister, legal academic and social worker (and former social-work student peer) Spencer Zifcak, (2002:256,257), in comparing the two professions and using a broad concept of law and social work, argues that, for social work, human relations are of central importance, whereas the law itself is of central importance to the lawyer. And, by extension, migration and refugee law is of central importance to the RMA worker. He goes on to highlight some of the contradictory foci and strengths: social workers seem to concentrate on the clients’ needs; they work with disadvantaged people; they attempt to represent while simultaneously caring for people; they have a concentration on psycho-dynamics; and, having little regard to the legal context, practice errors arise. A social worker’s tendency is to benevolent paternalism out of
working in the client’s ‘best interests’ and his/her lack of procedural sophistication disadvantages the client (Zifcak 2002:250). In some fields, social work counsellors are being identified as ‘counsellor advocates’ (e.g. the previously mentioned Foundation for Survivors of Torture); at the same time, ‘interdisciplinary approaches such as therapeutic jurisprudence that attend to the impact of legal activity on emotional and psychological well-being’ (Wexler and Winick 1996; Winick 2003; Winick and Wexler 2003; in Kennedy and Richards (2007:23) are being called for. Bates et al (1996:7) quote Mc Clean (1980) in pointing out different decision-making styles in more than matters of procedure, the lawyer taking a harder and less flexible attitude whilst the relationship between client and social worker may be longer and more close. In the Critical Theory tradition (Kellner 1989), rather than drawing hard lines between and amongst different disciplines, interconnections are identified, as in my choice of academic and literary voices; indeed, it is in the interconnectedness of my dual professions that I work best (Briskman, 2003).

Writers on advocacy, advocates, and para-legal advocates

The concept of advocacy is always central to migration and refugee law agent work, to all forms of legal casework and central to some social work practice; advocacy appears to be varied as I place its different practical expression and realisations along a continuum with RMA legal advocacy at one end and certain social work-labelled activities at the opposite end. I would prefer to refer to migration agents as ‘migration advocates’ because of their work and roles. The Macquarie Concise Dictionary (Third Edition 2000) defines the verb ‘to advocate’ as ‘to plead in favour of; support or urge by argument; recommend publicly’; and as a noun, its definition is ‘One who defends, vindicates, or espouses a cause by argument, an upholder, a defender; Latin: one summoned to help another (in a legal case)’. The registered migration agent plays a legal advocate’s role but, if not a professional lawyer, may be described as a ‘para-professional’ or, in this case, a ‘para-legal worker’. Again, the Macquarie Concise Dictionary provides a short definition of ‘para’: ‘a prefix meaning ancillary: paramedical, paralegal’.

In more detail, ‘Advocacy involves acting, mediating and interceding for another, in an attempt to influence the behaviour of the decision makers. It aims to improve the responsiveness of social arrangements to people’s needs’ (McNutt 2003; Payne 1997;
O’Connor et al. 1995 in Allan, Pease, Briskman 2003:69; Fook 1993; Wood et al, 1991). Ife (2001) makes a nice link between social work and migration work in discussing civil and political or first-generation human rights’ advocacy, including ‘work with refugees in prison, reform ... relatives of “the disappeared” groups, prison reform attempting to secure adequate legal representation for people, work on behalf of relatives of the “disappeared”, work in community legal centres and so on’ (Ife 2001:34).

Some social-work writers express reservations about this advocacy role, apparently fearing that it could dis-empower people (Mullaly 1997:61; Fook 2002:150,151) whilst Ife (2001:45,46) warns against the impotence of practising case advocacy while ignoring the need to change the structure in which the violation occurs. Linking advocacy with consciousness-raising within a structural approach is commended by Moreau (1990); but in their discussion of the legal advocate, Kennedy and Richards (2007:105) raise serious reservations about the reality and efficacy of social workers’ seeing themselves as ‘advocates of the oppressed’.

Policy advocacy is a feature of both the social worker and the human rights’ lawyer roles; community legal centres (including RILC and Springvale Monash, with which I still work) both individually and in the Australian Federation of Community Legal Centres, are key players in diverse and ongoing law reform initiatives, informed by the extensive casework experience they have (Law handbook Harper ed 2005; Ellis 1996). My long experience of working with community lawyers, from 1984 till the present, has allowed me to gain insights into their way of working, and to develop respect for their skills and knowledge; and it has been a pleasure working collaboratively with them and the clients.

Advocacy is a central feature of the registered migration agent’s work, a form of ‘creative justice’ (Stevenson 1973, cited in Payne 1996:86) exercised in work with the Department of Immigration, the Migration or Refugee Review Tribunal (MRT or RRT), the Administrative Appeals Tribunal (AAT) of the Federal Magistrates’, the Federal and the High Court of Australia. They also assist applicants to request that the Minister of Immigration use her/his non-compellable discretion to allow for what the applicant considers a more favourable decision.
Social workers, in turn, may include help and assistance, capacity building, casework, change facilitation, community development, conflict resolution, counselling, group work, information dissemination, lobbying, management, mediation, rehabilitation, research, therapy, training and education in their vocabulary of practice approaches. Frequently, in addition to what I have explicated as their ‘mainstay’ work, the RMA worker assists non-permanent residents experiencing poverty, persecution and marginalisation.

Finally, my own social work advocacy role to the Magistrates’ Courts with victims of domestic violence and to the Social Security Appeals Tribunal (SSAT) was always characterised by my explaining processes and procedures to the applicant, keeping her/him informed throughout the process and preparing him/her or them as the specialist of their own lives to present their own story within the boundaries of the related regulations and policies.

Writers’ voices: Professional values and ethics

Though activities and responsibilities of social workers vary greatly, there are a number of core values (Hugman, 2003) that are believed to be common to most and may guide and direct practice: the belief in human dignity (‘respect for persons’, see Payne 1996:73,74), human rights, non-discrimination, self-determination, social justice, empowerment; culturally specific, and all, of course, viewed from the perspectives inherent in ‘a western paradigm’ (Allen 2003:53; Ife 2001; Payne 1996:86).

This is a laudable rhetoric that is difficult to translate consistently into action and change. Still existent traditional social-work values were expounded by US-based Father Biesteck (1961) as:

‘individualization; the purposeful expression of feelings; controlled emotional involvement; acceptance; a non judgmental attitude; client self-determination; and confidentiality’ (quoted in Banks 2001:137–140, and addressed by Dominelli 2004:64).

Again, social workers may strive for these values, but social work’s social control position in society and its bureaucracies and some of its practices can make these values contradictory or ‘cognitively dissonant’, unattainable and generally difficult to adhere to.
The duality if not the paradoxical nature of a number of values identified by Payne (1996:69,70) should raise serious practice questions and dilemmas for the social worker: ‘Individualisation-collectivisation, acceptance-rejection, dependency, non-judgmental attitude-critical evaluation, anti-discriminatory approach-avoid labelling and victimizing, self-determination-rule following or interdependent, respect for persons-respect for community, confidentiality-openness’. Mullaly (1993), in turn, categorises the core values of social work as those of ‘humanism’ and ‘egalitarianism’ and its ‘secondary’ or ‘instrumental values’ as respect, self determination and acceptance. The AASW has produced its ‘AASW Code of Ethics’ (AASW 1999) to which I previously referred and its ‘Practice Standards for Social Workers: Achieving Outcomes’ (AASW, 2003). However, in their postmodernist critique of the AASW Code of Ethics, Briskman and Noble (2000:57) concluded that ‘these codes emphasized individual choice, minimizing [attention for] structural disadvantage and social discrepancy.’

Discussion and debates about verifying the philosophical systems at the core but often contentious level of practice are topical and certainly have been with social work since its inception and early historical beginnings, as variously pointed out in previous sections of this thesis.

The principles of duty of care and obligation are common to both social work and legal professions; they are quite concrete concepts as they are situated in both professions’ self-understanding. Complicating the situation for social workers is their difficulty in identifying their real clients: for example, in family or community work (Kennedy & Richards 2007:122-146). Lawyers are very clear about who their clients are.

A humane, human rights’ active solicitor-barrister practising in criminal law briefly described a case she was involved in at the time of our conversation: a carer in a residential facility had been charged with sexual assault on a young adolescent boy in his care. As the adult defendant’s counsel, she raised a question about the teenager’s motives in having a container of lubricant in his room. The barrister’s implication in that rhetorical question
was that the young adolescent was thereby implicated in and responsible for the adult’s assault on him. Social work considers the complexities of this situation, of the boy’s vulnerability, of the unequal relationship between a more experienced, more physically experienced and powerful adult and the young teenager etc. This, for me, revealed one striking difference between lawyer and social work – as the carer’s lawyer, my legal colleague had to focus completely on the defence of her client. Her perceived ‘duty of care’ was to her client, the adult youth worker/carer and the ‘victim’ was primarily an adversary in court.

The often conflicting yet simultaneous roles of care and of social control (Healy 1999:121; Rossiter 1996:3,34; Dominelli 2004:89) make it imperative that social workers be honest in the appraisal of their relationship with clients.

The RMA Code of Ethics sets out to establish a proper standard for the conduct of a Registered Migration Agent, establishing minimum attributes of good character in knowing the Migration Act and Regulations1998, completing continuing professional development, using diligence and honesty, dealing fairly with the clients; the remaining aims relate to running a business, confidentiality of files and accountability to the client and being able and willing to deal fairly with clients.

**Writers’ voices and a critical structural approach**

Lundy (2004:12) states that ‘the structural approach to social work practice starts with an understanding of global events’; a statement which might just as well be referring to the importance of the practice of the RMA worker, who needs to be informed about particular global events and structures, as clients are people from all parts of the world. The critical approach is an overarching approach and provides a way for me to conceptualise my work in both professions:

‘Many social workers chose their profession because of its mandate to treat clients in context; that is, to incorporate cultural and societal understanding into all social work activities and then to apply private concerns to national and international issues’ (Schechtman 2004:1 on Reichert 2003).
Throughout my professional work life, I have been at least as interested in clients’ life contexts as in their psychology; this duality might have been detrimental (Rossiter 1996:24) had I not realised the possibility of ‘conjunctural analysis’ (Gramsci 1976 in Wilson 2004:5), ‘the space where inner and outer confront each other’ (Ehrenreich 1985). Those contexts, including the time and place we were born into (our place in history and our physical locus), the family life we experienced and the culture and cultures that frame/have framed and help/helped to form our lives, our places in society – class or status, our formal education, our religious or non-religious practice, the major political ideologies of the state in which we live, the groups we are categorised into (e.g. terrorist, criminal, refugee, member of the intelligentsia, homosexual, unemployed, deviant, elite sportsperson, tribal) as well as their intersections and overlaps and contradictions and tensions.

A consideration of all or some of the structures that envelop any of my clients’ lives begins for me from the moment I meet the person as a client; and the deeper and ‘thicker’ my experience of him/her, the more I develop my understanding of him/her. The Structural Approach is based on Critical Theory (Kellner, 1992), and that body of theory developed from the time of the establishment in right-wing dominated Nazi Germany in the 1930s, or the so-called Frankfurt School – ‘the collective name given to a group of German intellectuals who sought to continue Marxist theory in an idiosyncratic form and in unfavorable conditions’ (Callinicos, 1999). Important academic figures associated with the school, which was forced to relocate to New York’s Colombia University with many of its protagonists in 1934, were all known to and by their peer, Hannah Arendt. Though sympathetic to Marxist ideas and ideals, she believed that political activity and attainment of social rights, rather than Marx’s concentration on the ‘production’ domain and the economic set of ‘production relationships’ in capitalism, was of central importance (King 2003:213).

All of the original members of the Frankfurt School (Max Horkheimer (1895-1973), Theodor Adorno (1903-1969), Herbert Marcuse (1898-1979) were born in Germany and spent at least some years in exile in the US, and some never returned to live there. They favoured and promulgated classical Marxist ideas and, to various degrees, raised serious reservations about capitalism. The relevance of Marxist theory to social work, including the central concept of ‘alienation’ within his critique of capitalism, keeps
being raised, particularly at times of social crisis (Ferguson & Lavalette 2004), for example, during the most recent collapse of the global capitalist financial systems in 2008-2009 and the frantic attempts by governments to ‘save’ them.


The ‘critical tradition’ in social work spans feminist and anti-racism theories and praxis, radical social work of various hues and participatory action research (Healy 1999:115,116). According to the main understanding in the critical approach, structural oppression ‘occurs through the systemic constraints on subordinate groups that take the form of unquestioned norms, behaviors and symbols and in the underlying assumptions of institutional rules’ (Mullaly 1997). Rossiter warns against the narrowness of dichotomising individual and society, arguing for a social-work theory predicated on social justice (Rossiter 1996:23).

Though the law is central to RMA work, so too is the client. I find my ‘RMA self’ – sometimes inappropriately, sometimes appropriately – listening to and closely observing who this person before me is as well as establishing what this person wants of me as service provider within the law. It is here that I ‘as the social worker’ and I ‘as the registered migration agent’ are working as one. It is here too that my imagination – creative, compassionate, altruistic – is at work.

**The all-pervasive, encompassing influence of neo-liberal Ideology(ies)**

‘...the vocational aspects of social work ... are rooted in an ethic of care (Sevenhuijsen, 1998) which sits unhappily alongside the market discipline which has been imposed on social work practice by government fiat. The market ethos ignores the relational basis of social work or the human relationships within which social work practice based on an ethic of care is enacted’ (Dominelli 2004:71).
Whilst Dominelli does not much use the term ‘neo-liberalism’ and I don’t want to be simplistic in my rendition and use of it and don’t feel confident in condemning all aspects of its underlying approach/philosophy, it does seem to offer a useful reference point to round off my discussions about the convergence of and the differences between the two professions I have been working in.

Reflecting on the influence of the Critical Approach on my thinking about my social-work practice has made me realise how pervasively neo-liberalism – aka ‘market liberalism’ or ‘economic rationalism’ – has dominated our world and its relationships on many levels throughout the decades that my study spans. I realise that it has been one of the emerging underlying infrastructures of my work. It also represents an often insidious and constant influence on the way I live and think. Neo-liberal economic and related policies take different forms (Hiebert et al 2003) in different places and at different times. As mentioned, the Australian version has been termed ‘economic rationalism’ (with Margaret Thatcher as the UK model, Ronald Reagan as the US model, and Victoria’s Coalition Government Premier Jeff Kennett during most of the ’90s) and it has been advocated by politicians of both ‘Left’ and ‘Right’ ideologies (Labor’s Bob Hawke and Paul Keating in Australia and Tony Blair in Great Britain would certainly have to be included in this category, pretensions of a ‘Third Way’ notwithstanding).

Nations of the world have all been affected directly or indirectly by related ideologies, especially where United Nations ‘instruments’ have been invaded and dominated by, for example, the World Bank, the IMF and, finally, the World Trade Organisation.

Characteristics of neo-liberalism include: the deregulation of market controls; small government; the downsizing of services; the privatisation of government-owned business; contracting out or ‘outsourcing’ of services to the private sector by government; tax cuts for high-income earners according to an assumed ‘trickle-down’ strategy; reduction of taxes on business’ profit-making even in the most fundamental of human services; taxes on consumption and the move to the user-pays principle in welfare services; the emphasis on balanced or surplus national and state and even local government budgets; the removal of what has come to be seen as ‘interference’ (by governments and unions) in the workings of the labour market; structural adjustment; the dismantling of the welfare state; the removal of tariffs and other obstacles to
international ‘free trade’; allowing dominance by the seemingly omnipotent, amorphous ‘globalised’ market with its virtual electronic market-place to be the only way to organise society and where the operation of a market or market-like structure is seen as the – probably only – ethical standard to judge on the ‘righteousness’ of all human action\textsuperscript{42}. All of these, as I have already indicated earlier, are I believe foundational to an understanding of some of the major causes which bring displaced people, refugees and other migrants to our shores.

In an ominous warning of the dramatic collapse of individual nation states and global markets in late 2008 and throughout 2009, Adelman (1999:87) stated: ‘The world of global capital is totally divorced from both nature and history, where value depends primarily on the faith in the global system itself’ (also Berger 2008:109, 113). Profit-making by corporate elites is ‘incompatible with social justice’ in both social work (Wilson 2004:16; Dominelli 1999) and human rights migration/refugee law advocacy, though profit-making and related values and practices are compatible with and even desirable (if not essential!) in neo-liberal practice.

Detrimental influences of neo-liberalism are also being experienced in social-work education (Wehbi & Turcotte 2007) and some propose that social work of the near future may do well to realign itself with alternative civil society and anti-capitalist movements. Allied with current neo-liberalism is neo-capitalism, in part ‘to blame for poverty, environmental destruction, and most recently war’ (Ferguson, Lalavette and Mooney 2002 quoted in Ferguson 2004:7) and which is considered to be ‘anathema to social justice’.

A post-1999 local example of the effectiveness of this was the emergence of the civil, alternative-political social movement in Australia that drew together a large and loose but effective coalition of groups, including grass-roots groups and networks, who opposed mandatory detention of asylum seekers and the issuing of Temporary Protection Visas (TPV) to them. Justice for Asylum Seekers (JAS), Rural Australians for Refugees (RAR) Actors for Refugees, Refugee Action Collective (RAC) (Briskman

\textsuperscript{42} The following are amongst the writers who highlighted for me different features of globalisation and/or neo-liberalism: Adelman 1999:86-110; Davies & Leonard 2004; Ferguson 2004:1-9; George, 2000; Kessel 2005, Chapter 4; McLean 2003:368; Monbiot 2000; Parkin et al 2006:430; Spellman 2002; Treanor 2005:15; Wilson, G. 2004; Wolf 2007.
2008) have been some of the groups who eloquently and loudly ‘stood up’ when the effects of brutal government policies became clear for all to see. Ongoing attempts to find ways through to and into new ways of thinking and organising ourselves include the rise of activist opposition to international and global finance and trade alliances and agreements and the resurgence of interest and activities in small face-to-face democracy. An example is the implementation of Anthony Giddens’ concept and paradigm of ‘social investment’ (Perkins, Nelms and Smyth 2004); a resurgence of interest in ‘civil society’ and its relationships with political and economic spheres (Kivisto 2007:112; Boulet et al 2008).

**What does all of this tell me about the social worker and the RMA?**

All of us human beings, whether we are helping others or being helped, whether human service workers or recipients, are affected by current thinking and acting trends. Social workers and RMAs assume the discourse of the corporate world in many ways and shift to seeing the world through consumer lenses; and clients do as well.

Formally, at least the rhetoric of social and civil and administrative justice, or creative justice, may be the stated aim of social work involvement; whilst lawyers, and amongst them, migration agents, will aim mainly at civil and administrative and judicial justice. Social workers provide service to mainly less-privileged people in any community where legal process services are expensive, except where they are subsidised by government, as with Australia’s Legal Aid system in or Community Legal Centres in refugee resettlement, or some subsidised asylum seeking legal advocacy. The motivations of civic responsibility and compassion may well characterise both social worker (Morley & Ife, 2002) and lawyer; whilst the lawyer is more likely, as a migration agent or not, to be better-versed in the relevant statutes than the social worker may be. The social worker, in contrast, will initially relate to the psycho-social/material needs of the individual ‘client’ and, from the critical perspective I have come to enunciate, identify structural and global elements and processes.

But from where I now stand, after long practice in the professions, I am more than ever struck by the complementarity of both professions (Chang-Muy et al 2008). This is an issue I shall deal with more specifically in the concluding chapter. To obtain a more grounded picture of the validity of my claim, this chapter would obviously more appropriately have been written by clients, since they know their own needs intimately.
and what works best for them. Again, to illustrate my contentions and to create a degree of coherence between my more theoretical/abstract statements and certain practice situations, I will conclude with the story of a recent experience (10th June 2009). I hope that it will serve as a validation of my assumption of ‘convergence and divergence’ as expressed in the title of this chapter.

As I have already indicated, I have continued to practice RMA and SW throughout the four years this research project has taken me. There have been numerous important encounters with clients. The following encounter with Joseph is especially important as it occurred within two months of the completion of this project and it has had a solid impact on me. I interviewed him ....

Josef is a young adult African male, who believes from what has been told to him by relatives that he is 18. He has only fractured memories of his childhood; he understands that he was born in a South Sudanese village but was handed over to a paternal aunt when he was only a baby, as his mother feared for his safety. As he reaches back into his memory, he can recall being in a Kenyan refugee camp when he was about 11, but his memories of what happened in the interim are dim; war raged and he was a child amongst displaced people; the memories of deprivation, violence and death are painful and difficult for him to re-call.

He expresses his resentment of the way he has been treated by the paternal aunt and her children, but does not give any examples of that treatment. I establish that he appears on one of his cousin’s refugee resettlement visas, that he was included as a brother and son of the paternal aunt when brought into Australia. Josef wants now to bring his real mother to Australia; he understands that she is in Kenya and that she has recently fetched her other children from Sudan. He thinks that relatives he no longer speaks with have tried unsuccessfully to bring her to Australia on three or four
occasions. He has no idea where that paper work might be. He has no idea if he has been granted citizenship and, in fact, does not understand my related question about his status. If he has, he says his aunt would have organised that. His life in Australia seems to have been very troubled – he ran away from his aunt and cousins and went interstate, attracted by former South Sudanese male friends and acquaintances; while in the place he said he was intercepted and cautioned in relation to violent behaviour by police.

His current dream is to bring his mother and siblings to Australia as he imagines having his own family around him will resolve the many problems he has. He lives in crisis accommodation provided by a fringe spiritual group and is accompanied to the interview by a man claiming to be the boy’s support person. That person seemed not to be able to comprehend what was discussed about the boy’s migration matters, making some inappropriate threats and comment: ‘I’ll go and complain to the PM about this! He’s got to have his mother here with him!’ and he clearly misunderstood my explanations.

My role:

I interviewed this young man with his support person, both having opted for that. Though I interviewed J in English, I established that he misunderstood even some basic expressions; however, he said that he is not a fluent speaker of his first language and is illiterate in both languages.

I was careful to sit opposite him with no table in between us; I hoped to gain his trust so that I could get basic information and make a quick assessment of his situation. He cried, he clenched and unclenched his fists, he tried to understand the complexities of his and his mother’s migration situation, complicated by her never having been declared to Australian authorities as his mother. He
seemed very tired and cradled his head in his hands a number of times. When I asked if he had headaches, he answered that he often had. I made sure that while gathering bureaucratic information and providing explanations of the related refugee and migration law, programs and policies, I acknowledged what appeared to be his feeling responses.

Things which went on in my social worker/RMA/just-human-being ‘head’:

- The destructive consequences of war and displacement
- Trying to fit him and his mother into Australia’s resettlement policy
- Communication with a young man who seems to have no well-formed language to be able to use to express himself
- What I have experienced per client work and media, etc of young South Sudanese males in Australia
- Dreams of and yearning for the reunited and ideal family and unbroken, ideal relationships
- A gulf between the law, bureaucratic process and this young man’s life, feelings and understanding
- Well-established knowledge of the related law and policy and appreciation of the related difficulties

... and what to do about it all...
Chapter 10  New insights … new learning … discoveries

Introduction

In this final chapter, I will review the steps I have undertaken and the course of my learning from the very first thoughts I had about researching my dual practice.

Approaching the end of my working life, I wanted to reflect in a structured way on the relationship between the two disciplines and on possible new learning opportunities for social work(ers) in particular. I found myself facing a daunting task. I was trying to re-integrate the various analytical themes I had first distilled from my reflections, and show the reader how in praxis these themes become moments in a complex process. This allowed me to consider all at once the local and the global, the personal and the professional, the private and the public, the internal me and the social/relational me (the newspaper reader and grandmother, the critical thinker and the compassionate carer, supporter and activist).

I will again use story (case study) as a medium to illustrate and share how this complex and integrated practice works on a day-to-day basis. I will follow the case study with more reflections on my experiences and my learning from the research process (Stake, 2000). Part One of this final chapter offers the story of my reciprocal relationship with one of my last ‘cases’, M and K. Part Two will offer conclusions and learnings from the process.

Part One: The case of W and K, including a tribute to Aung San Suu Kyi

‘All sorrows can be borne if we put them into a story.’(Karen Blixen aka Isak Dinesen 1885-1962, in Baehr, 2003)

‘...the story reveals the meaning of what would otherwise remain an intolerable event ... The world is indeed “full of curious stories, circumstances and curious situations which are waiting to be told.” More precisely, suggests Arendt from her curious perspective, “the world is full of stories because it is full of lives”’ (Cavarero 2000:2 quotes Arendt 1975:162).

‘The commonplace fact that we may be consoled by the knowledge that we do not suffer alone informs Isak Dinesen ... Her point is not merely that stories characteristically are ways of making sense of the lives of their heroes. It is that they do so against a compassionate sense of a common human condition’ (Gaita 1999:98).

Introduction

‘All sorrows can be borne if they are put into a story ... ’ This statement proved irresistible to me as I prepared for this final, poignant narrative chapter. Julia Kristeva (2001) in writing of the three women she holds in particular esteem – Hannah Arendt, Melanie Klein and Collette – helped me to name the ‘case study’ in this way. Within this chapter is my recognition of the importance of voices, of narrative, of my story encompassing and being encompassed by the stories of the country of Burma and of many other people. Aung San Suu Kyi, through her writings in Freedom From Fear and Other Writings (1991), can leave the reader with hope in human resilience.

At the end of this text writing work I can turn to a story of my roles as social worker, registered migration agent and advocate and as a ‘generic human being’. I was at all times social worker and refugee advocate and at the same time remained, I hope, at all times just a human being.

Using this case, I want to illustrate the central themes of my work in the two professions, and their ongoing integration. I use my own recollection of these events and make no claim to the accuracy of dates and exact chronology of events, something peoples from oral tradition would do as a matter of course. What was significant and memorable to me about the time my client(s) and I worked extensively and intensely with each other, related as much to what was happening to me personally at the time as to the events that were unfolding in my clients’ life; our relationship was characterised in practice by the societal norm of reciprocity, a crucial attribute along with humans’ interdependence in any society that endorses social justice (Dominelli 2004: 231; Wikipedia ‘Reciprocity (social and political philosophy)’ 2008:8).

Hannah Arendt, always as a philosopher interested in human beings’ communal, political actions and activities in distinguishing who each is, was fascinated by the biography; she chose Jewish Rahel Varnhagen and Karen Blixen aka Isak Dinesen to re-tell the stories of their lives. Blixen recognised the nice complexities of narrating
people’s lives, no one human being exempt from suffering, no matter how brief or long between birth and death.

My involvement with the on-shore refugee family as both social worker and RMA began about nine years ago, I believe in 2000, but the events that shaped W’s life and my approach to the work I do, started long before that time. I know that I was motivated by compassion for many people in this story, by fascination in the Burmese people’s stories and history, by liking these colleagues/clients, by being angered by the violence perpetrated against them by the Burmese military junta and, in very different ways, the violence perpetrated by the Australian government, by my delight in sharing in the narrating of their stories, by a sense that this was to be one of the very last of the cases I would have the energy and passion to fight for – my ‘Springvale swan song’ and their safety …

The knowledge I already had about the Burmese and Burma and the post-colonial diaspora of Burmese was to be augmented by my personal interaction with my clients and their family members, their fellow community members mainly in the Springvale area, researching for my migration agent advocacy role, continuing to read human rights literature and web information, and my active ongoing interest in national and international events. The more I knew about these historical and political structural contexts, the more effective I believed my social and RMA service to them could be.

One of the participants in my study is also Burmese of Karen ethnicity, and as a former work colleague, he too helped me to keep learning about his country, its recent history and the violence of the current government. His political awakening came in his student years in Burma and was followed by his political opposition and humanitarian works amongst the displaced Burmese on the Thai-Burma border and in Melbourne which continues as I write.

**W and K before we met**

My knowledge of W’s life story continued to develop over the time we interacted. What of her life we needed to present to the Minister for Immigration centred around her well-evidenced and well-founded past experience of persecution and of likely persecution should she and her family members be forced to return to Burma/Myanmar.
W was born of a well-established professional Arakanese Buddhist family in Burma in the 1950s. Well-educated, she was, however, not particularly interested in politics and, on the whole, oblivious to and ignorant of the true extent of the structural and systemic oppression and human rights injustices that were rampant in her own country. Her life was ‘safe’ and one of relative privilege in that society. After a first unsuccessful marriage she was left a sole parent; she then met and is still married to K who had become a parent with his first wife as well. K and W had another two children; and almost all their children and grand-children now reside as citizens in Australia. Before fleeing to Australia, in the 1980s and 1990s, the couple worked, travelled and lived extensively in other Asian countries. At some point, the family spent time in Thailand where W taught ESL to resettling refugees from Cambodia/Kampuchea and Vietnam, in Khoi Dang UNHCR camp. She also managed a restaurant in Bangkok, whilst K continued to work for a UN agency.

After their return to Burma/Myanmar, they were arrested on separate occasions and held for a number of months in Rangoon’s notorious Insein Prison, where each experienced loss of liberty, torment and an intimate and deep understanding of the violence of the military junta. This experience revealed to them the way ordinary people from their respective ‘small places’ lost their human rights – all three generations. Suffering and gross loss of human dignity characterised the insane world of Insein (M. Wai & Dunbar, S., 2003). This is the prison in which Aung San Suu Kyi

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43 Arakanese: a people who had founded their kingdom along the west coast of Burma; (Aung San Suu Kyi 1991:49) Under the title A Turbulent History Suu Kyi briefly traces a history of the turbulent relationships amongst the various peoples of Burma – including the Mon from Central Asia between 2500 and 1500 BC. The Mon are believed to have been followed by the Tibeto-Burmans from the North; and Indians entered from the West. By the 13th century the Shan people were gaining ascendancy with bitter internal wars and were strong until the resented arrival of the British, who apparently fostered inter- and intra-tribal conflicts from the 19th century; the Karen people along the south-eastern tract of Burma responded positively to Christian missionaries. From the beginning of WWII in 1939, the independence movement gained ascendancy. Suu’s father became commander-in-chief of the Burmese army but was assassinated in 1948 before independence was formally introduced. The three major racial groupings that remain are: the Mons-Khmers, the Tibeto-Burmans, and the Thai-Shans, with seven major sub-groupings: the Chins, Kachins, Karens, Kayahs, Arakanese (Rakhins) and Shans (ibid. 199:44-81).
has been incarcerated on a number of occasions, in a special camouflaged wing of the facility. So, Insein itself has become one of the ‘characters’ in this narrative.

All but one of M’s and K’s now adult children made their separate ways to Australia, with their daughters accepted as students into different educational institutions. W remained for a couple of years in Rangoon with twin boys they had informally adopted in Insein; and ongoing harassment by the authorities took on ominous features, so they obtained tourist visas to visit their children in Australia, and lodged protection visa applications, which were promptly rejected. The adopted twins remained in Burma with a small group of homeless children who had been taken in by W and K years before; these children lived with two women who had known, served and been financially supported by W and then by the couple for many years. The whole venture entailed risk for all the family members.

The Refugee Tribunal upheld the rejection of their protection visa application by the Immigration Department. Because of the way the decision was written, W and K were advised they had little chance of success if they went on into the judicial review process. Their next and possibly final step was to approach the Minister for Immigration to ask for his intervention and implementation of his non-compellable discretion to allow them to remain in Australia.

It is at this point of their story that I enter: as a Registered Migration Advocate and social worker at the Springvale Bureau and advocate to Philip Ruddock, the then Immigration Minister, on their behalf.

My life at the time I met W and K

In short, I had worked for a decade and a half at the Springvale Bureau and was struggling to understand and work through personal and family problems and crises. I had embarked on a beautiful spiritual journey alone but with the compassion, wisdom, support of other people I met in this remarkable period of my life. Though firmly founded in an Irish Catholic ritual, my spiritual life metamorphosed, nurtured by all of

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44 Burma’s pro-democracy leader, Aung San Suu Kyi, on Thursday was charged under section 22 of the country’s penal code, for protecting a criminal and disturbing the stability of the state and is currently being detained in Rangoon’s Insein Prison

the experiences I had had in my life till then, including the different faith traditions and religious practices of the many clients and work colleagues I had come to know.

My professional work experiences were still rich and compelling, and I appreciated and took advantage, for my clients’ sake, of the freedom I was given by my employer.

Though I had not been to Burma, I had flown over it on a number of occasions, perhaps on the way to Europe and back several times and definitely on the way to and from Bangladesh twice; I may have imagined seeing the golden diamond-studded domes of the magnificent and beloved Shwedagon Pagoda in Rangoon/Yangon and the waters of the Irrawaddi Delta glinting in the steamy sunlight. I had taken an active interest in Burma throughout the time I was in Springvale, having met a number of longer-established Anglo-Burmese residents and then meeting, from about 1989, the first of the displaced Karen students. I recall now, as I write, my now deceased father’s strong tenor voice singing the WWII song ‘On the Road Mandalay’ – very personal and old associations with Burma. Perhaps curiously, a reading of the haunting novel by a young first-time writer, Daniel Mason (2004) took me in my imagination to areas in Burma over a century ago, outside Yangon, where right now different tribal peoples, including the Shan people, have been doing forced labour under the generals. I learned more and more about Aung San Sui Kyi from reading and through Amnesty International, and from friends who had known her personally. Deeply saddened by Aung San Suu Kyi’s suffering, I participated in an official Christian-Buddhist memorial ceremony at Melbourne’s Canterbury Anglican Church when her husband Dr. Michael Aris, born in 1946, died in 1999.

**Meeting W and K and our RMA, social work and personal relationship**

When W appeared amongst the Springvale Bureau volunteers, we seemed ready to meet each other. Eventually, she asked me for my help, as an RMA, to request of the Immigration Minister that he use his non-compellable discretion to allow the family to remain in Australia. Learning more about Burma and Burmese people was very appealing and I took up this fascinating challenge. The couple’s high-profile, skilled, specialist, very busy, and dedicated migration lawyer had suggested that they find another RMA – a not-for-profit or non-fee charging one, as the couple’s funds were dwindling. They found me.
While I was still working with many other clients, W, her husband and I spent numerous in- and after-office hours working to document all that they could remember of the persecution they had experienced, especially in their Insein prison incarceration. Details of K’s suffering had not appeared at all in the original Protection Visa application. Eventually, at my suggestion, he spent one full weekend sitting with his wife, the two documenting what he remembered of his experiences in Insein. So distressed was he after this exercise, that he asked for help and we made a referral to a counsellor based at the Springvale Bureau from the Victorian Foundation Survivors of Torture (VFST). W, K and I lobbied many important people; co-wrote her and her husband’s stories in a small booklet (always trying to ensure the desired linear rhetorical shape and conventions of the text); and participated in meditation and meditative prayer sessions on Friday evenings at a small Burmese supporting community church network, the Urban Neighbours of Hope Mission in Springvale. We ate together, laughed and really cried together as life events continued. We gave talks and lectures together, raising awareness about the cruel repression of their people by the military in Myanmar/Burma. I was working simultaneously as a casual teacher in the RMIT Social Work Program and thereby becoming more and more familiar with social work theories including critical structural approaches, which I was using almost intuitively. I knew that in order to understand their lives I needed to become acquainted with at least the political, religious, geographic, historical structures that had encompassed their lives so far. On perusing their file documents, I realised that their story had been only partly conveyed; we needed to ‘thicken’ the narrative.

The social welfare and psycho-social problems they experienced in Australia through being excluded as unsuccessful asylum seekers were complex. Nevertheless, their life skills, experiences, resilience, companionship and determination, along with the warmth and welcome extended by the Springvale Bureau paid and unpaid staff to them, and a dash of my social work expertise, meant they survived and were allowed to move from the status of outsider to the protected one of insider. The Immigration Minister intervened, they were granted Permanent Resident visas and, some time after I had left the Springvale Bureau, the orphaned twins were accepted into Australia as orphaned dependent children with my ongoing and RILC’s RMA’s assistance (Tullberg, 2004).

The dynamic relationship that grew from that initial meeting carried with it and was shaped by structures, events and systems I sometimes glimpsed as time went by and only later comprehended or understood in greater depth, and now with unexpected insights. I called on my own expertise and related confidence in my social work and RMA abilities for the tasks that I knew would be involved. I recognised and understood the contexts and was at ease in locating myself in the contexts as a responsible agent and was empowered to act (Fook, Ryan & Hawkins 2000:17)\(^45\).

As I offered my knowledge, skills, expertise and experience to them, they shared theirs with me, helping me to shift my thinking about personal problems to the international-political and back to the personal. Their shared lived experience augmented mine. As a practicing RMA, I was legally able to help and offer guidance through Australia’s regulated and complex asylum-seeker and migration processes. I made house visits at mutually convenient times and together we continued planning and implementing our formal strategy, or we celebrated welcome outcomes. This would not have been possible had I been working for a bureaucracy or any other corporatised organisation, rather than for the small community-based agency where K was both client and volunteer staff member; all of us were involved in providing support of various kinds. Their various immigration processes continued into 2005, when the orphaned twins arrived in Australia and I stepped aside.

The Springvale Bureau and I extended support and service to W and K and they volunteered some of their particular skills to the agency and thereby to the local

\(^45\) One surprising example of related experiences that helped to strengthen our working relationship was that of the significance of the world’s illicit drug trade to all three of us. K. is an intelligent and multi-skilled man; amongst the many responsible positions he has had was that with a UN Drugs agency and a massive network, tracking and tracing the labyrinthine, callous and ruthless illicit drug traders of the Golden Triangle; illicit addiction of a close relative causing family trauma; personal and family crises I have already alluded to had taken me and family members not long before my meeting W and K to the huge, highly political, Buddhist, CIA-established Tham Krabok detoxification and rehabilitation centre in Thailand, used for mainly Hmong Hill Tribe children, adolescents and adults and for a small number of non-Asian heroin addicted people of various ages. From the personal experiences of the illicit drug trade grew my increasing understanding of its part in illicit arms and drugs trades, the abuse and exploitation of both refugees and trafficked people and non-refugees, the globalisation of all interlinked human issues (Ife 2001; Dominelli 2004:2).
community; this ‘reciprocity, mutual exchange of gifts’ was possible because of the openness, welcoming nature and flexibility of the already established systems of the agency (Healey, Boulet and Boulet 2006; Dominelli 2004; Abercrombie 2000:290; Titmuss 1970; Mauss 1925; Boulet, Healey and Helton 2008)

W and K were inspiring – each, for example, prepared to undertake menial and demeaning lowly-paid positions while, already in their 50s, undergoing formal training for new occupations (e.g. W into nursing) with a view to being able to make Australia their permanent domicile. Their willingness to do absolutely anything seemed to me to be as much a cultural as a personal and psychological characteristic of the two. Without government welfare support and assistance they had had to identify and exercise their own many and varied skills.

There is something here too that is related to ‘risk-taking’ and to ‘resilience’ (Hough 2003:216 in Allen et al 2003). That risk-taking K and W dared to try out and succeeded in many realms of their lives – international business, UN investigation, teaching, owning, managing and cooking in a Bangkok restaurant – and perhaps that is a feature of most Protection Visa applicants who set out for another place, believing or hoping that they will be welcomed as refugees in need of protection. But ‘Risk is a contestable, slippery and ambiguous concept making it very difficult to define’ (Webb, 2006), though many proffer different definitions of risk in our times and many leave out the necessary reflection about the existential reality and necessity of uncertainty and impermanence in human and worldly affairs (e.g. Beck 1998; Wolf, 2007).

**Perspectives on the narrative**

Reflecting on my involvement as a social worker, RMA and eventually friend of W and K, I realise that people and places, near and beyond my own life and place, played important roles in the unfolding of this ‘case’. Active transnational kinship relationships and networks remained, even where members are separated and absent from each other. As RMA, I had to work on an international scale, become familiar with and bring into the picture we were to present to the Immigration Minister, those significant others not necessarily present in Australia. The narration of their stories encompassed that of some of mine, adding to the dynamism of the client-human services work relationships in this ‘case’.

The now familiar cast of people and places in this narrative included:
i. **Aung San Suu Kyi** - Our professional and personal working relationship was no doubt fired by the love and respect we all three feel for this woman, leader of the Opposition in Myanmar and prisoner of conscience for most of the time since July 1989. Her frail body is enlarged by her enormous courage, fortitude, leadership, and love of the Burmese people. There is also something in here in relation to being inspired, not only by the words of another person, but by the way she lives out her life. Her courage and that of Nelson Mandela, Vaclav Havel, Xanana Gusmao and Martin Luther King are singled out by Ife (2001:68,143) as examples of human beings who inspire ordinary people to become passionate about human rights by their living example.

ii. **Rangoon-Yangon** – This is the place where W and K lived before coming to Australia and where the orphaned twins were living for some five years before being re-united with the couple. I imagined it as a steaming, hot and luxuriant city in our neo-liberal world, where silly and exaggerated investments were being made in new multi-storied buildings. That story was very significant to K’s ‘well-founded fear of persecution’ submissions. But as W and K moved through the immigration processes in Australia, so further ominous events were occurring in Rangoon/Yangon. W and K provided me with alternative news updates as I was being informed by local and international English-language media. With the changing of the leading military men, so came a curious move away from the former administrative capital Rangoon/Yangon, to the town of Nay Pyi Taw north of Rangoon, in November 2005. Aung San Suu Kyi was less and less visible in Yangon, making the Generals’ vague promises about democratisation of Burma chillingly unreal. She was ambushed in the early 2000s during a brief respite from house arrest and allegedly detained in a specially camouflaged section of Insein Prison. (After her recent arrest following the farcical arrival of an American man who had swum across the water around her house to ask for her ‘forgiveness’, she was once again imprisoned there.) After their departure from Myanmar/Burma, W and K worried about the safety of the twins, their old nanny, and the other orphaned children they supported financially in the Burmese no-government-support tradition.
iii. **Insein Prison, inmates and guards** – Having spent such intimate times with W and K and through their vivid word pictures, I really felt that I had spent time in at least some parts of the then already notorious Insein prison complex. The women’s birth clinic, where W was incarcerated is more a place of torment and even torture than of healing. It was there that the women laboured and died or did not and delivered babies alive or dead, disposing of the unwanted or deceased neo-nates as best they could, in plastic bags in the wing’s earthen floor. Human dignity was flouted. The filth, the harshness and the cruelty of the guards, both female and male, are real to me, but so too are all the acts of kindness (Levinas’ ‘les petites bontés’) that W described in others and the kindness she offered others – e.g. as an unofficial midwife for many terrified young women. In that kindness lurks human compassion. W ‘introduced’ me to inmates of that part of Insein: the young, pregnant women, for example, who had been plucked off the streets where they had lived and been repeatedly abused by powerful men, policemen, the military, then punished for being pregnant or diseased and denied medical treatment. W assisted in the delivery of many babies in the six months she was there. The young pregnant women were often so isolated, of different ethnic groups and forced, lured or trafficked into the bigger towns and cities from the villages and rural areas where no-one knew that they had been incarcerated. Amongst them was TM, the twins’ mother. Though only in her early 20s she had been pregnant on a number of previous occasions, but none of the newborns had apparently survived the harshness of life immediately after delivery. She was herself undernourished and suffered untreated sexually transmitted diseases. And beyond her were the shadowy, the creepy, powerful military men of government, best known to the supportive Chinese Government.

iv. **TM** was and is still our silent watcher, dead or alive – her children now surviving and living well with other people, in Australia, a foreign place.

v. **Other narrative participants.** Involved in this case are/were many different people, groups and places. These include: the then Minister for Immigration, Mr. Philip Ruddock; the Springvale Bureau itself; and the Burmese migrants and refugees who had been settling in Springvale from the post-WWII period through to the time of the arrival of the first Karen people. In addition were the Urban Neighbours of Hope Mission. This is a network of lay missionary people working in Bangkok, on the Thai-Burmese border and in Springvale, amongst other venues. The people of this
mission share their lives and their residences with numerous people, including homeless people. There work is another example of the Third or Civic ‘sector’ (Giddens, 1998).

RMIT social-work students who participated in two workshops considering work amongst refugees and asylum seekers and who offered support to W and K and began a continuing process with another staff member to increase their awareness of political repression in Burma/Myanmar; the Melbourne-based offices of Amnesty International and of AusAID. They all not only became actively involved in lobbying for W and K as part of their ongoing Burma campaigns but also included W and me together in a touring photo exhibition featuring ‘couples’: refugees and non-refugee friend/support persons. Beyond the adult children and eventually the grandchildren was the woman who employed W and K to look after pure-bred dogs whose living conditions and diet were ironically better than those of the inmates of Insein prison; even that woman was prepared to be granted permission to stay in Australia. Preparing herself for an imminent change of professional direction, W once again called on her versatility and worked in a number of smaller and larger hospitals, first as an unskilled person, then, encouraged by management, completing a certificate course and being employed in caring for frail aged and mentally ill people.

**Critical theory-based structural approach**

A critical appraisal of their situation took me not only to Migration and Refugee Law, but also to current news media, literature, politics, in-country and international; I used a critical approach, sharing my own specialist skills with M and K throughout the process while encouraging them to recognise their skills and apply them in this process. I called up whatever relevant knowledge, understanding and experience I already had while actively learning as much as I could throughout the process about the structural contexts - historical, political, familial, cultural – in which the relevant events in W’s and K’s lives occurred; I tried to ensure that W and K were empowered through their active participation in the migration application process, by them being as well-informed as possible about that process, by them recording their own story, with me

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46 The Australian government agency responsible for delivering most non-military foreign aid, part of the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, based in Canberra (with) representation in 25 Australian diplomatic missions overseas (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/AUSAID).
editing only to ensure compliance with an acceptable bureaucratic format. ‘You are the specialists in knowledge of your life and experiences!’ was my repeated refrain; I encouraged their telling of their own stories in a variety of ways to a variety of audiences; I tried to remain attuned to the emotional and psychological stresses that they experienced and supported their referrals to specialist therapeutic counselling; I helped them towards their own emancipation from the political oppression of Myanmar-Burma and the subsequent and different administrative oppressions of Australia’s Protection Visa application process and regime; I supported their activist work, aimed at the emancipation of the people of Myanmar/Burma; and I supported them in their self-initiated political activist work in Australia for Burma-Myanmar.

All the initial themes I identified in my work are evident in this story – violence, human rights, social justice, migration, cross-cultural communication, social work – as are the several ‘sub-themes’ that are deepened out in the second part of this final chapter. Binding all of this together, as I tried to tell W’s and K’s stories within mine, my imagination: ‘Like thought, narration has to do with invisible objects. The imagination is common to both’ (Cavarero 2000:97).

And all of us three have lived in a world suffused and confused by neo-liberal political-economic philosophy …

Part two

What have I learned from the heuristic research approach?

Moving into the last decade of my professional working life, I wanted to slow down and reflect, but even the way I had been talking about my past experiences, memories and learnings felt chaotic. Though I have continued to work in the two professional roles, embarking on this research has helped me to replace this chaos with order sufficient to highlight new, and surprising, learning; and I feel that I have been able to make space to recall and reflect on them. Moustakas’ (1990) heuristic research approach assisted me in legitimating and articulating the question I wanted to focus on: based on my experiences, how do the dual professions of social work and registered migration agent work, both complement and act in tension with one another?

Starting out along a path of comparing and contrasting, what emerged was the realisation of the subtlety of a relationship of at least mutual enhancement between the
two professions, their varying practice modes and realms of competence and their substantive-theoretical content.

Being asked what was common across the two, my response came without hesitation: the themes of violence, human rights, justice and social justice, migration, cross cultural communication, social work; and I set out to explore the two professions through these identified commonalities. As we all do, I live and work my life in particular contexts – history, culture, economies, current moral and ethical paradigms and discourses – so I realised that I needed to be quiet and listen: listen to my own reflections and to the voices of some of my peers, those of writers and thinkers and those of the multitude of clients I had met and continue to meet. My main sources of learning were through heeding these voices telling their stories. I had lived my own story and wanted to tell that, but it encompasses and is encompassed by numerous other stories of people and places. The heuristic approach promised initial ‘engagement, incubation, illumination, explication and creative synthesis’ (Moustakas 1990:31) and all of this has indeed happened and gave legitimacy to still other aspects of knowing I had always ‘known’ I had and trusted: ‘Polanyi’s philosophy and scientific journeys gave heuristic ideology added significance, in concepts of tacit dimension, indwelling and intuition as well as a particular understanding of validity in qualitative understanding’ (ibid. 1990:9).

Rather than stay with literature emanating from the confines of the disciplines assumed relevant for the two professions, I roamed widely across many areas, seeking help to expand my understanding of the themes and the wider contexts in which they gain their respective layers of relevance. This opened up the possibilities of a ‘conjunctural process of analysis’, allowing me to consider where and how writers of various perspectives saw the same phenomena. This, together with other influences emanating from my work with students in the context of social-work education, also assisted me in gradually realising the significance of Critical Theory: to teach, I knew I needed to understand. Critical Theory evolved from Marxist, Freudian, feminist and other theoretical and epistemological influences. For me, it gave a sense contextual layers – layers within which both professions are operating and within which they gain their fullness of meaning. In addition, my readings in Critical Theory gave me a window into the nature of neo-liberalism (Traynor, 2005; Wilson, 2004), and particularly the
way it penetrates into all parts of life and living of both clients and myself. I became more adept at applying critical theoretical understandings to my experiences; although this new understanding only started to deepen towards the end of the research process.47

The voices of my peers provided me with both a reminder and a new understanding of what had motivated them and me, to choose social-welfare and/or legal advocacy work amongst refugees, and migrants: parents’ and elders’ influence and an ability to imagine another way, stood out as particularly significant. I felt a kin-ship, a familiarity

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47 Just a snapshot of events which brought, quite literally, all of this ‘home’ for me: in Chile the assassination of President Allende in 1973 and rise to power of the brutal Dictator General Pinochet (and Australia’s extending the Humanitarian Resettlement program to Chileans); the ongoing defiance of Latin American nations vis-à-vis the US; the increasing hegemony of the USA in world politics in spite of major defeats (and the emergence of 20th century ‘boat people’ fleeing Indo-China Mekong River lands and states); the Third Way innovations of Pres. Clinton (US) and of Tony Blair (UK) and their influence on Australian prime ministers and federal governments of opposite political persuasions; the spread of multi-national then global companies and concerns; the corporitisation of sometimes long-established government service units (like Adult Migrant/Multicultural Education Services); the continuing and often contentious practice of Compulsive Competitive Tendering of government services to the private sector (for example in public transport and in provision of major utilities of water, gas and electricity); the emergence of large international health insurance companies in the restructuring and provision of health services once provided by governments; the increasing tendency across the globe for wealth to be accumulated by few individuals; the pressure by world banking systems to pressure poor countries into re-shaping and re-structuring their societies; the monopolisation of particular areas (e.g. public media) into larger and larger entities; the virtual deification of The Market and of futures and virtual markets; the subjugation and degradation of natural resources and the environment to our apparent insatiable quest for higher standards of living – for some of us (for example in our always volatile and sometimes lethal competition for oil and gas) – from writings of Allmand 1998; Brunnett 2004; Davies & Leonard 2004; Dominelli 2007 and 1999; Ferguson 2004; Fine & Boon 2007; Fook 1999; George 2000; Hage 2003; Hiebert, Collins & Spoonley 2003; Monbiot 2000; Parkin, Summers & Woodward 2006; George, 2000; Perkins, Nelms & Smyth 2004; Ramanathan & Link 1999; Rossiter 2005; Webb 2003; Wehbi & Turcotte 2007; Wilson 2004; http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Neoliberalism).
with these people, even though I have not experienced war or displacement or other trauma as many of them have.

And finally, my own voice. In the first draft of this final chapter, I forgot to acknowledge my voice, an oversight that is telling. It highlights for me another important realisation from the heuristic process: who I am, *my self*, is central to the way I practise, particularly in relation to social work. I meet The Other in my social work relationship; I experience The Other, learn from the experience of the encounter, reflect on that learning, and move on, changed, taking my changed self to the next relationships. My voice dominates in this text as I use my intellect to conceptualise and to take meaning from new perceptions and ideas; I use my memory to reflect on past and ongoing experiences; and my imagination to re-present the experiences and the people in them. I thus feel part of a multi-dimensional and multi-layered system and process of reciprocity. As well, throughout the research process I have become increasingly aware of the special, but in social-work literature, only sometimes acknowledged role of imagination in our lives. According to Stevenson and Haberm (1998:116–117), the still influential German philosopher Emmanuel Kant, already in the 18th century, identified imagination as a third, synthesising human faculty, overcoming the dualism of ‘understanding’ and ‘sensibility’. Imagination has allowed me to envision potential change and take steps to actualise it, to visualise the settings and the developments of the narratives offered by my clients as they recall past events. Imagination also helps me to see areas between the two professions, both linking and separating them; it helps to complement my work diligence and dedication, my seemingly innate ability to feel with, empathise with oppressed and suffering people both familiar and not known to me. It enables me to practise my work in ways that extend beyond limiting professional boundaries.

*Where did I take the themes distilled at the start of the research?*

Violence appeared to permeate the lived experiences of most if not all of my social-work and migration-advocacy clients, and I chose to step to the side and to discuss it as evil. The writers’ voices that had become familiar to me over the past few years taught me much: the banality of evil, the ordinariness of evil; the small-mindedness of the evil doer or the perpetrator of violence; the individual within the structural violence of injustice; the diverse faces of violence; the respective roles of social worker and RMA
in mitigating both individual and structural violence; the equal reality of its antidote
and balance – ‘compassion’ (Levinas). Newly-identified compassion that can be at the
core of social work and of human rights’ RMA, just as violence lurks in the
experiences of our social work and our RMA clients (Arendt) and, of course, in our
own experiences and in the structures of welfare institutions which are meant to ‘serve’
the victims.

Human rights writers’ voices awakened my understanding of these rights resting on our
human belief in the dignity of each us human beings, each as an individual and each as
a member of the collective of human beings; they encompass what seeks to ensure as
much our physical survival as that of our spiritual, emotional and political existence.
They can and probably should be enshrined in our laws and both social workers and
RMAs work to assist clients to attain certain living rights (Ife). What I learned lies in
the pithy phrase of Eleanor Roosevelt: ‘even in small places’, encapsulating for me
what Arendt expressed in her writing about our lives being political, even in the home
as in the civil sphere. Concepts and practice of justice and social justice are inherent
within human rights and human rights in them; retributive and restorative forms of
justice are sought and manifest at all levels, from the individual all the way through to
the intra- and inter-national and they should become sources of illumination for social
work and RMA practice (and education).

The theme of ceaseless human migration I have researched includes forced
displacement and migration by choice. I have considered migration as an age-old
phenomenon and a central platform of Australian society. New learning for me has
come in the form of the concepts of citizenship and belonging being central to social
work and migration and refugee thinking. The reality of government-sponsored and
government-sanctioned multiculturalism has provided me with unique opportunities to
practise the two professions amongst ethnically and citizenship-status diverse peoples
and connected well with the theme of cross-cultural communication; and my searches
into this beautiful grab-bag of language and communication has allowed me to move
into a consideration of discourse, of narrative, of the subjugation of knowledge, the
very lifeblood, I now realise of both RMA and SW.
And what have I learned to discern as differences, similarities, overlaps and boundaries between social work and registered migration work?

The two professions allow me a glimpse of human suffering both in the small places where people live and in the big historic developments that reverberate across the globe and down through human history, such as in the terrible unfinished wars in Somalia, Palestine and Sudan. Both thus also offer me a glimpse of our human capacity to harm, to kill and destroy; and both offer ways – to ever so small a degree – of soothing some of the suffering and addressing some of the violence.

The two can and do complement each other where human rights are at issue. Simplistically put, the professions both have a dominant side: social work concerns the heart and RMA work the mind; but, as both emphases are necessary, each profession should take more care of its other side.

Both social work and Registered Migration Agent work (and education), whilst operating necessarily at the local level, need to ‘develop a more internationalist approach both to the analysis of social problems and to practice’ (Ife 2001:75).

Each profession’s knowledge base can and should be expanded through the incorporation of other professions’ knowledge and perspectives. It should be accepted that all professions have flexible and porous boundaries; and social work seems to have the advantage here, even if it often does not recognise it as such. Equally, social work is more prepared to reflect on itself than RMA practice seems to be, the latter being more a matter of ‘knowing the law and knowing how to apply it’, but not about how best to communicate it to the people it affects.

My position, a fortunate one, is that I am in informed by both traditions. My work in either of the two professions is strengthened by my background in the other. I can see the human in the black-and-white law, and can explore it sensitively. And, conversely, RMA training helps me to focus on the legal parameters – which are really important in social work – such as court work.

More specifically, for social work:

- The profession could approach an understanding of itself through and from many more perspectives than it does by adopting the critical mode of reflection, based on the insights of Critical Theory;

- There is enormous scope for the imagination of both client and social worker to guide innovative and effective practice; I also acknowledge that institutional and other boundaries often make this nay impossible;

- Social workers do not ‘have to be shy’ about or hide their compassion just as they need not be dismissive of people’s religious beliefs; if we are serious about practising without discrimination, we need to be able to understand different belief systems just as we often seek to understand a client’s psychological or personal problems and issues. As well, we need in social work to really listen to different voices and to resurrect the subjugated knowledges of clients and peers in different parts of the world, as they seek to reveal their beliefs and practices in, for example, structuring their families;

- Linked with the previous point, social work education and practice still seem to avoid exploring certain aspects of the non-material or non-objective, the spiritual, religious faith, different belief systems and practices. We need to be more ready and open to identify and name this human quality in the work and the encounters of the social worker;

- I would love to be a part of social work education where at least one language other than English is taught and explored in the course; especially in the purported multi-cultural society of Australia that is more potentially multi-lingual than it is in actual practices fact; English and the associated cultural ways are so dominant that even the still-existing Aboriginal languages barely rate a consideration in our social work texts, let alone becoming a purposeful endeavour within the quiver of capacities future social workers are thought to have to acquire;

- Social workers need to acknowledge the continuing reality of a lack of access to adequate housing as an oppression, a source of suffering and central to social-work business, and not to be relegated to a demeaned position. In our social work discourse, a hierarchy of legitimate social-work foci seems to exist, ostensibly reflecting the different statuses of the people who experience the respective problems central to these foci. Mental and relational issues seem to remain high in that hierarchy, probably because they also befall middle-class citizens, whilst issues related to poverty and the material side of things are relegated to those working in the appropriate institutional setting presumably set up for these purposes. A genuine holistic and critical understanding of social work would reject such precepts.

- Borders and boundaries are found between and amongst nation states, between and amongst professions, between and amongst languages and cultures, between and amongst different human services between and amongst different human endeavours like philosophy, literature, science etc; defined and therefore re-definable by us humans; between theory and practice, between physical and cyber spaces. All of these boundaries are decided and defined by us humans who can also dismantle them at will. It is the wish of this writer that we try harder to succeed in this.

- The global reality of nation states’ ‘defining in’ certain people and ‘defining out’ a host of other people through mainly exclusive migration and refugee laws, regulations, policies and procedures, affects all of us humans. Further studies from particular social work perspectives, using various research approaches and methods, could expand social work knowledge and thereby its benefit to people it works with.
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207


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