

2002

## **An Auto/Ethnographical Study on the Effect of Context on the Experience of Being a Volunteer With Refugees**

Fran Price  
*Edith Cowan University*

Follow this and additional works at: [https://ro.ecu.edu.au/theses\\_hons](https://ro.ecu.edu.au/theses_hons)



Part of the [Social Work Commons](#)

---

### **Recommended Citation**

Price, F. (2002). *An Auto/Ethnographical Study on the Effect of Context on the Experience of Being a Volunteer With Refugees*. Edith Cowan University. [https://ro.ecu.edu.au/theses\\_hons/914](https://ro.ecu.edu.au/theses_hons/914)

This Thesis is posted at Research Online.  
[https://ro.ecu.edu.au/theses\\_hons/914](https://ro.ecu.edu.au/theses_hons/914)

# Edith Cowan University

## Copyright Warning

You may print or download ONE copy of this document for the purpose of your own research or study.

The University does not authorize you to copy, communicate or otherwise make available electronically to any other person any copyright material contained on this site.

You are reminded of the following:

- Copyright owners are entitled to take legal action against persons who infringe their copyright.
- A reproduction of material that is protected by copyright may be a copyright infringement.
- A court may impose penalties and award damages in relation to offences and infringements relating to copyright material. Higher penalties may apply, and higher damages may be awarded, for offences and infringements involving the conversion of material into digital or electronic form.

**An Auto / Ethnographical Study**  
**on the**  
**Effect of Context**  
**on the Experience of being a**  
**Volunteer with Refugees**

**by**  
**Fran Price**

**A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for**  
**Bachelor of Social Work with Honours**

**at the**  
**Faculty of Social Work**  
**Edith Cowan University**

**March 2002**

## USE OF THESIS

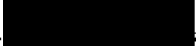
The Use of Thesis statement is not included in this version of the thesis.

## ABSTRACT

This study uses a critical social and feminist framework to explore the effect of context on the experience of being a volunteer with refugees. It is presented in an auto/ethnographical style, blending my own storytelling with the stories of other volunteers. My interest in this topic evolved as a result of my own personal experiences in volunteering with refugees in which I perceived certain contextual aspects to have had an impact on my identity and volunteering experiences. This study is therefore an attempt to make sense of my own experiences and to share in the experiences of other volunteers. Informal information sharing sessions were held separately with four volunteers who had worked or were working in a voluntary capacity with refugees in the Perth metropolitan area. The information that emerged from these discussions is organised into stories of volunteers' experiences and common themes. The data gathered revealed that cultural, social and political tensions shape the context from which volunteers practice. As a result, the experiences of volunteering with refugees can incorporate oppressive relationships, societal prejudices and disempowering experiences. This was shown to have an impact on the identities and self-making practices of volunteers. The feminist focus of this study highlights the diverse and complex nature of the lived experience of volunteering. This approach also brings an awareness and acknowledgement to the diversity of knowledges and capabilities held by volunteers working with refugees.

## DECLARATION

I certify that this thesis does not, to the best of my knowledge and belief: incorporate without acknowledgement any material previously submitted for a degree or diploma in any institution of higher education; contain any material previously published or written by another person except where due reference is made in the text; or contain any defamatory material.

Signed.........

Dated.....28.03.02.....

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I wish to thank the volunteers who participated in this study for sharing their stories, experiences and knowledges with me. Their contributions gave me a rich source of information from which to explore the contextual reality of volunteering with refugees in Australia.

I would also like to thank my supervisor Dyann Ross for her support. Her ability to facilitate self expression in others allowed me to take up the challenge of exploring and expressing my own thoughts and vulnerabilities around my volunteering experiences.

I also wish to thank the people from agencies and organisations running volunteer programs who took an interest in my research. Their knowledge and suggestions were invaluable to the research process.

Finally, I would like to thank my wonderful partner Andrew for being there with me throughout the research process and keeping those cups of hot 'coffa-choco-cinnos' coming in my nightly sessions on the computer.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

	PAGE
ABSTRACT	ii
DECLARATION	iii
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	iv
TABLE OF CONTENTS	v
 CHAPTER ONE: THE THICKET	1
Starting from my own experiences	1
The history of volunteer involvement in the settlement of refugees	4
National and State volunteering policy	6
Volunteering and professional helping	8
Immigration policy and ideology	11
The status of refugee-hood in Australian society	15
Bringing all the issues together into my personal Experience	17
The research questions	20
 CHAPTER TWO: THE BRANCH	21
Section One: The Ideology and Impact of Immigration Policy	22
The role of immigration policy in the shaping of a nation's thinking	22
The experience of citizenship	27
 Section Two: The Experience of Refugee-hood in Australia	29
The experience of settlement	29
The experience of culture shock	31
The experience of oppression	33
 Section Three: The Political and Cross-cultural Experience of Volunteering in Australia	36
Volunteering and reduced government responsibility towards social service provision	37
Professionalism and volunteering	38
The cultural construction of volunteering	40
The counter-cultural aspect of helping refugees	43



CHAPTER THREE: THE HEART	45
Section One: Theoretical Framework	46
Section Two: Methodology	48
Section Three: Research Plan	50
Method of data collection	50
-the dilemma of the politics of research	51
-making connections	53
-the participants	53
-the interview process	54
The collation process	56
Limitations	56
Ethics	57
CHAPTER FOUR: THE GENUINE AND THE BOLD	59
Section One: Complexity	61
The task	61
The emotion	63
The complexity	64
Section Two: The Felt Impact of Volunteering	65
A re-framing of thinking	65
Connection to family	67
Connection to community	67
Section Three: Tensions	70
Starting from my own experiences	70
On the home front of the volunteers	71
Outside tensions	72
Strategies for coping	73
Naming up strategies for self protection	75
A different perspective on tensions	76
Section Four: Experience of Professionalism	78
Differing experiences	78
Differing statuses	78
Professionalism within	80
From specific	80
To mainstream	80

Section Five:	Framing of Context	82
CHAPTER FIVE:	THE VOICE	84
	The final chapter	84
	Reflections on the research process	85
	Complexity	86
	Boundaries	86
	Emotions	87
	Differences	87
	Relationships, oppression and validation	88
	Political consciousness	90
	Consciousness raising	91
	The containment of knowledge	92
	Future directions	93
APPENDIX A		97
APPENDIX B		98
APPENDIX C		99
APPENDIX D		101
APPENDIX E		104
BIBLIOGRAPHY		106

## CHAPTER ONE : THE THICKET

*"When I start writing a project, I sometimes agonize for days, feeling lost and hopeless, worrying as I go about my daily round of activities. Then, often suddenly, I think of a first sentence that feels right, like a way to enter a thicket of ideas and take hold of a branch that will lead to the heart of things. I am pleased when I find a sentence that feels both genuine and bold - I want it to be a statement that will open space, and claim attention, for my voice."*

*(DeVault, 1999, p. 187)*

**Starting from my own experiences.....**

It's seven o'clock at night. I've just arrived home from visiting a refugee family. There's nothing to eat in the fridge, dirty dishes are strewn around the kitchen and my head is pounding. I turn on the tv, plonk myself down on the sofa and try to tune into the latest teenage crisis on Home and Away. But my thoughts keep returning to the afternoon's events with the family.....

.....to the elated way I was welcomed into their house as though I was the most precious visitor the family had ever seen. To the way I was enthusiastically shown around the house and given a grand tour of the garden, the bedrooms, the living room and even the laundry. To the way we all gathered around the washing machine and discussed in earnest about the utility of a washing device that didn't boil clothes. To the way the contents of the fridge were taken out, displayed, laughed at and discussed in great detail. And to the way this dynamic of excitement and anticipation became clouded in a cloak of anxiety and fear.....

.....fear at being left alone in their new house. A deep-seated fear at having to endure a long night by themselves, with so much time and space and silence

to dwell upon what lay ahead of them and what they had left behind. To the way I was pleaded with just to stay a little longer, to have one more cup of coffee, and even to stay the night. And to the way the lady broke down in tears when I was leaving.....

.....tears of fear ..... tears of anxiety ..... tears of plain vulnerability. And as I sit on my sofa at 7.30, and the credits of Home and Away begin to roll across my tv screen I too share some of the family's anxiety ..... some of their fears ..... some of their sadness ..... some of their loneliness and isolation. And with a certain amount of discomfort and an absence of like-minded friends or family with which to share my thoughts, I try to force myself to bring my awareness back to the relative certainty and familiarity of the existence of Fran Price ..... the student, the worker, the daughter, the sister, the friend and Fran Price the volunteer.

---

This research project has evolved as a result of my own personal experiences in volunteering with refugees. It is an attempt to make sense of my experience and to invite other volunteers to share their experiences with me and with each other. And it is with excitement, anticipation and a little bit of vulnerability at revealing self that I have chosen to use personal narratives and storying (DeVault, 1999) to engage the reader in my journey of personal and political sense making in being a volunteer with refugees.

---

Very soon into my first voluntary experience with refugees I discovered that helping people suffering from varying degrees of trauma to settle into a new and alien environment could be very stressful, draining, daunting and challenging work. I found that at the end of the day, it was hard and sometimes impossible to refocus my thoughts to my own life.

One aspect that made it even harder for me was the fact that on some occasions it was difficult to find a sympathetic ear towards refugees in the general community or for that matter amongst my friends and some of my family. Sometimes, when I spoke out about what I was doing, I found that there was quite a strong anti-refugee feeling in some sections of the community. It was sometimes easier to keep my thoughts hidden than expose myself to the antipathy and in some instances to the hostility of others.

Fortunately, the volunteer program I was involved in organised monthly debriefing sessions for volunteers. It was at these meetings that as volunteers we could off-load any issues or feelings we might have been carrying with us. It was also at these meetings I became aware that I was not alone in feeling overwhelmed by the draining effect of this type of voluntary work. Other volunteers in the program were experiencing similar issues.

I have since worked in other voluntary positions with refugees and my experience of the helping process has been the same. The feeling of being overwhelmed at the complexity and the immense amount of detail involved in assisting a person to construct a life in a new country has been a constant factor in my experience.

The above description of my initial volunteering experience was written a relatively short time after completing a volunteering task with a refugee family. I have chosen not to edit it and bring it more in line with my current understanding and new awareness of the experience of volunteering because I think it is important to document the felt reality of my experiences as they happened. This is in line with my belief in the relevance and power of the lived experience and personal story (Stanley & Wise, 1983).

Looking back I can see that my worldview of volunteering with refugees was contained within the personal and not extended to any degree to a political

perspective.<sup>1</sup> It may be that by not having a well-developed understanding of the political, social, cultural and historical contextual influences on my experience of volunteering, I had unconsciously positioned my volunteering self in a *vulnerable space*.<sup>2</sup>

What began as an experience, which generated what I personally consider to be an uncomfortable level of negative feelings and energy, has gradually evolved into a positive and motivated search for an understanding of how myself and others have taken ownership of this ever changing and ever challenging state called *volunteer-hood*.<sup>3</sup>

---

Part of the process of discovery around my own experience of volunteer-hood has been to take a critical and probing look at the contextual factors that were shaping my experience. The first path I ventured to take on this journey was to examine the evolution of volunteer involvement with refugees. I was searching for evidence of verbal recognition by agencies, government or volunteers themselves of the complexity of the volunteering task.

---

### **The History of Volunteer Involvement in the Settlement of Refugees**

A search of the literature on early volunteer participation in refugee settlement found a distinct lack of documentation prior to 1979. One possible reason for this was that at the time the government had not established a formal policy on the use of volunteers in the provision of settlement services. However,

---

<sup>1</sup>This understanding is linked to the feminist notion of the personal as being political whereby the personal lived experience is recognised as having political importance (Stanley & Wise, 1983).

<sup>2</sup>I use the term *vulnerable space* in relation to my own experience to refer to a positioning of self which at times encompassed feelings of inadequacy, lack of space to reveal self, self questioning and a tendency to pathologise self or others.

<sup>3</sup>I define *volunteer-hood* as the identity and self-making practices of the volunteer as experienced in the wider context.

volunteer participation across Australia was unofficially encouraged through the government run Hosting and Friendship and Home Tutoring Schemes (Cox, 1980).

In 1979 the Community Refugee Settlement Scheme was introduced (Cox, 1980). Whereas the Hosting and Friendship and Home Tutoring Schemes were seen as supplementary to the settlement process, the Community Refugee Settlement Scheme was established as an alternative to settling refugees through Migrant Centres.

Under the Community Refugee Settlement Scheme [CRSS], church and refugee oriented community groups were given initial training and information sessions and then allocated a refugee family to settle into the community (Department of Immigration and Ethnic Affairs [DIEA], 1981). Volunteer support tasks involved all facets of the settlement process including locating suitable accommodation, providing furniture and household items, connecting the family up to services and offering personal support and friendship (DIEA, 1981).

In 2000 the CRSS was replaced with the Community Support for Refugees Scheme [CSR]. In this program volunteers assist in reducing the social isolation experienced by many refugees through befriending them and linking them up to their neighbours, places of worship, sporting organisations and ethnic groups (Department of Immigration and Multicultural Affairs [DIMA], 2001a).

Two years after the CRSS began, an evaluation of the scheme was undertaken. This was aimed at examining whether the program's objectives of encouraging community involvement, providing alternative settlement options for refugees, facilitating greater community awareness and having a more widespread dispersal of refugees in the community had been achieved (DIEA, 1981). The experiences of both the refugee families and volunteer groups were investigated.

The study found notable differences between the envisaged and actual experiences of volunteers in helping refugees to settle (DIEA, 1981). These differences mainly involved volunteer underestimation of the time involved and intensity of the work. This corresponded with my own experience and alerted me to the fact that as early as 1981 signs of a type of vulnerability in this volunteering context were starting to emerge.

---

Having found evidence of a possible lack of recognition of the complexity of volunteering with refugees in volunteer programs within the immigration department, I then examined written policy on volunteering to see if a general acknowledgement of this dimension of volunteering was at all visible in policy.

---

### **National and State Volunteering Policy**

Both National and State volunteering bodies have policies outlining volunteer principles and codes of practice. Volunteering Australia's model code of practice<sup>4</sup> is aimed at enhancing the volunteer experience whilst providing a level of protection and duty of care for the volunteer (Volunteering Australia, 2001). Such policy outlines appropriate procedures for recruiting, training and supporting volunteers, as well as providing a working environment in which the volunteer has a clear understanding of their role in the organisation, their rights as a volunteer and the value of their contributions (Volunteering Australia, 2001).

---

<sup>4</sup> Refer to Appendix A to view Volunteering Australia's Code of Practice for Organisations Involving Volunteer Staff.



Volunteering Western Australia appears to take a more holistic approach to its volunteer code of practice.<sup>5</sup> In addition to outlining volunteer rights and responsibilities there is also an element of recognition of the social aspects of volunteering such as relationships with others and the quality of the volunteering experience (Volunteering Western Australia, 1992). However, whilst State volunteering policy may have placed some recognition on the volunteering environment, the notion of context as a valid and important factor in the volunteering experience remains unaccounted for in formal written policy.

The Department of Immigration and Multicultural Affairs' newly established Community Refugee Support Program has no formal policies on the use of volunteers who specifically work with refugees. Policy is only visible to the extent that it is contained informally within volunteer information sheets and brochures. Information provided to volunteers is predominantly rights oriented giving details about the availability of financial support, insurance arrangements and training (DIMA, 2001b).

Through an examination of basic volunteer policy I had yet to come across any specific policy, which acknowledged complexity in volunteering. This motivated me to think about the consequences of the lack of visibility of the complexity of volunteering in volunteer policy. I felt a growing sense of concern that the contextual complexity of volunteering with refugees seemed to be positioned in the background of organisational awareness. In contrast my personal experience of volunteering seemed to be telling me the opposite; that *contextual influences*<sup>6</sup> were having a definite impact on my experience of volunteer-hood.

---

<sup>5</sup> Refer to Appendix B to view Volunteering Western Australia's Code of Practice for Volunteer Agencies.

<sup>6</sup> Context is understood in relation to Fisher and Karger's (1997) notion of contextualisation in which a connection is made between personal practice and the historical, economical, political, social and cultural dimensions of society.

---

If the field of volunteering was yet to incorporate an acknowledgement of any cultural, social, political or historical contextual complexity into its policies, perhaps the field in which a great deal of volunteering in social services operates out of might have taken this path. My research therefore began to focus on the relationship between volunteering and professional helping. As a student social worker that will be shortly entering the professional realms of social work, I initially expected this relationship to be essentially complementary and supportive in nature, yet as I delved further I also found evidence of tension between the two.

---

### **Volunteering and Professional Helping - Power Dynamics<sup>7</sup>**

A search of the literature on the origins of *professional helping*<sup>8</sup> found it to be a profession that has been historically built on the efforts of volunteers. Lafrance (1996) describes social work as evolving from a charitable movement in which volunteers played a core role in the helping process and as a consequence, had the opportunity to greatly influence social service provision. However, she also points out that as the profession began to align itself with scientific knowledge (Solas, 1994) and endeavoured to become more professionalised and specialised, the knowledge gap between social workers and volunteers began to widen (Lafrance, 1996).

---

<sup>7</sup> The term power dynamics is used in recognition of the status connected to professionalism and the resulting powerlessness this may project on to others. This understanding is linked to Young's (1990) notion of powerlessness being a form of oppression whereby people can become inhibited via the interaction between their non-professional status and the professional status of others.

<sup>8</sup> I have used the term professional helping in preference to social work in recognition of the variety of fields in which professional helping can take place and of the capacity for all fields to play a part in both reducing and enhancing the validity of the volunteering experience. Lafrance (1996) and Darvill & Munday (1984) however, use the term social work instead.

Darvill & Munday (1984) argue that this resulted in social workers being afforded increasing amounts of respect and status whilst conversely the visibility and status of the volunteer was reduced. Some perceive this change to be a form of *devolution*<sup>9</sup> of the role of the volunteer within social work and argue that this has had a continuing impact on the experience of volunteering today (Lafrance, 1996; Darvill & Munday, 1984; Holme & Maizels, 1977).

Manser (cited in Lafrance, 1996, p. 2) argues that there exists a pervasive reluctance within the helping professions to want to involve volunteers because helping professionals are unwilling to accept "volunteers as legitimate partners in the helping process." In today's volunteering context, reluctance might present in the form of covert or overt resistance in which volunteers may be given menial tasks and excluded from more complex activities or simply excluded from participating at all (Lafrance, 1996).

A further argument suggests that paid workers may feel threatened by the possibility of being replaced by a volunteer, especially if the boundaries between paid work and volunteer work greatly overlap (Bagilhole, 1996; Holme & Maizels, 1977). Such assertions suggest a type of context in which volunteerhood may well be experienced as more compartmentalised and homogenous and less dynamic and individualistic in nature. In addition, if the current climate of *economic rationalism*<sup>10</sup> is taken into account, there exists a real potential for this context to be concurrently guided and controlled by the existing highly bureaucratised organisational environment.

If professionalism within professional helping positions the volunteer in the periphery of the helping process one effect of this might be a reduction in the recognition of volunteer work. As a consequence, volunteer-hood may be

---

<sup>9</sup> Lafrance (1996, p. 3) speaks of the devolution of the role of the volunteer in terms of a reduction "from that of leading social service programs and reforms to assimilation into a defined and managed structure designed to meet human needs."

<sup>10</sup> Economic rationalism is understood in reference to the current shift in welfare responsibility from the government to the free market and the resulting expectation for welfare services to demonstrate increased efficiency, output, productivity and accountability (Ife, 1997).

experienced as an oppressed identity. For volunteers, this may mean that they only feel valued to the extent that the organisational context from which they are working allows them.

Was this part of my volunteering experience? I have to say on some occasions yes. Often in my contact with paid workers I was aware of an underlying tension to our interaction. This was especially noticeable at meetings involving numbers of volunteers and paid workers. Perhaps when confronted with a group of dynamic and engaged volunteers some workers may have felt threatened. Having mentioned some negative examples, there were also many instances in which paid workers were immensely supportive and helpful.

Overall in my experience, the power dynamics between volunteering and professional helping were sometimes very visible and other times not felt at all. However it must be noted that being contextually quite unaware I may not have noticed the more subtle forms of exclusion. It may well be that such dynamics were continually in play.

---

At each leg of my journey I was becoming increasingly concerned and perplexed at the lack of recognition of the wider context in which volunteers helping refugees were working from. The next direction I took was to look for recognition in the wider public arena. I wanted to examine the existing ideology around immigration in Australian society to get a picture of community perceptions of both volunteers and refugees. I approached this exploration from the position that the very way immigration strategies have been expressed and acted out has had a permeating effect on the way Australia and many Australians react to difference and diversity in society today.

---

## Immigration Policy and Ideology

One perspective that has emerged alongside Australia's succession of immigration policies has been recognition of the tendency for the Australian government to have historically used *immigration*<sup>11</sup> as a strategy for countering undesirable economic and demographic situations (Betts, 1988; Birrell, 1978; Cope, Castles & Kalantzis, 1991). In 1940, White Australia policy, which had allowed only white skinned English speaking people to settle, was expanded to include people of European descent<sup>12</sup> who were expected to assimilate into Australian society and the Australian way of life (Cope et al., 1991). Castles (1992) makes the point that at the time, the motivating factor behind the government's decision to extend immigration was the need to increase Australia's workforce. He also argues that in the 1950's a similar rationale prompted the government to further expand immigration to include people from Asia wanting to settle in Australia.

In addition to the growing amount of economic discourse around immigration, social perspectives on immigration policy also emerged. These perspectives focused on the social implications of Australia's increasingly multicultural population, which was growing in diversity with the acceptance of refugees from Africa and Asia<sup>13</sup> (Hay, 1978; Martin, 1978). Jean Martin (1978), a prominent commentator on migrant issues, brought attention to the social, cultural and economical difficulties migrants and refugees were experiencing in settling into Australian life. A further issue that began to attract political and public debate was a questioning of the government's rationale behind increased immigration amidst a downturn in the availability in jobs and housing (Betts, 1988; Birrell, 1978).

---

<sup>11</sup> This thesis defines immigration in broad terms as being the past and present formal and informal policies that govern both entry into Australia and settlement services for refugees and migrants.

<sup>12</sup> This included a large component of displaced persons from central Europe after the 2<sup>nd</sup> World War. Previous to this, in the late 1930's Australia had accepted 7000 Jewish refugees from Europe (Iredale, Mitchell, Pe-Pua & Pittaway, 1996).

<sup>13</sup> Australia is a signatory to the 1951 Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees and its 1967 Protocol (United Nations High Commission Refugees, 2000). Since the intake of Indo-Chinese refugees Australia has accepted intakes from many countries including Eastern Europe, the Middle East, Latin America, Africa, Afghanistan, Sri-Lanka and East Timor (Iredale et al., 1996).

In the mid 1960's, the Australian government replaced assimilationist policy with the policy of cultural pluralism (Cope, Castles & Kalantzis, 1991). In contrast to previous policies, cultural pluralism was seen as an attempt at taking the first steps towards acknowledging and catering for the specific needs of migrants (Cope et al., 1991). In 1978 this new approach to immigration policy was further endorsed through the recommendations of The Galbally Report (1978), which reviewed post-arrival programs and services for migrants. The report called for an even greater acknowledgement and acceptance of difference and as a result a new policy of multiculturalism<sup>14</sup> began to take form.

One argument suggests that public opinion around immigration and migrants and refugees has not gone through the same transformation as immigration policy (Betts, 1988; Western, 1983; Cox, 1980). This argument asserts that within Australian society there is a pervasive apathetic and at times antagonistic attitude towards some groups of migrants and refugees (Betts, 1988; Western, 1983).

This assertion is supported by a progression of studies undertaken by researchers for the then Department of Immigration and Ethnic Affairs. The results of these studies which investigated public attitudes towards immigration consistently found that the majority of Australian born respondents interviewed thought that Australia's immigration intake was too high and should be reduced or even stopped altogether<sup>15</sup> (Buchanan, 1976; DIEA, 1980; DIEA, 1986).

---

<sup>14</sup> The National Agenda for a Multicultural Australia lists three dimensions of multicultural policy, which include the right of all Australians to cultural identity, social justice and economic efficiency (Office of Multicultural Affairs, 1989).

<sup>15</sup> Hay (1978) notes that during this period such attitudes were consistent with other countries experiencing migration such as Canada.

A study by Iredale, Mitchell, Pe-Pua and Pittaway (1996) found a similar type of ambivalence in the community towards refugees. Yet they make the point that as Australians have become better informed about world events there has been a greater level of understanding shown towards refugees arriving on humanitarian visas as opposed to onshore asylum seekers. However it is highly questionable whether this distinction between refugees and asylum seekers can easily be made when they are living amongst the community. There could well be the potential for all categories of refugees and perhaps even some migrants and non-Anglo Australians to be exposed to the unwelcoming and ambivalent attitudes of a proportion of others.

As a volunteer, I experienced firsthand the negativity that some sections of the community directed towards either myself, the agency I volunteered for or the refugee family I was helping. Sometimes the manifestations of this were quite subtle in the form of indifference or lack of helpfulness. At other times the negativity was quite overt and some people would go out of their way to create difficulties and show their antagonism. Furthermore my experience of this negativity extended over to my non-contact time with my refugee family. This occurred through the comments of friends, family and inescapably through media reportage. Thus I found it was hard to avoid my experience of volunteering being accorded a negative status by others.

This did not make me question what I was doing but impacted on my public expression of what I was doing. I found the expression of my volunteer self to the general community *lacked dynamicism*.<sup>16</sup> If this has also been the experience of other volunteers, then perhaps it has facilitated a lack of recognition to the complexity of volunteering with refugees.

---

<sup>16</sup> I use this expression to describe a containment of expression of self and knowledges.

If volunteers are not publicly presenting their *authentic volunteering self*<sup>17</sup> the *Australian community*<sup>18</sup> may only be receiving a partial and filtered picture of the lived experience of volunteering with refugees.

It would be too simplistic to think that an anti-immigration sentiment in Australia and the consequent ambivalence towards migrants and refugees has been facilitated by immigration policy alone. However, the impact early immigration policies have had on the intergenerational thinking of a large proportion of the Australian public must be recognised. It may be that by condoning and enacting exclusionary immigration policies in the past, the government has in effect helped to legitimise the existence of exclusionary attitudes in Australian society in the present.

---

Having investigated the role immigration may play in positioning volunteerhood, I then progressed to widen my gaze to the refugee experience and in particular refugee-hood. As I understood both volunteer-hood and refugee-hood to be identities that would interact with and act on each other, how refugee-hood was experienced therefore, would be an integral part of the volunteer equation.

---



---

<sup>17</sup> The authentic volunteering self is perceived as one in which the volunteer does not feel constrained, disempowered or vulnerable in revealing to others their experiences, knowledge and passion. This understanding is linked to hooks' (1990) notion of double consciousness where she talks of blacks having two worlds, black (personal) and white (public), as part of a coping strategy to manage racism.

<sup>18</sup> Australian community is understood in this thesis as both the informal and formal structures of society including organisations, groups in society and individuals.



### The Status of Refugee-Hood in Australian Society

The context in which refugees find themselves in Australia is one that can accentuate the legacy imposed on them by the processes of *displacement*<sup>19</sup> and *resettlement*.<sup>20</sup> Martin notes that cultural upheaval and a lack of knowledge of the new culture can place refugees at a distinct economic and social disadvantage (cited in Betts, 1988). Combined with being participants in a new environment that has been shown to project elements of ambivalence and antipathy towards refugees, the experience of refugee-hood can often occur from within a very vulnerable and potentially oppressive context (League of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies, 1991).

Berremman (1975) argues that identity is socially accorded. If this notion is applied to the identity of the refugee the host society then becomes a primary factor in the construction of refugee-hood. Thus a host society with an ambivalent and *imperialistic attitude*<sup>21</sup> carries the potential to project this on to the refugee and as a result refugee-hood could also carry an imposed devalued status. This understanding of refugee-hood is linked to Solomon's (1976) notion of powerlessness in which the consequences of continued exposure to negative projections can result in an internalised devalued sense of self.

---

<sup>19</sup>This thesis understands displacement to be the process of being uprooted from one's own country of nationality as a result of persecution and seeking refuge elsewhere. Cox (1985) notes that for some, this may involve a dangerous journey on unsafe sea vessels or an illegal border crossing. Displaced people living for lengthy periods in refugee camps are recognised as being in a category of high disadvantage due to being subject to malnutrition, poor sanitation and poor housing. In addition, those displaced as a result of war, political unrest or gross abuse of human rights may also be suffering severe health problems due to torture (Iredale, Mitchell, Pe-Pua & Pittaway, 1996).

<sup>20</sup>Resettlement is understood as the process of relocation into a third country. Factors that influence the resettlement process include the degree of cultural and linguistic variance experienced, availability of family support, state of health and procuring suitable accommodation and employment (Iredale et al., 1996). Cox (1980) also notes that a major factor in successful resettlement is for the host society to show a level of acceptance towards refugees and migrants and correspondingly for refugees and migrants to feel a sense of belonging in their host country.

<sup>21</sup>Imperialistic attitude is understood in terms of Young's (1990) notion of imperialism as a form of oppression in which dominant groups view their culture and experience as the norm and construct difference in terms of deviance and inferiority.

Adam (1978) refers to this dynamic of oppression as the impoverished identity, which has the effect of making invisible the experience, and identity of the outsider and of causing the identity to be filtered through the eyes of the dominant group. The impoverished identity can often be reinforced either by omission or by exaggerated representation in literature, the media or formal education (Adam, 1978).

This conceptualisation can potentially paint a saddening and bleak picture of refugee-hood. At times I felt this sense of lack of hope and bleakness of future. Yet I also felt and observed great strength and resilience. Although the impoverished identity may have existed in fragments it would be inaccurate to assume that it completely enveloped the refugee identity.<sup>22</sup> Thus refugee-hood itself was beginning to emerge as a contextually complex experience and one that could potentially impact greatly on the experience of volunteering.

---

As the questions guiding my research began to take on increased clarity, my theoretical positioning also strengthened and became more visible. I began to see clear links with feminist theorising about the connection between the personal and the political (Stanley & Wise, 1983). This provided me with a useful framework for extending my thinking to the impact context might have on the experience of volunteering. I began to have a clear understanding of volunteer-hood as not being experienced in isolation. Instead the lived and felt experience of volunteer-hood was beginning to emerge as highly relative to past and present social, economic and political forces acting on the context of volunteering.

---



---

<sup>22</sup> Here it is important to acknowledge the diversity of individual differences in the experience of refugee-hood. Pettman (1992) notes that in identity politics it is important to recognise both difference and affinity in order to provide opportunities for both building solidarity and making self-claims.

### Bringing all the Issues Together into my Personal Experience

Looking back, as a newcomer to volunteering with refugees, I had little awareness of the context from which I was volunteering. Although I considered myself to be an *engaged volunteer*<sup>23</sup> I now recognise that this engagement extended only to personal interaction with my refugee family. I was definitely not consciously contextually engaged. For example I can recall times when I was exposed to the ambivalence and anger from friends and acquaintances towards refugees, I often felt the impact in a very personal way.

Similarly when the family's actions or attitudes confused and sometimes disconcerted me I would look to myself for understanding rather than taking into account the complete picture and context. Therefore contextual forces that were acting on me were taken in and understood only from a personal perspective. I believe this placed me in a potentially harmful and vulnerable position.

I can best describe my experience in volunteering with refugees as being a mixture of both positive and negative experiences, of being confusing, of being completely uplifting and at times completely overwhelming. And four years on, I am still conditionally open to participating as a volunteer in this context.

The elements of personal vulnerability I felt as a volunteer has evoked in me many questions. It has motivated me to increase my understanding of the contextual influences operating on volunteer-hood. I want to find out if others working in the same context have shared the same experiences and felt the same impact as I have. And I wish to learn more about how, if at all, other volunteers have responded to this.

By investigating the social, historical, cultural and political undercurrents impacting on volunteer-hood, this research project aims to increase the level of

---

<sup>23</sup>I use the term 'engaged volunteer' to describe a type of relationship in which there is a high level of personal interaction between the refugee and the volunteer.

public and organisational awareness of the contextual complexity of volunteering with refugees.

This study will focus on the concepts of volunteer-hood (Bagihole, 1996) refugee-hood (Western, 1983) and the power dynamics between volunteering and professional helping (Lafrance, 1996; Darvill & Munday, 1984) in order to contextualise the experience of volunteering with refugees and to explore the dynamics of volunteering which may arise out of these contexts (Fisher & Karger, 1997). From this it is hoped that recognition of the contextual complexity of volunteering with refugees will emerge.

Volunteer-hood is a concept that will form the foundation of this thesis. Volunteer-hood can be defined as the identity and self-making practices of the volunteer as experienced in the wider context. The notion of volunteer-hood is understood from the perspective that the contextual complexity in which volunteering takes place has a definite and felt impact on the volunteer self.

Refugee-hood is another key concept guiding this research project. The term refugee as it appears in this thesis is based on the United Nations High Commission for Refugees 1951 Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees definition, which states that:

"a refugee is someone who is outside his or her country of nationality or habitual residence; has a well founded fear of persecution because of his/her race, religion, nationality, membership in a particular social group or political opinion; and is unable or unwilling to avail himself/herself of the protection of that country, or to return there, for fear of persecution."

(United Nations High Commission for Refugees, 2000)

Australia is a signatory to the United Nations 1951 Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees and therefore uses the above definition in determining the status of refugees in Australia [for details on refugee categories in Australia see

Appendix C] (Department of Immigration and Multicultural Affairs, 2001c). This thesis recognises that some migrants in Australia may also fall under the refugee definition. A major finding from a recent study of the settlement experiences of humanitarian entrant families in Australia was that there was a clear difficulty in separating humanitarian entrant families and migrant families from some source countries (Iredale, Mitchell, Pe-Pua & Pittaway, 1996). This brings attention to the potential for boundaries between refugee and migrant status to overlap.

For the purpose of this study, some of the volunteers may in fact be working or have worked with people documented as holding migrant status but be unofficially recognised as falling under the umbrella of refugee status. If this is the case this study will recognise such people by their own subjective definition as refugees. Refugee-hood as constructed in this thesis can be defined as the devalued position that current and past ideologies and policies have placed refugees in. This construction stems from Solomon's (1976) understanding of the links between dis-empowerment and devalued social roles.

The power dynamics between volunteering and professional helping also form part of the conceptual foundation of this thesis. This is understood from the perspective that the validity of volunteering is reduced when regarded as unprofessional compared to the professionalism of professional helping.<sup>24</sup> Volunteers therefore have the potential to occupy a devalued space within professional helping as non-professional workers (Darvill & Munday, 1984). This is perceived to bring an additional complexity to volunteering. The desired outcome of exposing this complexity in my research is recognition of the wider contextual issues that come into play when volunteering with refugees. Recognition as a concept involves a public acknowledgement of the contextual complexity impacting on volunteers working with refugees in which issues

---

<sup>24</sup> Hartman (1992) refers to this devaluation of knowledge and experience as subjugated knowledge. She argues that the privileged status carried by formal and professional knowledge has resulted in local and indigenous knowledges being relegated a lower status.

relating to volunteer-hood would be understood not in terms of private troubles of volunteers but instead as a public issue<sup>25</sup>(Mills, 1959).

From writing this research project I hope to contribute to knowledge on two levels. On a personal level I want to have a deep understanding of the context in which volunteers operate from in working with refugees. On a structural level I hope to create a piece of research as part of a policy strategy that will inform any agency or organisation having contact with refugees and running volunteer programs about the contextual complexity that volunteers may be placed in and the potential vulnerability for volunteers that may result from this.

### **The Research Questions**

In order to explore the contextual complexity of volunteering with refugees the principal questions guiding this research project are:

- a) Do volunteers working with refugees link their volunteering experiences with the wider socio-political context?
- b) Do they perceive this context to have impacted on their volunteering self?
- c) How do they negotiate their way through it?

My research project will also seek to answer the following supporting questions, which will be located in the literature review and the results analysis.

- (i) Do the volunteers perceive their experiences to have been adequately acknowledged?
- (ii) How have past and current socio-political processes, particularly in regard to immigration policies impacted on the experience of volunteers working with refugees?
- (iii) What are the implications for my volunteer work and for my practice as a social worker?

---

<sup>25</sup> For the purposes of the research, what constitutes a public acknowledgement will take shape and emerge during the research process. A possible result of the inquiry process may be action in the form of a copy of the research thesis being made available to agencies using volunteers to work with refugees.

## CHAPTER TWO : THE BRANCH

*"... like a way to enter a thicket of ideas and take hold of a branch..."*

*(De Vault, 1999, p. 187)*

---

This chapter looks to the literature to paint a contextual picture of the social and political environment in which volunteers helping refugees may be positioned.

Section One will begin with a brief summary of the historical evolution of immigration policy in Australia. This will then extend to an analysis of the influence policy may have had on the way immigration, migrants and refugees may be viewed and positioned as a social group in Australia today.

In Section Two the concept of refugee-hood will be discussed in relation to how settlement, culture shock and oppression may be experienced by refugees from within an environment of *imperialism*.<sup>26</sup>

Finally, Section Three will focus on volunteer-hood as it might be experienced in the confines of rationalist agendas and dominant cultural and counter-cultural tensions.

---

<sup>26</sup> As mentioned in footnote 21 imperialism is understood in terms of Young's (1990) notion of imperialism as a form of oppression in which dominant groups view their culture and experience as the norm and construct difference in terms of deviance and inferiority.

---

## SECTION ONE

### **The Ideology and Impact of Immigration Policy**

*"Is Australia a racist society? I am torn as I try to answer this question.... Racism is a central part of Australia's history. Yet so too has been the tolerance and understanding, the willingness to change and accept and cherish differences as the sourceblood for creativity and growth. So I say, yes, Australia has been a racist society-there are many structures which still reflect this racism today and could grow despite earlier attempts to tear them down. Yet we have recognised and can act on those issues which confront us so dramatically... We have moved forward."*

*(Jakubowicz, 1998, p. 31)*

---

At first glance the development of immigration policy in Australia may seem to have transformed from a White Only policy with an agenda of exclusion to a multicultural policy, which embraces cultural difference and seeks to produce and maintain an equitable society. However currently there is much debate around the actual effectiveness of the policy of multiculturalism. Critics of multiculturalism point to the increasingly introspective focus of current immigration policy and the existence of an anti-immigration and specifically anti-refugee sentiment in a proportion of the Australian public. This section will begin by exploring the politics of nation making and take a close look at the role of policy in shaping how Australians view themselves and others.

#### **(i) The Role of Immigration Policy in the Shaping of a Nation's Thinking**

Until the late 1880's immigration to Australia was virtually unrestricted (Cope, Castles & Kalantzis,<sup>27</sup> 1991). Australia's immigration policy was based on the British Imperial principle of laissez faire, which supported the free movement

---

<sup>27</sup> Here I acknowledge that the referencing in this section may seem to over rely on the contributions of Cope, Castles and Kalantzis (1991). However I find this particular reference to provide an important and comprehensive insight into the economic and social agendas of immigration policy.



of labour (Cope et al., 1991). In the late 1880's with the emergence of rising unemployment and a movement away from British Imperial principle and towards an increasing sense of nationalism, a White Australia policy was implemented (Cope et al., 1991). This policy allowed only people of European origin to settle in Australia (Jupp, 1998). Cope et al. (1991) argue that the assumption behind restrictive immigration policy was that economic hardship and ethnic differences would diminish social cohesion.

In the late 1940's following World War Two, White Australia policy changed to incorporate the policy of assimilation (Cope, Castles & Kalantzis, 1991). This policy was based on the premise that through a program of education and initiation, migrants could successfully assimilate into the Australian way of life (Cope et al., 1991). This was to be achieved through providing newly arrived migrants with courses in English, Australian social customs and any other relevant subject that would facilitate their assimilation into society (Cope et al., 1991).

At the same time as educating new migrants into Australian society, the government also began a campaign to educate the Australian public into the need for showing tolerance and a welcoming attitude to migrants (Cope, Castle & Kalantzis, 1991). The government considered tolerance to be an integral factor both in the achievement of a successful assimilation policy and in the maintenance of social cohesion (Cope et al., 1991). In order to achieve this the media and education were strategically used to promote attitudes of acceptance and tolerance.

In the 1950's the assumption that assimilation was an effective strategy in the maintenance of social cohesion began to attract criticism. Debate emerged around the social impact of assimilationist policies on migrants and the inferiorizing tendency of assimilationist ideology (Martin, J.I.; cited in Cope, Castles & Kalantzis, 1991). By the mid 1960's, the expectation of migrants to assimilate into Australian life was replaced with the more pluralist notion that

they would instead integrate into society (Cope et al., 1991). As policy was extended to firstly include people from Southern European regions and then people from Asia, the visibility of immigration increased (Jakubowicz, 1998). This visibility was also facilitated by greater media coverage and a correspondingly higher level of public and political discussion (Australian Catholic Social Justice Council, 1992).

The inclusion of refugees and migrants from Non-English speaking backgrounds presented the government with a whole new range of issues regarding provision of services, access and equity and social and unemployment problems (Cope, Castles & Kalantzis, 1991; Western, 1983). Martin argues that it was at this time that the migrant presence became redefined from that of contributor to society to that of burden on society (cited in Betts, 1988).

Henderson's Poverty Inquiry in 1975 assisted in formally publicising and making visible the notion of the problem migrant (Henderson, 1975). Western (1983, p. 255) notes how this inquiry detailed the problems refugees and migrants were having in adapting to Australian life and made public the new definition of an "economically disadvantaged and socially vulnerable" migrant. He concludes that the report was effectively a catalyst for the recognition of the expanse of migrant problems. As a consequence there emerged a re-framing of ideology from migrants being part of the solution to Australia's lagging economy to instead being part of the cause.

The Galbally Report in 1978 recognised the need for Australian society to provide for the unique needs of migrants and this report contributed to the newly emerging policy of multiculturalism (Galbally, 1978). Multiculturalism recognised the right of cultural expression and cultural diversity (Advisory Council on Multicultural Affairs, 1988). It was enacted through the policy of access and equity, which acknowledged the right of all Australians to have equal access to all social and political structures (Cox, 1991).

The notion of Australia as a harmonious, inclusive and multicultural society was the ideal that policy endeavoured to support and strive for. Yet there has been much debate around the extent to which Australia has been successful in achieving multiculturalism.<sup>28</sup> Jakubowicz (1998) questions whether a policy that has only been in effect for less than a generation can be effective in wiping out the influence of five generations of White Australia and assimilationist policies from the consciousness of the Australian public.

Multiculturalism has also come under criticism for being responsible for an acute increase in "ethnic and racial consciousness" (Bunnet: cited in League of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies, 1991, p. 70). This argument is supported by Jakubowicz (1998) who notes that the media has played a key role in raising ethnic awareness by making the Australian public extremely sensitised to cultural difference.<sup>29</sup> The public aversion to multiculturalism also rated a mention in the Fitzgerald Report, which noted the increasing antipathy of the Australian public to multiculturalism (Fitzgerald, 1988).

From an economic perspective, Betts (1998) argues that the state of the economy has played a major role in limiting the level of public acceptance of multicultural policy. She contends that slow economic growth and rises in unemployment have made the Australian public less receptive to the idea of multiculturalism. Instead it has caused the public to view migrants and refugees negatively and see them as part of the cause of Australia's economic woes. The Australian Catholic Social Justice Council [ACSJC] (1992) argues that this has caused a resurgence of public attitudes, which echo the ethos of White Australia Policy.

---

<sup>28</sup> The Fitzgerald Report (1988) notes the tendency for public thinking to strongly link multiculturalism and immigration and to therefore perceive multiculturalism in negative terms. Also at this time public debate emerged around the issue of immigration and social cohesion. In 1984 Professor Geoffrey Blainey gave a highly publicised speech in which he argued that Australia was in danger of becoming 'Asianized' (Cope, Castles & Kalantzis, 1991).

<sup>29</sup> Jakubowicz et al. (1994) additionally note that the Human Rights Commission has been critical of the Australian media for its portrayal of immigration issues. The Commission contends that the media has tended to over-focus on conflict and fundamentalism in its representations of ethnic issues.

From a global perspective it has been noted that an almost universal response to economic recession has been an adoption of an inward focus of national self interest and a resurfacing of racism in the form of ideologies and practices (ACSJC, 1992). The Australian Catholic Social Justice Council (1992) has been critical of Australia's current immigration policy for turning away from internationalism and taking an introspective focus on economic security and social cohesion. The Council views measures put in place by the government to prevent onshore arrivals such as overseas campaigns, temporary visas and the use of detention centres for unauthorised arrivals as demonstrative of the government's isolationist thinking behind immigration policy (ACSJC, 1992).

One critique which has been voiced by some over the history of Australia's immigration policies and which perhaps is situated at the crux of any debate around immigration is the argument that the government has tried to lead rather than follow public opinion (Fitzgerald, 1988). It may be that the long term effects of a disregard for public input on immigration issues have been a discontent with the product of immigration; migrants and refugees. Perhaps by failing both historically and currently to make a dynamic connection between immigration and humanitarian ideals the government has inadvertently fostered a less than optimal amount of humanitarianism in the general public. Current antipathetic public opinion may therefore be a reflection of the introspective focus that has been indicative of Australian immigration policy.

---

If the politics of nation making are seen to have taken on an increasingly introspective agenda, it raises the question of the effect this might have on how citizenship for refugees is politically structured, conceptualised and experienced. This section will now examine the formal rights and informal inequities within the experience of citizenship for refugees.

---

## **(ii) The Experience of Citizenship**

According to Pettman (1992) the concept of citizenship has been historically ambiguous for migrants and refugees. She argues that past restrictions on citizenship excluding non-white and non-English speaking background people and continuing restrictions on citizenship eligibility have helped to maintain the ambiguity of citizenship for refugees and migrants.

Australia's immigration policy is based on permanent settlement and citizenship (Castles, 1992). However it can be argued that the degree of citizenship afforded to migrants and refugees is greatly determined by the status of the visa they hold. Onshore asylum seekers given refugee status for example, are issued with temporary protection visas which consequently only give them access to work rights, the Special Benefit Centrelink payment and Medicare cover (DIMA, 2000). They are not eligible for additional settlement services provided to refugees entering Australia under the humanitarian program such as English lessons (DIMA, 2000).

Pettman (1992) argues that the dominant ideological construction of 'Australians' as white and English speaking has been a facilitating factor of the ambiguous nature of citizenship. The notion of a homogenous national identity effectively excludes those outside its construction from participating in the community.<sup>30</sup> Fraser (in Kenny, 1997) similarly argues that inequality of citizenship is a form of cultural injustice whereby difference becomes a marker for accessibility to both informal and formal rights.

Mullaly (1997) and Young (1990) argue that social justice strategies in Australia have over-focused on the unequal distribution of material resources whilst not taking into consideration non-material goods and services such as rights and responsibilities. This argument suggests that non-material goods and services

---

<sup>30</sup> Here it is important to acknowledge that the exclusive nature of citizenship also extends to Australia's indigenous people. However in order to limit the scope of this thesis indigenous issues are not part of this inquiry.

cannot be redistributed simply to those who do not have them because they are not possessions but rather relationships (Mullally, 1997).

### ✧ A Personal Reflective Note ✧

One piece of sense making that I have had to work my way through is to explore and acknowledge the part I have played in the maintenance and direction of the politics of nation making. Growing up in an Anglo-Australian family from a small farming community I effectively lived in isolation from the visible realities of immigration such as language, cultural and religious differences. I guess in a way because it was outside of my lived experience I was ignorant of the political shaping of immigration policy and of the assumptions behind the policies themselves. In effect I now view myself as a passive participant in the political shaping of Australia as a community. Therefore as I move into the next aspect of my research, it is with the acknowledgement that as a researcher and a citizen of Australia I am undeniably part of the dominant system, which impacts on the experience of being a refugee in Australia.

### ✧ A Personal Reflective Note ✧

---



---

## SECTION TWO

### The Experience of Refugee-Hood in Australia

*"There have been days when I felt very sad.  
I sat on trains, or walked in the middle of a crowd,  
to seek laughter,  
a grin,  
or to hear the word 'hello'.  
But the Australians seem as indifferent and as quiet as the  
winter in the Arctic.  
To me,  
life in Australia is just the four walls of the house."  
(Nguyen, 1982, p. 316-317)*

---



---

I first read this quote five years ago. It tugged at my heartstrings then and it tugs at my heartstrings now. I find so much truth and reality in its rawness. Perhaps this is an element of refugee-hood that as a volunteer I wish to reduce, to provide cushioning for in some way. It brings my attention to the 'everydayness' of life for refugees in Australia and what this 'everydayness' may look like and how it may be experienced. One inescapable factor in the everyday life of refugees is the experience of resettling into a new and often very different culture. This section will begin with an exploration of the experience of settlement for refugees in Australia.

#### (i) The Experience of Settlement

Wooden, Holton, Hugo & Sloan (1994) perceive settlement to be a problematic concept because of the difficulty involved in reaching a consensus on the length of time needed for settlement to be successfully achieved. This thesis aligns itself with the broad definition of settlement as a process in which refugees or migrants "secure a permanent footing in a new country" (Wooden et al., 1994, p. 315). This definition recognises the subjective nature of the settlement experience and the differing experiences of settlement that may occur between refugees and migrants.

Iredale, Mitchell, Pe-Pua & Pittaway (1996) argue that the type of situation that refugees have come from can play a large role in determining the success of their settlement. They note that pre-arrival factors such as refugees' past socio-economic status and whether they have come from areas of civil unrest, war or political stability will have a continuing impact on their well-being and consequently their experience of resettlement.

Refugees who have suffered from torture and trauma for example have been identified as being at high risk of experiencing settlement problems (Iredale, Mitchell, Pe-Pua & Pittaway, 1996). The probability of refugees having torture or trauma issues can be quite high. A recent study of entrants under Australia's Humanitarian Program found that 25% of respondents had experienced torture and trauma (Iredale et al., 1996). The statistics can take on alarming proportions when separated into countries of origin. The above study for example found that 70% of entrants from Iraq had been tortured or severely traumatised.

The Victorian Foundation for Survivors of Trauma [VFFST] (1998) note that upon arrival in their new country of settlement, many instances may arise for refugees which increase or maintain their experience of trauma. Fear about the future and not coping in a new unfamiliar environment, being separated from family members, having feelings of not belonging in the dominant new culture and being exposed to racism, ignorance and new humiliations can all potentially inflame or prolong the experience of trauma. According to the VFFST (1998), such factors result in a multitude of emotional states such as anxiety, helplessness, grief, depression, guilt or shame. This in turn can affect the amount of information refugees can take in and retain and their ability to cope with everyday activities.

An additional factor noted by researchers to greatly impact on the experience and success of settlement is the attitude of the host country towards newly settled individuals, families and groups (Cox, 1980; VFFST, 1998). Cox (1980) argues that this component is a major factor in successful refugee settlement.



He notes that a level of acceptance by the host country is required for refugees to feel a sense of belonging in their new country. This raises the question of just how successful settlement can ultimately be in an environment that could be described as exhibiting many signs of imperialist thinking and ideology.<sup>31</sup>

---

A major factor that can impact on the process of resettling into a new environment is the degree of cultural difference that may be experienced by refugees. Making a transition from one culture to another may involve being confronted with different languages, help-seeking behaviour, customs, societal rules, social etiquette or religious beliefs to name a few (Drachman & Halberstadt, 1992). This section will now examine the impact of culture shock on the experience of refugee-hood.

---

### **(ii) The Experience of Culture Shock**

Culture shock has been described as a major source of stress for refugees (Legault, 1996; League of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies, 1991). As it pertains to the refugee experience, the League of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (1991) define culture shock as occurring when cultural values, habits and beliefs come in conflict with those of the host society.

This understanding incorporates the notion of loss where culture shock contains aspects of mourning for lost culture and the associated diminishment of cultural identity (League of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies, 1991). Thus one effect of culture shock can be a weakening of the cultural identity of

---

<sup>31</sup> The publicity and public debate over the Tampa boat crisis is one example of current opinions towards those seeking refuge in Australia. The Australian government refused to allow the MV Tampa cargo ship entry into Australian waters after the Swedish ship had rescued asylum seekers from their sinking boat near Christmas Island. Public opinion polls in Australia showed support for the government's actions and political stance on asylum seekers around the Tampa crisis (Australian Broadcasting Commission, 2001).

self. The experience of culture shock for refugees may be heightened by personal or material losses and the stark finality of the departure from their homeland (Drachman & Halberstadt, 1992).

Legault (1996) argues that culture shock entails a dimension of intercultural misunderstanding. As cultural distance increases between individuals or groups, the chances of misunderstanding also increase. Schneller (1989) notes that conflict may arise as a result of miscommunication between two parties. This conflict may in effect be further compounded by competition in society for resources such as housing and employment.

Both dimensions of culture shock however, seem to conceptualise it essentially as an accidental process and ignore the context from which it is taking place. There seems to be no apparent distinction between conflicts arising from a lack of ability to understand as opposed to a lack of readiness to understand. This thesis therefore views culture shock as needing to be understood as occurring from within a potentially hostile and imperialist context. Perhaps culture shock may even incorporate and facilitate a type of othering and at times, coincide with experiences of cultural imperialism by the refugee (Young, 1990).

---

Refugee-hood is thus beginning to emerge as an identity that is potentially vulnerable to an accumulation of interconnecting factors. The unsettling nature of resettlement and the effects of culture shock are seen as two main experiences of refugee-hood, which might be expected within an imperialistic environment. This understanding shapes refugee-hood as being an experience that is existing in a type of 'cultural tension' and therefore may well be an identity that is vulnerable to oppression. To further explore the notion of refugee-hood as a devalued status the next section will focus on the way refugees might experience and act on oppression.

---

### The Experience of Oppression

Castles and Davidson (2000) argue that ethnicity is often understood by dominant cultures in terms of the 'other'. They note that this conceptualisation and related social practices can effectively devalue ethnicity and result in the formation of minority groups many of which will be vulnerable to varying forms of *oppression*.<sup>32</sup> Castles and Davidson (2000, p. 69) refer to this process as the 'other definition' whereby dominant groups utilise their power to impose a devalued status on minority groups.

'Other' definitions can be enacted through both institutions and ideologies (Castles & Davidson, 2000). Exclusionary and discriminatory practices such as stereotyping or lack of access to both material and non-material resources are avenues for oppression, which can effectively feed off and reinforce one another (Castles & Davidson, 2000).

Berreman (1975) makes the point that although negative external social ascriptions can infiltrate one's identity, a person can simultaneously make their own subjective claims on their *identity*.<sup>33</sup> One way the literature has conceptualised this tension between the imposed identity and the self-claimed identity is through the notion of resistance and the politics of difference (Castles & Davidson, 2000; Pettman, 1992).

Adam (1978) argues that individuals and groups respond to oppression in two ways; by resisting it through the politics of difference or by developing inferiorised coping strategies. Social withdrawal is one strategy which refugees may utilise in order to balance the tension between their claimed identity and their imposed identity (Adam, 1978). This involves acting one way with the dominant group in accordance to their imposed identity and acting another

---

<sup>32</sup> Young's (1990) notion of the five faces of oppression is a relevant tool for examining the connection between refugee-hood and oppression. Her categories of exploitation, marginalization, powerlessness, cultural imperialism and violence are all considered to be pertinent to the refugee experience.

<sup>33</sup> Identity is understood from a social constructionist perspective as being a conscious awareness of self in relation to others (Berreman, 1975).

way with their own cultural group to confirm their claimed self identity (Adam, 1978).

Finding haven amongst one's own culture can potentially strengthen identity and foster feelings of community and solidarity (Castles & Davidson, 2000). Such strengths are notable forerunners for voicing resistance through identity politics (Adam, 1978; Mullally, 1997; Pettman, 1992). The existence of a strong ethnic identity can help to avoid the internalisation of outside negative attitudes (De Vos, 1975). However an opposing argument suggests that only operating out of the confines of one's cultural group and withdrawing socially from dominant groups serves to accommodate oppression rather than fight it (Mullally, 1997).

Castles and Davidson (2000) argue that for many *minority ethnic groups*<sup>34</sup> religion is a fundamental aspect of their *resistance*<sup>35</sup> to oppression. They argue that when *economic marginalisation*,<sup>36</sup> *social isolation*<sup>37</sup> and *racism*<sup>38</sup> are factored into a group's

---

<sup>34</sup> Castles and Davidson (2000, p. 63) define ethnic minorities as groups who are "marginalised by dominant groups on the basis ... of physical appearance, race, origins or culture" and who have "some degree of collective consciousness based on ... shared language, traditions, religion, history and experiences." Within this definition it is important to acknowledge [as have the authors] that people will have multiple identities and also of the existence of minorities within minorities.

<sup>35</sup> Resistance is perceived as the "responses of oppressed people to their oppression" (Mullally, 1997, p. 151). Mullally (1997) notes two main responses of resistance include the accommodation of oppression through the adoption of an inferiorised view of self or the rejection of oppression through collective action and politicising.

<sup>36</sup> The term economic marginalisation refers to the marginalisation experienced by minority groups as a result of work opportunities being limited to lower levels of segmented labour markets [which are often marked by low pay, lack of opportunities for training or advancement and poor working conditions], high levels of unemployment and residential concentration in areas with poor housing and infrastructure (Castles & Davidson, 2000).

<sup>37</sup> This understanding includes Castles' (2000) notion of social exclusion as the isolation resulting from labour market segmentation and residential segregation. However it further recognises that language, cultural and religious differences and lack of family members in Australia can also facilitate social isolation.

<sup>38</sup> Racism is understood in reference to McConnochie, Hollinsworth and Pettmans' (1988, p. 32) notion of institutional racism in which racial prejudices "have been built into the operations of social institutions in such a way as to discriminate against, control and oppress various minority groups."

settlement experience, religion can be a key source of belonging and solidarity. Through religion ethnic groups can rebuild and re-orientate their identities (Castles & Davidson, 2000).

Castles and Davidson (2000, p. 134) however also make the point that there is a tendency for the visual aspects of religion such as mosques, temples and churches to be made "symbols of otherness" by the dominant society. This othering results from dominant culture, beliefs and values being conceived as being under threat. Additionally as already noted, declines in economic and social conditions can act as a catalyst for migrants and refugees to be blamed by the dominant society for problems such as high unemployment or housing shortages (Castles & Davidson, 2000; Vasta, 2000).

---

### SECTION THREE

#### The Political and Cross-cultural Experience of Volunteering In Australia

*"To truly become true friends with a refugee requires in some way to take on their story, their loss, their pain. It means getting inside their world which eventually leads to us experiencing our own sadness and pain."*

*"I remember taking an Australian who'd never been involved in refugee support before to the airport to welcome a newly arriving family. When we had finished and gone home, she just wept."*

*(Comments from CRSS volunteers in Brisbane; Westoby, 1994, p. 22)*

---

An exploration of the literature has exposed the potential for refugee-hood to both carry a devalued status and be experienced from within an imperialistic environment typical of settler nations (Castles & Davidson, 2000). Thus refugee-hood might be understood as an identity that is continuously being shaped by the interplay between subjectivity and social, political and cultural contexts. This framing provokes the question of whether the same could be said for volunteer-hood. Do volunteers helping refugees operate out of a similar environment, or is the status of volunteer-hood qualitatively different? This section will focus on the economical, political and cultural environment in which volunteers practice to see if volunteer-hood is also positioned in a similar context.

One pervasive factor shaping the context of volunteer-hood are the economic reforms taken by the government in the provision of welfare services. Such reforms are predominantly driven by an agenda of economic rationalism. This section will now look at the effect such economic strategies have had on the experience of volunteering.

### **(i) Volunteering and Reduced Government Responsibility Towards Social Service Provision**

The McClure Report (2000) on welfare reform is an example of the current tendency for governments to move away from welfare responsibility and towards the principles of community care and volunteerism. The report views one of the outcomes of welfare reform as resulting in a higher community awareness of the importance of individuals taking responsibility for their communities and of the moral benefits of voluntary work (McClure, 2000).

Baldock (1990) is critical of such moves and views the handing of welfare responsibility over to the non-government sector as predominantly a cost reduction strategy. She argues that within this political agenda cost expenditure is simply transferred from the government to the non-government sector with organisations having to bear the brunt of increased costs. Others argue that policies focused on reducing government spending on welfare effectively only result in costs being cut in specific areas (Hood & Wright; cited in Baldock, 1990). They note that such areas are usually the most politically sensitive ones. Taking into account the current ambivalence of sections of the Australian public towards refugees, refugee services may well be a likely sphere of social service provision to experience funding cuts.

Baldock (1990) argues that one way organisations counter the effect of increased costs is through the use of volunteers. In her study investigating the connection between the use of volunteers and the availability of government resources she found that 55% of voluntary agencies and statutory bodies interviewed reported volunteers as essential to the functioning of their organisation.

Current debate on the effects of decreased government spending and responsibility on welfare point to the negative impact it may have on volunteers. Bagilhole (1996) notes it can create the potential for volunteers to be exposed to increasingly complex and difficult situations. Woods (1997) further argues that volunteers feeling undervalued and working in complex situations

with deprived client groups may be at high risk to burnout. Another argument suggests that decreased government support for welfare can limit the extent to which organisations can provide volunteers with resources for training, supervision and support (Woods, 1997; Bales, 1996).

---

At the same time as contemporary reform in welfare plays a part in shaping the context of volunteer-hood, other connected influential factors simultaneously come into play. Economic rationalist strategies in the provision of welfare services such as measurable outputs, increased efficiency and accountability have all filtered through to volunteering in the form of professionalism. This section will now take a look at professionalism in volunteering and its costs and benefits for the volunteer.

---

## **(ii) Professionalism and Volunteering**

Mary Richmond was one of the first to argue that there was a tendency within the social work profession to limit the visibility of volunteers (Lafrance, 1996). Lafrance (1996) notes that as social work evolved, increasing professionalism and bureaucratisation changed the role of the volunteer in social welfare from an active and leading part to a role of assimilation into today's highly bureaucratised environment (Lafrance, 1996).<sup>39</sup>

Baldock (1992) argues that a combination of increasing privatisation of social service provision, government encouragement towards greater community participation in welfare and the development of principles and codes of practice in volunteering have all facilitated an increased influence of professionalism on

---

<sup>39</sup> As previously noted I prefer to use the term professional helping instead of social work to acknowledge the contributions and responsibilities of all paid helpers and their respective fields.



volunteering. She notes that this has had both positive and negative consequences for the volunteer.

Most volunteers now have access to increased rights and benefits such as payment of out of pocket expenses, volunteer insurance, the introduction of volunteer duty statements and job contracts, provision of volunteer training and the appointment of volunteer co-ordinators (Baldock, 1992). It is argued that these benefits have resulted in a more empowered volunteer and an increased awareness of the importance of volunteer rights.

Conversely it has also been argued that the downside of the interplay between professionalism and volunteering is the reduction in input volunteers may have within their agency. This Baldock (1992) argues is due to hierarchical and bureaucratic factors such as top-down management and economic accountability that exist concurrently alongside professionalism. She further suggests that increased volunteer professionalism may also increase tension between volunteers and workers as volunteers can potentially threaten the job security of paid workers.

If such contextual factors are taken into account there may in effect be a considerable gap between the politically condoned rights of the volunteer and the rights they actually have access to. This is understood from the perspective that the movement towards increased recognition of volunteer rights is occurring from within an environment of *economic rationalism*.<sup>40</sup>

---

<sup>40</sup> As previously mentioned, economic rationalism is understood in reference to the current shift in welfare responsibility from the government to the free market and the resulting expectation for welfare services to demonstrate increased efficiency, output, productivity and accountability (Ife, 1997).

### ✧ A Personal Reflective Note ✧

As this literature review moves into the more personal and emotional aspects of volunteering with refugees, I have a strong sense that my volunteer self is now much more visible than my researcher self. I am finding that I can personally identify with much of the literature on volunteering with refugees. From one perspective I am aware that such a sense of subjectivity may impact on my level of critical awareness and on the very content of literature I choose to access and use. Yet from another perspective, the resulting heightened sense of my personal lived experience perhaps speaks volumes about just how deep an impact my experiences in volunteering with refugees have had.

### ✧ A Personal Reflective Note ✧

---

Volunteer-hood is thus beginning to emerge as an identity, which is positioned amongst a potentially complex contextual environment. Economic and political influences may well have the effect of both controlling and limiting some of the ways volunteering is politically and privately lived, felt and understood. Yet additionally, there is also another factor which contends with the political and economic shaping of the context of volunteer-hood; the politics of culture. This section will explore the different cultural understandings of volunteering and how this might impact on the experience of volunteering.

---

### **(iii) The Cultural Construction Of Volunteering**

Recent research has noted the failure of many service providers to acknowledge the differing cultural understandings of volunteering (Martin, 1999; Vangelista, 1999; Westoby, 1994). The notion of volunteering to help others without financial gain originated from the Judeo-Christian ideal of altruism or selfless service to others (Martin, 1999). Martin (1999) cautions that this notion of

helping only represents one perception of volunteering. She argues that volunteerism is a culturally constructed concept, which has different meanings for different cultures.

The concept of volunteering can differ widely between collective and individualistic cultures. Vangelista (1999) noted this as a key issue in the Vietnamese Good Beginnings Parenting Project in which volunteers were connected to Vietnamese families. The Vietnamese tradition of getting assistance through family differed markedly from Australia's historical use of volunteers from within the welfare sector (Vangelista, 1999). Thus the program continuously had to work with two understandings of volunteering based on different language and concepts.

A report on Community Refugee Settlement Scheme [CRSS] volunteers at Fremantle Migrant Resource Centre noted the frequent occurrence of misunderstandings between volunteers and refugees (Martin, 1999). One difficulty noted was the existence of differing and sometimes non-existent cultural understandings of volunteering by refugees. In some instances this resulted in refugees feeling suspicious of the motives of the volunteer and being resistant to enlisting their help. Some refugees thought that volunteers were spying on them in order to gather information. Others had difficulty comprehending why someone would want to help them by volunteering (Martin, 1999).

Martin's (1999) report on the CRSS program at Fremantle Migrant Resource Centre found that differing cultural constructions of volunteering also impacted on volunteers. Misunderstanding on the part of the refugee regarding the role of the volunteer sometimes resulted in inappropriate and over-use of volunteers (Martin, 1999). Unrealistic expectations of the volunteer's function also resulted in refugees being dissatisfied with volunteers and volunteers feeling unappreciated. This may have been perpetuated by refugees' lack of familiarity and understanding of the social services sector (Martin, 1999).

The CRSS Program at Fremantle attempted to minimise cultural misunderstandings between volunteers and refugees through offering a series of training and debriefing sessions. Volunteers were given cross-cultural training that included a specific component on the differing cultural interpretations of volunteering. Interestingly, when volunteers were placed with families, the number of cross-cultural difficulties actually experienced was found to be much less than anticipated in training. A component of the CRSS Program at Fremantle also included the explanation to refugees using volunteers the role of the volunteer and that the volunteer was unpaid (Martin, 1999).

Martin (1999) is critical of current cross-cultural training and programs because they do not attempt to explicitly help volunteers to understand the reasons behind cultural misunderstandings. She notes that this is despite cross-cultural training covering the consequences of cultural misunderstanding such as demanding clients or suspicion of volunteer motives. Martin is also critical of current training not incorporating explanations to clients on what a volunteer is and what a volunteer does.

Martin (1999) argues that an over-focus on the effect of cultural misunderstanding rather than the cause shows an assumption by agencies that refugees will naturally have realistic expectations of volunteers. This assumption can lead to the overuse or under-use of volunteers. She asserts that this shows a lack of acknowledgement for agency obligations regarding access and equity for both clients and volunteers.<sup>41</sup>

---

<sup>41</sup> Here it is acknowledged that this section is heavily reliant on Martin's (1999) research on volunteerism in a culturally diverse context. An exhaustive search resulted in the location of only three articles on volunteering with refugees. Such lack of information may be evidence of the need for further research on this topic.

---

An examination of the politics of cultural knowledge exposes a challenging dynamic to the volunteer-refugee relationship, whereby communication may be fraught with misunderstandings and misinterpretations. A further dimension to this cultural arena in which volunteering is operating is the positioning of the volunteer in relationship to the dominant culture. Volunteers may well be ambiguously placed in relation to current anti-immigration and anti-refugee discourse in some sections of the Australian community. This next section will therefore explore the notion of a counter cultural aspect in volunteering with refugees.

---

#### **(iv) The Counter-Cultural Aspect of Helping Refugees**

In its Handbook of working with refugees and asylum seekers the Red Cross speaks of a 'counter cultural' element in working with refugees (LRCRCS, 1991). They argue that volunteers can be caught in the conflict between regularly observing pain and social injustice, yet at the same time being a member of a society that is increasingly demonstrating its antipathy towards refugees and asylum seekers (LRCRCS, 1991). The public reaction regarding the recent Tampa boat crisis off Christmas Island in which 480 asylum seekers were denied entry to Australia is a pertinent example of the strong anti-refugee and anti-humanitarian sentiment in seemingly large sections of the Australian community (Australian Broadcasting Corporation, 2001). The effect of this public discourse on the volunteer may therefore be extremely relevant in how the volunteer perceives themselves and the work they do.

The Red Cross argue that volunteer work within a context of public unwelcomeness and antipathy may result in volunteer-hood being identified with refugee-hood and consequently devalued (LRCRCS, 1991). They further argue that volunteers who strongly identify with the work they are doing may cause family and friends to become estranged. It may be that a self-preserving

strategy for volunteers from within such an environment is the suppression of their identity in some public and private domains.

In reference to my own experience, in social situations outside of my volunteering life I refrained from exposing my volunteering self to others. Yet in contrast this part of me came alive and was very dynamic when I interacted with other volunteers. In fact I took on more than a volunteer peer role on these occasions and made myself available to other volunteers in more of a supporting role. Perhaps this increased level of dynamicism helped compensate for the volunteering self I kept from the wider society.

### CHAPTER THREE : THE HEART

*"...and take hold of a branch that will lead to the heart of things."*

*(De Vault, 1999, p. 187)*

---

The heart is a very apt name for this chapter in that it reflects the subjectivity that I believe is an inherent part of research. In recognising and embracing this subjectivity this chapter is aimed at naming up my own personal worldview in relation to the research process.

Section One will begin with an explanation of the theoretical framings, which have guided my approach to the research process and to the topic of volunteering with refugees.

In Section Two the methodology used to investigate the research questions as underpinned by my theoretical approach will be discussed.

Finally, Section Three will look at the techniques I have used in the gathering, sharing and collating of information.

---

## SECTION ONE

### Theoretical Framework

*" Subjectivity is situated such that the voices in our heads and the feelings in our bodies are linked to political, cultural, and historical contexts."*

*(Ellis & Flaherty, 1992, p. 4)*

---

If this research project were to wholeheartedly embrace any one particular way of conceptualising the human experience, the above quote would be hard to surpass. This quote reflects two important concepts that underlie my approach to this study. Firstly my understanding of reality as being socially constructed, and secondly my belief that the lived experience is both intensely personal and at the same time intensely political. Thus my own personal storying, my approach to the research process and my embracement and recognition of the stories of others is undertaken in this study from within a feminist (Fook, 1993; Pettman, 1992; Stanley & Wise, 1983; Young, 1990) and critical social consciousness (Calhoun, 1995; Ife, 1997; Pease & Fook, 1999).

Critical social theory has provided me with a framework for understanding from a political perspective my own volunteer-hood and that of others. This has been a useful tool in helping me connect the personal experience to political, social, cultural and historical contexts. Critical social theory allows grounded personal experiences to be pulled out into a more political arena in which power systems and oppressive structures can be critiqued (Ife, 1997; Young, 1990). My thesis reflects this critical perspective within which I hope to paint a real and lived picture of the contextual complexity involved in volunteering with refugees.



My feminist awareness has further enabled me to be aware of how and where I am situated in the research process. As a researcher I recognise that I have dual consciousness; as a member of the oppressed class of women and paradoxically as a member of the dominant culture and privileged class of researcher (Cook & Fonow, 1990). The methodology that I have chosen will therefore be aimed at trying to minimise the power imbalance between the researcher and the researched in order to create a space for the sharing of subjective experiences.

This research project draws upon feminist understandings of power differentials and oppression to explore and analyse the politics of identity and self-creation for both refugees and volunteers. Young's (1990) more contemporary construction of the differing forms of group oppression is viewed as a relevant tool for examining the connection between identity and oppressed status. Young's (1990) five faces of oppression that include exploitation, marginalisation, powerlessness, cultural imperialism and violence, are seen as pertinent to the lived experience of both refugee-hood and volunteer-hood.

Finally, my analysis of the experience of self-making in refugee-hood and volunteer-hood is also informed by anti-oppressive theory and specifically by identity politics (Berreman, 1975; Castles & Davidson, 2000; Pettman, 1992; Adam, 1978; Castles, 1992; Mullally, 1997; Young, 1990). Castles and Davidson's (2000, p. 69) notion of the 'other definition'<sup>42</sup> is a relevant framework for conceptualising oppression as experienced through identity formation. They describe the 'other definition' as a process whereby dominant groups utilise their power to impose a devalued status on minority groups. This understanding is seen as very relevant to the experience of both volunteer-hood and refugee-hood.

---

<sup>42</sup> Whereby ethnicity is often understood by dominant cultures in terms of the 'other' (Castles & Davidson, 2000).

---

## SECTION TWO

### Methodology

*"Evocative stories activate subjectivity and compel emotional response. They long to be used rather than analysed; to be told and retold rather than theorised and settled; to offer lessons for further conversation rather than undebatable conclusions; and to substitute the companionship of intimate detail for the loneliness of abstracted facts."*

*(Bochner; cited in Ellis & Bochner, 2000, p. 744)*

---

From the onset of writing this study I have tried to inject a type of 'cosiness' to the way I present and approach subjective knowledge and experiences. I believe the motivation for this direction, which emerged during writing, was fuelled by my need to connect and engage with the reader. Ellis and Bochner (2000, p. 744) argue "the accessibility and readability [of ethnographic text] repositions the reader as a co-participant in dialogue." It was therefore a natural progression to connect my narrator self and researcher self to ethnographic methodology.

This study will use a blend of auto-ethnographic and ethnographic methodology, which will incorporate storying in a narrative, reflexive and evocative style (De Vault, 1999; Ellis & Bochner, 2000). Auto/ethnographic methodology is an effective form of expression for the critical social and feminist consciousness, which underpins my approach to this study.

I feel that my own volunteering story is a valid and important source of information that needs to be told and acknowledged. Similarly it is important that the stories of other volunteers are also told and given recognition. Auto/ethnographic methodology allows both myself and other volunteers the space in which to tell our stories. Additionally, in reference to my own storying,

ethnographic methodology sits well with my feminist beliefs of the power and validity of the lived experience. My feminist positioning is also reflected in the way I have politically presented and placed others and myself in the research process. The use of a blend of auto ethnography and ethnography has allowed me to use reflective narratives of my own experience of volunteer-hood to explore and embrace the validity of storying from other volunteers (Ellis & Flaherty, 1992).

Storying is an effective medium in which to contextualise and personalise meaning. Within ethnographic writing meaning is emergent rather than causative (Tedlock, 2000). The notion of meaning making as being a continual and reflexive process fits well with my personal journey of reflecting on and bringing understanding to my own experience of volunteer-hood. Additionally, the reflexivity that storying can facilitate opens the opportunity for researcher growth and learning (De Vault, 1999).

I view the notion of auto/ethnography as a power equalising research method with both enthusiasm and caution. On the one hand I can see the overt way it allows me to position myself amongst rather than above the research process. Yet on the other hand the fact still remains that at the end of the day, I will be the one choosing how, when and where to include the stories of others. This uneasiness with the 'power aspect' of the research process has led me to resist some styles of ethnographical representation such as formal interviewing. It has led me to seek a way of gathering data that I view as the 'best fit' for dealing with issues of power, voice and representation. I use the term 'best fit' in recognition that regardless of method, there will always be an inescapable element of power attached to the researcher and the research process.

The next section of this chapter will briefly discuss my journey of resistance to researching others and my negotiation around achieving a 'best fit' method of data gathering.

---

## SECTION THREE

### Research Plan

---

#### (i) Method of Data Collection

*My journey into data collection*<sup>43</sup> began from a broad ethnographical landscape. As it progressed, each path I took allowed me to become increasingly clear around my own ethical expectations and responsibilities as a researcher of subjective knowledge. As I took a more critical approach to the issue of power in research (Oakley, 1981) I could feel a gradual build up of resistance inside me to my initial plan of audio taping interviews with the volunteers.

To me this represented a move away from the subjective in the sense that I felt that word for word transcription would be an 'after the moment' form of expression. What I was looking for was a method that would facilitate a more 'in the moment' expression of self (Denzin, 1997).

So I turned my gaze to the environment that might foster this type of engaged response from volunteers. And unequivocally, the words ruling my thoughts were 'its up to them'. Unlike information, the dynamics of engagement is not something that can be extracted from others. It is more of a sense of subjectivity that can emerge if and when the conditions are right.

The decision to leave the method of data collection 'up to them' made me feel like a trapeze artist whose safety net had been taken away. The locus of control was now in someone else's hands. This demonstrated to me the grip I had had on my power as researcher. My 'up to them' decision also made me increasingly

---

<sup>43</sup> Stanley & Wise (1983) note that an important aspect of feminist research is a focus on process. I similarly view my personal journey in experiencing the research process as an integral and defining part of this research project.

reflective on the direction this research project may have taken if I had not released the grip that I had in a sense unconsciously had in writing the first two chapters of this thesis.

When I had arrived at my destination to what I considered to be a 'best fit' method of data gathering, I identified two main challenges to adopting this approach. Firstly, the difficulty that I might have in establishing an interpersonal and environmental rapport that would facilitate the engagement of volunteers. Secondly, the growing fear I had that my decision to hand over the data collection process to the volunteers would somehow result in insufficient raw material to successfully complete my research project.

These were two challenges that I was happy to sit with and let exist rather than seek immediate solutions for. I thought that the 'chasm' that handing over power had left in me would be replaced with something that at the time was unknown to me. I was willing to drift along with the research process and allow that unknown element to surface naturally.

#### **The dilemma of the politics of research.....**

As time passed, and my knowledge and theoretical positioning around my thesis began to strengthen and take on increased clarity, so did my focus on the topics I wished to discuss with volunteers. I found myself caught in the dilemma of wanting to achieve both a 'best fit' method of data collection and to have access to specific knowledge and experiences from the volunteers.<sup>44</sup>

This led to a lot of self-questioning as to where my research project was headed. Was it to be a formative process where each new step might either follow or deviate from the research topic? Or was it to take a more guided form which

---

<sup>44</sup> This paradox is similarly noted by Madriz (2000) who says that even in feminist research, which acknowledges the importance of collectivism in women's lives, the individual interview is still the most widely used research method.

required me to take back some of the power I had previously resolved to relinquish?<sup>45</sup>

As a researcher with a high sensitivity to the power dynamics between the research participants, and myself this was not an easy choice. In the end, I feel that I came to a comfortable compromise between my research aspirations and the reality of being a researcher in the research process.

This compromise did not take the form of one single action, but instead was made up of many small measures designed to facilitate respect, validation, sharing, support and openness between the participants and myself. Such measures included an increased resolve and awareness towards explaining and introducing participants to the research process and the *dialogical*<sup>46</sup> sharing, recording and clarification of information and experiences.

Thus my endeavour to understand and make sense of the politics of research emerged as a form of micro-level action research (Kemmis & McTaggart, 1988). I found this process of *reflexive*<sup>47</sup> thinking and doing helpful in maintaining my focus on the power dynamics of research relationships throughout the entirety of the research process. I believe that this had an important impact on my personal and professional interaction with both agencies and volunteers. In offering me feedback, one volunteer described how from an initial position of questioning the validity of her contributions to this research project, she made the comment that she felt comfortable in revealing and sharing her thoughts with me and expressed surprise that she had found so much to say about herself.

---

<sup>45</sup> Clifford (cited in Crawford, 1994, p. 62) talks of the link between the pursuance of coherency in research processes and increased authority and control. He concludes that such tensions are an inescapable element in the research process.

<sup>46</sup> Here dialogue is understood in relation to Ross' definition [who is strongly influenced by Freire (1970)] as "the ethico-political capacity to work across knowledge/power differences without exploiting the other person and with a view to enhancing socially just and democratic processes [and relationships]" (2002, p. 144).

<sup>47</sup> Reflexivity is understood in terms of Crawford's (1994, p. 60) notion of it being a "conscious, active reflection of an ethnographic researcher on their relationship to what it is they are trying to understand."

### **Making connections.....**

Gradually, through a process of snowballing, networking and taking leads from leads, I was able to make contact with representatives from four agencies to discuss my research project. All agencies contacted expressed interest in receiving feedback from my research and were open to involving their volunteers in this process. Two of these agencies offered to assist me in gaining access to some of their volunteers. It was very important to me that after completion, the research I was doing would continue to have an active, informative and political existence as opposed to being isolated in academia. It was also important that the connections I was making with agencies and workers would assist me in building relationships beyond research and act as a forerunner for my professional future as a social worker.

Although finding it easy to access volunteers through their agencies, I found it difficult to recruit these volunteers as participants in my research. In one agency for example, I was invited to speak with volunteers at a monthly volunteer peer meeting. My experience of this was both positive in the sense that the volunteers expressed interest in my experiences, yet slightly disheartening to observe the 'quietening' effect on the group when the subject of research was broached. However upon reflection I acknowledge this to be a useful learning experience in how, in the context of a first encounter, my status of researcher overrode and effectively reduced the visibility of my student and volunteer statuses.

### **The participants.....**

The people I wished to engage in my research were people who had worked or were working in a voluntary capacity with refugees in the Perth metropolitan area. The sample drawn from this population was made up of four volunteers who had recently had regular contact with refugees and who had a high level of engagement in the helping process with these refugees.<sup>48</sup>

---

<sup>48</sup> As mentioned in Chapter One, I understand engagement in terms of there being a high level of personal interaction between the refugee and the volunteer.

Of the four volunteers, three had Anglo-Australian backgrounds and one came from a refugee and culturally and linguistically diverse background. The length of time volunteers had been volunteering with refugees ranged from two to four years. Three of the volunteers were currently actively volunteering whilst one had recently ceased volunteering to engage in full-time paid work.

In the end, access to volunteers was predominantly gained through personal connections I had made in my past working and volunteering experiences. I found that in the context of familiarity, volunteers were much more open to participating in the research process. I was only successful in gaining access to volunteers through an agency when, in making a series of connections with various people within the agency, I was able to find a stakeholder with personal connections to many volunteers. When contacted, volunteers were happy to extend their association with this person to me and to my research.<sup>49</sup>

#### **The interview process.....**

The exchange of information took place via informal discussions lasting approximately one hour. Three of the volunteers chose to 'information share' in their own homes, with one choosing to meet at her place of work.<sup>50</sup> Before beginning any discussion, volunteers were given the opportunity to read an information sheet explaining the aims and focus of the research project and to ask any questions. The consent form [see Appendix E], a copy of which was given to the volunteer, was then signed by both the volunteer and myself.

In order to make the recording of information as visible as possible, a large sheet of cardboard was used to jot down important points and themes as they emerged. Volunteers were encouraged to participate in this process, however

---

<sup>49</sup> A similar experience was noted by Madriz (2000) who found that in her attempts to gain access to participants, taking a personalistic approach to recruiting such as utilising personal networks was far more successful than any impersonal recruiting strategies used.

<sup>50</sup> Madriz (2000, p. 841) notes that conducting research in the participant's comfort zone "further diffuses the power of the researcher, decreasing the possibilities of 'Otherization'."



no volunteer took up this option. It was also important that at all times volunteers could view everything that was written down.

Discussions took the format of an initial 'warming up' and familiarisation period in which both parties connected with each other and the topic by sharing how they first became involved in volunteering. This was followed by a more focused line of discussion in which specific topics, themes and issues were introduced through my own storying around past volunteering experiences. This disclosure prompted responses from volunteers in the form of storying. Thus the role of both researcher and participant alternated between listener and teller of stories. During this process, it was observed that there was a two-way dialogue of supportive comments and feedback.<sup>51</sup>

One unexpected benefit from this informal style of information sharing was that on occasions, it resulted in themes and issues previously unconsidered by myself to 'crop up' in discussions. This allowed for the further enrichment of the information gathered.

At the conclusion of the discussion volunteers were encouraged to re-read all of the comments and given the offer to have the information left with them for a short period for further perusal.<sup>52</sup> When given the opportunity to read any recorded information it was noted that each volunteer engaged in this process enthusiastically and reflectively. It was important that there was a sense of ownership and participation on behalf of the volunteers. A final ending point to the discussion was 'bringing back to the here and now' or debriefing between the volunteer and myself and an additional offer of support if issues later presented as a result of our discussion. Before inclusion in the thesis, a summary of each volunteer's contribution was later forwarded to him or her for editing and clarification.

---

<sup>51</sup> This approach is based on Oakley's (1981) notion of interviewing as an interactional exchange in which participants take an active part in interaction. She argues that this reduces the power differentials between researcher and participant.

<sup>52</sup> However no volunteers took up this option.

### **(ii) The collation process**

The data gathered was organised in two ways. In order to recognise the experience of the individual it was important that the volunteer's individual experiences were acknowledged. This was achieved by documenting significant 'moments' that came out of the volunteer's and my own storytelling. This assisted in showing the variability and complexity of our experiences. Secondly as it was an aim of this research project to link the personal to the structural, common themes that emerged from the discussions were noted and reflected upon.

### **(iii) Limitations**

As only one volunteer within this study came from a refugee and culturally and linguistically diverse [C.A.L.D] background, it is acknowledged that the resulting research will effectively contain a lack of breadth of the experiences of volunteers of difference. This study also does not extend to an analysis of agency or organisational support for volunteers. Therefore it is important to note that the themes that arise from this study be acknowledged as an attempt at sense making for volunteer-hood rather than a critique of agency or organisational context.

Initially it was expected that the relationship between the volunteer and their respective agency would have some influence on the content of experiences shared. However the decision not to make reference to specific agencies helped to effectively remove this anticipated barrier to disclosure.

My position in the research process as being a researcher as well as a volunteer also presented a challenge to the aim of reducing the power dimension between each participant and myself. My role as researcher placed me in a more powerful position in the context of the research interview. I will attempt to remedy this imbalance of power by using feminist methodology, which seeks to dismantle power relations between the researcher and the researched (Oakley, 1981).

#### **(iv) Ethics**

Two separate procedures were put in place to protect the autonomy of volunteers participating in the study. Volunteers who were accessed through personal contacts received an initial phone call informing them of the research project and requesting their participation. They were then given the opportunity to have a few days in which to make a decision. Before any interviewing took place, volunteers were provided with a research information sheet [see Appendix E] and given the opportunity to ask questions.

To protect the autonomy of the volunteers accessed through agencies, the agency was first approached and presented with a written outline of the aims, objectives and methods of the study [See Research Information Sheet, Appendix D]. After agency permission to access volunteers was obtained, interested volunteers within the agency were then approached and given the opportunity to read the proposal and discuss the research project.

Informed consent was obtained from volunteers who wished to take part in the research [Refer Volunteer Consent Form, Appendix E]. Volunteers had the right to withdraw from the research project at any time they wished. Due to the small sample size it was also most likely that volunteers would be able to recognise their own comments in the final report. Volunteers were therefore made aware of this aspect of the research. However, as the names of agencies were omitted from this study, this was perceived to effectively eliminate the risk for the comments of volunteers to impact negatively on their future contact with agencies and organisations.

To ensure confidentiality, no names or nationalities of the volunteers, their supporting agencies, or the refugees they were working with were mentioned in the study. A copy of any written documentation of data gathered in the informal discussion sessions was given to each volunteer to check for accuracy and amend if necessary.

A perceived risk in this research project was the potential for the stress level of volunteers to increase as a result of reliving past stressful experiences with refugees. To minimise this risk the following measures were put in place.

- All discussions concluded with debriefing sessions in which any issues that had presented were openly discussed.
- Prior to the commencement of the interviewing stage of the research process volunteers were offered additional researcher contact and support should circumstances require it.

These measures however, were not accessed or utilised by volunteers. This may have been due to the focus of discussions not being directed to the personal stories of refugees but rather to the more impersonal wider political context.

## CHAPTER FOUR : THE GENUINE AND THE BOLD

*"I am pleased when I find a sentence that feels both genuine and bold."*

*(De Vault, 1999, p. 187)*

---

The information gathering part of this research process has been both exciting and enriching for me. Exciting in the sense that I have the opportunity to move outside the relative isolation of academia and to interact with so many interesting and dynamic people. Enriching in the sense that those I have interacted with have been such wonderful sources of knowledge and energy. Every person I spoke with left me feeling high and fuelled with more enthusiasm to further immerse myself in the research process. And it is from this energised and connected state that I will now begin to share and reflect on the diversity and colour of the lived experiences of volunteers working with refugees.

The themes presented in this chapter are context focused and have originated from my own reflections and growing understandings around my personal experiences of volunteer-hood. Starting from my own experiences proved to be a good beginning point for discussion that had relevance for volunteers and facilitated rapport and relationship building between us. The sub-themes I have used emerged during the subsequent storying and sharing of information between volunteers and myself. In keeping to a contextual focus, they have been placed under the context headings to which they most strongly speak.

In an attempt to illustrate the complexity in volunteering with refugees, Section One will begin with a description of the tasks and emotions involved in volunteering.

In Section Two, volunteers' understandings of how their volunteering efforts, knowledges and capabilities have impacted on the domains of family and friends and local, wider and international communities will be discussed.

Section Three will focus on the cultural and political tensions that may surround and infiltrate the volunteering experience. The coping strategies volunteers might use in response to these tensions will also be discussed.

Section Four investigates the differing levels of relevance and recognition around professionalism by volunteers and how professionalism might impact on the experience of being a volunteer.

Finally, Section Five looks at how volunteers might understand the connection between volunteering and the context in which it is practised.

---

---

## SECTION ONE

### Complexity

*"I taught them how to laugh."*

---

---

#### **The task.....**

In the sharing and collaboration of my own experiences with the stories of other volunteers the complex nature of the volunteering task became increasingly evident. Such complexity came alive when volunteers told stories of how their helping roles moved between providing support with basic material needs to offering emotional and advocacy support.

Volunteers described how they had assisted with household support through helping find accommodation, explaining the terms of rent, leases, property condition reports and bonds, supplying household furniture, locating and sometimes cleaning crisis housing, supplying houses with initial stocks of food, taking families shopping and organising donations.

Volunteers also frequently mentioned how much of their work involved family oriented activities such as helping parents with school visits, parenting skills, house-keeping skills, linking families to playgroups, familiarising children with bus and train routes to school, linking mothers up to pregnancy support houses and undertaking a general role of befriending.

Assistance in accessing and negotiating with social services and formal institutions also factored heavily into volunteering tasks and roles. In fact it was notable that such tasks usually made up a large proportion of activities listed by volunteers. Volunteers told how they had helped refugees and their families in dealing with a variety of organisations, agencies and institutions such as courts,

Medicare offices, Homeswest, banks, the police department, Centrelink offices, libraries and torture and trauma services.

Finally, another form of assistance mentioned by volunteers focused on helping to reduce some of the cultural, social and linguistic isolation often experienced by refugees. These types of tasks involved familiarisation with transport systems, shopping areas, city centres and areas of recreational interest such as local parks and rivers. Volunteers also reported that they had provided support in learning English, learning to drive cars and making connections with other volunteers.

Thus the lived experience of volunteering with refugees is one which presents as being highly diverse in nature and requiring multiple skills, knowledges and coping abilities from the volunteer. An important point to emerge out of this discovery is that volunteers are effectively practising from within an environment, which is lacking in control and boundaries around what they have to work with and ultimately have to cope with.

Additionally, there appears to be a possible lack of recognition by volunteers themselves of the diverse nature of their volunteering activities. One volunteer who described her role as one of basic support and guidance, spoke of receiving a midnight phone call asking for her assistance from the police. Another volunteer, after listing all the tasks she had undertaken with her family, commented that she did not realise that she had done so much.

---

*"Sometimes after seeing the family I would feel a sense of relief that I had got through another visit."*

---



### **The emotion.....**

An additional marker for the complexity of the volunteering task was the emotional component that appeared to be connected to each volunteer's knowledge and lived experience. When volunteers were asked to reflect on all the tasks they had listed and to name any emotions or thoughts that came up for them, a multitude of mixed emotions, positionings and heartfelt declarations began to surface.

Along with many positive affirmations around the experience of volunteering and the helping relationship, volunteers also described the emotional intensity and emotional variability they experienced in their connections to tasks, relationships and the political environment. It was common for words such as fondness, joy and excitement to be closely followed by descriptions of emotional lows such as hopelessness, pity and crying.

One volunteer who had extensive involvement with many refugees spoke on one hand of the "sheer absolute joy" that made up part of her volunteering experience yet also made mention of her "deep seated shame" at Australia's treatment of refugees and ultimately at being Australian.

Other volunteers reflected predominantly positive feelings around their volunteering experiences and associated relationships. These volunteers spoke of the rewards and connectedness they gained from helping refugees. It is unclear however whether owing to these specific volunteers having lower levels of involvement in time and task than others, there had in fact been less opportunities for them to be exposed to a wider scope of experiences.

A point of interest to note is that one of the volunteers who spoke only in positives was from a refugee background and had a highly developed framing of refugee and political issues. This was evident in the language and political literacy she demonstrated and in how she described the positioning of herself and others in the volunteering context. She spoke of feeling gladness,

excitement and satisfaction at helping people to feel comfortable and safe and of volunteering being a global activity whose purpose was for the whole of humanity.

This connection between positive experience and political framing of issues may be evidence of the dialectic relationship between the two in which low levels of political consciousness may be correlated to disempowering experiences around volunteering. Here, Freire's (1970) notion of literacy as the ability to name the world in order to change what is problematic is pertinent. The link between political literacy and empowerment may well be a relevant point of reference for the focus of further research into this area.

---

*"I've done everything on my own bat."*

*"I'm it."*

*"I have to, I just have to."*

---

### **The complexity.....**

Bagilhole (1996) talks of the danger of the complexity of volunteering being contained by the use of descriptions, which conceptualise the volunteering task in terms of being a befriending activity. She argues that this lends a simplicity to volunteering and contends that if befriending is understood in terms of a friendly chat over a cup of tea, there is a danger that the full range of tasks that it can potentially entail will not be given recognition. Bagilhole's (1996) argument has relevance for the depth of acknowledgement of the task of volunteering with refugees. If in the future the complexity of volunteering in this context is to be given greater recognition, there perhaps needs to be changes to how such tasks are both privately and publicly described and acknowledged.

---

## SECTION TWO

### The Felt Impact of Volunteering

*"[It's] a way of doing something at ground level to help make me feel better about the situation."*

---

#### A re-framing of thinking.....

An element of the volunteering task of interest to me was the way volunteers conceived how far the effect of their actions had permeated into society. I wanted volunteers to, in a way, stand back from their volunteer selves and see how their lived experiences had interacted with the wider community. This perspective was very important to me in contextualising the volunteer experience.

In my experience, I found having an understanding of the contextual elements in volunteering with refugees gave me a useful reference point to reflect back to the personal. I found that by 'knowing of' the bigger picture I could more freely switch my gaze between the two. When this understanding began to emerge in me I felt that instead of looking through the lens of my trusty old instamatic camera, I was peering through a different lens.

I put this framing to volunteers not by sharing my own realisation and personal discovery, but rather by presenting them with the 'camera' and listening to the way they described what they saw when they looked through the lens. This was done by drawing five dots in a line representing in order: the space in which they volunteered, the local community or neighbourhood space, the wider community space, the national community space and the international community space.

These boundaries were constructed in reference to my own experiences as both a researcher and volunteer. In making a connection between the personal and political, I understood these locations to be the sites of varying degrees of support and prejudice in volunteering. I chose not to name the starting off point of the volunteering experience because I wanted to know how and where each volunteer personally framed and located this space.

From the material that resulted from these discussions, it emerged that volunteers' perceptions of impact were linked to the concepts of *change and recognition*.<sup>53</sup> Thus interaction between the personal 'on the ground' experiences of volunteers and the wider levels of society were thought of by volunteers in terms of how much of what they were doing was both touching and infiltrating these communities.

At first this way of viewing their volunteering experiences seemed alien to the volunteers. Most were initially slow to speak and needed time to give thought to their answer. I found that assisting volunteers to start from their 'on the ground' volunteering experiences and to gradually widen their thinking helped to extend their view beyond the personal. As volunteers began to make links between their own experiences and the wider picture, it became clear that whilst their volunteering impacted greatly at some levels, they considered it to have hardly been felt or recognised at others.

---

*"Hopefully [I can] change the nature of how Australia thinks via my grandchildren."*

---



---

<sup>53</sup> Most volunteers spoke of the impact of change as being improvements in attitudes and understanding towards refugees and refugee issues. Volunteers similarly described the impact of recognition, as being the effects such changes in attitude would have on their volunteering experiences.

### **Connection to family.....**

The majority of volunteers conceived their volunteering as starting from and operating within their own families. Volunteers described how the support, recognition and participation of their immediate family factored greatly in their abilities and capabilities in volunteering with refugees. Most volunteers mentioned how their partners and children had provided their time and support to assist with volunteering. One volunteer described the refugee family that she had been involved with for the past four years as being an everyday part of her thinking in regards to family and in fact as being part of her family. She described how three generations of her family had developed close relationships with the refugee family.

Another volunteer also noted how her grandchildren had become involved with the refugee families she had helped. She spoke of how they had formed friendships with other children and how they often played together. This family support and interaction however, did not extend to her entire family, as one affect of her decision to volunteer with refugees was that her relationship with some members of her family had suffered and in one case broken down completely. Two other volunteers mentioned that they had experienced similar difficulties and conflicts.

Thus there is a certain paradox for many volunteers in that whilst the family may well be the nucleus and source of energy, recognition and validation for their volunteering activities, it may also be the site for relationship breakdowns and family conflict.<sup>54</sup>

### **Connection to community.....**

A notable point of the discussion was the realisation by volunteers that their activities had interacted little if at all with the local neighbourhoods and

---

<sup>54</sup> This aspect of volunteering will be further discussed in the next section of this chapter.

communities in which they lived.<sup>55</sup> When their volunteering experiences were framed in reference to the wider society, three out of the four volunteers considered that their activities and knowledges had effectively by-passed their local neighbourhoods.

Instead, most felt that they had received greater levels of recognition and worked towards effecting more change at regional and national levels. Two of the volunteers felt that their volunteering had made an impact at a global level. Others did not perceive this of their lived experience. One such volunteer noted that she had difficulty seeing how such a small act in a big world could have any impact outside of Australia.

Another spoke of her disillusionment with the current discourse around refugee issues in Australia and how she had therefore taken a pessimistic view of the potential for her activities and beliefs to infiltrate much further past a national level. Interestingly she made the comment that in some cases, asylum seekers had known her name before they had reached Australia's shores and knew to ask for her when they were initially placed under detention.

This perhaps speaks to the way volunteers might perceive impact as being related to impact on the 'other' rather than impact on those with similar and supportive worldviews to the volunteers. This thinking supports the notion that when thinking contextually, volunteers may primarily understand impact in terms of change in societal prejudices rather than change in the lifestyles and living conditions in those they have helped.

Volunteers' understandings as to how their personal experiences interact with and fit with the wider society might therefore be thought of as involving two dimensions of recognition; one in which recognition is obtained via support from within the family and the helping relationship, and the second in which

---

<sup>55</sup> This does not include the church communities of volunteers, as these were mentioned by some volunteers as sources of support and recognition.

recognition is earned when, from within an environment of resistance, attitudinal change occurs. Thus for most of the volunteers, recognition comes predominantly from the personal sphere of their volunteering experiences and to a much lesser degree, from the wider levels of society.

This lack of recognition is concerning when viewed from the perspective that volunteering is essentially understood and promoted as a community orientated activity (Noble, 1991). It was notable that the notion of 'volunteering in community' was not reflected in the lived experience of the volunteers I spoke with. This is perhaps an important aspect of the interaction between context and experience that needs to be addressed if the complexity of volunteering with refugees is to be acknowledged.

---

---

## SECTION THREE

### Tensions

*"You just have to be pretty tough to it."*

---

---

#### **Starting from my own experiences.....**

I can remember a time when I had just started volunteering with refugees. I was so proud of what I was doing and of the family I was helping. I was feeling really positive about how things were going and I wanted to share this with my friends. So I did. And I was not prepared for the consequences. In fact looking back on that painful moment of disclosure still stirs up feelings of vulnerability and defencelessness in me. What I had not taken into account was the fact that the issue was not that I was *helping* someone, but the *someone* I was helping. And today, four years further down the track, the situation remains the same for me. There is a certain amount of tension and questioning that underlies my relationships with some friends, family members and workmates that continues to surround and impact on my experience of volunteering.

In my initial volunteering experiences I often found myself alone and ill equipped to cope with the tensions, conflicts and lack of validation by others that seemed to come with the territory of volunteering with refugees. This aspect of volunteering had not been spoken of in any training sessions I had attended. It was also something that did not seem to be discussed by volunteers themselves. At the time I did not question this or try to understand how I could cope and interact with this undercurrent of tension that was infiltrating my practice as a volunteer. I just knew it was there.



### **On the home front of the volunteers.....**

When I introduced this topic of discussion to volunteers and we began to share our experiences I could feel the solidarity between us strengthen. This was something that we could openly talk about and by the simple task of listening, provide support to each other. Volunteers spoke of instances with relatives, close friends, acquaintances and strangers in which they had been exposed to conflict, criticism, questioning and in extreme cases vilification and abuse.

---

*"It's a hit in the face."*

*"I forget myself in some situations."*

*"I have relatives that don't speak to me anymore."*

---

One volunteer described how she had negotiated with some of her close friends to "agree to disagree" about refugee issues. She noted that in some of her friendships there was an unspoken rule that the topic would not come up for conversation. Another volunteer spoke of being shocked when friends she had perceived as supportive or understanding of refugee issues would make negative comments. She made the comment that when such negativity came from an unexpected source it was like a "hit in the face."

Volunteers also spoke of slowly "making headway" with some of their family and friends by gradually informing them about refugee issues. Yet in these comments, volunteers were careful to add that even amongst such friends, they were cautious in broaching the subject. One volunteer even expressed concern that an upcoming family get together might result in arguments amongst her relatives. Another volunteer had similar fears and spoke of the potential for conflict as being in the periphery of her awareness at social functions.

Such reported experiences provide evidence of the complex nature of the context which volunteers become part of when they volunteer with refugees. In entering into such a 'helping contract', volunteers may well also be 'signing up' for a potential series of conflictual interactions, communications and relationships with the people closest to them. If such a component is a constant in the lived experience of volunteering with refugees, its potential to affect the well being of volunteers needs to be considered carefully. In this context volunteers may well be positioned in a vulnerable space between the intrusion of societal prejudices as refracted through close and familial relationships and the complex demands and needs of refugees.

### **Outside tensions.....**

The experiences of volunteers in coming into contact with confrontations, prejudices and ambivalent attitudes from people outside their family and friends varied from receiving questioning looks and gazes in public to a volunteer being subjected to abusive phonecalls within her own home. One volunteer commented that there had been an instance when she had felt physically unsafe when trying to resolve confrontations between a refugee family and their neighbours.

Another volunteer spoke of how just after the *Tampa crisis*<sup>56</sup> she had taken a refugee family shopping and had been spat on. This volunteer also mentioned that due to her high profile in helping refugees she had been subject to verbal abuse in public and over the phone. These examples however represent the extremes of societal prejudice experienced by a few volunteers and may not be representative of the experiences of all of the volunteers. Many volunteers whilst being highly aware of the tension surrounding refugee issues, did not perceive their experience of outside tensions to pose a threat to themselves or to intrude into their homes. Yet it is important to acknowledge that such extremes

---

<sup>56</sup> This refers to the Australian government's refusal to allow the MV Tampa cargo ship entry into Australian waters after the Swedish ship had rescued asylum seekers from their sinking boat near Christmas Island. Public opinion polls in Australia showed support for the government's actions and political stance on asylum seekers around the Tampa crisis (Australian Broadcasting Commission, 2001).

are part of the real and lived experiences of some volunteers and therefore should be recognised as a valid part of the total experience of volunteering with refugees.

#### **Strategies for coping.....**

Volunteers all commented on the effect of the media in fuelling negative attitudes and opinions around refugee issues. They spoke of how unfair representations and inaccurate reporting made them angry and frustrated. One volunteer mentioned that she "felt physically sick" when reading some of the comments made by members of the public in their letters to the editor. She described how both herself and her husband 'screened' television, newspaper and radio coverage of refugee issues for accuracy. The volunteer spoke of how they often phoned or wrote letters to stations and editors when coverage was both accurate and inaccurate. Another volunteer similarly described how inaccurate media representation had invoked an angry reaction in her and had motivated her to respond by sending the correct message to others.

Whilst many volunteers noted the effect of both ambivalent public attitudes and inaccurate media representation on them as being negative, they also spoke of how this negativity had motivated them to increase their involvement in volunteering and refugee issues. One volunteer described her response to such tensions as being an increase in her enthusiasm towards volunteering. She saw this as something she could do to "offset the feelings of injustice and anger." Another volunteer regarded such tensions as not representing a deterrent to volunteering but rather as fuelling her motivation and activism.

One way that some volunteers coped with any negativity or ambivalence was to effectively shield themselves from it. One volunteer chose not to listen to commercial stations and instead made a concerted effort to listen to Radio National whose portrayal of refugee issues she perceived to more accurately reflect her own 'on the ground' experiences. This volunteer also took care in

surrounding herself with the positive whether it be people, hobbies, music or possessions.

---

*"We quietly try to go about our business."*

---

This notion of self-protection through shielding was also apparent in the way some volunteers described their reactions to the prejudices imposed on them by others. One volunteer mentioned that before entering into any conversation around refugee issues with people from the wider community, she would "make little openings to test the water" to see if there was a possibility of exposing herself to vilification from others. She noted that if this was the case, she made the decision not to reveal her volunteering self. Another volunteer mentioned how she frequently used the tactic of "politely changing the subject" to avoid being vilified. She also noted that sometimes when she chose not to confront she felt a level of discomfort at not defending the refugee cause.

An additional factor noted was the resolve of some of the volunteers that they did not require overt public recognition of their volunteering in order for them to feel that the work they were doing was valid. One volunteer made the comment that a lack of validation had made no difference to her volunteering experiences. She saw herself as a person who generally did not require the approval of others and therefore did not seek it in her practice as a volunteer. Such a resolve to not require validation on a public level might be thought of as a type of pragmatic survival positioning where in response to a lack of recognition, volunteers have adopted defensive postures. This reasoning is strongly connected to the notion of identity politics in which resistance becomes a strategy for fighting oppression (hooks, 1990).

Woods (1997) notes that socially motivated volunteers will develop creative strategies to enable them to negotiate their way through disappointments and value conflicts. She argues that this is how volunteers can strengthen their identity from within a stifling context. This understanding corresponds with the responses of many of the volunteers. It may be that when volunteer-hood is under threat of becoming a weakened identity, one response is for volunteers to seek increased solidarity through strengthening their relationship with refugee families and with volunteering. It is interesting to note that, excluding myself, only one volunteer mentioned building relationships with other volunteers as part of a strategy for coping with context. Such a notable lack of recognition of peer support may be evidence that isolation and individualisation are perhaps part of the volunteering experience. A future training need therefore may be the facilitation of relationship building and peer support between volunteers.

#### **Naming strategies up as self protection.....**

It was notable that although volunteers could readily name the ways they reacted to conflict, negative attitudes, un-supportive comments and media misrepresentation, most had not recognised their actions as being self-protection strategies. When presented with this new framing it provided the volunteers with a different angle to view self and to view their strengths. One resulting factor to come out of this was the consensus in volunteers that they had all made a concerted effort at self-protection. This provides further evidence of the fundamental effect of context on volunteer-hood and of the potential for some volunteers to have a limited awareness of this effect.

When looking at the entirety of reactions of volunteers to the context in which they were volunteering, their responses might be understood as encompassing two tendencies; one which involves participation and immersion in context and one which involves a certain amount of isolation and detachment from context. It was apparent that volunteers utilised and interchanged both of these strategies as measures of strengthening and validating their volunteer-hood. This reflects the notion of identity politics in which strategies for coping in

oppressive environments may include a suppression of self or its opposite, a dynamicism of self (Pettman, 1992).

The connection of volunteer-hood to identity politics therefore gives weight to the understanding of volunteer-hood with refugees as being an identity vulnerable to oppression. In recognition of this aspect of volunteer-hood it is important to extend volunteers' experiences of oppression to the wider context. Both informal and formal structures in society may contribute to depleting or limiting the power volunteers have in defining and expressing their volunteer-hood. Thus in working towards a more socially just practice environment for volunteers, all potential sources of oppression need to be addressed.

#### **A different perspective on tensions.....**

The experience of the volunteer of difference in negotiating cultural and political tensions seemed to differ markedly from the experiences of Anglo-Australian volunteers.<sup>57</sup> This volunteer made the comment that she had experienced no open confrontations with friends or strangers around her volunteering with refugees. Although she was highly aware of the tensions surrounding refugee issues, she noted that conflict stemming from this had never been part of her experience. She believed that her appearance and strong accent played a definite part in shielding her from any negative comments and that her cultural difference made it difficult for people to 'place' her in context or even recognise her as a volunteer [ie. it was unclear to them whose 'side' she was on or should be on].

This uncertainty by others around her status seemed to be a definite factor in her overall experience of volunteering with refugees. However an additional factor might well be that due to her past experiences as a refugee, she may be to a certain extent, hardened to such tensions. She noted for example, that her past experiences had left her with her own firm opinions and political views and a

---

<sup>57</sup> In this specific instance the volunteer referred to is from a refugee and culturally and linguistically different background.

high awareness of the complexity inherent in cultural and political tensions. She added that this had allowed her to have a certain openness to the views of others and to the complexities of social cohesion.

---

*"The concept of volunteering is not clear to them."*

---

An additional interesting factor in this volunteer's experience was that whilst she did not perceive cultural and political tensions to have had any great level of impact on her, she made the point that she had to cope with a different type of tension. This tension resulted from the difficulties her friends from her own cultural background had with understanding why she was volunteering and with understanding the very nature of the concept of volunteering. She spoke of being constantly questioned as to why she chose to work for no pay, as her friends could not understand the utility of volunteering for free. She made the comment that this resulted in a lack of support and recognition of her volunteering by some of her friends.

This is an aspect of the volunteering experience that has perhaps remained relatively unacknowledged. Martin (1999) and Vangelista (1990) both make mention of the impact differing cultural understandings of volunteering may have on the volunteer-refugee relationship, but do not extend this to the relationships and interactions experienced by volunteers who are themselves from culturally and linguistically different backgrounds. In building a volunteering environment and worldview that caters for and welcomes difference, this is perhaps an area in which further research would be fruitful.

---

---

## SECTION FOUR

### Experience of Professionalism

---

---

#### **Differing experiences.....**

Initially when I began to research the contextual components of volunteering with refugees, I considered that professionalism would be a significant factor in the experiences of volunteers. Yet whilst tensions between professionalism and volunteering were part of my own experience, they were not as strongly reflected in the lived experiences of the volunteers I spoke with. Instead, I heard stories detailing positive interactions and support in relationships between volunteers and professional workers.

This raised the question in me as to why my experience had been different. As I still hold the position that there is potential for professionalism to exist in this context, I feel the need to explore why the responses and storying of volunteers reflected little or no evidence of this. This section will therefore focus on discussing the elements in volunteering which may have predisposed, protected or discounted volunteers from feeling the affects of professionalism.

#### **Differing statuses.....**

One factor that sets my own situation apart from the other volunteers is my status as a student social worker that will soon be looking to enter the workforce. In comparison, three out of the four volunteers I spoke with were outside of the labour market. Whereas I might have been conceived as using my volunteering for the purposes of finding work with migrants and refugees, due to their non-working status, the other volunteers might not have presented as such a threat to paid workers.



Another element that seemed to be unique to my experience of volunteering was the opportunity I had to attend meetings between volunteers and professional workers. I therefore had more exposure to settings in which numbers of volunteers were interacting with numbers of paid workers. It was in these situations that I mostly observed and experienced tension between stakeholders in the helping process. This may be evidence of the acceptability for volunteers to take part in the helping process but of a corresponding lack of acceptability for them to change or influence it.

Another factor that may effectively 'discount' volunteers from feeling the effects of professionalism is the way in which they perceive their own status. One volunteer for example described how she viewed professional workers as being much more knowledgeable around refugee issues than herself. She therefore considered their professional standing to carry a much higher status than that of her own volunteer-hood. Thus the position some volunteers might take around their own status may successfully screen them from the elements of professionalism. This positioning may be perceived as a strategy taken by some volunteers and in turn might also explain the lack of evidence of volunteers experiencing the effects of professionalism.

It is important that conclusions not be drawn from the contrast in experiences of professionalism between myself and the volunteers in this study. A lack of evidence of professionalism does not mean that it is not a valid issue in volunteering. It is also important to note that professionalism as a concept can be problematic in that it may be perceived and understood differently. Whereas professionalism might be commonly understood in terms of increased professional knowledges and capabilities in workers, this thesis suggests a different type of professionalism which contains elements of 'one-up manship' (Manser, cited in Lafrance, 1996). Thus the potential for ambiguity around the concept of professionalism may in effect cloud the issue of the experience of the effects of professionalism by volunteers. Further research would therefore be helpful in generating more information and research around this topic.

### **Professionalism within.....**

Interestingly, one volunteer who had quite an extensive involvement in the management of volunteers noted that she could see signs of tension emerging between volunteers themselves. She noted that this element had emerged when volunteers had brought their professional status and knowledge to their practice as volunteers. Thus perhaps the notion of professionalism amongst volunteers may have more relevance or be more recognisable to volunteers than the notion of professionalism between volunteers and paid workers. An additional argument might be that if volunteers are marginalised to the fringes of agencies, they may effectively be practising on the outskirts of the agency environment and therefore remain relatively passive participants in agency processes, interactions and politics.

### **From specific.....**

A common point mentioned by volunteers was their positive interactions with migrant agencies. One volunteer described her experience in dealing with these agencies as "incredibly positive." Another spoke of her interaction with agencies as being "on the whole ... great." However when talking about their experiences with non-migrant agencies volunteers were not as positive.

### **....to mainstream.....**

One volunteer spoke of her experience "in the system" as being at times quite negative. This occurred when her attempts to help her refugee family work with 'the system' resulted in endless cycles of referrals with no solution in sight. This volunteer understood that those working in the system perceived the situation as being "too hard." She spoke of how being caught up in this process had caused her to feel extremely frustrated. Another volunteer mentioned the lack of helpfulness that she sometimes came across in non-migrant agencies. She spoke of the need for her to constantly have to push her point across to get the attention of some agencies.

These reported experiences with non-migrant agencies are perhaps a reflection of the low status of refugees as clients. It may be that the status of volunteers is reduced through being associated with the devalued social role of refugees. Additionally, the reported negative experiences of volunteers may be evidence of the existence of professional imperialism within mainstream services.<sup>58</sup> Meemeduma (1993) argues that universalism oppresses and disempowers individuals, groups and communities of difference in Australia. If this is representative of the experiences of refugees within mainstream services, it will lead to the further devaluation of their status. As a result, this devaluation may also filter through to the volunteer. Thus there is a notable disempowering element to volunteers' interactions with mainstream services. This is one area in which stakeholders need to take responsibility in addressing the issues of lack of access, equity and social justice that is evidenced through the experiences of volunteers and refugees.

---

<sup>58</sup> This understanding is based on Midgley's definition where a universal approach to theory and practice is taken by professional workers resulting in a lack of relevance in the provision of services for people of difference (cited by Meemeduma, 1993).

---

## SECTION FIVE

### Framing of context

*"I've never thought of it like that."*

*"It's good to see it [written] down like that actually."*

---

One part of my research that came as an unexpected bonus was the way the sharing of dialogue between volunteers and myself had resulted in both of us extending our thinking around the connection between volunteering and context. This first became apparent when observing the responses and remarks from volunteers. For example, when volunteers had the opportunity to read all the comments they had made, they approached this task with eagerness and with a visible sense of ownership. This effectively may have allowed them to take an objective view of their subjective experiences and in a sense provided them with a different lens with which to view their volunteering.

Additionally, a point noted by volunteers was that our discussions were from a different angle to which they normally thought about their volunteering. Volunteers commented that a contextual view on volunteering was interesting and new to them. They also spoke of it as thought provoking and expressed happiness at their decision to have taken part in sharing information.

I found a certain level of paradox in that volunteers had a lot to say and much knowledge about the tensions they had experienced, yet they did not seem to frame these tensions in contextual terms. This was apparent in their storying in which they described their experiences more as direct person-to-person experiences as opposed to personal in environment experiences.

This lack of extension to context was also part of my own experience. I found that for me, what was happening on the ground stayed there. In my experience as a volunteer, learning about context was a gradual and at times lonely process of discovery. Gradual because of the multiple of layers and dynamics that I now acknowledge make up the volunteering context. Lonely because of the lack of visibility afforded to context in training programs and 'on the ground' communication amongst volunteers.

I guess it could be said that in the end, I did learn about context. It could also be said that I completed my journey with a higher awareness of the effect of context on my volunteer practice and on my volunteer-self. However looking back, I can see that the consequences of being contextually unaware for the majority of my volunteering experiences affected my ability to be at my most dynamic in volunteering. Additionally I believe that I was also positioned in a vulnerable space in which I did not have the tools to fully understand the cultural and political tensions surrounding and impacting on me.

Fisher and Karger (1997) note the importance of contextualization in social work practice. They contend that without an understanding of the wider context, practice will remain focused on personal issues, and quote Longres (1995) in arguing, "critical contextualisation ... connects the personal to the social, and politicizes the personal" (Fisher & Karger, 1997, p. 54). Such an understanding seems very relevant for volunteers working with refugees where volunteer-hood may be vulnerable to oppression and the environment is potentially fraught with tensions. Providing volunteers with the tools to view their experiences as occurring within a wider context may well be a strategy, which would help to minimise the potential for oppression and consequently strengthen the identity of volunteers.

## CHAPTER FIVE : THE VOICE

*"I am pleased when I find a sentence that feels both genuine and bold - I want it to be statement that will open space, and claim attention, for my voice."*

*(De Vault, 1999, p. 187)*

---

**The final chapter.....**

As I sit here and begin the last leg of my journey I feel a certain sense of pride at having nearly scaled the mountain that I set out to climb almost 12 months ago. I'm nearly there, nearly at the place where I can sit for a while and take in the view. A place where I can just sit and reflect.

I feel quite peaceful when I look back and see the maze of roads I have travelled to reach this destination. Some roads seem like two-lane highways that have led me nearly directly to where I am now. Others meander their way through each other, some petering out altogether.

It has been exciting, this journey, exciting and enriching. I have enjoyed its pace, its terrain, its insight. And as I work my way towards the place which I hope will afford me the best view, I feel steady on my feet and eager in my mind and heart to reflect on where this journey has led me. It is nearly time now to gather my thoughts and prepare to speak. It is nearly time to

*"claim attention, for my voice."*

*(De Vault, 1999, p. 187)*

---

### **Reflections on the research process.....**

The purpose of this study was to use my own experiences and the experiences of others to explore the effect of contextual complexity on the experience of being a volunteer with refugees. I was interested in how social, cultural, political and historical contexts might impact on the identity and self-making practices of volunteers working with refugees. I began this study from what I conceive as quite a vulnerable position in that I still harboured some relatively 'uncomfortable' feelings around my volunteering experiences and ultimately my own volunteer-hood. Additionally, as I began my initial explorations into this study, my sense of vulnerability increased a little due to the fears I had that my incompetence might be revealed. Yet I could not have been more farther from the reality. What occurred for me was the uncovering of a diversity of strengths, insights and coping abilities from within my own volunteering experiences and the experiences of others.

As I shared, exchanged and listened to stories with others, I found I was witness to an amazing amount of knowledges and experiences that were incredibly diverse in nature. Volunteers in action it seems were taking on all that life presented them and dealing with it. I heard stories of love, hope and admiration for refugee families; stories of determination in trying to help these families feel comfortable, needed and safe; and stories which spoke of volunteers' enthusiasm in providing their time, energy, love and activism to a cause.

Yet amongst the storying and the sharing of experiences emerged a certain sense of conflict and uneasiness with the environment in which volunteers were practising. Volunteers were having to cope with the multiple complexities of both 'working with' and at the same time seemingly 'working against'. It became apparent that this was an inescapable aspect of volunteering with refugees and a finding, which resulted in many of my own experiences being confirmed.

In an attempt to bring recognition and understanding to this element of volunteering, this final chapter will bring together the commonalties and diversities that make up the lived experience of volunteering. The previously discussed themes of complexity, felt impact, tensions, professionalism and contextual framing will be used as the foundation for a new emerging voice and political stance around the politics of environment and relationship in being a volunteer with refugees. It is hoped that putting these issues and thoughts onto the public arena will result in an increased recognition of the impact of context on the experience of being a volunteer.

### **Complexity.....**

I approached this study from the position that the experience of volunteering with refugees was very complex in nature and that this complexity had remained relatively unrecognised and in the background of both private and public awareness. This was an understanding I had gained from my own experiences in volunteering and that I found to be reflected in the experiences of other volunteers. Here, the notion of complexity refers to the interconnection of tasks, emotions, knowledges, capabilities, relationships, differences and tensions. This complexity was apparent in volunteers' storying which revealed a wide scope of experiences some of which were found to be of concern to the potential *well-being*<sup>59</sup> of volunteers.

### **Boundaries.....**

Many of the tasks required of volunteers for example, called for multiple and specific knowledges and abilities. Yet this very fact may in effect facilitate a lack of boundaries and control around what is required of volunteers and what they have to cope with. This was reflected in stories in which volunteers spoke of sometimes being called out at midnight to assist families. In some instances these situations involved issues of domestic violence and self-harm.

---

<sup>59</sup> In this instance well-being is perceived not in the physical sense but in terms of the effect oppression and oppressive experiences may have on one's identity (hooks, 1990).



Such experiences highlight the potential for volunteers to have a certain lack of control over when and how they volunteer. It could be argued that this aspect of the volunteers' experiences has perhaps been considered as solely the domain and responsibility of professional workers. This raises the question of whether there needs to be a shift in organisational and public awareness around the reality that volunteers may also be helping in such a capacity. One result of this might be increased measures in the guidance, protection and supervision of volunteers.

#### **Emotions.....**

Another aspect of volunteering that came out of the storying was the emotional component attached to volunteering with refugees. For many volunteers, emotional highs were sometimes coupled with emotional lows. Some volunteers spoke about how much they had gained from the volunteering experience yet also commented on how helpless or saddened they sometimes felt. Others spoke of their volunteering experiences in terms of positives only.

This factor of the volunteering experience has been similarly noted by the Victorian Foundation for Survivors of Torture and Trauma (1998) who speak of the positive and negative emotional responses that might surface in volunteers working with refugees. They argue that emotional responses can vary from feelings of helplessness, guilt and anger to feelings of fulfilment in which volunteers have a greater awareness of the human condition and an increased capacity for sharing and living.

#### **Differences.....**

One notable point to emerge from this study was the potential for some of the experiences of volunteers of difference to differ markedly from the experiences of Anglo-Australian volunteers. These differences were connected to the way volunteers perceived and negotiated the context and related environmental tensions from which they were practising. Such findings may be evidence of a qualitatively different experience of volunteer-hood for volunteers of

difference. However as only one volunteer in this study was from a refugee and culturally and linguistically diverse background, it is unclear whether this volunteer's experiences are representative of others. Further research in this area would therefore be helpful in gaining insight into how volunteering may be experienced by volunteers of difference.

#### **Relationships, oppression and validation.....**

In speaking about relationships amongst family and close friends it was common for volunteers to describe some of their relationships as being supportive and others as involving levels of conflict and questioning. Volunteers were also very vocal in their storying around their experiences with ambivalent attitudes and antipathy from the wider community.

Thus one factor that has emerged out of this study is the potential for volunteers to be vulnerable to oppression through their relationships with others. This type of oppression is understood as resulting from the prejudice of others and as evident from the stories of volunteers, may come from a multiple of sources and contexts. The source of this oppression may include for example family, friends, strangers, the media and professional workers. Similarly the context in which there is the potential for oppressive relationships to occur might span from family gatherings to very often, the local and wider communities.

Such oppressive relationships have the potential to bring a sense of questioning and conflict to the experience of volunteering. As a result, volunteers may be limited in the amount of support and validation they can access from both the personal and public domains of their lives. This raises the question as to how much validation is necessary for continued volunteering efforts and where the greatest sources of this validation may lie.

In this study volunteers themselves expressed only small amounts of concern over the lack of validation and recognition they were receiving from the wider

community. Some even commented that they did not require any type of recognition other than their own. Yet as discussed in Chapter Four, this may be evidence of a pragmatic survival positioning in which a defensive position is taken in resistance to a lack of validation.

A point that emerged from this study was the tendency for volunteers to conceive recognition in terms of how their volunteering was perceived and received by the wider society. There seemed to be little connection by volunteers to the notion of recognition and the positive effects for refugee families and humanity as a whole that resulted from their volunteering efforts. This may be evidence of how the context in which volunteers are practising might contain and limit the notion of recognition for volunteers. If this is the case, a higher awareness of the sources of validation and recognition need to be facilitated in volunteers.

Being pro-active in seeking validation may potentially have two effects. On a personal level, it has the potential to reinforce and strengthen the identity of volunteer-hood.<sup>60</sup> On a public level, by opening more volunteers up to the idea of seeking validation outside of their private realm, there may well be a greater public awareness around the issues and experiences of volunteering. The idea of seeking validation from the wider community however, may also have the potential to further expose volunteers to the vilification and prejudices of others. This strategy therefore must be carefully approached and consideration given to where the greatest potential for outside validation may lie.

---

<sup>60</sup> This understanding is linked to the notion that identity is socially constructed and is infiltrated by outside social ascriptions (Berreman, 1975). Berreman (1975) argues that seeking positive external ascriptions helps to avoid the internalisation of outside negative attitudes.

### **Political consciousness.....**

Another point of interest to emerge from this study was that there were signs of a correlation between low levels of political consciousness and disempowering experiences around volunteering. Evidence of this began to surface when the tendency was noted for volunteers with high political framings to conceptualise their volunteering experiences primarily in positive terms. It was also notable that positivity was expressed both in terms of the volunteers' relationships with the refugee families they were helping and in terms of their notions around being a volunteer and volunteering.

This finding brings attention to the possible implications for volunteers who have low levels of political consciousness. Being unable to politically read and understand the context in which they are practising may well place such volunteers in danger of only viewing their volunteering activities from a close and personal perspective. This can effectively facilitate a type of pathological thinking in which issues and problems are understood in terms of personal and private troubles (Mills, 1959). This might mean that volunteers could perceive themselves or refugee families as being to blame or responsible for problematic situations or misunderstandings. Ultimately this may lead to the disempowerment of both volunteers and the refugee families they are seeking to help.

A factor that might further consolidate disempowerment is the apparent lack of both public and private validation received by volunteers around their volunteering activities, capabilities and knowledges. For some volunteers, the combined effect of low levels of political consciousness and lack of validation may well leave them in a vulnerable and disempowered position in which they may be unable to respond to their own oppression.

In light of the potential for some experiences of volunteer-hood to incorporate a type of disempowerment, the ability to contextualise is therefore an important factor in the empowerment of volunteers working with refugees. An

understanding of the connection between personal experiences and political, cultural and social dimensions of society (Fisher & Karger, 1997) may well provide volunteers with a strategy for countering and reducing any disempowering and oppressive situations and relationships they might encounter.

#### **Consciousness raising.....**

One factor that emerged relatively quickly and unexpectedly from the sharing of experiences with volunteers was the consciousness raising effect of the research interview in which volunteers were able to name up context as a factor in their experience. Introducing the topic to volunteers by speaking from my own experiences somehow seemed to draw volunteers into trying to think through their own experiences of volunteering within the wider context.

A further benefit to emerge from naming up context was the facilitation in volunteers to make the connection between the effect of context on their volunteering experiences and the way in which they had responded to these effects. One volunteer, in talking about her experiences in coping with negative attitudes towards refugees, expressed surprise at the concerted effort she had unconsciously made in protecting herself from outside comments and negative images. Previous to this realisation, she had not perceived this effect on her self in terms of being a strategy for coping that was enacted from within a context.

The positive reactions and enthusiasm of the volunteers in this study to being involved in a process, which gave them an increased awareness of context, may be evidence of an additional focus needed in the training and supervision of volunteers. Contextualisation is perhaps an element of training in volunteering which has remained relatively untapped and unrecognised. In this regard, it is therefore important that its potential within the realms of training be recognised and further explored.

### **The containment of knowledge.....**

A final and perhaps all encompassing finding to emerge from this study was the lack of recognition by volunteers of the impact of their volunteering activities on their local neighbourhood and local communities. This result is perhaps demonstrative of the contextual reality in which volunteers are practising. Prejudicial attitudes and lack of public support and recognition are arguably effective barriers in isolating volunteers and their practices from the wider community. Thus the knowledges and capabilities of volunteers may remain in the personal realm of the volunteer-refugee relationship.

Such a containment of knowledge is demonstrative of the lack of social justice that volunteers might face when their practices and knowledges are marginalised in the wider context. As mentioned in Chapter Two Mullaly (1997) and Young (1990) speak of social justice in terms of the distribution of material resources as well as non-material resources such as rights and responsibilities. Therefore the containment of volunteer knowledge can be perceived as a social justice issue in that it represents an inequality in the distribution of non-discriminatory relationships. The containment of knowledge can therefore have many implications for volunteers themselves, the refugees they are helping and the wider society.

For volunteers, the containment of knowledge has very likely facilitated a lack of public awareness and recognition around the complexities that volunteering with refugees may entail. This effectively impacts on the level of availability of public validation that volunteers might access.

For refugees and refugee issues, the containment of knowledge prevents the reality of lived experiences from reaching those who are outside of them. This raises the question of how understanding and awareness can be cultivated when there is an absence of two-way communication. Thus information on refugee issues may only be received from those whose power affords them the privilege to deliver it. This may well mean that the media and government are

the principal 'feeders of information' around refugee issues. Refugees themselves then become minor contributors to information on their own lived experiences.

For the wider society, a containment of knowledge effectively obscures part of the entirety of discourse on refugee issues and as a consequence, the experience of volunteering with refugees also remains relatively hidden. It could be argued that this removes a certain amount of choice from the public in making informed decisions around refugee issues. Noble (1991, p. 70) argues that volunteering should "assist in promoting a more democratic, caring, informed, dynamic and co-operative community." It is apparent that this conceptualisation has not been reflected in my own experiences or in the experiences of the volunteers in this study.

For the future recognition of volunteers working with refugees and the cause for which they are working, it is imperative that the issue of the containment of knowledge be addressed. To ignore this factor would be contributing to the subjugation of volunteer knowledges and experiences. This issue however, is not one that will simply be solved by releasing information. There also needs to be a readiness to absorb and accept the information offered. Such dialogue requires sensitive and considerate organisation where the exchange of information is gentle and shared rather than enforced. This environment will not be cultivated overnight, however it is important to have a vision for the future and recognise the relevance and validity of volunteers and their knowledges and capabilities in this process.

#### **Future directions.....**

The findings of this study demonstrate the existence of a definite complexity and diversity in the experience of volunteering with refugees. Additionally, there is evidence to support the view that this complexity has the potential to place volunteers in a vulnerable position. The type of vulnerability that volunteers might experience is perceived in terms of the injustices of

oppression, disempowering experiences and a lack of recognition and validation. The achievement of social justice for volunteers therefore, is understood as being the protection of volunteers from experiencing these forms of vulnerability.

In light of these findings there is a need for further research and organisational development in certain aspects of the practice of volunteering with refugees. In an attempt to bring focus to these areas the following recommendations and suggestions have been put forward.

An increased public, private and organisational awareness and recognition of the issues volunteers might face such as:

- the lack of boundaries volunteers might be having to work within and the high capacity in which they might be helping,
- the potential for volunteers to be vulnerable to oppressive relationships and the potential for these relationships to occur within families and close friendships,
- the way societal prejudices might limit the amount of support and validation available and accessible to volunteers,
- the apparent lack of connection and dialogue between the experiences and knowledges of volunteers and refugees and the local and wider community.
- the potential for volunteers to have disempowering experiences in their interactions with mainstream services,
- the different experiences that volunteers of difference may have and the way this may impact on where and how they access support, validation and recognition,
- the lack of public acknowledgement and 'knowledge of' the multiple skills, knowledges and capabilities of volunteers and,



- the diversity and complexity of the volunteering task and the context of cultural, social and political tensions from which it is practised.

A suggested focus in training around:

- taking a pro-active stance in seeking validation in order to strengthen the identities and self-making practices of volunteers. Here the notion of validation from co-volunteers needs to be acknowledged as a valued and to date, under-utilised source,
- perceiving recognition not only in terms of changes in societal attitudes but also importantly in changes to the lives of refugees and,
- contextualisation of experiences and consciousness raising exercises around context in which volunteers are facilitated in making the connection between the effect of context on their volunteering experiences and the way in which they respond to these effects.

A suggested focus on future research around;

- professionalism in the volunteering context and the possibility that the lack of recognition of professionalism by volunteers may be connected to the marginalisation of volunteers within agencies,
- the relationship between low levels of political framing and disempowering experiences in volunteering and,
- experiences of volunteering for volunteers of difference.

In drawing from my own experiences and the experiences of other volunteers this research process has afforded me a valuable insight into volunteering with refugees. This insight however is of no use if it remains in my possession. I believe that knowledge must be shared and made easily accessible and available. Therefore even though this concluding chapter might mean the end of this research project as it is written, to me the knowledge it contains is perhaps only just beginning its journey.

In holding this belief, it is my intent to take this knowledge to any interested volunteers, organisations and related agencies and to share with them the wide scope and complexities of being a volunteer with refugees. I see this as a starting point in gaining increased recognition for volunteers and the context in which they practice. It is also my hope that this recognition will in turn lead to increased social justice for volunteers working with refugees.

The felt need to respond in this way is perhaps where my volunteer, social worker and researcher selves interconnect. It is also perhaps evidence of the deep affect that the research process has had on me. In fact from an initial lack of clarity around my theoretical positioning, the freedom of expression I have enjoyed in this research process has greatly strengthened my theoretical resolve and alignment with feminist thinking. Additionally, I believe the understanding and insight my dual identity as a social worker and a volunteer afforded me on the experience of having a devalued sense of self will play a significant role in my future practice as a social worker. These have perhaps been the most rewarding aspects for my personal and political development as a female, volunteer, researcher, and as a social worker.

And it is from this newly affirmed positioning and strengthened sense of self that I draw a close to the research process. In doing so, I would like to give credit to all of the volunteers and their families who give their time, love and effort in trying to make Australia home for refugees.

## **APPENDIX A: VOLUNTEERING AUSTRALIA'S CODE OF PRACTICE FOR ORGANISATIONS INVOLVING VOLUNTEER STAFF**

In order to enhance the volunteer's experience and comply with legislation and duty of care (*insert organisation name*) will:

- interview and employ volunteer staff in accordance with anti-discrimination and equal opportunity legislation;
- provide volunteer staff with orientation and training;
- provide volunteer staff with a healthy and safe workplace;
- provide appropriate and adequate insurance coverage for volunteer staff;
- not place volunteer staff in roles that were previously held by paid staff or have been identified as paid jobs;
- differentiate between paid and unpaid roles;
- define volunteer roles and develop clear job descriptions;
- provide appropriate levels of support and management for volunteer staff;
- provide volunteers with a copy of policies pertaining to volunteer staff;
- ensure volunteers are not required to take up additional work during industrial dispute or paid staff shortage;
- provide all staff with information on grievance and disciplinary policies and procedures;
- acknowledge the rights of volunteer staff;
- ensure that the work of volunteer staff compliments but does not undermine the work of paid staff;
- offer volunteer staff the opportunity for professional development;
- reimburse volunteer staff for out of pocket expenses incurred on behalf of the organisation;
- treat volunteer staff as valuable team members, and advise them of the opportunities to participate in agency decisions; and
- acknowledge the contributions of volunteer staff.

(Volunteering Australia, 2001)

## **APPENDIX B: VOLUNTEERING WESTERN AUSTRALIA: CODE OF PRACTICE FOR VOLUNTEERS**

To promote excellence in service and maximise the quality Volunteers give this agency will:

- Empower our Volunteers to meet their own agency needs.
- Offer Volunteers work opportunities appropriate to their skills, experience and aspirations.
- Provide Volunteers with clear duty statements and orientation to their work and the agency.
- Offer training and support for Volunteers to achieve personal and work goals.
- Implement procedures to safe-guard Volunteer safety and well-being.
- Offer reimbursement or other compensation to cover out-of-pocket expenses.
- Recognise Volunteers as valued team members, with opportunities to participate in relevant agency decisions.
- Provide mechanisms to acknowledge the value of contributions made by Volunteers.

(Volunteering Western Australia, 1992)

## **APPENDIX C: AUSTRALIA'S REFUGEE CATEGORIES**

### **Onshore Component**

The Australian government's intake of all categories of refugees is run through Australia's Humanitarian Program. Currently the number of refugees accepted into this program each year stands at 12 000 (Department of Immigration and Multicultural Affairs, 2001d). Australia's Humanitarian Program consists of two parts; an onshore component and an offshore component (DIMA, 2001d).

In the onshore component, the program allocates 4000 places per year for people arriving in Australia seeking refugee status (DIMA, 2001d). Under The United Nations' 1951 Convention relating to the Status of Refugees and the 1967 Protocol Relating to the Status of Refugees, Australia is internationally obligated to provide protection to those onshore arrivals whose claims for refugee status are in accordance with the United Nations' definition of a refugee (DIMA, 2001d). In 1999-2000 the main source countries for onshore arrivals were Iraq, Afghanistan, the People's Republic of China and the Philippines (DIMA, 2001d).

Onshore arrivals applying for refugee status may be issued with two types of visa. Those who enter Australia lawfully and are found eligible for refugee status under Australia's protection obligations are granted a Permanent Protection Visa [PPV - subclass 866] (DIMA, 2001d). Those who enter Australia without authorisation and are found eligible for refugee status are granted a three year Temporary Protection Visa [TPV - subclass 785] (DIMA, 2001d). This visa was introduced in October 1999 in response to an increase in the number of unauthorised arrivals into Australia.

### **Offshore Component**

In the offshore component the program allocates 8000 places per year for people identified by the United Nations' High Commission for Refugees

[UNHCR] as being in need of resettlement or as being in humanitarian need and having close links to Australia (DIMA, 2001d).

Within the offshore component there are two categories; the Refugee category and the Special Humanitarian Program [SHP] and the Special Assistance Category [SAC] (DIMA, 2001d). Currently the source countries for the offshore component of the Humanitarian Program are the former Yugoslavia, the Middle East and Africa (DIMA, 2001d).

The Refugee Category is open for people "outside of their country of nationality or usual residence who have suffered, or hold a well-founded fear of persecution, and who are in humanitarian need of resettlement" (DIMA, 2001d, p. 24). In 2000-2001 the Refugee Category has been allocated 4000 places per year of which approximately 420 places are set aside for women at risk (DIMA, 2001d).

The Special Humanitarian Program and Special Assistance Category is open for people "outside their country of nationality or usual residence, who have experienced substantial discrimination amounting to a gross violation of human rights, and for whom resettlement is the appropriate solution" (DIMA, 2001d, p. 24). This visa also requires applicants to have links with Australia. The Special Assistance Category will be discontinued during the year 2001. In 2000-2001, 4000 places were allocated for the Special Humanitarian Program and Special Assistance Category (DIMA, 2001d).

## APPENDIX D: RESEARCH INFORMATION SHEET

### Edith Cowan University; Bunbury Campus Social Work Department

#### Research Project Information Sheet

<b>Project Title:</b>	The contextual complexity in volunteering with refugees
<b>Researcher:</b>	Fran Price. Student ID 0978342 Phone: (08) 9402 2639
<b>Project Supervisor:</b>	Dyann Ross. Phone: 08 9780 7743 School of Social Work, Edith Cowan University

The purpose of this research is to investigate the impact of context on volunteer-hood with refugees. I am interested in the way social, historical and political contexts might infiltrate volunteer-hood and the experience of volunteering. This research project has evolved as a result of my own personal experiences in volunteering with refugees. It is an attempt to make sense of my experience and to invite other volunteers to share their experiences with me and with each other.

In 1998 I was a volunteer with the HEARTS Project [Help a Refugee to Settle] at the then Fremantle Migrant Resource Centre. Two years later on my first placement as a social work student I had the opportunity to work with volunteers in providing settlement services to refugees.

Very soon into my first voluntary experience with refugees I discovered that helping people suffering from varying degrees of trauma to settle into a new and alien environment could be very stressful, draining, daunting and challenging work. I found that at the end of the day, it was hard and sometimes impossible to refocus my thoughts to my own life.

One aspect that made it even harder for me was the fact that on some occasions I found it difficult to find a sympathetic ear towards refugees in the general community or for that matter amongst my friends and some of my family. Sometimes, when I spoke out about what I was doing, I found that there was quite a strong anti-refugee feeling in some sections of the community. It was sometimes easier to keep my thoughts hidden than expose myself to the antipathy and at times hostility of others.

Fortunately, the volunteer program I was involved in organised monthly debriefing sessions for volunteers. It was at these meetings that as volunteers we could off-load any issues or feelings we might have been carrying us. It was also at these meetings I became aware that I was not alone in feeling

overwhelmed by the draining effect of this type of voluntary work. Other volunteers in the program were experiencing similar issues.

I have since worked in other voluntary positions with refugees and my experience of the helping process has been the same. The feeling of being overwhelmed at the complexity and immense amount of detail involved in assisting a person to construct a life in a new country has been a constant factor in my experience.

Looking back on my experiences I can see that my worldview of volunteering with refugees was contained within the personal and not extended to any great degree to a political perspective. It may be that by not having a well-developed understanding of the political, social and historical contextual influences on my experience of volunteering, I had unconsciously positioned my volunteering self in a vulnerable space.

What began as an experience, which generated what I personally consider to be an uncomfortable level of negative feelings and energy has gradually evolved into a positive and motivated search for an understanding of how myself and others have taken ownership of this ever changing and ever challenging state called volunteer-hood.

Part of the process of discovery around my own experience of volunteer-hood has been to take a critical and probing look at the contextual factors that were shaping my experience. By investigating the social, historical and political undercurrents impacting on volunteer-hood this research project aims to increase the level of public and organisational awareness of the contextual complexity of volunteering with refugees.

This study will focus on the concepts of volunteer-hood (Bagihole, 1996) refugee-hood (Western, 1983) and the power dynamics between volunteering and professional helping (Lafrance, 1996; Darvill & Munday, 1984) in order to contextualise the experience of volunteering with refugees and to explore the dynamics of volunteering which may arise out of these contexts (Fisher & Karger, 1997). From this it is hoped that recognition of the contextual complexity of volunteering with refugees will emerge.

Volunteer-hood is a concept that will form the foundation of this thesis. Volunteer-hood can be defined as the identity and self-making practices of the volunteer as experienced in the wider context. The notion of volunteer-hood is understood from the perspective that the contextual complexity in which volunteering takes place has a definite and felt impact on the volunteer self.

Refugee-hood is another key concept guiding this research project. Refugee-hood as constructed in this thesis can be defined as the devalued position that current and past ideologies and policies have placed refugees in. This construction stems from Solomon's (1976) understanding of the links between dis-empowerment and devalued social roles.



The power dynamics between volunteering and professional helping also form part of the conceptual foundation of this thesis. This is understood from the perspective that the validity of volunteering may have been limited by some dynamics of the politics of professional helping. Volunteers may therefore potentially occupy a devalued space within social work as non-professional workers (Darvill & Munday, 1984). This is perceived to bring an additional complexity to volunteering. The desired outcome of exposing this complexity in my research is recognition of the wider contextual issues that come into play when volunteering with refugees. Recognition as a concept involves a public acknowledgement of the contextual complexity impacting on volunteers working with refugees.

In order to explore the contextual complexity of volunteering with refugees the principal questions guiding this research project are:

- a) Do volunteers working with refugees link their volunteering experiences with the wider socio-political context?
- b) Do volunteers perceive this context to have impacted on their volunteering self?
- c) How do they negotiate their way through it?

My research project will also seek to answer the following supporting questions, which will be located in the literature review and in the analysis of results.

- (i) Do the volunteers perceive their experiences to have been adequately acknowledged?
- (ii) How have past and current socio-political processes, particularly in regard to immigration policies impacted on the experience of volunteers working with refugees?
- (iii) What are the implications for my volunteer work and for my practice as a social worker?

This research project will be presented in an auto/ethnographical style as a blend of my own personal story in volunteering with refugees and the stories of other volunteers.

It is hoped that this study will contribute to knowledge on two levels. On a personal level, I hope to have a deep understanding of the context in which volunteers operate in working with refugees. On a structural level, I hope to create a piece of research that will inform any agency or organisation having contact with refugees and running volunteering programs about the contextual complexity that volunteers may be placed in and the potential vulnerability for volunteers that may result from this.

## APPENDIX E: VOLUNTEER CONSENT FORM

### Edith Cowan University

### School of Social Work

### Consent Form

**Project Title:** Volunteering with refugees: A study of the effect of context on the experience of being a volunteer.

**Researcher:** Fran Price. Student ID 0978342. Phone: (08) 9402 2639.

**Project Supervisor:** Dyann Ross. Phone: (08) 9780 7743  
School of Social Work, Edith Cowan University.

The purpose of this research is to investigate the impact of historical, social, political and cultural contexts on the experience of being a volunteer with refugees. I am interested in the way such contexts might influence how being a volunteer is felt and understood by volunteers themselves. It is hoped that this study will generate an increased understanding in volunteers and their supporting agencies about the level of contextual complexity in which volunteers may be working from and the potential vulnerability for volunteers that may result from this.

Information will be gathered through informal conversations, with participants and researcher working together to write down any thoughts, feelings or ideas that may result from discussions. These informal conversations will be conducted in a location of the participant's choice and will last approximately one hour. A copy of the resulting analysis of information will be given to each participant for editing, clarification or for adding additional information. If any changes need to be made the participant will be provided with the amended copy for further comment. Participants will be encouraged to discuss whether the identified themes and issues accurately represent their experiences.

To ensure confidentiality no names or nationalities of volunteers, their supporting agencies or the refugees they have assisted or are assisting will be mentioned in the study. Quotations used in the study will contain no identifying information.

Participants have the right to withdraw from the research at any time up to the completion of the final report. Any questions concerning the project entitled *An auto/ethnographical study on the effect of context on the experience of being a volunteer with refugees* can be directed to Fran Price of Edith Cowan University on 9402 2639. If participants have any concerns about the project or would like to talk to an independent person, Dyann Ross, the project supervisor can be contacted on 9780 7743.

CONSENT FORM

**Project Working Title: Volunteering with Refugees: A study of the effect of context on the experience of being a volunteer.**

I \_\_\_\_\_ have read the information above and any questions I have asked have been answered to my satisfaction.

I agree to participate in this activity, realising that I may withdraw at any time.

I agree that the research data gathered for this study may be published provided that I am not identifiable.

Participant\_\_\_\_\_ Date\_\_\_\_\_

Researcher\_\_\_\_\_ Date\_\_\_\_\_

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Adam, B.D. (1978). *The survival of domination: Inferiorization and everyday life*. New York: Elsevier.
- Advisory Council on Multicultural Affairs. (1988). *Towards a National Agenda for Multicultural Australia*. AGPS: Canberra.
- Australian Broadcasting Corporation. (2001). *Polls show Tampa crisis good for Howard's image* [online]. Available  
WWW:<http://www.abc.net.au/worldtoday/s357765.htm>
- Australian Catholic Social Justice Council. (1992). I am a stranger. Will you welcome me?: The immigration debate. *Migration Monitor*, 27-28, 9-22.
- Baldock, C. (1990). *Volunteers in welfare*. North Sydney: Allen & Unwin.
- Baldock, C. (1992, July). *Volunteer professionalism, its contradictions and consequences*. Paper presented at the 4<sup>th</sup> National Conference of the Australian Association for Volunteering, Murdoch University, Perth, WA.
- Bales, K. (1996). Measuring the propensity to volunteer. *Social Policy and Administration*, 30 (3), 206-226.
- Bagilhole, B. (1996). Tea and sympathy or teetering on social work?: An investigation of the blurring of the boundaries between voluntary and professional care. *Social Policy and Administration*, 30 (3), 189-205.
- Berremen, G. (1975). Bazaar behaviour: Social identity and social action in urban India. In G. De Vos, & L. Romanucci-Ross (Eds.), *Ethnic identity: Cultural communities and change* (pp. 71-105). California: Mayfield Publishing Company.
- Betts, K. (1988). *Ideology and immigration: Australia 1976 to 1987*. Carlton: Melbourne University Press.
- Birrell, R. (1978). Immigration and unemployment. In R. Birrell & C. Hay (Eds.), *The immigration issue in Australia* (pp. 15-30). Victoria: School of Social Sciences, La Trobe University.
- Buchanan, M.E. (1976). *Attitudes towards migrants in Australia*. Canberra: AGPS.
- Calhoun, C. (1995). *Critical social theory: Culture, history and the challenge of difference*. Oxford: Blackwell.

- Castles, S. (1992). *Working paper on multiculturalism No 19. The challenge of multiculturalism: Global changes and Australian experiences*. The Centre for Multicultural Studies, University of Wollongong, New South Wales.
- Castles, S. (2000). Underclass or exclusion: Social citizenship for ethnic minorities. In E. Vasta (Ed.), *Citizenship, community and democracy* (pp. 22-44). London: Macmillan Press Ltd.
- Castles, S., & Davidson, A. (2000). *Citizenship and migration: Globalization and the politics of belonging*. London: Macmillan Press Pty Ltd.
- Cook, J.A., & Fonow, M.M. (1990). Knowledge and women's interests: Issues of epistemology and methodology in feminist sociological research. In J. McCarl-Nielson (Ed.), *Feminist research methods: Exemplary readings in the social sciences* (pp. 69-93). Colorado: Westview Press.
- Cope, B., Castles, S., & Kalantzis, M. (1991). Historical overview of the assumptions about the relationship between immigration and social cohesion. In *Immigration, ethnic conflicts and social cohesion* (pp. 3-19). Centre for Multicultural Studies, University of Wollongong, Canberra: AGPS.
- Cox, D. (1980). Refugee settlement: An Australian case study. In *Refugees: The Challenge of the Future*. 1980 Symposium. Academy of Social Sciences in Australia.
- Cox, D. (1985). Welfare services for migrants: Can they be better planned? *International Migration* 23 (1), 73-93.
- Cox, D. (1991). Social justice and service delivery. In D. Goodman, D.J. O'Hearn, & C. Wallace-Crabbe (Eds.), *Multicultural Australia: The challenges of change* (pp. 192-122). Newham, Victoria: Scribe.
- Crawford, F. (1994). *Emic social work: A story of practice*. Doctoral thesis, University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign.
- Darvill, G., & Munday, B. (1984). The present state of social worker-volunteer co-operation. In G. Darvill, & B. Munday (Eds.), *Volunteers in the personal social services* (pp. 2-19). London: Tavistock Publications.
- Denzin, N.K. (1997). *Interpretative ethnography: Ethnographic practices for the 21<sup>st</sup> century*. London: Sage.
- De Vault, M.L. (1999). *Liberating method: Feminism and social research*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press.

- De Vos, G. (1975). Ethnic pluralism: Conflict and accommodation. In G. De Vos, & L. Romanucci-Ross (Eds.), *Ethnic identity: Cultural communities and change* (pp. 5-41). California: Mayfield Publishing Co.
- Department of Immigration and Ethnic Affairs. (1980). *Attitudes towards refugees and migrants in host communities in Sydney and Melbourne*. Surrey Hills, NSW: MSJ Keys Planners.
- Department of Immigration and Ethnic Affairs. (1981). *An evaluation of the community refugee settlement scheme*. Surrey Hills, NSW: MSJ Keys Planners.
- Department of Immigration and Ethnic Affairs. (1986). *Community attitudes to immigration*. Surrey Hills, NSW: MSJ Keys Planners.
- Department of Immigration and Multicultural Affairs. (2000). *Ruddock stands firm on illegal arrivals - Media release 043/2000* [on line]. Available WWW:[http://www.minister.immi.gov.au/media\\_releases/media00/r00043.htm](http://www.minister.immi.gov.au/media_releases/media00/r00043.htm)
- Department of Immigration and Multicultural Affairs. (2001a). *Community support for refugees: Volunteers helping newly-arrived refugees feel welcome through friendship and support* [Brochure]. Canberra: Author.
- Department of Immigration and Multicultural Affairs. (2001b). *Community support for refugees information sheet* [online]. Available WWW:[http://www.immi.gov.au/general/refugee\\_paper.pdf](http://www.immi.gov.au/general/refugee_paper.pdf)
- Department of Immigration and Multicultural Affairs. (2001c). *Refugee and humanitarian issues: Australia's response* [Brochure]. Canberra: Author.
- Department of Immigration and Multicultural Affairs. (2001d). *Humanitarian program* [online]. Available WWW:[http://www.immi.gov.au/statistics/publication/popflows/c2\\_4.pdf](http://www.immi.gov.au/statistics/publication/popflows/c2_4.pdf)
- Drachman, D., & Halberstadt, A. (1992). A stage of migration framework as applied to recent Soviet Emigres. *Journal of Multicultural Social Work* 2 (1), 63-78.
- Ellis, C., & Bochner, A.P. (2000). Autoethnography, personal narrative, reflexivity: Researcher as subject. In N.K. Denzin & Y.S. Lincoln (Eds.), *Handbook of qualitative research* (2<sup>nd</sup> ed., pp. 733-768). London: Sage Publications Inc.

- Ellis, C., & Flaherty, M.G. (1992). An agenda for the interpretation of lived experience. In C. Ellis & M.G. Flaherty (Eds.), *Investigating subjectivity: Research on the lived experience* (pp. 1-16). California: Sage Publications, Inc.
- Fisher, K., & Karger, H. (1997). *Social work and community in a private world: Getting out in public*. New York: Longman.
- Fitzgerald, S. (1988). Immigration and society. In *Immigration: A commitment to Australia. The Report of the Committee to Advise on Australia's Immigration Policies*. Canberra: AGPS.
- Fook, J. (1993). *Radical casework: A theory of practice*. St. Leonards, NSW: Allen & Unwin.
- Freire, P. (1970). *Pedagogy of the oppressed*. New York: Herder & Herder.
- Galbally, F. (1978). *Migrant services and programs: Report of the review of post-arrival programs and services for migrants*. Canberra: AGPS.
- Hartman, A. (1992). In search of subjugated knowledge. *Social Work*, 37 (6), 483-484.
- Hay, C.G. (1978). The immigration issue. In R. Birrell, & C. Hay (Eds.), *The immigration issue in Australia* (pp. 6-14). A Sociological Symposium. Department of Sociology, School of Social Sciences, La Trobe University, Bundoora, Victoria.
- Henderson, R. (1975). *Poverty in Australia: Commission of inquiry into poverty*. Canberra: AGPS.
- Holme, A., & Maizels, J. (1977). *Social workers and volunteers*. London: Allen & Unwin.
- hooks, b. (1990). *Yearning: Race, gender and cultural politics*. Toronto, Canada: Between the Lines.
- Ife, J. (1997). *Rethinking social work: towards critical practice*. South Melbourne: Longman.
- Iredale, R., Mitchell, C., Pe-Pua, R., & Pittaway, E. (1996). *Ambivalent welcome: The settlement experiences of humanitarian entrant families in Australia*. Canberra: AGPS.
- Jakubowicz, A. (1998). Is Australia a racist society? Reflections on globalisation, multiculturalism and Pauline Hanson. *Migration Action*, 20 (2), 31-37.

- Jakubowicz, A., Goodall, H., Martin, J., Mitchell, T., Randall, L., & Seneviratne, K. (1994). *Racism, ethnicity and the media*. St Leonards, NSW: Allen & Unwin.
- Jupp, J. (1998). *Immigration*. Melbourne: Oxford University Press.
- Kemmis, S., & McTaggart, R. (1988). *The action research planner* (3<sup>rd</sup> ed.). Geelong: Deakin University Press.
- Kenny, S. (1997). Citizenship and welfare, the welfare state? In *Benchmarking citizenship: An introduction to standard-setting for democracy and social well-being in Australia*. Citizenship in Australia Series, No. 1, 23-45.
- Lafrance, J. (1996). Social work and volunteers: A case of shifting paradigms. *The Journal of Volunteer Administration*, Fall, 2-8.
- League of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies. (1991). *Working with refugees and asylum seekers: A handbook for Red Cross/Red Crescent staff and volunteers*. Geneva: League of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies.
- Legault, G. (1996). Social work practice in situations of intercultural misunderstandings. *Journal of Multicultural Social Work*, 4 (4), 49-66.
- Madriz, E. (2000). Focus groups in feminist research. In N.K. Denzin & Y.S. Lincoln (Eds.), *Handbook of qualitative research* (2<sup>nd</sup> ed., pp. 835-850). London: Sage Publications Inc.
- Martin, J. (1999). Volunteering in a culturally diverse context: Implications for project designers and managers. *Australian Journal on Volunteering*, February, 1999, 23-29.
- Martin, J.I. (1978). *The migrant presence: Australian responses 1947-1977*. Sydney: Allen & Unwin.
- McClure, P. (2000). *Participation support for a more equitable society. Final Report of the Reference Group on Welfare Reform*. Canberra: AGPS.
- McConnochie, K., Hollinsworth, D., & Pettman, J. (1988). *Race and racism in Australia*. Wentworth Falls, New South Wales: Social Science Press.
- Meemeduma, P. (1993). *Reshaping the future: Cultural sense in social work practice*. Paper presented at the 1993 National Australian Association for Social Workers' Conference, Newcastle, New South Wales.
- Mills, C.W. (1959). *The sociological imagination*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Mullaly, R. (1997). *Structural social work*. Ontario: McClelland & Stewart Inc.



- Nguyen, N. (1982). Limbo. In L. Hawthorne (Ed.), *Refugees: The Vietnamese experience* (pp. 316-317). Melbourne: Oxford University Press.
- Noble, J. (1991). *Volunteering: A current perspective*. Richmond, South Australia: Volunteer Centre of South Australia Inc.
- Oakley, A. (1981). Interviewing women: A contradiction in terms. In H. Roberts (Ed.), *Doing feminist research* (pp. 30-61). New York: Routledge.
- Office of Multicultural Affairs. (1989). *National Agenda for a Multicultural Australia: Sharing our Future*. Canberra: AGPS.
- Pease, B., & Fook, J. (1999). Postmodern critical theory and emancipatory social work practice. In B. Pease, & J. Fook (Eds.), *Transforming social work practice: Postmodern critical perspectives* (pp. 1-22). London: Routledge.
- Pettman, J. (1992). *Living in the margins: Racism, sexism and feminism in Australia*. Sydney: Allen & Unwin.
- Ross, D. (2002). *Enacting my theory and politics of an ethic of love in social work education*. Unpublished doctoral dissertation, Edith Cowan University, Bunbury, Western Australia.
- Schneller, R. (1989). Intercultural and intrapersonal processes and factors of misunderstanding: Implications for multicultural training. *International Journal of Intercultural Relations* 13, 465-483.
- Solas, J. (1994). *The (De) construction of educational practice in social work*. Brookfield, USA: Ashgate Publishing Co.
- Solomon, B. (1976). *Black empowerment: Social work in oppressed communities*. New York: Columbia University Press.
- Stanley, L., & Wise, S. (1983). 'Back into the personal' or: Our attempt to construct 'feminist research'. In G. Bowles, & R. Klein (Eds.), *Theories of women's studies* (pp. 192-209). Boston: Routledge.
- Tedlock, B. (2000). Ethnography and ethnographic representation. In N.K. Denzin & Y.S. Lincoln (Eds.), *Handbook of qualitative research* (2<sup>nd</sup> ed., pp. 455-486). London: Sage Publications Inc.
- United Nations High Commission for Refugees. (2000). *The 1951 Convention: Lasting cornerstone of refugee protection* [online]. Available WWW:[http://www.unhcr.ch/issues/asylum/au000615.htm#What refugee rights are set](http://www.unhcr.ch/issues/asylum/au000615.htm#What%20refugee%20rights%20are%20set)
- Vangelista, A. (1999). Multicultural volunteering: Reflections on the salad bowl approach. *Australian Journal on Volunteering*, February 1999, 31-38.

- Vasta, E. (2000). The politics of Australia. In E. Vasta (Ed.), *Citizenship, community and democracy* (pp. 107-126). London: Macmillan Press Ltd.
- Victorian Foundation for Survivors of Trauma. (1998). *Rebuilding shattered lives*. Melbourne: Victorian Foundation for Survivors of Trauma Inc.
- Volunteering Australia. (2001). *Model code of practice for organisations involving volunteer staff* [on line]. Available WWW: <http://www.volunteeringaustralia.org/code.html>
- Volunteering Western Australia. (1992). *Volunteering Western Australia: Code of practice for volunteers* [on line]. Available WWW: <http://www.volunteer.org.au/res4agen/cop4agen.htm>
- Western, J.S. (1983). *Social inequality in Australian society*. South Melbourne: The Macmillan Company of Australia PTY LTD.
- Westoby, P. (1994). *Waiting in line-A mutual journey: Refugee support through volunteer eyes*. Queensland Churches Together, Refugee and Migrant Services Committee.
- Wooden, M., Holton, R., Hugo, G., & Sloan, J. (1994). *Australian immigration: A survey of the issues*. Canberra: AGPS.
- Woods, M. (1997). Shrinking government - A New Zealand story: The effects on volunteers, volunteer agencies and their clients. *The Journal of Volunteer Administration*, Spring 1997.
- Young, I. (1990). *Justice and the politics of difference*. Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press.