A relational encounter: the lived experience of direct social work practice with people of refugee background

Ann Joselynn Baltra-Ulloa, BA (Hons) BSW (Hons)

A dissertation submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for

the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy (Social Work)

University of Tasmania

September, 2014

Declaration of Originality

This thesis contains no material which has been accepted for a degree or diploma by the University or any other institution, except by way of background information and duly acknowledged in the thesis, and to the best of my knowledge and belief no material previously published or written by another person except where due acknowledgement is made in the text of the thesis, nor does the thesis contain any material that infringes copyright.

Candidate:……………………………………………….

Date:

Authority of Access

This Thesis may be available for loan and limited copying and communication in accordance with Copyright Act 1968.

Candidate:…………………………………………………….

Date:

Statement of Ethical Conduct

The research associated with this thesis abides by the international and Australian codes on human and animal experimentation, the guidelines by the Australian Government's Office of the Gene Technology Regulator and the rulings of the Safety, Ethics and Institutional Biosafety Committees of the University.

Candidate:………………………………………………….

Date:

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Saturdays we spent without a life dreaming of what the world was up to while we slaved away at the computer.

Thank you Dr Terry Cox and Aunty Phyllis for your love, friendship, warmth and for sharing spirit, wisdom and country with me - you made me feel part of the family and you offered a home away from home.

Susan Neighbour, I have no earthly words to thank you. You are everything I aspire to be in life.

Amira Reindorf, The Williams Family, John Lenga, Juma Piri Piri, Sonya Plitt, Mario Amaya-Bonilla and Aunt Anaelena: thank you for your love, friendship and for walking this journey with me.

Thank you Brian Sweeney, you lived this work with me. You helped me find myself and I can't thank you enough for that. You believed in my ability and you challenged yourself for me and for the things I showed you. You suffered because I needed more than you could give me: I'm sorry I held on longer that we could both withstand. Thank you for nursing me when I was ill. Thank you for taking on my pain as yours at times. Thank you for helping me heal from my mother's loss and from the pain of losing my home. Thank you for helping me reconnect with Chile, for helping me learn about what happened, for the films you brought home and watched with me. Thank you for the books you made me read and all the things you taught me. I'm sorry I was such a bad student at times. Thank you for working so hard to provide material things I thought would make things better. Thank you for showing me my dark side and challenging me to own

ABSTRACT

While there is significant research and theoretical literature both within Australia and internationally that relates to social work with people of refugee background, there is a lack of empirical research about how direct social work practice is understood and experienced by both people of refugee background and social workers. Using a qualitative phenomenological approach informed by critical and anti-oppressive theories, I aimed to address this significant gap in empirical knowledge by capturing the lived experience of social work practice with people of refugee background.

My research questioned: how direct social work practice with people of refugee background is understood and experienced. Thirty-one participants within Tasmania were recruited through volunteer and snowball sampling and were interviewed using a semi-structured interview. The participants were people of refugee background, social workers who worked with people of refugee background, and, social workers of refugee background. The interviews were thematically analysed.

The interview data with people of refugee background revealed both negative and positive experiences of social work practice. Experiencing help and change characterised positive encounters in which social workers were encountered as friends and partners who worked with the strengths of people of refugee background. Negative experiences were characterised by the absence of help, change, friendship and a sense of partnership with the practitioner.

Social workers commonly described positive practice as *being with* people through their personal relationships with clients. Negative practice involved *being to* people. Such negative practice was unreflective, emphasised professional boundaries and involved regarding people of refugee background as powerless.

Finally, for social workers of refugee background, the cultural exchange experience was the focus of what, for them, comprised positive practice. Cultural exchange was characterised by reciprocity and mutual learning between practitioner and client. Additionally, the professionalisation of social work was described as an obstacle to cultural exchange.

The study's findings highlight the significance for participants of a relational standpoint in direct social work practice with people of refugee background, requiring dialogical practices that were derived from and framed by friendships and partnerships between practitioners and clients. While it is acknowledged that qualitative findings do not easily lend themselves to generalisation, possible implications for practice are that social work needs to contend with how relationships with clients are understood as friendships and developed through reciprocity, dialogue and mutual learning. Further research is warranted to explore how to integrate these findings into the learning and practice of social work with people of refugee background.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

List of Tables and Figures

CHAPTER ONE

"Step into my shoes and ask me questions, walk along with me…"

1.1 Introduction

Being of refugee background in Australia is an experience outside of the social and cultural compass of the majority of Australians. Indeed much of what we know, as an Australian community, about being a person of refugee background living in Australia derives not from hearing their stories and 'stepping into their shoes' but from the political agenda delivered directly to our living rooms by the media (Power 2010). Given this context, it is not surprising that, as Meemeduma (1993, p. 248) points out, social work as a profession struggles to 'get it right' with refugee communities living in Australia.

My thesis was conceived as an initial step towards 'getting it right' in direct social work practice with people of refugee background in Australia. It has been conceived as a process of engaging with grounded stories from both people of refugee background and social workers who have worked with them in order to understand and learn from their lived experiences of practice. This thesis creates a space for honouring unheard stories and for learning anew that which will help us, as a community, to get to know one another.

This chapter is the first of two dedicated to providing the context of and background to the study. In this chapter, I begin by outlining the background and

context of the research. That is, I tell the story of my own experience as a social worker of refugee background and how these experiences prompted me to think about the lived experience of direct social work practice with people of refugee background. The aims of the study, its significance to the social work field and the reasons for conducting the study are then presented. A detailed description of the paradigm underpinning this study is provided, including a discussion of the influences of critical theory and anti-oppressive thought. The use of terminology throughout this thesis and my approach to the use of language concludes these discussions. Finally, the structure of the thesis is described and is followed by brief concluding comments that foreground the second chapter – the review of relevant literature.

1.2 Background and Context: Rationale

My interest in social work practice with people of refugee background emerges from the identity that I occupy as a person of refugee background, my practice experiences with refugee communities and the work that I do in intercultural education. My reading of cross-cultural social work literature, my practice experiences of social work with people of refugee background and my reflections on practice have led me to observe some problems within this field of practice. Social workers' practice is currently informed by bodies of knowledge such as the Australian Association of Social Workers (AASW) *Code of Ethics* (2010); anti-oppressive and anti-racist social work practice theory; an overabundance of cultural knowledge about cultural groups (Gray, Coates and Yellow Bird 2008); and, values and skills learnt through ever-popular cultural

competence training offered across the spectrum of health and human services. However, in spite of this current range of resources to draw on, I have heard social workers speak of how they struggle to feel relevant as helpers when working with people of refugee background.

Similarly, in my years of social work practice, being involved in community activism and growing up within a racialised minority, I have heard people of refugee background say about social workers: "they are not helpful…they don't understand I'm not from here". In discussions with refugee communities, I have often heard it said that "if a social worker is trained to help people who are homeless, mentally ill, suicidal, chronically poor, chronically excluded, abused, neglected, [then] why do they struggle to be helpful to people of refugee background?" As a social worker, I have not been able to answer these questions.

Furthermore, I'm not alone in observing that social workers prefer to respond to practice challenges through standardised formulae and approaches (Gray, Coates and Yellow Bird 2008). In responding to the challenges of cross-cultural practice, the preferred formula seems to be the application of 'cross-cultural competency' (Lum 2007). However, the reality of social work practice at the coalface, as I have observed it, is that cross-cultural competency has proven to be unresponsive and ineffective in the face of the vast array of challenges presented by cross-cultural practice settings. Park (2005), Meemeduma (1993), Ling (2004), Gray, Coates and Yellow Bird (2008) and Westoby (2009) all observe similar problems and theorise that, in the field of cross-cultural social work practice, these problems seem to derive from inconsistencies and gaps in the

body of knowledge that inform social work practice and the practices that are used to intervene with clients such as people of refugee background.

My 'hunch', however, pointed to a third pressing concern. As Chapter Two describes, very little is known about what actually happens in social work practice with people of refugee background. Social work practice has relied heavily on identifying and developing models of practice that have been derived within the context of social policy that privileges a neo-liberal Western perspective. Therefore, these policies attempt to articulate the needs of people of refugee background from a neo-liberal Western perspective. The result has been that the voices of people of refugee background and social work practitioners working with them have been ignored and silenced. Social work practices have thus far been understood and constructed in isolation of insights derived from the lived experience of direct social work practice of both people of refugee background and social workers who work in this field. My study aimed to address these important issues and critical gaps in social work knowledge and understanding of social work practice.

This research attempted to engage with these issues and contribute to an understanding of the lived experience of direct social work practice in the Australian context. The study re-examines the reference points that inform current social work practice with people of refugee background and aims to gain new insights about practice with people of refugee background. The study begins the process of reconsidering what practices are indeed relevant and helpful for direct social work practice with people of refugee background.

This study answers the following primary research question:

- *How is direct social work practice with people of refugee background understood and experienced?*

The following secondary research questions are also considered:

- *How is direct social work practice with people of refugee background understood and experienced by people of refugee background?*

- *How is direct social work practice with people of refugee background understood and experienced by social workers?*

- *What are the implications for social work practice theory with people of refugee background?*

The emphasis in this study is on grounded stories of direct social work practice with people of refugee background for the purpose of gaining new insights and to shed light on new thinking and ways of practising social work with people of refugee background. It is therefore imperative to outline the assumptions, personal experiences and thinking that have accompanied me in the study and therefore shaped my research practice.

1.3 The Personal is Political – A Personal Journey with Political Implications

I am Mapuche, a First Nation South American. I came to Australia as a refugee. My refugee and resettlement experiences reinforced my community's cultural belief that we are all interconnected and interdependent. However, those refugee and resettlement experiences also exposed me to the reality that there are

socio-cultural conditions that shape this world unequally "along relational divisions of class, race, gender, sexuality and other social divisions" (Pease 2010, p. 3). I became a social worker so that I could work for social justice, for a balance between "being" and "doing" in life that originates as much from the needs of 'the head' as from the needs of the human heart and spirit.

I am mindful, however, that my own positionality cannot be left behind or suspended as though it did not influence both my decision to take on this investigation and my research practice. So, in an effort to be transparent, to explore fully the context from which this study was born and in which it was carried out, I will articulate that positionality - that personal context that informed and travelled with me during the research journey.

Today, I live in a *diaspora* in Australia, in the 'third space' (Bhabha 1994). This third space leads me to juggle the "tension between where [I'm] from and where [I'm] at" (Gray and Allegritti 2003, p. 314). As a social worker and researcher, trained in the West and of refugee background, I also occupy a 'third space' by virtue of my insider and outsider positionality. I contend that this positionality need not signify that I am caught in a 'no man's land' between oppositional binaries. Rather it signifies that I have learnt to live and work in the continuously evolving and emergent 'in-between' space of a life fused from the life I had in South America, the life I have in Australia and the life that emerges each day from having a foot in each space. I theorise this space as a continuum, constantly exposed to ever-changing contexts, transient in nature, sometimes uncomfortable, never fully familiar but always political.

Bhabha's (1994) 'third space' is not "merely the mixing, blending and synthesizing of different elements to form a 'culturally faceless whole' but rather [it] generates new forms and…new connections... [which transcend] hegemonic westernisation and postmodern diversity" (Wang and Yueh-yu Yeh 2005, pp. 175 -176). Ang (1994, p. 9) describes this space as having emerged from mass global immigration and forced mobilisation of people around the world, giving rise to a "new form of culture among immigrants". It is a space also theorised as a complex 'creative tension' that points to every culture not only being different but also internally varied, "continuously contested, imagined, reimagined, transformed, and negotiated both by members and through their interactions with others" (Gray and Alegritti 2003, p. 315). This is the 'in-between' space that I feel led me to become curious about the lived experience of direct social work practice with people of refugee background.

Being privileged to the social work experience as a worker, the refugee experience as a person of refugee background and the experience of social work practice from the perspectives of both worker and client has led me to walk the 'in-between' spaces in my research practice. It has meant that this study became important to me professionally and personally and therefore raised challenges in separating these two realms neatly and distinctly. Furthermore, it meant I saw things through a different cultural lens than a researcher who has grown up in Australia as a white Australian. For example, for me spending time talking, getting to know participants over a meal, reciprocating their research participation by doing something for them that they had asked me to do, sharing stories of the home country and the refugee experience, felt intuitive, perhaps as a legacy of

7

being Mapuche. It feels important and relevant to alert the reader that this occurred in this study, thereby highlighting the context and nature of the research that I conducted as unlike 'traditional' approaches to research.

Research is an art – an art of "asking questions, building relationships, seeking answers and coming up with more questions – [an] art of daily life" (Potts and Brown 2005, p. 258). This art is a way of life that, to me, meant committing to a set of values, practices and principles that focused on believing in people, in their capacity and their right to be agents of their own life. Hence, the focus on the lived experience of direct social work practice with people of refugee background, for me, proved to be important as a source of new knowledge that can inform practice.

I believe that research is deeply political, personal and transformational and as such, can be a practice of liberation, of redressing injustices (Freire 2003). I have struggled with qualitative research and its positivist legacy. This legacy is present in the way that some social scientists still favour standardised and repeatable research methodologies (Liamputtong and Ezzy 2005) or the way that some social scientists speak of emotional distance as important during the interviewing process (Silverman 2001). These beliefs about research are the remnants of positivism 'lingering' within qualitative approaches to research. They prevent scrutiny and critical examination of the epistemology of qualitative research. They also dampen efforts to liberate through research activity and thus continue to support the privileging and perpetuation of relations of dominance (Lather 1991, p. 16).

The struggles I have experienced with the legacy of positivism are partially an outcome of my refugee experience: my distrust of systems that appear unexamined. An outcome of experiencing a protracted war situation, of having learnt to survive by critically engaging and scrutinising systems of power – learning to identify who had power at critically dangerous times, learning how to access power to survive and escape safely and then acting to regain power so a sense of humanity and dignity could be re-established. This understanding and experience of power is something that I brought to the study through my refugee experiences and I continued to learn and explore it during the research process.

A concern with an analysis of power led me to favour critical theory as the foundational element of this study. Critical theory has led me to think of cross-cultural social work as a practice of power and change. As such, I came into this study questioning whether cross-cultural social work could be simply defined as 'any working relationship in which two or more of the participants differ with respect to cultural background, values and lifestyles' (Sue et al. 1982, p. 47).

Research is, to me, an explicit manifestation of the freedom I am privileged to experience and a means of action for social justice and social change. It is a vehicle for deep personal discovery, deep personal questioning and deep personal growth. It has been the catalyst of my realisation that, as a survivor of persecution and oppression, I have a moral obligation to not take this privilege for granted and to therefore act to safeguard as well as to secure freedom and human rights.

The following section explains the aims of the study and its significance to social work.

1.4 Aims and Significance

My study aimed to develop new knowledge and inform social work practice theory with people of refugee background through learning from the lived experience of direct social work practice from both people of refugee background and social workers. The significance of grounding this study in stories of lived experiences is that localised practice-in-action that people have reflected upon can be utilised to inform future understanding and practices.

The potential benefits of this study are that it will:

- increase social work's professional relevance and responsiveness to people of refugee background;
- contribute empirically to what is known about direct social work practice with people of refugee background in Australia;
- inform international and national social work practices, theory and pedagogy;
- contribute to bridging the gap between the theories that currently inform cross-cultural social work practice and the tools and skills for such practice; and,
- help revitalise, strengthen and ready the profession for an era in which the only predictable elements are change and the presence of diasporas.

The study offers social work a more grounded entry into the field of direct social work practice with people of refugee background. It brings to social work the reflections, wisdom and recommendations of workers and their clients, thereby aligning theory and practice with lived experience.

The immediate contribution that this research offers is the production of empirical evidence on a topic that to date has mostly been theorised. Hence, this research bridges the gap between social work theory and practice. This research contributes to the current move within academic/professional social work discourse to reposition social work knowledge and practices as cultural products and, as such, to make the study of social work culture integral to how social work theory is created and attempts to achieve praxis (Houston 2002, Ling 2004, Gray and Fook 2004, Briskman and Noble 1999, Lum 2007, Graham 2000, Meemeduma 1993, Williams 2006, Schmitz et al. 2001). This study provides a voice for both social workers and people of refugee background who participated in the study, offering them the opportunity to have their experiences recognised, included and validated.

In the following sections I explore in detail the influences of critical and anti-oppressive theory on both my thinking and my research practice.

1.5 Choosing the Research Paradigm

1.5.1 The Influences of Critical Theory

As a theory that has informed my research and social work practice, critical theory has shaped this study "to the extent that [the study] seeks social transformation as forms of justice and emancipation" (Gray and Webb 2009, p. 107). Critical theory calls for thinking critically about individual practices that cause oppression and systems and structures in society that act to oppress. It also involves using critique to highlight this oppression and resulting injustices at both the micro and macro levels of society and calls for action to formulate approaches to transformative emancipation.

Initially influenced by Marxism, critical theory in the last three decades has also been influenced by Feminism, Post-structuralism and Critical Race Theory (Gray and Webb 2009). It is difficult to refer to critical theory as one pure type of theory. There are multiple manifestations of critical theory - critical traditions are not static and therefore continue to change and evolve. This changing and evolving nature has meant that critical theory evades precise definition and thus criticalists are seldom found to agree on what critical theory is (Kincheloe and McLaren 2003).

I have related critical theory's hybrid tradition to social work's understanding and conceptualisation of cross-cultural practice. As a result, I have regularly asked myself the following questions in relation to cross-cultural social work thinking and practice. First, why and how are social workers implicitly expected to know their own culture in practising cross-culturally? Second, why

are social workers unreservedly thought of as being able to identify how culture affects their practice? Third, why is the practice of cross-cultural social work assumed to rely on a social worker's acquisition of cultural knowledge about the 'other'? Finally, I have asked why and how social workers can be expected to be able to juggle all of this while remaining 'sensitive to difference' (AASW 2010).

In essence, the 'culturally sensitive practitioner' needs to know how to do culturally sensitive practice but she/he can remain immune to having to ask why the need exists. Such questioning captured and impacted both the way I thought about the theoretical underpinnings of this study and how I conducted the study. Kincheloe and Steinberg's (1997) and Kincheloe and McLaren's (2003) work on critical theory meant that in the formulation and conduct of my research, I needed to be cognisant that:

- all thought is shaped by power relations and power is formed by social and historical forces;
- facts derive from values and ideologies;
- the relationship between ideas, objects and meaning is unstable, fluid, and regulated by social influences in a capitalist world;
- language is the key to how we understand and make meaning of our experiences in the world;
- there are groups in society that are privileged at the expense of others - in the contemporary world we have learnt not to question why this is the case and so people uncritically accept their privileged or unprivileged position in society, leading to a

generalised acceptance of oppression as an expected outcome of contemporary life; and

- mainstream research practices are a product of this system of unexamined privilege and therefore inevitably replicate the oppression of some human beings (Kincheloe and Steinberg 1997).

Critical theory is no longer comfortable with thinking of oppression as only derived from economic structures. Critical theory's relevance to today's world rests on being able to position oppression at the intersection of multiple forms of positions of "advantage or subordination" (Pease 2010, p. 117). Hence, it becomes problematic to think of cross-cultural social work as informed by a model of practice that assumes that the power to do cross-cultural social work lies with the sensitive respectful worker who is mindful of religious, spiritual worldviews and meaning-making differences; can access interpreters; can promote culturally aware and culturally competent practices; includes community Elders in shaping Indigenous practice; builds collaborative relationships with clients; and, promotes anti-racist and anti-oppressive practice principles by challenging racism and other forms of oppression (AASW 2010).

Conducting research under the influence of critical theory has meant questioning the significant emphasis that is placed on the 'how' to research at the expense of giving attention to 'why' to research. This preoccupation with method over human values is leading researchers away from an analysis of which value choices have informed the research process and the impetus for research in the first instance (Giroux 1997). A concern with identifying which human values

inform research allows critical researchers to think about how research contributes to hegemony.

Gramscian hegemony, as explained by Kincheloe and McLaren (2003, pp. 439-440), stipulates that power is no longer exercised through physical force but rather it is negotiated by socio-cultural means such as through the media, educational institutions and the family. Therefore, thinking of hegemony in research can never be removed from the socio-cultural influences that are asserted by various groups with myriad individual agendas. Furthermore, critical theorists relate hegemony to ideology. In doing so, we think of hegemony as the larger force by which the powerful seek control of the less powerful and we think of ideology as the cultural means by which this force is delivered and reinforced:

> Ideology vis-à-vis hegemony moves critical inquiries beyond simplistic explanations of dominance [and] endorses much more subtle, ambiguous, and situationally specific form of domination that refuses the propaganda model's assumption that people are passive, easily manipulated victims. Researchers operating with an awareness of this…understand that dominant ideological practices and discourses shape our vision of reality (Lemke 1995 cited in Kincheloe and McLaren 2003, p. 440).

Culture is seen by critical researchers as a site for contested knowledge production and transmission. Kincheloe and McLaren (2003, pp. 441-443) argue:

> Cultural production can often be thought of as a form of education, as it generates knowledge, shapes values, and constructs identity…particular cultural agents produce particular hegemonic ways of seeing…the new 'educators' in the [21st century] are those who possess the financial resources to use mass media…Western societies have to some degree capitulated to this…passively watching an elite gain control over the political system…critical researchers are intent on exposing the specifics of this process.

Culture for criticalists is: "always contextual, emergent, improvisational, transformational … [and above all] political" (Laird 1998, pp. 28-29). Current understandings of culture run counter to efforts by criticalists who seek to think of culture as a social and individual construction (Dean 2001) and include:

- culture as "ways of life, and shared values, beliefs and meanings common to groups of people" (Quinn 2009 cited in AASW Code of Ethics 2010, p. 43);
- 'culture' as used interchangeably in many Western countries with concepts such as ethnicity, race, and nationality (Matsumoto and Juang 2004); or,
- culture as the "totality of ways of behaving that get passed on from generation to generation" (North American National Association of Social Workers' Standard of Cultural Competence Practice 2001, p. 9)

As society contests ideas about culture, there are also challenges being made to ideas about multiculturalism. This study, under the influence of critical thinking, has endorsed a rejection of the notion that "people need to practice a 'difference blindness' [perspective] that ensures individual rights and privileges are applied to everyone in the same way, without reference to one's cultural background, ethnicity, race, and/or religion" (Sundar 2009, p. 99). This study is more closely aligned with the 'recognition of difference' perspective first proposed by Charles Taylor (1994).

As an advocate of the politics of recognition, Taylor (1994) situated the idea of multiculturalism within the notion that all human beings make sense of

themselves in relation to others' recognition of that self – that is, identity is a process that evolves with human interaction. For multiculturalism to be enacted and workable in bringing about equality for all, Taylor (1994, p. 72) argues constant and ongoing dialogue is necessary to find a balance between "the inauthentic and homogenizing demand for recognition of equal worth, on the one hand, [and] the self-immurement within ethnocentric standards, on the other".

Ultimately, all of these ideas represent the extent to which post-structuralist thought has influenced and been fused with contemporary critical theory. This fusion has offered this study the opportunity to pose critical questions about the cultural reality that participants described during their encounters with one another and allowed the intention of the research to be spoken and examined openly. Critical theory has fused with post-structuralism in this study to fundamentally critique sources of power and privilege and provide a stage for transformative action.

The next section discusses another theoretical framework that has influenced this study and my research practice - anti-oppressive theory.

1.5.2 The Influences of Anti-oppressive Theory

Anti-oppressive theory represents a body of knowledge that I have relied on to make sense of what cross-cultural social work is and, more fundamentally, it has informed how I work cross-culturally and thus how I carry out research. As an approach to practice, it has shaped the perspective on criticality that I have taken and consequently how I have applied a critical analysis of power during the study.

Anti-oppressive theory and practice has broadened my understanding of critical theory. My perspective on criticality has expanded to include an understanding of oppression as being present at the intersection of multiple forms of oppression (Pease, 2010) and as a site where relational and cultural power and privilege are exercised to define who the 'other' is or is not (Razack 1998).

hooks (1994) speaks of anti-oppressive theory as a theory of contestation, a place where the oppressed can speak their truth according to their experience of identity and oppression. Burke and Harrison (1998) state that anti-oppressive theory is never ahistorical or de-contextual – the oppressed speak their story from where they are at and where they have been, a place as much shaped by history as it is by current context. A point worth highlighting is that, for an anti-oppressive researcher, binary thinking becomes problematic.

The oppressor and the oppressed, the centre and the margin, the normal and the different all have to be deconstructed and thought of as roles and socio-political spaces that can be cohabitated and simultaneously inhabited by an individual (Razack 1998). Each of these roles and socio-political spaces carry power: there is power in being an oppressor and in being oppressed; in inhabiting a mainstream cultural identity and in being different; and, in being in the accepted centre and in being in the margins. Therein lies the synchronicity that this study found in adopting both a critical way of thinking and an anti-oppressive practice – that freedom, emancipation and social justice come from treating the norm as superfluous and difference as the "basis for membership in society" (Moosa-Mitha 2005, p. 63).

Understanding that anti-oppressive research knowledge is socially constructed and political in nature calls for an epistemology in which knowledge exists not in and of itself but rather in people – derived from their position of power and privilege in society and from their interactions with one another. As a product of people's lived experience, knowledge is thus political - it is not neutral but rather a product of whose voice is heard, when and why. As such, knowledge can be used to oppress and liberate and, more often than not, it can be used to do both simultaneously. It is vital for anti-oppressive research to act as a form of resistance of the status quo, an overt political activity where knowledge is re-discovered, co-created and "acted on, by, and in the interests of the marginalized and oppressed" (Potts and Brown 2005, p. 262).

Anti-oppressive research is not necessarily linear. In fact, the anti-oppressive researcher accepts that the need to maintain a predictable linear research process is the product of a concerted attempt by the neo-liberal environment to dilute any focus on the status quo and thus disarm us as researchers in our quest to question what appears 'normal'. Thinking of the research process as a function of power relations has been enormously helpful in this study, given its multiple cultural contexts and the focus of the enquiry on lived experience.

It is not enough to think of doing anti-oppressive research by rejecting the positivist attitude to research participants as objects of research. Nor is it enough to 'empower' and 'give voice' to participants as though those actions are not loaded with assumptions of who has the capacity to empower and give voice and

who does not. In anti-oppressive research, attention is given to the complex matrix of power relations as they relate to who is the knower and who is the known; who are the groups of knowers; who is the researcher, what does she know, what does she want, who does she bring with her to the research; and, why does she want to know. As Potts and Brown (2005, p. 263) state:

> In anti-oppressive research constant attention is given to these relations, and care is taken to shift power from those removed from what is trying to be 'known' to those closest to it – that is, those people with epistemic privilege or lived experience of the issues under study…we say that "we do not begin to collect data in a community until all the dogs know us", which is [a] way of saying "no research without relationships".

As a final step in the articulation of the research paradigm of this study, the next section discusses the terms that were used in the study and what meaning was given to those terms.

1.5.3 The Use of Terminology

There are three central ideas that have shaped my approach to language and its use in this study. First, Habermas' *Theory of Communicative Action* (1987) speaks of the power of dialogue and mutuality between human beings to expose injustice and redress it. For Habermas, reasoning between human beings is at the centre of our primal need to communicate. Given the centrality of this need to communicate, his theory of communicative action asserts that language is the medium by which we construct reality, that as human beings we reason with each other through our communication and we do so because we want to be understood – we want our reality to be known and responded to by others (Houston 2010). I

drew heavily on the idea that language constructs reality; that it is political; that it can expose injustice and redress it; and that as human beings, we feel the need to use language to hear and experience ourselves and others.

Second, Derrida's work (1978) on deconstructionism describes meaning as never being fixed and only being produced and reproduced by the never-ending juxtaposition of communicators and ever-changing contexts. This idea of meaning being constructed and re-constructed resonated with me during my research practice as I interacted with participants in different contexts and terms took on different meanings. Furthermore, my own lived experience of how terms that are defined and used by powerful people can seal the fate of the less powerful also influenced my connection with Derrida's work (1978). For example: the label *refugee*, once applied by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), literally opens the door to resettlement, carrying with it the power to end persecution and the experience of violence and threat.

For the purpose of this study, and in consideration of the ideas that have shaped my understanding of the power and privilege of language, I have employed the following definitions in this research.

Refugee is defined as per the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees' legal definition:

> "Any person who owing to a well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion, is outside the country of his/her nationality and is unable, or owing to such fear, is unwilling to avail himself/herself of the protection of that country." (Refugee Council of Australia [RCA] 2012b).

People of Refugee Background* in lieu of the term *Refugees

Using the words 'people of refugee background' rather than the word 'refugees' to refer to people who have experienced forced dislocation from their country of origin and thus sought and were granted refuge in countries like Australia, represents an effort to acknowledge that the refugee experience need not totalise a person's identity. Two messages are communicated in this endeavour. First, that being a refugee ought to end once refuge is found; and, second, that the refugee experience may or may not be part of a person's historical context. Ultimately, it is the individual who defines what forms part of their context and the extent to which certain experiences in life warrant acknowledgement and, if so, the extent to which they want this to be acknowledged by others.

Resettlement* in lieu of the term *Settlement

The term 'settlement' is often associated with what people of refugee background experience when forced to adjust to a Western life. It is often presented as a new process, requiring the development of new skills and the ability to transition smoothly to a new, more desirable lifestyle. Using the word 'resettlement' is an attempt to signal that not all people of refugee background are new to 'settling' into a Western lifestyle – they possess the skills, capacity and resilience to make all kinds of readjustments in life should they choose to. However, what they lack, because of the impact of colonialism, is the choice to determine whether or not they will make a transition to a Western lifestyle.

Social Work Encounter* in lieu of the term *Social Work Intervention

I use the term 'social work encounter' in an attempt to acknowledge that for many of the people I have worked with, including participants in this study, the term 'social work intervention' assumes the social worker's capacity and right to intervene in people's lives. The preferred term of 'social work encounter' positions the power and privilege to intervene inside a negotiated and relational space created when client and worker meet.

Direct Social Work Practice

There are many positions regarding the definition of the term *direct social work practice* (Hyslop 2012). Carey (2008) states that direct social work practice is generally about 'case work', while Hepworth et al. (2010) state that direct practice is the performance of multiple social work roles such as case worker and counsellor, with individuals, couples, families, groups and systems. Generally, direct social work practice is associated with interpersonal one-to-one work that occurs within "tight, contested and internalised space[s] that are constrained by time, money, workload and governmental oversight" (Hyslop 2012, p. 405). For the purpose of this thesis, direct social work practice relates to 'everyday' practice – any work that entails a social worker engaging with clients and society with a focus on social justice and human rights.

The next section provides an overview of the structure of this thesis.

1.6 Structure of the Thesis

The thesis is divided into eight chapters. This first chapter is the first of two focused on explaining the context of the study, the problem that was observed and the thinking that informed and guided the study and the research practice. Chapter Two continues the explanation of the research context by providing an overview of relevant literature regarding the historical, political, socio-cultural and legal contexts that shape and influence the resettlement experience of people of refugee background resettling in Australia and social work's understanding of, and responses to, those experiences. The review of literature establishes that, while much has been theorised about preferred approaches to direct social work practice with people of refugee background, these preferred approaches and associated critiques are largely devoid of empirical evidence about the lived experience of direct practice by social workers and people of refugee background. The third chapter discusses the phenomenological qualitative methodological approach employed that was influenced by a critical and anti-oppressive research framework. The methods utilised to collect and analyse the data are also described.

Chapters Four, Five and Six describe the results of the study. Each chapter is dedicated to one of the three research participant cohorts and their lived experience of direct social work practice with people of refugee background. Chapter Seven discusses the research findings in relation to the literature, arguing for a reconsideration of direct social work practice with people of refugee background from a relational point of reference. Finally, Chapter Eight explores the strengths and limitations of the study and draws final conclusions by

describing the implications of the study for social work education and further research.

1.7 Conclusion

This chapter has introduced the research and provided an overview of the rationale that supports it. It also describes the personal and professional experiences and observations that gave way to my motivation for conducting the study. I have canvassed my personal context, the assumptions I have made, the thinking that has accompanied me in this study and the way I have defined key terms. These discussions outline for the reader the personal and political nature of the study and the non-neutral position taken within it. Chapter Two articulates the context and value of this study through a review of relevant literature.

CHAPTER TWO

Literature Review: Understanding and Responding to People of Refugee Background in Australian Direct Social Work Practice

"When someone…describes the world and you are not in it, there is a moment of psychic disequilibrium, as if you looked into the mirror and saw nothing" (Rich, 1986, cited in Meemeduma 1993, p. 248).

2.1 Introduction

This chapter provides an overview of literature concerning social work practice with people of refugee background. It begins with an exploration of the historical, political, socio-cultural and legal contexts that shape and influence the resettlement experiences of people of refugee background in Australia and the manner in which social work understands and responds to people of refugee background. This is followed by a review of the literature from six research focus areas relating to social work with people of refugee background. These areas of focus are:

(1) how immigration and refugee policies: their impact on resettlement experiences of people of refugee background and social work practice in Australia;

(2) the refugee and resettlement experiences of people of refugee
background in Australia;

(3) understanding refugees as traumatised victims;

(4) culturally-competent and sensitive approaches to social work practice
with people of refugee background;

(5) critiques of the relevance of culturally-competent and sensitive
approaches to social work practice with people of refugee background;
and,

(6) new ways of understanding and responding to people of refugee
background in direct social work practice in Australia.

The literature canvassed through the lenses of these six focus areas in social work research illustrates that social work plays a vital role in providing services to people of refugee background in general and specialist service settings. However, the literature reviewed also demonstrates that direct social work practice has been developed largely without consideration of the lived experience of direct practice by social workers and people of refugee background and this is problematic. The chapter concludes by articulating the need for research that elicits such lived experiences so as to better inform social work direct practice theory and approaches for working with people of refugee background.

2.2 The Contexts of Refugee Resettlement in Australia

In this first section of the chapter I consider the key historical, political, socio-cultural and legal contexts that shape and influence the experiences that people of refugee background negotiate before, during and after resettlement in

Australia. Direct social work practice with people of refugee background has developed in response to historical events, policy decisions and socio-cultural attitudes in Australian society that provide insights into the complex matrix of systems and lived experiences that intersect in this field of social work practice.

Much of what is known today about refugees and their treatment emerged in the aftermath of World War II. Until the mass human displacement that followed World War II, the global community had neither a term for nor any international agreement about the treatment of people fleeing persecution and/or disaster in their home country. By 1951, the term *refugee* had been adopted and the office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) created to assist in the resettlement of millions of displaced Europeans needing protection after World War II (RCA 2012b).

Australia signed the Refugee Convention on 22nd January 1954, later ratifying the amended 1967 Protocol on the 13th December 1973 (Amnesty International 2012). Australia has also signed and ratified most of the UN Human Rights treaties and associated protocols that have followed the Refugee Convention in 1951. In response to the obligations of the Refugee Convention, Australia has developed two legislative mechanisms to welcome refugees – the Onshore Protection Program and the Offshore Resettlement Program (RCA 2012a). The Onshore Program is for asylum seekers who seek refugee status after arriving in Australia. The Offshore Program is for people who have gained refugee status and seek resettlement from outside Australia. Currently, Australia is the only nation that numerically links these two components of its immigration

program. While Australia welcomes 13,750 refugees each year (Department of Immigration and Citizenship [DIAC] 2012), each time a visa is granted to an onshore applicant, a visa is deducted from the offshore quota.

The most contentious aspect of observing refugee rights under the UN Convention is that Australia has not legislated to give effect to many of its obligations as a signatory nation (Rice 2010). Furthermore, the only mechanism established to report as a signatory nation on issues of compliance with treaty obligations is the Australian government's annual report to the UN that rarely reflects poorly on compliance. Rather, these reports are "descriptive, promotional and uncritical" (Rice 2010, p. 19). Consequently, non-compliance issues are usually reported by non-government organisations (NGOs) or human rights institutions such as the Australian Human Rights Commission (AHRC). At face value, this context may seem removed from the realities of direct social work practice with people of refugee background, but these structural issues contribute to, and compromise, the capacity of social workers on the ground to understand the profession's obligations to refugees and to participate in addressing social justice issues at a national level.

Once resettled in Australia, refugees assume the status of a cultural minority. Protection against racism and discrimination in Australia is difficult in a legal system that relies on the Westminster system of common law, as international laws and treaties have no direct impact on Australian life unless they are specifically affirmed by domestic law (Parliamentary Education Office 2012). Rice (2010, p. 21) states, "There are gaps and lapses in protecting the rights of

migrant communities and asylum seekers [in Australia]". Australia has no 'rights' document to frame its local laws and, as such, federal and state laws function independently, leading to inconsistencies between the interpretation and application of the law from state to state. Laws can be suspended in some parts of the country while remaining active in others and thus the notion of 'equality before the law' becomes more of a formal statement than a practical reality. This overarching context also affects how human services are designed and delivered, encouraging regional differences in approach resulting in client outcomes being heavily influenced by where in Australia people reside (Westoby 2009).

Australia's capacity to safeguard and deliver on issues of human and refugee rights is held hostage, not by lack of good will and intent, but rather by "a range of structural and other problems within our justice system [making] for too many Australians, a lack of human rights…the norm rather than the exception" (Williams 2010, p. 5). The lack of alignment between larger systems and social policy frameworks within which resettlement of refugees takes place in Australia is an important consideration for direct social work practice with people of refugee background as it influences how social workers understand the experiences of people of refugee background before, during and after resettlement and how practice responses are formulated and enacted.

Current Australian socio-cultural and political discourses define people of refugee background as either threats to social security and cohesion or victims of war, torture and trauma (RCA 2011). As social threats, refugees in Australia become 'ungrateful queue jumpers', 'illegal boat arrivals swamping the welfare

system' and 'people who are burdening the job market' (RCA 2011). As victims, refugees in Australia become 'traumatised clients' of therapeutic experts (Westoby 2009). Somewhere between these two perceptions is where, Westoby (2009) argues, social work intervenes.

A new socio-political context is also emerging as a result of the election of the conservative government led by Tony Abbott in September 2013, which has launched its 'Stop the Boats' policy. This policy platform promises to radically weaken Australia's commitment to refugees and to meeting its obligations under the UN's international treaties and protocols. It includes ceasing reviews of unsuccessful refugee status determinations by the Federal Court via its Refugee Review Tribunal. These reviews will now be decided by the same government department which makes initial determinations – DIAC (Reilly 2013). Social commentators predict that significantly more refugee status determinations will go to the High Court where they will be further delayed, exposing asylum seekers to additional and prolonged anxiety and uncertainty.

Additionally, it is proposed that Temporary Protection Visas will again be issued to asylum seekers awaiting status determinations that will allow them to work but will deny them the option of sponsoring family members to join them. This is likely to reinforce the levels of unemployment, distress, depression, anxiety and isolation of this cohort and encourage family members awaiting reunion to board boats to reach Australia (Reilly 2013).

The 'Stops the Boats' policy and Temporary Protection Visas present social workers with many social and natural justice issues that require direct

practice responses including continued detention and processing offshore; resettlement of refugees in Papua New Guinea; large expenditures to gain intelligence and disable boat-smugglers in Indonesia; the reintroduction of the Royal Australian Navy in intercepting boats; and, the reduction of Australia's annual refugee intake to 13,000 (Reilly 2013, RCA 2013). A significant challenge presented by current policy is the cessation of free legal advice for asylum seekers (RCA 2013). This denial of natural justice to people who, under internationally recognised legal systems, are exercising their human right to seek asylum from persecution, is the most prevalent aspect of this new policy.

Australian academic Peter Westoby (2009, p. 13) argues that "where you sit determines what you see" and, as such, the focus areas of social work research dedicated to practice with people of refugee background shifts according to the perception and understanding of this cohort and their experiences on which it is founded. The following section reviews literature from six areas of enquiry that shape how social work understands and responds to people of refugee background.

2.3 How Social Work Understands and Responds to People of Refugee Background in Australia

Banks (2006) argues that there are many definitions of social work and social work practice. These vary according to social and professional contexts; ideology; culture and geographical origin (Thompson 2000, Ife 2008, Banks 2006). The AASW (2010, p. 7) defines social work as:

[a] profession [that] promotes social change, problem solving in human relationships and the empowerment and liberation of people to enhance wellbeing. Utilising theories of human behaviour and social systems, social work intervenes at the points where people interact with their environment. Principles of human rights and social justice are fundamental to social work.

This definition of social work by the AASW (2010) acknowledges that social work practice is the activity that takes place at the intersection of multiple interdependent contexts. The AASW (2010), however, also defines practice as distinct types of practice neatly 'packaged' as case work; counselling with families, individuals, communities or groups; advocacy; and, social action that targets both client and systemic issues.

The AASW (2010, pp. 10-11) overtly states that social work is a professional activity that recognises its responsibilities and accountability to the Code of Ethics, the expressed values and principles in the Code, and, the recognised professional obligations that benchmark the behaviours and actions social workers must adhere to and comply with. Beyond outlining the ethical responsibility to develop culturally sensitive practice (AASW 2010, pp. 17-18), the AASW (2010) does not define social work or social work practice with clients from non-Western cultures, such as people of refugee background, who may have different expectations and understandings of what social work is and what practice involves.

The literature does, however, state clearly that social workers meet people of refugee background within "schools, housing support services, employment and health services, statutory child protection, generalist welfare services,

neighbourhood centres and counselling services as well as in [re]settlement services" (Ingamells and Westoby 2008, p. 163). It also identifies that Western social work research on practice with this cohort is mostly focused on capturing the social, cultural and economic facets of their resettlement experiences in countries like Australia (Harding and Libal 2012). The next section of this chapter reviews literature about how Australian social work understands and responds to people of refugee background in direct practice.

2.3.1 Immigration and Refugee Policies: their Impact on the Resettlement Experiences of People of Refugee Background and Social Work Practice in Australia

Debates about national identity, social inclusion, multiculturalism and cultural integration have informed efforts to document the impact of immigration and resettlement policies on the experiences of people of refugee background in Australia. Research in this area has also attempted to theorise and empirically capture the experiences of social workers responding to policy, immigration and resettlement contexts

Barnes (1998), for example, interviewed 82 young Vietnamese men resettled in Sydney several years after their arrival to test the validity of the anti-multiculturalism attitudes that dominated Australian society at the time. Barnes (1998) asked her participants to describe their current lives in Australia and their future aspirations. She then compared responses to statements embedded in social policy that described the benchmarks every Australian citizen should aspire to in

helping to build "national priorities of nation building and social cohesion"
(Barnes 1998, pp. 10-11).

Barnes (1998) found that, despite the experiences of racism and exclusion,
many of her participants reported that their lived experience and aspirations for a
future life in Australia mirrored those 'national priorities' of learning English;
finding employment; having a family; accessing education; and, valuing an
Australian way of life, which was equated with a life of social cohesion. Barnes
(1998) concluded that there exists a need for social work practice to balance
negative perceptions about refugees in the Australian community with the real life
circumstances of those refugees. She suggests that this is best achieved through
community level interventions based on knowledge derived from research with a
particular focus on "making sure the voice of those most immediately affected by
the debate[s]…is heard" (Barnes 1998, p. 15). While this study did not involve
social workers or their practice as its primary focus, it did highlight the
importance of social, political and cultural contexts to social work practice and the
importance of hearing directly from refugees about their resettlement experiences.

Similarly, Cemlyn and Briskman (2003) and subsequent work by
Briskman and Cemlyn (2005), focussed on examining the immigration and
resettlement policies and what they label as the 'hostile reception' of asylum
seeking children in Britain and Australia. They reviewed national and
international policy and legislative contexts; international research undertaken on
the impact of detention on children; and, anecdotal and secretly recorded stories

from children in detention to make recommendations on the role of social workers and social work practice within hostile statutory environments.

Their conclusions about Australian and British social policy contexts and the experiences of asylum seeking children in detention include the observation that proclamations of multiculturalism and anti-racism in broader social policy are in direct contradiction with immigration policies. They also found that immigration and resettlement policies are "characterised by deterrence and punishment" (Briskman and Cemlyn 2005, p. 715) and that legislative frameworks support a breach of the UN's Human Rights Charter and Refugee Convention. Furthermore, they observed that the complexity of visa systems result in confusion and a lack of process support and that, most troubling, children detained while seeking asylum experience widespread human rights violations and are used as political "pawns in ideological contexts" (Cemlyn and Briskman 2003, p. 163)

In light of their findings, Cemlyn and Briskman propose both active and passive social work roles and practice responses. The active approach involves a political practice paradigm involving "subversion and civil disobedience" (Crock and Saul 2002, cited in Briskman and Cemlyn 2005, p. 720); protesting and advocacy; and, participation in groups and organisations dedicated to "pressing the government to honour its international obligations" (WaMungai 2001, cited in Briskman and Cemlyn 2005, p. 720). The passive role involves the continuation of a silent professional voice in matters of human rights. This study did not include data derived from social workers' lived experience of these practice

contexts nor did it include data derived from refugees outside of detention. Its relevance lies in its confirmation of the important impact of social, immigration and resettlement policies on the lived experience of resettlement and on social work practice responses.

Drawing on a similar comparative analysis of public policy and legislative contexts in Britain and Australia and empirical work involving the narratives of 31 front-line social workers working with refugees and asylum seekers, Robinson (2013) examined the demands faced by social workers responding to such policy contexts and offers suggestions for practice responses. Her study indicates that social workers face conflicting practice environments when working with this cohort and encounter prescriptive and punitive policy objectives that clash with emotionally and politically-charged social welfare practices. This environment promotes high levels of worker stress; discrimination, racism, confusion and uncertainty for clients; a sense of unpreparedness for working in this context; and, a lack of direct support for workers. This study was limited to 10 Australian social workers working with people of refugee background and, while two social workers of refugee background were interviewed, there were no clients of refugee background included in the study. The study does reinforce the importance of policy contexts for understanding the lived experience of practice.

In her conclusions, Robinson (2013) describes ways forward for the role and function of social workers. She supports a call for a "deviant" social work (Carey and Foley 2011, cited in Robinson, 2013, p. 13) that includes campaigning against racism and raising awareness about the refugee and resettlement

experiences. Furthermore, she suggests an emphasis on relationships with clients; cooperation across the sector; and, direct supervisory support to counter the effects of competition, bureaucratisation and managerialism that frame service development and provision. Robinson (2013) concludes that underpinning social work training and education with the study of critical race theory will help to "ensure there is a coherent position from which to actively [know how to] challenge racism and other forms of discrimination" in practice (Robinson 2013, p. 14).

The next section reviews literature from studies dedicated to understanding the resettlement experiences of people of refugee background resettled in Australia.

2.3.2 The Refugee and Resettlement Experiences of People of Refugee Background in Australia

Social work has contributed to extensive work across many disciplines that characterises the refugee and resettlement experience as difficult and fraught with challenges. In adding to previous multidisciplinary work, however, this body of social work research seeks to understand the lived experience of people of refugee background in resettlement and to distil from it elements of best practice.

McMichael et al. (2011) focused on the experiences of refugee youth. This longitudinal study of 120 young people of refugee background living in Melbourne, Australia, asked participants about their experiences of "levels of trust, attachment, discipline and conflict in family" (McMichael et al. 2011, p.

182) during resettlement in Australia. Findings indicated that the resettlement experiences of this cohort had been challenging and highly dependent on family dynamics associated with adjustment to life in a new country and broader socio-cultural experiences in resettlement (McMichael et al. 2011, pp. 190-192). In addition, the study found that this cohort adopted family roles unique to the refugee resettlement context. These included being cultural brokers and translators for family members who spoke no English, contributing financially to the support of relatives overseas, and, being sources of emotional and financial support for their parents who sought family reunification through relevant immigration programs.

The study did not provide extensive discussion of the implications of its findings for social work practice. However, it did conclude that more research was needed and that practice interventions should focus on supporting young people by supporting their families. The study is particularly relevant to my research in the emphasis it gives to the lived experience of its target group as a conduit for understanding the broader resettlement experience and its attempt to influence thinking about direct practice with this cohort. However, the study did not capture social work voices and their experience of encounters with people of refugee background.

The study by Broadbent et al. (2007) focused on distilling elements of best practice from the lived experience of participants in a relocation project issuing from a partnership between the Victorian Horn of Africa Community Network (HACN), representing a group of predominantly Horn of Africa refugees living in

Melbourne, Australia; the Warrnambool City Council Authority (WLGA); and, the Swan Hill community. The study adopted an action research methodology to capture and evaluate the relocation to Swan Hill and WLGA of HACN community members. The relocation project sought to address concerns about skill and labour shortages in WLGA and Swan Hill and the high levels of unemployment, discontent with life in Melbourne and feelings of powerlessness about resettlement locations experienced by HACN members.

Findings indicated that direct practice approaches with people of refugee background that supported freedom of choice for communities in relocating after arrival in Australia were found most relevant and helpful by participants of this study. Broadbent et al. (2007) suggested a community development framework for direct social work practice with this cohort that supported the building of social capital within refugee-arrived communities and the awareness of Australian workers to prepare them for the arrival of diverse co-workers. While the study drew on the lived experience of people of refugee background and mainstream Australian community members, its focus was on project evaluation rather than achieving an understanding of direct social work practice with people of refugee background.

Barnes (2001) conducted a qualitative study with 14 Vietnamese refugees resettled in Sydney, Australia. Participants were asked to provide a qualitative chronological account of their experiences of life in Vietnam, their flight and experience of seeking asylum, and, their subsequent experiences of arrival and resettlement in Australia. The aim was to understand how social inclusion and

exclusion, both in Vietnam and Australia, had shaped their sense of belonging and connection to Australia and influenced their participation in Australian life. Findings were related to how social workers could promote social inclusion of people of refugee background during resettlement.

The study is significant in its assertion that too much focus is given in social work practice to whether or not people of refugee background develop attachment to Australia during resettlement as a key indicator of their social inclusion and participation in Australian life. A case is made against this accepted truth and in support of practice based on an acceptance that people of refugee background often stay connected to two homelands, with each of these homelands playing a significant part in resettlement and experiences of belonging and connection in Australia. While Barnes (2001) also makes significant contributions to what is known about the refugee and resettlement experiences and argues strongly for important shifts in social work practice, she fails to position her contributions from within grounded stories of lived experience of social work practice.

Sweeney (2008) interviewed six Sierra Leonean people of refugee background resettled in Tasmania, Australia to gain an understanding of their lived experience of resettlement. Findings indicated that participants most valued feeling welcomed by the host community during resettlement, being able to work, and, being able to build connections and friendships with people in the community. This study was significant in that it related its findings to the intangible elements of connection and disconnection to the host community as

relevant considerations for social work practice with people of refugee background. In addition to the limitations presented by its small sample, the study did not specifically explore the lived experience of social work practice by this cohort or the social workers who work with them.

Finally, a study by Abdelkerim and Grace (2012) comprised a literature review focussing on the challenges faced by Horn of Africa refugee communities in Australia during resettlement. Their study focused on "synthesi[sing], and analys[ing] previously fragmented evidence that should be used to inform social policy and social program improvement" (Abdelkerim and Grace 2012, p. 104). Their review highlighted policy and practice implications including "streamlining of qualification recognition process [for people of refugee background]; introducing culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) specialised job networks; resisting anti-[African] sentiments [in practice]; challenging stereotypes and promoting diversity; introducing incentives [for people of refugee background] to undertake volunteer work; revitalising existing English language acquisition pedagogy; empowering CALD-specialised counselling services; and, establishing CALD-specialised research and advocacy entities" (Abdelkerim and Grace 2012, p. 104).

This study provided a valuable summation of existing empirical work regarding refugees and their resettlement experiences in Australia. However, discussions of practice implications focus entirely on describing macro practice modalities such as community and policy work as preferred approaches to social work with people of refugee background. The study did not consider what occurs

during direct social work encounters with people of refugee background to formulate its recommendations.

In summary, much work has been done to understand the refugee and resettlement experiences of people of refugee background in Australia. While attempts have been made to privilege the lived experience of people of refugee background, research has not considered how a combined focus on the lived experience of direct practice by people of refugee background and social workers could enhance professional responses. The next section reviews literature that focuses on understanding people of refugee background as traumatised victims.

2.3.3 Understanding Refugees as Traumatised Victims

During three decades of welfare reform in Australia, social work practice with people of refugee background has involved short term support framed mostly around medicalised psycho-social approaches (Westoby and Ingamells 2010). Furedi (2004) states that this is the result of Western nations' cultural shift towards using disease metaphors for understanding and addressing the myriad issues faced by human beings in their social, cultural and personal lives. Westoby (2009) argues that the implications for social work practice with people of refugee background of this cultural shift are that refugee and resettlement experiences are largely understood as manifestations of trauma. Trauma becomes the pathology issuing from experiences of violence, dislocation and forced migration and resulting in the facilitation of their status and identity as victims (Westoby 2009).

A considerable volume of literature has emerged around the perception of refugees as traumatised victims. Some of this work speaks of practice with people of refugee background needing to be linear, predictable, scientific and targeted at the individual (Pupavac 2002). Such approaches are reported by social workers as useful because they provide a clear method and direction for practice in the face of what is considered a complex, challenging and unpredictable field of practice (Westoby and Ingamells 2010).

Theoretical and ideological discussions in this literature describe how individualism and self-reliance have become the cornerstones of government policies that peel back services and generic practice approaches that do not support individual needs (McDonald 2006). Case management, criteria-based assessment of service performance, output reporting, evidence-based practice, short-term project funding and a reduced emphasis on advocacy and community work are all reported as characteristic of the contemporary Australian health and human services landscape (Westoby and Ingamells 2010, p. 1762). These discussions elucidate a socio-political landscape that is ambivalent about, and resistant to, refugee resettlement in Australia (Bowles 2012). Westoby and Ingamells (2010) conclude that social work practice with people of refugee background has, over recent decades, become depoliticised, prescriptive and dominated by narrow medicalised discourses and frameworks for practice.

Ingamells and Westoby (2008) and Robinson (2013) state that, as a result of intersecting contexts, ideas, ideologies and social circumstances, social workers report feeling overwhelmed, distressed, constrained, confused and inadequate in

relation to their practice with people of refugee background. They also report a climate of competition, anxiety, work overload, marketisation and managerialism that stifles relationships with clients, advocacy work and cultural change in social work practice that addresses social inequality. This is echoed by theoretical discussions and empirical work derived from the lived experience of practice by social workers where ineffectiveness and inadequacy in practice responses to the cultural 'other' are reported (Laird 2008, Lum 2007, O'Hagan 2001, Helms 1995).

Consequently, direct social work practice with people of refugee background in Australia is often described as complex and challenging trauma work that requires rebuilding shattered lives (Victorian Foundation for Survivors of Torture 1998), helping people restore their communities in an alien culture (Westoby and Ingamells 2010), and, addressing cultural differences to remove barriers to employment, education, language acquisition, social inclusion and acceptance (Abdelkerim and Grace 2012). These understandings have increased the focus on research that documents the struggles of people of refugee background during resettlement in Australia and the manner in which direct practice with this cohort emphasises psycho-social interventions.

Allan and Hess (2010) document extensive research undertaken to capture the psycho-social and cultural focus of direct practice with people of refugee background and the challenges associated with this work. Allan and Hess (2010) reiterate that direct social work practice with this cohort in Australia has

privileged a perception of clients as traumatised and, as such, has become primarily psychological in nature.

Rees and Pease (2007) affirm this perception in their action research study that captured the experiences of domestic violence by women of refugee background during resettlement. Their findings identified trauma and acculturation issues as key contributors to increased domestic violence during resettlement. Mention is made of the importance of direct practice that considers and "apprai[ses] socio-cultural factors in policies related to refugee wellbeing" (Rees and Pease 2007, p. 15), but the overall emphasis of the study affirms that direct social work practice with people of refugee background in Australia involves trauma work that facilitates the re-establishment of complex and challenging cultural and psycho-social norms.

Whelan, Swallow, Peschar and Dunne (2002) documented their practice-based learning during their engagement with Kosovo refugees resettled in Tasmania. They too confirmed that direct practice with people of refugee background was predominantly psycho-social in nature. They advocated for direct practice with people of refugee background being a practice of flexibility that can "make judgements to act in situations which are often unpredictable, complex, changing and uncontrollable" (Whelan et al. 2002, p. 14).

Nelson, Price and Zubrzycki (2013) also depict direct social work practice with people of refugee background in Australia as psycho-social work. Using a fictional case study that represented the authors' varied social work experiences with this cohort, they argued for the integration of a human rights framework into

existing trauma-focussed practice. They suggested that such action would "oblige us to take into account socio-political factors" (Nelson, Price and Zubrzycki 2013, p. 3) and would be a means of applying basic social work values such as social justice and the protection of people's rights to address the traumatic effects of the refugee experience, thereby challenging the dominance of trauma treatment in the Australian cross-cultural social work field.

Another Australian study by Westoby (2009) involved researching South Sudanese refugee communities living in Brisbane, Australia. Participants in this study expressed dissatisfaction with resettlement interventions predominantly targeted at the traumatised individual (Westoby 2009, pp. 3-6). He builds on his analysis in Westoby and Ingamells (2010), arguing that 'a dominant paradigm' underpins Australia's direct social work practice with this cohort that understands the refugee experience as traumatic, violent, disempowering and, above all, problematic for the re-establishment of life in countries of resettlement.

Accordingly, people of refugee background resettling in Australia are perceived and treated as hopeless victims, afflicted with post-traumatic stress disorders and therefore not aided by any resettlement intervention that is not focused on the medicalised treatment of individuals' mental health (Westoby 2009, p. 29). He argues that this creates and supports a hierarchical relationship with clients, in which the focus of practice becomes to "create a particular kind of professional *habitus* (emphasis added by author)" (Westoby 2009, p. 29) characterised by dominance and expertise over both the problem of trauma and the practice intervention (Westoby and Ingamells 2010). Research participants

described this paradigm as unhelpful, reporting a sense of invisibility in medicalised and bureaucratised experiences of direct social work practice that privileged the role of the social worker as expert on the experiences of people of refugee background (Westoby and Ingamells 2010, p. 1759).

Westoby's (2009), and Westoby and Ingamells's (2010) studies are significant as their conclusions illustrate how the process and findings of research intertwine dialogically to uncover, develop, test and propose what the authors saw as an alternative epistemological paradigm for practice, that brings: "a social model of healing" (Westoby 2009, p. 17). Despite the significance of these studies in pioneering empirical Australian work examining the lived experience of direct practice by people of refugee background, they were limited to a group of South Sudanese clients and the authors' own ethnographic account of their practice.

A qualitative study by Robinson (2013) involving 31 social workers in the United Kingdom and Australia related participants' experiences of practice with refugees and asylum seekers. This study also echoes concerns that this field of practice is dominated by trauma work that is demanding, stressful and located in hostile social, cultural, political and policy environments. However, it also found that this type of practice was rewarding to participants because it evoked a politically 'deviant' social work identity that assisted social workers in supporting clients and in surviving and countering the demands and restrictions they faced in practice.

The literature thus far reviewed is significant to this study because it suggests that direct social work practice with people of refugee background is

conceptualised and operationalised within medicalised and psycho-social contexts related only to individual trauma. Furthermore, associated debates indicate that direct practice with people of refugee background occurs in multi-levelled contexts that, in turn, promote perceptions of this cohort that are sometimes unhelpful. What remains absent are empirical data derived from the lived experience of direct practice by a more diverse group of people of refugee background resettled in Australia and a wider group of the social workers who work with them.

The next section of this chapter reviews literature that considers culturally competent and sensitive approaches to practice with people of refugee background.

2.3.4 Culturally Competent and Sensitive Approaches to Social Work Practice with People of Refugee Background

The AASW's Code of Ethics (2010) defines culturally-competent and sensitive practice as an approach that acknowledges the influences of culture on practice. This practice is said to require sensitivity to, and a working knowledge of, client cultures, cultural practices, values, beliefs and traditions. It is a practice grounded in confidentiality and accessibility to clients through the use of translated material and qualified interpreters and/or translators where relevant. It is also described as practice that seeks guidance in service development and delivery from community members, mentors and advisors, recognised community elders, and, colleagues from different ethnic, cultural, religious and other relevant backgrounds. Finally, it is defined as practice that challenges racism and other

forms of oppression through the use of anti-racist and anti-oppressive practice principles (AASW 2010, pp. 17-18).

Cultural competence and sensitivity in social work practice with clients such as people of refugee background reflects well-established, widely accepted and promoted constructs, discourses and approaches to practice within Australian and Western social work (Harrison 2013). Nevertheless, Gallegos, Tindall and Gallegos (2008) argue that the literature that discusses culturally-competent and sensitive social work practice provides little conceptual clarification or consensus in defining these approaches. Much of the literature is dedicated to theoretical discussions and mapping the philosophical foundations of culturally-competent and sensitive practice (Bernard 2005), but empirical research that assesses its effectiveness is limited (Bhui et al. 2007) and the lived experience of such practice from the perspective of clients remains largely absent.

Fong (2004) and Lum (2007) represent two major social work texts dedicated to theoretical and ideological explorations of the cultural competence framework for practice. Both describe the socio-cultural contexts of various ethnic cultural groups resettled in Western nations and provide detail about the resettlement experiences of these groups. Additionally, they define the culturally-competent social work practitioner, the values they should aspire to, and, the knowledge they should seek about their clients. There is no empirical work cited in these texts and the lived experience of practice by clients and social workers is ignored as a source of knowledge for exploring this practice framework.

Empirically-based work by Kaur (2007) examines the different facets of working in the child protection system with culturally and linguistically diverse communities (CALD) in Queensland, Australia. Kaur's study surveyed 66 child protection officers and team leaders who had conducted investigations and assessments with CALD clients. The survey incorporated elements from The Cultural Competency Agency Self-Assessment Instrument (Child Welfare League of America 2001 cited in Kaur 2007, p. 19) which pre-defines elements of practice that constituted culturally-competent and sensitive practice. Participants were asked open-ended questions about their roles; their level of training, knowledge and experience in working with CALD families; how their agency valued issues of cultural difference; the use of interpreters and their effectiveness; barriers in service provision to CALD communities; their views about what constituted culturally-insensitive practice in child protection; and, demographic data regarding participants.

The study found that participants lacked opportunities to attend cultural competence training and that such training, where available, was not tailored to the specific needs of child protection work. While the lived experience of practice by social workers was sought, it was measured against The Cultural Competency Agency Self-Assessment Instrument which pre-identified and categorised elements of practice deemed to be culturally-competent or incompetent, sensitive or insensitive. In essence the lived experience captured did not inform the evolution of the measuring tool used to assess practice. CALD clients were not included in the study and their lived experience of practice was absent.

Pine and Drachman (2005) document the myriad issues faced by refugee families during the refugee and resettlement experiences. Using case studies from child welfare practice settings, they proposed a multi-stage migration framework to support culturally-competent and sensitive child welfare practice. This practice was defined, prior to the study commencing, as practice that employs interventions that respect the cultural rights of groups while safeguarding children (Sherraden and Segal 1996 cited in Pine and Drachman 2005, p. 551).

The multi-stage migration framework included recommendations for social workers to: incorporate into their culturally-competent practice a better understanding of international migration processes and immigration law; engage refugee communities as 'cultural consultants' in becoming culturally-competent; and, develop relationships with community leaders, key resettlement organisations and community places like churches to build networks of knowledge and further support for practice. This study did not rely on empirical evidence from the lived experience of practice from social workers and/or people of refugee background. However, its relevance to my study rests in its contribution to understanding that culturally-competent and sensitive practice approaches have been largely theorised, defined and deemed to be preferable, without supporting empirical evidence from lived experiences of practice.

Walker (2005) engaged in a detailed examination of the changing patterns of migration, human displacement and globalisation across the Western world to make a case for a continued focus on cultural competence in the field of child and adolescent mental health. He provided an extensive review of literature to justify

his claims that research in social work has "highlighted the inequitable, oppressive and poor-quality services available" (Walker 2005, p. 58) to people of refugee background, and concluded that it is crucial that social workers working in this sector continue to focus on culturally-competent approaches to practice. This study did not engage the lived experience of practice by social workers or clients but is significant in again confirming that cultural competence has been well theorised and defined as central to effective social work practice with this cohort despite a lack of empirical evidence.

Boyle and Springer (2001) feature as prominent authors in the field of cultural competence and sensitivity in Western social work practice with clients such as people of refugee background. They argue that the social work profession considers "the notion of cultural competence [as] crucial to sound social work practice" (Boyle and Springer 2001, p. 53). They conducted a comprehensive review of the literature to trace the development of cultural competence, explore its theoretical foundations and critically evaluate various educational tools used to assess workers' cultural competence in practice. Their conclusions emphasised that cultural competence is an unclear construct, highly theorised and validated outside of practice evidence.

Furthermore, they argue that tools for measuring cultural competence in practice "were developed largely with student groups and seem appropriate primarily for measuring the impact of classroom teaching strategies…[these instruments] may or may not apply to the reality of serving clients" (Boyle and Springer 2001, p. 68). Boyle and Springer (2001, p. 69) also acknowledge that:

empirical research on cultural competence with specific populations is scant. The social work profession is working very hard to incorporate culturally competent methodologies into education and social services delivery systems [however] empirical validation of the efficacy of these efforts is greatly needed…[as are] collaborations with target populations.

This study identified key gaps in knowledge and highlighted the need for empirical evidence derived from lived experience of practice by both social workers and clients.

Internationally, culturally-competent and sensitive practice is also described as being derived from a variety of epistemologically-defined paradigms, each promoting a different focus in practice. Williams (2006) examines the epistemologies that define culturally-competent and sensitive social work practice approaches. Using Guba and Lincoln's (1998) contemporary knowledge paradigms of *post-postivism*, *constructivism* and *critical theory,* Williams reviews North American literature to describe how these paradigms suggest different ways of understanding and practising cultural competence in Western social work and to articulate a fourth potential paradigm – the *postmodern.*

Cultural competence is, in a *post-positivist* framework, underpinned by the assumption that culture is static, an element of identity that groups of people share (Husband 2000, Weaver 1999). Key social work literature supporting and promoting this paradigm include Devore and Schlesinger (1999), Al-Krenawi and Graham (2003), and, Lum (2007). These authors promote an anthropological gathering of cultural information about beliefs, values, views on family,

approaches to conflict, practices and traditions that, when mastered, renders a social worker culturally competent (Williams 2006 p. 211).

The *constructivist* approach to cultural competence involves social interaction and dialogue (Williams 2006, p. 212), where culture is seen as a set of group-based experiences defined by context and experience (Tran and Dhooper 1996). The culturally-competent social worker in this paradigm engages people to learn what they consider to be relevant to their practice (Williams 2006, p. 212). Key skills for this approach include focussing on the lived experience of the client; immersion in their world; and, a kind of chaotic co-constructed practice that requires "comfort with constant discomfort" (Baltra-Ulloa 2013, p. 99). Proponents of this perspective include: Dean (2001), Weaver (1999), Yan and Wong (2005), Mafile'o (2008), Bruyere (2008), and Weaver and Yellow Horse Brave Heart (1999).

Williams's (2006) *critical theory* paradigm for understanding and operationalising cultural competence favours the analysis of social arrangements and how these propel relations of domination and subordination that often lead to misguided notions of social reality where culture is seen as an end product of oppressed cultural expression (Williams 2006, p. 213). Accordingly, culturally-competent and sensitive practice formulated in this paradigm requires learning and unpacking historical, social and political contexts that shape perceptions of cultural others and that, in turn, shape perceptions of culture. Subsequently, social workers focus their practice on advocacy responses based on how culture is constructed, re-constructed, negotiated and re-negotiated within and across an

array of political contexts and engaging community strength in the struggle against oppression (Williams 2006, Gutierrez and Lewis 1999). Key authors of this perspective include: Gray, Coates and Yellow Bird (2008), Briskman (2003; 2008), Harding and Libal (2012), Yan (2008), Abrams and Moio (2009) and Sakamoto (2007).

Finally, Williams (2006) presents what she considers the emerging paradigm in Western social work – the *post-modern* – that considers reality as a "moving target" (Williams 2006, p. 214). In this paradigm, culture is constantly constructed by individuals as they shift their internal and external self-perceptions across ever-changing contexts. Such cultural perception requires the culturally competent social worker to abandon static expectations about how individuals are culturally defined (Williams 2006). Culturally-competent practice becomes about engaging the myriad stories that comprise a person over time and produce a variety of cultural experiences unique to that person (Dean 2001).

Literature supporting this emerging paradigm describes processes as the basis for practice rather than a required social work practice model (Laird 1998). This is described by Williams (2006), and Lerner and West (1996) as an attitudinal process of openness that facilitates a worker and client 'getting to know each other' through dialogue. Williams's (2006) work is useful for my research in its articulation of the dynamics by which particular ways of thinking give rise to particular practice approaches. However, this body of work has also emerged in the absence of empirical evidence derived from the lived experience of practice by clients and the social workers.

Despite the prevalence of culturally-competent and sensitive practice approaches within the social work literature, there also exists a body of work dedicated to critiquing such approaches and this is reviewed in the next section.

2.3.5 Critiquing the Relevance of Culturally-Competent and Sensitive Approaches to Social Work practice with People of Refugee Background

Goldberg (2000) was among the first to critique the notion that culturally-competent and sensitive approaches to social work practice are preferable with client groups such as people of refugee background. Her critique rests on the proposition that culturally-competent and sensitive practice cannot resolve the tension between respecting all cultures and their traditions and simultaneously supporting basic human rights.

Dean (2001) extends Goldberg's critique by examining the meanings assigned to 'competence' and 'culture' in the discourse of culturally-competent and sensitive social work. The central argument offered is that traditional definitions of 'competence' and 'culture' are underpinned by static, ahistorical and de-contextualised views of these terms that legitimise the belief that any culture can be known in its totality at any given point in time. She argues that legitimising traditional definitions of culture and competence maintains "the myth of cultural competence" (Dean 2001, p. 624) in social work. According to Dean (2001, p. 624), cultural competence is a "flawed…myth that is typically American and located in the metaphor of American 'know-how'…consistent with the belief that knowledge brings control and effectiveness, and that this is an ideal to be achieved [in practice]". The work of both Dean (2001) and Goldberg (2000) offer

substantive critiques that are relevant to this thesis but they disregard the lived experience of practice as a source of understanding and knowledge.

Wong et al. (2003) provide a unique empirically-based contribution to support and confirm Dean's (2001) premises by considering the lived experience of Asian social workers working with Asian migrants in Canada. They found that meanings given to 'culture' were political, elusive and contextual (Wong et al. 2003, p. 149). Furthermore, they argue that the traditional meaning given to cultural competence in Western social work emanates from colonial and racialised discourses. Consequently, Wong et al. (2003) describe the need to critically examine the sources of power that inform relationships between clients and workers and how these, in turn, influence the understanding and operationalisation of multicultural social work practice when working with non-Western 'others' (Wong et al. 2003). Their work is significant in its effort to empirically test previous theorisations and expand the critique of culturally-competent and sensitive approaches to practice.

Yan and Wong (2005) contended that another problem with culturally-competent and sensitive approaches to social work practice is the conceptual incoherence around the key practice skills of self-awareness and self-reflection. They argue that culturally-competent and sensitive approaches assume a "social worker's capacity to activate a set of techniques, namely self-awareness and self-reflection, in order to suspend their own cultural influences [during interactions with clients]" (Yan and Wong 2005, p. 181). However, this contradicts the stance of culturally-competent and sensitive approaches that purport that individuals are

cultural products. This contradiction derives from an unexamined need in social work to construct social workers as benevolent and skilful subjects, capable of crossing cultures by assuming cultureless identities while the client remains a static object of their culture. Yan and Wong (2005, p. 186) propose that multicultural social work evokes a dialogical self in practice, one in which reflexivity becomes about opening up a dialogical space where the worlds of worker and client can interact and influence one another. The relevance of this research rests in its enhancement of understanding of the collective motivations that underpin culturally-competent and sensitive practice despite the continued absence of empirical data derived from the lived experience of practice.

Yan (2008) took Yan and Wong's (2005) work further by testing how 30 Canadian social work practitioners understood 'culture' and 'crossing' in cross-cultural social work encounters. The study's premise was that terms such as 'culture' and 'crossing' have become clichés lacking intellectual challenge and are insufficiently examined for their significance in social work practice (Park 2005). Yan (2008) concluded that, for participants of her study, culture was indeed a 'taken for granted' concept that was ascribed temporary, flexible meaning in context and during interactions with clients. Such flexible conceptualisations of culture challenge the idea that social workers do all of the cultural crossing.

Yan (2008, p. 291) suggests that understanding the crossing of cultures as a one or two-way dynamic is insufficient for capturing the localised nature of meaning-making in multicultural practice. This supports the hypothesis of Yan and Wong (2005) that dialogue offers social work both practical and theoretical

benefits. Yan's (2008) findings highlight a gap between theory and the lived experience of multicultural practice that warrants additional research.

In Australia, empirical work by Harrison and Turner (2011), later expanded by Harrison (2013), engaged 20 social workers in South East Queensland who offered their perspectives in utilising cultural competence in their practice and state the problems associated with affirming culturally-competent and sensitive approaches as preferable practice models. These studies concluded that, while participants could appreciate the "symbolic value of cultural competence as an approach to practice" (Harrison and Turner 2011, p. 346), they also saw the ambiguities and limitations of this approach in reinforcing inequalities by promoting 'othering'.

Harrison (2013) claims that the danger confronted in favouring culturally-competent and sensitive approaches rests in the uncritical deployment of it. Furthermore, she notes "the issue of white privilege and associated power relations has not received adequate attention in the cultural competence literature" (Harrison 2013, p. 44) and there is limited research regarding the expectations of service users in relation to this approach to practice. The empirical contributions of Harrison and Turner's (2011) and Harrison's (2013) studies reinforce the need for empirical research and thus support the empirical focus of my study.

The literature that is critical of culturally competent and sensitive approaches to practice highlights that there are new and emerging issues worthy of consideration in relation to direct social work practice with people of refugee background. The next section reviews literature relating to new ways of

understanding and responding to people of refugee background in direct social work practice.

2.4 New Ways of Understanding and Responding to People of Refugee Background in Direct Social Work Practice in Australia

This chapter has so far canvassed aspects of context, both nationally and internationally, that shape and influence the refugee and resettlement experiences of people of refugee background and which permeate social work's understanding of, and practice responses to, this client group. This literature predominantly favours the academic and expert professional voice of social work over the lived experience of practice by people of refugee background and social workers.

Some of the studies reviewed describe how punitive and prescriptive Australian public policy on immigration and resettlement clashes with social welfare practices and that these policies have promoted racism, confusion and uncertainty for people of refugee background and the social workers who work with them. These environments promote a hostile reception for refugees and make resettlement work stressful and reliant on psycho-social interventions.

The core focus of this social work literature has been upon understanding and distilling elements of best practice from what is known about refugee and resettlement experiences. The literature highlights the emphasis given in direct practice to psycho-social interventions and discusses ways to complement such practice with social action, community and advocacy work, human rights principles, and, critically and dialogically-informed approaches. These elements

have been investigated both theoretically and empirically. However, knowledge derived from the grounded lived experience of practice by both clients and social workers remains largely absent.

The chapter has also reviewed studies that allude to the current dominance of and preference given to culturally competent and sensitive approaches to social work practice with people of refugee background. This review has explored the extent to which these approaches have dominated current thinking, how different epistemological positions have shaped these approaches, and, how critiques of these approaches highlight the limited empirical evidence supporting them opening the way for the consideration of new ways of thinking about direct practice with this cohort - the indigenisation and decolonisation of social work.

Indigenisation and decolonisation of social work have emerged from the context of a dedicated examination of the influences of white privilege and power relations on social work thinking and practice and offer new perspectives on direct social work practice with people of refugee background. These emerging fields of knowledge assert that direct social work practice with such client groups emerges contextually and relationally rather than relying on culturally-competent and sensitive approaches to practice (Gray et al. 2013). While indigenisation and decolonisation of social work are yet to be empirically formulated, there are some studies that capture the lived experience of practice. This work is reviewed in following sections to position this research and its relevance to social work.

2.4.1 The Indigenisation of Social Work

Indigenisation was originally understood as "a marginal movement in social work" (Gray and Coates 2010, p. 613), dedicated to understanding how Africa, Asia and Latin America adapted imported Western versions of social work to fit their local needs. In Australia, the process of indigenising Western social work knowledge and practice has been largely associated with Indigenous social work or work relating to Aboriginals and Torres Strait Islanders (Gray and Coates 2010). The indigenisation movement more broadly "holds that social work knowledge should arise from within the culture, reflect local behaviours and practices, be interpreted within a local frame of reference and thus be locally relevant, that is it should address culturally relevant and context-specific problems" (Gray and Coates 2010, p. 615).

Gray et al. (2013) argue that there is a need to scrutinise Western knowledge and practice that is 'imported' into working with people of non-Western background. The literature on the indigenisation of social work is critical of the dominance of Western thinking in multicultural social work. As the internationalisation of social work continues, there is a need to consider 'ways of knowing' from the standpoint of non-Western perspectives. This process is at the heart of what the indigenisation movement proposes - that indigenisation is a natural "response to the oppression of colonialism" (Gray and Coates 2010, p. 622) and as such, is dependent on "decentring colonial discourses and power structures" (Gray and Coates 2010, p. 623).

Gray and Coates (2010) state that the indigenisation of social work faces two significant challenges if it is to become part of mainstream social work knowledge and practice. First, while post-colonial thought underpins the epistemological foundations for "decentring colonial discourses and power structures" (Gray and Coates 2010, p. 623), social work has not yet formulated its own post-colonial praxis (Briskman 2008). Second, the formulation of such praxis is contingent on intellectually contesting the extent to which post-colonial thought can accommodate colonialism as a continuing force (Pease 2010). Furthermore, the merits of post-colonialism to social work are also contingent on research and empirical evidence of post-colonial practice, and both elements are currently absent in social work theory (Gray and Coates 2010, Fox 2010).

The indigenisation of social work has highlighted the political nature of multicultural work and the "tensions that derive from paradoxical processes of internationalization, globalization, universalization and localization" (Gray et al. 2013, p. 6). Similarly, the indigenisation of social work has placed a critical focus on the limitations and imperialistic frameworks that inform Western social work (Midgley 2008) with the cultural 'other' and thus there is a need to "strike a balance in acknowledging the diversity of cultures, traditions, and differing yet related ways of seeing, knowing and doing" (Ormiston 2010 cited in Gray et al. 2013, p. 6) via a process of decolonisation.

The indigenisation literature has not yet tested its theorisations empirically. However, it does draw attention to how little dominant and accepted debates about practice with groups such as people of refugee background have

been examined for their potential to facilitate knowledge-making from within direct practice encounters (Gray et al. 2013). It is this central premise within the indigenisation debate that supports the relevance of my own study in seeking to learn about direct social work practice with people of refugee background from within the lived experience of such encounters.

2.4.2 The Decolonisation of Social Work

Alongside the push towards indigenising social work, there is an emerging literature grappling with positioning social work within neo-liberal contexts as a politically *decolonised* practice (Briskman 2008). This literature continues to theoretically expand the critiques of dominant and accepted approaches to practice with the cultural 'other'. A *decolonised* approach to social work practice is defined as that which "requires workers to recognise their race and privilege, validate Indigenous wisdom, acknowledge Indigenous rights and discard the power they exert in the name of professionalism" (Briskman 2008, p. 83). Pease (2010) and Walter, Taylor and Habibis (2011) add that such practice also entails an awareness of the taken-for-granted power of Whiteness as "the invisible norm against which other races are judged in the construction of identity, representation, subjectivity, nationalism and the law" (Moreton-Robinson 2004 cited in Walter, Taylor and Habibis 2011, p. 7).

Gray et al. (2013, p. 7) argue that decolonising social work practice is an attempt to acknowledge that practice begins with people's lived experience: "it means putting people's needs, uniqueness and knowledge first and seeing all the activities in which we engage from…as honest attempts to discern the nature of

decolonised social work". While this literature focuses on concerns about cultural imperialism in social work practice with Indigenous peoples and other cultural groups, its messages are premised on: challenging the privileged status of Western social work knowledge (Pease 2004, p. 142); seeing social work as a racialised profession that is a product of Western culture and thinking (Wilson 2013); acknowledging the historical and contextual nature of theory and practice (Walter, Taylor and Habibis 2011, p. 17); and, building direct social work practice from relationships with clients rather than from formulae or templates (Baltra-Ulloa 2013).

The emerging decolonisation literature is yet to be empirically tested but it is facilitating the recognition within social work, of the limitations of existing dominant approaches to direct social work practice with client groups such as people of refugee background. This work also suggests a re-prioritising of relationships with clients as the mechanism by which direct practice is learnt and formulated (Gray et al. 2013, p. 7). The relevance of this literature to my study lays in its support for learning from clients how direct social work practice is experienced. This is the primary aim of my research.

While indigenisation and decolonisation of social work have emerged as new ways of understanding direct social work practice, there is still a knowledge gap in relation to the lived experience of practice. Research is emerging that attempts to engage with and privilege this type of knowledge.

2.4.3 The Lived Experiences of Social Workers Working with People of Refugee Background

A study by Russell and White (2001) is an example of empirical research that privileges the lived experience of practice by social workers. In their study, Russell and White interviewed a group of 13 Canadian social workers who were asked to select and reflect on two social work interventions, one involving a client of similar background and another involving a client of different cultural background. Participants were also asked to refer clients who may be willing to participate in focus group interviews resulting in a focus group of 15 clients from Asian backgrounds sharing their experience with social workers.

Two central themes emerged from Russel and White's (2001) study in relation to what characterises the "central elements of productive social work interventions with immigrant populations" (Russell and White 2001, p. 78). First, such practice requires a multi-faceted perception of self and other derived from a process of relationship development between social worker and client (Russell and White 2001, pp. 78-82). Second, a proactive service provision model involving cultural bridging, brokering of services and advocacy for system sensitivity best describes what participants identified as positive experiences of direct social work practice with immigrant clients (Russell and White 2001, pp. 82-87).

While Russell and White's (2001) study is grounded in empirical work that sought to understand the lived experience of direct social work practice with client groups such as people of refugee background, the researchers acknowledge

that the study was limited by its methodology which ensured feedback was "uniformly positive" (Russell and White 2001, p. 77). Furthermore, in asking social workers to refer clients for focus groups, clients that interviewed were mostly "clients [that] were clearly satisfied with service" (Russell and White 2001, p. 77). Hence, the analysis of data from this study was characterised by experiences "associated with productive interventions and positive outcomes" (Russell and White 2001, p. 77) and did not canvass instances of less productive social work intervention and negative client outcomes.

A similar focused study was conducted by Nash, Wong and Trlin (2006) who drew from data derived from two New Zealand surveys of social workers conducted in 2001. The surveys asked participants to self-rate their practice in relation to how they felt it met the needs of emerging immigrant and refugee communities. In addition to these data, Nash, Wong and Trlin (2006) drew on the input of Wong's (2000) research with Asian clients resettled in New Zealand, which examined the cultural skills required for practice with that cohort. They concluded that social work practice with people of refugee background in New Zealand presented new challenges and demonstrated the need to consider macro, meso and micro levels of practice to propose and enact the necessary skills and knowledge for such a practice context.

These studies privileged the lived experience of practice by social workers and a select group of Asian clients of refugee background. However, these studies did not involve Australian participants and the surveys, as data gathering tools, limited the possibility of eliciting detail from participant responses.

2.4.4 The Lived Experiences of People of Refugee Background Working with Social Workers

The empirical work of both Valtonen (2001) in Finland, and George (2002) in Canada, involved the consultation of people of refugee background on their experiences of resettlement services including social work services. These studies supported the integration of macro skills in community development with micro skills in direct practice to provide social work services as a "pivotal link" (Valtonen, 2001) between the client's world, bureaucracies and the host community. While George (2002) relied on data derived from focus group interviews with African refugees resettled in Toronto, Valtonen (2001) used field-work notes and interview data from a two-stage study conducted in 1994 and 1998 with Vietnamese, Somali and Middle Eastern refugees resettled in Finland. George (2002) and Valtonen (2001) considered general resettlement services but did not specifically focus on social work services.

The literature reviewed did not identify an empirical research focus upon the Australian lived experience of direct social work practice with people of refugee background. The voice of the client and how it informs and shapes these debates is absent. The voice of the social worker responding to the client's lived experience of their practice also remains absent. Therefore, my research seeks to add to what is known in this field of social work by capturing lived experiences of social work encounters. There is a need to understand how direct social work practice with people of refugee background is understood and experienced. This research has focussed on capturing the crucial voices of those people who

experience firsthand direct social work practice and has sought to elucidate the contexts in which these experiences occur.

2.5 Conclusion

The literature reviewed highlights how socio-political and cultural contexts in Australia act to privilege xenophobic cultural and social attitudes which then infiltrate and influence direct social work practice with people of refugee background. This results in a host community that is misinformed about the realities faced by people of refugee background resettling in Australia and becomes either hostile or over-sympathetic to their needs (Pupavac 2008). Direct social work practice with this cohort occurs within these contexts and within these tensions. My study provided an opportunity to learn how people of refugee background and social workers experience their practice in relation to such conflicting socio-cultural environments.

The academic and expert professional voice of social work dominates what is known about direct social work practice in cross-cultural contexts. While research has been done to understand the refugee and resettlement experiences of this cohort, emphasis is given to: 'trauma' as a driver of practice with people of refugee background; culturally competent and sensitive practice as the preferred approach; critique of dominant understandings and approaches deriving primarily from theorisation rather than empirical work; and emerging understandings of practice that seek to privilege the lived experience of practice. Overall there

remains a continued absence of the voice of the client and the worker interacting in practice.

Very little is known about direct social work practice from the lived experience of clients of refugee background and social workers in Australia. This study's attempt to amplify these voices is timely given that social work seems to be considering alternatives to dominant approaches for working in cross-cultural contexts. The following chapter presents the methodology and tools of enquiry utilised to conduct the study.

CHAPTER THREE

Research Methods that Honour the Lived Experience

3.1 Introduction

In Chapter Two, I demonstrated that there is a need for research in social work that captures the lived experience of direct practice with people of refugee background in Australia. There is a gap in practice knowledge that is grounded in social workers' and people of refugee backgrounds' experience of social work encounters. Consequently, my research addresses this gap in knowledge by investigating how direct social work practice with people of refugee background is understood and experienced.

In keeping with Australian social work's recent consideration of indigenisation and decolonisation, this study sought to develop a research framework and research methods that would amplify the lived experience of both people of refugee background and the social workers who work with them. To this end, I adopted a phenomenological methodological approach in concert with critical and anti-oppressive research frameworks to guide my investigation.

Chapter Three begins by explaining the methods employed to carry out the study, the approach taken and the values and principles that framed the research practice. Research aims and design are detailed. Data collection and details about participants' eligibility, sampling and recruitment methods, and, the interviewing

procedures employed are then described. Methods of data analysis and a consideration of validity and trustworthiness issues are described. This chapter ends with a review of ethical issues relevant to the research.

3.2 Aims of the Research

This study aimed to develop new knowledge and inform social work practice theory with people of refugee background through documenting the lived experience of direct social work practice with both people of refugee background and the social workers who work with them.

3.3 Research Questions

This study sought to answer the following primary research question:

How is direct social work practice with people of refugee background understood and experienced?

The study also sought to answer the following secondary research questions:

- *How is direct social work practice with people of refugee background understood and experienced by people of refugee background?*
- *How is direct social work practice with people of refugee background understood and experienced by social workers?*
- *What are the implications for social work practice theory with people of refugee background?*

3.4 Research Design

The design of this research was characterised by the following features. It was a qualitative study, informed by phenomenology and critical and anti-oppressive approaches in concert with a consideration of documented approaches deemed relevant to research with people of refugee background. Volunteer and snowball sampling methods were used to recruit both people of refugee background and social workers, and semi-structured interviews were conducted. Thematic analysis of interview data was undertaken in keeping with the conventions of qualitative research.

3.5 Methodology

3.5.1 Phenomenological and Qualitative Approaches

The aims of the study called for a phenomenological qualitative approach to research. I was guided by the phenomenological tradition to explore and understand the lived experience of social work practice with people of refugee background for several reasons. First, phenomenology as a research approach prioritises an understanding of lived experience "from the perspective of those who have direct experience" (Pascal et al. 2011, p. 175). Second, phenomenological approaches see the lived experience as the "starting point and end point of research" (Van Manen 1990, p. 36) and this resonated with the primary intent of this study to learn about practice from its lived experience. Finally, phenomenology values "things turn[ing] fuzzy just when they seem to become so clear" (Van Manen 1990, p. 41), meaning that in the context of this

study, understanding the lived experience was necessarily subjective and dependent on a methodology that tolerated a process of discovering, through the research activity, what methods worked and what methods didn't work (Moustakas 1994).

The qualitative approach was chosen because of the exploratory nature of the enquiry and the focus on making sense of direct social work practice from peoples' own lived experience of it. Daly and McDonald (1992) argue that qualitative methods facilitate the investigation of people's lives within social contexts and that these methods facilitate insight into, and understanding of, how people's lives are shaped and influenced by contexts.

A phenomenological and qualitative approach to research also concerns itself with issues of culture. Traditional phenomenologists such as Husserl (1931), Spiegelberg (1982) and Sadler (1969) speak of 'bracketing' our cultural heritage during our research activities to understand the world as it was before we were acculturated. Merleau-Ponty (1964), Armstrong (1976) and Crotty (1998), however, discuss a phenomenology that is "suspicious of culture" (Crotty 1998, p. 81), stating that while: "our symbols, our meanings…set us free, [culture] is also limiting…it sets boundaries…in imposing meanings, it is excluding others" (Crotty 1998, p. 81).

A phenomenology that is critical of culture, as an aspect of the human context that imposes certain ways of seeing and being in the world and thus serves to oppress and promote injustices, was the kind of phenomenology I employed in this qualitative study. This approach encouraged me to consciously and

reflexively take stock of my actions and my role in the research process during the 'bracketing' process (Liamputtong and Ezzy 2005, p. 43). I achieved this by engaging with the influences of culture in the research process through supervision and journaling.

Bourdieu's ideas about socio-analysis (as articulated by Houston [2002]) enabled me to develop a solid framework for conceptualising the critical cultural phenomenological perspective of the study. This framework comprised the following:

1. I developed an understanding of the dynamics of cultural oppression and an appreciation of the role of culture and how culture shaped perceptions, actions and discourse during the interview process via journaling, supervision, interactions with participants and the process of data analysis.

2. I engaged in reflexivity via journaling, supervision and interactions with participants. This was important as it helped me maintain an ongoing engagement with my taken-for-granted truths expressed in the assumptions I made and actions I took whilst I was engaging and re-engaging with the data during analysis.

3. I developed a heightened sense of cultural sensitivity, which I equated with a mindful openness to the cultural experiences of participants even when I felt uncomfortable and out of my depth (Husband, 2000). I maintained this cultural sensitivity during data analysis via the reflexive

cycle I followed of journaling, supervision and interaction with
participants.

4. I was attuned to social sensitivity through the process of 'bracketing'.
This process enabled me to locate the data within the larger societal
structures from which it was generated. This helped me to understand
and value data that came in the form of stories, songs, poetry and
proverbs.

5. I was aware of a double hermeneutics: in relationships with participants
I learnt to understand the circumstances of participants' lives. This
helped me to understand the data and the process of meaning-making as
relational and thus products of my interactions with participants (Kumsa
2004).

3.5.2 Critical and Anti-oppressive Influences

As described in Chapter One, critical and anti-oppressive theories also
influenced this research. Conducting research under the influence of these schools
of thought meant significant emphasis was given to 'the why' of the research and
research practices. Methods were selected and planned in accordance with the
values that underpin critical theoretical and anti-oppressive practice approaches.

In keeping with these approaches, I was mindful to make my research
practice a 'power with' exercise rather than a 'power over' imposition on research
participants. To assist me in a 'power with' research practice, I attempted the
phenomenological process of 'bracketing' my assumptions, positionality and
experiences by gathering data through a semi-structured interview that asked open

ended questions and also engaging with participants to confirm the themes that emerged during thematic analysis.

In my attempt to not take for granted the socio-cultural influences that are asserted through research methods and methodologies, I constantly reflected, shared and checked with participants that my ways of thinking and doing were known and understood by them. Furthermore, I offered flexibility and the capability to change and adapt to the ways of thinking and doing of participants. I was mindful of how my ways of thinking about research influenced my ways of doing research, thereby potentially exerting the dominance of my culture over the culture of participants. In essence, the critical paradigm was useful to the research activity as it reinforced the practice of focusing on the participants' lived experience and on building relationships with participants that facilitated a fusion of all our ways of thinking and doing research.

Similarly, I relied on anti-oppressive thought to make sense of cross-cultural practice and cross-cultural research. Anti-oppressive thought expanded my understanding of critical theory by making me aware of oppression as a site where relational and cultural power and privilege are exercised (Razack 1998). In practice, the influence of anti-oppressive thought led me to value and accept that each interview required its own approach and constituted its own context. Privileging the relationship with the participant became the compass for the research practice.

3.5.3 Being an Insider and Outsider in the Research

From an essentialist perspective it can be argued that as a social worker of refugee background I am the 'perfect' person to conduct research about the social work encounter with people of refugee background. Indeed, before I commenced the study I agreed with Merriam et al. (2001, p. 41) who state:

> "it has commonly been assumed that being an insider means easy access, the ability to ask more meaningful questions and read non-verbal cues, and most importantly be able to project a more truthful, authentic understanding of the culture under study".

However, while the counter argument to this premise would be that insiders are naturally partial and thus too close to critically examine what they study, my stance on my insider/outsider epistemology called for a complexity far beyond the binary that insider/outsider discourses promote. The insider/outsider position I occupied was much more than about what I did in the research and how I did it. The insider/outsider positionality called for a way of 'being' in the research. Accordingly, in this section of the chapter I discuss the person and researcher I became and enacted in the research. Participants valued a particular way of 'being', and I explain here the importance of enacting this perspective in my research.

The work of Denzin and Lincoln (2003) informed my preference for adopting the metaphor of the *bricoleur* to explain who I was in the research as I dealt with the insider/outsider aspects of my research experiences. The term bricoleur literally translates from the French as "Jack of all trades". It represents a type of thinking that when translated into research practice meant that I

interpreted the world as a myriad of pieces. The pieces available were always determined by context. Contexts shaped the different voices, perspectives and points of view that came into focus at different points throughout the research process. As a bricoleur everything felt unknown and unpredictable even though I was privileged to both the refugee experience and the professional role of social worker.

In order to piece together the ever-changing elements that were relevant to the contexts in which I operated, I deployed whatever research strategies were at hand and if these were not suitable new ones were invented. So, for example, in one interview I was social worker, person of refugee background and also a Spanish speaker who had been asked by the refugee background Spanish-speaking participants to act as interpreter during their interviews and also to translate and transcribe their interviews. What needed to be deployed and when could not be anticipated in such situations because all aspects of my research experience became context driven and the contexts were always changing in this study. Accordingly, I learnt to move from the personal to the political as well as having regard for the historical, cultural and social contexts of participants and myself.

I dialogically engaged with the participants of the research via a give-and-take process. For example, in the preceding paragraph I describe a situation where I was interpreter, translator and transcriber. What helped me maintain the capacity to ethically step in and out of each of these roles was to check the process that I was engaged in with participants. I simply did not do anything without asking the participants what they thought I should do in such situations. All methods of data

collection and data analysis, as well as methods for self-reflection and reflexivity required dialogical engagement with the research participants. This enabled me to hear their thoughts and reflections about the research processes that we were engaged in.

I read from multiple sources to make sense of my thinking and my practice. I was mindful that each time I picked up an ideology I was essentially picking up "ontologies, epistemologies and methodologies" that imparted particular world views (Denzin and Lincoln 2003, p. 9) thus connecting me with different sources of power and privilege. As bricoleur I recognised that moving from one ideology to another and from being a person of refugee background to being a social worker, inevitably implied confronting contradictions. Accordingly, the research activity became about working "between and within competing and overlapping perspectives and paradigms" (Denzin and Lincoln 2003, p. 9). I shared these thoughts with participants and together we discussed what to do from a practical perspective.

As a critical anti-oppressive researcher I kept asking myself: 'So, why me? What is it about me that resonates with the bricoleur and that almost intuitively feels as though I am in familiar territory?' In other words, I questioned how it was that I came to occupy the 'third space' that I described in Chapter One when interpreting the world and acting in the world requires comfort with unpredictability and uncertainty. In the Introductory chapter I explained who I am and why it is that I came to this study. I have no clear step-by-step answer for how I resolved the tensions of my insider/outsider role and experience nor how I learnt

to rely on being a bricoleur to respond to the research context during my research practice. In relationships with research participants I learnt to be the bricoleur and the bricoleur emerged through those relationships. The participants and the stories (that is, the data) they shared called for me to be a bricoleur. In relationships decisions were made about what would be done to juggle, for example, the 'being' of translator, interpreter, transcribe as the researcher, a community member and as a social worker. I did not come to the research planning to be a bricoleur. I was transparent with participants about my insider/outsider positionality and how I did not have a clear method for 'countering' that positionality.

The role of bricoleur required constant reflection through supervision, journaling and via dialogue with participants. As anti-oppressive research relationships were key to becoming a bricoleur these relationships were not time specific; they did not begin nor end at a particular time in the research process. They were the product of sharing my story as both refugee and social worker with the participants.

The next section outlines the data collection methods employed to investigate the research question.

3.6 Data Collection

3.6.1 Eligibility of Participants

Initially, approximately 30 participants in total from the state of Tasmania were sought for inclusion in the study. These comprised two groups, being: people

of refugee background who had worked with a social worker and social workers who had experience working with people of refugee background. The criteria for participation in each group in the study were:

- people who self-identified as being of refugee background, who were over the age of 18 years, and currently living in Tasmania and who had in the past worked with, or were currently working with, a social worker in Australia; and,
- social work professionals, eligible for membership of the AASW, over the age of 21 years, currently living in Tasmania, who had in the past worked with, or were currently working with, people of refugee background in Australia.

The criteria for participation aimed to attract a wide variety of people who could contribute to the study, thereby maximising heterogeneity of samples which enabled broad coverage of the conceptual issues being investigated (Liamputtong and Ezzy 2005). Age limits were included in the criteria for participation in order to ensure adult status and, in the case of social workers, ensure a minimum age at which it is assumed that a recognised AASW social work qualification could have been completed.

Although there were two distinct groups targeted for inclusion in the research, it became evident during the recruitment phase that seven people identified either as a social worker who was also of refugee background or a person of refugee background who was also a social worker. However, the analysis of data revealed that the responses by these seven people were unique in

nature and distinct from the account of the group they had originally identified with. For this reason, a third research group emerged – social workers of refugee background.

3.6.2 Sampling

A combination of volunteering and snowballing sampling methods were used for recruitment to the study and this ensured maximum opportunities for the inclusion of participants who felt connected, in their knowledge and experience, to the research topic (Liamputtong and Ezzy 2005). Volunteer sampling was adopted initially through the use of recruitment posters (for details see sections 3.6.3 and 3.6.4 of this chapter). Volunteer sampling is appropriate when undertaking research within networked communities (Liamputtong and Ezzy 2005) including research with social workers and people of refugee background. Such techniques facilitate flexibility and responsiveness to the cultural needs of participants of refugee background who, it was deemed, would feel more comfortable hearing of the research by word of mouth within their communities and/or from me as the researcher during face-to-face interactions.

MacDougall and Fudge's (2001) three stage model for sampling and recruitment of under-represented target groups in research such as people of refugee background also informed my approach to sampling and recruitment. According to these researchers, sampling and recruitment in such contexts can be optimised by:

- preparing to meet with potential participants after initially researching the target group(s);

- contacting potential participants via informal discussions and casual conversations; and,

- following up initial contact with more contact, as a means of showing commitment to the connection with the potential research participant and desire to facilitate meaningful research participation.

The operationalisation of this approach is described in the recruitment section that follows.

3.6.3 Recruiting People of Refugee Background

As indicated above, MacDougall and Fudge's (2001) model proved useful in being able to respond to the requirements of this study. Recruiting participants of refugee background meant that the recruitment strategy would be successful if it was flexible enough to respond and adapt to, as well as accommodate the needs of, potential research participants within this research context.

The initial recruitment procedure for this participant group involved the development and distribution of a Recruitment Poster (see Appendix 1). The poster was written and distributed in English as well as translated by the National Accreditation Authority for Translators and Interpreters (NAATI) and the Australian Institute of Interpreters and Translators (AUSIT) accredited members into the following languages: Arabic, Dinka, Tigrinya, French, Burmese, and, Nepali. The selection of target language groups for the translated posters was

based on information regarding the most recently arrived language groups in Tasmania (DIAC 2008, p. 4).

The intent of the recruitment strategy was to make the research known and participation in it available to any individual of refugee background who wished to participate, despite the possible language barriers experienced in the first few years after arrival in Tasmania. Underpinning this intent was the assumption that newly-arrived communities of people of refugee background would struggle with written English and would know how to read in their native language. I also assumed that more established communities of refugee background would have the language resources to capture the opportunity through the English language poster and would 'spread the word' to others who might be interested in participating in the study.

The recruitment poster was distributed to the following ethnic group associations within the Tasmanian context:

- Multicultural Council of Tasmania;

- Diversitat;

- Sunraysia Mallee Ethnic Communities Council;

- Australian Croatian Club;

- Baha'i Council of Tasmania;

- Chinese Community Association of Tasmania;

- Hobart Hebrew Congregation;

- Image of Africa Inc;

- Kingston Refugee Support Group;

- Multicultural Women's Council of Tasmania;

- Philippines-Australia Community of Tasmania;

- Sierra Leone/Liberian Union; and,

- The African Reference group of Northern Tasmania.

These groups were asked to distribute the posters across their networks (see Appendix 2). Migrant settlement services such as Migrant Resource Centres and Centacare were also contacted as agencies known to be in contact with communities of refugee background. Managers and team leaders in agencies such as Anglicare, Centrelink, Medicare, Adult Migrant English Service (AMES) and Student Services at the University of Tasmania and the Tasmanian Polytechnic, were similarly contacted and asked to display the recruitment posters in their reception areas and to disseminate them among clients who identified themselves as being of refugee background.

The posters invited potential participants to contact me by telephone or e-mail to express their interest in participating in the research. The posters also stated that an interpreter could be engaged on a participant's request. A Telephone and E-mail Protocol was designed (see Appendix 3) to assist me to develop initial rapport with potential participants and to hear from them about what would assist them to make a decision to participate in the study or to arrange for them to receive more information about it in the mail.

Following agreement to participate in the study, potential participants were provided with an Information Sheet (see Appendix 4); a Consent Form (see

Appendix 5) and an Interview Schedule that described potential topics for discussion in the interview (see Appendix 6).

I received 11 phone calls initially from potential participants of refugee background and no requests for interpreters were made. In keeping with MacDougall and Fudge's (2001) three-stage sampling method, I attended a range of community gatherings and meetings to explain and introduce the research, to introduce myself to communities, elders and leaders, and to provide written information about the study. In total, 74 informal contacts were made with people of refugee background before interviews were scheduled and conducted.

3.6.4 Recruiting Social Workers

Social Workers were also recruited initially via a Recruitment Poster (see Appendix 7) which was placed in the AASW quarterly magazine "*Horizon*", in the local Tasmanian AASW's branch members' newsletters and sent via bulk e-mail to all Tasmanian members of the AASW. As with the recruitment of people of refugee background, the poster was sent to migrant settlement services and health and human service agencies in contact with people of refugee background with a request that it be circulated within their networks (see Appendix 2).

Posters invited potential participants of social work background to contact me via phone or e-mail to express interest in participating in the research. A Telephone and E-mail Protocol was designed (see Appendix 8) to assist in developing initial rapport with the potential participants, to identify what would assist them to make their decision to participate and to invite them to receive more

detailed information about the study in writing (Information Sheet see Appendix 9 and Consent Form see Appendix 10).

I received 18 e-mails and two phone calls from people who identified as a social worker with prior and/or current experience working with people of refugee background in Australia. Five of these enquiries were from people who identified themselves as social workers currently working with people of refugee background but, as they were ineligible for membership with the AASW, they were therefore deemed to be ineligible for inclusion in the study. The 15 remaining eligible people after considering the mailed Information Sheet, Consent Form and Interview Schedule, volunteered to be interviewed.

3.6.5 Semi-structured Interviews

There were 31 semi-structured interviews conducted in total: 12 with people of refugee background, 12 with social workers and seven with social workers of refugee background. On average, interviews with social workers took two and a half hours while interviews with people of refugee background were generally longer. Interviews with social workers occurred mostly at their offices while interviews with people of refugee background took place at their homes. All interviews were audio digitally recorded.

The original Interview Schedule, designed for all participants, contained a series of open-ended questions that helped to identify areas of potential interest that could be explored during conversations with participants (see Appendix 11

Interview Schedule for Participants of Social Work Background and 6 Interview Schedule for Participants of Refugee Background).

Interviews opened with an exploration of what social work and social work practice generally meant to participants. Interviews then unfolded as conversations about participants' experiences in social work encounters with people of refugee background. Interviews with social workers sometimes involved them sharing their written reflections of their practice experiences with people of refugee background. Where this was the case, reflections were handed to me at the end of the interview.

Interviews with people of refugee background also involved periods of reflection where they expanded on their experiences with social workers through a story, a song, a poem one of them wrote and gave to me during the interview, and in one case, a drawing that depicted the feelings the participant felt about their country of origin. During interviews with people of refugee background there was also input from family members who did not become official participants but were welcomed to contribute to the interview conversations. While this additional information was provided and accepted, interviewee data with official participants was the primary data that were collected and analysed.

There was no rigid method employed that delineated what all of the interviews involved. It was an impromptu "mess-finding" (Potts and Brown 2005, p. 264) stage that evolved from ongoing interactions with individual participants and from welcoming and privileging their preferred way of sharing their experiences of social work encounters with people of refugee background. The

process also involved being asked about my own social work practice, being invited by participants into their process of meaning-making and having an open conversation driven by the immediate context of the interview. All interviews were transcribed verbatim and transcripts were sent back to participants for their revision. The next section outlines the data analysis process.

3.7 Data Analysis

Following interview transcriptions and validation by interested participants, the process of thematic analysis began. I followed Braun and Clarke's (2006) model for thematic analysis, comprising:

- **Phase One** – becoming familiar with the whole data via reading and re-reading the interview transcripts.
- **Phase Two** – coding data by breaking data down into the smallest parts - this involved identifying key words in responses that represented something that was repeatedly mentioned by participants as important and relevant to the research question.
- **Phase Three** – searching for themes by tracing smaller parts of data (codes) key words like *relationships*, back to their broader pattern. For example, where the code referred to *relationships* all responses that were relevant to that issue were gathered (these became data abstracts for a relevant theme), and what emerged was a prevalence of associating the issue of *relationships* to what was reported as experienced in social work encounters with people of

refugee background. A collection of themes then became an initial thematic map. For an example of these see Appendix 12.

- **Phase Four** - reviewing themes by examining data abstracts related to each theme. These data abstracts were generated during the gathering of responses relevant to a particular code (during phase three). Insufficient detail in responses gathered about a theme in the data rendered the theme unsustainable; when data spoke of connections between themes amalgamation of themes occurred. The end product of this phase was a sustainable thematic map − a set of themes that had detailed prevalent data behind them.

- **Phase Five** – after extensive defining and refining of themes, themes were named by revisiting data abstracts and getting clear on the key feature of the verbatim content. For example, while the issue of *relationships* was reported as important to the lived experience of social work practice with people of refugee background, different words like *connection*, *friendships*, *partnerships* and *mates* were used interchangeably by participants to refer to this theme of *relationships*. At this phase sub-themes were identified.

3.8 Validity and Trustworthiness of Data

I viewed the research process as a privilege where the responsibility to conduct the research with honesty and integrity fell on me as the researcher (Liamputtong and Ezzy 2005, p. 44). The validity of findings in this study was

ensured by checking and rechecking findings with research participants to make sure that what I was understanding, analysing and reporting was 'right' according to participants (Alston and Bowles 2012). Therefore, the trustworthiness of this study was "subject-oriented, not defined a priori by the researcher" (Sandelowski 1986 cited in Krefting 1991, p. 215). It was driven by me asking the participants whether or not "their realities had been represented appropriately" (Guba and Lincoln 1982, p. 246). The approach taken was relational in nature and best described as a culturally-based research methodology (Ling and Fejo-King 2013, p. 110).

Reflexive techniques such as journaling and supervision were employed to accurately assess how my own perceptions, background, history and story influenced the research process and my role in it (Liamputtong and Ezzy 2005). Journaling became a means of reflecting on my feelings, ideas, frustrations, problems, questions, biases and preconceived assumptions as I interacted with participants and it allowed me to alter my approach accordingly (Lincoln and Guba 1985).

This study assumed that there were multiple stories of the lived experience of social work with people of refugee background and that it was my responsibility to represent those stories as accurately as possible. This responsibility was met by confirming with participants the accuracy of interview transcripts as authentic representations of the stories revealed and the congruency of themes emerging from data analysis as valid representations of their lived experience.

These efforts achieved *communicative validation* (Kardoff 2004) a process of checking the accuracy of the data and evaluating the research process with the participants. My focus in employing these techniques was also to honour the relationships that developed with participants during the study. Furthermore, these relationships were products of privileging participants' needs during the research, such as welcoming the involvement of family, elders and friends during the interview; respecting the participants' decisions to delete or change parts of their transcripts; welcoming impromptu conversations with participants about data analysis; and, sharing with participants reflections, questions and developments of the research.

The final section of the chapter explores the ethical implications of the research methodology, particularly when considering how this study might be replicated by others in practice.

3.9 Ethical Considerations

This study had ethical approval from the (Tasmania) Network (HREC) which is recognised by the University of Tasmania Human Research Ethics Committee.

3.9.1 Ethical Considerations regarding Participants of Refugee Background

Nakkash and Makhoul (2011) recommend that obtaining consent from communities of refugee background must be done through a research demystification process that assumes they may have experienced gross breaches

of trust as part of experiencing human rights violations. Therefore, much of what is taken for granted and known about research by the average Western participant must be overtly explained and stated to people of refugee background to facilitate mutual trust and respect between researcher and participant.

Block et al. (2012, p. 69) state that ethical research practice with "vulnerable and marginalized groups…[such as] with refugee-background participants" involves maximising the input of participants, enhancing participants' capacity to give informed consent and adapting research methods to "heighten their relevance to the circumstances of participants' lives". During data gathering and data analysis the processes of honouring relationships with participants were prioritised. This meant involving participants in how the research was unfolding by adequately informing them and adapting research methods to their needs during "ethically important moments" (Block et al. 2012, p. 70) such as the interview. These responses required reflexivity, a mindfulness of context, transparency and the adoption of a "continuous process of critical scrutiny and interpretation with respect of [self] and the research situation" (Guillemin and Gillam 2004, p. 275).

The use of interpreters and the processes of translating and transcribing were informed by the same reflexive practice – a mindfulness of the context shared with each participant, a continuous scrutiny of myself as researcher and ongoing adaptation of research practice. Ethical issues surrounding the use of interpreters and translators were addressed through the offer of Translators and Interpreters Services (TIS) and Language Link services.

The ethical aspects of this research were also considered by accepting invitations to visit people in their homes to explain face-to-face the content and meaning of the written information offered about the study. The potential risks in participating were explained in clear and plain English, interpreters were offered and oral consent was also accepted initially (see Appendix 13); signed consent forms were subsequently obtained.

I made a concerted effort to consider different perceptions of what constitutes informed, confidential and minimal risk research participation in other cultures. Therefore, the information sheets and consent forms included specific information about:

1. the purpose of the research;

2. the methods of the research;

3. who the researcher was;

4. the potential benefits and risks associated with research participation;

5. how the researcher would behave should a participant be a current or previous client of the researcher;

6. allaying fears about possible links between research participation and reviews conducted by agencies like the Department of Immigration and Centrelink;

7. allaying fears about possible impacts of research participation on family members not residing in Australia;

8. how the researcher would behave should a community choose to either allow or not allow individuals to participate in the research;

9. the actions that would be taken to minimise any potential or perceived harm to social networks and/or relationships between social workers and people and communities of refugee background;

10. how the research data would be used;

11. the process involved in participating, making complaints, asking questions and seeking and receiving feedback;

12. the extent of involvement by participants;

13. who gave permission for the research to be conducted;

14. the use of interpreters and transcribers; and,

15. strategies for protecting identifiable information.

These issues were addressed also in recognition of the cultural distinctiveness of people of refugee background and as evidence that the research sought to engage cross-culturally.

For participants of refugee background, ethical practice was primarily about their relationship with me as researcher and what I offered and was trusted with as a representative of an educational institution. It was about me valuing a connection with them, their families and communities by delivering on what I promised and by accepting the connection with them as an invitation to friendship.

3.9.2 Ethical Considerations regarding Social Workers

For participants of social work background, ethical practice included adherence to predetermined procedures that had been obtained and approved by relevant authorities. Potential risks and the mitigation of these risks were explained in the information sheet. I made a concerted effort to consider different perceptions of what constitutes informed, confidential and minimal risk research participation for a group of professionals who were also my colleagues. Therefore, the information sheet and consent forms I provided to this participant cohort included specific information about:

1. The purpose of the research;

2. the methods of the research;

3. who the researcher was and how she would manage the research process as both a person of refugee background and a social worker;

4. the potential benefits and risks associated with research participation;

5. why social workers and people of refugee background had been chosen for the study;

6. the actions that would be taken to minimise any potential or perceived risks to participants, the organisation they work in and their relationships with colleagues and clients within the refugee resettlement sector;

7. how the research data would be used;

8. the process involved in participating, making complaints, asking questions and seeking and receiving feedback;

9. the extent of involvement by participants;

10. who gave permission for the research to be conducted;

11. the use of interpreters and transcribers; and,

12. strategies for protecting identifiable information.

Particular care was taken in information sheets to explain how the researcher proposed to maintain ethical conduct in the face of her double identity as both a person of refugee background and as a professional social worker.

Participants were invited to ask questions and raise concerns prior to formalising participation through signed written consent. No questions or issues were recorded for this group during this consideration period and interviews proceeded. In essence, it was through the process of interacting with participants through equitable relationships that ethical issues were addressed. The relational nature of this approach aligned congruently with a critical anti-oppressive research framework.

3.10 Conclusion

This chapter has described the research methods that were employed in my study and some of the key influences that informed my approach. The fusion of a

phenomenological and qualitative approach with critical and anti-oppressive

thought has fundamentally influenced the focus of this study on relationships.

The following three chapters present the findings of this study.

CHAPTER FOUR

Findings from People of Refugee Background

"Keep in touch warmly to learn more about us"

4.1 Introduction

The next three chapters present the findings of the study based on a thematic analysis of interviews with the three distinct cohorts. Chapter Four focuses on data derived from interviews with people of refugee background (Group A); Chapter Five on data from interviews with social workers (Group B); and, Chapter Six on data from interviews with social workers of refugee background (Group C). Before presenting the first of these Findings chapters, a profile of the three research participant cohorts is now presented in Tables 1, 2 and 3 overleaf.

4.1.1 Overview of Chapter Four

This chapter reports the data derived from responses during interviews with people of refugee background who had worked with a social worker in Australia and who were not themselves social workers (Group A). Group A participants described their experiences as both positive and negative. For Group A participants, positive experiences were said to be about experiencing unconditional help and change during the encounter.

Table 1: Profile of People of Refugee Background Interviewees (Group A)

Participant Number	Gender	Time Living in Australia	Country of Birth
13	F	2 Years	Burma
14	M	1.5 Years	Bhutan
15	F	1.5 Years	Bhutan
16	M	6 Years	Sierra Leone
17	M	2 Years	Bhutan
18	M	3 Years	Sudan
19	F	5 Years	Sierra Leone
20	F	3 Years	Sudan
21	M	3 Years	Burma
22	F	22 Years	Chile
23	M	22 Years	Chile
24	M	2 Years	Bhutan

Table 2: Profile of Social Work Interviewees (Group B).

Participant Number	Gender	Social Work Practice Experience	Field of Practice at Time of Interview
1	F	2 Years	Humanitarian Entrant Complex Case Support
2	M	9 Years	Family Services
3	F	7 Years	Mental Health
4	M	7 Years	Humanitarian Support
5	F	19 Years	Health
6	F	15 Years	Primary Health
7	F	10 Years	Aged Care
8	F	15 Years	Employment Assistance
9	F	16 Years	Community Health
10	F	11 Years	Family Violence
11	M	28 Years	Primary Health/Palliative Care
12	F	9 Years	Health

Table 3: Profile of Social Work interviewees who were also of Refugee Background (Group C).

Participant Number	Gender	Original Cohort Selected for Interview
25	F	Social Worker
26	M	Social Worker
27	M	Person of Refugee Background
28	F	Person of Refugee Background
29	M	Person of Refugee Background
30	F	Person of Refugee Background
31	M	Social Worker

Encounters were helpful when people's needs were noticed; their wishes heard; their contexts relevant and respected; and, the encounter framed around sensitivity to culture.

Results also indicated that, for Group A participants, social work was defined as being about responding to a call to help; this response was considered to be a trigger for social change of the kind that Group A participants stated facilitated their integration into Australian society. The social worker was described by Group A participants as someone committed to social justice; a friend who understood the challenges of the refugee experience and the re-settlement process; a partner who valued and respected the unique strengths of people; and, someone who felt a deep love for and connection with the principles of human rights.

For Group A participants, the negative social work encounter was associated with the absence of help and change during the interaction with a social

worker. In such instances, Group A participants reported encountering a social worker who was someone other than a friend and partner; someone preoccupied with policing cultural differences; and, someone who avoided heartfelt connections with their clients. The results of these encounters were described by Group A participants as the reinforcement of isolation, loneliness and a sense of invisibility in the community and also an obligation to fit in fast and effectively to Australian society.

This chapter about Group A's experiences of direct social work practice is divided into three sections. The first relates the story of Group A participants' accounts of the positive social work encounter. This section is presented as the first primary theme in the data from Group A participants. How help and change were experienced during the positive encounter is reported as a secondary theme in the findings. In addition, the nature of relationships with social workers during these positive encounters, as well as the cultural de-coding that was reported to take place, are outlined as secondary themes in the data. Embedded in the findings that relate the nature of relationships with social workers during positive encounters with people of refugee background, the role of culture and partnerships are presented as sub-themes.

The nature of the negative social work encounter is the second primary theme outlined in this chapter. The nature of relationships with social workers during these encounters is reported as a secondary theme. Finally, the consequences that were understood by Group A participants to derive from

experiencing negative social work encounters are presented as secondary themes in the data.

Table 4 provides an overview of the conceptual themes, sub-themes and their frequency drawn from Group A interview data.

Table 4: Frequency of themes and sub-themes amongst responses from Group A participants

Theme in Data	Participant Number											
	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	21	22	23	24
A. Positive social work encounters are described as:												
1. Experiencing Help	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
2. Experiencing Change	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
3. Derived from *Friendships* with social workers.												
3a. Valuing Culture in Friendships		●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
3b. Friendships as *Partnerships*				●	●	●	●		●			●
4. The role of cultural de-coding in positive social work encounters	●			●	●	●	●			●	●	●
5. Feeling assisted in integrating into Australian society		●		●	●	●		●	●	●	●	●
B. Negative social work encounters are described as:												
1. Being dominated by rules and boundaries	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
2. Involving the maintenance of professional distance		●		●	●	●	●		●	●	●	
3. Consequences of negative social work encounters include:												
3a. Creating a sense of Invisibility and Irrelevancy for the client	●	●	●	●	●	●	●		●	●	●	
3b. The client feeling *forced* to integrate into Australian society		●		●	●	●	●		●	●	●	

4.2 The Nature of the Positive Social Work Encounter

All 12 Group A participants stated that, for them, a positive social work encounter was framed around the experience of help. Social work practice experienced as a practice of helping both individuals and communities was said to frame the positive social work encounter. For example, Participants 13,14, 15 and 21 said:

I think [positive] social work is to help people who can't help themselves (Participant 13).

a social worker [I have a good experience with] is a person who works in the community in various areas, to help the community… (Participant 15).

Anything to do with society, anything to help society…that's a kind of [good experience of] social work for me (Participant 14).

[A positive experience of] Social work is about helping the people who need help, who cannot do things the social worker helps him or her (Participant 21).

Many participants passionately expanded on their responses and offered lengthy narratives to convey how much they felt any deviation from the experience of 'helping' was not a positive social work encounter. Participant 18, for example, offered an animated analogy to capture his views:

I think about [a positive experience of] social work like a priest or father. A priest can pray for you, can hear you and try for you that you get the best help you need, he can visit you, he can wish you all the positive, whether you're negative the priest will be there with you. But if you're just a preacher and you don't know your disciples by the end of the day you might find only two people in the church. Because there's no rapport…I won't have connections with that

church…if anything happens in your family that's the person you run to. As a comparison I see [a positive experience of] social workers as the people who can help, especially the most disadvantaged (Participant 18).

Participants also stated that experiencing a positive social work encounter was about experiencing a dedicated practice of being helped to contextualise the new Australian environment. Participant 16 stated that this contextualisation process was about receiving the kind of help expected from a social worker but with the social worker taking an active leading role in the learning of the new context that the person of refugee background experienced. He referred to this role being implemented through modelling and explaining the Australian way of life and culture during the practice of social work.

if you come into Australia there are rules and regulations you can't change there is also cultural standards that are here and I've got mine. If I come I have to focus and understand the rules of this country. The differences between my culture and the culture here are vast and I cannot get that understanding until I have someone who has that understanding of what the life, the rules, the laws and the culture of this country is and who can better lead me than a social worker. A person who has a vast understanding about how things work, this person has the ability to model and explain and modify a situation for someone who is confused. This person has the ability to make a good foundation for people to settle so that they are active in the community. To me this is [a positive experience of] social work (Participant 16).

A1. Experiencing Help

The helping that had been experienced during a positive encounter with a social worker was described by Group A participants as a passion witnessed during the encounter, where the social worker seemed eager to respond to the unmet needs of clients. A drive, a call or a vocational commitment to making a

difference was said to be expressed during the positive encounter. Participant 23 said:

> *We [experience the social worker during the positive encounter] like a vocation I guess, the person has a passion for this kind of work…we see this kind of work as a passion and a vocation. She [the social worker] had a passion for making a difference (Participant 23).*

The helping was said to be experienced during positive social work encounters irrespective of culture, religion, gender, age or social tradition. This observation was highlighted by all Group A participants who regularly made reference to how much a positive encounter was not preoccupied with categories of people or priority of need. For example, Participants 18 and 24 emphasised:

> *I think basically [in the positive encounter you experience] service to people. It's about helping every people doesn't matter who they are what they need (Participant 18).*

> *[In the positive encounter the] social worker, to me, helps [everyone in] community… that's my simple definition (Participant 24).*

Experiencing a positive social work encounter and therefore experiencing help was often associated with experiencing certain values in the practices of social workers. For Participants 14, 16 and 24 a positive social work encounter was experienced when a worker cared to welcome people; when a worker showed a higher degree of consciousness of people's plight; and, when a worker showed respect for people's unique characteristics and differences:

> *[in the positive encounter] social worker is someone who cares… the consciousness is higher… If there is respect than that's enough…they are like that from their inner heart… (Participant 14).*

[in the positive encounter] social workers can better understand the plight and issues facing the clients… [social work in the positive encounter is] a key chord that actually enhances the proper workings of people…that have experienced difficulties in life…a social worker [in the positive encounter]…understands the difficulties that these people experience, they match those difficulties with the standard rules of the environment they live in and then help them overcome the barriers (Participant 16).

[In the positive encounter social work is] the host and welcomes us and show us the Australian way (Participant 24).

For Participant 17, experiencing a positive social work encounter was said to be about experiencing social work ethics:

[in the positive encounter] we'll trust social workers because they have social work ethics. Usually, we'll share with the social worker the ones which cannot be exposed because we trust them…they have their ethics… (Participant 17).

Experiencing change was another characteristic of the positive social work encounter, according to Group A participants. Findings that reflect this theme follow.

A2. Experiencing Change

Experiencing change was reported by all 12 Group A participants as a central element of the positive social work encounters they had experienced. In this context, change was considered by Group A participants to be the underlying purpose of the helping they experienced during a positive encounter. That is, when helping was experienced, a positive social work encounter was reported by Group A participants as being associated with feeling a positive change in living circumstances. As Participant 18 said:

[In the positive encounter] They [social workers] are there to make sure things change, they're not only there to work they want to see things change, that's what makes them, at least they want to see an impact that something different is happening for these people. An element of change in their work… (Participant 18).

Change was said to be experienced in a variety of ways. For example, for Participants 22 and 23 it was experienced when, in experiencing a positive social work encounter, the help received was a service that was practical, emotional and spiritual in nature. Experiencing this kind of approach was, for these participants, a vehicle for restabilising life after the refugee experience:

Participant 23: [In the positive encounter social work is] a service that addresses the social problems that people might have. For us it was problems as a result of being refugees, we came without money…

Participant 22: [and] with psychological problems…

Participant 23: I came with psychological problems, I was tortured and I suffered paranoia and all sorts of things, I was depressed also. I think the spiritual part too…I think for us with our culture we're more emotional aren't we, so we need that kind of service. To settle here we need [social work] to show us how to step on our feet again and start walking by ourselves. That's the type of service we got from [the positive social work encounter].

Participant 15 stated that change was experienced during a positive social work encounter, recognising the need to respond to a call for help promptly and consistently:

When we were in the camps and we want to talk to [social workers] it takes a long time. He or she gave time but they were not on time sometimes they were late, they couldn't take responsibility and we had to wait and wait and wait…I like the equality here and [in the positive encounter] we feel free to chat openly… Suppose I have a

good program and I ask you [the social worker] to help me, she or he should help me...in the camp I had some problem and I shared with the social worker and she just nod and does not try to do anything, she just writing and I hope and wait, and wait...For me [in the positive encounter] it is important [to] offer help and carry though with the help... (Participant 15).

Additionally, for Participants 17, 20 and 24 experiencing change during a positive social work encounter was described as a vehicle for mediating between community and government. It was their opinion that a social worker who offered a positive social work experience to a person of refugee background, in a democratic country like Australia, would also voice community needs and facilitate people's access to government thereby involving government in responding to people's needs.

social work is directly funded by government it seems like that here... Here in Australia, particularly with refugees, what they [social worker] have done [during the positive encounter] is...everything...our needs were looked after...We don't have this type of experience because as a refugee in Nepal we're not recognised in that way... I see it [the positive encounter] like that... [The social worker was a] mediator, because when they came to this house they worked everything... (Participant 17).

We do not talk directly to the government but here we can...in Nepal never...yeah, it's very good [during the positive social work encounter] because they listen to us and can help a lot of people...they can get the government involved directly or indirectly to help the community, those who need help. It's very important to us (Participant 24).

[In the positive encounter the social worker] not only fixes problems, they also work hand in hand with the government. I think they take the people's needs up to the government and they tend to fix them (Participant 20).

The data also detailed how Group A participants recognised the nature and importance of relationships with social workers during positive social work encounters. The findings are reported in the next section.

A3. Experiencing Friendships

This section reports Group A participants' understanding of the nature of relationships with social workers during a positive social work encounter. For the majority of Group A participants (11 out of 12), friendship was spoken of as a key element of what was on offer from the social worker during a positive encounter. For Participants 16, 17, 18, 19, 22, 23 and 24, a positive social work encounter was a vehicle for friendships with the social worker and facilitated a sense of welcome and belonging in the Australian community.

Participants 14-19 and 21-24 inclusive stated that, when they had a positive social work encounter, they had found a place of friendship and a worker who was interested in becoming their friend. For example, Participant 14 stated that:

> *Most of the social worker I've met are friendly and smiley…Some of them maybe because of their jobs they are like that but [in the positive encounter they] are like that from their inner heart (Participant 14).*

Similarly, Participant 23 said:

> *[in the positive encounter] she [the social worker] did all the things she was expected and employed to do but she also did those extra things like inviting us to dinner, she'd take us to meet her husband and her mum… A genuineness to connect doesn't just happen because I tell you I would have never told anybody my problems.*

The way she did it you know she had that intention [to be a friend] (Participant 23).

In this context, the positive social work encounter was described as a process that involved seeking to be in the lives of the person of refugee background; a willingness and genuine curiosity to learn from the culture of the person of refugee background; reciprocity of that learning via a sharing of one's own culture; and, warmth during the encounter that promoted mutual understanding.

[in the positive encounter] social worker…has the passion to work with the people…has the courage to at least step into these people's lives, when I say step into their lives I mean get to know them… When I came to Australia I met an Australian [social worker]…In our culture when you cook food everyone dips their hands into one bowl to eat…I called him to eat with us he refrained himself…when I asked him "why?" he said: "It's not done in Australia people eat in their own plate". I told him then "if you want to be our friend you have to learn eating with us"…[on] the third day he came sat with us and dished out the food from the bowl. He stepped into our culture and he started understanding [us] and he started teaching us what Australian life is…there was a balance of understanding. That better suits me to live in this community (Participant 16).

we want him [social worker] to keep in touch warmly… we're not familiar with the paper way…Keeping in touch is very important for the Asian people… First [if the social worker wants me to have a positive experience with them] I say keep in touch warmly to learn more about us (Participant 21).

This friendship type of connection with the social worker during a positive social work encounter was said to facilitate learning about the person of refugee background's culture and reciprocity in learning as the social worker was also said to share their own culture during these encounters. This process was said to make possible a sense of equality during the positive social work encounter.

> *[In the positive encounter] they [social workers] are friendly and frank [they share] family background such as where they are born, who is their family, them sharing something about themselves. I call that friendly…Sometimes a little bit about their culture and their favourite things…[I feel] like equal and also more like friends (Participant 15).*

For Participant 20, this sense of equality during an emerging friendship was the factor that contributed to honesty, trust and realistic expectations between worker and client during the positive encounter:

> *[my experience of a positive social work encounter is] them [social worker] being free to you and you being free to them. Sometimes people coming from African background they just think certain things are going to be against them in the system because they don't understand how the system works they need sometimes people to explain a little bit better…to encourage them…That [a friendship with the social worker] gives them confidence in you…If they find out that the information is leaked out then that's how they lose trust in you… (Participant 20).*

Participant 18 felt strongly that the offer of friendship found in a positive social work encounter promoted mutual learning, reciprocity, a sense of equality and an experience of seeing the social worker committed to help, to adapt to new ideas and to implement change:

> *[In the positive encounter the social worker] she's part of that issue. She takes it on a personal basis, you can see the feeling of commitment, you can see that in her and she wants to get deep into issues, not just brushing things here and just keep the job and end things here, she has got that feeling of going deep, going deep into the community, going deep to help them. It's not just maintaining the job, filling in the forms and just stay in the office no, she goes beyond that. She's open to new ideas you know, she asks more and she wants to know more [she wants] to learn from us, to accommodate new ideas…I mean we came with a lot of ideas and she's so supportive and [then] you see changes… [She] becomes a friend (Participant 18).*

Group A participants reported friendship as a key feature of their experience of the positive social work encounter. Findings also illustrate two sub-themes within this category: the valuing of culture and the role of partnerships. These were outlined by Group A participants as constituents of friendship. These findings are discussed in the following section of the chapter.

A3a. Valuing Culture in Friendships

Valuing culture was discussed by 11 of the 12 Group A participants within the context of what facilitated friendships during the experience of a positive social work encounter. For them, having culture and cultural differences acknowledged and factored into how a friendship was developed during the social work encounter was important and indicative of whether or not the encounter was positive. Participant 19 made the point that:

> *What I wanted the social worker to do is that when there is a situation and they're coming to me they should know who they're coming to see. Number one colour; they should know what it means to be of colour. Secondly, what their culture [the client's culture] is all about… I don't know about other people but for me personally [I have a positive experience when] you know about me… that makes you feel you count and it makes you feel that person…really cares about you (Participant 19).*

Participant 16 explained:

> *[In describing the positive encounter] when I say step into people's lives you're not going to dominate their lives but you have to gradually…involve yourself into their everyday activities…by entering into this dialogue you come to understand somebody, you come to know the culture, you come to understand what this person likes and doesn't like (Participant 16).*

Participant 17 clarified that:

[In the positive encounter] they [social worker] try to understand our cultural view, always they try to understand whether such things will harm us or not, all the time they ask us so we feel more comfortable. From our side, from our cultural view whenever somebody helps us we express…our gratitude (Participant 17).

Participant 18 linked the valuing of culture in friendships during positive social work encounters to a process of facilitating trust. In speaking of his experiences with social workers he stated that for him, a social worker invested in developing a friendship during a positive social work encounter was aware of culture, recognised the cultural differences that might impede a friendly connection and was able to bridge cultural gaps.

the significance of the social worker [in the positive encounter]…is that they're trying to let you know the balance or the gap between this culture and the other culture. They're trying to let you know the significance regarding culture and how you adapt… it's actually good to know me as a person…you actually open me up. People who come from trauma, crime, a lot of issues sometimes they hide but the more you get closer to him or to her the more he talks, the more she talks because now it is one on one. But if they meet at the hospital and they're only strangers to each other despite the fact they're going to help me I'd have reservations I can't open up to everything so I just stop there…to have trust you need to meet beyond…That's the way I look at it… They'll look at you like the friend… (Participant 18).

A3b. Friendships as Partnerships

Friendships as partnerships were discussed by Participants 16, 17, 18, 19, 20 and 24 as the final element that supported the development of friendships during a positive social work encounter. Friendships as partnerships were identified as collaborations in practice, worker and client working together with their respective networks and communities to bring about change.

I wanted to send a message about my country, why I came…I saw a valuable [opportunity to do this in a] program to educate the community [being run by a social worker]. I have [since] seen a lot of changes, most people were shouting "you black monkey go back to your country, why are you here, starvation brought you here…" People never understood why Africans are coming here. Something brought me here; it takes me [time] to explain to them for them to understand why I am here and for them to know my culture. For them to ask me questions and step into my shoes and ask me questions, walk along with me…[in that positive experience with the social worker in this program] I could see the role of the social worker as very sensitive, able to take this role [with me] (Participant 16).

We shouldn't say that the culture of the person of refugee background is the only one important… like the refugee needs to learn the local ways of the place they've come to, it is good for us to learn the local ways of Australia. It's not just them that need to learn we also have to adapt to the new ways so I think it should be like a two way process. [In the positive encounter] the social worker learning the refugee culture and the refugees also learning the Australian culture…a two way process (Participant 20).

for me [what I experienced in positive encounters] is cooperation [with the social worker]. Most Australians cooperate and they want to know a lot of things about us…also we are trying to understand their culture, how the government is and lots of things…We are the new people here and the Australian people are the senior ones. They know a lot about this particular area of the world… if I'm in Nepal I know a lot about the geographical area and the conditions about the place so I would show them but here they [Australians including social workers]… show us (Participant 24).

Friendships as partnerships were said to naturally evolve from the nature of relationships during positive social work encounters – relationships said to be based on equality and a sense of wanting to promote independence and self-sufficiency. Participant 18 stated:

We [social worker and I] have been working together for quite some time, she's good, we've been doing a lot together, planning things, translating things, the laws to a variety of local African

languages…she has been very good in helping me, not only me but the entire community because you can look at her and her ideas and those ideas are about advocating for change not only change that ends there but change that goes down to the people. There is this element in service providers where they just maintain their job, which is good, but for how long are you just going to be helping this person out because we're going to create a situation of dependency which is very, very dangerous. You don't improve somebody like that, people should be trained and let them [social workers] train others (Participant 18).

The next section reports the final element that Group A participants believed characterised the nature of a positive social work encounter with people of refugee background. Cultural de-coding was outlined by Group A participants as both an outcome of and a process experienced during the positive social work encounter.

A4. The Bridging of Cultural Differences

Bridging cultural differences was the last element described by eight Group A participants as characteristic of the positive social work encounter. Bridging cultural differences was described by seven participants as a cultural guidance role that social workers took during positive encounters. In this role, social workers were said to both de-code Australian cultural norms to people of refugee background and also teach local Australians about the culture of newly arrived communities.

For example, in Australia people believe that children have their rights…As a social worker they have that knowledge… in Africa, children have their rights but parents believe that they should take maximum control of those rights. The children who are taught by those people out there who do not know the culture of where the children have come from it becomes more confusing for the children and they find themselves in between two cultures…[in the positive

encounter] you as a social worker with your vast experience you come in and you [help me as parent] better balance the learning (Participant 16).

The bridging process was described by Participant 19 as a type of help embedded in the positive encounter. This type of help was said to promote learning of the new Australian context while also respecting the individuals' own pace and preferred process in achieving cultural adjustment.

for us we can't help being African, we know things are different in Australia but we're still Africans. I find that here the Australians want us to lose our 'African-ness' that we should behave like Australians and that's going to take a process for us…we have those teachings [from a social worker during the positive encounter] "Ok guys I know who you are I just wanted to remind you and encourage you that you are no longer in Africa you are in a different land and there are certain things here that is ok and there are certain things here that is not ok so I want you guys to know the differences and the consequences" … that is help (Participant 19).

The nature of bridging cultural differences was described by Participant 18 as a practice of working across different communities, services and sectors. The social worker was said to create contacts and networks, bringing people and resources together and learning to recognise and act on opportunities to collaborate and share with organisations involved in resettlement, communities and clients of refugee background.

[In the positive encounter] she's [the social worker] doing a lot of things, she's trying to connect all the community…educate some of the doctors on what's happening… There is a bit of isolation, nobody knows enough about the Africans, so there's that kind of barrier but she's trying to link us… and not just the Africans but the Nepalese, she's created a good kind of network. So, there's a good network with all of us, refugees from Africa, Nepal, Bhutan, all of us so there is connection at least… many say "no that's not my job and my job ends here and that's it"… she doesn't… (Participant 18).

Group A participants reported an overall sense of assisted integration as a result of the positive social work encounter. An analysis of this thematic category follows.

A5. Feeling Assisted in Integrating to Australian Society

When positive encounters were reported, nine Group A participants referred to feeling assisted in achieving integration to the Australian community as a result of the encounter. Findings indicated that the key to Group A participants experiencing this feeling was the social worker's approach to their practice. Group A participants reported such practice as relaxed and untimed in its approach to assisting them to learn about and culturally adjust to Australia.

Mindfulness in practice was also said to be observed during these positive encounters. This mindfulness was explained as apparent in the way the social worker showcased an understanding of resettlement as a process fraught with challenges and also with emotional and spiritual readjustments. Furthermore, Group A participants reported the experience of an integrated approach to social work practice as part of these positive encounters. The integrated approach was associated with the social worker who worked both with the local Australian community to help them understand the people who arrive as refugees in Australia and with service providers to help them understand the benefits that were said to be experienced by people of refugee background when cross-sectoral collaborations took place.

The following is an extract of the joint interview conducted with

Participants 22 and 23 that portrays their view of how this approach to practice

was experienced and understood:

> *[In the positive encounter the social worker] understand[s] that ...even after 22 years here...[we might seem integrated but] in the heart we remain Chilean. (Participant 23).*

> *At the very least...[in the positive encounter the] social worker appreciate[s] that people come from other places and there are things you can accept and others you can't... like "Ok 10 years here you're ready, you're integrated, and it's done". I'd like to see [everyone in the community] not place a time frame on this; there are people who accept everything and others who struggle and may need more time. There are so many other factors that contribute to whether or not you can integrate like age, gender, even personality if you're shy you'll struggle so all this has to be considered and less pressure put on people...I think the first generation [struggles to integrate]... (Participant 22).*

> *That's right we [struggle so] the children struggle less...with the children we see that they are integrated, they have Aussie friends, they haven't suffered the rejection and the clashes because this culture becomes their culture...Connection, the emotional side of life is [also] very important [in the way the social worker approaches practice during the positive encounter]. The spiritual part as well, for many people the spiritual part is cultural and just as important. The emotional stuff is what gets lost and we knew [of other] social workers [and]... teachers that were simply mean. We felt rejection, we took the risk but felt rejected so I think for a social worker it is also important to look at the circle of people [those in the community and the people that provide services to people of refugee background] because there is work to be done with them too...they should be working in collaboration... (Participant 23).*

When conversations with Group A participants focused on what transpired

during negative social work encounters, all 12 participants referred to a type of

encounter that was devoid of friendship and was characterised by professional

distance and an emphasis on rules, regulations and boundaries. These findings follow.

4.3 The Nature of the Negative Social Work Encounter

All Group A participants described the negative social work encounter as an experience that was dominated by rules, regulations and boundaries. These encounters were also described by Participants 14, 16, 17, 18, 19, 21, 22 and 23, as experiences in which the social worker kept a professional distance. Experiencing the predominance of rules, regulations and boundaries, and a social worker who kept a professional distance, characterised the absence of friendships and partnerships during negative social work encounters. The social worker, in such experiences, was found to be unhelpful, blind to cultural contexts and someone seen as invested in imposing values and correcting deviations from Australian cultural 'norms'. According to accounts by Participants 14, 15, 16, 17, 18, 19, 21, 22 and 23 the negative social work encounter left them feeling invisible, irrelevant to the encounter and forced to quickly integrate to the Australian way of life.

B1. Being Dominated by Rules and Boundaries

All Group A participants explained that, when a social work encounter was negative, interactions with a social worker were marked by rules and boundaries that seemed to prevent the development of friendships and partnerships during the encounter. Participant 13 described how her experience of the negative encounter included the experience of a social worker who was bound

by rules and exercised boundaries that left the participant feeling confused as to whether or not she could still count on the social worker for help. For Participant 17, the negative encounter included the experience of a social worker who kept their distance and saw his need for more assistance as an imposition.

> *It's hard actually [having a negative encounter with a social worker], I myself don't understand what is the rule with social workers...I think if a social worker has a very deep understanding cross-culturally, also respect would be very good and I don't mean that they don't respect us but respecting each other is very good and it makes us feel more valued...before my case manager would help me now it's nearly eighteen months and I was exited from [the] program. After that my lease of the house was finished...now I don't know if I have a program where to go... I don't have the information about who is a social worker and where does he work. It is important for us to know...we don't have the idea of where to go and where to contact social workers (Participant 13).*

> *In our culture we are going to ask for more things and sometimes we are trying to be more intimate...[in the negative encounter] they [social workers] might hate it sometimes...Until we know each other they always keep some distance (Participant 17).*

B2. A Professionalised Approach that Promotes Boundaries

Participant 18 held similar views, describing the negative social work encounter as an experience where the social worker seemed preoccupied with rules and boundaries. However, for him this experience also derived from social work being "too professional". This inference referred to a professionalised social work practice approach that characterised the negative encounter. This approach was described as encouraging rules and boundaries between workers and clients, and also being characterised by blanket generalisations about the experiences of people of refugee background.

Too much professional…sometimes creates fear to others because it tends to limit the self…if you create that separation, if you're very rigid with boundaries which is common here [in the negative encounter], sometimes it's difficult to blame the social worker because these things have been around for a long time…Of course at the professional level…things always seem just like normal… Here is the professional social worker, she's from this culture and she's supposed to help this person from Africa…So, as a professional she has got certain rules and limitations that's how I look at it…the negative [encounter] with social workers, there is that assumption with social workers that they know everything. Assuming they know our culture, they look at us Africans and they generalise us. They look at Black and everything is the same… we're all different; to blanket everything to be just uniformed is a risk… Social workers need to be really careful because you have to know the person you're talking to…You can see the difference in approach when people are friends…(Participant 18).

Participant 16, on the other hand, felt that a professionalised social work practice approach had contributed to his negative social work encounter by making the social worker preoccupied with organisational rules. In his view, it was this preoccupation that gave way to forceful impositions of Australian culture and values and thus generated a negative social work encounter.

As a social worker it is good to be 60% in favour of the rules but also give 40% for the person you are working for. You may not accept what they tell you but listen and study what they tell you there might be something to learn from that…They [social workers during the negative encounter] should not only focus on the rules of the organisation they are working for, they should also listen to the people they are working with and they should sometimes accept their views. If they do so it becomes more flexible for them to step into their lives. If I go to your house and you tell me not to play with the TV and I play with your TV the next time I come would you accept me? I think no. That is to say if a social worker is working for me and he or she comes to my house and I say: "If you come to my house you're not to talk above my level" and then you come and you say: "Wait a minute I come as a social worker and it is my right and responsibility to do whatever I want to do". I will question our relationship "is he working for me or is he working to please himself" and that is the problem… (Participant 16).

The experience of a professionalised approach to practice, bound by rules and boundaries, meant that negative social work encounters were absent of friendships and partnerships. The social worker, in such encounters offered little opportunity for friendship, seemed to show no interest in being involved in the lives of their clients and seemed to offer no opportunity for their clients to genuinely connect through partnerships.

I had the worse social worker…me and [my husband] were having a bit of a fight…[I was told] I was going to see a social worker, I never asked for a social worker but you know that's our culture we're not allowed to question something that has been spoken because we think "that's how it is"… I went there…I wasn't asked I was told [by the social worker] fill in [this piece of paper] and then she said "your life is not really at risk" [she] ask "have you ever thought about suicide, mark from 1 to 10"…then she gave me a report and I took it to a doctor but since then nothing ever happened I never heard from her... [The social worker kept] telling me everything [about me when] you never receive anything from me and I would say: "Oh [social worker] knows everything so no need to say anything to her…" So, I won't pose a question or anything… What I wanted the social worker to do is that when there is a situation and they're coming to me they should know who they're coming to see…not allowing me to explain what I did and where I'm coming from, not knowing me and being in our lives I think that's the struggle that we have (Participant 19).

I think you have to have an intention to connect, people know "who's for real" like they say here. You see when people are genuine. A genuineness to connect doesn't just happen… I was 22 years old at home with a baby and [the social worker] asked me "what do you do…do you work" and I said "no, I'm at home with my baby" and she said "oh you're nothing then, you're nothing". Sure in time you forget these things but when you carry all this baggage from the past you don't need extra for the future. She had no idea about my dreams and my aspirations and she made me feel like nothing and she thought I would feel nothing after her comment (Participant 22).

[No friendship with the social worker]…makes the work vague, odd, and limiting (Participant 18).

Participant 14 stated that, for him, experiencing negative social work encounters devoid of friendships was like experiencing an "artificial smile", that is, a social worker of mind but not of heart:

Sometimes people smile but they're crossed on the inside but the face is smiling so…with an artificial smile… that is not [a positive social work encounter]. It is not a social worker of heart; it is still a social worker of mind because they are part of the society (Participant 14).

The consequences of experiencing the negative social work encounter were described in relation to the feelings that such encounters left behind for Group A participants. The findings of this last thematic category follow.

B3a. Feeling Invisible and Irrelevant

Ten out of 12 Group A participants referred to experiencing feelings of invisibility and irrelevancy due to the nature and impact of them experiencing negative social work encounters. Participants shared that being rejected as friends and having their culture ignored or rejected led people of refugee background to question their purpose in arriving in Australia and also their knowledge of resettlement issues; their skills in dealing with community needs; their status and voice within their own communities; and, their insights into the resettlement issues of fellow community members.

[In the negative encounters there are social workers]carrying out this [helping] process [who] are failing to realise the cultural setting for these people [of refugee background]…failing to realise that most of these people have got huge stress in their lives, failing to realise that most of these people cannot concentrate on anything… And also [these social workers are] accessing the services around them [people of refugee background], it becomes

very difficult because they [people of refugee background] feel isolated, they feel not to the standard to knock on an office's door to seek assistance because there is nobody to step into their lives that could direct them "don't fear you can do this and do that…"… There is no one to really understand them. No one to translate what they want, no one to mediate, to get across their feelings so they feel "why have I come to Australia, have I come here to be invisible? (Participant 16).

Once [in a negative encounter] I suggested to the social worker to let the community be a bit scattered… At that time I felt the young boys were engaging in some type of violent fighting or something like that so I suggested if the boys are scattered than they will not get together and act like that, then some of these things will be minimised…the social workers suggested that they [the boys] have their own rights so "don't worry about those things" some of them told me…When the social worker told me "they have their own right don't worry about these things" at that time I feel a bit hurt about that, I told another social worker about that and he told me "we'll see and we'll try to see how things go" at that time I felt hurt but now I don't feel anything because anyway it's going to be managed. We [the elders] have found an alternative (Participant 17).

Participant 21 described a sense of losing trust in social workers when experiencing invisibility and irrelevancy during a negative encounter. In these encounters, the needs of a community were felt to be ignored in favour of the needs of the worker. For this participant, the solution rested in keeping a warm connection with the social worker in order to maintain trust.

He [the social worker] don't care. I think it was his project and the feedback didn't fit his project. They don't care about participants they do it Sundays or Saturdays [days we cannot attend]. We don't need an apology for that but we do need him to keep in touch warmly, our Burmese people if we believe in someone and we know them we can trust him but if we don't then we can't trust him…This is part of [a positive encounter in] social work I think (Participant 21).

For others, like Participants 13 and 15, experiencing invisibility and irrelevancy during a negative social work encounter generated feelings of being forgotten and it was also described as a source of fear and isolation - a fear and isolation that was said to compound the uncertainties felt during difficult times in life.

> *I have an experience…6 months ago I had problems with family violence I reported to the social worker and he brought me to the police station. When I reported to the police station and I declared to him that he [husband] could not stay with me and from the police station it takes nearly 15 days for them to give him [husband] a family violence order. All that time was not good for me; I was very stress and worry. They told me to leave my house with my kids and I stayed with my parents and they [the social worker and police] never followed up me or call me to tell me what was going on. I was scared and it made me very upset. It was a bad experience… nobody come to help me, and nobody come to tell me, it took nearly 15 days. It was a very bad experience (Participant 15).*

> *when we arrived, like me, I was feeling very lonely you know in temporary house and I just asked my case worker his mobile number and he told me that he can't give his mobile number to a client and I understand that it shouldn't be but sometimes it made me feel a bit unsecured because if something happens to us and the food is running out and we don't know where to go after two or three days of arriving sometimes we find their office but they may be out so they are not always in their office so it's a bit worrying (Participant 13).*

B3b. Feeling Forced to Integrate into Australian Society

Participants 14, 16, 17, 18, 19, 21, 22 and 23 described feeling forced to take on Australian culture and values and feeling influenced to become an 'Australian' during a negative social work encounter. This was said to occur when social workers ignored the benefits of assisting people of refugee background to learn about Australian culture gradually through friendship. Furthermore, as Participant 23 indicated, when helping systems worked in isolation from each

other and social workers worked in isolation from these systems, this resulted in people of refugee background witnessing and experiencing different types of helping. This was said to lead to a perception that certain groups of people were privileged over others in their access to and in the provision of services.

> *I think…forcing people to take on this culture causes more damage than benefits. People should be helped to gradually learn this culture, it's a process…unfortunately, you see that each setting works in isolation and this is how you see and experience different approaches to helping. We saw the approach used to help people from Taiwan for example, they came with lots of money and they got different help so you'd see the difference and people talked about the difference. People are different, there are people who are emotional, we are emotional people we live to receive positive things from the heart if we receive negative things from the heart it hurts us and we sink. So, sometimes we need that kind of lift, affirmation that kind of thing and unfortunately we saw how that just doesn't happen [in a negative social work encounter] (Participant 23).*

> *I don't have that much devotion for religion but I don't want anybody to suppress me. If I want to be a Christian I would, if my heart said I should be a Christian than I would be a real Christian and the Gods would be ok with that….I said this to him [the social worker] and he was really crossed and he said "there is just one God"…He is really not compassionate; he showed no compassion to my family and friends…It is something nasty… (Participant 14).*

4.4 Conclusion

Data from Group A participants indicates that, for this cohort, a positive social work encounter was important and it was characterised by the manner in which they felt they experienced relevant help. The positive social work encounter also represented for them the place where they found friendship and connection with a caring human being and also with a new community. When positive social work encounters were experienced, Group A participants reported finding a

trustworthy friend in the social worker, a partner who treated them with respect, who valued their input to the social work encounter and assisted them to learn about their new home, Australia.

For Group A participants, the absence of the elements that were said to comprise the positive social work encounter proved experientially negative and also unhelpful. In such instances, participants reported finding a social worker who was preoccupied with maintaining a professionalised approach to practice focused on rules and boundaries. The consequences of such encounters told of experiences that left Group A participants feeling invisible and irrelevant to the social work encounter and forced to fit into a society which did not understand and respect them.

The next chapter presents the research findings from interviews with social workers who were not of refugee background but who had worked with people of refugee background (Group B participants). They identified types of social work practices that were either focused on *being and doing with* people of refugee background or *being and doing to* people of refugee background.

CHAPTER FIVE

Findings from Social Work Participants

"I'm not that cold disconnected professional…"

5.1 Introduction

This chapter explores what happens in social work encounters with people of refugee background from the perspectives of social workers interviewed who were not of refugee background (Group B). Group B participants alluded to postures to practice that were said to either align with the social work culture of valuing social justice, human rights, respect, dignity, service to humanity and integrity or that were distant from these values. Group B participants described instances in which an encounter with a person of refugee background involved a practice posture of either *being with* or *being to* people.

As social work practice postures, *being with* and *being to clients* are concepts that I have developed in this chapter as conceptual themes issuing from the analysis. They are an attempt to represent conceptual themes evident in the stories and experiences of Group B participants. Social work encounters in which Group B participants reported a *being with clients* involved a *doing with clients* via personal relationships with clients, advocacy, activism, two-way learning and educating clients. The *being and doing with clients* posture to practice was

described by Group B participants as the preferred and most effective approach to practice.

Social work encounters involving a *being to clients* were described as derived from a practice posture of *being* a professionalised and distant worker *to clients*, that is, someone who adhered to *doing to clients* via the active maintenance of professional boundaries; maintenance of the status quo; and, unreflective practice. This approach to social work was framed by elements of paternalism and assimilation. Furthermore, it was also associated with a perception of the client as powerless and a preoccupation with safeguarding a 'culture of niceness' within social work. This practice posture was reported as not being an effective or preferable approach to practice by Group B participants.

The data regarding the nature of a *being and doing with clients* of refugee background during a social work encounter, as related by Group B participants, is presented as the first primary theme of this chapter. The main characteristics and associated tools to frame and facilitate this practice posture are presented as secondary themes in the chapter.

Results relating to the nature of a *being and doing to clients* of refugee background during a social work encounter follows as the second primary theme issuing from the data. The descriptions given by Group B participants in reference to the main characteristics of such practice are reported as secondary themes in this chapter. Finally, the consequences seen to derive from a *being and a doing to clients* are presented.

Table 5 now follows and provides an overview of the conceptual themes and sub-themes in this chapter.

Table 5: Frequency of themes and sub-themes amongst responses from Group B participants

Theme in Data	Participant Number											
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12
A. Being and doing _with_ clients as social work practice posture.												
1. The Nature of being and doing _with_ clients is described as:												
1a. Being aligned with core social work values	●	●	●		●	●		●	●	●	●	
1b. Being appreciative of culture	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
1c. Derived from personal relationships with clients	●	●		●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	
2. Personal Relationships _with_ clients described as being built on:												
2a. Dialogue	●	●		●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	
2b. Mutuality	●	●		●	●	●	●		●	●	●	
3. Tools for being and doing _with_ clients:												
3a. Advocacy and Activism	●	●		●	●	●		●	●	●	●	●
3b. Advocacy and Activism as a preparedness in practice	●			●	●			●	●	●	●	●
3c. Advocacy and Activism as being creative and innovative		●		●	●	●		●		●		
3d. Advocacy and Activism align practice and values				●	●	●		●	●	●	●	
3e. Two-way learning	●	●		●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
3f. Educating	●	●	●	●	●			●		●	●	●
B. Being and Doing _to_ clients as a social work practice posture.												
1. The Nature of Being and Doing _to_ clients is described as:												
1a. Overlooking Culture	●				●	●	●	●	●	●		●
1b. Professionalised relationship characterised by boundaries, emotional detachment and expert stance		●		●	●	●	●		●	●		
2. Being and Doing _to_ clients originated in, relied n and perpetuated by:												
2a. Clients perceived as powerless	●	●		●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●

2b. Unreflective practice		●		●	●	●		●	●	●	●	
2c. A Culture of niceness in social work		●			●	●	●	●		●	●	●
3. Key Elements/Outcomes of Being and Doing to clients are described as:												
3a. Paternalism	●	●		●	●				●	●	●	
3b. Assimilation		●			●	●			●	●	●	

5.2 Being and Doing with Clients as the Preferred Social Work Practice Posture

All 12 Group B participants spoke of the most effective and preferred posture to social work practice with people of refugee background as involving a *doing and a being with* these clients. *Doing and being with* the client was said to represent a practice posture that acknowledged the intrinsic features of the clients. It was, therefore, a contextualised practice that acknowledged and respected the context of clients as individuals, their experiences, their socio-economic background, their educational level, their politics, their religion and culture, their gender and sexuality, as well as their immediate broader social and community context.

> *I think social work [with people of refugee background] is about social justice, it's being able to work alongside people…social work in general is to try and empower people it's just more specialised in that you need to know people's background, their histories, their culture and their way of viewing the world (Participant 7).*

> *I just don't think that you can work with people [of refugee background] in a vacuum you have to be looking at how they're seating in a community and of course if we're talking about marginalised people, so they are marginalised in a community, so there must be an aspect of trying to raise them up in the community, having more understanding in the community of their issues and needs and in this case cultures. Trying to engender respect for each other's cultures (Participant 8).*

Group B participants also talked about this posture to practice as an approach they believed to be congruent with social justice - an element said to be part of social work culture. Considering what social work was about in this practice posture, Participant 5 referred to it being about the "bigger picture", about addressing inequality by seeking to act with a purpose for change.

> *I believe we need to have a much bigger world-view [in working with people of refugee background]. So, it's about identifying any sort of inequity any disadvantage, any oppression, or attempting to, to do that and to take action...to me that's what social work is about, that's the power of social work again we witness the suffering but then we have the responsibility to do something about it...I think we can argue in a way that's different to other professions because supposedly we have a much broader understanding... (Participant 5).*

A1a. *Being and Doing with Clients*: Aligned with Core Social Work Values

Participants 1, 2, 3,5, 6, 9 and 10 also referred to a *doing and a being with clients* as derived more broadly from what they felt social work practice was generally about , that is, being cognisant of integrating the basic social work values with practice.

> *I think [social work with people of refugee background is] about working with people and on a personal level with yourself basically to create change. To challenge the systems or the structure that are stopping people from accessing things...So, very much the rights of people [like in any other kind of social work] (Participant 1).*

> *[Social work generally is about] giving people a voice a lot of the time...We're in a unique position [as social workers working with people of refugee background because]...I think social workers bring a different way of looking at things which other professions don't have...(Participant 3).*

> *[Social work with people of refugee background is about] social justice and humanity. Social work to me [generally] is…very much social justice and looking at disadvantage that people face. The primary work is about social change, challenging the system, anyone doing social justice is about challenging the system. It's the reason why I went into social work to maintain and instil a passion, that's the home of social work... And humanity, I believe that despite our background and the hardship that people face I think we're all equal…This is what social justice demands of me (Participant 9).*

Participant 10 added that the *doing and being with clients* for her went beyond simply relying on practices born of the client's context, focused on "the bigger picture" to bring about change and aligned with social work values. Participant 10 said that *doing and being with clients*, was also about acknowledging and learning from the cultures that meet when a social worker and a person of refugee background interact:

> *I think there is that involvement of care in practice, the passion, the feelings "I care what you've been through…" A lot is about needing to learn more about our cultures. How they are similar or different in values, what happens in relationships (Participant 10).*

Culture and how that concept was understood in the practice of *being and doing with* people of refugee background was a feature of the data derived from the interview responses of Group B participants and is presented in the following section.

A1b. *Being and Doing with Clients*: Appreciative of Culture

Appreciating culture was described by Group B participants as highly relevant to the practice of *being and doing with* people of refugee background.

Culture in this context was understood to be fluid in nature and to be always changing.

> *I think notions of culture can't be defined [in working with people of refugee background], culture is a process. In my experience, I've worked with lots of different cultures… I've seen those interact with our local frame of culture,…the culture of organisations, I've seen problems, I've seen issues for the people who come, I've seen issues for the people who work and live in this culture, and I've seen the penny drop, people get wonderful insights into other people that offer fantastic outcomes…While you're trying to neatly define it, it changes. You've got to experience it, how people live together is not definable. I think the outcomes are so varied culture doesn't wait, it varies and varies… (Participant 4).*

> *[in work with people of refugee background] you've got the culture of the client, you've got my personal culture…you've got the culture of the profession I work within, You've got the culture of the actual organisation I work for, the culture of the settlement services,… The culture of Australia…there's all these different cultures and for that person their culture, where they've come from what that means for them…So, when we're talking culture for me is multi, multi layered, incredibly diverse and it can take us on such an amazing journey if we stop and think about it (Participant 5).*

When multiple cultures were said to meet during a social work encounter with a person of refugee background, Participants 11 and 12 referred to the manner in which this process encouraged an awareness of and learning about one's own cultural context. They reported that, in adopting *being and doing with clients* during their social work practice, they had learnt that they too occupied a personal, a professional and an organisational culture. Cultures were seen to bring increased complexity into the practice domain: they were said to have the potential to clash with the client's context, influence social work practice, and, potentially impact the client's outcomes. Thus, cultures and their context required discussion and continuous mutual adjustment.

I think with any cultural interaction [in social work with people of refugee background] you end up learning more about your own culture. Each culture can value a part of another culture; I look at each culture and value and judge this culture… Some people want to deny their culture and you can't do that [in these encounters], it doesn't really work… I think that's come from people not understanding that culture is about life. They think that culture is about what you do with food and clothing and it's not actually about how you live. So, they don't understand what culture is. As a result social work can be overridden with other views which cause people to deny reality. So, you get social workers running from a very hard line to reactionary views, their culture is right or wrong, to people wanting to deny their culture and everything else is better… (Participant 11).

it's lots of cultures. I mean you've got the culture of the environment that you work with, the bureaucracy…rules and regulations…you've got the culture of the environment and my own culture…there is [a] woman in the health dpt. She's the first one that said to me "you know instead of focusing on other people's cultures really we have to be aware of our own culture" I suppose it's just the way she named it up made me more aware (Participant 12).

The *being and the doing with clients* during social work encounters with people of refugee background was also associated by Group B participants with the existence of certain types of relationships with clients. The nature of such relationships is described in the next section.

A1c. *Being and Doing with Clients*: Derived from Personal Relationships with Clients

The cultural adjustments that social workers were said to make in *being and doing with clients* were described as mutual learning opportunities between social worker and client - a process associated by Group B participants with the development of personal relationships with clients during such encounters. These learning opportunities complement the 'getting-to-know-each-other' process, the

development of mutual trust, the clarifying of mutual expectations and, as

Participant 8 described, the dismantling of power discrepancies between worker

and client:

> *[Because I worked with people of refugee background] I could teach them about Australian culture and they would teach me about their culture…I think that it is important because it makes for a more egalitarian relationship. If people are truly meeting on that level then you can't see the other person as lower on the social scale, you can't marginalise if it's a mutual learning experience and your learning is amazing from these cultures and then you can't ever think that "well that person's from Africa, has lived in a village and hasn't had much education so I'm better". It's just not true and it's about being open enough to see it, observe it and share that (Participant 8).*

Participants 6 and 9 talked about the *being and the doing with clients* as a

standpoint to practice that reclaimed social work from its dominant discourse of

professional expertise, boundaries and emotional distance. The emphasis was

placed on how much *doing and being with clients* validated personal relationship

building, emotional connections, friendships and partnerships with clients, and,

workers' intuition as a genuine, positive and helpful social work practice with

people of refugee background. Furthermore, findings indicated that this

reclaiming facilitated a kind of social work that was more aligned with the social

work intent of building relationships and with core social work values such as

service to humanity.

> *So, the first conversation that we had [in working with each other]…was about my total lack of understanding of where she'd come from or what it might be like to have come from her country… I explained to her that no matter how much I read I wasn't going to get there with my understanding that her task would be to help me to understand and she took that on really well…[Then there are the] hunches and sensations. When I first started social work I didn't use*

them because it'd been taught through the course that that wasn't appropriate. But then the longer I was out, praxis kind of informed me differently that it was ok so long as you check it out…So long as you don't feel or get these gut feelings of "yeah I'm right" you don't use it that way but you use it in a very fluid kind of a way and you're OK with not getting it right, then it is really useful (Participant 6).

The whole concept around service to humanity…understanding is really important I think and if you don't take the time to really do that then you lose people's stories and I think that was the most important thing that I could have done [in working with people of refugee background]…I was offering something that was useful…she helped me with that so it was a partnership between the two of us…I had questions about her culture and her background and how they managed that and what was important and trying to connect to what was important to her from where she had come from [and she had questions for me] (Participant 9).

The *being and doing with clients* was said to promote a personal relationship with the client of refugee background. In these relationships, every participant except Participant 3 and 12 described how the social worker ensured that they had the time and the flexibility to hear the client's story; valued what clients brought to the encounter; sought to connect with the client with respect, honesty and curiosity; sought to clarify the social work role, its limits and possibilities; and, was not afraid to challenge notions of professionalism in social work that discouraged such friendships with clients.

I think being able to become a friend because in that there is trust, truth…Reliable contact with her wasn't just about "how much money have you got, are you going to school, have you done this…" It was also about "what are you doing this evening?…and other social workers would frown on having this kind of contact…[but] for me that [kind of reliable contact] was great…But I also felt that it conveyed to her that I have a sense of understanding how you construct relationships from her frame of reference (Participant 10).

We had this organic non-structured conversation every time she came in and one day she began to talk about what she said she'd come in for and then again she went back to her history...she'd never talked about her history because she didn't think it was relevant it was only through a process of what she called friendship building and what my colleagues would freak out if they heard, that she was able to connect those dots herself and I never connected those dots for her...[in working with people of refugee background] You've got to be genuinely interested and I can't tell you how many times she said: "no, no, no, that's not right..." as I tried to paraphrase and try to summarise...occasionally, must admit at the time, I went: "Oh, Oh" inside but that was more about the knowledge of what my colleagues would've said... (Participant 6).

A2a. A Relationship Built on Dialogue

All Group B participants (except Participants 3 and 12) indicated that dialogue existed in both the intent to create a *being and doing with* posture to practice and in the manner in which relationships were said to exist with the client in these encounters. Participant 4 described this posture as a "dialogical relationship" with the client that enabled him to dismantle any form of prescribed worker expertise and helped him to encourage and maintain a human connection and a partnership with the client:

I think if you're creating a space around safety and make time for people, they'll know that you're not telling them "how it is"...it's actually creating that dialogical relationship. Having a conversation mutually beneficial. Doesn't happen all the time, when people first come in now I ensure it does. So, it's creating the building block for trust and dialogue. Many, many times on the fourth, sixth, tenth meeting all this stuff they want to know just comes out, it's really cool. And then I'm the one that's sitting there wide eyed... (Participant 4).

Participant 11 referred to dialogue as a cyclical reflective process initiated by self-examination aimed at learning who the self is and how it influences practice, followed by a sharing of these personal and practice based insights

with the client and their communities in an effort to maintain an exchange – a

two-way learning.

> *The other part of the dialogue is your understanding who you are…why you are doing what you are doing. For the communities to understand why you are doing what you are doing. It's a two way exchange. So, realising that it's not about you finding out stuff it's about the exchange through the engagement (Participant 11).*

A2b. A Relationship Built on Mutuality

Nine of the 10 participants who made mention of dialogue as a component

of *being and doing with clients* also reported mutuality as a by-product of

dialogue.

> *I actually worked with this girl…she was a young Muslim girl…she came to me one day…and told me she was pregnant to her boyfriend back in the camp…We became reasonably close I thought. She had her head scarf on and I had all these ideas about how things could be done and what could happen in a situation like that…Once I got the bit out of the way "do you want to work with a woman?", and she said "No, I don't want to I only want to work with you". The culminating fact was trust and knowing each other; she needed to know I was not going to go and tell her family…I was open with her and I respected her as a person, heard what she had to say, and deferred to her. I felt I was working with her first…at the core she wanted to work with me and I think that's why it worked so well (Participant 4).*

Mutuality resulted when relationships with clients were more personal than was

commonly experienced in other fields of social work practice. Mutuality was said

to result from a valuing of difference and of the uniqueness of a person's context

that was associated with the adoption of a *being and a doing with clients'* posture

to practice. Mutuality was said to facilitate: a surfacing of the worker's and the

client's context to each other; an exchange of skills and resources between worker

and client; knowledge and experiences relevant to the interaction between worker and client; honesty; and flexibility. This was said to establish a trusting partnership during the social work encounter.

> *[I guess dialogue and that mutuality that happens is]…Colourful and beautiful and it's rare when it happens so it's full of music and laughter and shared confusion in a good way. It's full of really honest conversations around "I have no idea…help me understand", and from the other side they also have an idea of what you're saying because they're also trying to understand. There is this colourful mix full of honesty and flexibility… (Participant 6).*

> *This is again something about my trying to understand a way of approaching; a way of coming into the client's world and it was difficult to know what was right and acceptable and what was helpful to my client and what helped her to trust me. I think one of the things that I asked was "what do you usually do back home? When you have a problem who do you ask and what do you do?". So, this person said, "they have the family, there are people in the family", but her family were all back home…So, one of the things that we tried to do…was contacting the family by phone back at home…Then the other thing I asked, "what kind of support did they have here?"…she said something about how they gather in a group and they have coffee…So, we did that…from then on I was able to be her counsellor because she would then talk to me" (Participant 7).*

A3a. Tools for *Being and Doing with Clients* - Advocacy and Activism

All Group B participants reported utilising tools for practising the *being and doing with clients* of refugee background. Ten of the 12 Group B participants spoke of advocacy and activism as ways of adopting the *being and doing with clients* in a social work encounter with people of refugee background. Advocacy and activism were referred to interchangeably by participants, to describe a facilitation role that the social worker had adopted to secure a voice and power for the client.

> *I think having respect for the person and valuing him or her I think those things above all and after that advocating for change [is what works in working with clients] (Participant 8).*

In this section of the analysis, the findings highlight the degree to which the *being and doing with clients* of refugee background was understood by Group B participants to be political in nature, focused on structural change and the understanding and prioritising of the client's needs during the social work encounter.

> *[In working with people of refugee background] you need to find out what structures influence their lives. You don't assume that because they're from Nepal that Nepalese culture is the most prominent thing in their lives… I can see the level of competence in engaging with people and work [ing] out what these external structures do to people… (Participant 4).*

> *I do like social work [as a means of working with people of refugee background] because it does have an activist sort of stream within it I suppose. I'd like it to be a bit stronger but it's very much about giving a voice to the voiceless and empowering communities and giving them access to knowledge and resources to be able to develop themselves in the direction they would like to go (Participant 12).*

A3b. Advocacy and Activism: Preparedness in Practice

The focus on change during advocacy and activism was emphasised by Group B participants as a form of preparedness in practice: a preparedness to learn, to identify and respond to opportunities for change wherever systems, practices and personal values were deemed judgemental or oppressive and thus prevented social justice.

> *I think it's [advocacy and activism] about a willingness to learn. It's being open and caring for somebody and people see that, without it*

> *being something that's contrived…that is the basics of this work. I think those core [social work] values, about service… So, keeping that core role…If you are in a service and you know how things work efficiently you should be sharing that knowledge with people (Participant 11).*

Responding to these opportunities for change was also said to extend to the adoption of a "bigger picture" mindset that was identified as a key part of the *being and doing with clients'* posture to practice. This was described by Participant 4 as a kind of social work that sees the connections between an individual's circumstances and local and global circumstances. Change, through this mindset, was thus understood as needing to target all of the layers of society interdependently in order to achieve social justice.

> *I see structures out there and social work is one of them, culture I guess is one too, what I see is how external things influence people's outcomes. I see that as an important part of my work…Through a dialogical process you can work out what sort of influence these structures around them have. What aspects of these are important to them, because everyone is different. If you, through a dialogical relationship just have discussions you can work out… what's important to individuals. Take your time to talk with them and share (Participant 4).*

A3c. Advocacy and Activism: Being Creative and Innovative

The preparedness to engage with opportunities for change was said to require determination, on the part of the social worker who adopted the *being and doing with clients* posture to their practice, to confront and challenge the system and, at times, their social work colleagues. Participants 2, 5, 8 and 10 referred to a need to engage with creativity in practice during advocacy and activism with a focus on change to loosen the constraints of professional boundaries that were said to define what is, and what is not, considered credible social work practice.

145

Furthermore, they referred to this process of broadening practice via creativity as a *doing with the client* that also offered a broadening of political thinking in practice. This, in turn, was said to allow for a targeted and strategic social work encounter:

> *whether you were in the counselling team or the early intervention team or you were in the youth team, the workers were labelled as counsellor advocates so all work had that very strong advocacy framework behind it no matter what area you worked in... that was when we learnt the base of the work that you did and it was very developmental, there were always community development components in it...you never just worked in that vacuum...you always had to work with systems [as well] you couldn't work with these people [people of refugee background] without undertaking system's advocacy (Participant 8).*

> *We'd have to advocate for ourselves to be able to take up more time to take someone out for lunch or taking someone to the movies or bowling or something like that. We had to advocate strongly to have those things seen as credible social work practice [with people of refugee background]... (Participant 10).*

Moreover, advocacy and activism as tools for practising *being and doing with clients* were considered by Participants 4 and 10 to be uniquely placed at the interface of multiple social layers and also offered a distinct opportunity to innovate in service delivery, to fill service gaps, to educate the public on issues of oppression and discrimination, and, to contribute to change in public attitudes towards people of refugee background:

> *When I started, four or five years ago, there was [nothing], the hospital didn't even tend to use social workers...[now] we're integral as social workers in advocating the needs for actual services for humanitarian entrants. I have my self been pretty active as an advocate...I've been involved with federal government, I've been involved with state government, with health services specially hospitals advocating for improvements for services for refugees (Participant 4).*

A3d. Advocacy and Activism: Aligning Practice and Values

Change within the context of advocacy and activism was also referred to in terms of actions that were focused on aligning social work practices to social work values such as social justice. As Participant 4 stated, the intent of *doing with clients* was facilitating people's own dreams and outcomes:

> *I think you can say that social work is about facilitating people to get to where they want to go, be what they want to be or achieve what they want to achieve but in different settings, in different contexts... I think [social work] gets defined outside but finessed in context (Participant 4).*

Participant 5 added:

> *Social justice and social change!...By that I mean my view of social work [culturally contextualised practice with people of refugee background] is about those very things... I don't think its enough just identifying [opportunities to take action], we need to take action, do something about it whatever that may mean and I think that's what social work lacks it's the action...I really love the Dalai Lama, his definition of compassion and to me this is social work. He says that compassion is that you witness suffering in the world...that's compassion but the other part of compassion is then you have a responsibility to do something about it to alleviate their suffering...for me that's social work [with people of refugee background] (Participant 5).*

While the findings indicated that advocacy and activism were tools for practising *being and doing with clients* of refugee background, Group B participants also reported a two-way learning process and educating as tools for such practice. These thematic sub-categories are reported in the following sections.

A3e. Tools for Being and Doing with Clients - Two-way Learning

Eleven of the 12 Group B participants stated that a two-way learning process was a tool for *being and doing with clients* of refugee background. In adopting this posture to practice, two-way learning was understood as a tool for practice utilised by social workers to invite the client's scrutiny and evaluate the social work encounter:

> *I had a long "friendship" with a Vietnamese person…I learnt about other cultures, and also learnt from him that if you put things in such a way, doesn't matter where you come from a person will respond anyway. I learnt from my Vietnamese friend that sometimes you just have to say it to a person: "is this the way things work…" (Participant 2).*

> *Yes, you both learn [in working with people of refugee background]. This can be in a formal or informal way too: if you want to get a house you offer information and share what you know about getting a house. The other person also has information and offers it to you. So, there is a two way process going on there at all times. And that's true respect. Also, being prepared to accept that sometimes we make mistakes and learn from those and understand that most people are fairly tolerant about that. If you don't, when you make a mistake you'll see it as a barrier…most mistakes can be about a misunderstanding or miscommunication (Participant 11).*

This critical evaluation of the social work encounter was presented as a form of critical reflective practice that, as Participant 2 described, involved the client in discussing cultural issues that acted to prevent a two-way learning between them and the worker and also involved the worker in discussing the uncertainties they felt they had about their own practice. This process was seen as facilitating mutual cultural adjustments:

First thing I have to do is learn myself, to be able to make mistakes and then as much as I say we need to be aware of their culture and adjust to them I think there is also an expectation on the other person to make some adjustment towards us. Such as speaking English for a start…there are cultural adjustments on both sides but because I'm the social worker I'm the one that has to do the analysis and the thinking about it and also be prepared to make mistakes and have the guts to say to a person: "I think I'm making a mistake here? If I do this how does it impact on you?". I have to be prepared to do that (Participant 2).

Participant 6 added that two-way learning with the client required the knowledge the social worker relied on to inform their practice to be responsive to the evolving nature of such a posture to practice. Furthermore, a worker who adopted this posture was understood to be a worker who expected their practice knowledge base to be constantly evolving and shifting in response to new client cohorts arriving from around the world and new practice contexts that could be expected to emerge as a result:

There is nothing that I decide or know 100%... the knowledge is constantly growing and shifting, we can't be hooked into "this is the right" because the "right" changes minute to minute…I think we still want to believe that we start a social work job and there is an end point and somehow we're going to be helping the person through whatever they want to do but what we forget is that you've got new people coming into the country, coming in with their culture and coming in with their issues like the rest of us have... So, our aims and goals and interests are changing… they always do...the knowledge changes with it too. You will never be able to say, what I'm sure many of us will be comfortable with, and that is: "this person coming through needs A, B, C"… we'll never be able to say that. And we're the damaged souls in that little dance, we are the ones that have to come to terms with that there is no A, B or C… it's never going to be that easy (Participant 6).

Participants 1 and 2 reported that if at any time during the *being and doing with clients,* the two-way learning ceased to take place, then the relevance of the

client's context to the social work encounter would be compromised and that an expert stance would be assumed. The latter was defined as non-characteristic of the *being and the doing with clients* posture to practice:

> *[often] the person who's doing the work with "other" people [of other cultures] is seen as the expert. I have a lot of trouble with that expert mentality that people have specially in working with refugees just because they've done it for six years or one year they think they know everything…it's ridiculous…I think people that claim to be the expert probably know the least amount of stuff… (Participant 1).*

> *I hadn't put much thought into my practice and how as a White male, just that presence alone, can be a negative experience for some people…I became complacent [in my learning]… I assumed that I knew what I was doing and here came this person who shattered my whole perception of myself as being a "good guy". I became an insipid social worker (Participant 2).*

Two-way learning, as a tool for *being and doing with* people of refugee background, was also linked to the practice of educating that the social worker was said to engage in during this posture to practice. This sub-theme follows.

A3f. Tools for *Being and Doing with Clients* - Educating

Educating was described by Group B participants as an exercise in raising public awareness during every facet of *being and doing with clients*. The issues that were identified by Group B participants as relevant to this exercise of education included: client experiences of displacement and refugee life; the cultures of people of refugee background living in Australia; the experience of re-settling in a country like Australia; and, the diversity of lifestyles and life perspectives extant in the broader Australian community.

Taking every opportunity available to pass on the knowledge gained during encounters with people of refugee background and sharing those experiences with colleagues, other clients and the community in general were said to be key elements of the process of educating.

I try to inform other staff and others through the larger organisations about cultural differences. I try to negotiate conflict or negotiate deeper understanding. On a one-to-one basis I might advocate for a client, I like to invite other members of staff to come and be involved in the process so that they too locate an understanding of how things work for other people (Participant 11).

I do a lot of the training, I do cross-cultural training so the doctors and nurses would get to see me in that role and I explain to them what my role is…I'm sure some doctors find me a bit challenging because I will challenge their assumptions around how they treat refugee patients…I suppose I'm trying to change the hospital culture… (Participant 12).

In summary, the practice posture of *being and doing with* clients was a unanimously shared theme in the data derived from interviews with Group B participants, and it was also offered as their preferred way of practising social work with people of refugee background. *Being and doing with clients* was seen as a vehicle for promoting and upholding social justice and as a helpful, relevant and effective posture to adopt in social work encounters with people of refugee background.

When *being and doing with clients* was absent in social work encounters with people of refugee background, Group B participants reported the absence of the clients' contexts as well as a misalignment with social work values like social justice. These findings are presented in the next section.

5.3 *Being and Doing to Clients* as a Type of Social Work Practice

Eleven Group B participants reported either having engaged in, experienced and/or witnessed in other social work colleagues at some point in time, a second posture to social work practice with people of refugee background. This second practice posture was described by Group B participants as what transpired in social work encounters with people of refugee background when the purpose of the encounter had been diverted from a *being and doing with clients –* when it had become a type of practice that was focused on *being and doing to* clients.

The 11 Group B participants who referred to a *being and doing to* practice posture with clients, stated that this practice inevitably involved working independently and in isolation from a client's context.

> *I've seen workers who are constantly focusing on particular kinds of problems when the person has turned up with something else… Sometimes we want our clients to fit into our way of thinking and I think we need to adjust ourselves sometimes to fit in where the client is and not assuming that if they're drunk that that's a problem to them because to some people the problem is with being sober (Participant 2).*

This posture to practice was seen to ignore the client's context as it was seen to favour 'box ticking' methods of practice. In addition, this approach to practice was seen to privilege the values of organisations over the values of clients. Some Group B participants also said that at times the worker's own personal stance on issues surrounding the resettlement of refugees in Australia was privileged over the client's own lived experience of resettlement.

the way we practise with our clients. Not just social work but I think everybody...not one box fits everybody, that's not just with refugees but other people as well... [a client I was working with] she was obviously put a lot in that 'too hard' basket...because it's too scary to work with interpreters or to figure out what they need (Participant 1).

As much as social work says: "We remove ourselves from the medical model" I think that's a bit of a dream view for social work because we have subtle medical models and paternalistic models. We're asked to know what we're doing and there is the tick a box type of thing too (Participant 6).

Being and doing to clients was said to be confused and dangerous social work practice as it was understood to compromise social work culture and its core values of social justice, service to humanity, integrity, dignity and respect.

I think social work is about social change...and social justice. [But in the context of social work with people of refugee background] I would actually say [social work is about] a confused practice...we're confused, we don't know what we're doing most of the time. I think we still have a really strong flavour of assimilation and we're not being honest about that and I think that comes from not just the White Australia policy but also comes from those of us who are fixed in our view of the world... Confused and dare I say it dangerous practices. When I say dangerous I mean I worry about the impact that we're having on our clients (Participant 6).

Being and doing to clients, as a social work practice posture, was identified by these participants as the least preferred and least effective way of "doing social work" with people of refugee background. Furthermore, Participants 2, 6, 9 and 10 described the *being and doing to* practice with clients as a racist, assimilationist, rescuing and paternalistic practice.

> *I think social work involved with refugees… it seems to me to be more about an assimilation framework which I don't believe is best practice (Participant 9).*

> *social workers who say: "You're welcome here, is there anything we can do for you" yet we're not doing that we're saying: "You come in, sit over there, sit up straight, be a good Aussie…" you know what I mean? We did that with the Italians and the Greeks and the Vietnamese and Lebanese, we're really racist…Racism is the undercurrent; even we who profess to be as far from racism as we can be we're still discovering our selves (Participant 2).*

Being and doing to clients as a posture to social work practice was also associated with professionalised practice. Noteworthy is the distinction Group B participants made between professional practice and professionalised practice. As Participant 10 described, professional social work was understood to be invaded by professionalisation – a process associated with corporatism. This was said to encourage a *being and a doing to clients* where change was overlooked and the promotion of coping with or adapting to disadvantage as a social work intervention was said to take precedence.

> *Social work [with people of refugee background] is free of corporatism…social work should be far more around working with communities rather than individuals…Social work in its current ways does get stuck in coping with disadvantage and racism and discrimination because we're working in professional corporatised environments we don't get an opportunity to change what's causing those problems in the first place (Participant 10).*

Participant 9 stated that these professionalised and corporatised practices only served to compromise the social work culture of valuing social justice, to alienate the social worker from collective action and relationships with clients, and, to help maintain the unchallengeable position of a neo-conservative culture.

I guess we live in a very neo-conservative environment. I think as a result social workers, at some level, have lost their connection with social justice, lost their connection certainly around things like ethics, around service to humanity, around competence, around integrity and all those kinds of things…[I wonder] is social work really connected to that? and actually supported by their agencies to be able to connect to those kinds of things?...the organisational contexts that we're actually working in where I guess the freedom to be able to be a social worker often clashes with organisational needs and boundaries. Like not being able to speak out, not allowed to take union action, not allowed to put a voice out there, there's very few avenues or path-ways for that stuff I think. As a group we're not very good at getting together and shaking the mountain, we're not good at doing it, we're very isolated and in some ways we work in our little silos, don't often get together enough outside of the Uni. It's very easy to become assimilated ourselves when you see that kind of view of the world. It becomes a job rather than a passion about what social work is all about (Participant 9).

Culture and how that concept was understood by Group B participants within the context of the *being and doing to clients* practice posture also featured in the data. A description of this thematic category follows.

B1a. *Being and Doing to Clients*: Overlooking Culture

Being and doing to clients was described by Participants 1, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10 and 12 as a practice that either ignored or problematised issues of culture, cultural difference and cultural identity. This was said to impact the social work encounter with a person of refugee background by promoting categorisations of difference. Participant 1 stated that these categories of difference promoted separation between what was considered mainstream and non-mainstream, while Participant 7 related that the separation of people based on categories of difference was leading to value clashes in social work practice.

it was interesting to see that if you're not like the majority you're seen as different… It [social work practice] should come down to a point where they're not seen as different to everyone else…it's separating everybody up (Participant 1).

I think it [culture] plays a really big role because somehow in trying to contact them or communicate with them… you do things [that] may be not acceptable to them. So, for example, the thing about Australians are very individualistic but some of the African cultures are not, they are more community orientated so somehow you need to involve the community or their family…I think some of the beliefs and values that mainstream Australia has…actually translate [to contradictory actions]…That's a problem I think [because unknowingly we clash with people from refugee background] (Participant 7).

Participants 8 and 9 also commented that the *being and doing to clients* posture to practice had, in their view, impacted social work culture and organisational settings by making the issue of culture an issue separate to and disconnected from the process of supporting clients' needs.

in my work with people of refugee background the culture of my clients and their own thinking is very important to them. What I actually find is that we [social workers] don't always connect with those important things. Sometimes that's a language barrier and sometimes it's a lack of support particularly if it's the practice to not support cultural needs or beliefs of everyone (Participant 9).

The nature of relationships with clients within the context of the *being and doing to clients* practice posture was also a theme in the findings. This thematic category is presented in the next section.

B1b. *Being and Doing to Clients*: A Professionalised Relationship with Clients Characterised by Boundaries, Emotional Detachment and an Expert Stance

Interviews with Participants 2, 4, 5, 6, 7, 9 and 10 referred to how the *being and doing to clients* posture to practice was the product of professionalisation in social work. Professionalisation acted to promote highly bureaucratised practices, that is, practices seen as guided by rules and regulations, constrained by boundaries defined by organisational mandates and de-contextualised from the Australian Social Work Code of Ethics. In this context, personal relationships with clients needed to be discouraged:

> *because of boundaries and because of what we've been taught about boundaries and it's just old stuck learning because as soon as I acknowledge what it was that I was feeling it went away. It comes from the discourse, the social work discourse around professionalism and what it means to be a professional and how to act in a professional manner…[that] You certainly don't become friends with your client (Participant 6).*

Furthermore, participants stated that in the presence of professionalisation, the nature of client relationships during social work encounters was altered – they were guided by objective assessment tools, mitigation of risk and a detachment from client-centred exchanges. Participant 10's comments captured the overall impression that, in these kinds of encounters, social work practice offered no room to explore the care that was afforded to clients, nor were practice dilemmas or culture and values surfaced for examination and reflection. The implications were described as "workers feel[ing] powerless to do real social work":

> *people would say: "It's just a job… you don't really care about them you get paid to care about people"… social work education teaches*

you that it's bad if you cross professional boundaries…there's not a lot of room [in social work] to have conversations about the dilemmas of practice…to convey the caring…[to] discuss the ethical dilemmas you face as a White woman…. The Western values around what's family, what's a reasonable standard of living… those ethical dilemmas around the clashing cultures, clashing values with massive implications and no one talks about them because it's too hard, people are too busy, and totally paranoid and we were told that if we don't act to immediately protect…it's going to blow up in our faces…[this] relates to some social work being corporatized…the ability for social workers to do what social work is about is limited…[so social work] gets caught up in corporate ideals, around management, economics and that kind of stuff…Workers feel powerless to do real social work. They are trapped in layers of bureaucracy and "fine objective" assessment tools… I think a lot of people are aware of this problem…" (Participant 10).

Participants 7 and 9 added that there are practical elements to practice that, under the influence of professionalisation, impact on the nature of relationships with clients and also the nature of the relationship social workers have with each other in the field. In their view, professionalisation had divided social workers and discouraged partnerships, collaborations and the sharing of best practice. In turn, this was said to have influenced the services that social workers provided to clients of refugee background by either generating a duplication of services and/or the irrelevancy of service.

There is a lot of duplication in this sector [work with people of refugee background]. A lot of what we do is so confusing…[social workers need] good communication…peer support, professional debriefing. I know we have meetings after meetings but they're not real meetings about what our real concerns are; they're about politics, who's doing what…If there is one client that's shared by a lot of workers I think we should be able to come together and talk freely and of course guard confidentiality for that client. But we know what we're doing and what the other person is doing and the impact that has on the client [and yet we fail] to share…(Participant 7).

The restrictions around how to service people, you know, we can't always be there because we're not funded to be around all the time and we're very organised in the way that we schedule our appointments and that seems to be one of the issues for refugees. They want help and they want it now but no body's available. Then they feel unwelcome…The ways of being and the way of the set up doesn't actually translate into what people need…Around the social work field it's very much about the individual base not group dialogue, the cooperative stuff works really well [yet]…organisations don't seem to work together… it's partnerships that offer the most cooperation (Participant 9).

The nature of professionalised relationships with clients, in the *being and doing to clients* posture to practice, was associated with taking an expert stance in practice. Adopting an expert stance was seen by Group B participants as negative and detrimental to the social work encounter with a person of refugee background as it was said to promote cultural clashes and a culture in social work where 'good' social work was only associated with 'pro-forma' types of practices that were considered objective and bureaucratised and thus professionalised and corporatised.

the ability for social workers to do what social work is about is limited…I think often what's been built up as professionalism, it's been chipped away by State governments, by professional bodies, constantly social work being used to fulfil duties or obligations that belong to politicians when really by social workers being in those roles there could be a chance to actually do social work…They [social workers]are trapped in layers of bureaucracy and "fine objective" assessment tools and making decisions that are sometimes in direct contradiction of social work values…[let me give you an example]…there is one young person [I worked with]…she was going to a colleague and was doing relatively well and had aspirations to be a nurse and I nurtured these aspirations I thought she'd make a really lovely nurse and I was happy to help her but for her those aspirations ended at marriage. I found that really hard to accept, I couldn't…I used to say to her: "You're a gorgeous girl you've got so much to offer"…I found it really hard to accept that as a woman she would be a mother and a wife that would be it. And it was even more scary for me…to consider that the marriage might not even be about love. So, we would talk about it all the time

and I'd get caught up in trying to convince her of the rightness of what I was saying and off course she would so politely offer me a: "yes, ok…" and I would say: "No that's not what I want…I don't want you to just lay down 'cause you stopped listening to me now…" and that was one of my biggest things in my work [being able to let go of the expert stance] (Participant 10).

The expert stance was also linked with a need to control and pre-determine practice during a social work encounter with a person of refugee background. Responses suggested that adopting an expert stance was about a need to master difference, as difference was often understood as problematic for professionalised corporatised practice.

To illustrate this point, Participant 4 related his experiences with cultural competence training. He felt that the messages in such training invited social workers to feel "professional" because they would learn "professional techniques" and also, in his opinion, led to generalisations and a packaging of the refugee experience. He felt these instances were examples of how professionalised relationships with clients legitimised the *doing and being to clients*. He felt that this made encounters with people of refugee background seem more predictable and certain for social workers whom he saw struggled with the natural discomfort and unknowns generated by cultural differences.

We get a lot of requests for cultural competency training and it's based on this factual sheets that are a load of…I talk to people about this, my idea of person centred that people want to achieve their own outcome…it's different for everyone. You can have as a broad wrap around things like the refugee experience…sure…but the refugee experience in Africa is completely different to the refugee experience in Asia…worlds apart, not only culturally but the actual experience. So, to say that "we're gonna talk about the refugee experience" is not true either. You couldn't generalise to help people, to learn how to work with people…I think it's a classic human problem that's

been written about for centuries…the other, those scary Black people…that one person" or whatever…I think they're [social workers] scared or forget that there are much more similarities between people than differences…perhaps we're fearful of what we're going to learn but also how we're going to interact [in a perceived professional manner](Participants 4).

Participant 2 referred to the adoption of the expert stance in the *being and doing to clients* practice posture as being derived from a personal unwillingness, or a not knowing how to, confront the self in practice and a sense of power over practice that was said to result from the use of prescriptive practices.

there is an unwillingness for a lot of social workers to confront themselves, I think a lot of social workers come into the field and struggle with the change in themselves. The change in self is the most significant experience in social work and they come into the field and notice the change, they come into the field either wanting to help or wanting to fix other people…How many social workers are dealing with clients like text book counsellors to cover their back side? I think you're looking at a high percentage rate. A lot of the time you've got a 24 year old social worker working with a 39 year old woman who's been belted around the house, has watched the kids get belted around and then social work comes in and says: "how did you feel about that?" and the woman turns around and says: "forget about it… you social workers…" all this happens because we often try to make people fit our little box so we can fix them. I think some people coming into social work get a sense of power around this (Participant 2).

In detailing their descriptions of the nature of *being and doing to clients*, Group B participants also referred to three elements of this type of practice that were seen as determinants of such practice and were also considered as ongoing consequences of such a posture to practice. The following sections present findings relating to sub-themes concerning an understandings of clients as powerless; unreflective practice; and, the culture of niceness in social work.

B2a. *Being and Doing to Clients*: Understandings of Clients as Powerless

All 11 participants who referred to *being and doing to clients* as a social work practice posture stated that such practice originated in, relied on and perpetuated a view of the client as a powerless victim who was helpless, needy, traumatised and devoid of agency.

> *in a sense we're disempowering people by thinking that they need to be taken care of, the fact that they've come thousands of kilometres and got themselves into another country we're sometimes forgetting the skills that people have and build through these experiences… I very much got caught up with being the only person in their lives: "I need to be strong for them, I need to be caring for them, I need to be doing this for them because I'm all they've got, I'm the only consistent adult in their lives…" and so, yeah, it lead me down a path perhaps of not practising social work as I had thought social work was at that time. I remember thinking "No, this is not social work, I'm better than that, I'm not that cold disconnected professional person…(Participant 10).*

Participants 2, 5 and 11 added that a social work encounter with the 'powerless client' was thus understood as an encounter that lacked engagement with the client's story (their history, their experiences, their dreams and aspirations); lacked clarity in defining the social work role; it imposed values external to the client's frame of reference; was generally apathetic towards aspiring to do things better; was fearful of doing things differently; and, ignored the client as a partner and a resource in the encounter.

> *In this particular job here [doing and being to people of refugee background]…I think that in some ways [this work] is insipid. We don't call it as we see it we don't call it as something that someone can do something about. We just think of it as people turning up for an appointment…who names it up? We could actually set new benchmarks for people but we can't be bothered (Participant 2).*

[Well, because]…the area of working with migrants…people feel…responsible for people…It can be a very seductive area of feeling really good and it invites you to be the person who does it all, knows it all and people are very grateful for that" (Participant 11).

B2b. *Being and Doing to Clients***: Unreflective Practice**

Eight of the 11 Group B participants referred to unreflective practices as both characteristic and a consequence of *being and doing to their clients*. Their comments focused on the degree to which this posture to practice resulted in a lack of dedicated time and thought to reflection in practice. Unreflective practice led to lack of self-awareness in practice and in addition to a lack of dialogue with clients.

the example I picked when I was thinking about what you were going to ask me was a time when I didn't have "down" the way I wanted to practise… [This example] I was in the midst of consolidating the way I thought and how I practised… The analogy of talking with students or the warden talking with prisoners, the powerful person talking to less powerful people and this is how it is. If I'd have said: "Well guys, what do you think about this situation?" and we could have talked about rights and wrong ways of going about things, and I could have got several messages across that way whilst the participants were active in the whole exchange… I think I tried to: "Hey, I'm not telling you you're all from the same brush even though that's how it's set up…", but it was from an unsophisticated approach where I forgot to dialogue with people (Participant 4).

I was in a place in my practice where I had no room for flexibility. I hadn't worked through the issues of violence, I hadn't come to the conclusion of what is the best way that I can share the information or gain information from this person that's respectful from where they are but doesn't struck a button of mine, I hadn't yet learned that stuff through… (Participant 6).

Participant 11 added that unreflective practice also resulted in workers becoming oblivious of their own culture and thus unable to articulate how this informed and

163

guided their practices. This led to an inability to articulate with clarity the "why" of an encounter.

> *I think that people have to understand their own culture to understand where they're coming from to be clear. If you don't agree with that, that's very difficult for other people you're working with to see that lack of clarity. I suppose most of the individual therapy with people, from any culture, isn't clear "where you are". You're the "anchor point", you're the person "who expects us to know", if you don't [know your culture] then that makes it more difficult (Participant 11).*

B2c. *Being and Doing to Clients*: Culture of Niceness in Social Work

The "culture of niceness", as labelled by Participant 5, was referred to by eight Group B participants. It was described as being a product of the fear that was understood to dominate contemporary social work practice. This fear was said to emerge when social workers associated advocating for change within their professional role with risking being disliked and excluded by peers, managers and funding bodies. When this fear was seen to take hold of a social worker, Group B participants reported social worker's practice became preoccupied with preserving the status quo and following rules. Therefore a practitioner's work became focussed on compliance, obedience and fear rather than social justice, advocacy and change.

> *I would say that the culture of niceness has a very heavy impact on social work because it is about being liked…There is enough of me that really appreciates the struggles that workers have too in organisations to be able to have some sort of passion and caring for other social workers but at the end of the day my commitment is to the people we are here to serve…that's my priority and so that's where I'll go every single time. If it's about challenging, if that makes you less liked so be it (Participant 5).*

Participant 6 added that ethical dilemmas arose when practice became about "being nice" to both the referring agency and the client. She described ending her encounters with clients "paralysed" by the fear of not knowing what to do in the face of the predicament of either telling the client the real reason for the encounter or not disclosing the reason in order to keep a cordial relationship with the client and the referring agency.

> *[Although I was offering a voluntary service I felt] [H]e was involuntary, even though he agreed to come in to see me in the end his reasons for agreement came from a child protection involuntary push... So, I was uncomfortable in this space [and I felt I had to be nice to the referral agency and to him and carry through with the intervention]... I don't think there was anything that I did that was useful...I think he went away with a sense of "this is a must do" but with no real desire to do it or no understanding of why it might be useful for him...there were many, many things that were unspoken in the dynamics with this gentleman... In the end that person did a couple of sessions and I contacted the involuntary service [because I felt I had to] and said: "you've got the information that you need he doesn't need to come to me anymore" ... I was frightened of making it worse for him [if I questioned the usefulness of my intervention]. I was frightened of doing the wrong thing...I was immobilised by that fear...(Participant 6).*

This posture to practice was recognised as incongruent with social work values and unaware of clients' contexts. This practice posture was described as unworkable in offering and delivering helpful and relevant social work encounters to people of refugee background.

The presence of paternalism and the assimilation imperative during encounters that focused on *being and doing to clients* were the final thematic categories reported by Group B participants. Findings indicated that these two elements were key characteristics of the practice of *being and doing to clients* and

as outcomes of this practice posture. The relevant data is presented in the next section.

B3a. Paternalism as a Key Element and Outcome of *Being and Doing to Clients*

Participants 1, 2, 4, 5, 10, 11 and 12 stated that paternalism was a feature of social work encounters that adopted the *being and doing to clients* practice posture. Paternalism was seen as both a dominant element of such practice and as an outcome of such practice. Paternalism unfolded and resulted from practices when social workers' interventions imposed external factors such as laws, rules, regulations and organisational and professional mandates, Western values and ethics and, occasionally the social worker's own personal judgements on to the client.

> *[This experience] involved a period when we had two or four cases of violence against women perpetuated by a "keep the peace" type of thing going on in the organisation I work in. I was asked to go to a DVP program where they gathered up all the men. We talked about the serious repercussions about perpetrating violence against women in Australia...Despite the fact that I tried to be helpful "you know I'm not talking to everybody here...you know who you are..." I could just tell that it really [angered] people...that they weren't treated like individuals, that they were lot together as African men...I thought about it since, if I was put into a room with a bunch of Aussie blokes say with all the grade 12's and the principal stood there and said: "bla, bla, bla"...I'd be [angry] too...Just absolutely the wrong way to go about it in hindsight. Actually I stood there thinking, "this is stupid what am I doing? (Participant 4).*

> *I suppose what didn't work well [was that] I was working in an environment I wasn't quite familiar with...they had had a previous negative experience with an interpreter... in the end the staff wanted them to sign a consent form and they were refusing...I suppose I had some doubts myself about what they were being asked to sign and I wasn't clear about the process. So, in this case I thought, because*

the nursing staff actually asked me for help they said "Can you get these patients to sign the consent forms"...they just said "No...we'll sign it at the time if we need to"...but after the birth of course they didn't need the form signed...I just remember the Dad coming up to me really angry with me...I hadn't realised how upset I had made them by the simple fact of helping the staff get this form signed...I hadn't realised...it was such a significant thing for them, just when they were asking that simple question I all of a sudden shot off to the other side... (Participant 12).

While paternalism was described as being present during these encounters and also to involve the imposition of values and a disregard for the client's context, it was also associated with a desire to rescue the client. This desire to rescue the client was associated with the nature and the outcome of *being and doing to clients.* Participant 10 commented:

I've never felt before in my practice such strong invitation to rescuing...I got so caught up in that and I would forget that I've stepped into rescuing and I'd get quite defensive sometimes with the things I'm doing that I thought, "I'm caring here" where in actual fact these were rescuing practices. So, that's what I mean when I say it can get paternalistic...(Participant 10).

B3b. Assimilation as a Key Element and Outcome of *Being and Doing to Clients*

Participants 2, 5, 6, 9, 10 and 11 shared the view that the *being and doing to clients* practice posture contains an assimilative focus to practice. Assimilation was seen to be apparent when clients of refugee background were given the impression they needed to let go of, or completely change, home grown cultural beliefs, values and traditions that did not align with the Australian way of life.

The boys coming from Somalia, for example, they've been child soldiers and they come here and people say: "What are they doing

167

getting drunk and going out and fighting...how dare they..." We need to step into their space and understand that maybe they've never had any counselling around that. Maybe they've got PTSD or some sort of anxiety or depression because of what they've been through over there and we think that the refugee experience and coming here [is the end of that experience]... I start to wonder whether these boys from Africa can see what's happening, they're not stupid they can see these things in our society. I think a lot of the young African boys are realising that they're being treated very badly here. You get an article on the paper about a stabbing over night and it's a young African, you never see stuff about this young White Christian from Newstead...you know what I mean, but you will see things about young Muslims, Africans and Aboriginals (Participant 2).

Contrasting this view was the opinion of Participant 3 who believed that an assimilation focus was required to be delivered during all social work encounters with people of refugee background in order to keep this cohort of clients safe in Australia.

I suppose our role would be...about assimilating them to Australian culture... One of the things we pick up often is, "Well in our country if he had done this, this is how he would have been dealt with". Our culture is very different, the practices are very different. So, we're very mindful of what they're used to but then trying to explain to people that this is the culture here: "When the police come you don't necessarily get shot" (Participant 3).

Assimilation, as an element and an outcome of the *being and doing to clients*, was described by Participant 6 as an ideology that had infiltrated pockets of social work as a result of Australian social attitudes to refugees. It was her opinion that many people in Australia expected refugees to assimilate and take on Australian values and ways of life rather than encourage a blending and social accommodation of cultural differences. This assimilationist view was said to be

visible in social work in the subtle disengagement of some social workers with opportunities to dialogue with and learn from new arrivals in the community.

> *I'm standing in line this weekend, there was an Indian family standing beside me speaking their own language…And an Australian family in front of me, the Australian husband turned to his wife and said: "Why can't those people speak properly our language they're now in our bloody country"…I don't believe for a second that those views sit outside of social work because I've also taught social work… I've seen students of social work who get through the course who have an assimilation kind of processes whereby you come to Australia and you're expected to become Australian... All those things I believe are Australian attitudes that perforate the social work field… I think there are opportunities to challenge our selves but I don't know that we do that particularly successfully for any length of time… We see it in subtle ways. In the last two years there were lots of invitations for social workers to attend dialogues, different kinds of opportunities to gain mutual understanding, the vast majority of the field has not turned up to those and I think that actually says something about the priority that it's given, the confusion that people feel and the discomfort that we feel. I mean we as a discipline in Australia are used to coming in, sitting down and understanding the language and the effect that's before us in the client… And that's subtle, they're not going to say I'm doing it, they're not going to own that that's what's happening because it's not politically correct (Participant 6).*

Participant 9 was of the view that assimilation sat naturally and comfortably within the Australian social work culture, one that, in her opinion, was framed around Anglo-Saxon, white middle class beliefs and values that understood client difference as a deficit.

> *I think social work involved with refugees… seems to me to be more about an assimilation framework…To some extent I see social workers working with refugees in the early stages of settlement, getting them settled and trying to assist them to assimilate a bit into mainstream Australian culture and I think that's particularly prevalent of our own culture and the way that we view difference [as an issue]…I think we work with people of refugee background from a very white Anglo-Saxon privileged view point, very modern white*

middle-class values and beliefs. That's what I think would be good to shift (Participant 9).

Findings from Group B participant data indicated that the *being and doing to clients* as a social work practice posture with people of refugee background was considered an undesirable practice approach, and understood to compromise the helpfulness and relevancy of the social work encounter. Overall, the data highlighted the conundrum of competing contexts and ideologies faced by participants each time they encountered a client of refugee background and in their own practice contexts and professional culture.

5.4 Conclusion

The data presented in this chapter reflects two main conceptual themes relating to the nature of practice as experienced by Group B participants: the *being and doing with clients* and the *being and doing to clients*. Group B participants preferred the *being and doing with clients* social work practice posture with people of refugee background. The key to their preference was the relevance of clients' contexts to the social work encounter and how this posture aligned practice with social work cultural values of social justice.

The tools in practice for achieving this posture included advocacy, activism, learning and educating. Each of these tools for practice reinforced the benefits that Group B participants saw in developing relationships and partnerships with clients. These were said to facilitate dialogue, reflective practice

and also a mutual surfacing of context and clarity about why *doing and being with* works.

Group B participants saw little benefit in the practice posture that saw them *be and do to* clients as this posture was seen to ignore context, assume a paternalistic attitude towards clients, seek to assimilate clients to Australian society, and, led social workers to assume an expert stance in the face of the person of refugee background. These elements were described as problematic and some participants said these elements were outcomes of the *being and doing to* practice posture. This posture was said to reinforce the disempowerment of clients, unreflective social work practices and a culture of niceness that sabotaged change and perpetuated fear within the practice of social work.

In the next chapter I present the findings relating to participants who were social workers of refugee background (Group C participants). They referred to a journey of cultural exchanges and a social work with people of refugee background that was grounded in direct practices that traded between, rather than across, cultures.

CHAPTER SIX

Findings from Social Workers of Refugee Background

"I can see it from the inside out and the outside in…"

6.1 Introduction

Chapter Six reports the findings derived from Group C participants' responses. Group C participants emerged as a distinct cohort during analysis. They were all social workers trained in Australia and who were working in a variety of practice locations with a variety of clients. They had all arrived in Australia as refugees and they had initially chosen to be interviewed as either a social worker or a person of refugee background.

Despite choosing to be interviewed initially as either a social worker or a person of refugee background, during analysis the responses of this group were found to be unique in nature, revealing distinctly shared experiences as social workers of refugee background and also similar opinions about what they understood as the preferred way of practising social work with people of refugee background.

The first primary theme reported in this chapter relates to data regarding Group C participants' preferred approach to direct social work practice with people of refugee background, being – a practice focused on cultural exchanges.

As clients of social workers they also reported a preference for social work encounters in which cultural exchanges were experienced. For Group C participants, this type of practice felt intuitively natural and was also said to result from being both an insider and an outsider of the social work encounter with people of refugee background. In this insider/outsider role some participants described their practice as bi-cultural. Data regarding this thematic category is reported as a secondary theme in the chapter

The nature of the cultural exchange in social work practice with people of refugee background was understood by Group C participants as a process employed to facilitate people getting to know one another. It involved reciprocity between worker and client whereby both worker and client were expected to share experiences and values as a result of a shared desire to learn from one another.

Sensitivity to the client and their context was identified as another element of the preferred social work practice of cultural exchanges. This theme referred to the worker and how she/he was able to be sensitive to the client and their context by using the skills of flexibility in their approach to practice, learning, sharing of information and deep listening as part of their practice. Data regarding the use of these skills in the cultural exchange encounter are reported as sub-themes in the findings.

The last primary theme outlined in this chapter relates to data that made reference to the challenges that Group C participants faced in being able to exchange cultures during their social work practice with people of refugee background. The impact of professionalisation on social work and the impact of

working with social workers who do not attempt an exchange of culture during their practice are presented as secondary themes derived from the findings.

Table 6 outlines the major themes and the frequency of responses to each theme from Group C participants reported in this chapter.

Table 6: Frequency of themes amongst responses from Group C participants.

Theme in Data	Participant Number						
	25	26	27	28	29	30	31
A. The Nature of Social Work Practice is described as:							
1. A Cultural Exchange	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
2. Bi-cultural Practice	●	●		●			●
3. A practice sensitive to clients and their context	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
4. Being sensitive to clients and their context is achieved by the employing the skills of:							
4a. Flexibility		●			●	●	
4b. Sharing of Information	●		●		●		●
4c. Listening	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
B. The perception of challenges in cultural exchange social work practice.							
1. The challenges of cultural exchange social work practice are described as:							
1a. The impact of professionalisation on Australian social work	●	●	●	●	●		●
1b. The impact of other social work on practice approaches	●	●	●	●	●	●	●

6.2 The Nature of Social Work Practice: A Practice of Cultural Exchanges

Group C participants unanimously agreed that they preferred to focus their social work practice in encouraging and achieving cultural exchanges during

encounters with people of refugee background. As people of refugee background,

Group C participants added that, as clients of social work, they also preferred

experiencing cultural exchanges during an encounter with a social worker.

The cultural exchange was said to occur because encounters with people of

refugee background took place at the intersections of different cultures. The

cultural exchange was defined as a sharing of experiences, values and life

journeys, and an honest and overt acknowledgement that the encounter brought

two strangers together who were said to need to get to know each other before

they can learn from each other and work together.

> *social workers in Australia who are working with clients or people of refugee background are involved in an exchange…the exchange might be seen as welcomed or unwelcomed…in the exchange the worker brings his culture or her culture, his or her life journeys and even cultural norms like attending appointments on time and the role that the worker has to play as part of an agency or organisation…[in the cultural exchange] the client brings their cultural views, their customs, and basic things like their food, their language, their experiences good and bad, then that's what the person of refugee background gives and [it's]up to the worker to accept it or not (Participant 26).*

> *I like to start off from, "I don't know you, let's talk…I'm here to listen to your story, tell me what's going on?" Sometimes you'd have some transparency, for me personally I'd tell them "I've been there where you are today, I came as a refugee just like you have…"… There would be that mutual thing rather than the worker asking all the questions…the worker becomes part of your network, someone you can always rely on…they can see you as a friend, someone who's helped you through the journey (Participant 28).*

> *when the social worker meets this person for the first time and she gets a referral for this person for the first time she can say: "I got this referral, I'm here to help you and maybe you can tell me what you want us to do…it's better that you tell me, I would like you to tell me so we can work together"… Surely if I don't know you and*

> *this is the first time we meet I would definitely understand that this is the first time and you might not know much about my problem I'd be keen to tell you what's happening (Participant 27).*

Participant 26 expanded his response to add that, for him, the cultural exchange in practice was also an invitation. In this invitation he described how the social work encounter was offered as an option that begins with a willingness to invest in a relationship with the client and a belief that the invitation to work together may or may not be welcomed by the client. He stated that when the invitation is welcomed, the encounter is shaped by the client's point of view, hence their aims and objectives are prioritised.

> *Social work…has to be from the point of view of the person that you are with…I think the exchange begins by putting into a relationship with the client…it doesn't always work like this but in return sometimes….the invitation is there. I'd like to think that there is an invitation there that the client may decide to take or may decide not to take at that particular moment… (Participant 26).*

For Participant 25, however, the cultural exchange was said to be about the social worker understanding the client's context, their experience, and, their journey. During the exchange, the social worker seeks to clarify the social work role, making clear what social work is and how it occurs. The aim therein was said to be to clarify the worker's style, what their posture in practice is and how that posture shapes how they 'do' social work.

> *in working with these people it's all about understanding their context… As a social worker you need to understand exactly what they have gone through at any particular time…[also] that Australian social workers [explain] this is what they do and this is how they do it…Because if you just start working and you don't explain 'this is what I do' then this could traumatise them and they might not come back to you, they'll become upset and if one is upset*

they'll immediately pass that information to others and they'll say: "Don't go there they don't help"…The common thing [in these interactions] is that we both want to get our cultures together so we can interact (Participant 25).

The values that were reported to underpin the practice of cultural exchanges were said to include social justice and service to humanity. Participants 30 and 31 added that, in this practice, the client's resilience and strengths took precedence, while building community capacity was also considered to be an important element of working with a focus on the exchange of cultures.

Social work is about social justice, service to humanity, looking at people as equal members of humanity… [cultural exchange in social work with people of refugee background] it's the same except I look at these people and go "Wow, you have resilience". Everybody has, but I always look at myself and think you don't rescue people but these people they've been through a lot but they've survived so they have the strength to get out of it…It could be two words. It could be just an encouraging statement to make the person feel like, "Wow I can do this" (Participant 30).

[Cultural exchange in practice is about…] Community. People. You know working with the people for the people that's what it means you know. [Also] capacity building is what I see… (Participant 31).

Findings also indicated that some Group C participants identified the nature of the cultural exchange as bicultural practice. As such, they reported an intuitive desire to work towards the practice of cultural exchanges during encounters with people of refugee background.

A1. Bicultural Practice

Although not all Group C participants used the words "bicultural practice" to describe the cultural exchange with people of refugee background, Participants

25, 26, 28 and 31 did use this term. For them, being a social worker and a person of refugee background meant an almost intuitive preference for an exchange of cultures during a social work encounter and also a perception of such practice as a type of bicultural practice in which a blending of cultures occurs. Bicultural practice was described as both a benefit and a hindrance to the social work encounter with a person of refugee background. The benefits were unanimously described as including the insider perspective of both the refugee and resettlement experiences as well as the social work role in the Australian context. The difficulty experienced was in needing to continuously balance these insider perspectives with the outsider demands of being both a member of the refugee community and a professional social worker.

> *I can see it [social work with people of refugee background] from inside out and outside in because I'm a social worker, a community worker and again I'm also of refugee background…being a bi-cultural worker here [in Australia] I have to cross cultures everyday [so that's a cultural exchange process] anyway …it's a big learning curve and a big learning load…Sometimes a blend of the two is helpful because the more you know the better…It's knowing how to balance the two… it's really challenging… Drawing the line between the professional and the friendship [is also a challenge] because the client comes having heard about you as a community member but when they come I have to switch the professional role on and do the professional thing… Sometimes I feel guilty, sometimes I feel like I'm betraying the community… I am isolated which also affects me (Participant 31).*

Participants 25 and 28 added that bicultural practice with clients who had similar life experiences and were of similar racial background to them offered the client of refugee background a relevant point of cultural orientation upon arriving in Australia.

They [people of refugee background] always tell me how they prefer someone like me than an interpreter. At the airport, just seeing me makes things better…they relax even if I can't speak their language just seeing me…a black person they see me and say, "There's Africans here…so it's alright". When you arrive to a foreign country and seeing only white people around [is difficult] (Participant 25).

I think the first thing that I realise is they need to employ people from those backgrounds. So, that when the clients walk in they feel, "Yeah this is a place where I can walk in and they might understand me a bit better" [because they employ people of refugee background] (Participant 28).

However, although results in this thematic category indicated that participants felt a deep connection with the advantages they sensed in bicultural social work practice, they all emphasised feeling some degree of separation in not being able to explain to colleagues, community members and family members, the conflicting and demanding nature of achieving personal and professional balance in the bicultural nature of their professional social work role. Participant 31 summarised his experiences in the following terms:

it involves both sides of me like as a worker and as a community member and sometimes people misunderstand me. Like when I go to a community barbeque people say; "Oh, the social worker is coming". I come as me but they take me as a worker and sometimes I go as a worker and they think I'm me it's been a very hard one. I had to learn…to say "no". I cannot go…past Centrelink because I'm stopped to fill out a form or to go and interpret…I had to break up with my girlfriend because she doesn't understand what I go through, because I'm always on demand, phone calls I've got two phones, sometimes in the middle of the night I'd have to drive away and see someone who has an accident or something. She thought I was not caring and we broke up. (Participant 31).

For Participants 25, 26, 28 and 31, cultural exchanges with people of refugee background involved the negotiation of multiple competing practice

contexts and also a balancing of different cultures. Participant 26 reported that

bicultural practice was what allowed him to remember this process of balancing

different cultures when working with people of refugee background and

understanding the value of cultural exchanges in practice.

> *my culture is Latin American…and that comes in the way I see the world. Also, I work within Australia so I'm expected to be aware of the cultural expectations here like the importance of time and those two cultures within me play a role in working with refugee clients because I feel in my work I'm a gate keeper, I'm ticking boxes... [bicultural practice is a] reminder that it's very well to exchange cultural diversity but at the same time I feel like I'm a gate keeper because as a social worker it's a dilemma between control and care. I'm case managing but I'm also caring… two ends of the spectrum so to speak. I know I'm not alone because I have seen it in other social workers and I know that in my journey as a social worker I've had difficulties aligning my values with my practice because the agency I may work for, or the expectations of the funding body, does not take into account, it excludes culture. It expects the worker to behave ethically and be culturally competent but it really excludes [the benefits of exchanging culture in practice]. (Participant 26).*

In expanding their description of the nature of the cultural exchange

practice and how such practice was achieved, Group C participants emphasised

the importance of being sensitive to clients and their context as an element of the

cultural exchange: a sensitivity that was, in turn, facilitated by the deployment of

particular sets of skills. These results follow.

A2. Sensitivity to Clients and their Context

Group C participants highlighted sensitivity to clients and their context as

a key element of the cultural exchange in practice. This sensitivity was achieved

by the deployment of flexibility, learning, listening and sharing information as

practice skills. Participants 27 and 28 stated that sensitivity in practice was

evident in a welcoming worker, a worker that smiled and someone who made overt efforts to express an interest in the client.

> *some people [social workers] don't smile; some people smile throughout a conversation those sorts of personalities they also mean a lot to the clients. Some clients need comfort, when they don't confront these sorts of personalities in social workers they might think, "Wow, this is really bizarre maybe I won't go and see them…" Like workers need to be knowledgeable but open to the client as well like a friend otherwise people won't go to see them… (Participant 27).*

> *The welcoming is a big part [of exchanging culture in social work practice]…people need to see a cheerful face all the time. If you go into an organisation and the worker is frowning at you from the start you're not going to get anything from the client anyway…people's skills, the non-verbal cues go a great way like nodding, active listening because the person knows when you are listening…you can tell when somebody is trying to get the paper work out of the way and wants you to get out…It's good to be curious, you [referring to researcher] might find it a bit intrusive but it tells me that the person is interested in me, who I am, my culture and what I'm feeling (Participant 28).*

For Participants 25, 26 and 30, sensitivity to clients and their contexts was manifest when the social worker connected with the client and their story through genuine curiosity. In such instances, the social worker was described as being "in the world of the client", meaning they were not afraid of making mistakes; they were aware that traditional social work approaches may or may not suit the cultural context of the client; caring; and, they were aware that adjustments in their practice might be required. Thus, for Group C participants, sensitivity to clients and their contexts involved adopting a 'not knowing stance' to practice.

> *This sense of how you talk to them [people of refugee background], how close you are to them, their trauma stories, be simple that is the only thing that can bring us closer given we are from different*

cultures. For me, as a social worker working in different cultures, what I do is put myself in their situation. Even when they say, "I don't know how we can do this" I believe they still come with ideas. I may know what to do but I actually have to put myself in a place of not knowing...The building of the relationship is the best thing... (Participant 25).

I think it's [sensitivity in cultural exchanges] about being aware, for me it's a humble experience because it's about being aware that I may work and I have a professional mandate to work with different people some of them will be or come from a refugee or culturally and linguistically diverse background and others will be perhaps in a different part of their journey...I suppose, in the world of the client that's how I see it. It's not a talk down approach but it's being in the field with the person you work with learning from them what works and what needs to be changed (Participant 26).

Additionally, Group C participants described a 'non expert stance' that framed sensitivity in practice to clients and their context and thus the cultural exchange experience in practice.

You can't know everything, as long as your intentions are good and you're being nice and polite about it even if you offend somebody you can apologise I'm sure they would understand. Just like we don't know everything about the Australian culture there are some things that I get wrong. I might offend people unintentionally but I apologise "I didn't know that was part of this culture". As long as you are working with care I think then it should be fine (Participant 30).

A3a. The Practice Skill of Flexibility

Participants 26, 29 and 31 stated that employing flexibility as a social work skill facilitated sensitivity to clients and their contexts and formed part of what they saw as the practice of exchanging cultures with people of refugee background. Flexibility in practice involved a learning of, and a response to, the disparities that exist between the expectations and beliefs of clients of refugee

background and the services offered by social workers located across different practice contexts.

Flexibility also facilitated recognition of the knowledge gaps in practice. The knowledge required for cultural exchanges in practice with people of refugee background included the refugee experience, the resettlement experience, and migrant community profiles. Knowledge gaps were described as natural parts of working with people of different cultural backgrounds.

> *They [people of refugee background] have different expectations and they have different shared beliefs and different shared practices so as a social worker [who exchanges cultures and is sensitive to clients and their context] my culture is like a…reminder that there is more than one way of doing things…flexibility is necessary in working with people of refugee background (Participant 26).*

> *I'm not a doctor or a professional like that but I get training, health issues, cultural awareness, HIV, and it's [cultural exchanges] also about reading a lot and searching a lot on the net, going to conferences and listening (Participant 31).*

> *when I studied Aboriginal studies I learnt that a look to a person can tell a lot and someone actually not looking at you could be a mark of respect. Little things like that can be very big [for cultural exchanges and sensitivity to clients and their context] because an Australian social worker might be wanting to get a look to see that you are being acknowledged…when in fact they are but because of the other culture, how they relate to people and how they see respect working with someone who is totally different that totally offsets that connection… (Participant 29).*

A3b. The Practice Skill of Sharing Information

For Participants 25, 27, 29 and 31, the sharing of information was an important skill that facilitated cultural exchanges and sensitivity to clients and

their context in practice. The sharing of information with the client of refugee background was said to be the first step during a social work encounter that focused on cultural exchanges. This information included details about the social work role, the Australian welfare context and Australian culture. This information needed to be shared with the client in a relaxed conversation that invited the client to ask questions in their own time.

Participants also referred to the transmission and exchange of best practice between services, between the community and services, and, between individual clients and services as important additional methods of sharing information. This added element of sharing information was identified as important to facilitate a wider awareness of the needs of clients of refugee background and to build practice "know how" in relation to a diversity of client cohorts.

> *they [social workers that exchange culture in their practice] work as a translator sort of role where they provide knowledge in different services and assistance and being able to relay that to other services and other people that are relevant to that person…If you can explain the complexities to the system about what the person is experiencing, their lived experience, their culture, being able to relate to people from the same area like Africans how they relate to people, how they talk to people, their culture…you have the understanding, you have that knowhow and you have that practical knowledge that's needed and lots of people want… (Participant 29).*

> *here [in Australia] working with these people [of refugee background] is about actually giving them the awareness of how things work here and the process of actually solving their situation…Not a lot of questions…just conversation, just having a chat for a while and the questions come later…they don't really want to answer so many things they just want to talk. They're the ones that have questions for you…Just present yourself as a social worker. So, they know you…You can go for a walk, go for coffee, a walk around the park. Let them come up with the issues and the questions will come from there… (Participant 25).*

A3c. The Practice Skill of Listening

All Group C participants described listening as another skill that facilitated cultural exchanges and sensitivity to clients and their contexts in practice. Listening was considered beyond its practical characteristics. It was presented as deep reflective listening that invited listening to each particular client with compassion, genuineness, empathy and without judgement.

> *I didn't employ what you'd call any sort of grand skill, I had to listen, I had to learn to listen, I had to find avenues because my client did not attend appointments and that was not uncommon and if he did attend appointments he was one hour or two hours before or after his appointments or a week after his appointment... I had to listen with compassion every time I met him because I knew that he was a man much older than I, who has more wisdom than I, who has gone through war and God knows what else and he has survived and I respect that... (Participant 26).*

> *[Sensitivity in cultural exchanges] is about listening...all about learning and patience, you have to explore the world with your client. Not everything can be taught to you in school or at University... (Participant 31).*

Listening was described as a process in which the social worker learns to read the signals that each client gives during an encounter. These signals, as Participant 26 elaborated, were descriptors of what was observed to work well to support and be sensitive to a client, and conversely, were signals of what was observed to not work and seen to compromise a client's well being:

> *I don't mean listening by saying, "Ok, I listen to what you want..." but listening as well for other signs that he's giving me. That he is perhaps in pain or in difficulty... [It's beyond the simple act of listening] I think so yeah. Looking back I think it was. Because ...there were other things that were not there, other supports that*

were lacking…Some of the things that were not there were very basic things… (Participant 26).

Participants 29 and 30 offered their opinions as people of refugee background and added that, for them, experiencing a social worker who listened in the manner described above, offered a sense of being heard and an experience in which they felt validated and remembered by someone who cared to help them.

the social worker…she was really nice. I talked to her and I started crying because I was very upset, all she said was, "What do you want to do?...she was very respectful, very kind to me, and I was in a miserable situation…she listened to me...She was interested in what I was talking about (Participant 30).

having someone who actually listens to you, refers back to things that have been said and that are remembered is really important the fact that they've remembered your story is always really important…To me that's really important to remember, it's not always going to happen but little things if you can remember them to me shows that a person is really listening, really caring and really noticing you at that time… (Participant 29).

Participant 25 described listening as the means by which she felt able to explore options with her clients. She said that having felt valued from being heard, clients passed on the learning they had experienced during the encounter to others in their community.

the valuable thing was that using my social work practice was very, very good because…I was able to speak with them and offer options and explain consequences… to listen gave me options…And now what happened is that…what they learnt and what they experienced they passed onto other people... (Participant 25).

Group C participants outlined sensitivity to clients and their contexts as an important element of the cultural exchange practice. Flexibility, sharing

information and listening were described as the practice skills that facilitated sensitivity to clients and their contexts.

The following section reports the elements that Group C participants described as sometimes hindering the adoption of cultural exchanges as an approach to direct social work practice with people of refugee background.

6.3 The Challenges of Cultural Exchange Social Work Practice with People of Refugee Background

Group C participants did not describe a counterpoint to cultural exchange practice. For Group C participants, adopting cultural exchanges as a focus to social work practice with people of refugee background attracted challenges. It is noteworthy that data in relation to these challenges tended to derive from Group C participants' stance as social workers of refugee background more so than from their stance as people of refugee background. Nevertheless, the challenges reported by Group C participants in adopting cultural exchanges as a focus in their practice included their understandings of the impact of professionalisation on Australian social work and the impact of working alongside a social worker who did not adopt a practice focused on cultural exchanges with clients of refugee background.

B1a. The Impact of Professionalisation

Except for Participant 30, all Group C participants described an ideological and value clash between professionalisation and social work. The

impact of such a clash was said to be most evident during direct social work practice as this was seen as the site for the convergence of multiple cultural contexts derived from multiple ideologies and world-views.

As Participant 26 described, each of these contexts was seen as having their own unique culture and each culture was seen as having its own set of values. The culture of social work was understood to align with social justice and human rights values while, however the culture of professionalisation was seen to align with neo-liberal values of competition, efficiency, mitigation of risk and rationalism. Contexts were said to clash when values clashed. For Participant 26, cultural exchanges in social work practice with a person of refugee background involved negotiating with clients the tensions and clashes between the multiple contexts that intersected during the social work encounter.

> *My social work professional culture more than anything else [is what I have problems with] because my own culture will always be different to the Australian one and to the person I'm working with but its more to do with my social work environment...Like the culture of work, the professional mandate that they have will impact on the worker. The expectations of the funding bodies it's a different culture that expects that a person will engage in contact with me as a case worker...I have to negotiate [all that]...and...I can't negotiate it without including the client (Participant 26).*

Participant 25, however, stated that, for her, cultural exchanges in practice meant having to wait for the client to experience enough of the Australian social work context in order for them to recognise that ideological and value clashes were an inevitable part of accessing social work services in Australia and not necessarily a product of a worker's own approach to social work practice.

When I'd say, "You are the expert, you have to tell me, if you don't want something you have to tell me because I can't tell you I'm not part of your life, I'm a worker", she got upset at that…there is a lot of clashes with clients on that…they still come back because they go to other places and find the same thing… they come back only because I'm of their background [and my practice offers them a chance to exchange cultures] (Participant 25).

Group C participants also referred to professionalisation as having infiltrated social work culture in Australia. Participants described how 'Western' social work in Australia had become seduced by risk-focused practices such as the enforcement of rigid boundaries and the invalidation of what are seen as non-traditional practices such as giving advice to clients. For Participant 27, cultural exchanges in practice in the face of such infiltrations to social work culture meant limiting his ability to respond to the contexts and the needs of clients of refugee background.

The model that governs social workers here [in Australia] is limited because of the boundaries, the professional boundaries. If you examine critically you can't make suggestions, you can't share your experiences and the client can't come up with suggestions [because] he feels hopeless…maybe the suggestions could work. Suggesting for the client, not for yourself but for the client, "how does this sound?"…you are taught to see the client as self contained. For someone who has been to school it might be different but for someone who hasn't it's difficult they have nothing to say, they have not have to be creative before so they don't know how to think, to be able to tackle problems. So, it makes the Western way very difficult (Participant 27).

Participant 28 added that the infiltration of social work in Australia by professionalisation helped to promote ethnocentricity in practice. In such instances, social work was said to diverge from its culture and thus its values of social justice and human rights, limiting the capacity of the social worker to

engage with the client's cultural contexts and thus negating a focus in their practice on cultural exchanges.

> *Social work in Australia working with people of CALD background tends to be a little bit tricky because social workers use their ethnocentric lens to view people of refugee background. They want people to behave the same way as Australians and as a result of that most of the time they get things wrong… I think it's based on their values and their beliefs and those come from being an Australian professional…you have to obey all those organisational codes of ethics…then you have social work values and ethics and then you have individual values and beliefs systems. So, it causes a whole lot of problems… sometimes [all this] overshadow[s] your own personal values and beliefs systems (Participant 28).*

Similarly, Participant 31 added that he felt unable *"to do more"* in his role as social worker to stop the infiltration of professionalisation. However, he felt that as a result of focusing his practice on cultural exchanges, he had learnt to bypass professionalisation by meeting with clients of refugee background as friends rather than as a social worker.

> *I feel I professionally would like to do more. To do more in general, to have the capacity to do more in general …I had to do orientation work like how to use a washing machine, a phone, things like that and they [clients of refugee background] become so close they become like part of the family which professionally is not good…So, sometimes the boundaries are blurred…I find my own way around it because with the professional role they just talk to me about certain things and they can't go outside that, with the friendship role they can (Participant 31).*

The data derived from Group C participants outlined professionalisation in Australia and its infiltration of Australian social work as a significant challenge in adopting a practice focused on cultural exchanges with people of refugee background.

The next thematic sub-category identifies another challenge in adopting the cultural exchange practice, that being - encountering other social workers who do not focus their practice on cultural exchanges.

B1b. The Impact of Other Social Work Practice Approaches

Results indicate that all Group C participants saw a significant challenge in cultural exchange practice when working alongside other social work colleagues who do not adopt a similar practice approach. Such working relationships were described as difficult because clients were observed to be caught between approaches that were often contradictory in nature. For Participant 26, this meant witnessing a worker's approach to practice diminishing a client's humanity through judgment and the adoption of a deficit focus.

> *there are different professional…ways of doing things… my client is there, I'm there and the other social worker is there…I explained my role and why I was there and my client felt confronted that he had to justify himself to the other worker and the other worker unfortunately was making comments like, "Such and such (the clients name) may not be doing this because of this and this and that…" There were judgements made as if my client was not going to achieve what he wanted…I've been working with this person to focus on what he could do, what he could change, what he could improve…he was being told that he wasn't good enough, that he was not prepared for this, that he had this, he has that, he has an alcohol addiction…I was thinking on the humanity of my client. I wasn't going to reduce him to addictions…That particular room that day was divided into to two areas, unfortunately, two areas (Participant 26).*

Participant 31 believed social workers would sometimes extend their practice approach to their interactions with colleagues in the workplace. He reported a situation in which he felt misunderstood by a colleague. He described

his social work colleague as someone who had not sought a cultural exchange with him and, as a result, acted on an assumption that his behaviour in the workplace had been due to stress related anxiety rather than trauma related to his refugee experience.

> *there are a lot [social workers I work with] who just don't understand…My level of stress can be different to the level of stress of an Australian. My trauma or depression is the result of war, someone can be crazy because of drugs but someone can also be crazy because of the result of war...So, to understand that makes a difference (Participant 31).*

In summary, Group C participants stated that the practice approaches of other social workers were sometimes problematic during encounters with people of refugee background. Deviations from cultural exchanges in practice were seen to compromise the consistency of the service offered to clients of refugee background and were thus understood as potential disruptions to clients' voices during such encounters.

6.4 Conclusion

Results presented in this chapter reveal the unique perspective of social workers who are of refugee background. The findings relate the perspective of participants who reported an intuitive preference for cultural exchanges in practice – a type of practice derived from being both an insider and an outsider to the social work encounter with people of refugee background. This type of practice was also seen as a type of bicultural practice that facilitated the balance required

to practice cultural exchanges between, within and across multiple cultural contexts.

Group C participants did not identify a less preferred type of practice for social work with people of refugee background but they highlighted a set of external challenges for any social worker focusing their practice on cultural exchanges. These were identified as the influence of professionalisation on Australian social work, and conflict with other approaches to practice that did not focus on cultural exchanges.

Chapter Seven discusses all of the findings of my research with reference to relevant literature. In addition, it attempts to draw together and synthesise key findings from this study to propose an emerging relational framework for social work practice with people of refugee background.

CHAPTER SEVEN

Discussion of Findings

"How can I be a better friend to you?"

7.1 Introduction

This thesis has explored the experiences of social work practice with people of refugee background from the perspectives of three participant cohorts: Group A - people of refugee background; Group B - social workers not of refugee background that have worked with clients of refugee background; and, Group C - social workers of refugee background.

The study sought to answer the primary research question, 'how is direct social work practice with people of refugee background understood and experienced?' This study aimed to develop new knowledge and inform social work practice theory with people of refugee background through documenting the lived experience of direct social work practice with both people of refugee background and social workers. The process of answering the research question involved hearing personal experiences of social work encounters.

The underlying and common link between the findings from each cohort was the central importance of relationship between social worker and the client of refugee background. This relationship (either in its presence or absence) became

the key determinant of direct social work practice that was regarded as helpful, meaningful and effective with people of refugee background.

What follows is a detailed, nuanced discussion and analysis of the findings of this study. The discussion in this chapter considers how participants gave meaning to the relationships they experienced in social work encounters with people of refugee background and how these, in turn, defined positive, meaningful and effective direct social work practice. The analysis of the findings is interlaced with critical analysis and discussion of relevant literature. The main finding of this study, the central importance of a relational point of reference, is also discussed and proposed as being a key defining component in direct social work practice with people of refugee background.

The chapter is divided into four main sections. The first three sections discuss the findings related to Groups A, B and C participants. The final section distils from these findings the ingredients of a relational standpoint for positive, meaningful and effective direct social work practice with people of refugee background.

7.2 Participants of Refugee Background – The Positive and the Negative Social Work Encounter

All Group A participants identified and described two distinct experiences during interactions with social workers – the positive and the negative experience. Experiencing help and change were the elements that this group understood to frame the positive encounter with a social worker, while the absence of help and

change characterised the negative encounter. For participants of refugee background, experiencing help and positive change in their lives involved having their needs noticed by the social worker, their wishes heard and their contexts acknowledged and respected. Positive change was described as being inherently cultural in nature, with people of refugee backgrounds being assisted by the social worker to learn and understand Australian society and Australian people, which would then subsequently enable them to make personal decisions about the type and pace of the transition that they could make to an Australian way of life. These experiences were associated with social workers being in relationships with people of refugee background, being in their lives as friends and partners, valuing their strengths, and acting as advocates for human rights and social justice.

These findings contradict the significant proportion of the expectations set by government agencies, such as the Department of Immigration and Citizenship (DIAC), who fund refugee resettlement services on the basis of the provision of practical and psycho-social support for resettling refugees. As Westoby and Ingamells (2010) suggest, funding bodies' expectations have served to justify approaches to social work practice with people of refugee background that are based on the positive encounter being framed around knowing how to do trauma recovery work and not on facilitating relational socio-cultural understandings between worker and client; the latter approach is certainly affirmed by the findings of this research. Adamson (2005) agrees and adds that the attempt to link social work practice with people of refugee background to trauma recovery and biomedical frameworks has seduced social workers into believing that this field of

practice relies on one set of linear know-how that is predictable, logical and non-relational in nature.

Group A participants' experiences of the social work encounter with a person of refugee background highlights learning what was helpful and what was not helpful during an encounter as an element of practice that occurred in relationships with social workers. According to participants, these relationships were born and shaped by the friendships and partnerships that a positive encounter offered both social workers and clients. This finding challenges the accepted ideas of professionalism in social work as outlined by the Code of Ethics (AASW 2010). The Code includes a section about professional boundaries (2010, p. 22) describing the importance of social workers and clients setting and maintaining clear professional boundaries that facilitate a discrete differentiation between what is personal and what is professional conduct during a social work encounter. This section in the Code represents the hallmarks of what is considered 'being professional' in social work practice. This study challenges the relevancy and usefulness of this section in the Code given its focus on relationships, friendships and partnerships between social workers and clients of refugee background as being the foundation of positive and helpful social work encounters with people of refugee background.

Findings in this study also challenge the ideas by Lum (2007), Fong (2004), Kaur (2007) Walker (2005) and Boyle and Springer (2001) that support culturally competent and sensitive practice approaches as being preferable and indeed "crucial to sound social work practice" with people of refugee background

(Boyle and Springer 2001, p. 53). These authors encourage social workers to approach practice in terms of the acquisition of "cultural competence [or] the ability to understand the dimensions of culture and cultural practice and apply them to the client and the cultural/social environment" (Lum 2007, p. 112) as the basis for positive encounters with client groups such as people of refugee background. Such understandings of practice oppose the findings in this study by suggesting that social work encounters with people of refugee background rely on the social worker independently learning how to be culturally competent before the encounter and outside of a relationship with the client.

In this study, relationships between social worker and client of refugee background were described by Group A participants as the mechanism that revealed practice, a mechanism that discerned in the context of the encounter what seemed to be helpful, positive and effective social work practice with people of refugee background.

The relationships that framed the positive social work encounter for Group A participants were also described as being influenced by the culture of the social worker and that of the client. All but one participant in this group agreed that their experiences of a positive social work encounter included a friendship and partnership with the social worker where both the culture of the social worker and the culture of the client were valued and acted as sources of knowledge for direct social work practice. Furthermore, it was asserted that, in this relational setting, the social worker acted as bridge with the client as partner, through a

process of dialogue, mutual cultural understanding and iterative co-negotiation to define the aspects of culture that were relevant to the encounter.

While this finding supports Williams' (2006) constructivist paradigm for culturally competent social work practice approaches and Westoby's (2009) understanding of culture as defined in context through group experiences, this finding is a distinct deviation from literature that supports and promotes culturally competent and sensitive approaches to practice, as they have been defined, as being the preferable approaches in direct practice with clients of diverse cultural backgrounds.

As key supporters and promoters of such approaches to practice Lum (2007), Fong (2004) and Boyle and Springer (2001) argue that cultural competence requires an independent analysis by the social worker of what culture is, of their own cultural identity, and of their own cultural biases in order to filter out the influences of these on practice. This literature makes no mention, however, of a possible role for dialogue and mutuality with the client as partner in the worker's analysis of culture. Yan and Wong (2005) point out that this literature also relies on the unspoken assumption that social workers are equipped with, and thus able to transcend, cultural bias in order to distil the elements of a culturally competent approach to social work practice. Prominent understandings of how social workers undertake analyses of culture within practice support a more hierarchical relationship between worker and client – it is the worker who is considered the capable agent for neutralising cultural influences during a social

work encounter, while the client remains embedded in their role as an object of different cultural background (Yan and Wong 2005, p. 181).

Group A participants' descriptions of a social work encounter that they regarded as positive, relied on experiencing a relational process between worker and client of refuge background. This relational process was described as being supported by and being an outcome of dialogue between worker and client, mutual learning by worker and client of each other's culture, and, co-negotiation of how this shared learning informed direct social work practice. These findings challenge the position of Lum (2007), Fong (2004) and Boyle and Springer (2001) as proponents of culturally competent and sensitive approaches to practice. The findings of my study echo the call made by Yan and Wong (2005) for developing a 'dialogical self' in cross-cultural social work.

The literature supporting and promoting culturally competent and sensitive approaches to practice describes the outcome of such practice as efficient and effective cross-cultural social work, although efficiency and effectiveness remain undefined (Lum 2007, Kaur 2007, Walker 2005). The findings of my study suggest, based on the experiences of all but three Group A participants, that the outcome of a positive, helpful encounter with a social worker was the experience of positive change.

Positive change was defined by Group A participants as assisted learning of the cultural adjustments that make possible a positive integration into Australian society. These cultural adjustments were not described as a process of assimilating to Australian life in response to Australian social expectations as

Hugo (2011) suggests. Instead, Group A participants said helpful practice happened when they were supported through a multitude of positive social interactions (including the positive relational encounter with a social worker) to learn and make cultural adjustments at their own pace, in their own contexts and over an undefined period.

This finding is worth considering in the context of Barnes's (1998), Cemlyn and Briskman's (2003) and Briskman and Cemly's (2005) work which examined the impact of immigration and refugee resettlement policy on people of refugee background. They relate that, at the heart of the problems that, refugees encounter in resettling in Australia are the constant social, political, cultural and economic pressures that are placed upon them to adopt the language and customs of Australia. This pressure serves to legitimise the marginalisation of people of refugee background.

These observations are paralleled by the conclusions drawn by Barnes (2001) in her study of the resettlement experiences of Vietnamese refugees in Australia. In her research, while participants spoke of feeling a "sense of belonging in Australia" (Barnes 2001, p. 396), the majority of participants stated that their transient connection to Australia as their home was often not recognised. Westoby and Ingamells (2010) interpret the pressure imposed on people of refugee background in Australia as a pressure imposed by social policy delivered through social and resettlement support services, health and human services practitioners and community volunteers alike who fail to identify the role of the

socio-political context on the lives of people of refugee background resettling in Australia.

This failure to identify the socio-political context is said to undermine the refugee resettlement experience, producing social work practices that are described as apolitical, decontextualised, unreflexive and colonising (Westoby and Ingamells 2010). Westoby and Ingamells (2010) go further to suggest that such a landscape of practice calls for "relationships, networks, long-haul commitments, imagination and the reflexivity to stay outside the narrow service delivery base…" (Westoby and Ingamells 2010, p. 1772).

A negative social work encounter for participants of refugee background involved the absence of the experience of help and change. In these encounters, participants felt isolated, invisible and forced to quickly integrate into Australian society. They experienced social work practices and social workers dominated by rules and preoccupied with maintaining boundaries. The feelings of isolation, invisibility and forced integration to an Australian way of life were described by Group A participants as signalling the absence of positive change due to the negative social work encounter.

The social worker described in these negative encounters resembles Westoby and Ingamells' (2010) description of the social worker seduced by neo-liberal ideology and the 'passive social work role' described by Cemlyn and Briskman (2003). These authors assert that, in the face of neo-liberal ideology and punitive refugee social and policy discourses, both the human services and social work practice landscapes have shifted towards evidence-based practice and the

valuing of individualised, highly structured, planned practices and disciplinary management of clients (Westoby and Ingamells 2010, p. 1762). The focus on individualised responsibility in the contemporary neo-liberal context exerts pressure on refugees at an individual level and runs counter to the valuing and operation of collective, community-oriented cultures.

Such practice environments promote a passive practice approach where social work becomes complicit with policy frameworks that promote assimilation and a 'hostile reception' for people of refugee background (Cemlyn and Briskman 2003). This coincided with Group A participants' descriptions of the negative social work encounter as an experience that left them feeling that direct social work practice was a practice of following rules, regulations, establishing and maintaining boundaries.

Participants also spoke of this experience as being driven by the social worker's own predetermined considerations of what would be valuable and useful for the encounter with the client of refugee background. The absence of the social worker as the friend and partner also marked the negative experience. In these experiences, social workers were spoken of as being disinterested in cultural contexts. Group A participants described feeling invisible and irrelevant in such encounters, forced and rushed to change their values to quickly fit into Australian norms.

These findings parallel what Westoby and Ingamells (2010) describe as social work practice being seduced by neo-liberal imperatives. They argue such practice environments leave social workers feeling distrustful of alternatives to

practice as these are considered poorly theorised and articulated and thus less likely to attract funding, organisational support and professional legitimacy (Westoby and Ingamells 2010, p. 1761). These findings also parallel Robinson's (2013) study who described the concerns of practitioners she interviewed who reported that as a result of the demands placed on them by neo-liberal policy frameworks, their practice at times left clients of refugee background feeling unsupported, confused and at times even discriminated against.

The findings of my study highlight the importance of understanding the lived experience of social work practice by participants of refugee background. Their experiences challenge the accepted existing ideas of direct practice with people of refugee background by suggesting that at the heart of positive encounters with social workers is a relationship founded on partnership, friendship, dialogue and mutual understanding of cultural contexts. The following section discusses the findings from Group B participants who were social workers who were not of refugee background.

7.3 Social Work Participants – The Values of Practice with People of Refugee Background

All social workers not of refugee background that comprised Group B participants, spoke of social work practice with people of refugee background as involving two kinds of experience: a more preferable experience of *being with the client*; and, a less favourable experience of a *being to clients*. The *being with and being to clients* as social work practice postures are concepts developed from the

analysis of findings in this research. They represent an attempt to represent conceptual themes in the stories and experiences of Group B participants.

Being with clients of refugee background was described as an experience where social work practice was aligned with core social work values of social justice, human rights, respect, dignity, service to humanity and integrity. *Being to clients* was an experience described by this cohort as a practice less aligned with core social work values. Each of these experiences of *being* in practice was associated with particular ways of *doing* practice.

Being with the client of refugee background was described by Group B participants as an experience that involved forging relationships with clients. In these relationships, Group B participants spoke of learning with the client, during the social work encounter, aspects of practice that were relevant and useful to the encounter. *Being to clients* involved doing social work in a way that was more removed from core social work values in practice such as being unreflective; acting to assimilate the client to Australian society; seeing and treating the client as powerless; and, being preoccupied with maintaining boundaries in practice.

The findings from this cohort coincide with how Group A participants described their experiences of both positive and negative social work encounters. Both cohorts related the importance of the context of the encounter for shaping and forging relationships between worker and client and for defining the kind of encounter that was experienced. Both cohorts located the relationship between worker and client as central to defining the kind of experience that was had in social work encounters with people of refugee background. These findings also

parallel suggestions made by Williams (2006), who refers to epistemologically-defined paradigms as frameworks for understanding and operationalising social work practice with clients of diverse cultural backgrounds.

7.3.1 *Being With the Client* **of Refugee Background**

The *being with the client* practice experience was also associated with *doing* practice that involved acknowledging, learning and integrating the client; their experiences; their social, economic, political and cultural contexts; and, the social worker and their personal culture and professional context. This finding again parallels Group A's description of the positive encounter. Group B Participants 3, 6, 9 and 12 highlighted how this experience of practice validated the need to redefine professionalism, professional boundaries and what constituted a safe emotional distance in the context of these encounters.

This finding is supported by Gray et al's. (2013) and Fox's (2010) work that asserts that the multicultural setting demands an open debate about what becomes ideal and professional in contexts where the local cultural realities question the relevancy and validity of Western constructs, values and ideologies for social work practice. Midgley (2008) goes further to suggest that the absence of a redefined meaning of professionalism in the face of multicultural practice simply reinforces social work practice as a limited and imperialistic practice helping to sustain hegemony and control rather than uphold the ideals of human rights and social justice that frame core social work values.

7.3.2 The Nature of Relationships in the *Being With Clients* Practice Experience

Personal relationships with clients in a *being with* experience of practice were described by 10 out of 12 participants in this cohort as both a key characteristic and outcome of this experience. These relationships were described as conduits of trust that facilitated the clarification of mutual expectations and the equalisation of power between worker and client. The *being with clients* experience of practice was also described as one in which the relationship between social worker and client offered flexibility and time to be with one another, purely for the purpose of getting to know each other. Social workers were described as being curious, respectful and honest in these relationships, qualities that were seen by Group B participants as products of being guided in practice by core social work values and the client's story.

Westoby (2009) argues that to forge relationships with clients in practice framed on core social work values, means forging a dialogical relationship. Such relationships are said to move beyond the fleeting connection of individuals to a practice founded on an intention to commit to finding common spaces to exchange human connection. Dean (2001, p. 628) proposes that such relationships in social work are not about gaining knowledge of clients but rather understanding that multicultural practice involves "understanding that we are engaging in building relationship[s]…This understanding needs to be directed towards ourselves and not just our clients".

Group B participants also offered their perspectives on the nature of how issues such as culture within relationships, between worker and client, are examined and treated during the *being with client* experiences. Culture was said to play an important role in informing and shaping the *being with* practice experience for clients. In this context, culture was described as being understood as an ever-changing element of a person's life and as such, was said to require ongoing and open discussion as well as mutual adjustment between client and worker during the encounter.

This finding suggests Group B participants understood culture as a dynamic concept defined in the context of practice with the client. This contradicts what Wong et al. (2003) describe as the fundamental conceptualisation of culture in writings about culturally competent approaches to practice. These writings conceptualise culture as a set of unified systems of meanings, stereotypical traits, uniform and static that help the social worker define what 'know-how' is necessary prior to the encounter with the client to bring about certain and effective practice (Dean 2001).

In articulating culture as an important, dynamic and co-constructed element of the *being with* encounter, Group B participants highlighted how their lived experience of such encounters correlated with the indigenisation of social work debate that describes multicultural social work practice as being the product of a collective understanding of both the worker's culture and the client's culture during an interaction framed in mutual reflexivity, dignity and respect for each other's culture (Gray et al. 2013, Gray and Coates, 2010).

According to Group B participants, multiple cultures were said to intersect in the *being with* practice experience. Participants of this group described the intersection of cultures as a process that involved a deeper learning about their own culture, as individuals and professionals, alongside a deeper learning of the culture of the client. The intersection of multiple cultures, including organisational cultures, during the *being with* practice experience was also seen by this group to bring with it an increased complexity to the practice environment. All Group B participants agreed that, in such encounters, cultures often clashed, influencing both practice and outcomes for clients. Such clashes were described as opportunities for deeper learning and connection between worker and client.

These findings suggest a close affinity with what Westoby and Ingamells (2010) and Nelson et al. (2013) describe as the tenets of a critically-informed and human rights-focused social work practice. These scholars are critical of what they perceive is a lack of substantial debate within social work and in social work encounters with clients regarding issues of race and culture. They argue that a practice that facilitates a space to meaningfully discuss with clients issues of culture, cultural clashes and the intersection of cultures in practice is a practice that recognises racism and oppression as products of uncontested power and privilege (Westoby and Ingamells 2010). Furthermore, Nelson et al. (2013) state that such practice is characteristic of a practice framed by human rights where dialogue on issues of culture and racism is critical to bridging differences.

7.3.3 The Role of Dialogue and Mutuality in the *Being With Clients* Practice Experience

In the context of sharing their understanding of how personal relationships with clients during the *being with* practice experience developed, 10 out of 12 Group B participants referred to dialogue and mutuality. Dialogue was described as underpinning both the intent to engage authentically with clients as well as the manner in which relationships developed between worker and client during these encounters. Participant 4 described these relationships as "dialogical relationships" and explained that any perceived practice expertise derived solely from the human connection and partnership with the client that such relationships offered. This finding is supported directly by Westoby and Ingamells (2010) who conclude that dialogue and mutuality enable, and are products of, dialogical relationships with clients in practice.

Participant 11 added that these dialogical relationships functioned as a cyclical process of mutual learning between worker and client. According to Group B participants, this learning included the learning of self in practice, the learning of client in the encounter and the exchange of these learnings between worker and client during the encounter. Mutuality in these dialogical relationships was described as the mechanism by which worker and client were able to share with each other their contexts, their differences, their skills and their knowledge flexibly and respectfully – reinforcing the trust and partnership that participants described as being present in the *being with* practice experience.

The relevance of these findings is significant in light of the ideas that have been theorised by scholars such as Gray et al. (2013), Briskman (2008), and, Quinn (2009) who formulate indigenised, decolonised and critically informed anti-racist social work practice as new imperatives for practice with clients of diverse cultural background such as people of refugee background. These scholars refer to dialogical processes in indigenised and decolonised social work practice as the basis for context-driven encounters that involve "giving up power of dominance [as a worker]… relinqui[shing] one's own cultural ways of making meaning…learn[ing] new ones [from the client]…It involves [a practice of] acceptance of, and engagement with uncertainty and discomfort" (Quinn 2009, p. 103).

7.3.4 Tools for Practising the *Being With Clients*

Group B participants described several tools for adopting and practising the *being with clients* posture. These included advocacy and activism, two-way learning and educating. Ten out of 12 participants in this cohort described advocacy and activism interchangeably to refer to how these elements of practice involved securing a voice and power for the client through the facilitation of access to resources by the client and being prepared to view the *being with clients* practice experience as political in nature. The latter was described by eight Group B participants as involving acts of supporting structural change in practice.

Structural change was defined as actions taken in direct practice to align social work practices to the core social work values of social justice and human rights. Participant 4 described his experiences of using advocacy and activism in

the *being with clients* encounter to approach practice with a "bigger picture" mindset, seeking to connect the client's individual circumstances with local and global issues and targeting actions towards multiple layers of society dynamically in order to achieve social justice.

This finding is directly supported by Nash, Wong and Trlin (2006) who reported that social workers in New Zealand working with people of refugee background found that this field of practice relied on the use of macro, meso and micro levels of practice. Social work participants in Valtonen's (2001) study also supported the idea that acts of supporting structural change in practice proved part of a positive encounter with people of refugee background as they involved the integration of micro and macro skills that facilitated a link between the world of the client and the world of bureaucracies and the host community at large.

For four Group B participants, the *being with clients* approach involved being prepared to learn, identify and respond to opportunities for change at both the structural systems and personal levels. For two other participants, this also involved being creative and innovative in the employment of advocacy and activism as tools for *being with clients*. These findings mirror the findings of Robinson (2013) whose work explored the experiences of social workers working with people of refugee background. In her study Robinson (2013) offers that direct social work practice with people of refugee background warrants the consideration of socio-political and cultural contexts and evokes a politically 'deviant' social work role that involves protesting and advocating for rights of people. Such a social work role is associated with developing relationships with

clients in practice and in these relationships, the worker is able to find the

necessary support to counter the effects of neo-liberalism in the resettlement

sector and can also offer the client the support to act against racism in the

community (Robinson 2013).

The *being with clients* using advocacy and activism and involving acts of

structural change in practice, as described by participants of this study, also

correlates with findings from Russell and White's (2001) study of the lived

experience of practice by social workers working with clients such as people of

refugee background in Canada. They conclude that a *proactive service provision*

model involving cultural bridging, brokering of services and advocacy for systems

sensitivity best facilitated participants' positive experiences of their practice with

immigrant clients.

All but one Group B participant spoke of their experiences of *being with*

clients as involving, and resulting from, the use of a two-way learning process.

This process reinforced for participants the importance and relevancy of client and

worker contexts to the social work encounter. This finding parallels findings from

Group A participants, as they too related the positive encounter as one that was

reliant on both the social worker and the client learning from each other's contexts

during the encounter.

Group B participants described two-way learning as a form of critically

reflective practice that invited the client's scrutiny of the worker's social work

practice. As a process, derived from and supportive of the *being with clients*

practice experience, two-way learning was also associated with the *being with and*

doing with clients experienced by participants as an ever evolving context. As such, a similar number of Group B participants felt the process of two-way learning made possible, and was supported by, efforts to share that learning with the broader community through education on issues such as the refugee and resettlement experiences. These attempts to educate the public were seen by participants as tools for raising public awareness and a means of demystifying what was known publicly about people of refugee background.

Being and doing with clients, as described by Group B participants, resonated with the previous cohort's descriptions of what they experienced in positive encounters with social workers. The experience of this participant group of the *being and doing with clients* also resonates with Williams' (2006) ideas about a critical and postmodern paradigm that informs the understanding and operationalising of practice. The critical and postmodern paradigm favours considerations of socio-cultural and political contexts of worker and client and how these shape their encounters. Learning to recognise these contexts through dialogue and relationships frame the fundamentals of Williams' (2006) ideas about what characterises the critical and postmodern paradigm to practice.

7.3.5 The *Being To* the Client of Refugee Background

A second type of practice was also experienced and/or witnessed by 11 out of 12 Group B participants – a *being and doing to clients*. This type of practice experience was identified as the least preferred way of engaging in social work with people of refugee background. Participants described this practice experience as the outcome of diverting from the *being* and *doing with clients*.

As an experience and a type of practice, the *being* and *doing to clients* involved working in isolation from the client's contexts. It reflected a box-ticking approach to practice that privileged the worker's own individual responses to policy agendas and the worker's own personal stance on issues surrounding the resettlement of refugees in Australia. In some cases, the values of organisations were privileged over the lived experiences of clients. Participants 2, 6, 9 and 10 described it as a type of racist, assimilationist, paternalistic and rescuing practice that sought to promote coping and adjustment to disadvantage by clients rather than core social work values of social justice and human rights.

Participant 10 added that the *being* and *doing to clients* was a type of professionalised practice defined by corporate values. Several other characteristics were assigned by this group of participants to the *being* and *doing to* clients practice experience including:

- the irrelevancy of culture to the social work encounter;

- the importance of expertise in being able to categorise difference;

- the absence of personal relationships with clients;

- the absence of dialogue with clients; and,

- the focus given to boundaries.

These findings suggest that the *being* and *doing to clients*, according to Group B participants, was a practice experience in which the client and their contexts played no role in shaping what happened during the encounter. Group A participants defined their experience of the negative encounter in a similar fashion.

According to Walter, Taylor and Habibis (2012, p. 237), a practice devoid of the client and their context reflects an unawareness of issues such as race influencing practice as "an omnipresent feature of human relationships". In such instances, Pease (2010, p. 142) states, issues of power and privilege that shape social work practice also become invisible, leading to a colonialist social work practice that simply imposes and reproduces the privileged status of Western knowhow in practice. The experiences of *being* and *doing to clients* described by Group B participants, therefore, give credence to scholarly debates regarding the indigenisation and decolonisation of social work practice. These debates support the introduction of Whiteness studies to social work to unsettle and reframe the focus that traditional social work practice is considered to give to practice know-how derived solely from the privileging of Western knowledge (Walter, Taylor and Habibis 2012, Gray et al. 2013).

The experiences of 11 out of 12 Group B participants also reflected how this type of encounter relied on, perpetuated and originated from a perception of the client as powerless. This finding mirrored the experiences Group A participants shared in relation to how they felt during, and as a result of, the negative social work encounter. Group B Participants 2, 5 and 11 elaborated on this point by relating that this experience generally involved the social worker demonstrating disinterest in the client as a partner during the encounter.

In this practice approach the story of the client, their values and traditions was also ignored in favour of the worker's own frame of reference. The *being* and *doing to* clients was summarised by Group B participants as characteristic and

evidentiary of an unreflective practice, an outcome of not seeing one's own culture and the impact of it on practice. As Participant 5 described, it results from fear of challenging the status quo and thus falling into professional disrepute – a safeguarding process of what she called the 'culture of niceness' in social work.

The end product of the *being* and *doing to clients* practice experience, according to Group B participants, was understood to be paternalism, described as the imposition of values on clients informed by an underlying aim of assimilating people of refugee background to an Australian way of life. This finding echoed Group A participants' description of how they felt forced to quickly fit into Australian life as a result of the social worker who imposed values and was disinterested in relationships and partnerships with clients during the negative social work encounter.

The descriptions offered by Group B participants of the *being* and *doing to clients* practice experience are consistent with the views of Bowles (2012), Robinson (2013) and Westoby and Ingamells (2010) who describe social work practice with people of refugee background in Australia as having become depoliticised, prescriptive, restricted by rules-based approaches and complicit with medicalised approaches to practice. This situation is reported to be creating anxiety and work overload for practitioners, stifling relationships with clients of refugee background who are reported to experience isolation and discrimination during interventions (Robinson 2013).

The *being* and *doing to clients* described by Group B participants as an imposition of values, reflects the accounts by Group A participants who, as clients

of social work, highlighted how the negative social work encounter (as a parallel to the *being* and *doing to clients*) left them devoid of the experience of help and change. The *being* and *doing to clients*, described by Group B participants as an imposition of values, also mirrors the observations by Midgley (2008) and Gray et al. (2013) who refer to the imperialistic nature of current approaches to social work practice with clients such as people of refugee background.

These authors discuss the profession's struggle with shifting its own ways of thinking about practice in the face of culturally diverse clients who question the relevancy of approaches derived purely from Western thinking (Gray et al. 2013, p. 1). This struggle is described by both Midgley (2008) and Gray et al. (2013) as the conundrum Western social work is currently facing when confronted with the indigenising and decolonising movements within social work which seek to formulate a social work praxis contingent on decentring the power and privilege of Western-generated ideas about practice.

The experiences of the *being* and *doing with clients* and the *being* and *doing to clients* framed the responses by Group B participants in relation to the research question – *how is direct social work practice with people of refugee background understood and experienced*? These findings suggest that the focus of practice for research participants was on relationships with clients and how and why these took place as they did within the context of the social work encounter. They also challenge "the notion that cultural competence and sensitivity is crucial to sound social work practice" (Boyle and Springer 2001, p. 53) with people of refugee background. Furthermore, they challenge previous work that describes

practice with people of refugee background as preferably linear, predictable and trauma-orientated work with individuals (Pupavac 2002, Lum 2007). Finally, they challenge the notion that social workers should act alone in defining and implementing boundaries during social work encounters (AASW 2010, p. 22).

The following section analyses the experiences of Group C participants who are social workers of refugee background. This group contended that, for them, social work with people of refugee background was a practice embedded in cultural exchanges.

7.4 Social Workers of Refugee Background – The Cultural Exchange Experience of Social Work

Social workers of refugee background, that is Group C participants, spoke of a preferred practice with people of refugee background, naming it a practice of *cultural exchanges*. This practice involved a process of 'getting to know each other' through a shared and reciprocated relationship with the client of refugee background. Such encounters were described as being steeped in a mutual desire by worker and client to learn from one another in these relationships. For participants of this group, this was an intuitive practice that they felt derived from being both a social worker and a person of refugee background. Furthermore, such practice challenged accepted ideas of professionalism for this cohort and that also made working with other social work colleagues, who were less inclined to relationships and cultural exchanges with clients, difficult.

The idea of a cultural exchange in practice as expressed by this cohort resembles Yan's (2008) description of her findings in a study dedicated to understanding how social workers make sense of the "crossing of cultures" (Yan 2008, p. 282) during multicultural social work practice. She reports that participants of her study described a kind of "blending and merging" that occurred when worker and client sought a "higher level of crossing culture" (Yan 2008, p. 284) during an encounter. Yan (2008) states that her findings did not suggest a 'how to' for the "blending and merging" in practice although she hypothesises in her conclusions that reciprocated relationships between client and worker could facilitate such a process. Yan (2008) also describes dialogue as facilitative of such a process. Dialogue is the "closest methodological metaphor…suggested to achieve this merging" (Yan 2008, p. 285).

Group C participants described the cultural exchange experience as a practice of sensitivity to clients and their context. This sensitivity was said to be facilitated by the use of flexibility, learning, sharing of information and deep reflective listening as practice skills. Such practice was compromised by the professionalisation of social work. Professionalisation of social work was described by six of the seven Group C participants as a process preoccupied with risk management, rigid boundaries and the invalidation of non-traditional social work practices. The professionalisation of social work was also said to clash with core social work values of social justice and human rights and to limit the capacity of social workers to respond to the client's cultural context and the chance of engaging in the practice of cultural exchanges.

Ling's (2004) study parallels these findings. Her research participants faced challenges trying to indigenise imported Western social work ideas as Malaysian social workers working in the Malaysian context. Their challenges were lessened when they were able to engage in mutual exchanges with clients (Ling 2004, p. 342). Furthermore, Ling's (2004) findings also indicate that the challenges presented to Malaysian social workers by the implementation of imported Western ideas of social work were also lessened when workers were able to reciprocate the clients' efforts in forging a connection with them through the offer of friendship and flexibility during the encounter.

In addition, Ling's (2004) participants highlighted how Western constructs of professionalism promoted professional boundaries with clients that "contravene[d] the nature of relationships [between clients and social workers] in the community but also become a channel of professional colonisation of cultures" (Ling 2004, p. 343). Conversely, Yip (2005) asserts that cultural exchanges in multicultural practice are limited by the extent to which the dominant culture (i.e. the worker's culture) is able to welcome a dynamic, mutually respectful two-way exchange that sees the culture of the 'other' (i.e. the clients' culture) as "wisdom" (Yip 2005, p. 603) worth learning from and adjusting to. Without such an exchange cultural exchanges in practice become token camouflage for "transplanting Eurocentric social work practice models to non-Eurocentric cultures" (Yip 2005, p. 603).

Finally, the experiences of Group C participants revealed that the practice of cultural exchanges was also compromised by social workers who refused to

engage in such practice, opting instead for more traditional professionalised approaches to social work. Such instances were described by this cohort as difficult to endure because they were said to compromise the forging of productive and collegial working relationships with fellow social workers and exposed them to witnessing poor outcomes for clients of refugee background who were also members of their own communities.

Owen and English's (2005) research captured their personal experiences as American social workers working with colleagues of refugee background and highlighted several aspects of relevance to the findings described by Group C participants. They state that workers of refugee background often play an additional unrecognised role within organisations as cultural brokers, helping these organisations to transition to multicultural modes of human service provision. This role is described as often being misunderstood by non-refugee workers and supervisors in the organisation, while it becomes an accepted and unchallenged reality for workers of refugee background.

Owen and English (2005, p. 679) found that for workers of refugee background, relationships with clients of refugee background "frequently require more than standard social work practices dictate". Power disparities in the workplace, derived from the privileging of Western professional know-how and lifestyle, are described as detrimental to instances in which non-refugee workers misjudge the demands placed on workers of refugee background and thus display a lack of "attentiveness and interest" (Owen and English 2005, p. 681) in the experiences of colleagues of refugee background and their clients. These instances

are said to compromise the collegiality available to workers of refugee background (Owen and English 2005).

In essence, Group C participants reported cultural exchanges as their preferred experience in social work practice with people of refugee background. Their description of such practice resembled the description of the positive social work encounter shared by Group A participants and the preferred practice of *being with clients* described by Group B participants. The challenges that Group C participants reported facing in their experience of the cultural exchange practice, although unique given their dual identity as both social workers and people of refugee background, mirrored the experiences of Group A and B participants regarding the negative social work encounter or the *being to* clients practice experience respectively.

The central importance of the relational standpoint to practice is discussed next as the study's main finding. Discussions in the next section of this chapter focus on proposing the adoption of the relational standpoint as the core component within the context of direct social work practice with people of refugee background.

7.5 The Relational Standpoint for Direct Social Work Practice with People of Refugee Background

The most common aspect of the findings across cohorts was the reference made by participants to how positive direct social work practice with people of

refugee background originated from a relational standpoint. In this section I articulate a relational model of practice derived from the findings of this study.

Firstly, a relational standpoint should not be taken as a linear paradigm, a 'one size fits all' formula or recipe for direct social work practice with people of refugee background. Nor should an attempt to describe such a standpoint be taken as a rush to apply knowledge: as Briskman (2008) suggests, such a rush to practice is often an indication of privileging Western belief that knowledge is only useful if it can be "externalised and applied to others". Such an approach contradicts the research findings which suggest that the lived experience of practice is supported by a variety of approaches, all contextual in nature, relational and constantly negotiated and re-articulated during encounters between social workers and clients of refugee background. This representation is merely an attempt to portray the array of components that help frame the main finding of this research.

Figure 1 below provides a diagrammatic representation of direct practice with people of refugee background based on a relational standpoint. Such a standpoint was considered by participants of this study as always being situated in, and emergent from, the social work encounter. It was also considered to develop from and, in turn, be informed and shaped by, various ways of being and doing social work during the social work encounter with people of refugee background. The essence of what was described as either a *positive* encounter (according to Group A participants); a *being* and *doing with* clients as the preferable social work encounter (according to Group B participants); and, a

cultural exchange described as the preferred practice (according to Group C participants) was determined by the degree to which the participants felt that both the client's and the worker's contexts were shared and mutually learnt during the social work encounter.

Figure 1: The elements of the relational standpoint in direct social work practice with people of refugee background
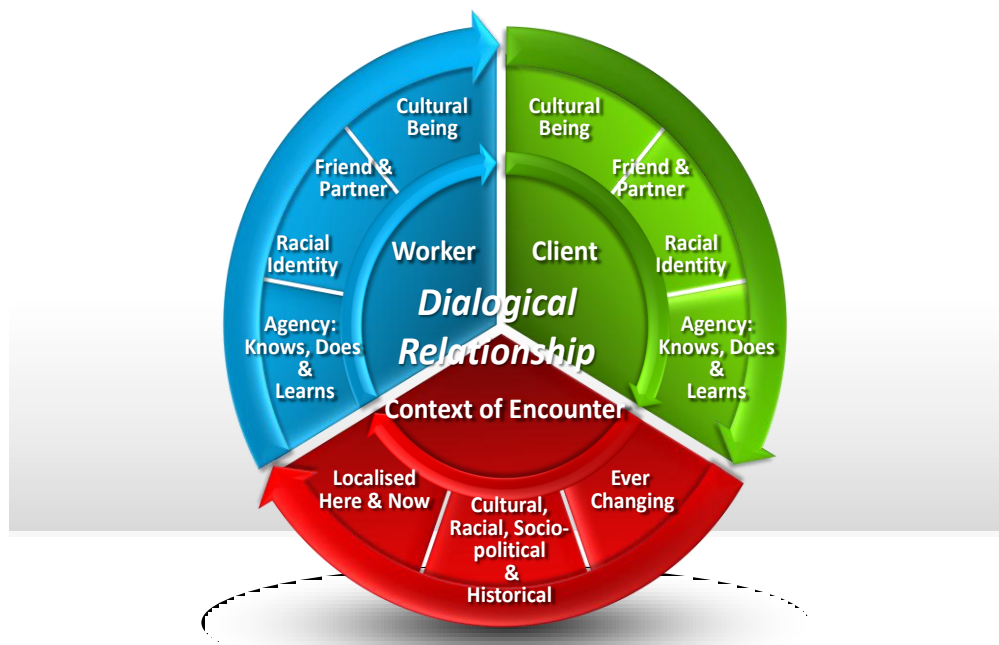
The relational standpoint to social work practice with people of refugee background calls for encounters that are cyclically formed and re-formed by dialogically-oriented relationships between the client, the worker and their contexts. The nature of these relationships, as the participants of this study described, reflect the worker and client being on an equal footing: both invested in friendships and partnerships with one another; both active agents in knowledge

production, doing together and learning from one another; and, both bringing a racial and cultural self to the encounter.

In these relationships, the intent of the social work encounter is to understand and elicit how the worker's contexts, the client's contexts in concert with their racial identities, social position and degree of agency interact to collectively enable an encounter where help and change are experienced. Dialogue and mutual sharing 'fuel' this dialogical process of interaction. This process in turn focuses on both the worker and client as actors, able and willing to co-create and re-create direct social work practice in the face of ever-changing, permeable, fluid and shifting contexts. Contexts are understood as varied and ever-changing entities that represent equally the personal contexts of workers and clients, the larger context of social work practice in Australia and the contexts of Australian society including its systems of welfare, values and beliefs.

There is a distinct contrast between the relational standpoint described by participants in this study and the reality of contemporary direct social work practice in Australia. The review of relevant literature in Chapter Two discusses the widely accepted importance assigned in social work to the development and application of what is considered preferable approaches to practice with client groups such as people of refugee background. These approaches are namely those that favour trauma recovery as the focus of interventions with people of refugee background as well as culturally competent and sensitive practice approaches. The body of work that focuses on examining the importance of trauma-orientated work in social work with people of refugee background has resulted from

understanding the refugee and resettlement experiences in the West as manifestations of trauma (Westoby 2009). Trauma is the pathology that requires treatment; such treatment relegates the person of refugee background to victim status while it legitimises the therapeutic role of social work (Westoby 2009).

The literature describes how this therapeutic approach to work with people of refugee background is the product of socio-cultural shifts in countries like Australia (Furedi 2004), a product of a socio-political landscape ambivalent and resistant to refugee resettlement (Bowles 2012). Trauma as a focus for work with people of refugee background is well-embedded in immigration policy and thus resettlement service design and delivery. It supports and promotes individualised psycho-social interventions that are de-politicised, prescriptive and complicit with narrow medicalised frameworks and approaches that guide direct practice with people of refugee background (Westoby and Ingamells 2010). The result is a climate of complexity, anxiety, work overload, cultural clashes and more importantly, stifled relationships with, and poor practice outcomes for, clients of refugee background (Robinson 2013).

Similarly, culturally competent and sensitive social work practice approaches have "become an organising theme …for shap[ing] effective ways to build relationships and intervention strategies" (Lum 2007, pp. 3-4) in direct social work practice with client groups like people of refugee background. This literature articulates what culturally competent and sensitive approaches are, the values that underpin these approaches to practice and the array of epistemologically-defined paradigms that inform various interpretations for how

to implement the culturally competent and sensitive social work practice approach as the preferred approach to social work practice with clients of diverse cultural backgrounds (Williams 2006). Concerns about the array of epistemologies that inform the interpretation and implementation of culturally competent and sensitive social work practice are described in this literature as sets of know-how that inform sets of methods for practice (Lum 2007), all considered by the literature to be equally relevant, useful and applicable to any practice situation (Williams 2006, p. 210).

The main finding of this study challenges these understandings because, for participants of the study, it was the social work encounter, in the context of the interaction between social worker and client of refugee background, that relevant, preferable and useful know-how and social work practices were revealed, designed and implemented. Findings also suggest that it is within the context of the encounter between the social worker and the client of refugee background that irrelevant and unhelpful knowledge and social work practices were born.

The literature that is critical of the degree of relevance given to preferred approaches to practice such as culturally competent and sensitive practice supports the main finding of this study. This literature argues that the focus given in social work scholarship to culturally competent and sensitive social work practice as the preferred approach to practice attests to social work's struggle with diversity (Gray et al. 2013). Furthermore, it argues that the importance given to preferred approaches to practice has generated an over-emphasis and reliance on Western know-how and thus an over-emphasis on knowledge that produces and

satisfies Western views of what works in direct social work practice with people of refugee background.

The literature that explores and supports the indigenisation and decolonisation of social work knowledge and practice (Gray et al. 2013, Gray and Coates 2010, Pease 2010, Midgley 2008, Briskman 2008) states that the outcome of such an over-emphasis and reliance on Western know-how is also silencing and devaluing knowledge and practices unique to local, relational and contextual experiences between social workers and client groups like people of refugee background.

Most recent literature discussing Whiteness within social work (see for example Walter, Taylor and Habibis 2011, Pease 2010, Pon 2009, Nylund 2006) locate this process of privileging Western know-how and practices, at the expense of alternatives, at the centre of social work's historical alliance with conservative understandings of diversity. These understandings exoticise cultural differences, reducing them to categories best understood as outside an unspoken norm, the norm being white middle class ways of life (Nylund 2006). In such a context, social work practice is designed and implemented uncritically and devoid of nuanced and complex analyses of power as well as of the history and socio-cultural contexts of social work (Walter, Taylor and Habibis 2011, Nylund 2006). Pon (2009, p. 59) goes as far as asserting that preferred approaches to practice such as culturally competent and sensitive practice, as an example of the privileging of Western know-how and practices, are a form of 'new racism'.

These considerations align with the experiences that participants reported in this study in which positive encounters were described as deriving from the social worker and the client being able to share and understand each other's socio-cultural and historical contexts relationally. Similarly, when participants described negative social work encounters, they described experiencing an absence of each other's context and a relationship defined by the privileging and imposition of values and beliefs from the social worker. This study's main finding regarding the central importance of relationships to direct social work practice with people of refugee background spoke of context as key to determining this practice and suggested that, for participants, what needed to be known in social work practice with people of refugee background was for them both a process and an outcome of how the social worker and client related to one another.

The main finding of this study suggests the primary importance of having an integrated contextualised and relationally-based standpoint for direct social work practice with people of refugee background. For participants of this study, the relational standpoint was situated in and emergent from the social work encounter. The relational standpoint suggests encounters that are dialogically-oriented and cyclically-formed and re-formed by dialogical relationships between social worker, client and contexts. According to findings in this study, contexts included the worker's culture and the client's culture; their raced identity; and, their agency as 'knower' and 'doer' in friendship and partnership with one another. The encounter is considered as the site where contexts converge and where each context is derived from culture, races and histories that meet, intersect

and blend in and through the encounter. All these elements within the encounter were described as fluid, ever-changing, learnt and re-learnt relationally.

7.6 Conclusion

Embedded within the discussion presented in this chapter were the stories of each group of participants of their lived experience of social work practice with people of refugee background. This Chapter has presented a macro analysis and integration of findings with relevant literature across all participant cohorts. A theoretical discussion and description of an emerging standpoint for practice was also presented.

The next chapter draws final conclusions from the research and discusses the limitations of the study.

CHAPTER EIGHT

Conclusion

"Creating the building blocks for trust and dialogue"

8.1 Introduction

The consequences of integrating the relational standpoint, as this study's main finding, to social work thinking and practice is extrapolated in this final chapter. A section is dedicated to discussing the implications of the relational standpoint for social work theory and practice, social work education and future social work research. The limitations of the study are also discussed and the thesis concludes with a final summary and comments.

8.2 Implications for Social Work Theory and Practice

The relational standpoint presented in Chapter 7 suggests the need for a social work theory that speaks beyond cultural awareness of the 'other'. The relational standpoint requires a theoretical base from which social workers unveil and question their own culture as social workers and its impact on the 'other'. Social workers need ways to make explicit the issues of race and culture that are embedded in their own way of thinking and practice (Razack and Jeffery 2002).

In essence, "we need to scrutinise the fundamental epistemological base of our profession" (Meemeduma 1993, p. 249). Walter, Taylor and Habibis (2011) agree and call for a turning of the gaze inwards and back towards social work as a profession, to scrutinise the foundations of our thinking and our practices before we re-articulate our practices with client groups such as people of refugee background.

The relational standpoint to practice is also supported by current calls for a decolonised social work practice (Gray et al. 2013). The implications are that of a transformation of social work, similar to that of decolonisation, which would involve replacing externally-imposed models of thinking and practice with locally contextualised ideas and solutions. The relational standpoint requires locally contextualised thinking and practice and an explicit examination of how issues of race and culture (embedded in the context of the worker, the client and the encounter), shape what we think, what we do and how we are in practice.

This presents a problem for traditional social work practice that relies on established, evidence-based know-how because the contextual and relational nature of the standpoint proposed by the findings of this study require both knowledge and practice to be always emergent from the context of the encounter between worker and client. As such, social workers need to move beyond appropriating dominant Western models of direct practice and interventions when working with client groups, such as people of refugee background. 'Importing' dominant Western models of direct practice can be seen to reflect the Whiteness of Western social work, which may provide a sense of certainty to practitioners about how to 'conventionally' respond to people of refugee background. Such

practice fails to reflect the cultural contextuality of people of refugee background, however. These practices are not necessarily derived from the fusion or inclusion of other world-views and perspectives such as those of a client of refugee background.

Pease (2010) and Gray et al. (2013), in relation to discussing a decolonised social work practice, explore the predicament of realising that what we consider best practice may only be best practice in our context and suggest that the implications for social work thinking and direct social work practice are numerous. First, Western social work would have to contend and engage with an understanding of itself as the product of only one way of thinking, being and doing in the world thus challenging the notion that it is universally applicable and transferable (Young 2004, Pease 2010, Gray et al. 2008). These perceptions of universal applicability and relevance blind social work to its history, implicated in the spread of colonialism and reliant on its uncontested authority on know-how and practice.

Young (2004) argues that an intellectual understanding of how social work has historically been implicated in colonialist and imperialists pursuits has, to some extent, been explored by critical, post-structural and anti-oppressive social work thinking, leading to much of the intellectual work social workers do in reflexively examining their values, their use of self and their impact on practice. However, Pease (2010) and Walter, Taylor and Habibis (2011) state that directly confronting the homogenous nature of a monocultural practice within social, political, professional, cultural and bureaucratic systems that remain invested in maintaining the uncontested nature of Western know-how, often translates into a

social work that recycles its own notion of change while simultaneously bypassing the need to consider itself as the product and activity that privileges its own ways of knowing, being and doing.

The consequences of amalgamating these considerations, born of contemplating a relational standpoint, will be to wrestle with this privileging, namely to make visible and contest Whiteness within social work as Pease (2010) and Walter, Taylor and Habibis (2011) suggest. Therefore, the most significant implication of adopting the relational standpoint, as suggested by the findings of this study, will continue to be how to make contexts important to practice and accept that our ways of knowing, being and doing are founded in very nuanced, yet powerful beliefs, of superiority and normalcy.

Although the findings did not identify Whiteness per se as an impediment to the relational standpoint, participants in this study described a range of elements that acted to obstruct the relational standpoint to practice. Under the umbrella of the *negative social work encounter* and the *being to clients'* experience, participants in this study alluded to how context, culture and race, particularly those of the social worker, became unspoken and invisible yet potent forces that negatively shaped encounters. These forces were experienced as the imposition of values, boundaries and rules during encounters and the absence of friendships and partnerships leading clients to feel invisible and powerless. Such is the nature of Whiteness: it acts to impose uncontested ways of knowing, being and doing in the world, thus normalising them and transforming them as widely-accepted standards that everyone then takes for granted.

The concept of Whiteness refers to issues beyond that of skin colour and is most commonly understood in the Australian literature as an ideology described as "the invisible norm against which other races are judged in the construction of identity, representation, subjectivity, nationalism and the law" (Moreton-Robinson 2004 cited in Walter, Taylor and Habibis 2011, p. 7). Its original conceptualisations lay in critical race scholarship, predominantly driven by African-American scholars motivated by and responding to the civil rights movement in the United States (Jeyasingham 2012, Abrams and Moio 2009). Whiteness theory is at the heart of post-colonial thought, the latter currently shaping the debates in social work around indigenised and decolonised social work practice (Gray and Coates 2010).

The basic premise of Whiteness theory is that "Whiteness is a multilayered construct embedded in the fabric of Westernised society and centred on the way that White institutions, cultures and people are racialised and ethnicised by history and society" (Hambel 2005, p. 75). The common descriptor of Whiteness as 'the invisible norm' derives from critical race theory's understanding that socio-cultural conditions have allowed, accepted and perpetuated white people's voices to be representative of all people's voices (Pease 2010), while 'non-White' people can often only speak on behalf of their own race and no other (Dyer 2002 cited in Pease 2010, p. 113).

Whiteness theory's usefulness to the theorisation and application of a relational standpoint to direct social work practice with people of refugee background, as suggested by participants in this study, is fundamentally about

extending the scope of anti-oppressive thought. Anti-oppressive theory has promoted the use of a critically reflexive stance in social work. This stance calls for practitioners to self-examine and self-identify aspects of their cultural self that affect practice, while also engaging critically in structural change aimed at redressing issues of social inequality.

This contention 'falls short' on two fronts if it is to support the theorisation and the practice of the relational standpoint as suggested by the findings of this study. First, as Yan and Wong (2005) have identified, critical self-reflexivity relies on the worker being the 'all knower', capable of identifying and rectifying the impact of cultural bias on practice. This "one way process" (Yan and Wong 2005, p. 184) privileges individuality, a Western prerogative offering limited chances for the self to be confronted with its own sources of power and privilege in relation to and by the 'other' (Young 2004). A *self* or worker that is not scrutinised by the *other* or client conflicts with the process of the dialogical relationship between worker and client described by findings in this study as an element of the relational standpoint in social work encounters with people of refugee background.

Second, anti-oppressive theory fails to problematise the issue of race, often diluting it from arguments about oppression (Young 2004). This prevents critical questions from being asked, such as "[why are] negative life chances disproportionally affecting non-white people" (Young 2004, p. 115). Incorporating Whiteness theory into anti-oppressive thought does not involve ignoring the role that issues such as class, gender, sexuality, age and able-

bodiedness play in social work, but rather suggests how it can help anti-oppressive social work consider the racialised nature of its premises and therefore the racialised nature of social work thinking and practice. Pease (2010, p. 127) argues:

> The starting point for any form of anti-racism by white people must be an acknowledgement that they are white…white people have privileges accruing to their whiteness…they are personally implicated in the reproduction of the ideologies and structures of white dominance. White people must come to understand that what we do in the world reproduces our privileges…whiteness is useful as part of the critique of white supremacy because it is important to challenge the invisibility of whiteness as normative.

This is the basis of the decolonisation and indigenisation debates which argue that social work is a racialised profession, the product of Western culture (Gray et al. 2013).

These debates support the findings of this study by arguing that the challenge that anti-oppressive thinking faces lies not in its attempt to theorise emancipation through a challenging of unequal power distribution, but rather, in how it struggles to move past the social worker as the bearer of practice wisdom and relevant knowledge: the 'knower', the 'doer', and, the benevolent helper (Pease 2010, Walter, Taylor, Habibis 2011); the client, by contrast and default, is theorised as 'other' and the recipient of social work's empowering anti-oppressive practice (Walter, Taylor and Habibis 2011). The lived experiences of practice described in this study highlights the importance of the client of refugee background as a source of practice wisdom and knowledge to the positive relational social work encounter.

A relational standpoint involves the unveiling of Whiteness. If Whiteness was to be unveiled it would then be made visible and social workers would be involved in making visible their own contexts as much as the contexts of their clients. A relational standpoint would then translate into social work encounters that involved reciprocal learning facilitated by deep listening – of 'self' and 'other' as suggested by findings in this study. It would provide a space where people seeking help would define the help they wanted rather than a space where the helper determined what was needed, how the need would be met and when.

In the case of people of refugee background, they would define with the social worker what they wanted from them and whether they wanted them involved at all in the helping and, if so, what the nature of the helping they required might be. There would be a special kind of discourse around these interactions where the common practice would be that there were no recipes or rigid formulae – only ongoing learning from one another through meaningful relationships as participants in this study described. Clients and social workers would work in partnership to design, develop and test what might work for them, in their context, in their particular situation rather than expert workers busily designing and implementing what they considered to be the help the client was seeking.

This would be a practice of evoking a 'third space' (Bhabha 1994), where the encounter would be contextualised giving meaning to histories, cultures and values and developing new and unique ways of *doing* social work. Social workers would share with clients what their organisational contexts – and their associated imperatives – sought to impose on the kind of help they were able to offer and,

239

therefore, the form of direct social work practice they could offer. Social workers would take care to notice how and why all cultural contexts, all histories and all positionalities of power and privilege naturally create a discomfort with 'not knowing' one another. Social workers would also take care to notice how Western organisational contexts reinforce this dynamic of discomfort with 'not knowing'.

If cognisant of the intersection between cultural norms, race, values, ideologies, individual experience and open to sharing all that the 'other's' world brought to the social work encounter, social workers might reach a space of co-construction, friendship, partnership and joint action that participants in this study suggested in their description of the nature of the relational standpoint.

The key tool for this type of practice is dialogue, although as 'a form of struggle … not chitchat' (Lerner and West 1996, p. 266), given that participants proposed that such dialogue demanded a mutual sharing of contexts, history, power and privilege. In an organisational context, dialogue of this nature would entail a willingness to confront and engage with direct conflict. This would be challenging because political correctness has swayed many in social work to avoid conflict as harmful, and see it as only ever violent – or leading to violence – when, in fact, it is by working through conflict that the possibilities for transformative dialogue, capable of delivering concrete change, is opened up (Simpson 2008).

The relational standpoint through dialogue might threaten the sense of self and material power and privilege with which social workers are seduced. Not all people would be willing or eager to see their lives and profession as products of

only one way of knowing, being and doing in the world. In essence, this process of integrating the findings of this study is best "undergirded by an ethic of care" (Simpson 2008, p. 143), where care becomes a mutual act of care giving and receiving (Baltra-Ulloa 2013).

These discussions have canvassed some of the implications of considering and adopting the relational standpoint for direct social work thinking and practice. The next section discusses the implications of the relational standpoint to social work education and further research.

8.3 Implications for Social Work Education

The AASW has decided to progress the profession's journey in responding to issues of cultural diversity by developing and introducing cross-cultural curriculum content (AASW 2009) to social work qualifying courses. Universities across Australia have integrated these curriculum standards into their teaching by either introducing specific stand-alone courses dedicated to multicultural practice, cross-cultural practice, anti-racist and anti-oppressive practice, ensuring every course offered in social work programs covers diversity-focused content, or by combining both of these approaches (AASW 2009).

The curriculum standards set by the AASW promote a "critical appraisal of knowledge in…cultural and race theories; culturally safe and sensitive practice; specific historical and contemporary cross-cultural issues in Australia [and] international cross-cultural issues" (AASW 2009, p. 68). Furthermore, the values, attitudes, knowledge and skill base supported by these curricula are underpinned

by the requirements of being able to engage in relationships with people. In relationships with people, social workers are said to learn of clients' ever-changing and evolving contexts, their histories and stories (AASW 2009, 2011).

These curricula requirements would also congruently support the implementation of the relational standpoint suggested by the findings of this study. However, as the literature canvassed in this thesis indicates, the current Australian social work field relies heavily on the social worker mastering the culture of the client as well as learning sets of knowledge, skills and practices that facilitate a crossing of cultural contexts (Gray et al. 2013, Walter, Taylor and Habibis 2011). This is the crux of the challenge for implementing a relational standpoint within social work education. The current privileging in Australian social work practice of professionally derived know-how and expertise juxtaposed with cross-cultural curricula embedded in relationships with clients leaves little room for considering social work knowledge and practice as products of a particular culture and world view. In essence, the teaching of diversity-focused social work in Australia is unfolding in a context where relational praxis is problematic.

The introduction of the study of Whiteness theory is suggested by Walter, Taylor and Habibis (2011) and Robinson (2013) as a possible way of teaching students of social work the relevancy of the relational standpoint suggested by this study. Such theoretical study would allow the examination and contestation of the epistemological foundations of current social work knowledge and direct practice. The aim therein would be to go inwards, turn the gaze back to social work, to relearn our professional history and examine it as a Western construction shaped

by the Western cultural tradition of privileging Western ways of knowing, being and doing (Martin 2003) above all others. This would be a beginning process of re-privileging relationships with clients and the context of the encounter as sources of alternative and additional ways of knowing, being and doing in social work practice.

The teaching of Whiteness theory within Australian social work is not yet widely recognised as an element of social work education. As such, much of the body of pedagogical theory that is available to critically examine methods and tools for teaching Whiteness has emerged from experiences in North American and British contexts where expanding 'multicultural' and/or 'cross-cultural' educational curricula has been examined (Walter, Taylor and Habibis 2011).

This more widely available body of work from North America and Britain has emerged from the influences of critical race theory, post-modern, post-colonial and feminist thought and the Freireian liberatory educational movement (Miller, Hyde and Ruth 2004). These traditions have shaped the values and principles that underpin the teaching of Whiteness as part of a 'multicultural' and/or 'cross-cultural' teaching agenda. According to Miller, Hyde and Ruth (2004, p. 411), the values and principles that underpin the teaching of Whiteness as part of a 'multicultural' and/or 'cross-cultural' teaching agenda include:

1. The understanding of oppression as multifaceted, multidimensional and ever-changing. Oppression is rooted in the way we think, the way we are in the world and the way we act in the world. It is also embedded in the

social structures we have created to support our ways of knowing, being and doing in the world (Martin 2003).

2. No person, space or system is neutral. When we teach and learn about oppression, power, privilege, whiteness, race and indeed social justice, everything and everyone is implicated.

3. The classroom, therefore, and the experiences had within it, are also never neutral.

4. Learning about Whiteness must also be about learning how to take action against dominance and the concentration of power and privilege; teaching and learning about Whiteness must extend beyond a focus on self-awareness and intellectual understanding to also include strategies for actively engaging with tangible change and transformation.

The challenges associated with teaching Whiteness under such a framework of values and principles are documented across disciplines. In the field of education, Levine-Rasky (2000), Howard (1999), Frankenberg (1997), Giroux (1997), hooks (1994) and Cochran-Smith (1991, 1995a, 1995b, 1999, 2000), all record the resistance of students in the face of being taught material that argues that Whiteness exists and that it exists unbeknown to most white people. Gillespie, Ashbaugh and Defiore (2002) document the literature in sociology that argues that the teaching of Whiteness as part of 'multicultural' 'cross-cultural' education attracts student and institutional resistance because it racialises power and privilege, making being white about belonging to a particular culture, race and a particular tradition that values thinking of itself as the 'norm'.

In social work literature the arguments are similar. Whiteness is spoken of in social work as an unacknowledged, unexamined and invisible element of race that operates secretly through social, political and cultural systems (Jeyasingham 2012, p. 671). Teaching, then, involves presenting these systems as racialised systems that claim, on the surface, to have no reference to race but inevitably support and propel the privileged position of white people over others (Pease 2010).

Baltra-Ulloa (2013) claims students of social work also tend to resist learning about Whiteness, similarly because it threatens their sense of 'normal' self and shifts perceptions of social work as a culture-less, race-less, benevolent and neutral caring profession. Teaching Whiteness in social work has emanated from efforts to find pedagogical ways to prepare graduates for a racialised social work practice (Gollan and O'Leary 2009). However, the literature also documents that there are problems with how these efforts incorporate Whiteness because they remain largely epistemologically underpinned by professional values, theories and practices that still favour Eurocentric ways of being, knowing and doing (Walter, Taylor and Habibis 2012).

Jeffrey (2005, p. 410) describes how educators often encounter the problem of teaching diversity-focused social work by teaching students to be racially cognisant through a self–reflexive consideration of how Whiteness is present and enacted, which inevitably leads to an inherent critique of social work. Students, as prototypically "free modern liberal subjects" (Jeffery 2005, p. 410),

struggle to understand why social work would benefit from turning the gaze inwards and to challenge itself.

Writers such as Razack (2002), Fellows and Razack (1998), and Roman (1993) elaborate further by stating that the free moral Western subject sees the self as rational and capable of learning cross-cultural competencies that lead to mastery and autonomy so, when called to challenge social work and examine how social work is a site of Whiteness, there exists a redemptive retreat to social work practice. Social work practice is where the *doing* of social work becomes the means by which the *being* of Whiteness is seen to be conquered. Jeffrey (2005, p. 410) thus warns: "if you have to 'give up' Whiteness, how can you be a good social worker?'.

This is the challenge that implementing the relational standpoint to social work education presents – Whiteness does not just exist and therefore exposing it becomes the pedagogical aim. Whiteness is performed in context and comes into being through relationships. While educational contexts continue to privilege Western ways of knowing, being and doing in social work above all others, it will be very difficult to teach a relational standpoint to practice that suggests social work is the product of just one way of thinking and doing social work and therefore not universally applicable and not always cross-culturally relevant. The words of Walter, Taylor and Habibis (2011, p. 242) are thus highlighted: "Only by 'othering' itself will social work shift the frame and start to explore and interrogate the raced assumptions that underpin the frameworks of professional knowledge, teaching, learning and practice".

8.4 Implications for Future Social Work Research

The work of proposing the implementation of the main finding of this study, that the relational standpoint is fundamentally critical in direct social work practice, is far from over. There are considerations for how social work continues to do research in this area without imposing on it Western prerogatives such as the need for formulae, recipes and a rush to step-by-step practice guidelines. There is also the consideration of how to implement a standpoint to practice that essentially proposes, as a method for practice, a constant comfort with 'not knowing', with experientially and relationally allowing know-how to develop and be tested contextually in each and every social work encounter through friendships and partnerships with clients.

The challenges of such a proposition in the face of neo-liberalism are enormous. How do we epistemologically and ontologically shift our understanding of professionalism in the face of such encounters? How do we give up the power and privilege of Western know-how? More research is needed to help answer these questions, but how do we do research that does not reproduce or recycle our privileged ontological and epistemological positions as Western researchers? The answers to these relevant considerations are beyond the scope of this thesis. More is needed to open up the possibilities for exploring different research methodologies, different research paradigms and different forms of reporting on research that, in their own right, will be considered relevant, legitimate and valuable for informing direct social work practice.

While the scope of the findings of this study does not articulate a new theory of direct practice *per se*, this study does suggest additions to content and processes related to social work thinking. The study does not suggest what could explicitly be added but rather has highlighted how a relational standpoint in practice could benefit from what current thinking suggests is the unveiling of Whiteness in social work and the articulation of a decolonised practice that disarms the performance of Whiteness. Such theoretical and practical endeavours require more exploration and more research, but in whose hands?

If social work was to articulate a dialogical reflexivity, dependant on the client participating equally in the process of reflection with the worker, would we be testing a way to surrender the research process as we currently know it as the primary means to achieve knowledge production? Would dialogical reflexive cycles with clients be the way we do localised, contextualised and relational research in the future? Which direction can be taken to prove that such methods are legitimate? How do we find ways to absolutely surrender the research process to clients and in turn have clients invested in being involved in such research as a tool for changing their lives and the lives of others?

This study suggests the way forward is relationships, friendships and partnerships with clients. In these relationships all that is relevant, useful and effective for direct social work practice with people of refugee background is revealed. Finally, Martin (2003), Tuhiwai Smith (1999), Said (1978), Spivak (1988) and Fanon (1963) have all explored the challenges of doing research in ways that deconstruct and challenge the privileged Western paradigm and yet they

all agree that, at the heart of the problem in opening up research to other ways of knowing, being and doing in the world (Martin 2003), lies not the empowering of alternatives but rather the *giving up* of the power and privilege of our own position.

8.5 Limitations of the Study

This study involved a relatively small sample of 31 people from Tasmania, Australia. It is, therefore, a highly localised and contextualised study that would be difficult to replicate. While this might potentially be considered a limitation, the study using its phenomenological approach has valued the localised and contextual nature of the lived experience shared by participants. These experiences are considered representations of social interactions, descriptions of life and samples of human know-how that shape the world we live in and are thus worthy and legitimate sources of knowledge (Schofield 2002). In its attempt to privilege and learn from the lived experience of direct social work practice with people of refugee background, this study has added the voices of people who would otherwise not participate in influencing social work knowledge.

There were some limitations, however, in attempting to privilege the lived experience of research participants. While interpreters were potentially available, no participants requested these services during the revision of transcripts and it is therefore impossible to know with absolute certainty that all participants categorically sanctioned their interview transcripts as being true representations of their lived experiences.

A further limitation was that there was no explicit validation of the 'status' of either people of refugee background or 'qualified' social workers in the study. Mechanisms were put in place to confirm this as far as possible however, including sourcing of research participants through services and communities relevant to people of refugee background. In the case of the former group, it would be very unlikely that people who were not of refugee background would have participated in the study as having refugee status.

Finally, reference to trauma work in practice was largely absent in the data. This runs counter to what I argue in Chapter 2 in reference to trauma work being a dominant discourse within the refugee resettlement sector. This is a discrepancy that highlights the possibility that social work participants who self-selected into the study may well have had strong interest in my project and perhaps were 'atypical' in their practice experiences with people of refugee background. Despite these potential limitations, this study is unique in its focus on the lived experience of direct social work practice with people of refugee background.

8.6 Conclusion

This final chapter has explored and discussed the main finding of this study, the central importance of – the relational standpoint in direct social work practice, and implications for social work practice, education and research. Links to emerging literature concerned with the indigenisation and decolonisation of social work support the theorisation of the relational standpoint in social work

practice. Such theorisation points to the relevance of Whiteness theory to a rethinking of social work that can align and accommodate the core ingredient of the relational standpoint – the dialogical, context-driven encounter that fosters relationship and partnership between worker and client.

Implications for direct social work practice, influenced by the relational standpoint, include the engagement with social work as a product of Western world views; practice as defined and as an outcome of a deep listening of both worker and client's contexts in relationship with one another as mutual learners; dialogue, as a struggle to challenge the status quo; and, finally, an ethic of care where care involves caring for, and being cared for by each other.

Implications for social work education have been presented and these include finding ways to give less privilege to Western ways of thinking, being and doing in social work. Implications for future research were considered with the conclusion that while this study's scope is limited, it highlights the need for a research paradigm shift capable of opening up research to new epistemologies and ontologies without falling victim to the replication of Whiteness.

Finally, limitations of the study were explored and the conclusion was drawn that, while this study was highly contextual, localised and relatively small, its focus on the lived experience of direct social work practice with people of refugee background renders it unique and capable of making a valuable contribution to social work.

8.7 Final Summary

This study focused on the lived experience of social work by both clients of refugee background and the social workers who work with them to consider how direct social work practice with people of refugee background is experienced. Findings highlight the following:

- relationships between worker and client of refugee background are the key to positive experiences of social work practice;
- these relationships rely on friendships and partnerships between worker and client of refugee background;
- these relationships develop contextually during the encounter and thus encompass every part of the contexts of the worker and client equally;
- these relationships rely on worker and client mutually listening and learning from one another through dialogue;
- through dialogue, worker and client learn what is relevant and helpful during their social work encounter;
- the absence of relationships between worker and client of refugee background leads to negative social work encounters;
- negative encounters are hallmarks of experiences that leave clients of refugee background feeling powerless, isolated, invisible and forced to change their values to fit Australian norms; and,
- negative encounters involved doing social work in a way that was removed from core social work values in practice, including being

unreflective, treating the client as powerless, acting to assimilate the client to Australian society, and, being preoccupied with maintaining boundaries in practice.

The findings support the central importance of a relational standpoint for direct social work practice with people of refugee background. This standpoint calls for direct social work practice with people of refugee background as dialogical encounters where the worker and the client are equally invested in learning together and from one another what works and what does not work during the encounter.

This study suggests an understanding of direct social work practice with people of refugee background beyond that of cultural awareness of the 'other'. This study highlights the need for social work to contend with its privileging of Western know-how to find ways to make visible, contest and stay implicated in Whiteness within the profession. The relational standpoint to practice, as this study's main finding, suggests an unfamiliar, risky, uncomfortable and somewhat painful way forward for direct social work practice with people of refugee background that challenges our accepted ideas about cultural competence, professionalism and ethical practice in the face of non-Western clients. However, at the end of most difficult journeys is often a place worthy of reaching. The relational encounter offers incredibly transformational experiences for social work practice, experiences participants of this study often related to a rediscovering of our interconnectedness as humans. I end with the words of Participant 14:

They say social work must be light, humble, honest, confident and from the heart…for the welfare of human kind.

REFERENCE LIST

Abdelkerim AA & Grace, M 2012, 'Challenges to employment in newly emerging African communities in Australia: A literature review, *Australian Social Work*, vol. 65, no.1, pp. 104-119.

Abrams, L & Moio, J 2009, 'Critical race theory and the cultural competence dilemma in social work education', *Journal of Social Work Education*, vol. 45 no. 2, pp. 245-261.

Adamson, C 2005, 'Complexity and context: An ecological understanding of trauma practice', in M Nash, R Munford & K O'Donoghue (eds), *Social work theories in action*, Jessica Kingsley, London, pp. 64-79.

Al-Krenawi, A & Graham, JR 2000, 'Culturally sensitive social work practice with Arab clients in mental health settings', *Health & Social Work*, vol. 25, no.1, pp. 65-81.

Allan, J & Hess, L 2010, 'The nexus between material circumstances, cultural context and experiences of loss, grief and trauma: Complexities in working with refugees in the early phases of resettlement', *Grief Matters: The Australian Journal of Grief and Bereavement,* vol. 13, no. 3, pp. 76-80.

Alston, M & Bowles, W 2012, *Research for social workers: An introduction to methods* 3rd edn. Allen & Unwin, Crows Nest, NSW, Australia.

Amnesty International 2012, *Refugee's human rights* Amnesty International, Australia, viewed 18 May 2012, <http://www.amnesty.org.au/refugees/comments/29461/>.

Ang, I 1994, 'On not speaking Chinese: Postmodern ethnicity and the politics of diaspora, *New Formations*, vol. 24, pp. 1-18.

Armstrong, EG 1976, 'On phenomenology and sociological theory', *British Journal of Sociology*, vol. 27, no. 2, pp. 251-253.

Australian Association of Social Workers 1999, *Code of ethics*, Australian Association of Social Workers, Canberra.

Australian Association of Social Workers 2009, *Statement of specific cross-cultural curriculum content for social work qualifying courses*, Australian Association of Social Workers, Canberra.

Australian Association of Social Workers 2010, *Code of ethics*, Australian Association of Social Workers, Canberra.

Australian Association of Social Workers 2011, *Australian social work education and accreditation standards: Statement of specific Aboriginal and Torres Strait*

Islander curriculum content for social work qualifying courses, Australian Association of Social Workers, Canberra.

Baltra-Ulloa, AJ 2013a 'Incorporating Whiteness into the teaching and learning of anti-racist social work' in HK. Ling, J Martin and R Ow (eds), *Cross-cultural social work: local and global*, Palgrave Macmillan, South Yarra, Melbourne, Australia, pp. 49-66.

Baltra-Ulloa, AJ 2013b, 'Why decolonized social work is more than crossculturalism', in M Gray, J Coates, M Yellow Bird & T Hetherington (eds) *Decolonizing social work*, Ashgate, Aldershot, pp. 87-104.

Banks, S 2006, *Ethics and values in social work*, Palgrave Macmillan, New York.

Barnes, D 1998, 'A threat to social cohesion? A perspective of young Vietnamese men living in Australia', *Australian Social Work*, vol. 51, no. 2, pp. 9-16.

Barnes, D 2001, 'Resettled refugees' attachment to their original and subsequent homelands: Long term Vietnamese refugees in Australia', *Journal of Refugee Studies*, vol. 14, no. 4, pp. 394-411.

Bernard, C. 2005, review of *Culturally competent practice with immigrant and refugee children and families,* ed. by Rowena Fong, *British Journal of Social Work*, vol. 35, pp. 287-288.

Bhabha, H 1994, *The location of culture*, Routledge, New York.

Bhui, K, Warfa, N, Endoya, P, McKenzie, K & Bhugra, D 2007, 'Cultural competence in mental health care: A review of model evaluations', *BMC Health Services Research*, vol. 7, no. 5, pp. 1-10. viewed 22 April 2013, <http://www.biomedcentral.com/1472-6963/7/15 >.

Block, K, Warr, D, Gibbs, L & Riggs, E 2012, 'Addressing ethical and methodological challenges in research with refugee-background young people: Reflections from the field', *Journal of Refugee Studies*, vol. 26, no. 1, pp. 69-87.

Bowles, R 2012, *Social work with refugee survivors of torture and trauma*, STARTTS Sydney, viewed 15 November 2012, <http://www.startts.org.au/media/Research-Doc-Social-Work-with-Refugee-Survivors-of-Torture-and-Trauma.pdf >.

Boyle, DP & Springer, A 2001, 'Towards a cultural competence measure for social work with specific populations', *Journal of Ethnic and Cultural Diversity in Social Work*, vol. 9, no. 3 & 4, pp. 53-77.

Braun, V & Clarke, V 2006, 'Using thematic analysis in Psychology', *Qualitative Research in Psychology,* vol. 3, no. 2, pp. 77-101.

Briskman, L 2003, *The black grapevine: Aboriginal activism and the stolen generations*, The Federation Press, Sydney.

Briskman, L 2008, 'Decolonizing social work in Australia: Prospect or illusion', in M Gray, J Coates & M Yellow Bird (eds), *Indigenous social work around the world: Towards culturally relevant education and practice*, Ashgate, Aldershot, pp. 83-93.

Briskman, L & Cemlyn, S 2005 'Reclaiming humanity for asylum seekers: A social work response', *International Social Work*, vol. 48, pp. 714-724.

Briskman, L & Noble, C 1999, 'Social work ethics: Embracing diversity' in B Pease & J Fook (eds), *Transforming social work practice*, Allen and Unwin, St Leonards, NSW, pp. 57-69.

Broadbent, R, Cacciatto, M, & Carpenter, C 2007, 'A tale of two communities: Refugee relocation in Australia', *Australian Journal of Social Issues*, vol. 42, no. 4, pp. 581-601.

Bruyere, G 2008, 'Picking up what was left by the trail: The emerging spirit of Aboriginal education in Canada', in M Gray, J Coates & M Yellow Bird (eds) *Indigenous social work around the world: Towards culturally relevant education and practice*, Ashgate, Aldershot, pp. 231-244.

Burke, B & Harrison, P 1998, 'Anti-oppressive practice', in R Adams, L Dominelli & M Payne (eds), *Social work: Themes, issues and critical debates*, Palgrave Macmillan, Houndmills, pp. 157-182.

Carey, M 2008, 'Everything must go? The privatization of state social work', *British Journal of Social Work,* vol. 38, no. 5, pp. 918-935.

Cemlyn, S & Briskman, L 2003, 'Asylum, children's rights and social work', *Child and Family Social Work*, vol. 8, pp. 163-178.

Cochran-Smith, M 1991, 'Learning to teach against the grain', *Harvard Educational Review*, vol. 51, pp. 279-310.

Cochran-Smith, M 1995a, 'Color blindness and basket making are not the answers: Confronting the dilemmas of race, culture, and language diversity in teacher education', *American Educational Research Journal*, vol. 32, pp. 493-522.

Cochran-Smith, M 1995b, 'Uncertain allies: Understanding the boundaries of race and teaching, *Harvard Educational Review*, vol. 65, pp. 541-570.

Cochran-Smith, M 1999, 'Learning to teach for social justice', in G. Griffin (ed), *98th yearbook of NSSE: Teacher education for a new century: Emerging perspectives, promising practices and future possibilities*, University of Chicago Press, Chicago, IL, pp. 114-144.

Cochran-Smith, M. 2000, 'Blind vision: Unlearning racism in teacher education', *Harvard Educational Review*, vol. 70, pp. 157-191.

Combs, AW, Richards, AC & Richards, F 1976, *Perceptual psychology: A humanistic approach to the study of persons*, Harper & Row, New York.

Crotty, M 1998, *The foundation of social research: Meaning and perspective in the research process*, Allen & Unwin, Crows Nest, NSW.

Daly, J & McDonald, I 1992, 'Covering your back: Strategies for qualitative research in clinical settings', *Qualitative Health Research*, vol. 2, no. 4, pp. 416-438.

Dean, RG 2001, 'The myth of cross-cultural competence', *Families in Society: The Journal of Contemporary Social Services*, vol. 82, no. 6, pp. 623-630.

Denzin, N & Lincoln, Y 2003, 'Introduction: The discipline and practice of qualitative research', in N Denzin & Y Lincoln (eds), *The landscape of qualitative research: Theories and issues*, Sage Publications, Thousand Oaks, CA, pp. 1-45.

Department of Immigration and Citizenship 2008, *Annual Report 2008-2009*, Department of Immigration and Citizenship, Canberra, Australia.

Department of Immigration and Citizenship 2012, *Annual Report 2011-2012*, Department of Immigration and Citizenship, Canberra, Australia.

Derrida, J 1978, *Writing and difference,* Routledge and Kegan Paul, London.

Devore, W & Schlesinger, EG 1999, *Ethnic-sensitive social work practice,* 5th edn, Allyn & Bacon, Boston.

Fanon, F 1963, *The wretched of the earth*, Penguin, UK.

Fellows, ML & Razack, S 1998, 'The race to innocence: confronting hierarchical relations among women', *Journal of Gender, Race and Justice*, vol. 1, no. 2, pp. 335-352.

Fong, R. (ed) 2004, *Culturally competent practice with immigrant and refugee children and families,* The Guilford Press, New York.

Fox, M 2010, 'Post-colonialist practice: An Australian social worker in rural Zambia', *International Social Work*, vol. 53, no. 5, pp. 720-731.

Frankenberg, R (ed) 1997, *Displacing whiteness: Essays in social and cultural criticism,* Duke University Press, Durham.

Freire, P 2003, *Pedagogy of the oppressed*, Translated by M.B. Ramos, Continuum, New York.

Furedi, F 2004, *Therapy culture: Cultivating vulnerability in an uncertain age*, Routledge, London.

Gallegos, J, Tindall, C & Gallegos, S 2008, 'The need for advancement in the conceptualization of cultural competence', *Advances in Social Work*, vol. 9, no. 1, pp. 51-62.

George, U 2002, 'A needs-based model for settlement service delivery for newcomers to Canada*, International Social Work*, vol. 45, no. 4, pp. 465-480.

Gillespie, D, Ashbaufgh, L & Defiore, J 2002, 'White women teaching about white privilege, race cognizance and social action: toward pedagogical pragmatics', *Race, Ethnicity and Education*, vol. 5, no. 3, pp. 237-253.

Giroux, H 1997, 'Rewriting the discourse of racial identity: Towards a pedagogy and politics of whiteness', *Harvard Educational Review*, vol. 67, pp. 285-320.

Goldberg, M 2000, 'Conflicting principles in multicultural social work', *Families in Society*, vol. 81, no. 1, pp. 12-21.

Gollan, S & O'Leary, PJ 2009, 'Teaching culturally competent social work practice through black and white pedagogical partnerships', *Social Work Education*, vol. 28, no. 7, pp. 707-721.

Graham, M 2000, 'Honouring social work principles – exploring the connections between anti-racist social work and African-centred worldviews', *Social Work Education*, vol. 19, no. 5, pp. 424-435.

Gray, M & Allegritti, I 2003, 'Towards culturally sensitive social work practice: Re-examining cross-cultural social work', *Social Work/Maatskaplike Werk*, vol. 39, no. 4, pp. 324-336.

Gray, M & Coates, J 2010, 'Indigenization' and knowledge development: Extending the debate', *International Social Work*, vol. 53, no. 5, pp. 613-627.

Gray, M, Coates, J & Yellow Bird, M (eds) 2008, *Indigenous social work around the world: Towards culturally relevant education and practice,* Ashgate, Aldershot.

Gray, M, Coates, J, Yellow Bird, M & Hetherington, T (eds) 2013, *Decolonizing social work,* Ashgate, Aldershot.

Gray, M & Fook, J 2004, 'The quest for a universal social work: some issues and implications', *The International Journal of Social Work Education*, vol. 23, no. 5, pp. 625-644.

Gray, M & Webb, S 2009, 'Critical social work', in M Gray & S Webb (eds), *Social work theory and methods*, Sage Publications, London, pp. 99-125.

Guba, EG & Lincoln, YS 1982, 'Epistemological and methodological bases of naturalistic inquiry', *Educational Communication and Technology Journal*, vol. 30, no. 4, pp. 233-252.

Guba, EG & Lincoln, YS 1998, 'Competing paradigms in qualitative research' in NK Denzin & YS Lincoln (eds.), *The landscape of qualitative research*, Thousand Oaks, CA, pp. 195-222.

Guillemin, M & Gillam, L 2004, 'Ethics, reflexivity and ethically important moments in research', *Qualitative Inquiry*, vol. 10, no. 2, pp. 261-280.

Gutierrez, LM & Lewis, EA (eds) 1999, *Empowering women of color*, Columbia University Press, New York.

Habermas, J 1987, *The theory of communicative action, Vol. 1: Reason and the rationalization of society,* Translated by T. McCarthy, Beacon, Boston.

Hambel, S 2005, 'Alternative futures of whiteness', *Journal of Futures Studies*, vol. 10, no. 2, pp. 75-85.

Harding, S & Libal, K 2012, 'Iraqi refugees and the humanitarian costs of the Iraqi war: What role for social work?', *International Journal of Social Welfare*, vol. 21, no. 1, pp. 94-104.

Harms, L 2009, *Specific cross-cultural curriculum content for social work qualifying courses: Educational resource package*, Australian Association of Social Workers, Canberra.

Harrison, G 2013, 'Cultural competence: a critical analysis', in HK Ling, J Martin & R Ow (eds), *Cross-cultural social work: Local and global*, Palgrave Macmillan, South Yarra, pp. 30-43.

Harrison, G & Turner, R 2011, 'Being a 'culturally competent' social worker: making sense of a murky concept in practice' *British Journal of Social Work*, vol. 41, no. 2, pp. 333-350.

Helms, JE 1995, 'An update of Helm's White and people of color racial identity models', in JG Pinterotto, Casas, JM, Suziki, LA & Alexander, CM (eds), *Handbook of multicultural counselling*, Sage Publications, Thousand Oaks, CA, pp. 181-198.

Hepworth, DH, Rooney, RH, Dewberry Rooney, G, Strom-Gottfried, K & Larsen, J 2010, *Direct social work practice: Theory and skills*, Brooks/Cole, Belmont, CA, USA.

hooks, B 1994, *Teaching to transgress: Education as the practice of freedom*, Routledge, New York.

Houston, S 2002, 'Reflecting on habitus, field and capital. Towards a culturally sensitive social work', *Journal of Social Work*, vol. 2, no. 2, pp. 149-167.

Houston, S 2010, 'Further reflections on Habermas's contribution to discourse in child protection: An examination of power in social life', *British Journal of Social Work*, vol. 40, no. 6, pp. 1736-1753.

Howard, GR 1999, *We can't teach what we don't know: White teachers, multiracial schools*, Teachers College Press, New York.

Hugo, GJ 2011, *Economic, social and civic contributions of first and second generation humanitarian entrants*, Final Report to Department of Immigration and Citizenship, Department of Immigration and Citizenship, Canberra.

Husband, C 2000, 'Recognising diversity and developing skills: The proper role of transcultural communication', *European Journal of Social Work*, vol. 3, no. 3, pp. 225-234.

Husserl, E. 1931, *Ideas: General introduction to pure phenomenology*, Allen & Unwin, London.

Hyslop, I 2012, 'Social work as a practice of freedom', *Journal of Social Work*, vol. 12, no. 4, pp. 404-422.

Ife, J 2008, *Human rights and social work: Towards rights-based practice*, Cambridge University Press, New York.

Ingamells, A & Westoby, P 2008, 'Working with young people from refugee backgrounds in Australia', *European Journal of Social Work*, vol. 11, no. 2, pp. 161-173.

Jeffery, D 2005, 'What good is anti-racist social work if you can't master it? Exploring a paradox in anti-racist social work education', *Race, Ethnicity and Education*, vol. 8, no. 4, pp. 409-425.

Jeyasingham, D 2012, 'White noise: a critical evaluation of social work education's engagement with whiteness studies', *British Journal of Social Work*, vol. 42, no. 4, pp. 669-686.

Kardoff, E 2004, 'Qualitative evaluation research', in U Flick, E Von Kardoff & I Steinke (eds), *A companion to qualitative research*, Sage Publications, Glasgow, pp. 137-142.

Kaur, J 2007, 'Working with families from culturally and linguistically diverse communities in Queensland: An Australian exploratory study', *Children Australia*, vol. 32, no. 4, pp. 17-24.

Kincheloe, JL & McLaren, P 2003, 'Rethinking critical theory and qualitative research', in NK Denzin & YS Lincoln (eds), *The landscape of qualitative research: Theories and issues*, Sage Publications, Thousand Oaks, CA, pp. 433-488.

Kincheloe, JL & Steinberg, SR 1997, *Changing multiculturalism: New times, new curriculum*, Open University Press, London.

Krefting, L 1991, 'Rigor in qualitative research: The assessment of trustworthiness', *The American Journal of Occupational Therapy*, vol. 45, no. 3, pp. 214-222.

Kumsa, MK 2004, 'Sieves and reeds: Identity, cohesion, and be-longing in a glocolazing space: Young Oromos in Toronto', Unpublished PhD Dissertation, University of Toronto.

Laird, J 1998, 'Theorizing culture: Narrative Ideas and Practice Principles', in M McGoldrick (ed), *Re-visioning family therapy*, Guildford, New York, pp. 20-36.

Laird, S 2008, *Anti-oppressive social work: A guide for developing cultural competence*, Sage Publications, London.

Lather, P 1991, *Getting smart: Feminist research and pedagogy with/in the postmodern*, Routledge, New York.

Lee, MY 2003, 'A solution focused approach to cross-cultural clinical social work practice: Utilizing cultural strengths', *Families in Society*, vol. 84, no. 3, pp. 385-395.

Lerner, M & West, C 1996, *Jews and Blacks: Let the healing begin*, Grosset/Putnam, New York.

Levine-Rasky, C 2000, 'Framing whiteness: working through the tensions in introducing whiteness to educators', *Race, Ethnicity, and Education*, vol. 3, no. 3, pp. 271-292.

Liamputtong, P & Ezzy, D 2005, *Qualitative research methods*, Oxford University Press, South Melbourne, Victoria, Australia.

Lincoln, YS & Guba, E 1985, *Naturalistic inquiry*, Sage Publications, Beverly Hills, CA.

Ling, HK 2004, 'The search from within: Research issues in relation to developing culturally appropriate social work practices', *International Social Work*, vol. 47, no. 3, pp. 336-345.

Ling, HK & Fejo-King, C 2013, 'Developing culturally based methods of research', in HK Ling, J Martin & R Ow (eds), *Cross-cultural social work: Local and global*, Palgrave Macmillan, South Yarra, pp. 101-112.

Lum, D 2007, *Culturally competent practice: A framework for understanding diverse groups and justice issues*, Thomson Higher Education, Belmont.

McDonald, C 2006, *Challenging social work: The institutional context of change*, Palgrave Macmillan, Basingstoke.

MacDougall, C & Fudge, E 2001, 'Planning and recruiting the sample for focus groups and in-depth interviews', *Qualitative Health Research*, vol. 11, no. 1, pp. 117-126.

McMichael, C, Gifford, SM & Correa-Velez, I 2011, 'Negotiating family, navigating resettlement: family connectedness amongst resettled youth with

refugee background living in Melbourne, Australia', *Journal of Youth Studies*, vol. 14, no. 2, pp. 179-195.

Mafile'o, T 2008, 'Tongan social work practice' in M Gray, J Coates & M Yellow Bird (eds), *Indigenous social work around the world: Towards culturally relevant education and practice*, Ashgate, Aldershot, pp. 117-128.

Martin, K 2003, 'Ways of knowing, being and doing: A theoretical framework and methods for Indigenous and Indigenist re-search', *Journal of Australian Studies: Voicing Dissent*, vol. 76, pp. 203-214.

Matsumoto, D & Juang, L 2004, *Culture and psychology*, Thomson and Wadsworth, Belmont, CA.

Meemeduma, P 1993, 'Reshaping the future: Cultural sense and social work', *National Social Work Conference*, September 1993, Newcastle, Australia.

Merleau-Ponty, M 1964, *Signs*, Northwestern University Press, Evanston.

Midgley, J 2008, 'Promoting reciprocal international social work exchanges: Professional imperialism revisited', in M Gray, J Coates & M Yellow Bird (eds), *Indigenous social work around the world: Towards culturally relevant education and practice*, Ashgate, Aldershot, pp. 31-48.

Miller, J, Hyde, C & Ruth, BJ 2004, 'Teaching about race and racism in social work: Challenges for white educators', *Smith College Studies in Social Work*, vol. 74, no. 2, pp. 409-426.

Moosa-Mitha, M 2005, 'Situating anti-oppressive theories within critical and difference-centred perspectives', in L Brown & S Strega (eds), *Research as resistance: Critical, Indigenous and anti-oppressive approaches*, Canadian Scholar's Press, Toronto, pp. 37-72.

Moustakas, C 1994, *Phenomenological research methods*, Sage Publications, Thousand Oaks, CA.

Nakkash, R & Makhoul, RA 2011, 'Obtaining informed consent: Observations from community research with refugee and impoverished youth', *Journal of Medical Ethics*, vol. 35, no. 10, pp. 638-643.

Nash, M, Wong, J & Trlin, A 2006, 'Civic and social integration. A new field of social work practice with immigrants, refugees and asylum seekers', *International Social Work,* vol. 49, no. 3, pp. 345-363.

Nelson, D, Price, E & Zubrzycki, J 2013, 'Integrating human rights and trauma frameworks in social work with people from refugee backgrounds', *Australian Social Work*, pp. 1-15, viewed 22nd March 2013, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/0312407X.2013.777968>.

North American National Association of Social Workers 2001, *Standard of cultural competence practice*, North American National Association of Social Workers, Washington, DC.

Nylund, D 2006, 'Critical multiculturalism, whiteness and social work: towards a more radical view of cultural competence', *Journal of Progressive Human Services*, vol. 17, no. 2, pp. 27-47.

O'Hagan, K 2001, *Cultural competence in the caring professions*, Jessica Kingsley, London.

Owen, CL & English, M 2005, 'Working together as culture brokers by building trusting alliances with bilingual and bicultural newcomer paraprofessionals', *Child Welfare*, vol. 84, no. 5, pp. 669-688.

Park, Y 2005, 'Culture as deficit: A critical discourse analysis of the concept of culture in contemporary social work discourse', *Journal of Sociology and Social Welfare*, vol. 32, no. 3, pp. 11-33.

Parliamentary Education Office 2012, *Get Parliament*, Fact Sheet, Parliamentary Education Office, Canberra, viewed 14 July 2012, <http://www.aph.gov.au/About_Parliament/Work_of_the_Parliament/Forming_and_Governing_a_Nation/parl#fedjud>

Pascal, J, Johnson, N, Dore, C & Trainor, R 2011, 'The lived experience of doing phenomenology: Perspectives from beginning health science postgraduate researchers', *Qualitative Social Work*, vol. 10, no. 2, pp. 172-189.

Pease, B 2010, *Undoing privilege: Unearned advantage in a divided world*, Zed Books, London.

Pine, BA & Drachman, D 2005, 'Effective child welfare practice with immigrant and refugee children and their families', *Child Welfare*, vol. 84, no. 5, pp. 537-562.

Pon, G 2009, 'Cultural competency as new racism: An ontology of forgetting', *Journal of Progressive Human Services*, vol. 20, no. 1, pp. 1-21.

Potts, K & Brown, L 2005, 'Becoming an anti-oppressive researcher', in L Brown & S Strega (eds), *Research as resistance: Critical, indigenous, and anti-oppressive approaches*, Canadian Scholar's Press, Toronto, pp. 255-286.

Power, P 2010, *Australian attitudes to the acceptance of refugees*, Refugee Council of Australia, viewed 3 December 2012, <http://www.refugeecouncil.org.au/r/spch/100320-MurdochUni-PPower.pdf>

Pupavac, V 2008, 'Refugee advocacy, traumatic representations and political disenchantment', *Government and Opposition*, vol. 43, no. 2, pp. 270-292.

Quinn, M 2009, 'Towards anti-racist and culturally affirming practices', in J Allan, L Briskman & B Pease (eds), *Critical social work*, Allen and Unwin, Crows Nest, NSW, pp. 91-104.

Razack, N 2002, 'A critical examination of international student exchanges', *International Social Work*, vol. 45, no. 2, pp. 251-265.

Razack, N & Jeffery, D 2002, 'Critical race discourse and tenets for social work', *Canadian Social Work Review*, vol. 19, no. 2, pp. 257-271.

Razack, S 1998, 'Race, space and prostitution: the making of the bourgeois subject', *Canadian Journal of Women and the Law*, vol. 10, no. 2, pp. 338-379.

Rees, S & Pease, B 2007, 'Domestic violence in refugee families in Australia', *Journal of Immigration and Refugee Studies*, vol. 5, no. 2, pp. 1-19.

Refugee Council of Australia 2011, *Myths about refugees and asylum seekers*, Fact Sheet, Refugee Council of Australia, viewed 18 May 2012, <http://www.refugeecouncil.org.au/f/myth-long.php>.

Refugee Council of Australia 2012a, *Australia's refugee and humanitarian program*, Fact Sheet, Refugee Council of Australia, viewed 18 May 2012, <http://www.refugeecouncil.org.au/f/rhp.php >

Refugee Council of Australia 2012b, *Refugee convention*, Fact Sheet, Refugee Council of Australia, viewed 18 May 2012, <http://www.refugeecouncil.org.au/f/who-conv.php>

Refugee Council of Australia 2013, *Latest news*, Newsletter, Refugee Council of Australia, viewed 28 September 2013, <http://www.refugeecouncil.org.au/n/news.php>

Reilly, A 2013, 'Where to now for asylum seeker policy under Tony Abbott?', blog, 13 September, The Conversation, viewed 28 September 2013, <https://theconversation.com/where-to-now-for-asylum-seeker-policy-under-tony-abbott-18010>

Rice, S 2010, *Human rights issues relating to African refugees and immigrants in Australia. Background paper for African Australians: A review of human rights and social inclusion issues*, Australian Human Rights Commission, Canberra.

Robinson, K 2013, 'Voices from the front line: Social work with refugees and asylum seekers in Australia and the UK', *British Journal of Social Work*, pp. 1-19.

Roman, L 1993, 'White is a color! White defensiveness, postmodernism and anti-racist pedagogy', in C McCarthy & W Crichlow (eds), *Race, identity and representation in education*, Routledge, New York, pp. 73-94.

Russell, MN & White, B 2001, 'Practice with immigrants and refugees', *Journal of Ethnic and Cultural Diversity in Social Work,* vol. 12, no. 13, pp. 29-54.

Sadler, Jr, WA 1969, *Existence and love: A new approach in existential phenomenology*, Charles Scribner & Sons, New York.

Said, E 1978, *Orientalism*, Penguin, New York.

Sakamoto, I 2007, 'An anti-oppressive approach to cultural competence', *Canadian Social Work Review*, vol. 24, no. 1, pp. 105-114.

Schmitz, C, Stakeman, C & Sisneros, J 2001, 'Educating professionals for practice in a multicultural society: Understanding oppression and valuing diversity', *Families in Society*, vol. 82, no. 6, pp. 612-622.

Schofield, G 2002, *Part of the family: Pathways through foster care*, British Association of Adoption and Fostering, London.

Silverman, D 2001, *Interpreting qualitative data: Methods for analysing talk, text and interaction,* Sage Publications, London.

Simpson, J 2008, 'The color-blind double bind: Whiteness and the (im)possibility of dialogue', *Communication Theory*, vol. 18, pp. 139-159.

Spiegelberg, H 1982, *The phenomenological movement: A historical introduction*, Martinus Nijhoff, Boston.

Spivak, G 1988, 'Can the subaltern speak?', in C Nelson & L Grossberg (eds), *Marxism and the interpretation of culture*, Macmillan, London, pp. 271-316.

Steinberg, SR 1997, 'Kinderculture: The cultural studies of childhood', in N Denzin (ed.), *Cultural studies: A research volume*, CT:JAL, Greenwitch, pp. 17-44.

Sue, D. W, Bernier, JE, Durran, I, Feinberg, L, Pedersen, P, Smith, EJ & Vasquez-Nuttal, E 1982, 'Position paper: Cross-cultural counselling competencies', *The Counselling Psychologist*, vol. 10, no. 2, pp. 45-55.

Sundar, P 2009, 'Multiculturalism', in M Gray & S Webb (eds), *Social work theory and methods*, Sage, London, pp. 98-108.

Sweeney, AJ 2008, 'Bumps on the yellow brick road: Sierra Leoneans in Launceston, Australia and their settlement experiences', *International Journal of Diversity in Organizations, Communities and Nations*, vol. 7, no. 6, pp. 283-294.

Taylor, C 1994, 'The politics of recognition', in A Gutman (ed.), *Multiculturalism*, Princeton University Press, Princeton, NJ, pp. 25-74.

Thompson, N 2000, *Understanding Social Work: Preparing for Practice*, Palgrave, New York.

Tran, TV & Dhooper, SS 1996,' Ethnic and gender differences in perceived needs for social services amongst three elderly Hispanic groups', *Journal of Gerontological Social Work*, vol. 25, pp. 121-147.

Tuhiwai-Smith, L 1999, *Decolonizing methodologies: Research and indigenous peoples*, Zed Books, New York.

Valtonen, K 2001, 'Social work with immigrants and refugees: Developing a participation-based framework for anti-oppressive practice', *British Journal of Social Work*, vol. 31, no. 6, pp. 955-960.

Van Manen, M 1990, *Researching lived experience: Human science for and action sensitive pedagogy,* State University of New York Press, Albany, NY.

Victorian Foundation for Survivors of Torture 1998, *Rebuilding shattered lives*, Parkville, Victoria.

Walker, S 2005, 'Towards culturally competent practice in child and adolescent mental health', *International Social Work*, vol. 48, no. 1, pp. 49-62.

Walter, M, Taylor, S & Habibis, D 2011, 'How white is social work in Australia?', *Australian Social Work*, vol. 64, no. 1, pp. 6-19.

Walter, M, Taylor, S & Habibis, D 2012, 'Australian social work is white', in B Bennett, S Green, S Gilbert & D Bessarab (eds), *Our voices: Indigenous and Torres Strait Islander social work*, Palgrave Macmillan, South Yarra, Victoria, pp. 230-247.

Wang, G & Yeh, EY 2005, 'Globalization and hybridization in cultural products: The cases of *Mulan* and *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon*', *International Journal of Cultural Studies,* vol. 8, no. 2, pp. 175-193.

Weaver, HN 1999, 'Indigenous people and the social work profession: Defining culturally competent services', *Social Work*, vol. 44, no. 3, pp. 217-225.

Weaver, HN & Yellow Horse Brave Heart, M 1999, 'Examining two facets of American Indian identity: exposure to other cultures and the influences of historical trauma', *Journal of Human Behavior in the Social Environment*, vol. 2, no. 1-2, pp. 19-33.

Westoby, P 2009, *The sociality of refugee. healing: In dialogue with Southern Sudanese refugees resettling in Australia*, Common Ground Publishing, Australia.

Westoby, P & Ingamells, A 2010, 'A critically informed perspective of working with resettling refugee groups in Australia', *British Journal of Social Work,* vol. 40, pp. 1759-1776.

Whelan, J, Swallow, M, Peschar, P & Dunne, A 2002, 'From counselling to community work: Developing a framework for social work practice with displaced persons', *Australian Social Work*, vol. 55, no. 1, pp. 13-23.

Williams, C 2006, 'The epistemology of cultural competence', *Families in Society: The Journal of Contemporary Social Services*, vol. 87, no. 2, pp. 209-220.

Williams, G 2010, *The future of the Australian Bill of Rights debate*, Freilich Foundation, ANU, Canberra.

Wilson, S 2013, 'Using Indigenist research to shape our future', in M Gray, J Coates, M Yellow Bird & T Hetherington (eds), *Decolonizing social work*, Ashgate, Aldershot, pp. 311-322.

Wong, J 2000, 'Agencies providing social services for the Chinese community', *Proceedings of the ANZASW Biennial Conference*, Auckland, New Zealand, pp. 83-96.

Wong, R, Cheng, S, Choi, S, Ky, K, LeBa, S, Tsang, K & Yoo, L 2003, 'Deconstructing culture in cultural competence. Dissenting voices from Asian-Canadian practitioners', *Canadian Social Work Review*, vol. 20, no. 2, pp. 149-167.

Yan, MC 2008, 'Exploring the meaning of crossing and culture: An empirical understanding from practitioners' everyday experience', *Families in Society: The Journal of Contemporary Social Services*, vol. 89, no. 2, pp. 282-292.

Yan, MC & Wong YR 2005, 'Rethinking self-awareness in cultural competence: Toward a dialogic self in cross-cultural social work', *Families in Society: The Journal of Contemporary Social Services*, vol. 86, no. 2, pp. 181-188.

Yip, K 2005, 'A dynamic Asian response to globalization in cross-cultural social work', *International Social Work*, vol. 48, no. 5, pp. 593-607.

Young, S 2004, 'Social work theory and practice: The invisibility of whiteness', in A Moreton- Robinson (ed.), *Whitening race: Essays in social and cultural criticism*, Aboriginal Studies Press, Canberra, pp. 104-118.

APPENDICES

Appendix 1: Recruitment Poster for Participants of

Refugee Background

Did you come to Australia as a Refugee?
Have you received services from a social worker and thought…"that was helpful" OR maybe…"that could have gone better"?

Are there things you think social workers do really well? Are there things you think social workers could improve on?

Maybe you have ideas about how social workers and people of refugee background can better interact?

If you answer yes to any of these questions and you would like to contribute to the development of Multicultural social work practices in Australia why not consider participating in the following study…

Joselynn Sweeney BA (Hons) BSW (Hons) Ph.D. candidate at the University of Tasmania is hoping to unders people of refugee backgrounds' and social workers' opinion of what is currently working and no working when they interact with one another.

How can you participate?
If you can spare a maximum of 2 hours and would like to be interviewed please e-mail anns2@utas.edu.au or phone 03-63243254 for more details. Joselynn can travel to you and/or together we can discuss arrangements that suit you. Interviews are private and confidential and YOU CAN ASK FOR AN INTEPRETER.

Look forward to your contributions. Thank you!

Appendix 2: Preamble (via e-mail or letter) to relevant agencies seeking their support in distributing research recruitment poster

Dear Sir/Madam;

My name is Joselynn Sweeney, I am a Ph.D. social work student at the University of Tasmania researching cross-cultural social work practices with people of refugee background. My research project involves interviewing social workers and people of refugee background to find out what currently works and does not work in cross-cultural social work practices. I am seeking to collect the experiences of both social workers and people of refugee background in an effort to elaborate ways of working that best meet the needs of our multicultural community.

I am writing to you hoping that your agency can assist me in recruiting potential research participants by both circulating the enclosed flyers through your networks and possibly referring interested workers and/or community members with whom you have direct contact. I have received approval to conduct this research from the Human Research Ethics Committee (Tasmania) Network. I am also professionally supervised by Professor Sandra Taylor (University of Tasmania) and Dr. Sonya Stanford (University of Tasmania); I can provide you with their details if you wish to seek further information.

My research does not seek to identify your agency in any way; it will make no reference to any agencies that assisted in the recruitment process; and, it will not make any reference as to which agency participants were referred from or work in. Participants themselves will not be personally identified in the research. All potential participants will be given detailed information about the purpose of the research, its aims, methods, potential risks associated with participation, avenues for complaints, feedback and withdrawal from the research before an interview is agreed on and scheduled. Interpreters will also be offered.

I thank you in advance for your time, consideration and assistance. Should you have any queries or wish to discuss this matter further please contact me on 03-63243254 or anns2@utas.edu.au

Kind regards,

Appendix 3: Telephone and E-mail protocol for first contact made by a potential participant of Refugee background

- Hello! Thank you very much for calling; I'm honoured by your phone call. My name is Joselynn I am the person doing this research. (the conversation at this point would focus on building trust by offering as much about me as possible including where I am from and how long I have been in Australia, how old I am and what my professional background is).

- Depending on the level of English fluency I would ask the following question: Would you like for me to use an Interpreter to call you back? Please can you tell me which language or dialect you speak? Can I have your number to call you back? Which time is better? Which day is better? Thank you, I will call you back with an Interpreter. If an interpreter is required I would end this initial contact at this point and call back with an Interpreter to follow the format described in this document.

- English is not my first language and I have an accent so may I please ask that you let me know if what I am saying is confusing, if you need me to slow down or perhaps if these issues are not of concern to you and I can just relax and not worry about my accent?

- I am a social worker and a person of refugee background also so the reason behind me wanting to do this research was to understand what works and what doesn't work when a social worker and a person of refugee/migrant background work together.

- May I ask: what other information would you like me to give you over the phone that would help you know more about what I propose to do?

- My plan was to get to know each other a little over the phone, invite you to receive more detail information about the project in the mail and ask you if I could call you later (after you have had a chance to read and think about the information I send you). And then, if you were still interested in being interviewed, book a time and place convenient to do the interview. How does all this sound to you?

- The phone conversation would end with the following: After hearing all this about the project would you be interested in receiving the written information in the mail? May I have a postal address to send the information to you? Could I call you back in a few days to see what you think and see if you are still wishing to be interviewed? May I please have your number? If you have any more questions or you want to talk some more please you are welcome to ring me. It has been a pleasure hearing from you, thank you very much, I look forward to talking with you again.

Appendix 4: Information sheet for Research Participants from Refugee communities

This is an invitation to people of Refugee background. I would like to invite any person of Refugee background between the ages of 18 onwards to participate in a study being conducted by Joselynn Sweeney, Social Work Doctorate student under the supervision of Professor Sandra Taylor from the University of Tasmania.

Title of investigation: How can social workers work more effectively with people of refugee background?

Name of investigator: Joselynn Sweeney *BA (Honours) BSW (Honours)* Social Work Ph.D. student at the University of Tasmania.

Who is Joselynn Sweeney?

I am a 36 year old woman who came to Australia when I was 15 years old after my family left my homeland of Chile because of social, political and cultural problems. I am a social worker. I work with refugee and migrant communities in Tasmania. I have 3 children and am now doing my doctorate in social work.

How will Joselynn manage to do the research as both a forced migrant and a social worker?

I do not claim to have every insight possible to the experience of forced migration and/or professional social work. Nor do I claim to know everything that

is going on between social workers and clients of refugee background. I have experienced and observed that the cross-cultural social work setting presents challenges but I seek to capture the experiences of the experts in this area - the social workers and the clients of refugee background.

I also recognise the unique position I am in and how this might be seen as a threat to confidentiality and anonymity particularly when one considers that participating in the research involves discussing with a fellow refugee the experiences of working with social workers. Please know that I am bound professionally, legally and ethically by both the Australian Social Workers Code of Ethics and the Human Research Ethics Committee (Tasmania) Ethical conduct in Research guidelines. Any misconduct and breach is reportable – please see information that follows.

What is the purpose of the research?

The purpose of the study is to understand the experiences that people of refugee background have when working with social workers in Australia. The research also looks at the experiences that social workers have when working with clients of Refugee backgrounds. I hope to develop ways that improve the working relationship between a social worker and clients of Refugee backgrounds.

What benefit can you or others achieve by being involved in this research?

You will have a chance to tell your story and provide your opinion of what has gone well and what could have been improved upon during your interactions

with social workers. This research is also a chance for you to identify ways in which social workers and people of refugee backgrounds can better interact with each other. This research is not a guarantee that things will change but a chance to have your views voiced in a confidential manner.

Why have the Refugee communities been chosen for this research?

Communities of people of refugee background are growing in Australia; many people are arriving from parts of the world we know very little about. As a result, not much is known about the views that people of Refugee background have of their interactions with Australian social workers. As social workers we are not sure about what works and what does not work when we work with people of other cultures. This study is a chance to learn about each other, find ways to talk with each other and work together in ways that meet the needs of your community.

What do you need to do if you wish to participate in this research?

Please ring Joselynn on 63243254 to arrange a personal interview. You can ask for a Professional Interpreter to assist you during the interview (please see "Can I ask for an Interpreter?" below for more details). Interviews will take between 1 and 2 hours and will take place at the university or in a place of your convenience and comfort. Interviews will be audio taped and Joselynn will write up your interview and give you a copy of it in writing. You will then be asked to read it and I will change or delete anything you wish. You will then be given a copy of your interview to keep. If you wish to withdraw your interview from the

research you can let Joselynn know and the original audio tape and written copy will be given back to you.

When the research is completed a final report will be written. This report becomes Joselynn's thesis. The thesis will go to the University for final assessment of Joselynn's degree, at that time Joselynn will also contact you to discuss what else we can do with the report.

Are there any risks to me or my community if I participate in this research?

There are no material risks to you, your family and/or your community if you decide to participate in this research. You **will not** have your visa reviewed or revoked, you **will not** be reviewed by the Department of Immigration, Centrelink **will not** stop or review your payments and **no one** back in your home land will be affected because your name is never disclosed to any one but Joselynn. This research has nothing to do with any government department and the university will not have access to your personal details.

If you know Joselynn, because you have worked with her or see her in the community, she will not be offended if you decide not to be part of this research. She cannot refuse you or your community services or tell other social workers to refuse you or your community services because you decide not to participate. Doing something like that would mean Joselynn is acting badly and you can report her to the University for unprofessional behaviour.

The only issue to be mindful of is whether or not during the interview you feel sad because you have remembered a bad experience. You do not have to talk about anything you do not wish to talk about and if you do feel sad Joselynn will be there to talk with you. If you wish the interview can be stopped or you can decide not to do it at all.

If you do not want to talk to Joselynn after you have felt sad we can arrange a time for you to talk with a counsellor from the Phoenix Centre through the Migrant Resource Centre .The counsellors at the Phoenix Centre are free, you do not have to pay to see them.

Will anyone know of what I say in the interviews?

Joselynn is the only person who will know who participated and when she is writing the final report she will not use any information that can identify you personally. She cannot tell anyone, including other participants, who participated and what was said in interviews.

She will refer to all participants as 'participants', she will say how many females and males participated, what their ages were and which country the participants came from **but** she will not use your first and last name, family or tribal name, she will not identify your address, your religion, your ethnic group or your clan. She will not use the names of any of your family members not even those who are still in your home land or in a refugee camp.

Joselynn hopes to employ a professional to help her transcribe some interviews. You will be asked if your interview can be transcribed by this

professional. If you say yes your interview will be listened to by this professional who will then write it up. This person is obliged by law, the same way Joselynn is, to not tell anybody what they hear. This person can not reveal your details to anyone, not your name or anything they hear on your tape. Their job is to simply type what they hear and hand over both the tape and the written copy. They do not keep copies of anything. No copies will be made of your tape. If you are not happy with Joselynn using this person to transcribe your tape then Joselynn will be the only person who will listen to it and transcribe it.

Can I ask for an Interpreter?

Yes, you can. Joselynn will ask you which language you speak and she will employ a professional interpreter from agencies like TIS and Language Link and we will as far as possible try and find you someone you are comfortable with to help you understand all this information before you decide if you want to participate in the research. The interpreter can also be used during the interview if you decide to be interviewed. They have the same professional obligations to protect your privacy as Joselynn has. They will not be given a copy of your interview once it is written up.

If I cannot find an Interpreter who is accredited I will try and find someone who has a good reputation with agencies and communities. I will then contact you to see if you can work with that person. If you find that you cannot work with that person then I will not interview you as I do not want to offend you or make you uncomfortable. If this happens I will understand and will not be offended. I will not ask for details as to why you cannot work with that person.

What happens to all the information that is collected?

All audio tapes, interview notes and transcribed material will be kept in a locked cabinet at the University and only Joselynn will have access to this cabinet. The transcriber will also keep any audio tapes and transcription in progress in a locked cabinet only accessible to them. Joselynn will provide the transcriber an USB flash drive on which to save the transcribed interview. The transcriber will be bound by law, the same way Joselynn is, to not tell anybody what they hear on an interview tape and cannot make or save a copy of the transcribed material. Upon them completing transcription the USB flash drive containing the transcribed interview and the original audio tape will be returned to Joselynn for storage.

A copy of your interview, once written up, will be given to you to keep. Another copy is locked at the University and will also be electronically stored on an USB flash drive secured by a password which only Joselynn knows how to use. All material is destroyed after 5 years of locked storage at the University.

Can I withdraw from the research if I wish to?

Yes. If at any time you wish to withdraw you can. You do not have to give Joselynn an explanation or a reason. You only need to ring her and let her know. You can also choose to withdraw your interview after it has taken place. Please note that after the 1st December 2009 however, you will not be able to withdraw your interview because by then the final report would start to be written. Please note that your interview's audio tapes and notes **ARE NOT** a part of this final report.

Who do I talk to if I have any questions?

You can talk to Joselynn on 63243254 or write to her c/- Locked Bag 1340, Launceston 7250 or send her an e-mail to anns2@utas.edu.au

Who has approved this research?

The research has received ethical approval from the Human Research Ethics Committee (Tasmania) network which is constituted under the National Health and Medical Research Council. The Committee under Human Research Ethics Committee (Tasmania) network use the National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Research Involving Humans Guidelines to inform decisions.

Who can I contact if I have any concerns or complaints to make?

If you have any concerns or complaints about the way in which Joselynn conducts this research or you have any concerns or complaints about the research you can contact the Executive Officer on the Human Research Ethics Committee (Tasmania) Network on 6226 7479 or email human.ethics@utas.edu.au

If you are a student at the university you can also contact Colin Clark on 63243787 colin.clark@utas.edu.au or Mike Spurr on 63243381 mike.spurr@utas.edu.au. They are both university counsellors and you can talk with them confidentially about any concerns or complaints you may have about Joselynn's conduct or the research itself.

You can also contact Joselynn's research supervisor Professor Sandra Taylor on 63243528 or e-mail S.D.Taylor@utas.edu.au if you have any concerns or complaints about Joselynn's conduct or the research itself.

Will I find out about the results of the research?

Yes, a copy of the final report will be given to you by Joselynn. She will also invite you to think about the ways the final report could be used to share the learnings.

What happens to these forms I sign?

All participants will be given a copy, to keep, of this information sheet and the statement of informed consent which you view and sign at time of interview if you decide to participate. These forms are not contracts that stop you from withdrawing from the research, they are not documents that force you to pay for anything and they are not records that are kept by the government. These documents are simply to assure the university and the Ethics committee that **you** have been fully informed of what this research is about and that you have made a free decision to participate in the research. They are designed to make sure that Joselynn did not force you to participate in the research, that she explained to you what this research was about and that she respects your rights to not participate and to withdraw if you change your mind.

Joselynn Sweeney	**Prof. Sandra Taylor**
Social Work PhD Student	*Research Supervisor*

Appendix 5: Participant of Refugee Background Consent Form

"How can social workers work more effectively with people of refugee background?"

1. I have read and understood the "Information Sheet" for this study.

2. The nature and possible effects of the study have been explained to me.

3. I understand that the study involves one initial interview that will last no more than two hours. I understand that during this interview I will be asked to talk about my experience in interacting with social workers.

4. I understand that I might feel sad when I talk about my experiences but that I do not have to share anything that I do not wish to share or that makes me uncomfortable.

5. I understand that if I feel sad and wish to talk to someone about this sadness that I can talk with Joselynn Sweeney and that she can also arrange for me to talk with a counsellor from the Phoenix Centre.

6. Any questions that I have asked have been answered to my satisfaction.

7. I agree that research data gathered from me for the study may be published provided that I cannot be identified as a participant.

8. I understand that my identity will be kept confidential and that any information I supply to the researcher will be used only for the purpose of the research.

9. I agree to participate in this investigation and understand that I may withdraw at any time, up until the 1st December 2009, without any effect and if I so wish, I may request that any data I have supplied to date be withdrawn from the research.

Name of Participant:

Signature: Date:

☐   I have explained this project and the implications of participation in it to this volunteer and I believe that the consent is informed and that he/she understands the implications of participation.

☐   The participant has received the Information Sheet in which my details have been provided so that participants have had opportunity to contact me prior to them consenting to participate in this project.

Name of Investigator:

Signature of Investigator: Date:

☐   I have no problem with my interview tape being transcribed by a professional transcriber employed by Joselynn Sweeney. I understand that this means this transcriber will hear what I say in the interview but that like Joselynn Sweeney they cannot reveal to anyone what they heard and they do not keep copies of my interview.

☐   I do not wish for Joselynn Sweeney to have my interview transcribed by a professional transcriber. I understand that this means only Joselynn Sweeney can transcribe my interview tape.

Name of Participant:

Signature: Date:

☐   I have explained to the participant the process and consequences involved in using a professional transcriber.

☐   The participant has had the opportunity to consider consenting to the use of a professional transcriber and ask me any questions in relation to this issue prior to signing this consent form.

Name of Investigator:

Signature of Investigator: Date:

Appendix 6: Interview Schedule for Participants of

Refugee Background

Phase One: Defining social work and social work practice.

- Let's Talk about what you think about…

    - social work ….
    - social workers in Australia working with people of refugee background…..

Phase Two: Cross-Cultural Social Work practices.

- Let's talk about your experiences in Australia and your interactions with social workers?

Phase Three: Helpful social work practices

- Thinking of your experiences with social workers, thinking back to the most positive, most helpful social worker you have worked with here in Tasmania, can you share a little about those experiences - what were they like?

Phase Four: Non helpful Social work practices

- Thinking of your experiences with social workers again, thinking back to the most unhelpful, least positive experience you have had working with a social worker here in Tasmania, can you share a little about those experiences – what were they like?

Appendix 7: Recruitment Poster for Social Work Participants

👋 **Social Workers!** 👋

Have you ever worked or are you currently working with people of refugee background?

Are there social work practices that you think refugee clients find more helpful than others?

Have you ever wondered if there are tools for social work practice with refugee clients that we are yet to explore?

If you answer yes to any of these questions and you would like to contribute to the development of Multicultural social work practices in Australia why not consider participating in the following study…

Joselynn Sweeney *BA (Hons) BSW (Hons)* Ph.D. candidate at the University of Tasmania is researching so workers' and people of refugee backgrounds' opinion on what is currently working and not working in cross cultural social work practice around Australia.

How can you participate?

If you can spare a maximum of 2 hours and would like to be interviewed please e-mail anns2@utas.edu.au or phone 03-63243254 for more details and an information sheet. Joselynn can travel to you and/or together we can discuss arrangements that minimize any inconvenience. Interviews are confidential and a preliminary chat is guaranteed to be commitment free.
YOU CAN ASK FOR AN INTERPRETER.

Look forward to your contributions. Thank you!

Appendix 8: Telephone and E-mail protocol for first contact made by a potential social work participant

- Hello! Thank you so much for making contact. My name is Joselynn Sweeney, I'm the person conducting this research, I'm a social worker by trade and I'm also a person of refugee background hence my interest in understanding what works and what doesn't work in cross-cultural social work practice.

- English is not my first language and so if you're having trouble with my accent or any issue like that please let me know I will not be offended, and if you don't mind I might ask you to repeat things at times. I struggle with pronouncing English names so I tend to ask several times to confirm I've got it right that way I feel like I will not offend you. I'd rather we understand each other so we can relax and get to know one another. Is that Ok with you?

- At this point the conversation will focus more on building rapport and listening to what the person is seeking from me to facilitate their participation in the research. One question I think can assist at this point is: **what sort of information would you like me to give you over the phone that would help you know more about me, the project, your potential involvement and what I propose to do?**

- My plan was to get to know each other a little over the phone, invite you to receive more detailed information about the project in the mail or electronically and ask you if I could call you later (after you have had a chance to read and think about the information I send you). And then, if you were still interested in being interviewed, book a time and place convenient to do the interview. How does all this sound to you?

- The phone conversation would end with the following: After hearing all this about the project would you be interested in receiving the written information in the mail? May I have a postal address (or e-mail address) to send the information to you? Could I call you back (or e-mail you) in a few days to see what you think and see if you are still wishing to be interviewed? May I please have your number? If you have any more questions or you want to talk some more please you are welcome to ring me or e-mail me. My supervisors are Prof. Robert Bland and Dr. Sonya Stanford I can put you in touch with them as well if you wish in case you want more background to what I've offered you. It has been a pleasure hearing from you, thanks so much for expressing interest, I look forward to talking with you again.

Appendix 9: Information Sheet for Social Work Research Participants

This is an invitation to social workers eligible for membership to the AASW. I would like to invite any social worker who has had professional experience working with people of refugee background in Tasmania and who is between the ages of 21 onwards to participate in a study being conducted by myself, Joselynn Sweeney, Social Work Doctorate student under the supervision of Professor Sandra Taylor from the University of Tasmania.

Title of investigation: How can social workers work more effectively with people of refugee background?

Name of investigator: Joselynn Sweeney *BA (Honours) BSW (Honours)* Social Work Ph.D. student at the University of Tasmania.

Who is Joselynn Sweeney?

I am a 36 year old woman who came to Australia when I was 15 years old after my family left my homeland of Chile because of social, political and cultural problems. I am a social worker. I work with refugee and migrant communities in Tasmania. I have 3 children and am now doing my doctorate in social work.

How will Joselynn manage to do the research as both a forced migrant and a social worker?

I do not claim to have every insight possible to the experience of forced migration and/or professional social work. Nor do I claim to know everything that is going on between social workers and clients of refugee background. I have experienced and observed that the cross-cultural social work setting presents challenges but I seek to capture the experiences of the experts in this area - the social workers and the clients of refugee background.

I also recognise the unique position I am in and how this might be seen as a threat to confidentiality and anonymity particularly when one considers that participating in the research involves discussing with a fellow social worker of refugee/migrant background individual social work practices with people of refugee background. Please know that I am bound professionally, legally and ethically by both the Australian Social Workers Code of Ethics and the Human Research Ethics Committee (Tasmania) Ethical conduct in Research guidelines. Any misconduct and breach is reportable – please see information that follows.

What is the purpose of the research?

The purpose of the study is to understand the experiences that Social Workers in Australia have when working with people of Refugee background. The research also looks at the experiences that people of Refugee background have when working with Australian Social Workers. I hope to develop ways that improve the working relationship between a Social Worker and clients of Refugee

backgrounds and to propose a frame of reference for social work practice with people of refugee background.

What benefit can you, others and the field of Social Work achieve by being involved in this research?

You will have a chance to tell your story and provide your opinion of what has gone well and what could have been improved during your interactions with people of refugee background. This research is also a chance for you to identify ways in which Social Workers and people of refugee background can better interact with each other. This research is not a guarantee that things will change but a chance to have your views voiced in a confidential manner.

Why have Social Workers and people of Refugee background been chosen for this research?

People of Refugee background are a growing sector of the Australian community; many people are arriving from parts of the world we know very little about. As a result, not much is known about the views that people of Refugee background have of their interactions with Australian social workers. Social Work research in the area indicates that as social workers we are not sure about what works and what does not work when we work with people from other cultures. This study is a chance to learn about each other, find ways to talk with each other and work together. It is also an opportunity to record and test the Social Work practices that offer ways forward and share these learnings both nationally and internationally.

What do you need to do if you wish to participate in this research?

Please ring me on 63243254 to arrange a personal interview. Please know that Professional Interpreters can be arranged and when an accredited Interpreter is not available every effort will be made to find someone with documented positive feedback from both service providers and communities (please see "Can I ask for an Interpreter?" below for details). Interviews will take between 1 and 2 hours and will take place in a place of your convenience and comfort. Interviews will be audio taped. I will write up your interview and give you a copy of it in writing. You will then be asked to read it and provide your feedback and let me know if you wish to change and/or delete anything. The proposed changes will be made and I will then provide you with a final copy to keep. If you wish to withdraw your interview from the research you can let me know and the original audio tape and written copy will be given back to you.

When the research is completed a final report will be written. This report becomes my thesis. The thesis will go to the University for final assessment. At that time I will also contact you to discuss what else we can do with the report to disseminate the learnings.

Are there any risks to me or my organisation if I participate in this research?

There are no material risks to you or your organisation. The dissemination of the final report will be negotiated with all participants. The final report will not contain your personal details or any detail identifying you or your

agency/organisation. No names will be used to report the findings; all participants will be identified as 'participant', as either male or female, of the relevant age, working for example: "in the settlement field". Agencies/organisations will not be profiled.

Participants are being drawn from around Tasmania and no mention will be made of participant's geographical location or context.

Will anyone know of what I say in the interviews?

I hope to employ a professional to help me transcribe some interviews. You will be asked if you consent to a transcriber being used to type up your interview. If you do not consent to the use of a transcriber then I will be the only person to listen to your interview tape. The transcriber is professionally bounded to uphold the same confidentiality laws that apply to me. Their job is to simply type what they hear and hand over both the tape and the written copy. They do not keep copies of anything. No copies will be made of your tape.

The final report will not use any information that can identify you personally or your agency/organisation.

Can I ask for an Interpreter?

Yes, you can. I will ask you which language you speak and I will employ a professional interpreter from agencies like TIS and Language Link and we will as far as possible try and find you someone you are comfortable with to help you understand all this information before you decide if you want to participate in the

research. The interpreter can also be used during the interview if you decide to be interviewed. They have the same professional obligations to protect your privacy as I have as a researcher. They will not be given a copy of your interview once it is written up.

If I cannot find an Interpreter who is accredited I will try and find someone who has a good reputation with agencies and communities. I will then contact you to see if you can work with that person. If you find that you cannot work with that person then I will not interview you as I do not want to offend you or make you uncomfortable. If this happens I will understand and will not be offended. I will not ask for details as to why you cannot work with that person.

What happens to all the information that is collected?

All audio tapes, interview notes and transcribed material will be kept in a locked cabinet at the University and only Joselynn will have access to this cabinet. The transcriber will also keep any audio tapes and transcription in progress in a locked cabinet only accessible to them. Joselynn will provide the transcribe with a USB flash drive on which to save the transcribed interview. The transcriber will be bound by law, the same way Joselynn is, to not tell anybody what they hear on an interview tape and cannot make or save a copy of the transcribed material. Upon them completing transcription the USB flash drive containing the transcribed interview and the original audio tape will be returned to Joselynn for storage.

A copy of your interview, once written up, will be given to you to keep. Another copy is locked at the University and will also be electronically stored on an USB flash drive secured by a password which only Joselynn knows how to use. All material is destroyed after 5 years of locked storage at the University.

Can I withdraw from the research if I wish to?

Yes. If at any time you wish to withdraw you can. You do not have to give me an explanation or a reason. You only need to ring me and let me know. You can also choose to withdraw your interview after it has taken place. Please note that after the 1st December 2009 you will not be able to withdraw your interview as the final report will be in production. Please note that your interview's audio tapes and notes **ARE NOT** a part of this final report.

Who do I talk to if I have any questions?

You can talk to me on 63243254 or write to me c/- Locked Bag 1340, Launceston 7250 or send me an e-mail to anns2@utas.edu.au

Who has approved this research?

The research has received ethical approval from the Human Research Ethics Committee (Tasmania) network which is constituted under the National Health and Medical Research Council. The Committee under Human Research Ethics Committee (Tasmania) network use the National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Research Involving Humans Guidelines to inform decisions.

Who can I contact if I have any concerns or complaints to make?

If you have any concerns or complaints about the way in which I conduct this research or you have any concerns or complaints about the research you can contact the Executive Officer on the Human Research Ethics Committee (Tasmania) Network on 6226 7479 or email human.ethics@utas.edu.au

You can also contact my research supervisor Professor Sandra Taylor on 63243528 or e-mail S.D.Taylor@utas.edu.au if you have any concerns or complaints about my conduct or the research itself.

Will I find out about the results of the research?

Yes, a copy of the final report will be given to you. At the time of handing you a copy of the final report I will also invite you to think about the ways the final report could be used to share the learnings.

What happens to these forms I sign?

All participants will be given a copy, to keep, of this information sheet and the statement of informed consent which you view and sign at time of interview if you decide to participate. These forms are not contracts that stop you from withdrawing from the research, they are not documents that force you to pay for anything and they are not records that are kept by the government. These documents are simply to assure the university and the Ethics committee that you have been fully informed of what this research is about and that you have made a free decision to participate in the research. They are designed to make sure that I

did not force you to participate in the research, that I explained to you what this

research was about and that I respect your rights to not participate and to

withdraw if you change your mind.

Joselynn Sweeney   **Professor Sandra Taylor**

Social Work PhD Student   *Research Supervisor*

Appendix 10: Social Workers Consent Form

"How can social workers work more effectively with people of refugee background?"

I have read and understood the "Information Sheet" for this study.

- The nature and possible effects of the study have been explained to me.

- I understand that the study involves one initial interview that will last no more than two hours. I understand that during this interview I will be asked to talk about my experience in working with people of refugee background.

- Any questions that I have asked have been answered to my satisfaction.

- I agree that research data gathered from me for the study may be published provided that I and the agency/organisation that I work in cannot be identified as participants.

- I understand that my identity will be kept confidential and that any information I supply to the researcher will be used only for the purpose of the research.

- I understand that the agency/organisation I work in will not be identified in this research.

- I agree to participate in this investigation and understand that I may withdraw at any time up until the 1st December 2009 without any effect and if I so wish, I may request that any data I have supplied to date be withdrawn from the research.

Name of Participant:

Signature: Date:

☐ I have explained this project and the implications of participation in it to this volunteer and I believe that the consent is informed and that he/she understands the implications of participation.

☐ The participant has received the Information Sheet in which my details have been provided so that participants have had opportunity to contact me prior to them consenting to participate in this project.

Name of Investigator:

Signature of Investigator: Date:

☐ I have no problem with my interview tape being transcribed by a professional transcriber. I understand that this means this transcriber will hear what I say in the interview but that like Joselynn Sweeney they cannot reveal to anyone what they heard and they do not keep copies of my interview.

☐ I do not wish for Joselynn Sweeney to have my interview transcribed by a professional transcriber. I understand that this means only Joselynn Sweeney can transcribe my interview tape.

Name of Participant:

Signature: Date:

☐ I have explained to the participant the process and consequences involved in using a professional transcriber.

☐ The participant has had the opportunity to consider consenting to the use of a professional transcriber and ask me any questions in relation to this issue prior to signing this consent form.

Name of Investigator:

Signature of Investigator: Date:

Appendix 11: Social Workers Interview Schedule

Phase One: Defining social work and social work practice.

- Let's Talk about what you think about…

    o social work ….
    o social workers in Australia working with people of refugee background…..

Phase Two: Cross-Cultural Social Work practices.

- Let's talk about your experiences in Australia and your interactions with people of refugee background?
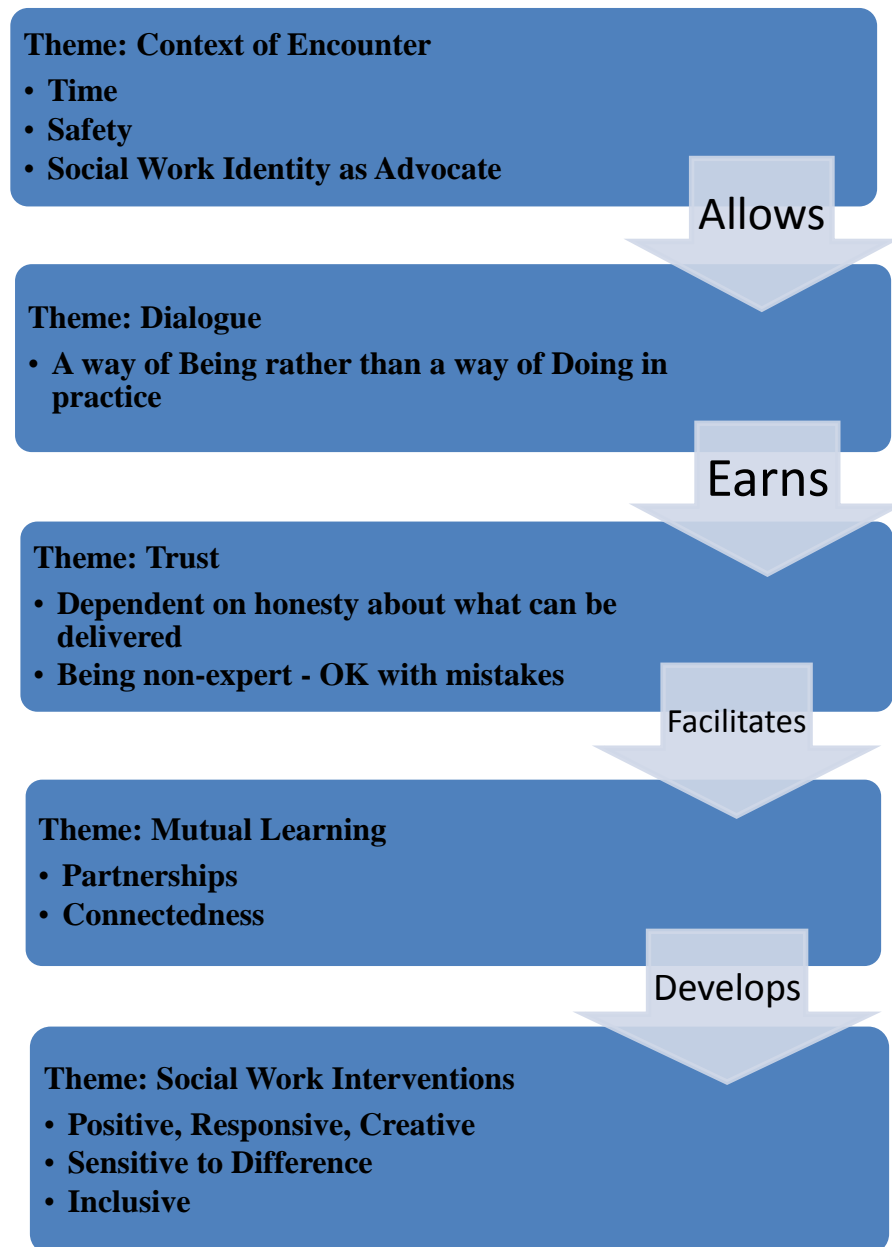
Phase Three: Helpful social work practices

- Thinking of your experiences with people of refugee background, thinking back to the most positive, most helpful social work encounter you had here in Tasmania, can you share a little about those experiences - what were they like?

Phase Four: Non helpful Social work practices

- Thinking of your experiences with people of refugee background again, thinking back to the most unhelpful, least positive social work encounter you had here in Tasmania, can you share a little about those experiences – what were they like?

Appendix 12: Thematic Map of Responses

Theme: Context of Encounter

- **Time**
- **Safety**
- **Social Work Identity as Advocate**

Allows

Theme: Dialogue

- **A way of Being rather than a way of Doing in practice**

Earns

Theme: Trust

- **Dependent on honesty about what can be delivered**
- **Being non-expert - OK with mistakes**

Facilitates

Theme: Mutual Learning

- **Partnerships**
- **Connectedness**

Develops

Theme: Social Work Interventions

- **Positive, Responsive, Creative**
- **Sensitive to Difference**
- **Inclusive**

On-going mutual learning and change (between worker and client) as foundational elements of how the positive encounter is experienced.

Appendix 13: Letter enclosed with posted information offering oral consent and/or the use of an Interpreter.

Dear…..

This is Joselynn Sweeney. We spoke on the phone the other day. I hope you and your family are well.

Thank you for receiving the information about my research project. I wanted to let you know that I can organise an Interpreter during the interview if you decide to participate in the research. I cannot always find an accredited Interpreter but I can try and find someone who is professionally trained as an interpreter and has a good reputation with agencies and communities. If the person I find is not an accredited Interpreter I will let you know who I have found and I will ask you to decide whether you can work with them. If I cannot find someone that you can work with then I will not be able to interview you as I do not want to offend you or make you uncomfortable.

Please also note that I can also accept your permission to interview you orally, in case forms in English are confusing and/or you don't feel comfortable signing a formal piece of paper. Can you please think about these options and when I call you back in a few days you can let me know what you decide? It is no trouble at all and I am very thankful that you are taking the time to consider all this.

Take care and I look forward to talking with you again.

Declaration by researcher confirming oral consent was obtained from research participant.

I, Joselynn Sweeney Ph.D. candidate in the school of Sociology and Social Work at the University of Tasmania (C/- Locked Bag 1340 Launceston Tas. 7250), hereby declare that (**Name of Participant**), participant in my Ph.D. research project titled "How can social workers work more effectively with people of refugee background" has orally consented to participate in the research and be interviewed after being provided with and considering the following information:

- "Information Sheet" for this study.

- The nature and possible effects of the study.

- The methods employed; one initial interview that will last no more than two hours where the focus will be in asking (**Name of Participant**) of **his/her** experience in interacting with social workers.

- It was explained to (**Name of Participant**) that feelings of sadness might be experienced during the interview. (**Name of Participant**) does not have to share anything that makes **him/her** feel uncomfortable.

- It was explained to (**Name of Participant**) that, if feelings of sadness are experienced, Joselynn can make a referral to a counsellor of (**Name of Participant**) choice.

- All questions that (**Name of Participant**) had have been answered.

- It was explained that research data gathered for the study may be published provided that (**Name of Participant**) cannot be identified as a participant.

- It was explained that (**Name of Participant**)'s identity will be kept confidential and that any information supplied to the researcher will be used only for the purpose of the research.

- (**Name of Participant**) has agreed to participate in this investigation and has understood that **he/she** may withdraw at any time, up until the 1st December 2009, without any effect and if so wish, may request that any data supplied to date be withdrawn from the research.

I have explained this project and the implications of participation in it to this volunteer and I believe that the consent is informed and that he/she understands the implications of participation.

☐   (**Name of Participant**) has orally consented to **his/her** interview tape being professionally transcribed.

☐   (**Name of Participant**) has orally declined consent to **his/her** interview tape being professionally transcribed

I have explained to the participant the process and consequences involved in using a professional transcriber.

Name of Investigator:

Signature of Investigator: Date: