Getting to Know You: The Journey from African Refugee to African-Australian

Insights into the life and times of African refugee women settling in Perth

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BA Hon. (Sociology)

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Declaration

I declare that this thesis is my own account of my research and contains as its main content work which has not previously been submitted for a degree at any tertiary education institution.

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Nicolette Macdougall
Abstract

In this thesis I adopt a multi-disciplinary approach to explore the experiences of African humanitarian migrants in Australia. I argue that effective integration and positive settlement outcomes for this group would be enhanced by a clearer understanding of their originating circumstances and culture(s).

I employ a combination of ethnography, autoethnography and narrative styles to articulate different aspects of the lived experience of flight and settlement of twelve individual African refugee women. These stories were collected through semi- and unstructured personal interviews over a period of two years. They emerge out of my evolving relationships with the participants, and highlight the importance of friendship and active listening in promoting positive cross-cultural interaction.

The narrative accounts are supplemented and augmented by documentary chapters that examine the broader socio-political aspects of culture, war and refugees in Africa. The fine detail of the individual experiences of flight, settlement and relationships converge with these contextual accounts to open a window on the social world of humanitarian migrants. Together, they provide a layered and multi-faceted account of the life and times of African refugees and the challenges that they face in Australia in the 21st Century.
Acknowledgements

Those closest to me understand how important completing this thesis has been, and why. You have all contributed to what has been an extraordinary journey, one in which I’ve navigated the shores of knowledge production, personal experience, and relationships.

My thanks, first and foremost, go to the women who agreed to participate in this study and who provided me with invaluable insights into their lives. Without you I would have been lost, in more ways than one.

To supervisors-extraordinaire Peta Bowden and Trish Harris, who offered personal and professional support throughout this journey, muchas gracias. Your thoughtful and perceptive comments, and your tireless enthusiasm and faith in the intrinsic merit of this undertaking were key to its completion.

Always, and in all ways, I thank my partner, Tony de Groot. The journey was all the richer for your company, not to mention your outstanding patience, humour, and intellectual and practical support. To my sister, Tara Smith, and to rest of the motley crew that laughed and cried with me over the past four years – thanks for providing a sounding board for my ideas and frustrations, and for being there when I needed more.

Maps used in this thesis are courtesy of the University of Texas Libraries, The University of Texas, Austin.
Dedication

To Honey, faithful friend and constant companion.

You kept me grounded and reminded me that there is more to life than study.

And to Tessa, who woke me up.
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Part I: Background
Chapter One
Introduction
In which the scene is set, expectations are raised, and the study takes shape.

The refugee story is not a new one, but it is an increasingly complex one. At the end of 2006, the United Nations High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR) estimated that the refugee population worldwide was approximately 9.9 million people, the highest in four years (UNHCR 2007a). The total population of concern to the UNHCR at the same time was approximately three times that figure, with Afghanistan, Iraq, Sudan, Somalia, Democratic Republic of Congo, and Burundi the countries of origin of the bulk of the refugee population. In Africa alone, the total population of concern to the UNHCR increased by 89 percent in 2006 – reaching approximately 10.1 million people, 30 percent of the total population of concern worldwide (ibid).

With such a vast number of refugees and displaced persons worldwide, it is not surprising that the topic of forced migration/refugee studies has emerged as one of considerable interest, ranging from studies of displaced persons in their countries of origin and/or temporary safe haven to studies of settlement outcomes in countries of final refuge. Centres for refugee studies have been set up at universities around the world, ranging from the now well established Refugee Studies Centre at Oxford University, to programmes in Egypt, Canada, Uganda and Australia (Crisp 2007, 5), amongst others.
Getting to Know You: The Journey from African Refugee to African-Australian emerged out of an examination of the role of friendship in contemporary society (Macdougall 2004), and of my personal journey of settlement in Australia. I had experienced the impact of the loss of friends and family when electing to migrate from South Africa, and had found the process of establishing new networks and family-like relationships complex and time consuming. At a time when I was still immersed in considering notions of friendship, family, and the intersections between them, I became aware of the gradually increasing number of black African refugees / humanitarian migrants settling in Perth. Australia had started to accept greater numbers of refugees from Africa in 2003 (Oxenball 2005), with 10,000 African refugees settling in Australia between 2002 and 2004 (Vanstone 2004a).

Observing this new and visibly different group on the Australian social landscape, and having some pre-existing cultural understanding of the importance of family to Africans, I found myself wondering how effectively African humanitarian migrants might establish supportive ties in Australia. With this question in mind, I set out to examine the formation and reformation of social bonds and community interaction within the Australian-African refugee diaspora in Perth. The study focuses on a small number of refugees from seven African countries, examining what is held in common by Africans in this context and attempting to ascertain what is perceived as lost on coming to Australia.
The circumstances that have resulted in the massive movement of forcibly displaced people are situated in history, in a combination of the complexities of colonial legacies and subsequent external interventions, local tensions that escalate into conflict, and international/global developmental trends (Marfleet 2007, 137). Over the past three decades, the conflicts in Africa and the resultant refugee crises have increasingly been the focus of research projects, international aid programmes, autobiographical accounts, novels, documentaries and feature films. In different ways, each of these endeavours provides some insights into the issues that face the displaced peoples of various countries, and/or examines possible courses of action to assist groups and individuals. The trend, however, has been for the products that emerge to be either complex scholarly or statistical reports – with which the general public is likely to have limited engagement, or less formal accounts – these often holding little credibility with academic audiences.

Dissertations generally have direction, shape and scope, and these are somewhat predetermined by the academic context and discipline within which the scholar has undertaken the research. Whilst these elements are integral to the process of research development and outcomes, the implementation is not necessarily as straightforward as it may initially appear. *Getting to Know You* focuses on the lives and times of twelve African women, exploring their history and settlement experiences. The particularities of these individuals and of their lives, which were gradually revealed as we got to know each other, impacted both on what I wrote and how I wrote it. Some of the more orderly and traditional aspects of social
science stood in stark contradiction to my actual conversations with the participants in this study. The generalities of the theoretical context and planned outcomes appeared increasingly to be at odds with the particularity of their individual stories and with the emerging relationships between them and myself as researcher.

As the research progressed, those who had initially been framed as bearers of information, as data sources for the study, became ‘real people’ to me. Their stories unfolded as complex and layered narratives that touched on a wide range of issues affecting their lives, past and present. At the outset, it became apparent that these were the issues that the women wanted to address and, as Oakley (2000, 11) suggests, attempting to keep the participants at a distance, sidestepping their need to be active in the production of their own stories, was shown to be both insensitive and inappropriate research conduct. Although they understood that my research project revolved around friendship formation, the participants trusted me to write about more than that. Their need to be understood, to provide me – and through me, a broader audience – with insights into their world, became the core focus of the study.

Malkki (1995a, 8-12) notes that there is a tendency to discount the historical and cultural specificity of refugees when writing about them, rendering them one-dimensional. The generic ‘refugee’ is thus separated from the historico-politico context out of which they have emerged, visible only as a generalized and problematized figure that is broadly seen as a “a burden, a victim, and a threat” (Harrell-Bond & Voutira. 2007, 290). Colson (2007,
320-324) suggests that, as forced migration results from large-scale historical processes, an interdisciplinary approach to writing about refugees provides the linkages required to bring the detail of history, culture and social context into focus. Drawing on, amongst others, anthropology, sociology, cultural studies, philosophy, geography, and history, Getting to Know You attempts to provide an alternative view of African refugees in Australia. It is a discursive journey, meandering in and out of the lives and histories of the participants, exploring the circumstances that brought them to Australia and the complexities they have faced since their arrival.

Writing about the specifics of interaction with the study participants, however, did not mesh neatly with the broader general concepts, and the accounts that emerged from these interactions, likewise, did not interleave comfortably with conventional social science prose. The writing styles that emerged as the study progressed gradually transformed, shifting almost imperceptibly to reflect the research journey, some chapters developing as clearly academic/scholarly, others as narratives based on personal stories and my interaction with the participants.

After repeated attempts at integrating or amalgamating the two styles, it was clear that forcing this process would, in the end, be destructive; it would in all likelihood result in a loss of coherence, and undermine the holistic nature of the account. It also became apparent that each section was inadequate to the task of describing both the broad contextual elements and the detail of lived experience. Each appeared increasingly to need to be seen/read with reference to the other, the sections mutually informing and co-dependant on
one another in shedding light on the world of African humanitarian
migrants. In the light of this realisation, it seemed more appropriate to leave
the two streams to their own devices, to allow them to show the strengths
and limitations of a sociological investigation without trying to prioritise
one or other style. They became what amounts to two streams of the same
phenomenon, parallel worlds that do not quite meet and yet do not stand
alone comfortably. Each is informed by aspects of the other, producing a
complex pattern that cannot be forced into something more linear or
straightforward – an ‘artful representation’ of intricate life stories, histories
and interactions (Cole & Knowles 2001, 212).

Artful writing and artful inquiry do not need a password or a lexicon. There is
no vocabulary test for this work: we simply write what we see (and hear and
touch and smell and sense), who we are, what we believe, what we rejoice,
discern, dream-creating from our many emerging and imagining selves lines to
connect beyond (Neilsen 2001, 267).

I employ a narrative style to demonstrate different aspects of the lived
experience of individual refugees. These segments are interposed with
chapters drawing on the secondary literature that provides the context within
which the stories themselves are situated. This approach allows for an
engagement with both the general and the particular, providing the reader
with the freedom to move backwards and forwards both in time and across
continents and cultures, linking Africa and Australia to one another. These
are stories of achievements, of relationships formed and lost, of flight and
settlement - a coherent narrative of self identity emerging within new
surroundings. They are brought together and articulated as a means to
promote the main aim of the thesis, that of providing a clearer understanding of refugees, and specifically of African refugees, in Australia.

The accounts straddle a line that appears to demarcate a more general or abstract approach, which can tend to show limited understanding of the inner world of individuals and their particularities, and an individualised or narrative approach, which has the potential to display a lack of awareness of the ‘bigger picture’ within which the individual accounts are based. Individually and together they present aspects of the study and of the social world in which it is situated in such a way as to provide room for reflection on both the specifics and the general, a complex interaction of theory and particularities that provides insights as to how accounts of lived experience and socio-political context can be mutually informing. This realisation, which goes to the heart of the difficulties sociologists face when they try to understand and interpret the world, is also valuable in and of itself.4

A road map to the thesis

This is an exploratory ethnographic study in which the individual participants and their interactions with the broader community and with me, as researcher and friend, are central. It focuses on the lives of a relatively small number of women, twelve individual humanitarian migrants from Africa, recruited via personal referral. The aim of the study is to focus attention on the lived experience of flight and settlement of African humanitarian migrants who have settled in Australia, and to promote a greater level of understanding of these experiences.
The initial stages of the study were framed as an exploration of how effectively African humanitarian migrants establish new social bonds after resettlement in Australia. This question changed during the course of the study, becoming more a question of how to highlight African historical and cultural contexts as a means to shift social understanding of refugees from that of problem/threat/burden to that of individuals and groups with history, culture and context.

This shift in emphasis affected both the way in which the interviews were undertaken and how the study was written up. Whilst there have been numerous studies relating to African humanitarian migrants in Australia in recent years, many of these studies and reports have focused on functional issues, problems and solutions. It is, however, in individual stories that the fine texture of flight and settlement experiences are to be found, providing greater understanding and potentially instigating social change. Establishing meaningful interactions that will elicit these stories and views on settlement does, however, take time. In Getting to Know You, I was able to engage with a number of the participants at a more than superficial level and to hear from them on a range of issues of importance to them. As a result of this interaction, the narrative moved away from its original focus on social relationships per se, becoming one that related the aspects of settlement that the women as the women wanted told. This allowed me to take a refugee-focused perspective (Doná 2007, 219) to the study, and to include their voices, their experiences, and their histories in the text as it evolved. The chapter on relationships and interaction therefore comes later in the thesis.
than was originally planned, but is in keeping with the structure and focus that emerged over the course of the project.

The text is divided into five main sections. Part One comprises Chapters One and Two, and provides the background to the study. Chapter One introduces the topic and the questions raised, examining some of the methodological complexities uncovered in conducting the research. Chapter Two introduces narrative ethnography and autoethnography as the key method(s) utilised in this text. I explore the rationale for employing these methods, highlighting story-telling and writing practices as means to both generate knowledge about the social world and to disseminate this to a broader audience. The sample group and the research instruments are also outlined in this chapter.

Parts Two, Three and Four contain the bulk of the research encounter and are each divided into two chapters. Whilst the chapters are discreet entities and can be read as such, each chapter in a pair relates directly to its partner – combining the narrative and theoretical approaches mentioned above. The narrative sections in which the participants are ‘heard’ rely largely on recorded interview data. The narratives in Chapter Five - Talking about Settlement – are, however, a pastiche of transcribed data and field notes recorded immediately after each interview and/or meeting with the participants. Every effort has been made not to misrepresent or obscure the participants’ views and voices in this medley, and to retain the essence and key content of our discussions.
In Part Two (Chapters Three and Four), I introduce the participants and their backgrounds, the historical context to some of the conflicts in Africa providing counterpoint to, and context for, their stories of flight and settlement. The liminal status of the participants is established, positioned with one foot in their originating context and the other in Australia. I then build on these notions, providing an overview of contemporary socio-cultural attitudes towards refugees and asylum seekers in Australia, lodged in the resonances of the White Australia Policy and the resultant latent racism at social and institutional levels.

Settlement and notions of the self, as pertaining to refugees’ experiences of forced flight and its outcomes, are discussed in Part Three (Chapters Five and Six). Utilising the personal stories of two of the key participants, Chapter Five foregrounds their voices and experiences to provide accessible accounts of the lived experience of settlement in Australia, including aspects of isolation, depression, access to appropriate education, employment, discrimination, and the value of human bonds in the resettlement process. Chapter Six builds on these narratives, exploring the broader context of those experiences – originating circumstances, forced flight and trauma, and how these may impact on notions of self and the ability to settle effectively in Australia.

Part Four (Chapters Seven and Eight) elaborates on aspects of African culture, both traditional and current, examining the contemporary African diaspora and linking it to culturally specific notions of extended family and community. Different understandings of friendship, western and African,
are incorporated into the discussion on emerging relationships, and participants talk about family, its importance to their state of mind and well being, and the feelings of loss they have experienced on leaving Africa. This provides some understanding of the cultural challenges that these African women have faced since arriving in Australia.

The final section is the discussion; this provides an opportunity for some conclusions to be drawn, to consider whether the reader may have come to know the participants in this study to some extent and, through them, the life and times of African humanitarian migrants and the challenges they face in Australia in the twenty-first century.

Getting to Know You moves between the worlds of theory and experience, presenting a range of contexts in such a way as to provide as broad an understanding of the lives of refugees, particularly African refugee women in Australia, as possible. My research addresses a gap in understanding and service delivery to humanitarian migrants from Africa, providing insights from which an appropriate model could be developed for more effective interaction and service delivery to this group. As an act of communication, it provides a space in which to reflect on the various facets of the kaleidoscope that makes up the refugee experience.

A note on terminology and endnotes

There are a few terms that are used frequently in the text and may require some clarification: refugee, humanitarian migrant, community.
Refugee and humanitarian migrant are used somewhat interchangeably throughout the text; the former, however, generally refers to individuals living as refugees in a country of first or subsequent refuge, or to experiences prior to resettlement; the latter refers to life after resettlement (usually as part of a humanitarian programme), after which people are no longer considered refugees, as such. The specifics of the terminology, as broadly defined by the United Nations and more specifically defined within the Australian context, are discussed in the Chapter Four, the policy chapter.

Whilst this is not a community development thesis, it does talk about the women’s settlement patterns and experiences as part of a community throughout the text. In this sense it should be noted that I am not working with any specific or formal definition of community, but am instead using the term variably as used by the participants in conversation over the course of the project.

This thesis covers a broad canvas and, at times, there is a need for additional contextual information or anchor points; these are inserted as endnotes after each chapter. In this way, readers will not be distracted from the key points around which the thesis revolves but has the additional anchor points to which they can refer.

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1 The UNHCR identifies seven at risk population categories, generally referred to collectively as ‘persons of concern’ or ‘total population of concern’. This group includes refugees, asylum seekers, internally displaced persons (IDPs) protected/assisted by UNHCR, stateless persons, returned refugees, returned IDPs, and so-called Others of concern. By the end of 2006, some 32.9 million people fell under this descriptor, of which 9.9 million were refugees (UNHCR 2007a, 7).

2 Hereafter referred to as Getting to Know You.
The terms ‘refugee’ and ‘humanitarian migrant’ are used somewhat interchangeably throughout the text; the former, however, generally refers to individuals living as refugees in a country of first or subsequent refuge, or to experiences prior to resettlement; the latter refers to life after resettlement (usually as part of a humanitarian programme), after which people are no longer considered refugees, as such.

Reflections on this point, and on the way in which accounts of the general picture both inform yet stop short of each other, are provided throughout the text.

Chapter Two

Narrative and Writing as Method
In which a voice and a method emerge.

This chapter starts with an outline and explanation of the methods used in Getting to Know You, including the aims, approach, and instruments used. A more extensive discussion ranging around some of the ethical and epistemological issues encountered in the study follows on from this, providing insights into aspects of the creation, shaping, and dissemination of knowledge. This discussion works to contextualise, clarify and frame the core chapters of the thesis.6

Participants: Sample and Instruments

The sample group for the study is made up of twelve African women, each of whom arrived in Australia as a refugee (humanitarian) migrant. Moderate or better conversational English was desirable in order for the women to talk to me directly, obviating the need for interpreters and thus ensuring that our interaction would not be mediated through a third party. Whilst translators do invaluable work, I felt that discussing issues relating to friendship, family and settlement required direct engagement with participants and was prepared to take extra time in interactions with the participants to ensure that mutual understanding was achieved.

The participants were selected to provide insights into the complex and diverse experience of settlement in Australia, on the understanding that each individual had unique stories to tell (Holstein & Gubrium 1995, 25-26), and
that these stories could highlight aspects of the settlement experience more broadly. The choice of women as participants relates to the subject matter of the study. As creators/nurturers of social bonds, it is often African women who appear to sustain and promote kinship and friendship ties within their communities. These relationships provide support structures that help people to deal with a range of settlement issues, such as education and unemployment, loneliness and depression, unfulfilled expectations, and racial discrimination.

I initially sought participants by advertising at multicultural support agencies; this, however, proved to be an unsatisfactory approach. I had placed posters and flyers at a number of agencies, but these had not generated any response over a period of two months. Upon discussing this outcome with staff at the agencies and with refugees that I had come into contact with in other contexts, it became clear that many of the African humanitarian migrants attending sessions or appointments at the agencies did so in order to address an assortment of immediate problems pertaining to their settlement. Many of them also had very limited English skills. As such, posters and flyers suggesting that they contact me to talk informally about their settlement experiences were not relevant to their needs and had very little impact.

One of the main motivations in the decision to recruit participants through these agencies was to address the ethical requirement to protect the participants from potential harm. The objective was to ensure that the participants would have access to counselling, should it be required as a
result of talking to me about their traumatic experiences of flight and settlement. The agencies in question make counselling available to their clients through the Association for Services to Torture and Trauma Survivors (ASeTTS) as a matter of course and were prepared to liaise with me on this matter during the course of my study if any of their clients participated in it. However, given the lack of response through the agencies, it became clear that I would need to change my recruitment method. A snowball technique would allow me to utilise the contacts I had made in the African communities thus far to generate participants through word-of-mouth, and by handing out flyers outlining the research project to these contacts for distribution within their communities. In order to address the matter of there being adequate alternative provision made for counselling, I made contact with the Deputy Director & Manager of the Early Intervention Team at ASeTTS to establish whether I could refer participants directly to that agency for counselling.

ASeTTS stated categorically that there was no requirement for referrals to come to them through another agency, and that I was at liberty to refer people directly if necessary. To ensure that participants felt empowered to seek counselling, ASeTTS suggested that I inform each participant that counselling is available free of charge, and provide them with the contact details; it was also suggested that I should emphasise that I would be willing to contact ASeTTS for participants if they preferred me to do so. Once referred to ASeTTS, however, I would have no further involvement in the counselling arrangements. The University Ethics Committee and ASeTTS both considered this to provide adequate cover in the event that counselling
was required by any of the participants, and I was given approval for this change in recruitment technique.

The change proved to be both appropriate and effective. Within a relatively short time, I had made contact with twelve refugee women who were willing to meet with me to discuss the project. Three women from Sudan were referred to me by a colleague at Murdoch University. He is also a member of the South Sudanese community and, after discussing the participant selection criteria with me, put me in contact with three women from his community who were able to communicate effectively in English. One of these women in turn arranged for me to meet a possible participant from Burundi. Another colleague at the University, a woman from Nigeria with whom I had become friendly, provided me with the contact details of two other possible participants – one from the Democratic Republic of Congo and the other from Liberia. I made contact with the West African community through a contact at ASeTTS and was introduced to a number of women by a key member of that community, three of whom agreed to participate in the study – two from Liberia and one from Sierra Leone. The final three participants, one from Uganda/Sudan, one from Somalia, and one from Eritrea, were referred to me by Australian friends who had heard about my project and had come into contact with humanitarian migrants through their church or through volunteer work.

Direct engagement with the participants occurred at several levels: initial meetings, core semi-structured interviews, and follow-up observation sessions with a sub-set of the group. The initial meetings each took between
one and two hours, at which time I outlined the research and answered any questions that arose, including those pertaining to my reasons for undertaking the research and what I intended to do with the information that I gathered. All the prospective participants agreed to be involved in the study and signed consent forms at this time. These meetings were followed by the core interviews, which commenced in January 2006 and concluded in October 2006 - each interview taking between one and three hours. Two participants were, however, not interviewed for the project after the preliminary meetings. Marcy, from Burundi, initially appeared enthusiastic and agreed to further meetings. Despite this positive early response, she then postponed and subsequently cancelled a number of appointments and stopped returning my telephone calls. I concluded that she did not wish to proceed further and did not pursue the matter, using only the information gathered at the preliminary meeting as agreed to by Marcy at the time. Faye, from Liberia, actively chose not to be formally interviewed. When we met, she told me that she would prefer to act as a key informant for the duration of the study, and gave both written and verbal permission for all the information discussed over this period to be used in my thesis. 

Aimed at generating a clear understanding of the refugees’ lives as a whole, the interviews were sympathetically framed and non-confrontational, the questions presented in a conversational manner aimed at eliciting relaxed and open responses. Although a great deal of thought went into listing a range of possible questions, based on three identified general topic areas, not all questions were asked in all interviews. I created an interview
guideline and introduced questions from this guideline when and where appropriate during each interview. Whilst each interview attempted to cover all three general topic areas, this task was undertaken reactively – and every effort was made to be sensitive to each participant’s willingness to talk about their life and circumstances.

The first of the identified topic areas was that of the participant’s background circumstances. These questions aimed to establish each individual’s country of origin, and their living arrangements and social context in that country, and in any country of first / subsequent refuge. At the beginning of each interview, I asked the participant to tell me a little about their life prior to coming to Australia. This was intended to put the participants at their ease and to allow them to settle into a culturally familiar, story-telling mode of interaction. Several of the participants started their stories with their birth and told fairly comprehensive tales from that point forward; others skimmed over the events of their life – providing me with what they considered relevant key points. Where necessary, and in order to elicit more detail, I asked about the significant personal relationships that may have provided emotional and practical support for the participants in their day-to-day lives in Africa.

When the stories started to lose momentum, I moved into the second general topic area – that of the current day-to-day social interaction of the participants. The questions in this section were framed with reference to the participants’ personal, institutional, and leisure-related activities and relationships. The objective was to establish the level of integration or
isolation that individual participants were experiencing within the receiving community, and to uncover related or underlying settlement issues. Following on from these questions, the third topic area focused on the friendship and fictive kin bonds that individuals may have formed since relocating to Australia, and the depth and breadth of emotional and practical support that these networks might provide for the participants in their new environment. These questions were aimed at establishing a pattern of emergent relationships in the African-Australian refugee community.

The interview process was highly interactive, with the guiding questions serving merely to focus each session. The desired outcome of this informal mode of interaction was to set the participants at ease and to promote active engagement between us (Elliot 2005, 3). Following Malkki (1995a, 51), I did not attempt to pry or chase down ‘facts’, choosing instead to listen actively to the participants’ responses to the questions and to what they appeared to consider the significant aspects of their stories. The stories that each participant chose to tell, and how they told them, shaped my interaction with both the participant and their story. Whilst each interview evolved independently of every other interview, I found that individual responses to my questions, and the information I gleaned in each session, helped me to respond to and interact with participants more effectively over time (Holstein & Gubrium 1995, 46). I was able to rephrase questions more appropriately in later interviews, making my meaning more readily apparent to the participants, to pick up on similarities and differences in responses more effectively, and to gradually build an understanding of refugee life,
both in the originating countries and in Australia, over the course of the interviews.

The recording device used during the interviews was chosen for a combination of reasons – it is small and unobtrusive, approximately the size of a matchbox, and has the capability to record high quality sound files in MPEG-1 Audio Layer 3 (also known as MP3) format. The MP3 recorder was a discreet addition to the interview sessions, placed on a central table upon arrival and turned off at the end of each interview session, as agreed to, despite additional interaction after the close of the interview. Permission to record the primary interview sessions was requested in my initial meetings with the participants, all of whom gave every indication of being very willing to be recorded once they were assured that their names would not be included in any reports. Given that the African communities in Perth are relatively small, I have endeavoured to ensure that the anonymity of individuals within these communities is preserved. I am conscious that close examination of the text could, potentially, reveal sufficient detail about some individuals to enable them to be identified. However, all participants were allocated pseudonyms at the beginning of the study and every effort has been made to maintain their privacy.

After each of the preliminary meetings and interviews, I recorded my personal observations of, and responses to, the participant and the session. These recordings acted as my field notes and provided additional data on which to reflect. Each interview recording was transcribed, so as not to lose any of the rich descriptive detail provided by the participants as they told
their stories, and these transcriptions were then annotated with my observations from the first meeting and those made after the interview. This review process greatly enhanced my cultural understanding and provided invaluable insights into the similarities and differences between each individual and their stories.

Once all the initial meetings and core interviews had been conducted, the first two parts of the interview stage of the project were complete. All of the participants had agreed to be involved in the final stage of the study, i.e. to participate in a follow-up half-day session in which we could explore their everyday lives and their culture in more detail. These sessions were aimed at placing the information already gathered within specific cultural contexts, and reinforcing the participatory nature of the research (Miles & Huberman 1994, 6). However, as these sessions involved longer in-depth observation / interactions, the time constraints of the study did not allow for on-going interaction with all twelve participants. During the early stages of the interview series, I had established more friendly relations with six of the women, purely on the basis of the ease of our interaction and their willingness to engage more openly in discussion, and it was with these participants that additional time was spent.

Although the final stage of the study had initially been framed as single half-day observations with each person in their homes, our interaction actually took place in a variety of locations – at university, in their homes – sometimes over a meal, or at coffee shops. The objective of these sessions was to assist me to gain a clearer understanding of the participants’ day-to-
day lives and to provide an opportunity for them to tell me more about their
cultures and settlement experiences. The meetings were informal and varied
in length from two to four hours, the discussion topics ranging from home
and family to settlement services and work - depending upon what each
participant chose to talk about. Whilst this technically concluded the
observations, four of the women showed ongoing interest in continued
interaction – encouraging me to remain in contact and meeting with me
regularly over the next two years. My perception was that a level of mutual
trust and understanding had been established with these four women in
particular, and that this allowed for a deeper and more open interaction than
might otherwise have been possible as we talked about their lives in Liberia,
Southern Sudan, Eritrea and DR Congo, respectively, and about their
settlement experiences in Australia.

Whilst the initial interview with each of the participants was recorded, the
nature of the research and the requirement for trust precluded the use of a
recording device in the final observations and subsequent sessions. Intimate
relationships do not flourish and conversations tend not be as open if the
situation is stressful, such as when recordings are being made. In addition to
the issue of trust, the later sessions were conducted in a wide variety of
locations, many of which were noisy and this would have made recording
difficult. My observations and reflections on these meetings were recorded
onto the MP3 recorder en route home after each of the meetings and
subsequently transcribed into my journal; these notes have formed the basis
of a large proportion of the narrative content of the thesis.
Building Relationships and Managing Asymmetry

In order to embark on the interview section of this study, it was essential to establish bonds of trust between myself, as researcher, and each of the participants. This was a time consuming process during which relationships were built, confidences shared and networks established within the communities. Interaction of this sort cannot effectively proceed faster than the speed of trust, and it was a process that required a certain delicacy of touch, an awareness of cultural context, and a willingness to be both an attentive and active listener.

Following Oakley (1981), who suggests that women-to-women research is most effectively carried out in such a way as to empower both parties to engage actively in the process, all the initial meetings and core interviews with the participants in this study were undertaken within their home environments and at a time convenient to them. As all of the participants are on low incomes, possible costs for childcare and travel that might be incurred by participating in the study were highly relevant. Conducting the interview in their homes addressed concerns relating to time and cost, was aimed at encouraging the participants to feel that I had an awareness of / sensitivity to their situations, and sought to provide them with a measure of control over the interview process.

The identity/role that a researcher assumes within the context of the interview – whether as academic/expert, student, mother, or friend - affects the stories that are told, and can work to actively facilitate productive interaction (Holstein & Gubrium 1995, 41; Bruner 1990, 41) or to
undermine it. As part of establishing what I hoped would be a mutually acceptable and understood balance to our interactions, I encouraged the participants to ask me questions and volunteered information about my background in an attempt to put them at ease. The decision to make my self accessible to the participants was made prior to the first meeting with any of them, and was based on my belief that it would promote positive woman-to-woman interaction and a constructive attitude towards the interview process. In addition to this, as Vickers (2002, 619) states, “being prepared to ask another to risk exposing his or her life implies that we might at least be prepared to do the same.” Ellis et al (1997, 121-123) and Oakley (1981) note that exchanges of this sort, where disclosure is not limited to a one-way dissemination of information, can produce an increasingly intimate and trusting context in which insights can be gained by both participant and researcher – effectively narrowing the hierarchical gap between them.

Alcoff (1991, 6) indicates that there is, however, a “strong, albeit contested, current within feminism which holds that speaking for others is arrogant, vain, unethical, and politically illegitimate.” Edwards (1990, 481-2), for example, suggests that whilst insights into women-to-women interviewing practices, such as Oakley’s, are valuable, they do not address difference, such as race or class, as contributing elements in interaction, and thus fall short of providing a full picture of the possible complexities of women-to-women interviews. Referring to her own study of mature mother/students, which included women of different races and classes, Edwards notes that she had difficulty both in finding black participants and then, subsequently, in establishing meaningful relationships with them; they related to her not as
woman-to-woman, as she had anticipated from her exposure to literature on women interviewing women, but as black-person to white-person (ibid, 483). Social and structural asymmetry, Edwards notes, results in black women not talking about “all areas of their lives to white female researchers in the same way that white women do” (Edwards 1990, 486) and, as race holds significant implications for the research process, she questions whether white women should study/interview black women at all.

We write from perspectives that are informed by our personal history, and it is naïve to believe that this can be effectively separated from the subject matter of the research (Alvermann et al 1996, 117). Oakley (2000, 305) states that, in all kinds of research, “it is ultimately the researcher who is privileged.” Acknowledging the inherent hierarchical differences and working to negotiate them in order to minimise difference, Oakley adds, should be a key objective of all research. Whilst a certain ‘lop sidedness’ was clearly present in my interaction with the participants in Getting to Know You, our life experiences and the cultural knowledge embedded in them having differed so widely, like Oakley (1981) and Finch (1984), I found it relatively easy to establish a level of rapport with the individual women. Unlike Edwards, who only gradually came to realise that an acknowledgment of difference was required in her interaction with the black participants in her study, I addressed the issue of ‘blackness’ and ‘whiteness’ head-on in my first meetings with my participants. At the outset I explained that I immigrated to Australia from South Africa in 1992 by choice, and readily acknowledged that, although I am from Africa, I have not experienced any of the hardships that they as refugees have endured –
and continue to endure. These statements seemed to be met with acceptance
and appeared to cause no visible disjuncture in my interaction with any of
the participants. Once my position as a white ex-South African was
acknowledged, it was treated as almost irrelevant. I say ‘almost’ because the
reaction from the women was one of recognition and welcome, partly based
on the fact that, like them, I am not Australian-born and am from Africa.

Whilst individual histories and social positions do tend to result in a certain
asymmetry in relations with other people, Young (1997, 39, 51) suggests
that this can be negotiated through dialogue, interaction and mutual
acknowledgement of one another’s unique history. In addition to this,
interviews allow researchers to access people’s thoughts, ideas and
memories, as expressed in their own words (Reinharz 1992, 19); the
dialogue that one enters into with research participants, combined with the
elastic quality of qualitative research design (Janesick 1994, 218), allows
researchers to be flexible - to adapt and change the design as a study
progresses and accommodate the negotiation of asymmetrical relationships.
My identity, within the context of the interviews, was collaboratively and
contextually established, resulting in a relaxed and informal atmosphere
during my interaction with the study participants. Finch (1984, 78) notes
that a personal identification can be key to successful woman-to-woman
interviews and, in this context, although differing widely, our African roots
appeared to provide the participants in this study with the initial point of that
link. Whilst I acknowledge that the differences between the participants
(black African humanitarian migrants) and myself (white, privileged,
academic) are anything but insignificant, their welcome appeared to be a
great deal more than merely the practice of what might be seen as ‘good cultural manners.’ A number of the participants noted that being interviewed by somebody from Africa made them feel more at ease than being interviewed by an Australian. “You are from Africa… you will understand how we feel about family and the land.”

As previously mentioned, choosing the women’s homes as the site for the initial meetings and early interviews was designed to create an intimate environment in which the participants felt at ease and unthreatened. As Finch (1984, 74) suggests, this worked to promote what amounted to intimate conversations, rather than formal interview situations, and appeared to further contribute to an easing of any hierarchical differences between the participants and myself. As Oakley (2000, 47) states, “interviews imitate conversations; they hold out the promise of mutual listening.” Bruner (1990, 124) suggests that interviews carried out informally, as conversations that follow the ordinary rules of dialogue - with communication two-way and interactive, elicit very different responses from participants and different sorts of information being generated than in more formal situations. To this, Holstein and Gubrium (1995, 77) add that the give-and-take of conversation is a way of indicating to participants that the researcher is interested in the subject matter. This interactive and informal mode of engagement tends to put participants at their ease, allowing the interview to become a process of collaborative communication and active knowledge creation (Ellis et al 1997, 121).
Like Oakley (1981, 45), I found that participants were very hospitable in welcoming me into their homes. I, in turn, took a small gift with me when visiting each of them to conduct the primary interviews. As they already knew that I am originally from South Africa, it seemed appropriate to take something culturally specific. In African culture it is common to arrive at someone’s home with a gift of food and, with that in mind, I elected to take them each a pack of *koeksisters*.¹⁴ I explained that, in South Africa, these pastries are very popular and are eaten as a dessert or with morning or afternoon tea. The preparation and consumption of food plays a big role in the participants’ lives, and they appeared pleased to receive the pastries - several of the women immediately telling me about various foods from their country of origin. The giving and sharing of food, and the discussions about food preparation and traditions, started the interviews off on a relaxed footing.

The relatively easy access into their homes and lives, and the wide range of topics that the participants chose to discuss with me, carried with it the risk that I might, inadvertently, breach the trust that had been established between us. Finch (1984, 80-81) notes that discussions held in informal settings, such as people’s homes, can lead to participants revealing more about themselves than they otherwise might. This is particularly so in the case of the humanitarian migrants who participated in this study; once they had accepted me, they appeared to assume that they would not be misled or, later on, misrepresented by me in any way. My verbal guarantee that I would be the only one to hear the taped interviews, and that the identity of the participants would not be revealed in anything I wrote, appeared to be
accepted at face value. Several of the women said that they trusted me to do
the right thing and that they were sure that nothing I wrote would be
harmful to them.

Eastmond (2007, 261) points out that there are significant ethical issues
involved in interviewing groups and individuals, such as refugees, who may
have limited ability to control the fate of their stories. Olesen (2000, 236)
concurs, noting that researchers need to be constantly alert to the fact that
they are personally responsible for the accounts that emerge out of their
research, and how the voices of the participants are portrayed. This requires
researchers to examine their own views and practices during the course of
the study, and to be sensitive to possible ethical issues that may emerge at
every stage (ibid). With this in mind, and in order to alleviate any concerns
that might arise regarding confidentiality, I made every effort to be as
transparent as possible in terms of my rationale for doing the research and
what the expected outcomes might be. I explained the scope of the study to
each participant in turn, emphasising my role as student and my interest in
them as individuals and as members of specific cultural groups, not only as
refugees or humanitarian migrants.

This acknowledgement of individuals is particularly relevant when
interacting with vulnerable groups such as refugees, many of whom have
endured enormous hardship and, frequently, numerous invasive interviews
in which they have felt disempowered and unable to express opinions.
Walker (1997, 64) notes that
Specific moral claims on us arise from our contact or relationship with particular others whose interests are vulnerable to or dependant on our actions and choices. We are obligated to respond to particular others when circumstances or ongoing relationships render them especially, conspicuously, or peculiarly dependent on us.

Whilst not dependent on me in any practical sense, the participants in this study made it abundantly clear that they felt confident in my willingness and ability to facilitate greater understanding of their views and concerns to a broader public, telling me so in various ways on a number of occasions. This presented me with an ongoing ethical imperative to live up to what I perceived as the moral assumptions of the participants, whilst simultaneously fulfilling the academic requirements of my research.

My straightforward approach to presenting my credentials, both as researcher and individual, received a positive response from participants. Positioning myself as a student, as a seeker of knowledge and understanding, and the research participants as teachers (of culture and history), rather than merely as data sources, helped to further diffuse hierarchical discrepancies between us. The participants appeared comfortable to speak to me about personal and other matters, the commonalities of gender, Africa, and separation from family providing a starting point and setting the tone for future interaction. Several of the women had been involved in other research projects or interviews since arriving in Australia, and made a point of stressing how important they thought it was to feel that the contribution they were making was valued.
All too often, they said, they ended up feeling that they had been mined for information and then discarded as of no further interest or value after an interview. One participant in particular\textsuperscript{15} said that she considers there to be inadequate acknowledgement of the time and information that humanitarian migrants contribute to research projects of various sorts, that there is seldom any continuity of engagement, and that participants often feel that they receive little of value in return for their efforts.

Mackenzie et al (2007, 303) suggest that some refugee research participants may have unrealistic expectations regarding the outcomes of research projects and the benefits associated with them, possibly believing that their involvement may make a difference to their settlement outcomes. Conscious of this, I made it clear from the outset that my role as a postgraduate student in no way empowered me to lobby government agencies or community groups on behalf of the participants and that, at best, all I could do was make their concerns more visible by talking about them. The response in each case was both positive and swift, the women telling me that they were pleased to be given a clear idea of the outcomes up front, and that they valued the opportunity to talk about things that mattered to them informally with someone who understood their background. They said that they believed that, in doing so, they would promote a greater understanding of Africans in Australia. Sharing their stories and opinions with me appeared to carry no expectation of return other than promoting positive cross cultural relations and the hope that this would, in turn, have positive flow-on effects for their communities over time.
Finding a Research Voice

Whatever its objectives, no matter how well thought out and planned, no research journey is without its complications and seldom turns out quite as expected. In the case of Getting to Know You, at the same time as I was preparing for the interview stage of the study, planning interview schedules, I found myself in the throes of lengthy medical investigations, surgery and recuperation. My left hip, which has been highly problematic ever since I fractured my pelvis in a climbing accident in my teens, dislocated twice in fairly quick succession, resulting in high levels of pain, numerous hospital stays for medical investigations, and the need to wear a large, cumbersome hip brace to restrict movement. The hip was diagnosed as dysfunctional and I was scheduled for what was to be my eighth hip replacement in 34 years - the most recent of those only eight months earlier (in May 2005).

Over the course of the next year I met and got to know the twelve humanitarian migrants who had agreed to participate in the study. Most of the initial meetings and all of the core interviews were conducted whilst I was either wearing the hip brace, and walking with the aid of a cane or crutches, or on crutches following further surgery. Understandably, the participants were curious as to what had happened to me and, in the process of me getting to know them, learning about their fears, privations, struggles, sorrows, hopes, and joys, they got to know me – perhaps better than they otherwise might have. My ongoing physical discomfort further narrowed the gap between us, placing me on a footing with my participants that would, I believe, not otherwise have been available to me. Pain, enduring it and surviving it, brings one to a clearer understanding of “the really real” (Frank
1995, 72), lowering barriers and making the self both more accessible and more visible.\textsuperscript{16} My vulnerabilities were visible to the participants, shifting their perception of \textit{me-as-researcher} to that of \textit{me-as-person}.

Whilst sympathetic, and even distressed at my discomfort, these African women did not dwell on it, any more than they dwelt on the horrors of their own past lives and the difficulties of their present. Several of my research participants, now friends more than subjects, kept in contact with me by telephone while I was in hospital, ringing up to tell me how worried they were about me, one doing so even though she herself was at that time in an abusive relationship and had no-one to help her. Two other participants visited me, taking the time to catch three buses to the hospital, waiting for connections in between and walking a considerable distance from the final stop in order to see for themselves that I was in good health. “We needed to see you, Nik, to see for ourselves that you are okay.”

It was at this time that I wrote the first narrative account to emerge out of my research. It revolved around one of my early engagements with the West African Community, a baby’s funeral.\textsuperscript{17} I had been invited to attend the funeral by the Chairperson of the Women’s Group of that community, as a means to introduce myself to the community and, subsequently, to possibly find participants for my study. A two-day-old infant had died the previous week, and I was told that the community as a whole – and particularly the child’s parents - considered the death to be the result of medical mismanagement and poor communication on the part of the hospital staff. I met the parents, both in their early twenties, and stood witness to their grief.
as the tiny funeral casket was carried into the church. The support offered by
their community then and later was immense, the women in particular
rallying round to support the young mother not only emotionally, but also
physically when she was overcome by her grief and collapsed as the casket
was taken out to the hearse. The events of that day stayed with me, not as
data, but as part of a settlement story. I was left with a strong need to try to
provide some kind of insight into the lives of humanitarian migrant settlers
in Australia, to write their stories in such a way as to show the intersections
of inequality, power and interaction in society (Kleinman 1999, 21).

To do so, and do it well, I decided I would have to write openly - what
Behar (1996) refers to as ‘vulnerably’ - about the research process and its
outcomes. This was not a task lightly undertaken, as it required that I risk
exposing my thoughts and reactions (Krieger 1991, 148) alongside my
observations and reflections, and that I step away from some of the more
accepted practices of social science writing in order to provide a well
rounded and interesting, yet relevant, account of the research. As Vickers
(2002, 608) notes, however, whilst authentic writing is a risky undertaking,
this is no reason to shy away from it. Instead, one can choose to rise to the
intellectual, creative and emotional challenge and attempt to write a
compelling and relevant account of self and other.

In writing, we convey a particular view of reality (Janesick 2001, 535), and
any attempt to make a substantive contribution to an understanding of social
life requires careful consideration of how one might go about presenting
this. I found that it required crafting a detailed, complex, textured - and yet
accessible - reflexive account of my observations and experiences, and of the stories I had been told. It involved structuring an account which highlights the silences and suppositions that still inflect qualitative research, particularly those silences surrounding the manifold ways in which the relationship between the researcher and her research participants can unfold. I gradually attained a clearer sense of what knowledge is, coming to see that it is partial, situated and open to interpretation, which in turn allowed me to come to an understanding that one can choose to allow a personal ethic of writing to emerge within the academy.

Within a discipline, “the terms of discourse” (Geertz 1988, 19) are heavily influenced by the works of key figures in those disciplines, the language of the discipline guiding one along particular paths of research procedures and representation (Gubrium & Holstein 1997, 3). The disciplinary origins of writers are often revealed as much by how they write as what they write about – by what Van Maanen (1988, 22) refers to as “the nature and feel” of what they write. Moving away from these influences, stylistically, is gradual, as other ways of thinking, other ways of writing, start to be given credence – both by individuals and more broadly. Although I had spoken with many people who had already undergone similar experiences, I had to navigate my own course through this maze. I had started out with the premise that knowledge is ‘out there’ to be found, tracked and written about. This outlook was shaped by understandings that research and scholarly writing are framed by positivistic notions of empiricism (Kaplan 1998, 124) in which academic endeavours are portrayed as objective and impersonal, and subjectivity is considered questionable at best (Etherington 2004, 25;
writing in the first person within the academic discourse had been presented to me as both unprofessional and inappropriate, an outlook that I had incorporated into my work - despite the fact that, as Vickers (2002, 614) points out, keeping the personal voice out of writing often seems to result in dry, inaccessible texts. In addition to this, I was aware that recent approaches in qualitative research had challenged the positivist model of inquiry (Jaggar 1989, 130-1) such that it is now widely accepted that we are immersed in our data and use our own subjectivity to interpret it (Oakley 1981). Nevertheless, I found that the influence of the positivist outlook remained very strong, very privileged.

It is not my intention to present an either/or scenario, to infer that traditional academic writing has become irrelevant or, as Arras (1997, 65) suggests, to “jettison the last vestiges of the Enlightenment ideals of objectivity, rationality, truth, and universality.” However, as Kaplan (1998, 118-119) notes, writing in a traditional framework can result in the writer/researcher losing their own voice in the task of ensuring that the voices of experts are seen to back up the ideas he/she espouses, and that the researcher can thereby become unsure of what it is that they are writing about. The multiplicity of personal and cultural images that beset us at every turn appear to require something more than this. The process of writing and telling the story of the baby’s funeral allowed me to dislodge the imperative to be the invisible, impartial observer, and helped me to find a voice that I recognize as my own.
Stories – listening and writing

Research is an active verb. It is a way of seeing the world that goes beyond the ordinary (Janesick 2004, 3).

Ethnographic writing is… complex, overlapping, ambiguous, and multifaceted (Van Maanen 1988, 8).

My work has been influenced by a range of different approaches, including ethnography, autoethnography, and narrative inquiry. Each of these methods has affected both how I have engaged with the material and my style of writing, changing them in almost imperceptible increments until what has emerged is, perhaps, all – and none – of these. This study was initially conceived of as a combination of literature-based and research-by-interview processes; I anticipated that I would uncover background information on refugees from existing literature sources and then acquire key insights into settlement and its impact on relationship building via my interviews. In the planning stages, this sounded like it would be a neat and readily packaged process.

My view changed, however, as the study progressed from reviewing available literature on refugees and Australian refugee settlement policies, to actually meeting and then interviewing individual humanitarian migrant participants. Once other people entered the research equation, it rapidly became clear that this would not be a neat, easy or quick undertaking. For a while I felt as though I was drifting from method to method as I tried to establish how to go about translating what I was learning about actual experiences of flight and war, refugee life, and social interaction into a concrete and meaningful text. I found that there was no clear mechanism for
objectively planning outcomes, sourcing the data, or analysing and collating it, without the subjective elements of engagement with the process and content, the interpersonal relationships with the people I encountered, and my reactions to all of these things coming into play.

Given that I was examining aspects of a culture – the African refugee diaspora in Perth - with the intention of portraying what I had come to perceive as hitherto overlooked aspects of that culture, I made ethnography my starting point. I interviewed participants, listened to their stories, learned about their cultures, and uncovered aspects of ‘the refugee experience’ that were not adequately covered in the literature I had sourced. I recorded interviews, kept field notes and became more rigorous about keeping my personal journal of the research process up to date. All of this was very much in keeping with my understanding of the ethnographic undertaking. As the study progressed, however, I found myself increasingly dissatisfied with this approach. Progressively, I found that I was writing about my interaction with the study participants - and my reactions to that interaction - as much as I was about the participants’ personal experiences. The immediacy of our human interaction, and the stories that were emerging out of it, affected how I viewed both my research and my writing. I struggled with the dilemma of how to provide balanced accounts of the research, to retain strong story-like elements that would engage readers at many different levels, and to simultaneously present an informative and integrated text that would construct a particular social understanding. My increasing visibility in the text made me reassess both the process and the content, drawing me towards a relatively new genre - autoethnography. This
appeared to overlap ethnography and autobiography, and to present me with
a way of writing about social life that I had previously not encountered or
utilised.

Numerous terms can be considered to fall under the rubric of
autoethnography. Broadly speaking, the term refers to ethnography as
written about one’s own group, or to autobiographical writing that includes
an ethnographic interest (Reed-Dannahay 1997, 2). It is a genre in which the
self is present, to a greater or lesser extent, setting the scene and weaving the
connections between the cultural and the personal (Reed-Dannahay 1997;
Ellis & Bochner 2000; Holman Jones 2008). By so doing, the author invites
the reader/audience into the text to embark on a journey towards alternative
understandings of self and culture. As I wrote about the participants in this
study, and my engagement with them, I found my presence to be pervasive
throughout the emerging text in what I now considered to be an
autoethnographic sense. Although not actively visible in the text at all times,
there was a sense in which I could see myself as always present and
interactively involved. Ideas, theories, and notions that I had not previously
expressed had emerged in my personal journal and were translated into the
text, my thoughts coalescing as I wrote about my interaction with the
participants and about how these interactions were affecting me and the
research process as a whole. Richardson (2000), Freeman (1993), Hastrup
(1992) and Alvermann et al (1996) make the same point when they note that
writing is a dynamic and creative process, one that works to shape and
reshape experiences and refine what it is that needs to be told. In telling the
stories in Getting to Know You, I reveal aspects of the evolving relationships
between me and the participants - part of the ongoing discussions and engagement that I had with them. Realising this, I felt more comfortable about claiming aspects of autoethnography and situating myself, to some extent, within the text. I could make use of myself as a data source, alongside the study participants, thereby living inside the text rather than alongside or outside of it.

Not long after this, however, it dawned on me that, whilst autoethnography can have a range of meanings, a key element is often taken to be the representation of a culture by a member of that culture (Pratt 1992, 7). Although I felt that I was clearly present in the text, I became concerned that, as I am not part of the refugee group, what I was creating might not actually be an autoethnography - and that presenting it as such could be seen as inappropriate or inauthentic. When reflecting upon this, I noted that everything I had written to this point appeared to be framed as a story of one sort or another. I had written participants’ stories, stories about the participants, and stories about culture and settlement. In what might be termed ‘a light bulb moment,’ I brought narrative inquiry (or narrative ethnography) into the picture. My epiphany was, simply, that stories work and that, as Geertz (1986, 377) states quite emphatically, they matter. The stories that were emerging out of my study resonated with the way that the participants and I had interacted throughout the process, and with the idea that Africa is a place of stories. In every encounter I had had with the participants, they had drawn attention to the need for people to take the time to get to know one another, to listen to their stories, and to learn from them. Thus, when writing, narrative appeared to be a particularly appropriate
means of depicting the interaction between the lived experience of the humanitarian migrants who participated in this study, and the world in which those experiences are embedded.

Geertz (1986), Janesick (2001) and Zaner (2004) are amongst those who promote the notion that stories are a means through which greater understanding of the social world can be achieved. Like numerous others who have been drawn to story writing and narrative in the past, such as Frank (1997), Bruner (1990), Van Maanen (1988), Randall (1995), and Josselson (1995), I use this genre as a means to shape both my own and others’ understanding of the world. Collectively, the stories in this thesis shed light on the particulars of the life and times of humanitarian migrants in Australia. Individually, the stories present something unique about my field of research, about the participants in that research, and/or about their background-historical circumstances, in an accessible and evocative manner. They overlap ethnography, autoethnography and narrative to articulate the research and to provide intellectual, emotional, ethical and aesthetic reader-engagement. This aspect of narrative ethnography is supported by Okely (1992), Tillman-Healy (2002), Gergen and Gergen (2002), and Janesick (1999), along with its capacity to encourage authors to reflect on what they have experienced and learned during the process of research and writing.

Narrative ethnography also encourages the exploration of the particulars of situations and individuals from different angles (Nelson 1997; Montello 1997; Lopate 1994). As researcher-storyteller, I have tried to make sense of
what I have witnessed and experienced in such a way as to draw the reader in to share the world through which I have travelled with the study participants. The stories I relate about their lives and experiences - and about my engagement with each of the women - offer a means through which the reader can engage with them as individuals with histories, cultures, hopes and fears, and with me as participant/author/researcher.

The accounts emerge as stories in two senses. Firstly, they are ethnographic stories of the women’s lives; the glances, gestures, and interactions providing the reader with names, faces and personalities, and rendering the research participants as real as possible within the context of the dissertation constraints. These stories intersect the more dominant western narratives of refugees and provide a vicarious, although partial, understanding of lives other than our own. Secondly, in that they document my emerging friendship relationships with the participants, these stories are also autoethnographic in a very real sense.

However, in the process of identifying and settling into what I now understood to be narrative ethnography, I discovered that blurring the established boundaries of ethnographic writing by presenting research accounts in alternative ways can be controversial. Peshkin (1993), Kleinman (1999), and Van Maanen (1988) endorse the view that alternative practices may not always meet with a favourable reception within the social sciences. I had personal experience of similar attitudes to narrative research when submitting a paper for publication at the end of 2006 (Macdougall 2007b). The paper, my subjective account of the baby’s funeral (mentioned above), had been presented at a workshop on the social inclusion of refugees earlier
that year and was submitted for publication as a personal narrative in the volume that emerged out of the workshop. Feedback from the editorial panel, however, was that the paper was neither ‘fish nor fowl’ – not formal enough to be considered a research paper, owing to its narrative style, and yet not a strictly representative personal account of social inclusion, as I am not a refugee.21

Like Holt (2003, 7), I tried to navigate a line between the need to communicate the events I had witnessed and experienced as a meaningful and representative story, and the need to be published - and thus be heard at all. This made me very aware that, as Dunne et al (2005, 15) point out, there remains a tendency to equate 'story' with notions of the 'untrue' and the 'unreal.'22 In response, I concluded that, in order to negate charges regarding a possible lack of intellectual rigour, I would need to feel sure that what I produced made a substantive and coherent contribution to the understanding of social life. Following Richardson (2001, 250-1), Alvesson and Skoldberg (2000, 5), and Spence (1982, 40), I endeavoured to ensure that my use of language and structure in the accounts in this thesis represent my ideas adequately, can be seen to have aesthetic merit, give a clear indication as to how the information was gathered, and that they convey a real sense of the subject matter to the reader. Like Ellis (2004), Bochner (2000), and Krieger (1991), I choose to represent my research in a way that is internally consistent with my overall outlook, in the belief that this will provide both the reader and my researcher-storyteller self with an integrated and interesting text.
As the stories started to emerge, however, I became aware that they did not provide readers with adequate background understanding when heard in isolation. Participants were telling me their stories from a position of cultural and historical knowledge and understanding, and I found that I needed to go back to the literature and do further background research to fill in some of the gaps. There was a clear need for contextual material to be included in what I wrote, a view supported by Spence (1982), who suggests that providing readers with context allows them to successfully navigate and decode the text. To this end, I sought clarification on the details of the wars in the different countries, how long those wars have endured, and what flight from home and country may have entailed. Elements such as the ‘refugee crisis’ in Africa, the impact of living in refugee camps, and the lingering effects of the White Australia policy on African humanitarian migrants started to snap into focus. Writing about these things, I found that the fine detail of the individual experiences of flight, settlement and relationship building now had a framework on which they could be hung. This information, which is presented somewhat more formally than the participants’ stories and my reflections, provides some part of the bigger picture into which those stories fit - a picture in which the particulars of the stories can be contextualised and on which those details, in turn, can be brought to bear to provide clarity and focus.

Presenting narrative ethnographic writing alongside the more formal contextual pieces, as mentioned above, provides insights into dimensions of both of the research process and the participants’ journeys that might otherwise remain invisible to the reader. Josselson (1995) and Finnegan
(1988) underscore that meaning is generated via the connections that both the participants and the researcher make between various aspects of stories that are told and heard - and how these are shown to connect to the broader contexts. Further to this, the particularities of the stories and the general of the background or big picture ‘documentary’ pieces work to achieve these connections, each relying on the other to provide an integrated whole.

The individual stories rely on the historical and political background information to provide a framework for the lived experiences of the refugees – the context from which they have emerged and in which they operate. Similarly, the documentaries intersect with the lived experiences of the individuals; the stories that the women tell inform the statistics and ‘facts’ by speaking to the heart, to the common humanity in the reader, about the suffering that is masked by facts and statistics. This provides a depth of meaning to the documentaries, revealing layers of suffering otherwise not rendered visible in such accounts. This, then, is where the parallel worlds of lived experience and theory converge, as mutually informing - each providing the other with context to create the desired gestalt aimed for in Getting to Know You.

Summary

In this section, the question, method, sample and instruments were introduced. Narrative ethnography and writing as method were highlighted as a means to produce information and generate knowledge, from which a clearer understanding of the lives and times of African humanitarian migrants can emerge. Writing and reading narratives were presented as a
conversation between teller and listener, writer and reader, context and culture.

In the next chapter, the individual participants will be introduced. Their stories and contexts, histories and experiences, are the flagship upon which this thesis stands.

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6 Chapters Three to Eight
7 A copy of the flyer used can be found in Appendix 1.
8 Interview ethics require informed consent, a right to privacy, and protection from harm (Fontana & Frey 2008, 142).
9 Sharon McFarlane.
10 The Democratic Republic of Congo, formerly Zaire, is commonly known as DR Congo or Congo, and referred to as such interchangeably in this text.
11 Two participants were not formally interviewed; the reasons for this are discussed in Chapter Three.
12 See Appendix 2 for a copy of the consent form.
13 The interview guideline, as used in each interview, is presented in full in Appendix 3.
14 Koeksisters are traditional South African deep-fried pastry twists – crisp on the outside and gooey and syrupy on the inside. The dough is rather like that used for doughnuts, but it is plaited before being deep fried and then soaked in syrup. The secret of the crisp syrupy outside of koeksisters is that they are taken straight from hot oil and dipped into ice-cold syrup to seal the syrup outside, leaving the inside relatively dry.
15 Faye.
16 A more comprehensive account of how these events impacted both the research process and researcher was published as The Permeable Self: Making Connections Through Personal Experience (Macdougall 2007a).
17 Published as Friendship and Kinship: Pathways to Community Inclusion (Macdougall 2007b).
18 These include narrative ethnography, reflexive ethnography, personal narrative, and experiential texts, amongst many others. For a comprehensive overview of all the terms used to signpost autoethnography of one sort or another, see Ellis & Bochner (2000).
19 See also Richardson and St Pierre (2008).
20 See also Ellis (2000).
21 Discussed with Val Colic-Peisker at Murdoch University on 10 October, 2006.
22 See Patai (1994) for an example of negative attitudes towards autoethnographic styles of representing research.
Part II: Context
Chapter Three

Home Talk and Talk of War

In which we catch glimpses of both the brutality of war and of the resilience of those caught up in it.

Above is the summer moon
Children will be sleeping soon
The work is all done and so
We sleep by the fire’s glow
The cattle bells do not ring
The night birds begin to sing

The stories have all been told, so we’ll dream
Hometalk, takes me home, hometalk
The moon meets the breaking day
The dreams have all gone away
Though the memories tear me apart
They will always be here in my heart

Hometalk, takes me home, hometalk; Kaya, takes me home, hometalk.

(Mango Groove 1991)

In this chapter I introduce twelve women, their personal narratives of adversity and resilience set against documentary accounts of the complex background of wars in seven different countries in sub Saharan Africa.

Alice, Sarah, Theresa, Kama, Ghadir, Wardah, Leah, Marcy, Elizabeth, Juliana, Faye, Paula – these women have each endured great hardship, and have each told me stories – stories about their families, their home country and war, and about their eventual arrival in Australia. The twelve accounts present twelve very different ways in which war – and the individual responses to war – shaped these women’s lives. Where they were when war overtook them affected the future outcomes for each individual, as did their age, whether they had family support, how long they subsequently spent in
refugee camps, and whether they had educational qualifications or contacts that could assist with their migration applications. All these elements influenced the ways in which individual stories unfolded.

The twelve women who spoke with me about their homes in Africa comprise a cross-section of African refugee women resettled in Australia. They were born in seven different countries, are aged between 25 and 60, some have up to seven children - others no children at all, and they have widely varying levels of education. What they all share, however, is a sense of loss; Africa is in their hearts, it is who they are. They speak of civil war, of flight, privation and desperation, calmly and with little emotion. But home, ah, talking about home is another matter. Telling stories of home and of family takes them there, just for that moment, and it shows in their body language, in the gleam of an eye, the curve of a smile, the cadence of a voice. *Hometalk* takes them home - and they take me there with them.

War is, however, only one aspect of an Africa that is home to these women. Their courage and resilience, their determination to survive against all odds, drew me in and I found I was, when talking with them, once again in Africa – but not just an Africa torn apart by war. They spoke to me about *home*, relating their stories to me with the clear assumption that I had some understanding of the political and social circumstances in their countries of origin. Details were glossed over as being so everyday, so much a part of the lived experience of Africa and of war, that no explanation was required. The brutal reality of the wars is so intrinsic to their understanding of the world that these African women did not consider that my reality might not
have encompassed, at the very least, a basic awareness of their surrounding circumstances – and so they spoke to me about other aspects of their lives.

In real terms, however, I knew relatively little about the individual countries in Africa at the start of this study – their peoples, cultures, history or wars. In this, I am not very different to most people who come into contact with the African refugees / humanitarian migrants in Australia. War is not something that many Australians today have been exposed to on a first-hand basis, and the wars in Africa tend to pass us by as we go about the business of our lives. Although we see images on television and in newspapers - and we may listen to the news and read news reports on the internet – we are distanced from the reality of the situations on the ground. For us there is no accompanying panic, desperation, fear, hunger, mutilation, rape or death; nor is there any understanding of the circumstances that underpin these events. The women I have spoken with, however, all been shaped by the conflicts in their countries of origin and first refuge, where some or all of them have experienced a range of these traumatic situations prior to their arrival in Australia.

If one is to come to any real understanding of the lives and times of refugees, both before and after they are resettled as part of a humanitarian programme, it is essential that one try to grasp some measure of their immediate personal circumstances alongside the more general circumstances that surround these. The documentary and narrative accounts in this chapter work together to provide such an understanding. They capture the multiple experiences of war and show that, however brutal and
levelling it is, war and flight are not uniform; there is no one definitive experience that overrides all others. Whilst the documentary accounts make no claim to being comprehensive, or to presenting an entire range of social or political detail, they situate these refugee women temporally and physically with relation to the history of their respective countries, thereby providing relevant contexts for the narrative accounts and affording glimpses of some of the forces bearing down upon refugees.

Each of the accounts, both the documentaries and the narratives, is part of the complex picture of Africa and of the refugee experience and subsequent resettlement. The stories of lives lived and homes and family members lost are interwoven with the broad threads of political and social upheaval. Presenting the information in this way is, however, not merely a stylistic device. Neither narrative nor documentary is adequate to the task of providing a holistic view of this complex reality. The individual accounts and the documentary details cannot be reduced or isolated in the search for a coherent understanding of the life and times of African humanitarian migrants. Together, however, as the documentary and narrative accounts ‘talk’ to one another, different aspects of home and of war are presented and we can, to some extent, come to grips with both the complexity of war and the core of resilience that each of these women possesses.

Each country and each conflict deserves considerable attention in its own right, and innumerable books and articles have been written about all of them. This chapter provides accessible documentary information on the wars in each country, based on a combination of first person accounts,
journalists’ stories and reports, online current events sites24, as well as more scholarly texts. Nothing that I have read or heard, however, enables me to enter the Africa my participants know, love and have fled; there is no way I can claim to have a real understanding of their experiences – the good or the bad. The documented descriptions of atrocities inflicted on men, women and children, of interference from neighbouring states and the inadequate and usually inappropriate involvement by First World powers, is overwhelming. Nevertheless, every book and every story enhanced my perception of those circumstances, of what is said and not said, and the ways that interaction occurs and relationships are formed, providing insights and some measure of understanding of the lives these refugee women have left behind.

Coming to grips with the sheer volume of information, the immense complexity of the situations, and the magnitude of the loss of life, displacement and devastation, however, left me intellectually and emotionally exhausted; it also made it clear that it is well beyond the scope of this thesis to do more than provide a window into these worlds. To this end, I have struggled to present sufficient breadth and depth of background information on the conflicts in each country, such that each of the participants is situated geographically, politically, socially and personally, whilst simultaneously reducing neither the conflicts nor the narratives to text-book style accounts.

Nevertheless, when writing up the documentary accounts of the conflicts, I noted a tendency to allow facts and dates to dominate, to quote statistics -
declaring, for example, that the sixty wars fought in Africa between 1962 and 1992 resulted in seven million deaths and a further five million people becoming refugees (Shepherd 1992). Or that the early 1990s saw the end of the Cold War and an abrupt loss of interest on the part of Russia and the United States of America in African wars, wars that they had been both actively and tacitly supporting for decades (Connell 1997, 264; Gershoni 1997, 57). These numbers and dates provide no concrete understanding of the real life situations, however, so why quote them?

Perhaps, as Jackson (2004, 14) suggests, the statistics provide one with something to hide behind when the horror of war becomes overwhelming, when it appears incomprehensible on any other level. They provide a mechanism with which one can attempt to cope with the binaries of war and peace, suffering and comfort, thus allowing us to sidestep for a moment the reality as we read about things we cannot possibly experience or understand. It is this reality, however, that these refugee women have not had the leisure or opportunity to sidestep, it is what they have faced, have endured, and have survived; it is a reality that needs to be integrated as part of a broader understanding of the lives of refugees.

The majority of armed conflicts today appear to take place within the developing world and between groups within the same nation-state (Murshed 2002, 388); there is never any one cause, one trigger, for these wars - and the events that have unfolded in Sudan, Eritrea, Somalia, DR Congo, Burundi, Liberia, and Sierra Leone are prime examples of just how complex and multifaceted history is. Many of the conflicts go back to the
impact of colonisation in the last quarter of the 19th century, to a time when European powers squabbled over possession of land and wealth on that continent. This Africa, the Africa we know today, bears little similarity to the Africa on which the colonial powers descended, when territorial borders were drawn up to suit the colonial process rather than the indigenous populations. Mismatched peoples and tribes were randomly – and forcefully - aggregated as ‘nations’, with no consideration as to their future stability (Greenfield 1994, 105; Lewis 2004, 489). These new territories and nations have been left with a compound legacy of dependence and instability, along with hierarchical rule rather than democratic rule – making a transition to independence a process fraught with complexities.

This chapter, *Hometalk and Talk of War*, facilitates some understanding of the complex nature of war and resilience. The chapter has been divided into four sections: Sudan, Horn of Africa (Somalia, Eritrea), Central Africa (DR Congo, Burundi), and West Africa (Liberia, Sierra Leone). The accounts, both documentary and narrative, vary in length, depending on the ease with which each of the histories of conflict could be condensed and on the amount of information offered by participants during their interview. Maps are provided in each section in order to be able to make an immediate connection with and to the physical movements of each of the women, and timelines are provided in Appendix 4 so that conflicts in each country can be cross correlated against the flight path of each participant.
I: Sudan

Some aspects of a history of Sudan and of the lives of four Sudanese refugee women.

Four of the participants in this study are from Southern Sudan. They arrived in Australia at different times, from different places, and have endured a wide variety of experiences along the way. For each of them, however, the journey to Australia started with flight from war in their home country.

Sudan has been described as “a land where peace always seems to hover over the horizon while numerous destructive wars scar its inhabitants” (Iyob & Khadiagala 2006, 13). These wars, which have lasted for over five decades, have their roots buried in the distant past, but are often presented relatively simplistically as arising out of tensions between north/south, Arab/African, or Muslim/Christian, with the notion of political
infighting over control of resources and international interference occasionally added to this mix (Iyob & Khadiagala 2006). However, claiming that the war is about “race, religion and riches. The same things people always kill each other over” (Bernstein 2005, xvii), fails to take into account the complex interaction of all those elements and the history that has shaped them. Contrary to the view held in much of the West, there is no clearly unified north or south Sudan; each is beset by factional infighting and driven by the politics of the past – along with ideological and ethnic rifts, cleverly manipulated by the ruling elites since independence was attained in 1956 (Iyob & Khadiagala 2006, 15;65).

Mutiny in the ranks of the southern army and police units on the eve of independence (1 January 1956) resulted in the deaths of large numbers of northerners living in the southern regions and could be considered to be the start of the civil war in Sudan (Iyob & Khadiagala 2006; Woodward 1994). Soon afterwards, the head of the army\textsuperscript{27} took over the government, harshly quelling strikes and demonstrations, closing mission schools and actively promoting Islamization\textsuperscript{28} of non-Muslims in the south of the country. This resulted in increased resistance from the South Sudanese, and a push for self-determination (Anderson 1999, 11-13; Iyob & Khadiagala 2006, 80-83). Six years of sustained guerrilla warfare, a general strike and dissention within the army resulted in a change of government in 1964, followed by a coup\textsuperscript{29} in 1969. By this time, disparate armed factions in the south had formed a loose alliance\textsuperscript{30} and the governments of Ethiopia and Uganda were providing them with military support,\textsuperscript{31} which worked to exacerbate the situation (Iyob and Khadiagala 2006, 84).
Civil war continued to rage across Sudan, with the population in the south of the country bearing the brunt of much of the action. By 1972, after 16 years of escalating violence and war, the population was starting to scatter, seeking refuge further north or in neighbouring countries. A truce was signed between the government and the rebel forces in that year, but civil unrest continued unabated and full scale war erupted again in 1983 (Johnson 1998, 56). The government introduced sharia laws across the country in an attempt to contain the situation, but was overthrown in a popular revolt in 1985. A new government, elected in 1986, remained unable to put an end to hostilities or prevent marauding militia from raiding villages and terrorising civilians. The infrastructure and public services were in tatters, there were ongoing food and fuel shortages, power cuts, and the water supply was unreliable (Anderson 1999, 22, 37; Woodward 1994, 92; Iyob & Khadiagala 2006, 89-90). The country faced another coup in 1989, by which stage all four of the Sudanese participants in my project had fled from their homes, one south to neighbouring Uganda, the others north and east to towns outside of the war zone.

In 1999, in the face of famine and continued atrocities countrywide, peace talks commenced between the government and the southern forces; a peace accord was signed in 2002, signifying an end to the civil war and the establishment of self-determination in Southern Sudan. In 2003, however, the army was deployed to quell an uprising in Darfur and pro-government militia wreaked havoc in the region, killing indiscriminately. After prolonged heavy fighting across the country, peace agreements were once
again signed in early 2005 – both between the southern rebel groups and the government, and between the government and the main rebel groups in Darfur.

Sudan, however, continues to be torn by factional violence; two million people are estimated to have died between 1986 and 2006, over four million people have been internally displaced, others trekked vast distances to seek asylum in Ethiopia,38 Kenya, Uganda, and Egypt. Farm lands in the south remain littered with landmines, guerrilla bands from neighbouring countries continue to roam the jungles, health services are very limited, and disease is widespread (Wakabi 2006, 829; Global Security 2007a; Bernstein 2005, xix; BBC News 2007a). In December 2005, eleven months after peace was declared, thousands of Sudanese were reported to still be fleeing the ongoing violence in their country – some 7,000 people having sought refuge in Kakuma camp in northern Kenya alone in that time (Pennells 2005, 10).

This, then, is the backdrop to stories related to me by Alice, Sarah, Theresa and Kama, all of whom were caught up in the backlash of decades of war in Sudan.

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Alice – The Long Journey to Australia

Alice has spent more than half her life fleeing war, living as a refugee, and then seeking resettlement. When I initially interviewed her, she was approximately 36 years old39 and had only been in Perth for six months. She started her story by telling me that she was born in a village in the district of
Juba, in Southern Sudan, and that she is the third of nine siblings - five girls and four boys. Halfway through her schooling, war broke out in Southern Sudan and many families were separated as they fled from the rebel forces.

“I was start to my schooling, but because of the poorness of my family I can’t continue my schooling, then I end in the middle,” Alice said. “Then after that, when the rebel war in the Sudan - because indeed, that is why people can be separate from their parents - and then I was separate to Juba, and my family, my father and my brother and my mother, they were in the village... So I was here in Juba alone with my stepfather.”

These events took place in 1988 and, although she was separated from her family, Alice hoped that this move to the city of Juba, about 190 kilometres north of her village, would at least enable her to continue her schooling. However, because of the ongoing war and the unstable situation in the area, this turned out not to be the case, so Alice decided to travel to join her older sister in Khartoum. She was sure that there, at least, she would have the opportunity to go back to school.

“So then I was in Khartoum. This, all my life, I continue here in Khartoum. But, in Khartoum, I decide to go to school. But there is no way out, because there is not any assistance in Khartoum. So I just situate with my elder sister; but she also is poor, she can’t help me. So I just stay like that.”

Alice’s sister was struggling just to support herself and was unable to afford to pay school fees for Alice or help her in any way other than to provide her with a place to sleep. “But what can you do?” Alice said, clapping her hands together softly and turning them over in her lap. She took on
whatever work she could find to supplement their income, living under very
difficult circumstances for the next decade whilst the country struggled
under the weight of ongoing civil war. Travel, particularly travel to areas in
the south of Sudan, was dangerous and not lightly undertaken and, before
she had an opportunity to try to return to her village, Alice heard that her
mother had died. Her father and all her siblings, with the exception of her
sister in Khartoum, had gradually made their way back to the village; Alice
herself decided that, since the war was ongoing and her situation had not
improved since 1988, she would travel north to Egypt – a distance of some
2,000 kilometres. Once in Cairo she would try to lodge an application for
refugee status with the United Nations, in the hopes that she might be
resettled somewhere like Canada, where she would be able to continue with
her schooling and make something of her life.

She told me that she travelled to Cairo in 2001 in two stages - first by train,
which was crowded and uncomfortable - with frequent stops and high levels
of uncertainty, and then by boat; road travel was too dangerous and air
travel too expensive. Once in Cairo, she registered her application for
refugee status at UNHCR offices. This was a slow and frustrating process,
with many confusing forms to fill out and bureaucratic hoops to ‘jump
through.’ The road ahead was still a rocky one, as filling in an application in
no way assures a positive outcome. Once an application is lodged, a refugee
has no option but to wait for the process to gradually move along; there is
no way of knowing how long it will take for UNHCR to contact them as to
the outcome of the application. Alice had a two year wait for the process
to unfold, for her case to creep up the queue, and for a final interview with
UNHCR to be set. “When you register, you must take to a long time to wait for your process. There is interview, then the review, then there will be reject, then there will be appeal...” Alice laughed, appearing resigned to it all.

There are no refugee camps in Cairo, Alice said, no support and very little work. It was a very difficult, hand-to-mouth existence until she was finally called for her settlement interview. To her surprise and dismay, however, she found that although she had been accepted for resettlement, her resettlement was to be in Egypt. “They make my settlement to be stayed in Egypt, not outside it!” I asked her what she did next, if she wanted to stay in Egypt, and she just laughed again. “They say my settlement is in Egypt, they say that I must stay in Egypt, but my aim is not that aim. When I came from Sudan, there, I came and stayed in Egypt, but I want to go ahead.” For two years she had worked and struggled in Cairo in the hopes of a better life, and a final settlement in Egypt, where her living conditions were, in many ways, worse than her life as an internally displaced person in Sudan had been, was not a life in which Alice felt she would be able finish her schooling and get ahead. But there was nothing she could do about it, other than return to Sudan. “Then, after that, we stayed, we looking for our lives, working to get money for rents, do everythings, and clean. We getting a hard time, many hard things in Egypt.” She cleaned houses for Egyptians, tried to save some money, working every day just to feed herself and stay housed. “There were many difficulties,” she concluded.
The use of the word difficult, by Alice and by many of the other refugee women, is a telling understatement of the adverse circumstances that they have encountered during flight and settlement. They refer to events and situations as “difficult” or “a bit difficult” or, sometimes, “very difficult.” Their misfortunes are never related in graphic detail, just as points on a ‘difficulty scale’, the specifics unspoken, but implicit in the context of each story. When I’m with Alice or Sarah – indeed, with any of the women, the way they speak and the things they speak about elicits an empathic understanding of the difficulties they have faced and overcome. It is only later, when reflecting upon and then writing up the encounters, that I start to try to unpick the specifics, finding myself both curious about the details of the ‘difficulties’ and yet also accepting of the fact that there just are some difficulties in these women’s lives that do not require elaboration.

Alice continued her story, telling me that she met her husband, Solomon, at this time; he was also a refugee from Sudan and trying to make a new life away from the rigours of war. Soon after this, a man with whom Solomon had been friendly in Sudan many years before contacted them and offered to sponsor Solomon and Alice for resettlement in Australia.42 Approximately a year after the application had been filed in Cairo, once the case had been reviewed and Alice and Solomon had both been interviewed by a representative from the Australian High Commission, they were accepted for settlement in Australia. Alice said that although she knew nothing about Australia and spoke very little English, she was happy to leave Egypt and go where she could resume her schooling and have a better life. But she was sad to leave her homeland so far behind her. “Australia, it’s better than
Sudan. Yah,” Alice said, nodding. “But Sudan... but because it’s my family, because it’s my place of born, it’s like my mother and my father,” she added, smiling.

Sarah – Free of Fear

Like Alice, Sarah is from South Sudan; she is approximately 40 years old and has six children, aged between seven and 22. When I asked Sarah about her life in Sudan, she said that she and her husband, Peter, were both born in a village in the Juba region of Southern Sudan. Her parents moved from their village to the city of Juba to escape the ongoing rebel warfare when Sarah was about ten years old, and she remained in Juba until she married at the age of 18. These eight years were skipped over, leaving childhood behind as Sarah told me that, soon after this, she and Peter moved to Khartoum (in 1984). A couple of months later they moved further away from the war zone - to Port Sudan, approximately 850 kilometres north east, on the Red Sea and relatively close to the Egyptian border. There they settled with their infant son, born in Juba, and remained for 16 years, during which time Sarah had five more children.

Life in Port Sudan became increasingly difficult because of the war, however, and Peter decided that the family should leave Sudan. “Then, from there, then the life is getting not good, worse. Then my husband decided to move to Egypt. Then we move and stay there like almost three years. We come to Egypt in 1999 - because of war, and that makes the life hard. They
want to take all the people to be like soldiers and then my husband refuse. That’s why he said to move to Egypt.” Peter managed to escape conscription into the army or the militia, but it was a very difficult time.

When the family arrived in Cairo, Sarah and Peter thought they would be able to continue on to Canada, and were very disappointed to find that this was not the case; they had to register with UNHCR and apply for refugee status before resettlement options could be made available. When they put in their application, they were told to go home and wait to be called for an interview. Sarah glanced at me and folded her hands in her lap. “We wait until one year, they did not call us for the interview. And then, after this, they call us for interview. Then, when we do the interview, they are say we fail. Then we don’t know what to do, we come back home, then we stay. Then we are waiting for appeal, because sometimes they are calling for appeal, to do it again. But they say our file is closed. Then we don’t know what to do.”

After all they had been through, Sarah and Peter had not been able to prove conclusively to UNHCR that they were legitimate refugees. By that time, the family’s situation was fairly grim; they had been living on the money they had saved to take with them to Canada, and they could not go back to Sudan for fear of Peter’s immediate conscription into one or other rebel militia or into the army proper. Sarah said that, in order to be able to pay rent and feed her family, she had to leave her five younger children in the care of her eldest son, then sixteen years old, and find a job. She emphasised that life in Cairo was very hard; the Egyptian authorities were harsh and schooling was not readily available for those who were not Egyptian.
citizens. Refugees have insufficient food and little access to employment in Egypt, she added, reinforcing what Alice had already told me – that refugees in Cairo were in constant danger and are often molested by members of the Egyptian public. “They even spit on you.”

At about this time, Peter’s cousin in Perth sent them completed sponsorship forms and they were able to lodge an application with the Australian Embassy for resettlement. Sarah said that it was as if one door closed, and God opened another one. They were called for an interview relatively soon after putting in their application and were finally accepted for resettlement in Australia, although they had to cover all the ground that they been over with UNHCR again to do so. The family’s trials and tribulations, however, were not yet over; they were shocked to find that only refugees who are referred to the Australian government by UNHCR have their travel costs covered by Australia. Sarah’s family was expected to cover the cost of their flights to Perth themselves - or in conjunction with their sponsor. As there were eight tickets involved, the cost was not inconsiderable. “Then the problem is money. It takes lots of money, like $5,000 for us all us, we are eight, and we don’t have money. But one lady from Canada, she is really kind, she give us like 8,000 Egyptian pounds and her husband was, I think, the manager of the bible society, and he give us the rest of the money. So we came without any loans.”

Sarah, Peter and their six children arrived in Perth in 2002. The youngest child was only four years old when they arrived and will soon not remember much about Africa at all - she will be an Australian very soon, Sarah said.
The older children, however, have lost so much ground, their education interrupted and their childhood lost to the war. “Those, like my eldest one, because he was studying in Sudan, he finished I think junior second school, he was going to senior high, then we move. Then, in Egypt, no schools for foreigners unless you are Egyptian citizen. So that was very difficult. Then they stay home for three years, no school. He was clever, really, my eldest son was clever. But, because of the losing of time, everything is gone.”

As with Alice and most of the other women that I met, it was Sarah’s resilience that struck me. Her determination to make the most of whatever opportunities she has underpinned everything she said; the greatest joy, she told me, was to be free of fear, to have sufficient food and a good place to live. Everything else will come slowly, she commented, but these things are the most important. Each setback that these women encounter, every change in circumstances, is handled pragmatically. Often, when telling me about their experiences, the women would shrug and, like Alice, say “But what can you do?” Their lives and their stories move forward, sometimes so very slowly, but they never give up. Living from hand to mouth, fleeing one’s home, losing loved ones – through all of this they remain focused on a future which they pray will be a better one, one in which they will be able to find some security for themselves and their families.
Theresa – Your Heart is Always at Home

Theresa was born in the same village as Alice and Sarah, in the Juba province of Southern Sudan. She patted her baby’s back, trying to get her to go to sleep, before starting to tell me about her life in Sudan. Keeping to the bare bones of the story, she explained that her village is not far from the Ugandan border and that she lived there with her parents and family until 1983, when war overtook them. She was about eight years old at the time, she said, which made her slightly older than her eldest daughter is now. Because of the war, which scattered family members as they ran in all directions, her uncle took her from their village to the city of Juba for safety. She started school there when the situation eased up a little and continued to live with her uncle for the next ten years.

“Then, in 1992 the war came to Juba, so I came to Khartoum.” Theresa spent no time detailing the years spent in Juba or her journey to Khartoum, making it sound purely matter of fact that one might leave one city and flee a distance of some 2,000 kilometres to seek sanctuary with yet other relatives. She made no mention of how long the journey took, or whether it was made by air or by road. My discussions with Alice and Sarah had, however, made it clear that road travel was very dangerous at that time; the roads were in very poor condition, people had to travel in convoy, and the convoys were frequently attacked, so road travel was unlikely. I calculated Theresa must have been about 18 years old when she hastened across war-torn Sudan to reach the relative safety of Khartoum, along with thousands of other Sudanese for whom war and flight had become a way of life.
Life in Khartoum was difficult, she continued, with much the same inflection on the word as Alice had used. She was still separated from her parents and had no idea whether they were alive; she had not heard from or of them since she had had to leave her village in 1983. Travel remained dangerous and there was seldom news, which made her life very unsettled. Theresa explained that, because of the conflict in Southern Sudan, she had not had any contact with her parents for over twenty years. “I stayed almost twenty years without hearing from my parents, or talking to them, or conversations, or letters.” She had feared they were dead until she finally spoke with her father again in 2005 for the first time and discovered that, although her parents had suffered greatly in that time, they had both eventually returned to their village. Her father had lost much of his wealth during the war and had endured torture, his hands broken by soldiers.

The eight years that she had spent in Khartoum were whisked out of sight; they were difficult, but they are over. “Then, until 2000, so I got married. When my husband was in South Africa, so he sent me ticket and I go to South Africa,” she stated. Her statement also only tells one part of another big part of her life and, because we had spoken about her wedding on previous occasions, she did not elaborate. I remember her telling me that she had met David in Sudan before he left to study in South Africa, but had not known him well. David had told me that he wrote letters to Theresa from South Africa and that, in this way, they gradually go to know each other better; he had then started marriage negotiations with her relatives, via his own family in Sudan. Once an agreement was arrived at in 2000, David sent the agreed bride wealth back to Sudan. The pastor of his church in South
Africa was able to organise a visa for Theresa, something that David, as a refugee, was not able to arrange himself. Theresa then flew across the continent to join him, leaving Sudan and all that was familiar behind, exchanging her life as a young single woman in a country ravaged by war for that of a married woman living as the wife of a refugee-student in post-Apartheid South Africa.

“In South Africa is also a bit difficult because it’s a foreign language, and different language, and no friends. So it was a bit difficult,” Theresa continued, explained that she spoke no English when she left Sudan. She was lonely and homesick, but was committed to this new life. “What can you do? You only give thanks to God that He provide for you a nice people, and guides you, and gives you comfort, and always be happy.” Theresa shrugged and told me that within about six months she was well settled into a supportive church community and had started to learn to speak English and to make friends. She concluded by saying that she and her husband lived in South Africa for the next four years whilst he completed first his Bachelor of Science degree and then a Masters degree; during this time two of their three children were born. In 2003, and with the help of his pastor, David began the refugee application process through the United Nations; he had also applied to do further studies at a university in Perth and requested that the family be resettled in Australia. The application was processed relatively quickly and the family arrived in Perth in 2004. Theresa looked across at me and smiled. “There are many things... you think about home always. Even, wherever you go in another country, even if everything is there, your heart is always at home.”
Kama – Home Remains Home

The fourth Sudanese woman I interviewed was Kama. Her story is slightly different to that of Alice, Sarah and Theresa in that, although she was also born in Southern Sudan, she grew up and was educated in neighbouring Uganda. She began her story by telling me that her parents had left Sudan when she was a tiny baby, only one week old. She said that civil war had broken out while her mother was still in hospital, having just given birth to her. The hospital and surrounding area came under heavy bombardment and Kama’s father, assuming that his wife and baby must have been killed in the attack, fled to Uganda with her two older siblings. Kama’s mother, however, managed to escape the chaos in and around the hospital and she also fled across the border to Uganda, carrying her infant daughter. Kama laughed, saying that despite the odds against it, her parents were re-united in Uganda, where they settled and lived for a number of years.

In the early years of the Sudanese civil war, the Ugandan government had been prepared to make land available for refugees to settle on; Kama said her family was therefore able to live moderately comfortably and not go into a refugee camp at all. This was a point in which she took pride, telling me that she had always lived in a house with running water and sanitation, unlike many other refugees. Her father died when she was about seven years old, after which her mother decided to return to Sudan. Kama and a younger brother were left in Uganda, in the care of her father’s sister. She completed her schooling there, and subsequently married John, a Sudanese refugee who had fled to Uganda as an adult.
“My husband came during the time of the war, when they started bombing the cities.” He found employment with a Norwegian church organisation, working for them on a renewable temporary visa basis, which was arranged with the local authorities by his employers. “He was earning good money. He won’t be… really, thinking about going somewhere else for asylum.” After seven years, however, the Norwegian operation closed down and John was told he could either leave Uganda or go and live in a refugee camp. “But he said no… he’s not going to refugee camp, and he’s not going to Sudan. So they should look for him a way, as a government, to send him where he can go. But he’s not going back to Sudan – he left Sudan because of the war.” The Norwegian employers assisted John and Kama with their United Nations application for resettlement in a host country, as John did not want to move his family into a refugee camp. The application for asylum took three years to be processed and approved, by which time Kama was eight months pregnant with her third child and unable to travel to Australia.

It took another year for all the paperwork to be finalised so that the family could make the move to Australia. Kama said that she knows that war brings about change and results in people doing things they might otherwise never have considered, such as leaving their home, their country. “War is war, and war is something that can break boundaries,” she added, recalling her childhood and telling me about ‘Africa time’ - the laid-back lifestyle in Uganda, where things happen in due course, not to schedule. “Home remains home, no matter what.”
Alice, Sarah and Theresa - each of whom endured varying levels of hardship and trauma, separation from loved ones for periods up or exceeding twenty years, and witnessed the impact of war on their land and families - all evinced the same feelings and attitudes towards Africa as Kama, a nostalgia that permeates their daily lives. This connection to Africa is also evident in the stories of the women from each of the other African countries and speaks to their sense of connection and familiarity to their past life, notwithstanding the impact of war and trauma.

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23 Sudan, Eritrea, Somalia (East Africa); DR Congo, Burundi (Central Africa); Liberia and Sierra Leone (West Africa).
24 Current events sites accessed for up to date information on the various conflicts.
25 Also described as “Africa’s longest civil war” (Johnson 1998, 53).
26 There are many works that provide comprehensive detail on Sudanese history and conflicts, amongst these are A History of the Sudan: From the Coming of Islam to the Present Day (P.M. Holt and M. W. Daly. 1988), and The Root Causes of Sudan’s Civil Wars (Douglas H. Johnson. 2003).
27 General Ibrahim Abboud.
28 According to Iyob & Khadiagala (2006, 38), Islamization and Arabization can be understood as the “incorporation, integration, and/or assimilation of the sociocultural norms, values, and institutions associated with Arab societies and adherents of Islamic religious doctrines.”
29 Led by Colonel Ja’far al-Numeiri.
30 Allied as the South Sudan Liberation Movement (SSLM).
31 Reportedly funded by Israel (Johnson 1998, 56).
32 Islamic religious laws based on the Koran.
33 Under Sadiq al-Mahdi.
34 See Nazer & Lewis (2004) for a first-person account of capture and enslavement of civilians by militia groups.
35 Led by General Omar al-Bashir.
36 For a period of six years.
37 A region in western Sudan which was forcibly incorporated into Anglo-Egyptian Sudan in 1916 and marginalized by successive governments ever since independence. Refugees International (2004) highlights the ongoing violence in the region.
38 See They Poured Fire on Us From the Sky (Deng, A., et al. 2005) for some insights into the kinds of hardships that people endured on these journeys.
39 Alice told me that people do not keep birthdays in the way that Western countries do in Sudan; most people know more or less which year and in which season they were born, but place little emphasis on the details. Many Sudanese, she said, end up with January 1 as their official date of birth on immigration papers when they relocate, simply putting down the first day of the year that they believe themselves to have been born when pressed by immigration authorities to provide a date.
40 Juba city is situated in the region of Juba; it is relatively close to the Ugandan border and is the capital of Southern Sudan.
41 See Browne (2006, 7-10, 52-53) for further insights into difficulties faced by people applying for resettlement through UNHCR.
42 Under the Special Humanitarian Programme (SHP) – see Chapter Four for further details the Australian Humanitarian Programme.
Like Alice and Solomon, Sarah and Peter arrived in Australia as part of the Special Humanitarian Programme.

In addition to this, Sarah and Peter also had to prove to the satisfaction of the Australian authorities that their youngest child was not mentally impaired. The child did not speak or understand Egyptian Arabic, with the result that she did not respond to questions posed to her by interviewers. This put the application in jeopardy until Peter was able to establish exactly what the problem was and insist that a Sudanese Arabic speaker interview the child, after which, Sarah said, the application was finalised.

Alice, Sarah and Theresa did not know one another prior to arriving in Australia - each having left their village with various family members at different times and under different circumstances during the war.

Baby Sara was two months old at the time of this interview.

Affiliated with the Church of Uganda.
II: The Horn of Africa (Eritrea and Somalia)

Providing an overview of the wars in Eritrea and Somalia, and the ways in which these events affected the lives of two refugee women.

Eritrea – A Fight for Independence

Sudan’s nearest neighbour to the east is Eritrea and, for much of the time that Sudan struggled with civil war, Eritrea was at war against occupying forces from Ethiopia. Eritrea and Ethiopia were liberated from Italian rule by the British in early 1941. Eritrea remained under British occupation until the United Nations finally adopted and guaranteed a federal relationship between Ethiopia and Eritrea in 1952 (Cliffe 1994, 52; Bariagaber 2006, 43). However, Emperor Haile Selassie of Ethiopia revoked the federal status of Eritrea in 1961, claiming it as a province of Ethiopia. Peaceful protests were vigorously suppressed by Ethiopian government forces, which prompted armed resistance soon after (Cliffe 1994, 53; Medhanie 1994, 23). The EPLF⁴⁹ became the driving force of the independence movement,
actively promoting literacy programmes in Eritrea, working to empower the local population at the same time as mobilising them for war with the occupying Ethiopian forces (Pool 1998, 20; Connell 1997, 63-65; Compagnon 1998, 77). The EPLF finally defeated the Ethiopian army in a pitched battle near the capital, Asmara, in mid-1991, bringing an end to Ethiopian control of the country (Cliffe 1994, 52; Pool 1998, 19). Hundreds of thousands of lives were lost during the thirty year conflict and hundreds of thousands more people were displaced, leaving a legacy of poverty and social dislocation (Connell 1998, 40-42; 1997, 283-285). Within six months of the end of the war, however, the EPLF had set in place a structure for Eritrean independence to move forward; this was achieved in 1993 after a country-wide referendum (Connell 1997, 266; Cliffe 1994, 67; Global Security 2007b).

Hostilities with Ethiopia were resumed just four years later, sparked by competing claims to a village on the Eritrean/Ethiopian border. This war, which continued through into 2000, resulted in the deaths of about another 70,000 people - finally ending with the signing of a peace agreement at the end of 2000 (Bariagaber 2006, 54-55; Global Security 2007b). By 2004, only an estimated 15,000 Eritrean refugees had not returned home from Sudan (Bariagaber 2006, 41), but no definitive peace has been reached with Ethiopia. In late 2007, the United Nations was once again urging restraint as military forces continued to build up in the Eritrean/Ethiopian border regions, clearly concerned that the struggle for control of the area was not yet over (United Nations News Service 2007a).
Ghadir – Flight from Eritrea

Ghadir started her story of how she came to be in Australia by telling me that she and her family had lived in a town called Agordat\(^5\) in central Eritrea, until war broke out and her parents were killed – her young brother witnessing their father’s murder. Ghadir said that these events took place sometime around 1967, when she was about eleven years old, and the Ethiopian army was actively suppressing the early stages of rebellion in Eritrea. Ghadir and her brother were taken in by relatives, and they all fled to Sudan to escape the war.

Reaching the town of Kassala, just over the border in north east Sudan, approximately 160 kilometres away, Ghadir and her relatives stayed with family friends for a week before going to the refugee camp nearby to register with the United Nations. After living in the refugee camp for a couple of years, Ghadir and her uncle moved to Cairo where she was able to study. “I then study - before high school, high school, then university,” Ghadir had done all her previous schooling in Eritrea in her native language of Aramaic. In Cairo, however, the schooling was in Arabic, and she had to redo some of her schooling in order to cope with the language change. It was difficult, she said, but she persevered and, sponsored by the Eritrean Government, was able to complete a science degree at the university whilst living in a boarding house for young Muslim women. Several fellow students relocated overseas after this as part of a special programme sponsored by the United Nations, but Ghadir returned to the refugee camp in Sudan. She explained that she felt she had an obligation to help those who had not been as fortunate as her. “When they send you to study, they tell
you when you finish you must do training or volunteer for the camp.” She shook her head. “Myself, I would prefer to go to the camp to help. I thought it’s easy. But it wasn’t easy, especially with children.”

Ghadir taught chemistry in the camp for the next two years and married a fellow Eritrean, with whom she had studied in Cairo. She told me about some of the difficulties in the camp, where conditions were extreme and temperatures soared over 120 degrees Fahrenheit (48.9 degrees Centigrade) in summer.52 “Every day, maybe more than 100 children die - from cholera, malaria, bacteria, virus, so many things. Because no-one has water… and no houses... there’s no toilets ... easy to get a virus, bacteria.” As she talked, she looked at me intently, as if to emphasise how appalling the conditions in the camp were. “The refugee camp, it is too difficult to have a baby there. A lot of malaria, a lot of cholera, so many things, you know.” She chose to go back to Cairo for the birth of her son, not willing to risk giving birth in the camp. On her return, desperately concerned that her baby would catch one of the diseases which were running rampant in the camp, Ghadir started leaving the child with her cousins in the city and visited him there, sometimes sleeping over before returning to her duties.

About a year later, Ghadir once again travelled to Cairo - this time for the birth of her daughter. On returning to Sudan, she decided she could no longer cope with life in the camp; she said that she was ‘fed up’ with the living conditions and with being away from her son. In addition to this, her husband had joined the army and disappeared soon after the birth of their
daughter. Ghadir told me that although she continued to teach in the camp, she found accommodation nearby and lived outside the camp after this.

Her children started to get sicker and sicker, and she became increasingly worried. She contacted friends in the Gulf area, people with whom she had studied in Cairo, and asked them to find a way for her to get a ticket back to Egypt. There she hoped she would be able to take up the offer of resettlement in Canada or America that had been made to her by the United Nations when she had graduated from university three or four years earlier. Thanks to the (financial) help of her friends, she managed to get to Cairo. Once there, however, she found that, as several years had passed since the offer of resettlement had been made, it was no longer valid. Ghadir said that she felt quite desperate when she heard this news and telephoned a cousin in Australia to tell him about her situation, explaining that she wanted to apply for resettlement in Australia. “He said no problem, I will send to you application, and you take to the embassy, if they accept you, you are lucky.”

Ghadir lodged the forms at the Australian Embassy and was told that she would be contacted in due course for an interview. In the interim, she found a job, teaching chemistry to children, so that she could pay her rent and support herself and her family. After a few months, the embassy invited her to come for an interview and she was accepted for resettlement soon after, arriving in Australia in 1991. She recounted how relieved she had been the process had been relatively straightforward. “I was so lucky. The Australian process was finished quick. I come to Australia, I was so happy.”
Unlike Alice, Theresa, Sarah and Kama, who had all been internally displaced in Sudan and/or lived independently as refugees in other countries, Ghadir had experienced life in a refugee camp, starting when she was only eleven years old. At a time when Sudanese nationals were fleeing to Kenya, Uganda, Ethiopia and Egypt, she had not only lived in a Sudanese refugee camp – she had chosen to return there. Her determination to find some way out of Sudan, to survive in Cairo without any support, and to make her final journey to Perth, were all predicated on her core need to protect her children and to provide them with a brighter future. “Why I came Australia, I think I came for peace and for the children. Actually, if our country is good we never thought go out to other places. But the camp places are so awful, so awful.”

As will become apparent, Ghadir was not the only participant in this study to have spent time in a refugee camp. Of the twelve women with whom I spoke, six told me little about the time they had spent in similar camps – for periods ranging from three to twelve years.\(^{53}\) For the most part they chose to gloss over the privations and dangers of the camps, speaking more about the food shortages and poor accommodation than the day to day difficulties. Like the Sudanese women, each of the women who had been in refugee camps evinced a clear connection not just to their respective countries of origin, but to Africa more broadly – to ways of thinking and being that shaped them and continue to do so.
In 1960, despite local resistance, the British and Italian protectorates of Somaliland merged (Ahmed 2006, 34); the constitution and electoral law of the new state was put together by ‘foreign experts’ and showed little understanding of a pastoral society based on power sharing and clan allegiances, which inflamed local rivalries (Adam 1994, 118). A coup by the Somalia Revolutionary Socialist Party (SRSP) placed Muhammad Siyaad Barre in power in 1969, where he remained for the next 22 years – his regime prone towards intimidation and suppression. In this time, Barre depended heavily on ties of lineage and clan to shore up his flagging popularity and actively excluded members of clans he considered a threat (Lewis 1989, 573-4). Two major resistance groups emerged - the Somali National Movement (SNM) and the United Somali Congress (USC), and Siyaad’s regime came under attack in 1988. Attempts to quell the rebellion resulted in over 100,000 deaths and the displacement of at least half a

By the time the capital was overrun by rebels at the end of January 1991, virtually all vestiges of the Somali state had disappeared; many government officials had fled and the army was making little effort to protect the regime. The rebels wreaked havoc on what remained of public offices, burning archives and records, and set about a systematic witch-hunt against members of Siyaad’s clan, the Darod. Hundreds of people were killed without trial and without any evidence of their complicity with the Siyaad regime (Compagnon 1998, 78); those that could, fled - many people using Kismayo, approximately 400 kilometres south of Mogadishu, as a staging post to refuge in Kenya – large numbers scrambling to leave Somalia for the relative safety of Kenya in overcrowded and unprovisioned small boats.

The struggle for power continued, various factions refusing to disarm their militias and send them home in case they were needed to enforce power-sharing ‘negotiations.’ Members of the various militia, many of whom had been unemployed before being recruited, showed no desire to return to pastoral life and leave behind the freedom and relative power they had enjoyed - including “almost free license to loot, kill and rape” (Compagnon 1998, 79); the civilian population of Mogadishu found it increasingly difficult to distinguish between members of the USC and bandits. SNM forces soon withdrew to the north, however, where a peace conference of all of the northern clans was held and the former British Protectorate of Somaliland declared itself the Independent State of Somaliland, this region
has remained relatively stable ever since - especially compared to the situation in the south of the country (Ahmed 2006, 35).

By 1992 famine, stemming from ongoing civil war and disruptions to agriculture, had resulted in approximately 300,000 deaths in Somalia (Patman 1997, 509). Peacekeeping forces were deployed to Mogadishu, two under the auspices of the United Nations,59 and one American-led intervention force;60 a UN mission remained in Somalia until 1995, but suffered numerous casualties and was never successful in putting an end to the war (Adam 1994, 86-89; Patman 1997, 510; BBC News 2007b). In 2000, a Transitional National Government (TNG) was appointed (HRW 1995); Lewis (2004, 509) suggests, however, that within three years the government was fractured internally, had little control of the country, and was virtually indistinguishable from any other armed faction. There has been intermittent fighting in Somalia ever since, particularly around Mogadishu. Successive peace agreements have been brokered and failed (HRW 2007, 14), and hundreds of thousands of people have been displaced61 from the capital by factional fighting between the Transitional Federal Government62 and opposing militia groups.

Wardah – Life is Not Easy

Wardah is about 36 years old and has six children. She was born in Mogadishu, well before the civil war took hold, and told me that she lived a relatively privileged life there. “My house is a big house. Before… good life. Is very easy, in my country. My family - my husband is having good
job - some people cleaning in my house. Three people are working my house, some work in the garden, some clean the house, iron clothes, everything.” Her family lived nearby and her husband, who worked in administration at the university in Mogadishu, was able to provide her with a very comfortable lifestyle. Wardah glanced around her living room as she told me this, then looked at me. “It’s okay,” she said, “but before - my country is good life, this one is no, is middle.”

“But good, lucky, my family they here... One body guard my husband is killed.” Wardah told me how she, her husband and her baby son had had to leave Mogadishu when the war had overrun the capital in 1991; they had lost everything they had other than their lives. “When he started, the fighting, one day and the other afternoon, I moving Mogadishu. But my husband has a lot of houses and lot cars, everything. Only one cars is move. One car is put the other Somali village. Is getting boats, little small boats. 24 hours aboard these boats, no foodies, no waters. 24 hours.” As so many others did at the time, Wardah, her husband and their baby son fled south to Kismaayo, about 450 kilometres south of Mogadishu. They escaped from Kismaayo in one of several small boats; the boats were over crowded and many people died out at sea. “Some people they come in the boats, they fall in the water, no survivors. It’s very difficult. I’m very lucky, it was only 24 hours. Some people, they lost children, mum, father. Just, I only lost money, my house, but it’s okay.” After 24 hours at sea, with no food or water, they were fortunate enough to land on Lamu, an island just off the Kenyan coast. From there they were assisted by representatives of the Kenyan government,
who interviewed them, brought them food, and provided the refugees with transport to Mombassa.

Wardah’s son, who was only nine months old, had become very ill while they were on the boat; he lapsed into unconsciousness and remained that way for eleven days. She twisted her hands together as she recounted the events. “He’s cry, he’s sick, when we come here, when we come Mombassa. He’s very sick, he’s sick six months, he’s very sick. Yah. Because the little boy, he’s nine months old, he’s very sick.” Treatment for the child was very expensive, but her husband had some relatives in Nairobi and they provided the money; it took six months for the child to recover fully. The family remained in the refugee camp in Kenya for three years, and Wardah’s husband managed to get some work with the UN until they were assigned resettlement in New Zealand in 1994. “It was not easy,” she added, telling me that while she was in the refugee camp, conditions were so stressful that she had not been able to fall pregnant. Since their resettlement, she has had five more children. The move from New Zealand to Australia in 1998 was for far more mundane reasons than their flight from Mogadishu. “Africa, Somalia is very nice, hot. Come New Zealand, they very cold, they no good. Is no good houses, are very cold, the ice, I can’t live.” She would go back to Somalia if she could, but the ongoing war makes this impossible. “There’s still war. It’s very difficult, especially for the kids… they no safe.”

Wardah’s story is the last of the six participants from East Africa in this section. While these women fled wars in three different countries (Sudan, Eritrea and Somalia), and came to Australia via three different countries of
first refuge (Uganda, Kenya and Egypt), what struck me was their
acceptance of things that could not be changed and their determination to
make the best of whatever circumstances they find themselves in. I had a
similar response to the stories of the women from Central Africa (DR
Congo and Burundi), where war also affects the lives of millions of people.

49 The Eritrean People’s Liberation Front, which emerged out of the original resistance
movement in Eritrea, the Eritrean Liberation Front (ELF).
50 “Of a total of 520,000 refugees in the Sudan at the end of 1981, approximately 425,000
are Ethiopian or Eritrean, with the much larger number being Eritreans” (Smock 1982,
451); By 1994, over a million Eritreans lived outside of their home country (Henze 1994,
74)

51 Also known as Akordat
52 Conditions in refugee camps near Kassala in Sudan were very poor in the early 1980s, a
time when Ghadir would have been living in that area. “There is no sanitation and only
enough water for drinking. Disease, as a consequence, is rampant” (McNamara 1984, 1).
53 According to UNHCR (2004, 2), the average time spent in refugee camps had risen from
nine years in 1993 to 17 years by 2003.
54 Kinship groups or lineages are the basic building blocks of Somali society (Lewis 2004,
491). There are six main clan groups in Somalia – the Dir, Isaaq, Darod, Hawiye, Digil and
Rahanweyn (Lewis 2004, 495; Compagnon 1998, 75).
55 Siyaad Barre was a member of the Darod clan.
56 The SNM was substantially made up of members of the northern Isaaq clan.
57 The USC largely comprised members of the north-central and central Hawiye clans.
58 The Independent State of Somaliland was declared on 18 May, 1991 (Ahmed 2006, 35),
but has not been recognised by international governments (UNODC 2007; Ahmed 2006,
35).
59 UNOSOM and UNOSOM II (United Nations Operation in Somalia)
60 This operation by the Unified Task Force (UNITAF) was dubbed ‘Operation Restore
Hope’.
61 The displacement is ongoing: 88,000 people fled Mogadishu between 27 and 29 October
2007 (Balslev-Olesen 2007); approximately 25,000 people were displaced from the capital
in January and in February 2008 (OCHA 2008).
62 The Transitional Federal Government (TFG) was established in 2004 and is reported to
be backed by the Ethiopian military (Bryden 2006, 225; IRC 2007a).
III: Central Africa (DR Congo and Burundi)
In which war and genocide provide the context for the flight and resettlement of refugee women from the Democratic Republic of Congo and Burundi.

Democratic Republic of Congo – the ‘African World War’

DR Congo is situated more or less in the middle of Africa, sharing borders with nine other African states. Rich in natural resource, it was of strategic importance internationally during the Cold War. Within a year of gaining independence from Belgium in 1960 the first democratically elected Prime Minister was assassinated (Kanza 1972; French 2004), unleashing enormous political unrest and violent clashes throughout the country, which continued over the next four years (Kanza 1972). Joseph-Désiré Mobutu took power following a coup in 1965. He dismantled all vestiges of parliamentary democracy and ruled by military dictatorship for the next thirty-two years, renaming the county Zaire. Although Mobutu’s years in
office were rife with flagrant abuses of human rights and rampant corruption, he enjoyed widespread international support for most of this time - particularly from the United States, France and Belgium, all keen to secure the country’s resources (Ewans 2002, 244; Nzongola-Ntalaja 2006, 132-3; French 2004). By 1996, the Cold War was over, however, and international support for Mobutu had waned. The Alliance of Democratic Forces for the Liberation of Congo/Zaire (ADFL) mounted an aggressive military campaign to overthrow the government, supported by the governments of Rwanda and Uganda (Nzongola-Ntalaja 2006, 133), starting what is known as the First Congo War. This war continued until mid-1997, when Laurent-Désiré Kabila and the ADFL took over the government (Reed 1998, 150-2). The newly renamed Democratic Republic of Congo remained unstable, however, as numerous militant factions had emerged and many of these were receiving support from various neighbouring states with economic and political interests at stake in DR Congo (Global Security 2007c).

The Second Congo War erupted in August 1998, carrying on into 2004 (Nzongola-Ntalaja 2006, 140). This is widely considered to have been one of the most violent wars in African history; nine African nations and no less than twenty armed groups played a role in conflict that impacted the lives of approximately 50 million Congolese. Approximately four million people died as a result of violence, starvation and disease, and millions of people were displaced – many seeking asylum in neighbouring countries (Jackson 2006, 97; Coghlan et al 2006, McCullum 2006, 23, Global Security 2007c; IRC 2007b).
By 1999, five neighbouring states had troops in DR Congo; the government controlled approximately one third of the country, forces from Rwanda, Uganda, Angola, Zimbabwe and Namibia having secured the remainder (Global Security 2007c). Kabila was assassinated in 2001, his son (Joseph Kabila) immediately taking his place and committing the government to peace negotiations with all factions. A peace accord that provided for a transition to constitutional government was signed by all political and military factions, and by representatives of civil society (mostly the churches), in December 2002 (McCullum 2006, 29; Nzongola-Ntalaja 2006, 140-1). Elections held in December 2006 saw Joseph Kabila returned to office. Factional differences remained, however, and there was little to show that the war was over (Global Security 2007c; McCullum 2006).

The effects of the war are most clearly visible in Eastern Congo, where mortality rates have been particularly high. Tens of thousands of Congolese women have been physically and emotionally traumatized, targeted for rape as a means of terrorising and subjugating the population by numerous armed factions, both from within the country and from neighbouring Uganda, Burundi and Rwanda (McCullum 2006, 34), leaving a legacy that has scarred individuals, families and communities.\footnote{The final year of the war (2006) saw 27,000 cases of sexual assault reported in just one province of DR Congo\cite{Gettleman2007}. United Nations camps set up in the region have been unable to deal with the sheer weight of humanitarian need in the country and the number of Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) (Coghlan et al 2006).}
Leah – Never Give Up

Leah told me that she was born in Bukavu, in Eastern Congo, but that she knew Uganda quite well as she had often visited relatives there and had learned the language. She was at school when the war broke out and, worried and frightened, had run home to try to find her family. Everyone was gone, however, so she telephoned an aunt to find out what to do; her aunt was about to leave town with her children and younger sister, so Leah joined up with her and they made their way to Goma – about 100 kilometres away, near the Ugandan border. “It was such a dangerous time. Because you are running in a group, and then you just see somebody who is running in front of you falling dead - just from a bullet from nowhere. So, it was such a difficult time.”

When they arrived at her aunt’s house in Goma, they found that the house had been commandeered by armed strangers and they were forced to flee once again. “We were just running and hiding in bushes, because the place was so dangerous.” Sometime later they asked someone where they were and found that they had crossed into Uganda. “We just asked people to show us where the United Nations office would be. Then they took us to a United Nations office in Mbarara …from there the UN took us to Kampala, and then they registered us as refugees” After this, Leah and her relatives were transferred to a refugee camp. Leah said she was lucky because she was allowed to attend the local high school. There she made friends with a Ugandan girl, whose family took her in and let her live with them while she continued her schooling. Leah said that this made her life
much easier as she did not have to deal with the difficulties inherent in living in a refugee camp.

After about three years, Leah’s aunt insisted that they leave Uganda. “When things became hard for my aunty in the camp, and the kids, then she told me we can’t stay here, we have to go.” There were rumours that Congolese refugees with connections to the ousted regime in Kinshasa were being killed by rebels in Uganda, and Leah’s aunt insisted that they had to go to Tanzania. “She told me ‘We can’t stay here, we have to go.’ And she told me ‘If I am in danger, you are also in danger, because we are family.’” Leah said that she had no choice, partly because her aunt was the senior member of her (available) family but also because she, too, was afraid. “I had to abandon everything.”

They boarded a bus and made their way south, masquerading as a Ugandan family en route to see doctors in Tanzania, and with Leah using her familiarity with the local language to get them across the Tanzanian border. After numerous difficulties, and reregistering with UNHCR, they finally ended up in a refugee camp near Kigoma, in Northwest Tanzania towards the end of 2002. Leah said it took strength not to give up; she found that many Tanzanians were actively hostile towards refugees, life in the camps was not easy, and food supplies were very limited and often inedible. Finally, seven years after fleeing her home in DR Congo, Leah and her family arrived in Australia in late 2003.
By 2003, Burundi was the source of the largest refugee population group in the world, most of them residing in Tanzania (UNHCR 2003, 20). Burundi gained independence from Belgium in 1962, at a time when ethnic violence was rampant in neighbouring Rwanda and large numbers of Tutsi refugees had fled into Burundi to escape the Tutsi/Hutu conflict in their own country. This exacerbated tensions in Burundi, where the Tutsi elite and the Hutu majority were vying for dominance. A number of events over the next decade led to these uneasy relations coming to a head: (Tutsi) King Mwambusu refused to inaugurate the elected (Hutu) prime minister in 1965, a minor Hutu uprising was vigorously suppressed by combined military and civilian (Tutsi) reprisals, and the military took command of the government in a coup in 1966. A further Hutu uprising in 1972 resulted in the deaths of hundreds of Tutsi civilians, followed by the deaths of between 100,000 and 200,000 Hutu civilians in reprisals mounted by the Tutsi-controlled army.
The events of 1972 entrenched the mutual distrust and fear between the two ethnic groups. Two coups in the next eleven years reinforced Tutsi military rule in Burundi. The first (1976)\textsuperscript{78} saw the introduction of a one-party state (Des Forges 1994, 204; BBC News 2007c); the second (1987)\textsuperscript{79} was followed by mass killings and reprisals and the escape of large numbers of Hutus over the border into Rwanda over the next year (Lemarchand 1994, 118-130; Dallaire 2003, 98, 339). Democratic reforms were gradually introduced, culminating in a referendum in 1992, the introduction of a new constitution, and elections in 1993. A Hutu civilian, Melchior Ndadaye, was elected president but was assassinated within three months, resulting in violent reactions from many Hutu civilians, who attacked and killed their Tutsi neighbours. As many as 20,000 Tutsis were murdered in two months, the Tutsi-dominated army responding by killing as many, if not more, Hutu civilians (Uvin 1999; Lemarchand 1998); approximately 900,000 people, mostly Hutu, sought sanctuary in neighbouring DR Congo, Tanzania and Rwanda, or in the swamplands and forests of Burundi (Des Forges 1994, 206).

After three years of unstable government and civil unrest, Tutsi ex-president Buyoya seized power again in 1996 and suspended the constitution. An internationally brokered peace agreement in October 2001 put a three year Tutsi/Hutu power-sharing government in place; elections in 2003 and 2005\textsuperscript{80} voted ethnic Hutus into the presidency under an ongoing power
sharing constitution. Although April 2006 saw an end to the 1972 country-
wide curfew (BBC News 2007c), the political situation in Burundi remains
unsettled.

Marcy - Missing Home

The ongoing civil war in Burundi drove Marcy and her husband, George,
both ethnic Hutus, from their home. George went to South Africa in 1996,
leaving during the violence that erupted after the assassination of President
Ndadaye. Marcy joined him in South Africa in 2001, where they continued
to live until being resettled in Australia in 2004. George said that he
experienced difficulty finding employment in South Africa and that there
was no refugee support available; he therefore resorted to starting up his
own (unspecified) business in order to make a living, and had been
moderately successful. Little was said about their circumstances before they
left Burundi or how each of them got to South Africa, and no mention was
made of where Marcy was for the intervening five years.

Marcy has two children, one almost a year old, the other in the first year of
primary school. Throughout our discussion, she sat very close to her
husband; she was polite, but very quiet, sitting with her eyes lowered and
her face slightly averted most of the time. Although her English was
excellent, she deferred to her husband during the discussion, allowing him
to ask and answer the questions and to interact with me, only answering
direct questions and remaining silent the rest of the time. Marcy did say, like
so many of the other women, that she missed her home country, and agreed
with her husband when he stated that it was friends and family that they miss the most.

This was very different to the interaction I had experienced with the other participants, where all discussions and interviews were conducted privately or, in one case, in the presence of another woman. While eight of them were married at the time they were interviewed, with the exception of George, their husbands all left the room or went out after greetings and pleasantries had been exchanged and before the preliminary discussion and/or interviews commenced. George’s presence appeared to limit the range and content of the discussion.

63 Cobalt, copper, niobium-tantalum (coltan), petroleum, industrial and gem grade diamonds, gold, silver, zinc, manganese, tin, uranium, coal, hydropower and timber (McCullum 2006, vii-viii).
64 Patrice Lumumba.
65 Later known as Mobutu Sésé Seko.
66 Supported by the governments of Uganda and Rwanda, who were both highly concerned about Mobutu’s apparent support of the Rwandan Hutu militia forces (Interhamwe) that had fled across the border into Congo at the end of the civil war in Rwanda and continued to make raids across the border into Rwanda, Burundi and Uganda.
67 Amongst the first towns to be attacked by the ADFL in 1996 was Bukavu, in Eastern Congo (Reed 1998, 147), the home town of Leah, the Congolese participant in this project.
68 For an eye witness account of this period, see Howard French (2004) A Continent for the Taking, The Tragedy and Hope of Africa.
69 Rape continues to be a crisis issue in the country, particularly in Eastern Congo; victims as young as three years of age and up to 75 years old – and all the ages in between - are routinely treated in a clinic in Bukavu (Gettleman 2007).
70 South Kivu province in Eastern Congo.
71 Leah’s ‘aunt’ is actually her mother’s relative; she is referred to as ‘aunty’ by Leah because she is much older than Leah herself, and the honorific is considered culturally appropriate.
72 There appears to be a generic understanding of the process of registering with UNHCR – how, where and why, a form of collective cultural knowledge disseminated by and to refugees by word of mouth.
73 Mbarara is the south west of Uganda, approximately 280 kilometres from Kampala.
74 Host states have become increasingly concerned regarding the economic, social and security burdens placed on their society by large numbers of refugees (Crisp 2004, 5); between 2003 and 2005, Tanzania hosted the largest number of refugees in a single country in Africa (UNHCR 2003, 15; UNHCR 2006a).
75 Approximately 570,000 people (UNHCR 2003, 15, 20).
76 There are three ethnic groups in Burundi; Hutu comprising approximately 85 percent of the population, Tutsi approximately 14 percent, and Twa one percent (Uvin 1999, 253; Ndikumana 1998, 29).
77 The coup was led by Captain Michel Micomebro.
78 Jean-Baptiste Bagaza.
Both Bagaza and Buyoya are Tutsi and from the Bururi province in the south.

Domitien Ndayizeye and Pierre Nkurunziza respectively.
Liberia and Sierra Leone - decades of war, terror and flight.

Conflict in Liberia

14 years of civil war in Liberia (1990 – 2004) resulted in the deaths of more than 200,000 people, the internal displacement of a further 1.4 million, and approximately 700,000 Liberians seeking refuge in other countries; these figures account for well over half of the total pre-war population of 2.5 million people (Global Security 2007d; Owusu 2000; Gambari 2005).

Settled by ex-slaves in the 1820s, Liberia was ruled for 133 years by a minority elitist regime descended from this settler population (dubbed Americo-Liberians); the indigenous population largely excluded from the political process during this time (Adebajo 2002, 21; Saha 1998).

Notwithstanding reforms, which began to emerge in the 1940s (De Lynden 1947; Harris 1999), significant social inequity and discrimination on ethnic grounds remained rife (Adebajo 2002, 22). By early 1979, the indigenous
population was largely unemployed and there were calls for social and economic change. Riots sparked over a proposed increase in the price of rice in April 1979 were vigorously suppressed by the Americo-Liberian dominated army, and a coup, led by Samuel Doe in April 1980, was initially welcomed by indigenous Liberians (Adebajo 2002, 25; Harris 1999, 432). Doe soon placed members of his own ethnic group (Krahn) in strategic positions in the army and government, however, and formed alliances with the wealthy Americo-Liberian minority and the other two most powerful ethnic groups to bolster his position. Doe remained in office for a decade, during which time large sums of public funds were stolen by members of the regime, human rights abuses became rampant, and political opposition was not tolerated (Adebajo 2002, 25-28).

A coup attempt in 1985, led by members of the Gio and Mano ethnic groups, resulted in military reprisals in central and north eastern Liberia (Nimba County) - home of those ethnic groups; approximately 3,000 civilians were killed and their villages destroyed, entrenching ethnic differences and tensions in Liberia (Adebajo 2002, 27-30). Regrouping in Côte d’Ivoire, the survivors of the 1985 coup launched an attack into Nimba County from Côte d’Ivoire on Christmas Eve 1989. Led by Charles Taylor, the rebel army recruited civilians as they moved south, manipulating ethnic differences to incite recruits. The government retaliated by giving the army free reign in the region in an attempt to quash the insurgency, resulting in villages being destroyed and civilians being indiscriminately killed (Van Damme 1999, 37). Nevertheless, within six months Taylor had secured control of approximately 95 percent of the country (Adebajo 2002, 85;
harris 1999, 434; kieh 2004, 67-68). Before he could enter the capital, however, more than half of Taylor's army joined a splinter group \(^91\) formed by one of his commanders, prince yeduo johnson, \(^92\) and the civil war intensified.

approximately 674,000 Liberians \(^93\) had fled into neighbouring countries before the end of the first year of the war, and the region was becoming increasingly unstable; ECOWAS (Economic Community of West African States) \(^94\) sent a 3,000 strong peacekeeping force (ECOMOG) \(^95\) to Liberia in August 1990 to remedy the situation (Adebajo 2002, 61). Doe, Taylor and Johnson continued to escalate the violence, however, and pitched battles raged in the streets of Monrovia; Taylor declared ECOMOG illegal and himself President of Greater Liberia, Johnson’s forces captured, tortured and executed Doe, after which Johnson also declared himself President (Adebajo 2002, 59-79; Gershoni 1997, 61; Kieh 2004, 73). ECOWAS continued to negotiate with the three warring factions until a disarmament agreement was finally signed in January 1991. \(^96\) Taylor continued the war, however, and the country remained highly unstable; peace accords were attempted, new splinter groups emerged, and the fighting continued unabated. ECOWAS finally secured another cease fire and a promise of disarmament from all warring factions in August 1996; this was followed by elections in July 1997 – with Charles Taylor securing 75.3 percent of the vote (Global Security 2007e; Adebajo 2002, 65, 87).

Looting and armed robbery remained rife across the country, however; the infrastructure of the country was in tatters, and rebel forces were in control.
of two thirds of the country again by May 2003. Another peace agreement
was put in place later that year, international peacekeepers arrived to
maintain security and to assist the transitional government, and Charles
Taylor left Liberia (Global Security 2007e; Gambari 2005, 3; United
Nations 2005). Following a lengthy disarmament programme, elections
were held in 2005 (United Nations News Service 2007b), and Ellen Johnson
Sirleaf became the first female head of state in Africa. By September
2007, Liberia was moving toward economic and political stability - although
rape continued to be one of the most frequently reported crimes in the
county (United Nations News Service 2007c).

Elizabeth – The Legacy of War

Like all the Liberian women with whom I spoke, Elizabeth was one of the
674,000 people who fled their homeland in 1990. Elizabeth told me that she
lived as a refugee in Nigeria for twelve years before coming to Australia;
her only child, now in his early twenties, spent most of his childhood
exposed to war and its aftermath. “I lost my mother during the war. She died
during the heat of the war, 1990 August. And I lost my sister and her
children... and I lost all relatives at home.”

Soon after this, Elizabeth continued, an opportunity arose for her and her
son to be evacuated to Nigeria. Fortunately this did not require them to
navigate across war torn Liberia and then through the neighbouring
countries of Côte d’Ivoire, Ghana, Togo and Benin to get to Nigeria.
Instead, they were evacuated directly to Nigeria by sea. She explained that
Like, 1990, during the heat of the war, when they send a peace keeping
force… and Nigeria sent a ship to evacuate its citizens. And before you can
get on the ship, you have to prove that you are a Nigerian.” She was able to
do this because, although she grew up in Liberia and her mother was
Liberian, her father is Nigerian and she was actually born in Nigeria.

Elizabeth told me that her grandparents had moved to Nigeria and settled
there many years before. They had raised their family in Nigeria, where
Elizabeth’s mother had met and married her father; some years later she and
her mother relocated to Liberia and Elizabeth had grown up and gone to
school in Monrovia. Elizabeth’s brother lived with her father in Nigeria, and
the only contact Elizabeth had had with them during her childhood was via
letters and telephone calls. It was these letters that proved to be invaluable
when it came to providing proof of a Nigerian connection. Initially,
Elizabeth had hurried down to the harbour with her son and a bundle of
possessions, assuming that when she said that her father was Nigerian it
would be sufficient to get her on board the ship. There were, however,
thousands of desperate people trying to leave Monrovia, and Elizabeth was
told that she had to present physical proof of her heritage. Fortunately she
had kept the letters from her father and was able to run back to where she
had been living and retrieve them in time.

“But when I got back home in Nigeria,” Elizabeth continued, “situations
were not good for me, because not knowing the language of my father and
being in Liberia all my life.” She lived in her father’s village for three
months, but the combination of not speaking the local language, suffering
from the trauma of what she had witnessed and experienced in the lead up to leaving Liberia, and missing her home and the comfort of people with a similar background, made the situation particularly difficult. “So I decided to be with Liberians and moved in the refugee camp. And that’s where I was up to... I think 2000... I came to Australia in 2002.”

The unembellished way that Elizabeth recounted these facts gave little indication of the privations and dangers she and her son had endured from 1990 to 2002. Choosing to move into the refugee camp, rather than living with her Nigerian relatives, was an enormously complex decision, made out of her need for the familiar at such a difficult time. She and her son lived in the camp with many other Liberians, some of whom became surrogate family to one another. Her son went to school nearby, but things were difficult, Elizabeth said, particularly the living conditions and access to adequate food. “Living in a country that is not your country, you have no access to work, you only live on food provided by UNHCR. And food - the only food you get is rice, beans and oil. There’s no money to buy fish, meat, peppers, salt, or whatever you need to prepare your food.” She paused and added, “For 12 years.”

Elizabeth and her son were eventually resettled in Australia as part of the ‘Women at Risk’ programme in 2002. Although she would dearly like to return to Liberia one day to visit the places she grew up in and be reunited with friends and family, she has reservations about doing so. She is fearful of placing herself in a situation from which she may be unable to escape, remembering all too clearly the loss of virtually all vestiges of control over
her personal circumstances, an experience that has left her with an abiding discomfort at the thought of placing herself in the way of similar outcomes: “I don’t know if I can go back to Liberia. Not that I can’t, but I wouldn’t want to go and find myself in a situation that when I get there it would be hard to get out. For each time I think about the war, I still have that phobia.”

Juliana – Plagued by Fear

Juliana’s story is very different to Elizabeth’s; whilst they left Liberia at much the same time, Juliana fled on foot to neighbouring Guinea. “Well, ah, I was born in Liberia, in a village called Felelah,” she explained. She looked at the map of Liberia I had brought, searching for the name so that she could point it out. “Okay,” she said, putting her finger on the map. “Felelah is not there; but you see here, Gbarnga? So, Felelah is here.” She pointed to an area in central Liberia, towards the top of a triangle formed by Monrovia, Buchanan and Gbarnga, carefully spelling the name of the town out for me so that it could be jotted down before she continued.

Juliana spoke about her schooling, telling me that, although she was born in Felelah, she did not go to school there. Instead, she completed six years of primary schooling in Yekepa, a town about 200 kilometres away, situated three kilometres from the Guinean border. “I go up to year six because my uncle lives there, so I stay with him, up to year 6.” She completed the rest of her schooling closer to home, in Gbarnga. “After high school... I wanted to do nursing, I took the test, and I took the university test, and I decided to go
to the uni and not do nursing. I wanted to business administration. But then
the war came.”

By this time, in early 1990, Juliana had gone to live in Monrovia. “There we
were, and then the war came. So, during the war I had to walk... I walk from
Monrovia to Felelah.” Juliana looked down at the map, tracing her journey
for me with her finger, showing me the towns she travelled through on the
200 kilometre journey back to her home village so that I would have some
understanding of the distance involved. “One day we were just sitting in the
village, after I had travelled back to my village, and then we just heard the
shooting, so whenever there is shooting everyone has to find their way,
sometimes you forget about even your sandals or whatnot. I was lucky that
day, I had my son and then I just took my sister’s daughter because I didn’t
know where she went. So I just took her.” She ran, then walked, burdened
by two small children, a further 200 kilometres, back up to Yekepa, where she had attended primary school all those years before. Thousands of
other people were also fleeing from their homes, leaving most of their
possessions behind them in their haste to escape the fighting.

Juliana crossed into Guinea, not knowing if any of her other family
members were still alive. “I hiked into Guinea. Yah, so I came into Guinea
in 1990, the same 1990. And then I stayed in the camp throughout, in
Guinea.” Her husband, who had been in Buchanan when war broke out, was
finally reunited with them in Guinea a year later. They remained in Guinea
for the next ten years, initially in a refugee camp in Thuo, just over the
border in Guinea, where they stayed for about five years, and then in
Telikoro refugee camp, in the forest regions. There they did what they could to supplement their meagre resources, but life was difficult and jobs were hard to come by. “At that time, if you can’t read and write French, you can’t get a job. Yes. It was very difficult…”

By 2000 Juliana had five children, including her young niece, to care for; her sister had never been found. That year, the United Nations did a routine check of Telikoro camp to identify the most vulnerable families and individuals; fourteen families were selected for the Australian authorities to interview for immediate resettlement, including Juliana’s. She told me that, just the day before they were all due to go for the interviews, the number of eligible families was suddenly dropped to six, with no explanation, although all six families were accepted for resettlement. The other eight families were bitterly disappointed as they had thought that they, too, had found a way out of the camps.  

Juliana and her family, although accepted for resettlement in Australia, had to delay their departure from Guinea by a further eight months. She laughed as she told me that only two days after finally getting the visa to come to Australia, she gave birth to her youngest son. “So I couldn’t travel and I have to wait for another eight months,” she commented. Even with visas, these months dragged for the whole family; the fear that something could go wrong plagued Juliana’s thoughts until she finally arrived in Perth with her family in 2002.
Faye – Moving On

Like Juliana, Faye lived in Guinea as a refugee before being resettled in Australia with three of her four children in 2002. She was separated from her eldest son during the war and has not seen him for the past fifteen years, although she did manage to trace him to Nigeria in 2005 and they have been in regular telephone contact since then.

Although some details of Faye’s past emerged in conversations over a two-year period, these tended to be sketchy. When asked about her family, she said that her father had always encouraged her and her siblings to achieve, to be independent, and to get a good education. He was a fairly wealthy man but he always told his children that one should never depend on the wealth of one’s father, and urged them to be independent. Faye laughed as she told me that her father’s family is well known for its strong minded women, and that her father encouraged this. Since arriving in Perth, Faye has completed an undergraduate degree, enrolled in a Masters programme of study, received numerous community awards for her involvement in the African communities, and has secured a full time professional position working with people from diverse cultural communities.

Faye has not told me the exact circumstances of her flight to Guinea, other than that she was separated from one of her children at that time. She has also made little mention of the years she and her three children spent in Guinea, saying only that she taught and worked in administration. The rest, she said, is history; and for best outcomes for her and for her family, she needs to focus on the future. In many of our conversations, Faye made
reference to the need for the African humanitarian migrants in Australia to leave the past behind, not to allow past sadness to cloud their new opportunities, and not to become embroiled in carry-over factional politics. She has also mentioned that she has observed that, as the size of the African refugee diaspora in Perth has grown, there is an increasing tendency for people to fall back into old habits in terms of cliques and factions, with the result that the diaspora has become more political.

Whilst most of the other participants chose to share much more of their backgrounds with me than Faye did, this attitude of wanting to leave the ‘difficulties’ of the past behind, to not dwell on the details, is not unusual. Even the women who appeared to tell me a great deal about themselves, did not reveal much of the day-to-day trauma and insecurity that they had endured. Although this suggested that they wished to distance themselves from their traumatic pasts, and many of their comments revealed that this was so, the women did tell me many stories about their families and their countries of origin that showed their strong links back to both, and to the past.
Sierra Leone – War and Diamonds

Within five years of independence in 1961 there was talk of mismanagement and corruption within the government of Sierra Leone. Two coup attempts later saw Saika Stevens and the All Peoples Congress (APC) take charge of the government, retaining control from 1967 to 1985 and declaring a one-party state in 1978 (Pratt 1999). During this time, the government systematically exploited Sierra Leone’s natural resources and public funds. Inflation was rampant, foreign debt increased exponentially, and there were chronic shortages of food and fuel in the country (Jackson 2004, 141; Pratt 1999). By 1985, less than two percent of the population was in paid employment; a thriving ‘informal economy’ had emerged based around the illegal diamond trade and largely made up of unemployed and disaffected youth, and civil discontent was rife (Abdullah 1998, 207-211). Joseph Momoh assumed the presidency upon Stevens’ retirement, and initiated government crack-downs in response to student unrest; a number of
students and other militants fled to Libya, where they were trained in guerrilla warfare (Abdullah 1998, 216; Pratt 1999). These Libyan-trained fighters returned to Sierra Leone as the Revolutionary United Front (RUF), recruiting fighters from amongst the thousands of unemployed youths (Abdullah & Muana 1998, 172; Blunt 1999).

In March 1991, Forday Sankoh106 and the RUF entered the Eastern Province107 of Sierra Leone from Liberia (Pratt 1999; Jackson 2004, 1; Bell 2005; Gershoni 1997, 55). Although the government doubled the size of the army, it was unable to contain the RUF.108 Within a year of the start of the war, members of the army mounted a coup that placed Captain Valentine Strasser in power (Pratt 1999; Abullah & Muana 1998, 181; Bangura 2000, 554; Adebajo & Keen 2000, 8). The new government was also unable to contain the RUF, however, and the newly expanded army was soon as prone to brutal exploitation109 of the civilian population as the rebels (Adebajo & Keen 2000, 8).110 The RUF finally overran Freetown in 1995, by which time more than 30,000 people had been killed and over half the population had been displaced (Abdullah & Muana 1998, 172). In May 1995, government hired mercenaries111 to quash the RUF and to train government troops (Gershoni 1997, 68); the mercenaries worked in conjunction with the Kamajors112 to push the RUF back both from the capital and the diamond areas (Pratt 1999; Adebajo & Keen 2000, 8).

Brigadier Julius Maada Bio led a coup January 1996, but stepped down in favour of President-elect Ahmad Tejan Kabbah113 less than a month later, after elections had been held. The Kamajors and mercenaries continued to
exert heavy pressure on the RUF, forcing Sankoh to resume peace negotiations and to sign a peace accord in November 1996 (Pratt 1999; Abdullah & Muansa 1998, 186-188), although the RUF nevertheless remained active. The government was overthrown six months later by the army, Major Johnny Paul Koroma forming the Armed Forces Revolutionary Council (AFRC), suspending the constitution, and including the RUF in the government (Abdullah 1998, 228; Bangura 2000, 555; Pratt 1999). A complete breakdown of all remaining law and order followed and ECOMOG troops finally forced the last of the AFRC/RUF coalition out of Freetown in February 1998 (Pratt 1999).

In 1999, the United Nations sent a peacekeeping force and introduced an international ban on the direct or indirect importation of rough diamonds in an attempt to cut off funding to the RUF (United Nations 2001). UN forces made gradual progress, but fighting continued relentlessly well into 2001. Disarmament was finally completed in January 2002 and people celebrated in the streets (Bergner 2005, 175). However, eleven years of conflict, during which the RUF had killed, raped and maimed tens of thousands of civilians, has the county scarred from end to end and unemployment remains very high.

Paula – Sierra Leone Not Safe

Like Faye’s, Paula’s story was brief and matter-of-fact. She appeared to have little patience for recounting her experiences prior to coming to Australia, speaking rapidly and in short, compact sentences that left little
room for interjections or questions. She had come straight from work and said that she was tired, hungry and did not have much time. Choosing not to provide much in the way of background information, she told me that she was born in Freetown, the port and capital city of Sierra Leone, and that she grew up and was educated there. She was content with her life in Freetown until the war came and she was forced to flee. “I left my country because of the war, and I seek refuge in Nigeria. I lost my mum and my dad during the war.”

She went on to tell me that she is a single mother, and fled to Nigeria when her children were four and eight years old respectively. “I spent four years in a Nigerian refugee camp,” she said, not providing any details of how she arrived there – whether it was on foot, as Juliana had travelled to Guinea, or by boat, as Elizabeth had travelled to Nigeria. She made no mention of how long it took to get to Nigeria, saying only that life in the camp had been difficult and that she and her two children arrived in Perth as part of the ‘Women At Risk’ programme in 2001.

“For now, Sierra Leone is not safe anymore,” she observed. ”I mean, they fight and bomb, the rebels, everywhere.” She shook her head, adding that it is particularly unsafe for single women and women with children in Sierra Leone, a comment that pointed towards, but did not elaborate on, issues that have been of key concern in Sierra Leone, such as the abduction of children by the militias, rape, and mutilation. She went on to say that it is virtually impossible to find a job in Sierra Leone at the moment and that people are struggling to survive. In Perth, however, she has been able to gain full time
employment, support her family ‘back home,’ and sponsor five of her seven siblings to come and live in Perth – thereby reuniting as much of her family as she is able to.

Hometalk - Wartalk

Talking about home and about war highlights the extent of the hardships suffered by refugees in Africa, and specifically by the women involved in this project. Of the millions of refugees in the world, relatively few are resettled in Australia. These twelve women made it through the selection process, each having experienced different levels of displacement, uncertainty and fear, compounded and exacerbated by delays experienced in the resettlement process. In telling me their stories, the women used body language and vocal emphasis to underscore their intense focus on moving forward towards their desired outcome of a better life.

During this discussion I have referred to the determination that they have shown in overcoming obstacles, but this is more than determination as I have previously understood it. Picking up the pieces of their lives, in some cases several times, shows them to be courageous, tenacious and resolute, not merely determined. The sadness of separation from families and loved ones, and the longing for home, are themes that emerged frequently in our conversations. These are linked to the notion of difficulty, which was used to encompass a plethora of detail that they choose not to elaborate upon, calling attention to an understated, pragmatic outlook on life. These stories provide a starting point from which to consider the range of challenges that
face African refugees settling in Australia or, indeed, in other parts of the globe.

81 English-speaking ex-slaves and their descendants, originally from West Africa, and West Indian and Sierra Leonean creoles, supported by the American Colonization Society (Saha 1998, 9; Kieh 2004, 60-61).
82 Americo-Liberians made up five percent of the total population.
83 The indigenous peoples of Liberia made up 95 percent of the population, comprising sixteen main indigenous ethnic groups: Bassa, Belle, Dei, Gbandi, Gio, Gola, Grebo, Kissi, Kr, Kro, Loma, Mandingo, Mano, Mende, and Vai (Adebajo 2002, 21).
84 Four percent of the population owned 60 percent of the country’s wealth (Adebajo 2002, 22-3); in 1962, only 30 percent of the work force was in paid employment - earning approximately 75 cents a day, either in cash or in wage supplements (Dalton 1965, 578).
85 Rice is the staple diet of most Liberians.
86 A Master-Sergeant in the Liberian army, and an ethnic Krahn.
87 “Despite constituting only 5 percent of the Liberian population, Krans held 31 percent of cabinet posts in 1985” (Adebajo 2002:26).
88 Loma and Mandigo ethnic groups.
89 Following the 1985 elections, which were widely considered to have been rigged by Doe (Harris 1999, 433; Adebajo 2002).
90 Taylor’s army, the National Patriotic Front of Liberia (NPFL), had grown from 168 fighters to a force of 10,000 within the first six months the war; at that time, the national army could only muster about 2,000 troops (Adebajo 2002, 58).
91 The Independent National Patriotic Front of Liberia (INPFL).
92 Most of the fighters who shifted allegiance were, like Johnson himself, ethnic Gios (Adebajo 2002:58-59).
93 Approximately 311,000 refugees fled to Guinea, 193,000 to Côte d’Ivoire, 130,000 to Sierra Leone, 34,000 to Ghana and 6,000 to Nigeria (Adebajo 2002, 3, 61).
94 ECOWAS was founded in 1975 to ensure the free and peaceful movement of people, goods and services across West Africa; it comprises the following member states: Benin, Burkina Faso, Cape Verde, Côte d’Ivoire, Gambia, Ghana, Guinea, Guinea-Bissau, Liberia, Mali, Niger, Nigeria, Senegal, Sierra Leone, and Togo (ECOWAS 2008; Adebajo 2002, 61).
96 An interim government was put in place under Dr Amos Sawyer, a prominent political exile during the Doe regime.
97 Troops were also provided by ECOWAS (August – October 2003), the Unites States (August – October 2003) and by the United Nations (UNAMIL - the UN Peacekeeping Mission in Liberia; October 2003 - present).
98 Sirleaf was imprisoned during the Doe regime, and was a one-time supporter of Charles Taylor.
99 There were also many Sierra Leonians, Sudanese, and Congolese in the camp.
100 This visa class was introduced by the Australian Department of Immigration in 1989 in response to UNHCR concerns regarding the plight of particularly vulnerable refugee women (Manderson et al 1998, 271-272; UNHCR 2005a). This includes women whose partners are missing or deceased, and single women who have no family support (Manderson et al 1998, 272).
101 The children were approximately four and two years old respectively at the time.
102 Yekepa is in Nimba County, an area targeted by the government for massive reprisals once the war began.
103 Conditions in refugee camps in West Africa are, generally speaking, harsh. “The heat is often exhausting and food, water and health care may be scarce. In some instances, women and girls are subject to sexual abuse and exploitation in camp environments. Disease and malnutrition are prevalent in camps, as they are in Liberia itself” (DIMIA 2006, 8).
104 Gold, diamonds, and titanium dioxide (rutile).
105 Approximately 60,000 people - of an estimated total population of 3,515,812 (United Nations Statistics Division 2007) - were in paid employment in 1985 (Abdullah 1998, 207-211).

106 Trained in Libya and backed by Liberian warlord Charles Taylor (Pratt 1999; Adebajo & Keen 2000, 9).

107 Resources in this province, largely diamonds, provided funding for the RUF throughout the war (Rodgers 2006, 268-269).

108 A people’s militia / civil defence force, the Kamajors, emerged in 1992 in response to government’s inability to deal with the rebels (Bangura 2000, 554). By 1999, there were an estimated 35,000 Kamajors active in Sierra Leone (Pratt 1999).

109 Civilians took to calling these soldiers ‘sobels.’ Recruited from the same stock of disaffected youth as the rebels, the behaviour of the soldiers was often indistinguishable from that of the RUF (Abdullah & Muana 1998, 181-2; Bangura 2000, 555).

110 The 2006 film Blood Diamond provides a very accessible account of the circumstances in Sierra Leone during the 1990s, showing glimpses of the undisciplined nature of the militias, the random violence facing the general population, and the resultant desperation and fear in the county. See also Soldiers of Light (Daniel Bergner 2005) for a graphic and moving account of the same period.

111 A highly experienced South African based counter-insurgency company, Executive Outcomes (EO).

112 The people’s militia / civil defence force.

113 Leader of the Sierra Leone People’s Party (SLPP).

114 See footnotes 96 and 97.


116 Also known as ‘conflict diamonds’ because they originate from areas not under the control of legitimate, recognized governments and were used to fund rebel military actions (United Nations 2001).

117 Approximately 75,000 combatants were disarmed by the UN, including approximately 20,000 child soldiers (Bell 2005, 8).

118 The rebel tactics included brutal mutilation of thousands of men, women and children; hands, arms, legs and/or genitals were hacked off, usually by machete, to inspire fear and compliance in the civilian population (Pratt 1999; Bergner 2005, 167-169).

119 In 2005, Sierra Leone was referred to as the poorest country in the world, with 70 percent of the population illiterate and an estimated two million youths (one third of the population) unemployed (Bell 2005).

120 There were an estimated 9.9 million refugees worldwide at the end of 2006 (UNHCR 2007a).
Chapter Four

Refugees and Australia: Politico-economic Background

In which some background to refugee movements/asylum seekers and the receiving society is explored, including the long shadow of the White Australia Policy, contemporary social/cultural attitudes, and the homogenization of African Humanitarian Migrants.

Refugees – world context

Refugees leave their countries of origin for very different reasons to those of voluntary migrants. As with the twelve participants in this project, their move is typified by the forced nature of their departure from their country of origin, and by what Kunz (1973, 130) refers to as the “absence of positive original motivations to settle elsewhere.” These are people who have fled their countries as a result of war, civil strife, persecution, personal danger, human rights abuses – or a combination of these factors (Benard 1986, 617; Forbes Martin 2004, 1). They are unwilling migrants, leaving their homes in search of safety; their departures to a place or country of first refuge tending to be calculated in terms of flight, escape, and survival, once all other alternatives have been exhausted or choice removed (Forbes Martin 2004, 13-14).

In 1951, 26 countries, including Australia, became signatories to The Geneva Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees. This agreement was established as the cornerstone of protection for the vast number of post-war refugees in Europe and was expected to resolve the refugee crisis that was the legacy of the war years. It outlined what was meant by refugee, limiting the scope to displaced persons within Europe and to events prior to January 1, 1951 (Wilkinson 2001). At this time there were an estimated 1.5 million
refugees in the world (McMaster 2001, 9). By the 1960s it had become abundantly clear that refugees were not to be found only in Europe and certainly not only as a result of World War II. This resulted in an amendment to the 1951 Convention, the 1967 Protocol, which aimed to cover the increasingly complex refugee issue worldwide. It is a document upon which millions of people uprooted around the world have come to rely for their protection and for some hope for their future. In addition to specifying the criteria required to claim refugee status, the 1951/67 Convention outlines a set of basic human rights, the obligations of refugees to host governments, the extent of the refugee crisis, and the need for international cooperation to resolve it, setting the standard for the treatment of refugees (Wilkinson 2001; Feller 2001, 582).

According to the 1951/67 Revised United Nations Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees, Article 1(2), a refugee is defined as someone who:

…owing to 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 [sic passim] nationality and is unable, or owing to such fear, unwilling to avail himself of the protection of that country; or, who, not having a nationality or being outside the country of his former habitual residence as a result of such events, is unable, or, owing to such fear, unwilling to return to it (UNHCR 2007b, 16).

Once a refugee has fled his or her country of origin for any of the above reasons and has then applied for permission to stay in another county, they are, literally, asylum seekers. This term has become more broadly used in Australia, where it has come to refer to people arriving in the country in an
unauthorised fashion, rather than under the auspices of the United Nations and with formal refugee status, who then apply for asylum under Article 1(2) of the UN Convention (Neumann 2007, 27-28; Lusher et al 2007, 11-12; Smith 2001). Government policies that are shaped with a view to regulating and managing the burgeoning number of people claiming refugee status worldwide serve to shift and limit public understandings both of the terminology and of the surrounding circumstances that result in people seeking asylum outside of their country of origin (McMaster 2001, 21).

In 1992, the Australian government estimated that approximately two thirds of the world’s refugees were housed in refugee camps in Africa, Asia and the Middle East (Australia 1992, 7). In 2001, Erika Feller, UNHCR Director for the Department of International Protection, stated that there were approximately 22 million people of concern to the UNHCR worldwide, most of whom were women, children and the elderly (Feller 2001, 581); UN statistics show that 12 million of these people were formally designated as refugees, as defined by the 1951/67 Convention (UNHCR 2002, 12), and would receive assistance from UNHCR. These figures do not, however, include the vast number of people who are displaced in their own country either for political reasons or by the vagaries of nature, such as famine or flood - potentially as many as another 50 million displaced people worldwide (McMaster 2001, 9).

The extent of refugee populations around the world can only be estimated. Numbers fluctuate as wars and other crises flare up or settle down, and different groups use different criteria to try to establish a real picture of the
situation. UNHCR makes refugee statistics available on an annual basis and much of the work published on refugees refers to these figures as a reliable baseline. Nevertheless, statistics do not always agree – as evidenced by those relating to Africa. Awaku (1995, 79) states that the refugee population in Africa in 1995 constituted approximately one third of the total refugee population of the world; UNHCR figures for the same year, however, suggest the figure was closer to 40 percent (UNHCR 2005b). In 1996, Iredale et al (1996, 20) claimed that “almost half the world’s refugees are in Africa,” whilst UNHCR estimates for the same period indicate that it was closer to one third (UNHCR 2005b). By 1998, the Brookings-SAIS Project on Internal Displacement gave their estimate of the number of people displaced in Africa alone as 10 million (Cohen 1998); UNHCR estimated the number to be just under six million (UNHCR 2005b). The Institute of Race Relations (IRR 2007) indicates that, by 2005, the number of refugees worldwide had fallen by 12 percent and infers from this data that the refugee population fell by approximately one third over the previous five years (IRR 2007).

The total number of people of concern to UNHCR – a figure that includes refugees, asylum seekers, recent returnees, internally displaced persons (IDPs) and stateless people - remained almost the same during that period, however, dropping by less than a million people in total (UNHCR 2007c).125 This is less than a five percent reduction overall in the number of people requiring assistance, despite the reduction in refugee numbers.
Table 4.1 indicates that estimates of refugee populations vary considerably. What is not in doubt, however, is that vast numbers of people worldwide are at risk. By the end of 2006 UNHCR (2007a) stated that of the 32.9 million people of concern to that organisation worldwide, 9.9 million were refugees – the highest number in five years.

**Table 4.1: Summary of comparative data** (see Table 5.1, Appendix 5 for source data).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>UNHCR value</th>
<th>Other pundit</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1995</td>
<td>40.1%</td>
<td>33.3 % of world total refugees in Africa</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1996</td>
<td>32.65%</td>
<td>~50 % of world total refugees in Africa</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1998</td>
<td>5,889,708</td>
<td>10,000,000 displaced in Africa</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2000</td>
<td>12,129,572</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2004</td>
<td>9,574,840</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2005</td>
<td>8,661,994 - a drop of 9.53% from 2004</td>
<td>A drop of 12% from 2004</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Whatever criteria are used to generate a picture of refugee numbers, internationally or in specific locales, even the lowest estimates represent a significant number of individuals (Benard 1986, 617). According to Crisp (2000a, 2), nine of the top 20 countries ‘producing’ refugees are in Africa, as are 10 of the 20 countries with the largest populations of internally displaced persons. Only a fraction of these people are provided for under the 1951/67 Convention.
In 1969, the Organisation of African Unity (OAU) chose to examine the scope of the refugee situation in Africa and extended the United Nations definition of refugees to include a broader range of individuals, more in keeping with the uncertain situations which are part and parcel of everyday life in much of Africa. Specifically, the OAU stated that a refugee in Africa is any person who,

...owing to external aggression, occupation, foreign domination or events seriously disturbing public order in either part or whole of his [sic passim] country of origin or nationality, is compelled to leave his place of habitual residence in order to seek refuge in another place outside his country of origin or nationality (OAU 1969, 2).

This definition is more encompassing and inclusive than the 1951/67 UN Convention, which limits the status of refugee to those who are unable or unwilling to return to their country of origin. Although it is not accepted by the United Nations, the OAU definition extends the classification of refugee to a far wider range of displaced persons (Forbes Martin 2004, 3; Iredale et al. 1996, 20). It is a definition that draws attention to the limitations of the 1951/67 Convention and attempts to make provision for the care and maintenance of a vast number of displaced persons in Africa by neighbouring African states, which continue to bear a disproportionate burden of sheltering refugees.126

The majority of African refugee populations are housed in refugee camps, often in neighbouring states, and provided with minimal living conditions.
Although safe from the originating cause of their flight once in the camps, this is only relative security; there is no guarantee of physical safety for the refugees once they have arrived. It is not uncommon for there to be armed attacks on the camps, for refugees to be forcibly recruited into regular or irregular armies, and for women and girls to be subjected to violence and sexual abuse\(^{127}\) (Australia 1992, 8). According to Rudd Lubbers, United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (January 2001 - February 2005), women and girls make up more than 50 percent of refugee populations (Lubbers 2004, vii). This is a group that the United Nations considers to be particularly vulnerable to exploitation and violence, having lost the protection of their homes, government and, in many cases, their families (ibid). In most cases, their flight results from persecution and violence. They then suffer the hardship of their journey into exile, the new environments, languages, social and economic roles that they face there, harassment or indifference from officials, frequent sexual abuse and changes to familial relationships (Forbes Martin 2004, 13; Lubbers 2004, vii).

This highlights the abundant differences between planned immigration and forced flight, between migrant and refugee. The impact of forced flight and the associated physical and mental trauma on individuals and groups prior to final resettlement in a host country is likely to have an impact both on the individuals and on the receiving society. Kunz (1973, 130) suggests that the trauma is likely to affect the resettlement of displaced persons in their ultimate host countries. In addition to this, refugees are dependent upon the goodwill of the receiving society (McMaster 2001, 8). This may exacerbate their distress, if they perceive the society as inhospitable or hostile to their arrival.
**Australia, Refugees and Africa**

A relatively small number of countries in the world consistently offer resettlement placements to refugees; Australia is one of these (Iredale et al. 1996, xii). As a long standing member of the United Nations High Commission for Refugees Executive Committee, and a signatory to both the 1951 Geneva Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees and its subsequent amendment, the 1967 Protocol (DIMIA 2005a, 4), Australia has certain international obligations to refugees. These include offering protection to anyone who meets the criteria for refugee status as set out in the Convention (Mares 2002, 5). The Australian government responds on two fronts. It provides financial assistance to UNHCR, to supply support and relief to refugees, and it accepts a percentage of the refugee population for resettlement within Australia itself each year as part of a humanitarian immigration programme (Vanstone 2005, 2; DIMIA 2005a, 6).

Whilst UNHCR can recommend to countries party to the 1951/67 agreements that they take in refugees from a given area, it nevertheless remains in the hands of the individual countries as to how many refugees they accept - and from where (Jupp 2002, 182; Asekeh & Tilbury 2004, 136). The Australian government sets an annual refugee quota and undertakes individual assessments of all refugees referred by UNHCR; this can be a lengthy process as it aims to ensure that the refugees meet Australian immigration criteria before being accepted (DIMIA 2005a, 7). Once the individual referrals have been reviewed to ensure that “…all applicants meet health and character requirements” (ibid), their airfares and
associated resettlement costs are paid for by the federal authorities as part of Australia’s Humanitarian Programme (Mares 2002, 5).

This programme is made up of two separate elements. The first element relates to refugees, as defined by the 1951/1967 Convention and Protocol, who are generally referred to the Australian authorities by UNHCR; it includes the Women At Risk programme, which works to assist female refugees, whether or not they form part of a family unit, acknowledging the particular difficulties that this group encounters. The second element is the Special Humanitarian Programme (SHP), under which Australian citizens can sponsor individuals or families that are outside their country of origin. The candidates must be able to prove that they have been subject to what amounts to gross violations of human rights in their country of origin. If they have not otherwise qualified as refugees under the UN Convention rules, they may then be sponsored to enter Australia under the SHP (DIMIA 2005b; Mares 2005, 4). For these migrants, however, it is expected that travel expenses to Australia will be covered by the sponsors and/or the individuals themselves, not by the Australian government (DIMIA 2007a, 1). This is what Sarah and her family encountered after fleeing to Egypt from Sudan and subsequently gaining entry visas to Australia under the SHP. Once accepted for resettlement, they discovered that they were required to fund eight airline tickets in order to take up their visa offers – a not inconsiderable burden under the circumstances.

Jupp (2002, 182) argues that Convention commitments and altruism are not the only motivation for Australia’s refugee intake. He paints a picture of the
Australian government having a range of agendas, of viewing refugees as useful additions to the workforce and population, as well as a vehicle for promoting a co-operative image for the country within the international community. McMaster (2001) supports Jupp, pointing out that refugees and resettlement raise complex moral and practical questions for governments, both in terms of management at home and in terms of foreign policy. Neumann (2007, 27-29) likewise suggests that diplomatic relations play a not insignificant part in the shaping of immigration policies, particularly those concerning refugees. Thus the refugee can become a political tool in the arena of international politics.

The total Humanitarian Programme in any given year makes up a very small proportion of the overall migrant intake in Australia. According to the Australian Bureau of Statistics (2005), humanitarian entrants in the year 2002-2003 accounted for approximately 10 percent of the total immigration intake. In 2004-2005, the number of allocated humanitarian placements was increased for the first time in seven years, from 12,000 to 13,000 (DIMIA 2005b, 2; Browne 2006, 142). This increased quota included a 50 percent increase in the number of refugee places allocated, from 4,000 to 6,000 per annum (ibid), and a reduction in the number of SHP placements from 8,000 to 7,000.
Table 4.2: Summary of Humanitarian Programme and total immigration arrivals, 2002 – 2007 (DIAC 2007a, 13).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Financial Year</th>
<th>Refugees</th>
<th>SHP</th>
<th>Immigration Total</th>
<th>Humanitarian Migrants as a percent of Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2002 – 03</td>
<td>3,882</td>
<td>5,686</td>
<td>93,914</td>
<td>10.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2003 - 04</td>
<td>3,130</td>
<td>7,205</td>
<td>111,589</td>
<td>9.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2004 – 05</td>
<td>5,278</td>
<td>7,957</td>
<td>123,424</td>
<td>10.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2005 – 06</td>
<td>5,190</td>
<td>6,923</td>
<td>131,593</td>
<td>9.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2006 - 07</td>
<td>6,231</td>
<td>6,016</td>
<td>140,148</td>
<td>8.7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

These quotas remained the same for the 2005-06 and 2006-07 programme (DIMIA 2007b). Table 4.2 (above) shows that, despite the increase to the Humanitarian Programme quota in 2004-05, the proportion of humanitarian entrants decreased by 1.5 percent by 2006-07.

In 2004, the Minister for Citizenship and Multicultural Affairs, Gary Hardgrave,132 announced changes to the structure of the Humanitarian Programme. He stated that, as the United Nations had identified Africa as the area of greatest need and that the refugee crisis in Sudan was particularly acute, three out of four migrants arriving in Australia under the expanded Humanitarian Programme would be from Africa in 2004-05 (SBS 2004). It is, however, only relatively recently that Australia has started to include any significant numbers of Africans refugees as part of the annual humanitarian intake. A total of 420 African refugees were accepted in the decade between 1976 and 1986, mostly from Ethiopia; numbers climbed gradually
thereafter, with 850 Africans admitted between 1986 and 1991, and 2,700
between 1991 and 1995 (Iredale et al 1996, 3). In total, these 3,970 people
constitute or 1.5 percent of the total humanitarian intake from 1976 to 1995
(ibid).

UNHCR figures confirm that there has been a gradual increase in the
number of African refugees accepted into Australia since 1992, when only
694 people were accepted for resettlement. By 1996 this number had grown
marginally, to 771 individuals, with the greatest increase occurring between
2002 and 2003, when refugee intake numbers jumped from 3,660 to 6,097
(Oxenboll 2005). In a 2004 media release, Minister for Immigration and
Multicultural and Indigenous Affairs, Amanda Vanstone (2004a) stated
that 14,442 humanitarian visas were granted to Sudanese refugees between
1994 and 2004 – with approximately 69 percent of these visas (10,000)
actually granted between 2002 and 2004. Senator Vanstone added that
“Australia works closely with UNHCR in determining resettlement
priorities. Our commitment to helping people escape often horrendous
conditions in Africa will continue this year” (Vanstone 2004a).

In 2007, however, the positive momentum gained in resettling African
refugees in Australia was negatively impacted by statements from the
Minister for Immigration and Citizenship, Kevin Andrews. In a doorstop
interview on October 4, 2007, Andrews indicated that the Department of
Immigration had shifted the focus of humanitarian assistance from Africa to
Myanmar/Burma and Iraq, saying that many of the refugees settled from
Africa were experiencing difficulty integrating into the Australian way of
life and “have effectively been sponsoring others to come here and therefore adding to the problem” (Andrews 2007a). When asked for specific examples and data to back up these claims, Andrews said that the integration difficulties were evident from reports received from a number of sources – including the police department and several undisclosed sources that “are not going to provide information to us the way they do if we disclose the sources of information” (Andrews 2007a). Andrews stated that these reports had mentioned altercations between members of African groups, the highly competitive nature of African community organisations regarding access to government funding, tension within African family groups resulting in conflict and assault, a rise in the level of criminal activity amongst African youths, and that young African men were congregating to drink alcohol in parks at night (ibid).

In an interview the previous day, Andrews had mentioned that all other refugees taken in by Australia since World War II, whether from Europe or the Asia-Pacific, had possessed similarities of outlook and culture to those of the Australian public not present in the African contingent (Andrews 2007b). Andrews also confirmed that, in light of the difficulty that many African migrants appeared to be experiencing in terms of integrating into mainstream society in Australia, the annual refugee intake from Africa had been reduced from 70 percent to just 30 percent of the quota of 13,000 people for 2007-08, and noted that sponsorship arrangement for humanitarian entrants had been changed such that individuals would no longer be able take on the role of sponsor (Andrews 2007c).
Andrews’ statements regarding integration issues resulted in a high level of public debate; police spokespersons are reported to have stated that Africans (Sudanese) “are not over-represented in crime statistics”139 (Courtice & Windisch 2007), the Ethnic Communities Council pointed out that basing cuts to refugee intakes on integration “departs from the convention and also from the commitments that all nations had with the United Nations” (ABC News 2007a), and Phil Glendenning, Director of the Edmund Rice Centre, asserted that “the point behind humanitarian visas is that the people they are issued to require our help” (Edmund Rice Centre 2007). Australia’s Human Rights Commissioner, Graeme Innes, said that it is of concern when one particular community or group is singled out and highlighted as not settling and integrating effectively (Caldwell 2007). African community groups rejected Andrews’ statements, church groups expressed concerns, and a number of politicians across the political spectrum (Greens, Labor, Democrats and Independent) indicated that they considered the changes to the immigration policy inappropriate (Hobday 2007; ABC News 2007b; Farnsworth 2007).

Andrews subsequently participated in a number of interviews on this issue and was consistently unable to produce any viable statistics – from the police department or other sources - to back up his opinions regarding alleged integration problems and/or crime and violence amongst the African, and specifically Sudanese, communities.140 The statistics that were cited were those relating to the average number of years African refugees had spent in refugee camps, their limited English skills on arrival in Australia, the large number of young single males in the group overall, and
the fact that the average level of education was very low (Laws 2007; Kelly 2007; Andrews 2007a). Andrews added that Africans were the most challenging group to be settled in Australia to date and that this was a cause of concern to the community (Andrews 2007a, 2007c).141 In 2006, however, Margaret Quirk, Western Australian State Minister for Citizenship and Multicultural Interests, stated that the African refugees settling in Australia are, in effect, no different to any previous wave of immigrants to the country. “It’s just that it’s happened rapidly and not given us sufficient time to prepare,” she said (Aisbett 2006, 5), indicating well over a year before Andrews chose to address the matter that there was a need for additional government services to assist this new migrant group to integrate.

In interview, Fran Kelly (2007) drew Andrews’ attention to a statement delivered by UNHCR Assistant High Commissioner – Protection, Erika Feller, at the fifty-eighth session of the Executive Committee of the High Commissioner’s Programme (ExCom) on October 3, 2007. In this statement, Feller expressed concern that some countries offering resettlement to refugees under the 1951/67 UN Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees are introducing what amount to supplementary resettlement criteria, such as low educational levels and that some refugees may take longer to integrate, and using them to exclude refugees who, in all other ways, meet all criteria for refugee status and resettlement (Feller 2007). This falls outside of Convention obligations, as agreed to by member countries, and is a clear cause of concern to UNHCR. Whilst Feller’s address to ExCom made no mention of Australia’s changes to the refugee
intake for 2007-08, it was directly relevant to the debate surrounding these changes.

It was suggested to Andrews in various interviews that, with Federal elections on the horizon, there existed the possibility that the changes to the Humanitarian Programme - and the manner in which they had been highlighted to the public – may have been motivated more by political concerns and a desire to please a voting public than by humanitarian interests, and that they appeared to carry with them a certain racial bias (Laws 2007; Kelly 2007). Andrews had rejected these suggestions outright in previous interviews, stating that the policy changes were not racist, but that it would be “a false compassion to say we just keep on bringing more and more people when we know we’ve got challenges” (Andrews 2007b), and continued to dismiss both the suggestion of political machinations and that of racial overtones made by Laws and Kelly.

Faye, one of the Liberian participants in my research project, told me that many Africans with whom she had spoken were concerned that Africans were being singled out and held up as unsuitable material both for resettlement and for citizenship. She added that there were also concerns in the African community relating to the changes to sponsorship under the SHP, in that people felt that they were increasingly unlikely to be reunited with family members if the quota from Africa was cut so dramatically. She said that the overall result of the way in which the policy changes had been brought to public attention was that many Africans were feeling increasingly unwanted in their new society, which was in turn exacerbating
existing stresses, such as unemployment, and associated depression. “If they didn’t want us here, why did they bring us?” Faye asked. Considering that potential humanitarian migrants undergo a lengthy process of selection and interview to ascertain their suitability, and that the age, education levels, length of time spent in refugee camps, language skills, and ethnicity of all humanitarian migrants is known to the government prior to the arrival of refugees, the sudden emphasis on these issues left Faye wondering whether the key factor is actually racism, rather than integration.

The ‘White Australia’ policy as background to Australian attitudes towards refugees.

The 2007-08 changes to Australian immigration policy, and the manner and timing with which they were made known to the broader public, carry with them echoes of the racism of the 1901-58 Immigration Restriction Act, commonly referred to as the ‘White Australia policy.’ At the outset, it should be noted that Australia is an immigrant society, a country comprised of people from all over the globe. As Mares (2002, 4) has pointed out, those among us who are not Aborigines are migrants, or descendants of migrants. Migration continues to play a significant and ongoing role in population growth in Australia (McMaster 2001, 5), with approximately 6.5 million people having migrated to Australia since World War II (DIMIA 2007c). According to 2004 statistics from the Department of Immigration and Multicultural and Indigenous Affairs, “almost one in four of Australia’s 20 million people was born overseas” (DIMIA 2004, 2); by 2006, the figure had risen from the 23.6 percent (2004) to 24.1 percent (ABS 2007,4).
Jupp (2002, 5-6) points out that this immigrant society of ours has, however, been carefully and systematically engineered over many decades to produce a society with exceptionally strong ties to Britain and to Anglo-Celtic outlooks and understandings of the world. Although Australian society is becoming increasingly multicultural, this has been a gradual process and the society as a whole remains significantly ‘British’; English remains the language spoken by some three-quarters of the Australian public, and the social, intellectual, business and political elites in Australia retain very strong links to their British roots. McMaster (2001, 5) concurs, suggesting that the Australian national identity was formed out of a settler society with its roots firmly located in its Anglo-Celtic heritage. Mares (2002, 4) refers to Australia as a ‘nation hostile to its foundations,’ one that is both immigrant and yet preoccupied with controlling immigration. He claims that the influence of the White Australia policy still resonates in contemporary society. Jupp (2002, 6-8, 15) agrees, arguing that this policy, and the ‘Britishness’ of Australian society, has its roots in the 1880s, when a deliberate and concerted strategy of immigration control and manipulation of population change began.

These controls were enshrined in government policy in the form of the Immigration Restriction Act (1901-58), which became known as the White Australia policy. It was a policy that made it possible for the Australian government to disallow migration by groups or individuals they considered either unlikely to assimilate into the mainstream of Australian society or a threat to social cohesion (Jupp 2002; Curthoys 2003, 30-31; Jones 2003, 112). According to Willard (1967, 188-9), the fundamental reason that this
policy was adopted was to preserve the British character of Australia. It was based on the fear that immigration from countries with cultures radically different to those of Britain could potentially destroy the united and British character of the community, a character considered to be dependant upon common loyalties, beliefs and traditions.

This was an act of racial exclusion, which, although not overtly based on colour, used a specified education test which allowed for the exclusion of those the government considered undesirable aliens (Jayasuriya 1999, 17). The test was in the form of a dictation of no less than 50 words in length, in a European language, and, although it theoretically applied to all would be immigrants, the Government that passed the bill stated that it was only to be given to those belonging to non-European peoples, which gives a clear indication of the bias of the time (Willard 1967, 121-122). Anyone who failed the test could automatically be denied entry to Australia (Collins & Henry 1994, 524). This policy enjoyed widespread, cross-class support in Australia (Markus 2003, 176).

The scope of the White Australia policy, from 1901 to the 1970s, allowed successive governments to keep out or severely limit immigration of members of the native populations of Asia, Africa and the Pacific (Jupp 2002, 15). McMaster (2001, 4) suggests that the fear of invasion ‘from the north’ is an ever present component of the Australian psyche and works to support racist and exclusionary immigration policies. Currently, these fears are exacerbated by television programmes which graphically show the scope of the refugee situation in camps in Africa and Asia. Although only five
percent of Australians actually have had any direct experience with refugees or the refugee situation (Jupp 2002, 181), the sheer magnitude of the refugee crisis is clear to a far broader segment of society. The very apparent need for assistance from First World countries feeds public concerns that Australia could be ‘swamped’ with refugees (Jupp 2002, 118), concerns that can be tapped into for political advantage.

Although the White Australia policy was formally abandoned over a period of 25 years, with its final abolition occurring in 1973 (DIMIA 2004, 1), the long-range effect of these policies is still felt in contemporary Australia. Jupp (2002, 6) argues that they have worked to shape the cultural development of the country and Australian attitudes toward ‘race’. The result of this, Banchevska (1981, 129) suggests, is that

Even though every fourth person in Australia was either born overseas, or was born of overseas-born parents, there is still a great deal of discrimination against those who appear to be <<new>> Australians, even if they have lived in the country for most of their lives; a <<foreign>> appearance, a <<foreign>> accent, no matter how good the English, can be a distinct disadvantage.

Jayasuriya (1999, 9) and Asekeh & Tilbury (2004, 136) support this view, suggesting that there is a long history of racial bias in Australia, based on precepts of race inherited from the Anglo-Celt founders of the society and carried forward in various iterations of the Immigration Act. Further to this, Asekeh & Tilbury (2004, 136) suggest that this Act has tended to show preference to people having similar culture, language and race to that of the majority Anglo-Australian population, which is supported by Kevin
Andrews’ statements (2007b) regarding migrants from Europe and Asia being a better cultural fit in Australia than those from Africa. Notwithstanding that Australia is, to all intents and purposes, a stable and united society, there remains a lingering fear that this may not last. Jupp (2002, 118-119) suggests that this allows issues such as leadership, solidarity, homogeneity and common values to be mobilised by politicians relatively easily in order to further their own ends, playing on the underlying racism and/or xenophobia, particularly when elections are imminent. Two very clear examples of this occurred in the lead up to the 2001 Federal elections and serve to highlight contemporary reactions to the perceived threat of refugees to Australia.

In August 2001, a Norwegian cargo vessel, MV Tampa, rescued 433 individuals from an Indonesian fishing boat in distress. The passengers were refugees who had paid passage to get to Australia. The Liberal-National conservative Howard government, however, refused to allow the refugees to set foot on Australian soil and later instituted the Border Protection Bill. This gave the government the legal authority to exclude the independent island state of Nauru as well as Manus Island,\textsuperscript{143} from the Australian migration zone, to set up off-shore detention centres there to house future asylum seekers, and to direct any future asylum seekers to these places for assessment. As a policy it met with little or no resistance from the Australian public (Manne 2003, 164-6; Ang 2003, 52). A potential ‘problem’ was removed from the public gaze. Australia’s international reputation as a tolerant and welcoming society lost some of its credibility,
however (Jupp 2002, 202), and UNHCR (2007d) has stated that it has some concerns over Australia’s human rights record in this regard.

In October 2001, during the Federal election campaign,144 the HMAS Adelaide intercepted a boat loaded with Iraqi asylum seekers en route to Australia. At the time, government spokespersons, including the Minister for Immigration,145 claimed to have incontrovertible proof that the asylum seekers were throwing their children overboard in order to put pressure on the government to allow them to land. Although no evidence of these actions was ever produced, the asylum seekers in question met with overwhelming disapproval from the Australian public – based on incorrect information or disinformation provided by government (Manne 2003, 171) and exploited by the popular press (Rodd 2007, 43-44; Romano 2007).

What has been referred to as “latent racial prejudice” in Australia (Marr & Wilkinson 2003, 280) was manipulated by the Howard government via the media for political advantage during the 2001 Federal election campaign. It was at least partly on the basis of the Howard government’s handling of the Tampa crisis and the ‘children overboard’ issue that they were returned to office in November 2001 (Manne 2003, 165, 172; Rodd 2007, 35) by an Australian public which appeared not unsupportive of Prime Minister John Howard’s aggressive and unrelenting attitudes to immigration control (Ang 2003, 52).146

The xenophobia of Australians was to be shown democratic respect… Howard had found a perfect issue in border protection: tough but popular, crude racism
combined with genuine concern for the security of the country… It was race
wrapped in the flag (Marr & Wilkinson 2003, 176).

Jupp (2002, 217) claims that opinion polls continue to show that the
majority of people remain suspicious both of immigration and immigrants
and that the shift toward acceptance of difference is slow. The ongoing
emphasis on ‘genuine refugees’ and ‘unauthorised arrivals’ in government
statements (Vanstone 2004a; 2004b) may well lead the population at large
to question the legitimacy of all refugees and continue to affect popular
opinion on these issues.147

Another reminder of the prejudices in Australian society comes in the shape
of the relatively short lived popularity of political parties of the like of One
Nation, formed in 1996, and its leader, Pauline Hanson. The popularity of
this party coalesced around its hostile attitudes toward Aboriginal
Australians and Asian migrants/refugees (Ang 2003, 51). More recently,
the topic of a safe (white) Australia was given considerable newspaper and
television coverage as a result of a controversial letter to the editor of the
Paramatta Sun, in Sydney. In July 2005, Associate Professor Andrew
Fraser, an academic in the Department of Public Law at Macquarie
University suggested that allowing African migrants into Australia would be
to the detriment of the host society. He referred to the likelihood of
associated crime and violence and other social problems if the government
pursued such immigration policies (Murray 2005, 19; Roberts 2005), citing
low intelligence, a lack of cognitive ability, and high testosterone levels as
the reasons for these negative behaviours (Roberts 2005). Fraser elaborated
on these views on the television show A Current Affair on Channel 9, when
he asserted that Australia would be better off it had not abandoned the White Australia policy (Martin 2005). Whilst these views sparked an outcry in the press and online forums, 148 and Fraser was reprimanded by Macquarie University, he also received community support in some quarters.

Duffy (2005) reports that a telephone poll conducted after Fraser’s appearance on A Current Affair showed that 85 percent of the 35,000 respondents agreed with Professor Fraser’s point of view, 149 whilst others considered him racist. Whilst the issue died down relatively quickly, it does point to the presence of a level of prejudice against black Africans in contemporary Australia. Sims (2006) reflects that humanitarian migrants arriving from Africa in 2001 perceived a change in attitude in the Australian public by 2006; people who had initially been receptive, helpful and hospitable appeared to have become less empathic - even fearful. In those five years, the number of African humanitarian arrivals had been gradually increasing each year in response to requests from UNHCR and the growing need for assistance in Africa; whilst only 2,801 Africans arrived in 2001-02, by 2005-6 the annual intake had risen to 7,100 (DIMIA 2007b). In total, approximately 34,388 Africans had arrived in Australia since 2000 (ibid); they had formed communities in that time and had become a distinctly visible presence in the community.

In 2007, Bowman150 (Valenti 2007, 14), expressed concern that many Australians, knowing relatively little about refugees, or about Africans, tend to base their opinions on information provided by the media; information that could leave a lasting impression and build on pre-existing cultural
stereotypes. Bowman’s comments came in response to what appeared to be an attempt by the Minister for Immigration and Citizenship, Kevin Andrews, to mobilise these attitudes in the lead up to the 2007 Federal elections. With less than seven weeks to the elections, Andrews had participated in door-stop interviews, put out press releases, and been interviewed by numerous radio stations, citing community concerns and stating that changes to the reduction in the humanitarian intake from Africa aimed to “meet the aspirations of Australians in general” (Andrews 2007b) and to “ensure that the Australian community remains supportive of and confident in this programme” (Andrews 2007a). Clear resonances of the 2001 elections, and the Tampa and ‘baby overboard’ affairs could be heard in the rhetoric, so much so that Andrews was asked questions like “Is this your Tampa for this election?” (Laws 2007), and “Aren’t you playing the race card in the lead up to an election” (Andrews 2007b).

In his statements, Andrews implied that the need for support for people who have fled Iraq and Burma outweighed that required in Africa (Andrews 2007a, 2007b, 2007c). To this point, the humanitarian crises in Iraq and Burma (Myanmar) had received limited attention from the Immigration Department, notwithstanding oppressive regimes and/or wars in those countries. The Burmese had endured conflict and neglect for decades by this time (UNHCR 2007e); 250,000 Burmese had fled to Bangladesh in 1991-92, many of those people living in refugee camps in Thailand for many years thereafter (UNHCR 2006b), and the Burmese population of concern to UNHCR by the end of 2005 numbered some 238,587 people (UNHCR 2007f). However, it was the protests against ongoing privation and social
injustice in Burma, initiated by Buddhist monks in mid-August 1997 and rapidly gaining both popular momentum and government reprisals in that country (Iltis 2007), that refocused attention there. Likewise, the Iraqi refugee situation did not arise in 2007; in the previous five years, approximately four million Iraqis had been displaced. Close to two million of this displaced population, many of whom are middle-class and educated, had fled to other countries in the region (IRC 2008a; IRC 2008b).

The composition of the Australian Humanitarian Programme is adjusted each year. These changes are based, in part, on information supplied by UNHCR as to where humanitarian assistance is most needed (Andrews 2007c). With the need for assistance in the Middle East and Asia growing, and UNHCR calling for more support in those regions, the focus of the Humanitarian Programme was shifted accordingly for 2007-08. For Andrews to frame the changes to the programme around African refugee integration issues was ill-advised. This was not helped when Andrews was asked, “what makes you think that Iraqi and Burmese refugees will perhaps settle better into Australia than the African refugees?” Unable to answer effectively, Andrews stated that the government would “monitor their rate of settlement in Australia” (Andrews 2007a). The overwhelming impression that remained, particularly amongst African humanitarian migrants, was that Australia considers Iraqi and Burmese refugees to be a better option than refugees from Africa.

Only a year before these events, a spokesperson for the West African Community had commented that “80 percent of Australians have been
receptive, kind, considerate, helpful and hospitable, but 20 percent have their own reservations, observations, insecurities and fears about Africans and some of them have behaved badly” (Aisbett 2006, 5). At the same time, Margaret Quirk152 asserted that there is a level of systemic racism in the community, and that it affects the day-to-day lives of African migrants, impacting their search for work, their ability to secure housing, and their effective integration into the community (ibid). Even if the negative outlook is, indeed, held only by a relatively small number of people, given the circumstances from which most African refugees have come, the manner in which views such as Fraser’s are presented in the tabloids and Andrews’ statements as to their ability to integrate effectively leaves a lasting impression that is unlikely to make them feel ‘at home’ in Australia.

121 Specifically, to conform to the “laws and regulations as well as to measures taken for the maintenance of public order” in host countries (UNHCR 2007b, 18)
122 Romano (2005; 2007) notes that journalists in Australia persist in using terms such as refugee, asylum seeker and boat people somewhat interchangeably and with little or no explanation or context for these terms, which can result in ongoing public confusion as to the definition of refugee as relating to government settlement programmes.
123 Unauthorised asylum seekers attempting to enter Australia are referred to as ‘onshore asylum seekers.’ They tend to face substantially greater hurdles with the Australian authorities than those faced by the ‘offshore refugees’ or ‘offshore humanitarian entrants’ referred by the UN, despite the presence of anti-discrimination clause in the 1951/67 Refugee Convention (Lusher et al 2007, 11-150; UNHCR 2007b, 31).
124 This figure refers to 2000, when the number of people of concern to UNHCR reached 22,005,972 people; this figure dropped to 20,028,897 in 2001(UNHCR 2007a).
125 See Table 5.1, Appendix 5
126 By 2003, the countries hosting the largest refugee population in Africa were Tanzania 690,000, DR Congo 330,000, Sudan 328,000, Zambia 247,000, Kenya 234,000 and Uganda 217,000 – of an estimated 15 million displaced persons (refugees and internally displaced in Africa) (UNHCR 2003, 15).
127 Gender based violence (GBV), as pertaining to refugee women, will be discussed further in Part 3 (Settlement).
128 As at May 1, 2001, 50 years after the Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees first came into being, 140 states were party to the 1951 Convention and/or the 1967 Protocol (UNHCR 2001, 28). The main countries offering third country resettlement through UNHCR in 2006 were, however, the United States (41,300), Australia (13, 400), Canada (10,700), Sweden (2,400), Norway (1,000) and New Zealand (700), although Norway, Denmark and Finland also regularly assist with resettlement (UNHCR 2008a).
129 Immigration criteria include individuals possessing a valid visa, satisfying health requirements, and that they sign a “values statement” (DIAC 2008a); the values statement requires the applicant to agree to “respect the Australian way of life and obey the laws of Australia” (DIAC 2008b).
130 Australia, Canada and New Zealand are amongst the few countries to have established women-at-risk programmes (Martin 2004, 132-134). Both Elizabeth, from Liberia, and
Paula, from Sierra Leone, entered Australia under the auspices of the Women-At-Risk Programme.

131 As of 2007, sponsorship under this programme is to be undertaken by community organisations, rather than individuals (DIMIA 2007c).

132 Gary Hardgrave was Australia’s first Minister for Citizenship and Multicultural Affairs, November 2001 – October 2004 (DEST 2008).

133 These figures relate to refugees, as defined in the 1951 Convention, accepted by Australia during these periods; they do not include those accepted under the Special Humanitarian Programme.

134 Amanda Vanstone was the Minister for Immigration and Multicultural and Indigenous Affairs, 2003 - 2006, after which her portfolio changed to Minister for Immigration and Multicultural Affairs, 2006 - 2007 (DFAT 2008).

135 Kevin Andrews was the Minister for Immigration and Citizenship in 2007 (Andrews 2008).


137 “Since 2001, the largest group of refugees and humanitarian entrants have been from Africa. This reflects our response to the conflict on that continent… the proportion reached 70 percent of our total intake in 2003-4 and 2004-5” (Andrews 2007c).

138 “Individuals struggling to adjust in Australia are not necessarily the best placed to be sponsoring other people. Instead community organisations will be taking up this role” (Andrews 2007c).

139 In response to media reports relating to crime and violence in African communities, Assistant Commissioner (Victoria) Paul Evans said, “In 2005-6, a total of 327 alleged offenders apprehended in Victoria had a birthplace of Sudan… but represented only one percent of the total number of offenders processed in the district” (Carnovale 2008).

140 For transcripts on several of these radio interviews on this issue, as well as media releases from the Minister’s department, see http://pandora.nla.gov.au/pan/67564/20071110-0000/www.minister.immi.gov.au/media/media-releases/2007/index.html

141 Andrews noted that “It’s a false compassion to say we just keep on bringing more and more people when we know we’ve got challenges” (ABC 2007c).

142 The elections were held on 24 November, 2007.

143 Manus Island is situated in the Indian Ocean and is part of the Manus Province of northern Papua New Guinea.

144 The 2001 Australian Federal elections were held on November 10.


146 David Marr and Marian Wilkinson provide a comprehensive account of the events surrounding the Tampa and subsequent Federal elections in Dark Victory (2003).

147 See Romano (2007).

148 For a transcript of A Current Affair and an example of some resultant online comment, see http://www.elefanttraks.com/chooser.cfm?view=forum&forumSection=1&forumThread=504&threadStartRow=421 (accessed May 14, 2008).

149 Although 85 percent of the poll was in favour of Fraser’s views, Macdonald (2005) notes that a white-supremacist website carried postings from members claiming to have voted numerous times in the poll.

150 Steve Bowman, Director of the Edmund Rice Centre.

151 According to Refugees International (2008), there are currently approximately 2.7 million Iraqis internally displaced. As at January 1, 2007, Iraq was the second major source country of refugees in the world; the top ten countries at that time were Afghanistan, Iraq, Sudan, Somalia, DR Congo, Burundi, Vietnam, Turkey, Angola and Burma (Myanmar) (UNHCR 2007g).

152 Western Australian State Minister for Citizenship and Multicultural Interests, 2006.
Part III: Settlement
Chapter Five
Talking about Settlement
*In which African humanitarian migrants shed light on aspects of life in Australia.*

Many humanitarian migrants settling in Australia have experienced and/or witnessed traumatic events. These compound the process of settlement, impacting individuals and groups physically, emotionally, and economically. Some of the settlement issues that arise for African humanitarian migrants in Australia are highlighted in this section through the observations of two of the participants in the study, Ghadir and Faye. They are both eloquent and articulate speakers, and have expressed their concerns to me clearly and emphatically on a number of occasions. These stories were selected because they emphasise specific issues of great concern to the migrants, such as isolation, depression, education, employment, and community interaction.

I. Conversations with Ghadir
Resident in Australia for over fifteen years, Ghadir is well settled and actively supports new arrivals from the Horn of Africa, working closely with migrant resource agencies as a multi-lingual interpreter. She lives and works in an intermediate space, being part of the African refugee community and yet able to both analyse and comment on its needs. Ghadir firmly believes that these needs could be addressed more effectively if they were known to the broader community and to decision makers in government.
Expectations and disappointment

Ghadir works as an interpreter and resource worker for one of the migrant resource centres in Perth. In this capacity she regularly encounters different aspects of the challenges that face Africans settling in Australia, and has often spoken to me about the need for community understanding and interaction. We met for coffee at a local café, where she told me about several newly arrived Eritrean families that she had been working with. “They are settling, but it’s difficult, slow.” She said that new arrivals tend to have a very limited understanding of the social systems and cultural practices in Australia. There are so many new things to learn and understand when they first arrive, and it takes time for them to come to grips with what their personal responsibilities are, what Centrelink\(^{155}\) can provide, how to access funds using a bankcard and an automatic teller, and, in many cases, even how to use various kitchen appliances. “I try to explain, but it takes time – and that is one thing they don’t have.”

Most refugees arriving in Australia from the Horn of Africa have little or no English language proficiency. Ghadir explains to the people with whom she has contact that the government will not support them indefinitely, and urges them to learn to speak English as soon as possible so that they can get jobs. She tells them that they will only receive support while they undertake the 510 hours of English tuition provided through the Adult Migrant English Programme.\(^{156}\) “Some people can request extra hours, but altogether it is only about one year of English classes. Then they must find a job.” She leaned forward across the table towards me, emphasising how frustrating she finds it that no matter how hard she tries to explain to new arrivals that
it is vital for their future that they learn English, many of them simply do
not believe her – appearing to think that this is merely her opinion.

“This expectations are so high when they come here, and they have no idea
of how the system works. They think they will be supported indefinitely and
that life will be easy. It is not easy.” From her experience, what seems like a
great deal of money to the refugees when they first arrive and calculate the
exchange of dollars into dinar, or whatever local currency they used before
coming to Australia, in reality turns out to be a bare minimum for survival
once rent, bills, food, transport, and childcare are taken into account. Living
expenses are high in Australia, compared to those in the refugee camps or
even the towns and cities many of the refugees have come from. Once
month-to-month expenses are met, there is little or no leeway for money to
be set aside to send back to Africa to support family members there. But
family ties and obligations are strong and when the refugees arrive in
Australia they expect to be able to help support the relatives they have left
behind. Most often these expectations cannot be met, and the realities hit
home hard. Many of the women, in particular, have never been in paid
employment and find it beyond belief that they should be expected to look
for work in Australia. “They say to me ‘Why does the Australian
government bring us here to suffer?’ What can I tell them?”

She provided a specific example of high expectations going wrong in the
case of a young Eritrean refugee who arrived in Perth on his own, expecting
to be able to provide financial help to family members still in Africa. “So
he sent them money, he didn’t pay his rent, his bills.” Ghadir was asked to
act as an interpreter for Community Services,\textsuperscript{158} to explain to the man that he did not have enough money to send back to Africa and to pay his way in Perth. “He told me to tell them that he will not eat and he will not pay bills, he will send his money back to his family.” Nothing that she or the Community Services said or did made any difference to the man’s outlook. He was eventually evicted from his accommodation and ended up living as a homeless person on the streets, which he found difficult to understand as he had never been reduced to that level whilst living in poverty as a refugee in Africa. Ghadir said that the man ultimately chose to return there, preferring the known to the incomprehensible and wanting at least to be physically close enough to provide his family with practical help. He was required to sign a document stating that he had chosen to go back of his own accord and that he understood that he would not get a second chance at settlement in Australia. He told her that he did not care, that there was no point in being in Australia if he was unable to help those who depend on him.

This sort of thing wouldn’t happen, Ghadir suggested, if people knew what their situation would be in Australia before they came here. Many might choose not to come to Australia, but those that did would be more inclined to work with the system rather than against it. She asserted that the entire system for refugee settlement needs an overhaul, that those who devise legislation regarding these matters are so out of touch with the reality of the situation that it is impossible for them to implement appropriate procedures. She had given a great deal of thought to how the settlement process could be improved and concluded that pre-arrival education could be the key. “It
needs to be addressed in the camps, before people even get to Australia.”
There are often lengthy periods between when refugee visas are granted and
resettlement actually takes place, and refugees sometimes know for up to a
year that they will be going to a particular country. If the basics of English
were taught as a matter of course and as a requirement for settlement to go
forward, she added, it would advantage both the Australian society and the
individuals.

Many of the refugees have never had any formal schooling at all and they
struggle to make use of the 510 hours of English tuition when they arrive.
She told me about a 49 year old Eritrean single mother who had been
resettled in Perth under the Humanitarian Programme. This particular
woman has been in Australia for over two years but remains unable to
communicate in English, even though she attended all 510 hours of AMEP
(Australian Migrant English Programme) language classes. She had never
been to school and told Ghadir that she had no idea of what was going on in
the class, but she had been told she had to attend - so she went, and each
week she sat at the back and did not participate. Her situation has not
improved since then; she cannot speak or understand English, has little
direct contact with anyone except her family and, when not cleaning the
house or cooking, she sits in front of the television. “She is depressed and
isolated.” Centrelink tried to encourage the woman to get a job and Ghadir
was asked to act as interpreter for her at Job Network,159 where she was
asked to enquire of the woman what sort of job she would like to have. “She
says to me, ‘Tell them I don’t want a job, I don’t want to work.’ So I tell
them, and the case worker says to ask her if she wants a cleaning job.”
Ghadir looked at me and raised an eyebrow, emphasising the lack of understanding on both sides. “She tells me to tell them again that she doesn’t want a job, not any job.” The woman had never had to work for a living before coming to Australia, through war and refugee life and more, and could not see why she should be expected do so now that she was somewhere secure. She was given three months grace before her case would come up for review by Centrelink, but there was no real prospect of a solution that would satisfy all parties. “It’s a very difficult situation.”

Ghadir added that she really believes that something needs to change in the way that humanitarian migrants, particularly those from Africa, are assisted in Australia - or the society as a whole may well face major problems in the future. She said that she can see that the gap between the educated and uneducated, and between whites and blacks, will grow, and that the few African humanitarian migrants who are educated will not make a difference.

A possible solution to at least part of the problem, she suggested, going back to her point on pre-arrival education, is for all refugees coming to Australia to be clearly informed, many times if necessary, about how the social support system works and for how long people can realistically expect to be supported before their benefits are reduced or cut. “If they are told this officially, they will believe it.” She added that this would probably predispose the new arrivals to be more realistic with regard to their settlement options.

The impact of inadequate pre-arrival education becomes particularly acute when large numbers of refugees arrive at any one time, placing pressure on
existing settlement facilities and translation services that are already struggling to cope. Ghadir told me about closures of refugee camps in Sudan,\textsuperscript{161} pointing out that this would probably result in large numbers of refugees being resettled in Australia, Canada, and America in the near future. She added that many of these people have never lived in cities, having gone to the camps from rural environments. Ghadir reiterated that educating the refugees destined to arrive in Australia to some extent prior to their arrival would make their settlement easier for them, and for the receiving society. “I can’t say this enough times.”

Similar views have been expressed by several other African settlers with whom I have spoken during this study, as they told me how little most Africans know about Australia before their arrival, indicating that it might be appropriate to utilise the time between when a settlement place is granted and settlement is actually implemented to undertake some education programmes. Such an initiative could go a long way towards preparing refugees for life in Australia, which in turn has the potential to facilitate informed integration.

In an attempt to address this issue, the Australian Cultural Orientation (AUSCO) Programme was introduced in 2003 (DIAC 2007c; 2008d). Delivered by the International Organization for Migration (OIM), it aims to provide humanitarian migrants with an introduction to various aspects of Australian life prior to their arrival. According to the Department of Immigration and Citizenship (DIAC 2008d), this programme is “available to all refugee and humanitarian entrants over the age of five, and is delivered
over five days.” In addition to the five days of tuition, participants are provided with a copy of a 52-page booklet entitled Beginning Life in Australia (DIAC 2008e). The booklet is made available in 24 languages and clearly assumes a literate audience. Although DIAC claims to have run approximately 1000 courses since 2003, assisting over 22,000 entrants (DIAC 2008d), none of the women with whom I spoke indicated that they had been provided with any pre-arrival tuition/information of this nature.

The newly appointed Minister for Immigration and Citizenship, Chris Evans, announced in May 2008 that the Humanitarian Programme will accommodate an additional 500 people\textsuperscript{162} in 2008-09, and that the government aims to deliver effective assistance to humanitarian migrants (Evans 2008). Perhaps a review of current pre-arrival information programmes and delivery strategies might establish whether the information is absorbed and understood by participants, and whether all humanitarian entrants actually receive it. From what I have been told, African humanitarian migrants appear to be equipped with virtually no safety net of cultural knowledge or understanding when they arrive in Australia.

As our discussion continued, Ghadir proposed that another way of coping with the lack of knowledge could be for the government to house newly arrived refugees in high density dwellings, such as blocks of flats or migrant centres, so that their trauma and isolation is limited and managed when they first arrive. “They come here from a camp or village situation, where people know each other and neighbours talk to each other all the time. There, you are never alone.” When they arrive in Australia, however, many of the refugees are confused and uncertain, and have no-one to call on for help or
advice. Ghadir’s words brought to mind the migrant reception centres set up across Australia in the post war years. Noalimba, situated in the suburbs of Perth, Western Australia, was one such centre; migrants were housed there for four to six weeks after arrival in Fremantle in the 1960s and into the 1970s, to give them time to ‘find their feet.’ Ghadir was interested to learn that she was not the first person to have thought of bulk housing as a stop-gap measure for new arrivals, and said that she could definitely see the benefit of such a scheme compared to the systems that are currently in place.

She went on to tell me about a family that had experienced great difficulty with their initial settlement. In her role as interpreter and community worker, she had gone to meet an Eritrean family at the airport when they arrived in Perth. Taking them to their new home, which had been arranged by Community Settlement Services, she showed them how the appliances worked, made sure that they understood about turning the gas off after using the cooker, explained the food in the pantry and fridge, and showed them where to sleep. As it was late at night by the time she had settled them in, Ghadir told them that she would be back to take them to Centrelink to sort out the rest of their settlement needs at ten o’clock the following morning, and went home.

“When I came back they were outside the house with all their belongings.” Although she had spoken to them in their own language and had been friendly and supportive, Ghadir was the only person that they knew in Australia and they spoke no English. When she left, they were alone in very unfamiliar surroundings and felt increasingly unsettled and unsure of
themselves. The family told her that they had been too afraid to sleep in the house, in separate rooms, away from each other. They did not know the area or the house, or who the neighbours were, and feared they would be trapped inside if trouble started. Not knowing when she might be back, they took some blankets outside into the Perth winter and huddled together until morning. By then all they wanted was to just go back to Africa, which, they said, would be less frightening than the suburbs of Perth. When I asked Ghadir if many refugees feel this way when they arrive, she nodded. “Australian suburban life is very isolating.” She explained that, to Africans, social contact and the support it offers are very important. Coming back to the notion of migrant housing, she suggested that six months in a reception / settlement centre could make a significant difference to settlement outcomes. A transition period of this sort, living close to other refugee settlers, would provide the time and support in which to learn about the environment and the society. People would also be able gain some understanding of their rights and obligations in terms of Centrelink, and to plan for their future. After this they would be in a far better position, she said, to be housed in the broader community and to take up their 510 hours of English tuition and make good use of them. It would be an effective way of reducing feelings of isolation, fear and depression.

Ghadir’s story about the Eritrean family reminded me of that of a Burundian family resettled in Sydney in late 2005. This family was also met at the airport by a contract caseworker who spoke their language; they were taken to an apartment in the Sydney suburbs, where their caseworker explained how to work the appliances, much as Ghadir had, and told them to dial 000
if they had an emergency. The family had been living in a refugee camp in Tanzania prior to being granted asylum in Australia; once their visas were issued, they had been flown to Nairobi where they stayed for two months whilst their two year old child was treated for sickle-cell anaemia. Within 24 hours of their arrival in Sydney, however, the child went into convulsions. His parents spoke no English, had no idea how to use the telephone, and did not know who to turn to for assistance. The father ran into the streets, calling out for help, but by the time he found someone who could understand what he needed, it was too late – the child had died (Grimm 2005; Cobb 2005; Ray 2005). This family had survived civil war in Burundi and had spent years in an overcrowded refugee camp before being accepted for resettlement in Australia, where isolation, inadequate/inappropriate services, and language difficulties had resulted in a tragic start to their new lives. Interviewed later, the mother said “I was very upset. To arrive here and lose a child, that doesn’t happen to others. I am very upset” (Grimm 2005).

**Depression and support strategies**

Based on what she has seen and heard whilst working with new arrivals, and then following their progress as they settle, Ghadir estimated that seventy percent or more of the East African population in Perth struggles with depression. “It happens for many reasons, but I think that lack of education is a major cause.” She explained that most of the refugees she encounters have had little or no formal education, are not literate in their own language, and have little or no command of English. Returning to the issue of the 510 hours of tuition provided by AMEP, she stressed that many of the people
who are expected to undertake the tuition have never sat in a classroom or
even held a pen, and that their inability to make effective use of the
language classes exacerbates feelings of inadequacy, powerlessness and
isolation.

She has observed that many of the African Muslim, humanitarian migrant
women deal with these feelings by falling pregnant within a very short time
of arriving in Australia, and then having numerous children. “This is not
because they particularly want many children.” It gives them a focus and a
reason to stay in the home and not have to deal with their change in
circumstances. They often have very limited or no English, and spend much
of their time alone. Often, the only person they can talk to is their husband,
and that raises difficulties if the problems the women are facing relate to
women’s health issues or to their marital relationship. Many of these women
start to take less care with their house, and the children go to school without
lunches and have head lice – all clear indicators that their isolation has led to
depression. “Sometimes the husband gets tired of this and leaves his wife.”
Ghadir related that she regularly comes across unrecognised and untreated
depression and finds it worrying and exasperating that she is not allowed to
intervene. “It is so difficult. People from Africa, we don’t talk about such
things. Everything is kept secret and it is hard for us to talk about these
things.” These difficulties are enhanced when individuals are expected to go
to a doctor, a stranger with no understanding of the culture, and explain their
problems – often with the help of someone from the translation services,
usually also a stranger. What many women do is to telephone a relative in
Africa and talk to them, but this rapidly becomes unaffordable. Ghadir
emphasised again that education is the key, telling me that if the women learned English, they could build relationships in the broader community and have an outlet for their concerns.

“These things are all tied together - community, depression, family, English. And Centrelink just complicates things.” She feels that it undermines family authority and cohesion for 16 year olds to be given financial support by Centrelink,165 and proposed that the government introduce a scheme whereby Centrelink allowances are tied to school attendance or work166 as this might encourage more youngsters to stay in school rather than dropping out and moving away from the family home. “What hope is there for these young people, for these families, if things don’t change?” Ghadir added that it is usually community workers that bring these issues to the attention of agencies, and they do so regularly, but to no effect. The laws, she said, are made by people who are so removed from the problems that they have little concrete understanding of what is actually required, and agencies choose to maintain the status quo in order to ensure ongoing funding, rather than raise problematic issues with funding bodies.

II. Conversations and visits with Faye
Ever since she arrived in Australia in 2001, Faye has worked as a volunteer to promote the West African Community - as well as the interests of Africans in Australia more broadly. A qualified teacher and social worker, Faye works with culturally diverse communities and is also working
towards completing her Masters degree. She believes that cultural awareness and sensitivity are essential for effective communication and integration.

Integration and understanding

“Nik, it’s good to see you!” Faye greeted me with a hug, touching her cheeks to mine three times, alternately, in the West African way. As we entered her apartment, we encountered her teenage son and two of his friends on their way out and exchanged greetings. As they left, Faye commented that she has had trouble adjusting to her son’s friends coming home and ‘hanging out’ with him at the apartment. Such things are not usual in Africa, where children generally play/interact with their friends out of the house, and it has taken time for her to accommodate these sorts of differences in cultural practices. She said that her son is fortunate that he came to Australia with a good command of English, and had attended school regularly before they settled here, but that he tends not to focus on his studies much any more and is more interested in his friends and football. “It is not like this in Africa. There, an education is the thing that will make a difference to your life, make it better because you will be able to get a good job. But not here.”

Faye noted that not all African children settle in Australia easily; many have difficulties, particularly with schooling. She has observed, however, that the younger the children are when they arrive, the more readily they are able to settle in and adapt to the Australian way of life. Children arriving up to the age of five tend to integrate and cope well, and those arriving when they are between the ages of five and ten also appear to have a reasonable chance of
successful integration. She suggested that this is because these children
learn key aspects about life and society within the Australian context, rather
than the African context, thus facing less in the way of cultural confusion. It
is the children between the ages of 10 and 18 that face the greatest
challenges, she said. They are caught between family and cultural
expectations on the one hand, and social and adaptive expectations on the
other - neither ‘African enough’, nor ‘Australian enough.’167 They suffer
discrimination at school, tend to have little motivation to succeed, and come
to accept that an education will not necessarily get them anywhere in
Australia.

Faye reemphasised that, in Africa, an education is the stepping stone from
poverty to success – for you and for your family. She said that many in this
10 - 18 year old age group appear to have lost sight of the importance of
education and of family, and that it is a problem in every single family from
Africa; every family has experienced these things, either because they have
children of that age or because they know people from Africa who do. She
noted that her son was 10 years old when they arrived in Perth, and was thus
on the cusp of both adapting well and not quite fitting in. “A difficult age to
arrive here.” She said that she had also observed that Africans who arrive in
Australia between the ages of 18 and 35 or 40, having grown up in Africa,
gone through school and been socialised in the African way, also adapt
fairly readily. These people tend to have goals and are driven to achieve and
to ‘make a go of things’ in Western society; people who are over 40 years of
age when they arrive in Australia, however, are often too set in their ways to
accommodate change readily.
Faye went to talk about the need for African liaison persons in Australian schools where there is a growing African student contingent. When her son got into a fight at school soon after they arrived, she went to the school to find out the details and subsequently visited the parents of the other boy involved in order to mediate and to make both boys aware that their elders were keeping an eye on them. This worked well and there was no further trouble. After this, the school contacted her on a number of occasions with requests for her to advise teachers on how to manage African students.

Some time later, Faye enquired whether there was any possibility of a job at the school and was given a contract position for six months. This turned out to be a very negative experience, however. “They made my life hell!” Faye was referring not to the students, but to the teaching staff. She felt that she was continually side-lined and that her expertise, both as teacher and community liaison, was largely ignored. The staff appeared to be actively disinclined to utilise her knowledge and skills at that time, particularly as it related to managing the African students. “It was as though they viewed me as a threat.”

An example of this, she said, was when, in an attempt to resolve conflict between a couple of African students, she spoke to them in their own language. “It was just the quickest way to sort out the problem because the children didn’t have to think about what I was telling them – there was no misunderstanding.” As English is not the first or, quite often, second language for many of the African students, she was trying to avoid any confusion as to what she meant when she called a halt to their actions and explained to them why what they were doing was inappropriate. Other
teachers found this to be unacceptable, and told her very firmly that the
students must be addressed in English, which she considered counter
productive. I suggested to her that, as the teachers were unsure what exactly
she was telling the students, they may have had some concerns that the
students might complain to their parents and that it could cause a problem
for the school. “But they would not complain. They knew that if they told
their parents that I had reprimanded them, their parents would ask them why
I needed to do so.”

Faye completed the contract period but, by the last few days, she had given
up and had decided that she would not look for teaching work in Australia
again. “I don’t think they want educated Africans. But for those last few
days, I dressed up!” In West Africa, if someone is feeling unsure or less
than happy for some reason, they do their hair and make-up, put on all their
jewellery and wear a brightly coloured traditional outfit to make them feel
better. “When I came here I saw that Australians are very casual, even
sloppy, in how they dress. I stopped wearing my traditional clothes because
I wanted to be Australian. But I can never be Australian.” So, for the last
two days of her contract, she wore one of her full traditional outfits and all
the accessories. “And I felt good!” She noted that, for those couple of days,
the staff treated her differently – showing her more deference and respect
than they had previously. I mentioned that I had noticed that when African
women wear their traditional outfits their demeanour appears to change;
they walk differently, hold their heads differently, talk differently, and
generally appear more self assured. Faye was delighted with this
observation, clapping her hands and laughing in agreement. “That is exactly how I felt!”

**Assistance – or interference?**

To give me some further insights into some of the difficulties African humanitarian migrants face when settling in Australia, Faye suggested that we visit Vana - another member of the West African community. She told me that Vana had grown up in a village, later marrying a wealthy businessman from the city who wanted a traditional wife. When the war came, Vana and her family had tried to flee to Guinea, but had been caught by the rebels. Finding American currency in her husband’s pockets, the rebels killed him and took the money – forcing Vana to drink his blood.169 Faye added that Vana now suffers from post traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), having never recovered from the events she witnessed and experienced during the war. She is haunted by the images and memories, and has told Faye that she can still smell the blood and the gunpowder. Traumatic experiences are recognised as having a profound impact on survivors (Ugwuegbu 2001; ASeTTS 2008; Brison 1997, 13-14; Forbes Martin 2004, 69), and Vana had recently taken to telephoning Faye several times a day, sometimes in the early hours of the morning when she was unable to sleep, usually sounding distressed and confused. Faye mentioned that Vana was attending regular sessions at ASeTTS,170 the Perth-based association that assists survivors of torture and trauma in Western Australia, to help her to manage her PTSD. She had told Vana about me and mentioned that we might visit her that afternoon. “I think you will find it
interesting. It will help you to understand some of the issues our community faces."

We were greeted at the door by Vana’s son Suah. Vana was dressed in a lappa, a traditional garment rather like a wrap-around skirt or sarong, which she had wrapped around her body and knotted under her arms; her eyes were wild, her hair undone and her manner very agitated. Faye embraced her, patting her back and speaking to her in a calming way, telling Vana that everything would be alright. A man, who had been sitting talking to Vana’s youngest daughter, got to his feet and introduced himself to us Moses, a family friend. He explained the situation to me, whilst Faye continued to comfort Vana, who sat next her looking distraught and twisting her hands together in her lap. The main issue was Vana’s interaction with a volunteer community worker called Nancy. Hearing her referred to as a ‘community member,’ I assumed that Nancy was from Liberia and, like Faye, assisted people who were experiencing difficulties with settlement. She is, however, an elderly white Australian who had become involved with the family through a volunteer programme at the local school soon after their arrival in 2003. Faye added that Nancy had taken on the role of mother to Vana and grandmother to the three children, now approximately 18, 16 and 11 years old, and that the family had deferred to her right from the beginning. They were grateful for her help and respectful of her age, giving her free reign within the house as is usual for a person in that position within African culture.
As time went by, however, the family gradually came to suspect that Nancy might not be acting in their best interests. From what the children, Faye and Moses said, it appeared that Nancy had taken it upon herself to interact directly with the rental agent regarding Vana’s tenancy agreement on a number of occasions. She had also attempted to enforce changes in the household, such as allocation of chores, what food the family ate, and how Vana’s finances were managed. I was told that Nancy had taken to coming into the house and removing documents, some of which she returned after making copies of them, others not. In addition, she had also recently approached the children, suggesting that their mother was not able to care for them adequately. Suah said that she had been actively encouraging him and his two sisters to leave and to move in with other community members. “She wants us to leave our mum alone.” His younger sister chimed in, agreeing, saying that Nancy talked to them when Vana was not there, telling them that they would be better off if they moved out.

Vana became increasingly distressed as the children told me this and exclaimed that Nancy was trying to take her children from her. When I asked why Nancy might do such a thing, Vana just pressed her lips together and wrung her hands, saying it would be better for her to leave this place – meaning her life – than to continue. She said it was all too much and that if she was unable to go back to Africa she would just end it all, as she would not be able to live in the street and on her own. She turned to Faye and implored her to promise that if she died in Perth, her body would be sent back to Africa. The children withdrew from the conversation, huddling on the couch and watching their mother anxiously. Faye begged Vana not think
of such things, reassuring her and telling her that the children would not leave and that the community would look after her.

Once Vana was calm, Moses explained that Nancy had just left. She had told Vana that the rental agent required her to do substantial maintenance on the property, failing which she would have to vacate the premises as she would be in breach of contract. This maintenance included painting the house inside and out, replacing the bath tub, and replacing the carpet in the living room – a total cost, Nancy had told Vana, of about $2,000. She had been adamant that the work had to be done and had demanded Vana’s bankcard so that she could go and draw the money to pay for repairs.

Moses said that he had intervened, pointing out to Nancy was proposing was illegal, adding that he had dealt in issues of advocacy before and that any matters to do with the house should be handled directly between the agent and Vana. Vana interjected that she did not have $2,000, and produced a letter from the rental agent that requested her to replace the lawn in the backyard but made no mention of any other maintenance requirements. I was told that the backyard had been very overgrown when the family moved in and that Vana had cleared it and had planted sweet potato vines. This had given her something to do while the children were at school, and had prevented her from thinking about her experiences before arriving in Australia.

I met Nancy on a subsequent visit and she told me that she had tried to arrange a power of attorney so that Suah could sign documents on his
mother’s behalf, but that Vana would not agree to it. “She doesn’t trust me.” She said that she had come to help the family get the house ready for the forthcoming rental inspection, but admitted that most of the maintenance she was undertaking was not at the request of the agent. She produced an exercise book in which she had the family’s income and expenditure noted, emphasising that there was an unpaid water bill and commenting that it was inappropriate for Vana to be sending money to her eldest daughter in Guinea.\(^{173}\) Intent on showing me various bills and statements, she appeared oblivious to the distress Vana was displaying at her actions and comments.

Nancy telephoned me the following day, wanting to explain her involvement with the family. She told me that Vana cannot read or write, and opens the mail and just throws it away or leaves it on the floor. “She’s mentally impaired, it's as simple as that.” She added that she had invested three years in the family and was very fond of the children. “They need so much help. Who will do all of this? Will you? Will Faye?” She became very defensive when I asked her if Vana had agreed to the maintenance on the house, insisting that she always asks Vana before she does anything – but that she’s not sure that Vana understands her. My suggestion to that she should make sure that Vana was in agreement before proceeding with any course of action – even if this meant asking one of the children to interpret – was not well received. “I don’t see why I should have to defend my position to you.”
According to Rudd Lubbers (2004, viii), “Women are the life-sustaining force of any refugee community. We must ensure that their voice is heard, that their potential is developed, and that their role is fully recognized.”

Translating the intensity of emotion and the depth of feeling present in my conversations with Ghadir, Faye and Vana into written accounts, so that their voices are heard and that they are seen, was challenging. The nature of conversations is interactive and there is a great deal more to each of my encounters with the participants in this study than what is related in these stories. Body language, context, and cultural specificity add dimensions to each exchange. Some of these dimensions are ephemeral and do not translate readily into formal accounts, although they are often key elements to those encounters and are what leave the lasting impressions.

Humanitarian migrants have enormous hurdles to surmount in terms of the practical, social and emotional landscapes that they encounter in Australia, and the need for understanding between the migrants, as individuals and groups, and the receiving society appears to lie at the heart of many of the concerns that were expressed. Whether it is the delivery of human services from Centrelink, pre and post-arrival education of refugees, or the actions of community helpers, each instance exemplifies a lack of understanding and/or miscommunication. A number of the participants in this study have shown themselves to be very aware of this, saying that they have a lot to learn about Australia and about being Australian. They add, however, that they feel sure that if Australians knew more about Africans and about their cultures, that this would also promote positive settlement outcomes.
As noted in Chapter Two, these conversations were not recorded; they are based on my field notes, recorded immediately after each session.

See also Westoby (2007) for a broad ranging discussion with and about Sudanese humanitarian migrants regarding experiences and understandings of distress following settlement in Australia.

Centrelink is an Australian Government statutory agency that provides a range of Commonwealth (social) services to the Australian community.

The Adult Migrant English Programme (AMEP) provides basic tuition in English to eligible migrants for up to 510 hours, although additional tuition is made available to special needs humanitarian migrants (DIAC 2008c); eligible clients are those assessed as having inadequate functional English (Iredale et al 1996, 52). AMEP forms part of the Integrated Humanitarian Settlement Strategy (IHSS) which provides intensive settlement support to humanitarian migrants for approximately six months after arrival in Australia (DIAC 2007b).

The practice of humanitarian migrants providing whatever financial support possible to family and friends left behind in Africa is not uncommon. See Browne (2006, 44).

The Metropolitan Migrant Resource Centre - part of the Community Settlement Service Scheme administered by the Department of Immigration and Multicultural and Indigenous Affairs.

Job Network is a national service, linked to Centrelink; it works to assist people in finding and keeping employment.

Gradual changes to community-development models are starting to emerge in Australia as individual organizations and practitioners work to re-engage refugee communities in ways that actively include them in this restructuring process; see Westoby (2008).

Although Ghadir told me that the camp closures in Sudan were the result of the UN no longer having sufficient funds to run them, this is not the only reason for closing the camps. In November 2006, the Norwegian Refugee Council announced they were closing down the humanitarian programme in Darfur as a direct result of local government making it increasingly difficult for aid work to continue to work in the area; they noted that this would directly affect some 300,000 internally displaced persons (IDPs) in South Darfur (ReliefWeb 2006).

This will bring the total humanitarian intake to 13,500 for 2008-09, including a one-off increase of 500 refugee places to assist people affected by the ongoing conflict in Iraq (Evans 2008). Simon Dowding, Media Advisor to Senator Evans, has confirmed that the programme will be increased by a further 250 places in 2009-10, of which 6,000 will be refugee places and 7,750 will be SHP places (Dowding 2008).

Noalimba was one of several centres in Australia where post war migrants were accommodated. Urban and country Australia hosted reception and training centres, transit camps, holding centres and/or workers hostels for migrants arriving in post war Australia (JCPML 2005). Noalimba was turned into a function centre sometime after that, however, and was subsequently sold in 2002.

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According to a number of the participants in this study, until young Africans marry, their parents consider them to be children and expect them to live at home. In Australia, young people between the ages of 16 to 24 who are studying fulltime or enrolled in an apprenticeship and those under the age of 21 who are “undertaking job search or a combination of approved activities” (Centrelink 2008) receive a Youth Allowance, which is paid directly into their bank account.

A precedent for social security payments to be linked to individual and community outcomes was set in Australia in 2007 (FaHCSIA 2007).

Junot Diaz suggests that understanding social norms and rules defines one’s success in a society, and that lacking them alters one’s relationship with the language and the culture (Koval 2008). He notes that social, linguistic and epistemic norms are largely acquired unconsciously when children are relatively young and that migrating to another country at an age when one is old enough to remember aspects of primary language and cultural acquisition may limit effective settlement.

Faye completed her teaching qualification in West Africa and taught there for many years. Once she arrived in Perth, she completed Certificate 4 in English at TAFE and as well as a graduate diploma in order to fulfil the qualification/employment requirements of the Western Australian Education Department.
During the war, the rebels in Liberia employed a number of tactics of this sort to instil fear and compliance in their victims.

Sweet potatoes, and the young leaves (greens) of the plants, are widely enjoyed by West Africans. Although the greens are now more readily available in Perth, they were very difficult to find when Faye and Vana first arrived.

Vana’s eldest daughter is HIV positive and was unable to accompany her to Australia. Vana tries to help support her daughter by sending her money regularly.
Chapter Six
Flight, Settlement and Subjectivity
*In which we consider the effect of refugee life and settlement experiences on self and identity.*

Ghadir, Faye and Vana’s stories provide windows into settlement experiences of African refugees in Australia, particularly those of African women. Whilst being classified as a refugee can act as a kind of master symbol that works to mask the complexity (and variety) of the women’s experiences and their status as African-Australians, the broader context of these experiences is highly relevant. It relates to the impact of forced flight, the circumstances under which these women lived prior to resettlement, and how these may affect their ability to settle in the host country that offers them final refuge.

As previously mentioned, women and girls account for over half of the refugee population in the world (Lubbers 2004, vii). As refugees and as internally displaced people within their own countries, this group is one of the most vulnerable ‘at-risk’ population groups in the world today, with little or no protection under the law (Oloka-Onyango 1996; Kuoch et al. 1992; Browne 2006, 46-47). The circumstances that these women face during their flight from persecution and violence in their countries of origin are almost incomprehensible to those who have neither lived through, nor witnessed them. Refugee women are catapulted into situations that require the ability to adapt and assimilate change rapidly in order to survive, both as individuals and as members of a group. Having lost the support of
community, family, and government, and suffering from the impact of political, racial, national, religious and/or class persecution, many are also forced to take on roles that have not, traditionally, been their responsibility.

According to Susan Forbes Martin (2004), the role changes that refugee women assume are intimately related to the disruption of the family group. It is not uncommon in situations of forced flight for families to lose one or more member of the family. This is usually the elderly and young children, either to disease or hunger during flight, or as a result of malnutrition and exhaustion once they reach the refugee camp. In addition to this, the men in the family are often caught up in local fighting and are killed or conscripted into the government or rebel military forces. This dislocation of family leaves the women in the invidious position of becoming the de facto head of the household, generally with little or no support or protection, and having to take on the roles of breadwinner, strategist and protector – over and above those of carer, nurse and nurturer - during and after flight. They face significant changes to their social and economic milieu, most often leaving their homes with no cash resources to hand, little or nothing in terms of identification, and without a full compliment of family. Raids on villages are often sudden and violent, leaving families scattered and populations fleeing for their survival (Deng et al, 2005; Nazer 2004; Bergner 2005, Browne 2006). Their community structures are decimated, and, in many cases, people face communication problems resulting from language difficulties, both en route to and in the refugee camps.
In these camps, the refugees are obliged to live in circumstances over which they have little or no control, existing in a state of perpetual insecurity as to the eventual resolution of their plight and having ongoing concerns regarding their immediate safety, as well as that of family members (Forbes Martin 2004, 13; Crisp 2003, 17-18). Families, or what remains of them, are often separated during flight and may well end up in different camps, leaving many refugees without the comfort of either an intact nuclear or extended family structure, and in a state of ongoing anxiety regarding the fate of their loved ones (Forbes Martin 2004, 14; Weiss & Collins 1996, 162). They have little or no freedom of movement, few educational or economic opportunities, and are obliged to live with and amongst large numbers of strangers - many of whom may be from mutually antagonistic tribes or groups (Forbes Martin 2004, 13; Crisp 2003, 17-18; Benard 1986, 626), which has the potential to bring the conflict from which the displaced persons have fled into the camp itself.

According to Crisp (2003, 7), these circumstances, especially if they are for protracted periods of time, frequently result in heightened levels of social tension which easily escalate to violence. The antagonism within national refugee groups, between national refugee groups, and between refugees and disgruntled local populations who feel economically and socially disadvantaged by those in the refugee camps, is exacerbated by the living conditions. This bubbles over as domestic and community violence, gender based violence (GBV) and armed robbery. Of these, it is GBV - specifically rape, sexual exploitation (including forced prostitution and early marriage),
domestic violence, and trafficking/slavery that continues to haunt women in war torn regions of Africa (Roque 2002; Jok 1999, 428).

Historically, GBV has, in its various guises, been an integral part of armed conflicts in Africa, employed indiscriminately or methodically in different contexts. These crimes, which dehumanize and objectify their victims, may be committed in order to destroy community and family bonds, to demean the enemy, or to ensure the provision of sexual services for the militia or armed forces; any or all of these objectives may also be combined with programmes of ethnic cleansing - tacitly or actively encouraged by leaders of the militia, as in the conflict in Burundi (Ward 2002, 7; McWilliams 1998, 114). Whatever the case, refugee women are frequently subjected to gross human rights abuses, both prior to their arrival in a ‘safe haven’ and once they are settled there. Men and boys also fall prey to GBV, but it is women and girls that are its primary targets world-wide (Ward 2002, 4), including in refugee populations.

A number of international agencies actively monitor the refugee situation around the world and have done extensive research into the area of human rights issues within these contexts. The United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA 1999) has produced an inter-agency field manual in which they assert that sexual and gender-based violence and abuse can, and very often does, occur at each and every phase of a refugee situation. This includes in the country of origin, prior to flight, during the journey to relative safety, whilst in the refugee camps themselves and, finally, even during repatriation and reintegration, should those occur. This view is supported by Human
Rights Watch (HRW 2000), which claims that women in particular find that they flee conflict and violence in search of refuge, only to find that they face different types of violence in the refugee camps.

It is evident that refugee camps do not necessarily offer safe haven to the millions of people that end up in them. Those fleeing persecution and oppression find that they are highly vulnerable within the camps themselves and that ‘safety’ is, at best, a relative term. According to Forbes Martin (2004, 15), the personnel who are in place to assist and protect women and children in camps all too often exploit them instead, demanding sex as payment for services. Ward (2002), Weiss & Collins (1996) and Schafer (2002) affirm the view that refugee camps are dangerous places for women and girls, sites of sexual exploitation by not only camp officials, but also border guards, police officers, military personnel, as well as other camp members. The refugees are also at the mercy of raiding parties, as the camps are large and indefensible, offering little or no protection to those within them (Crisp 2000b, 631). Referring to conditions in Kakuma, Eileen Pittaway has stated that ‘rape is endemic in the camp’ (Pittaway & Bartolemei 2005, 106), and that women in camps such as this face constant danger to their physical and mental well being.

Jok (1999, 429) refers to gender violence in Africa overall as ‘a woman’s nightmare’, averring that women’s very survival often hinges on their complicity in these acts – leaving them physically and emotionally scarred (ibid, 432). Along with many others, Forbes Martin (2004, 136) describes how these traumatic experiences, which are often combined with having
witnessed the violent death of family members, result in symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder. These include depression, anxiety, hyper vigilance, heightened startle responses, sleeping and eating disorders, violent or disruptive behaviour, alcohol or drug abuse, self-destructive behaviour, and a sense of a ‘foreshortened future’ (Brison 1997, 13-14; Forbes Martin 2004, 69).

**Trauma, self and the road to recovery**

Although Lubbers (2004) and Forbes Martin (2004) agree that refugee and displaced women tend to adapt to the changes thrust upon them fairly readily, reconstructing as much of their familiar lifestyle as is socially and physically possible for themselves and their families, the impact of the trauma they have endured should not be underestimated. Many of the women have been systematically brutalised by a range of different individuals and groups, have had their world ‘turned upside down’ and, according to Crisp (2000b, 619), have little or no recourse to law in an environment where the rule of law is weak and perpetrators of violent crimes are rarely held accountable for their actions. Brison (1997, 13) suggests that events can generally be considered to be ‘traumatic’ if they threaten the life or the integrity of the individual’s body, generally violently and personally. Confronted with extremes of fear, helplessness and loss of control, in fear for their lives, the victims lose any sense connection and meaning they may have had to the world around them (Herman 1992, 33; Brison 1997, 13). These reactions are heightened in situations where individuals experience physical violation or injury, exposure to extreme
violence, and/or bear witness to grotesque death (Herman 1992, 34), as is the case in most, if not all, refugee situations in Africa.

A 1991 Sydney-based study indicates that two-thirds of female refugees in Australia survived experiences of trauma and torture prior to their arrival (Pittaway 1991, 8). This is consistent with information in the previous section regarding levels of abuse in refugee situations. It is highly significant in the context of the long-term resettlement potential of these individuals and their families, indicative of trauma that needs to be managed on a day-to-day basis. As already indicated, most of the inmates of the camps have travelled great distances, fled traumatic circumstances and endured immense hardship in order to find relative safety for themselves and what remains of their family. There is nowhere else for them to go whilst they wait and hope for repatriation to a host country or for war to finally come to an end in their country of origin. In addition to this, movement in and out of the camps is often restricted, and work opportunities limited or negligible.

Brison (1997, 12-14) emphasises that trauma inflicted intentionally by other human beings has a particularly profound impact on the victims. It reduces the individual to the status of object, shattering their core perceptions regarding the world and their place in it. Brison (2002, 38) adds that it is very common for survivors of trauma to assert that they do not consider themselves to be the people they were before being traumatized. Similarly, Herman (1992, 93) points out that re-assuming a former identity is not possible, as the traumatic experiences are incorporated into people’s
perceptions of self. I am drawing here on a notion of self as referring to an individual’s sense of personal identity, a socio-cultural perceived sense of one’s own self apart from and different to that of others. This is closely connected to embodied concepts such as how a person looks and the continuity of their mental life, as well as those of agency and responsibility (autonomy) (Ofstad 1981, 44; Brison 1997, 14-15). These elements of identity are inextricably caught up in the idea of self as narrative - shaped according to the social context in which the individual is situated.

According to Baumeister (1997, 191), we use this understanding of self actively, rather than passively, both to take our place in society and to communicate and interact with other people. Thus, the discrete incidents in individual narratives take their meaning from the broader context of the ‘story’ in which they are situated (Schechtman 1996, 96). As such, identity narratives are particularly vulnerable during times of change, such as changes to the individual’s role, setting, or both of these (Trickett & Buchanan 1997, 575). For refugee women, flight and trauma constitute radical instances of this sort of change. Herman (1992, 1) states that a common human response to trauma or atrocities is to banish them from one’s consciousness or to relegate them to the past. The participants in my study exemplify this practice; without exception, they all refer to the specifics of their traumatic past as what amounts to ‘another country’ – a place they have been, and may visit from time to time, but somewhere they no longer live. When they refer to life in Africa, it is generally to family and home, to culture and food that they refer, not to the traumas they have experienced or witnessed in the past.
According to Brison (1997, 26) this is a coping strategy and serves two purposes. Firstly, it enables individuals to distance themselves from issues that are too difficult to deal with at that time. It also allows a society that is ill-equipped to deal with the possibilities that these stories provide to ‘forget’ about them. The receiving society is thus able neglect issues relating to trauma and healing, tacitly reinforcing pre-existing insensitivities. My observations of the participants in this study indicate that they all tend to relegate their ‘difficulties’ to the past as far as possible. Hermann (1992, 1, 70) notes, however, that it is not necessarily a strategy that best serves positive long term outcomes, either for the individual or the society. He suggests that it is in remembering and acknowledging the truth about traumatic events that both individual victims and the social order are healed and balance is restored.

In order to tell their stories, however, survivors of trauma need both the words with which to tell them and an audience that is prepared both to listen and to try to glean some understanding from what they hear (Brison 1997, 21-23). This supportive interaction with the community, both Herman and Brison suggest, can provide a window of opportunity in which to help the individuals reconfigure their sense of who they are, to integrate their experiences into their life, and to re-establish their place in the world. I suggest, however, that this is not an opportunity that is often available to refugees – and further, that it is not always considered desirable by them.

Difficulties in achieving positive, supportive outcomes in the context of Australian society can arise in that few people appear to be aware of the
ongoing, long term trauma that refugee men, women and children have endured prior to their eventual resettlement. Jupp (2002, 181) points out that the majority of Australians, including crucially those in positions of knowledge and power such as politicians and public servants, have lived relatively sheltered lives and are largely unable to understand or accept the scope of the problem. Although trauma counselling services are available from agencies such as ASeTTS, the overall lack of understanding of these issues on the part of the receiving society reduces the possibility of interaction with what Brison (1997, 23) refers to as ‘understanding listeners’ to assist the refugees to come to terms with their experiences.

The African refugee women in this study not only expressed a desire for Australian society to have greater understanding of their circumstances, but also made it clear that they had no desire to revisit the specifics of their traumatic experiences on an ongoing basis with a range of different individuals and agencies. Pittaway (2004) has explained that refugee women end up feeling that they are seen only as victims, objects of pity in need of support, rather than individuals who have, through bravery, determination and skill, survived great odds. This perception may, as Pittaway suggests, result from the ways in which the women most commonly see themselves portrayed, that is as vulnerable, passive, and in need of protection (Schafer 2002, 30). Those portrayals are compounded by the responses the women receive from agency workers and members of the public when retelling their stories. Many of the participants in my study mentioned that they have told their stories numerous times, initially to prove the veracity of their claims to be refugees in need of resettlement – and then again on arrival in Australia,
to agencies and volunteer workers who requested the same information. They say that every time they revisit the trauma, it brings it back; it also labels them once more as victims and objects of pity, all of which makes it more difficult for them to move forward with their lives. Nevertheless, many cooperate in community and academic research programmes in the hope that the information they provide to a relatively small number of people can be widely disseminated, thus educating the community whilst maintaining their privacy.

**Resettlement and associated issues**

Most African refugees arrive in Australia from rural or semi-rural living conditions. After lengthy periods of uncertainty and delay, relocation often occurs relatively suddenly, allowing for little final preparation. The refugees are transported to Australia by air, a mode of travel few of them will have experienced before (Iredale et al. 1996, 21). Family groups often do not arrive in Australia together; on arrival they are thrust into large, bustling metropolitan environments, full of unfamiliar people and objects. This rapid change of environment and circumstances, combined with a separation from country, kin and community, can result in feelings of bewilderment and be a negative influence on future interaction of the individual with the host society (Banchevska 1981, 109; Stoller 1981, 29).

There are a range of government and community services to assist the new migrants with housing, social security, medical issues and English literacy (Banchevska 1981, 109; Iredale et al 1996, xii). Whilst these services are laudable, it is clear from the experiences of migrants such as those described
in *Conversations with Ghadir*\textsuperscript{179} that they are either inadequate or inappropriate. A number of studies and reports (Iredale at al 1996; Pittaway 1991; Ondongkara 2005, Colic-Peisker & Tilbury 2005) support this view, showing that the services do not address many of the fundamental cultural and social difficulties that refugees, particularly female refugees, face in Australia.

An example of cultural misunderstanding was provided by Kama, one of the Sudanese participants in my study, who told me that when she and her family arrived in Australia they were told they should be very wary of strangers. She said that whilst she came to understand that the warnings were delivered by the support services with the best of intentions, differences in language and cultural understandings resulted in confusion. “Where I come from, you don’t hear that word – stranger. Immediately, from the time we arrived, we are told ‘don’t open the door if you don’t know anyone... We have strangers here.’ And I said ‘Wah, they are telling me to not open the door to anyone because the strangers… what about these open windows?’” Hearing the warnings about safety, Kama was worried when she saw that the windows did not have locks on them. “I couldn’t even sleep that night! I have to gather all my kids to sleep in one bedroom so that if any breaking in, I could hear it. It took me, like, months, with the fear – I lived in fear.”

Having overcome some of the early stresses of resettlement, the refugees gradually start to settle into their new lives, a process that allows them, to differing degrees, to let down their guard and move away from the survival
mode that has, to this point, assured their survival. Banchevska (1981, 129) notes that although the refugees are at first more than satisfied with the arrangements that have been made for them in their new environment, as time passes and they start to adapt, varying levels of discontent begin to emerge. Pittaway (1991, xiv) suggests that, before their arrival, many refugee women anticipate that they will live in a ‘western paradise’ a place where they can rebuild their shattered lives and reconfigure their families. What they find, however, is a different set of problems, both social and practical, to which they have to adjust.

Once the initial gloss fades, the ‘utopia’ becomes the everyday and many refugees find that their long term emotional needs are not met. As they struggle to make sense of different social practices and complex bureaucracy, many experience heightened sensitivity to perceived elements of prejudice and discrimination, feeling increasingly dissatisfied and frustrated that the reality does not live up to the imagined outcomes – nor to the remembered ideal of home. These realities of their new situation, Stoller (1981, 31) suggests, can lead to difficulties in adjustment and to the refugees idealising their homeland. Consistent with these observations, each of the participants in this study expressed their joy in coming to Australia, mentioning how grateful they were to the Australian government for the opportunity to improve their situation. Many also expressed reservations and disappointment, however, as amply confirmed in the stories of Ghadir, Faye and Vana.
One of the difficulties facing the women in this study was lack of recognition of their qualifications. Those who arrived in Australia with professional qualifications have struggled to find appropriate employment, facing what they perceive as prejudice based on their visible difference in the community. Others have undertaken professional training at local institutions and then faced similar outcomes. Some have struggled to overcome the burden of childcare responsibilities so that they can engage in further education with a view to employment and bettering their prospects. They have also drawn attention to what they see as a broad perception on the part of the Australian public that, because they are refugees and many of them have little formal education, they are either unable to learn or have no skills. Several women suggested wryly that it would be interesting to see how an Australian woman coped with situations if they were suddenly sent to live in rural Africa.

Forbes Martin (2004, 134) and Iredale et al. (1996, 59) confirm Ghadir’s observations regarding the relatively low literacy levels amongst African humanitarian migrants – particularly amongst the women. Clearly, this reduces their ability to be understood and to understand, and to cope with the complexities of the new society, which hampers their ability to become actively involved in many aspects of life in the host country (Pittaway 1991, 7; Forbes Martin 2004, 136-137). It also often results in refugee women accepting lowly paid, dirty, boring and monotonous work. When these responsibilities are combined with the roles of primary child carer, homemaker and cook, their potential for interaction with the broader community, improving English language skills, and enhancing employment
opportunities is further reduced (Pittaway 1991, 7). Forbes Martin (2004) and Stoller (1981) suggest that in situations such as this, refugee women can become increasingly isolated and depressed, often feeling that they are better off staying at home and not interacting with the community. As a result, women can come to rely increasingly on their husbands and children, who have acquired higher levels of English competency, to serve as a buffer between them and mainstream society (Forbes Martin 2004, 137).

Changing gender roles are another source of difficulty. Forbes Martin (2004) and Pittaway (1991) note that even in the appalling conditions in refugee camps, the women worked to support and nurture what remained of their families. The men, on the other hand, in the absence of their traditional productive (agricultural) roles, were often unable to make any significant contribution. Forbes Martin (2004, 15, 134) suggests that these changes to the traditional patterns of male/female roles often continue upon resettlement, especially if the skills the men hold are not readily transferable to an industrialized country such as Australia, and that this can result in negative outcomes both for the individual and for their family.

Upon resettlement, many families find that they are unable to support themselves on one income, which results in the women often having to take on the added responsibility of seeking out paid work soon after arrival in order to alleviate that situation (Pittaway 1991, 7; DCD 2005, 12). This may result in refugee men feeling disempowered by their inability to support their families. If these feelings are not resolved, Stoller (1981, 31) suggests, they can lead to increased feelings of anxiousness, frustration, anger and
even paranoia. Pittway (1991, 7) concurs, adding that there can be resultant family tension which can, in turn, spill over into domestic violence as well as depression and alcoholism.

A report on domestic violence in African communities in Western Australia (DCD 2005) examined views on domestic violence in 21 different African communities in Perth. Key contacts were asked for their opinions as to what they understood by ‘family and domestic violence’, and what they thought the reasons might be for it occurring in their communities. The overall view was that domestic violence was unacceptable both to individuals and communities. However, understandings of what constituted domestic violence varied considerably. Although there was general consensus that physical violence was unacceptable, some participants questioned whether ‘reasonable’ punishment, verbal abuse, sexual (marital) abuse, and child neglect actually constituted domestic violence.

A number of comments were made regarding the extent of the belief in African communities that discipline and reasonable punishment of women and children was acceptable. The idea that some of this behaviour may be seen as domestic violence was new and challenging for many (DCD 2005, 11).

Anecdotal evidence shows that, although many men in these communities cling to their pre-existing notions of acceptable social behaviour, African women are gradually starting to take a stand on matters relating to domestic violence once they understand that Australia has clearly defined laws on these issues. Of the twelve participants in my study, seven were married at the time we met. Of these, two have left their husbands because of domestic
violence and/or spousal abuse, turning to the law for support. (Numerous
other cases of similar situations were brought to my attention by the
participants, although with reservations in some instances.)

The fact that different family members may settle in to the new cultural
context at different rates could also lead to or exacerbate family problems.
Stoller (1981) and Forbes Martin (2004) suggest that traditional,
authoritarian patterns of parenting tend to be impacted by the relatively
rapid acculturation of children and adolescents. These younger members of
the family are generally able to pick up the new language fairly rapidly,
assimilating and adjusting to the new social environment more readily than
their parents. According to Banchevska (1981) and Iredale et al (1996),
many refugee parents have difficulty dealing with these changes and
become concerned about their children’s manners and values, perceiving the
behaviour and attitudes of Australian English speaking youngsters to be too
permissive and a threat to both the status quo and traditional values of
African families. This can polarise opinions and outlooks within the family
and aggravate existing tensions.

Ghadir made frequent mention of family tensions arising or being
exacerbated by the ways in which African youths try to blend in with their
peer groups, becoming dismissive of parental authority, traditional values
and cultural practices. Faye, from Liberia, and Kama and Sarah from Sudan,
also highlighted these issues, suggesting, like Ghadir, that Youth Allowance
payments from Centrelink are partly to blame for divisiveness within
African families. They said that many young Africans saw these payments
as ready cash to spend on entertainment, not as part of general family income, and that their Australian peers encourage this point of view.

More broadly, many of the participants in this study encountered racial intolerance and cultural discrimination in their interaction with the dominant society, as showcased in some of Faye and Vana’s interaction with workmates and community members, such as Nancy. Forbes Martin (2004) and Iredale et al (1996) state that African women are very likely to experience both racism and sexism to some extent in every aspect of their new life, whether looking for employment, undertaking training or engaging in social interaction. This is borne out by a range of stories related by African refugee women at the recent National Conference on Racism in a Global Context, held in Perth in November 2007, at which participants gave examples of both subtle and direct forms of racism. Eli Magok Manyol, speaking on the impact of discrimination in schooling on young Africans, noted that African children are often told by other students that their skin ‘stinks’, and that teachers encourage senior students to apply for apprenticeships rather than attempt a university entrance school certificate. He suggested that these behaviours result in African students feeling rejected and inferior, which in turn results in negative attitudes towards school and learning (Manyol 2007). Examples of discrimination on public transport, by neighbours, in shopping centres, in hospitals and in the workplace were provided by other speakers. Although a number of the participants in this forum acknowledged that they do receive positive responses from members of the community, it is, nevertheless, the negative
or racially-biased responses that are remembered most clearly, compounding earlier traumas.

Eitinger (1981, 23) suggests that people who have recently escaped dangerous or life-threatening situations, such as refugee situations, consider many of the problems that accompany resettlement to be trivial by comparison. He claims that the refugees place enormous value on freedom and safety, both their own and that of their family, and are grateful to have been removed from situations of trauma and oppression. Whilst the host society may not live up to all of their expectations and the refugees may miss specific foodstuffs or work environments, Eitinger asserts that they have an understanding that relocation to a safe environment provides them with the opportunity to improve their situation in ways that were not available to them prior to resettlement. This view takes little or no cognisance of the complex nature of refugee settlement. The participants in this study did not find difficulties with language and employment, social isolation and community misunderstanding ‘minor’ – even if they were hesitant to talk about them. It is, however, my contention that a view such as Eitinger’s is held only by those not experiencing these difficulties or, perhaps, those having limited knowledge of them.

Whilst gratitude for the provision of a safe haven, and the opportunities implicit therein, is certainly borne out by discussions I have held with refugee women and men in Perth, Eitinger gives little attention or credence to the high levels of depression and frustration that refugees experience on resettlement. I was told by most of the women of the enormously high
expectations that they had on arrival in Australia – how they hoped and planned to further their education, gain employment, nurture their children, and/or assist family members who had not been able to accompany them. Several participants mentioned how happy they were to be able to walk down the street, to catch a bus and go shopping in safety, that this was something they valued very highly. I was, however, also told numerous stories that showed that the reality of physical safety does not, in the end, make up for losses of home and family, or dignity and feelings of self-worth. Their stories fit more closely with the views of contemporary researchers in the field of refugee settlement, such as Forbes Martin (2004), Pittaway (1991) and Iredale et al (1996), who have marshalled arguments supporting the notion that the settlement experiences of refugees tend to be fractured and complex. It is also consistent with data on African migration provided by Udo-Eckpo (1999), who stresses that a combination of unfulfilled expectations, racial discrimination and unemployment are amongst the greatest stressors for the newly arrived African migrants.

It is quite common for refugees to come from relatively close knit communities in which extended family and friends provided support systems on which they could rely. For African families, ‘family’ extends to include grandparents, uncles, aunts, cousins, and so on – an extended family, rather than the western style nuclear family182 (Iredale et al. 1996, 73; Tilbury & Rapley 2004, 54). Udo-Eckpo (1999, 139) stated that, for Africans, “…the hardest thing to come to terms with is distance, loneliness, and separation from others.” The loss of traditional structures in favour of
more impersonal community structures in a host society such as Australia can be disruptive and unsettling.\textsuperscript{183}

I have drawn attention to the strength and resourcefulness of the study participants a number of times in this discussion. Forbes Martin (2004) elaborates on this, saying that female refugees, in particular, have shown an extraordinary desire to survive and clear ability to adapt to extreme circumstances; they are resourceful and, upon resettlement, work to develop ethnic communities in which they can feel comfortable and so that they can assist others in the same predicament to settle more easily. Discussions held with African refugees have led me to understand that a common background, even if it is only a shared ‘sense’ of Africa, has the potential to assist in this process, bringing people together in such a way as to limit isolation and facilitate the formation of new bonds. Whilst difference need not preclude friendship formation, these commonalities can provide a context within which new social bonds can be nurtured, once established, thus potentially easing the settlement process.

It is important to note that none of the refugee women with whom I spoke considered return to their country of origin at some stage in the future as outside the bounds of possibility, even if only for a visit. If anything, the idea that they could never return would exacerbate feelings of loss and isolation, potentially undermining positive settlement outcomes.\textsuperscript{184} Each of the women is actively engaged in assisting with the support of surviving relatives, in Australia, the country of origin, refugee camps, or elsewhere in Africa, and all feel a strong connection to ‘home’. This connection tends to
make the women work all the harder to ensure effective settlement in Australia for themselves and their immediate family. It is not only a flexible outlook, it is a highly pragmatic one, and one predicated on a strong desire for survival of both the individual and the extended family group.

It is apparent that the stresses of trauma, oppression and insecurity experienced by the refugees when in Africa are not directly comparable to the stresses of language, unemployment and social isolation experienced in Australia. Each, however, forms part of the history of individual refugees; various elements, sometimes combinations of these elements, have a greater or lesser impact at different times than others. Udo-Eckpo’s suggestion (1999) that social isolation, as embodied by distance from loved ones and separation from cultural context, is the hardest thing to cope with for Africans settling in Australia, does not discount other resettlement issues. He acknowledges the impact of language difficulties, discrimination and unemployment. Social isolation, however, appears to be the element that, above all others, can hamstring the settlement process. It can lead to depression and exacerbate feelings of inadequacy. This in turn, can lead to a lack of engagement with the host society, limiting the uptake of a new language, undermining employment prospects and reinforcing negative outlooks – a spiral that is difficult to break out of.

Government and community engagement with these issues is required in order for humanitarian migrants to settle effectively. Ruth Sims (2007) noted that integration and cooperation feed off each other, promoting community development. Further to this, proactive engagement is necessary
on the part of the receiving society that has facilitated the arrival of African
humanitarian migrants if systemic inadequacies are to be resolved. As
Ghadir suggested, it is essential that programmes and policies are informed
by community needs, such that they address the issues relevant to both the
receiving society and to the refugees who have been invited to settle in
Australia. Discrepancies between service delivery and service needs require
urgent attention to ensure that the social, educational and economic needs of
humanitarian migrants are understood and that equitable solutions are found
to accommodate them.

174 See Chapter Four.
175 See UNHCR (2008b) and Fontanini (2008) for current information on GBV in refugee
situations.
176 Kakuma refugee camp is located in northern Kenya.
177 For insights into the living conditions in camps such as Kakuma, see Welcome to
Kakuma (Pittaway & Bartolemei 2002). See also The Longest Journey: Resettling Refugees
from Africa (Browne 2006, 32-54).
178 Association for Services to Torture and Trauma Survivors, Perth.
179 Chapter Five (I).
180 Based on a 2004 study of refugee employment in Western Australia, Colic-Peisker &
Tilbury (2006, 211) note that “African respondents described… difficulty in getting highly-
skilled jobs even when their qualifications were achieved or updated in Australia… they
argued that their overseas experience, however impressive, was utterly disregarded,” and
that “although often highly skilled they are nonetheless perceived as the lowest class of
immigrants” (ibid, 222).
181 African employment in Western Australian is largely concentrated in the cleaning, age-
care, security and food processing industries (Colic-Peisker & Tilbury 2006, 215-216).
182 African notions of family will be explored in greater length in Chapter Eight.
183 This is discussed more fully in Chapter Seven.
184 Banchevska (1981, 129) has proposed that a certain flexibility of outlook and adaptive
capacity is often particularly apparent when refugees think that there is no possibility of
returning to their country of origin. Eitinger (1981, 23), likewise, asserts that this is an
outlook that provides the refugee settlers with an overall positive attitude for at least the
first year(s) in their new environment and that this facilitates settlement. Whilst refugee
settlers certainly show clear adaptive capacity, having coped with extreme situations in
their countries of origin and first settlement, as well as with complex social and cultural
changes that confront them on arriving in Australia, views such as those of Banchevska and
Eitinger seem to show little understanding of the long term effects of traumatic flight, loss
of family and home, and survivor guilt.
Part IV: Relationships
Chapter Seven

African Diaspora, Relationships, and Culture

In which we consider diaspora, African culture, and the importance of kinship and friendship.

This chapter will explore aspects of African culture and the contemporary African diaspora, linking them to notions of family and community, and to settlement outcomes of African humanitarian migrants in Australia. At the outset, it is necessary to establish a clear understanding of what is meant by a contemporary African diaspora. Until relatively recently, the emphasis in discussions on the diaspora has tended to privilege the European and New World African diaspora (Zeleza 2005, 36; Patterson & Kelley 2000, 14; Akyeampong 2000, 188-190). This dimension of the diaspora emerged as a result of the slave trade between Africa, Europe and the New World, and could be referred to as the historic diaspora. The nature and composition of the African diaspora in contemporary society are somewhat different, however.

There has been a distinct move over time from forced (slave) dispersal to voluntary (economic and political) immigration of skilled Africans (Akyeampong 2000, 183) and, most recently, a trend towards the international dispersal of African refugees (Zeleza 2005, 55). In this context, ‘contemporary diaspora’ refers to those diaspora formed from the beginning of the 20th century onwards, with specific emphasis on those that have come into being in the past five decades, when the refugee crisis in Africa has become increasingly apparent to the rest of the world. According to Tambiah (2000, 164, 169-170), people who make transnational moves to
other countries, whether voluntarily or involuntarily, can be considered to form diasporic communities, bound together by ties and associations to, and memories of, their countries of origin. Widespread civil wars in Africa during the second half of the twentieth century, and into this century, have resulted in forced displacement, the establishment of large refugee camps within Africa, and an increasingly visible African refugee diaspora in the West. A discussion relating to the emergence of the African refugee diaspora requires a shift in focus from the established outlook, which is inclined to encompass only Europe and the New World. Today, African diaspora are no longer to be found mainly in the Americas; they have spread to countries such as Australia, New Zealand, Japan, Taiwan and Israel (Akyeampong 2001, 183, 214).

As with the historical diaspora, the establishment of this contemporary diaspora has its starting point in the movement of people from their ancestral homelands; a move that generally encompasses substantial distance, and carries with it connotations of exile – although not necessarily permanent exile (Clifford 1994, 304). This movement is an ongoing, iterative process towards settlement in new lands, and possible subsequent resettlement (Palmer 2000, 28-29), often occurring as a result of violent forces (Safran 1991, 83). Certainly, as has been explored in earlier chapters, this is almost invariably the case for refugees resettled by the UNHCR. Zeleza (2005, 39) notes, however, that flight and resettlement do not automatically result in the emergence or formation of a diaspora and that, when diaspora do emerge, there is no guarantee that they will survive.
According to Safran (1991, 83-84), the appellation ‘diaspora’ should only be used as a descriptor if members of the group in question share certain six specific characteristics. Other than dispersal, violent or otherwise, he suggests that a second key feature of the diaspora is the retention of a collective or group memory, which may be factual or imagined, of their homeland, binding the group together. Thirdly, this ‘memory’ tends to be intertwined with belief that the group ought to have an ongoing commitment to the future of their homeland, to its restoration and possible future prosperity. It is a view that is certainly borne out by anecdotal evidence of groups outside of their countries of origin, such as those described in this study, who are engaged in providing economic support both to family members and to political parties in those countries in the hopes of bringing about positive change, thus reinforcing connections and commitments to the country of origin within the diaspora. Akyeampong (2000, 213-214) states that “wealth flows from the diaspora to the homeland” and that African governments now factor this into their economic planning. Certainly, a connection is clearly apparent between what Clifford (1994, 304) refers to as “multiple communities of a dispersed population” and their countries of origin.

In addition to these three characteristics of diaspora, Safran (1991) also discusses a fourth criterion: that marginalization and feelings of alienation in the host society combine with the other features and contribute to the solidarity of the group (see also Palmer 2000). Zeleza (2005, 41) suggests that it is partly the feeling of being both ‘here’ and ‘there’ simultaneously that heightens such feelings of alienation. The remaining two of the six
criteria proposed by Safran for the identification of diaspora (1991, 83-84) are, fifth, that members of such communities aspire to return to their country of origin, and, sixth, that they define themselves with relation to it. My discussions with African refugee women in Perth suggest, however, that it is unlikely that groups or individuals will necessarily fit all these criteria. Clifford (1994, 306) notes that this need not make a community any “more or less diasporic,” and that diaspora are inherently ambivalent and change over time.

Carter (2003, x) supports the view that the sense of a shared identity associated with the concept diaspora entails a great deal more than the way in which individuals leave their place of origin, whether it be as migrant, exile or refugee; networks of ethnicity, gender, clan, kinship and religion can play significant roles in the formation of diaspora and in sustaining them. The historic conditions bringing about the move, and the experiences of people before, during and after such a move, all explicitly contribute to the development and maintenance of a diasporic consciousness (Zeleza 2005, 39; Patterson & Kelley 2000, 15). Beyond originating from a common or specific country or region, shared experiences also work to coalesce diaspora formation; experiences of displacement and suffering, and subsequent adaptation and/or resistance, are also contributing factors in providing a sense of common identity (Clifford 1997, 250). As Agnew (2005, 1) puts it

The past is always with us, and it defines our present; it resonates in our voices, hovers over our silences, and explains how we came to be ourselves and to inhabit what we call ‘our homes.’
Thus the diaspora is a myriad of macro and micro connections, both conscious and unconscious. In the case of refugees, the shared experiences of trauma, dislocation and resettlement appear likely to affect development of this diasporic consciousness.

The sense of identity in contemporary African diaspora is reinforced and shaped by the ready accessibility to the lands of origin via modern technologies. Diaspora of the past, historical diaspora, had limited opportunities for ongoing, reinforcing links to their homelands. Today, however, diaspora are able to maintain active contact with their countries of origin and with their cultural roots (Akyeampong 2000, 183, 213). This contact is achieved both indirectly, mediated and facilitated by communications technology, and directly, via travel. The availability and relative accessibility to modern telecommunications and international travel work to reduce both the spatial and temporal distance between contemporary diaspora and the countries of origin (Zeleza 2005, 41, 56; Byfield 2000, 3; Clifford 1994, 304). According to Pool (1990, 8, 65), the tyranny of distance has been ameliorated by technology and no longer presents a significant barrier to communication, making it likely, therefore, that the nature of any diaspora formed in this new age of technology will be different to those formed prior to the twentieth century.

However, although these barriers are gradually lifting, it should be noted travel to Africa remains relatively expensive, and that access to telecommunications in individual countries in Africa still varies widely. According to data from the International Telecommunications Union187
telephone subscribers make up less than 25 percent of the total population of Africa, mobile phone users in the region of 24 percent, and internet subscribers less than five percent. Whilst these resources are often shared, it still comprises a significantly smaller proportion of the population compared to Australia, where the figures are in the region of 145 percent, 97 percent, and 75 percent, respectively.

Nevertheless, multi-media, popular culture and travel do impact on and redefine diasporic subjectivities and African social identities (Ifekwunigwe 2003, 57). This accessibility to the homelands not only offers opportunities for maintenance and reinforcement of ties to these homelands - key features of diaspora, but potentially also exacerbates any sense of alienation that may be present in members of that community. Whilst keeping in touch with current and past events in the homelands via direct contact, the diaspora is simultaneously exposed to largely western-mediated representations of Africa. Combined, these elements feed and continuously revitalise the myth/dream of a home elsewhere. Wahlbeck (2002) suggests that members of contemporary refugee diaspora experience a particularly transnational experience, where boundaries are not clear and beginnings and endings merge. Thus, flight, exile and resettlement make the negotiation of social relationships, past and present, a unique, complex, and interwoven ongoing reality for this group.

Members of the diaspora have left the continent of Africa, and their individual states within that continent, behind them - but not their culture, outlooks or belief systems. As far as is possible, various ethnic groups try to
recreate some small part of their remembered Africa within the country of resettlement (Palmer 2000, 30). In this process both an implicit and explicit/overt ‘group consciousness’ emerges, one that could be understood to be shaped by the realities and imaginings of Africa by the group, based on their shared understandings of culture, politics, ways of thinking and being (Zeleza 2005, 41-42). This is combined with a shared emotional attachment to the ancestral homelands, and a sense of identity, whether racial, ethnic or religious, which is linked to those lands (Palmer 2000, 29).

The contemporary African (refugee) diaspora, then, should not be thought of merely as made up of groups of individuals who have left Africa. Instead, it should be understood as a diverse group of people on a journey, both physical and psychological, that starts with leaving Africa. In this process of movement, relocation and repositioning within the diaspora, the social identities of the individuals are reshaped (Akyeampong 2000, 213). The diaspora is thus in a state of flux at all times, whether in Australia or elsewhere, undergoing a process of reinvention and re-inscription. Understanding and adapting to these changes is a complex process, both for the diasporic community and for the receiving society.

As touched on in Part III, whilst many refugees from Africa tend to consider re-location to western societies to be the culmination and fulfilment of their fragile hopes for resettlement, rather than resenting them as sites of forced relocation, there is often little understanding of how radically different their lives will be once they have left Africa behind them. Similarly, there is little knowledge or comprehension within the receiving society of just how
different social and cultural life is in Africa, and of how that cultural context is likely to produce certain outlooks as to how a society is structured and functions. It is clear that refugees need assistance in gaining the necessary understanding of the Australian social context. On the part of Australians, too, both at an official level and a community level, some understanding of the socio-cultural differences, even if relatively limited or shallow, would be likely to facilitate an easier transition and settlement for the refugees and a more inclusive attitude from the community.

In order to facilitate this process, to gain some insight into the cultural context from which the sub-Saharan African refugee diaspora originates and of the social life of African people, it is necessary undertake an exploration of African life, and, more specifically, of the kinship and family relations, which are central to it (Palmer 2000, 30; Radcliffe-Brown 1950, 1; Nukunya 1992, 31).

**Africa: kinship and family – traditional context**

Africa can be seen as “a geography, a history, a material and imagined place, or constellation of places” (Zeleza 2005, 44). Sub-Saharan Africa, which encompasses most of the continent of Africa, is an enormous geographical area and includes the largest number of countries in any Third World region. It refers to those countries south of the Sahara desert and is characterized by ethnic, political, linguistic, religious, and historical diversity (Brydon & Chant 1989, 32). This diversity can be seen in the wide range of cultures, places and lifestyles in Africa, from urban to rural,
formally educated to illiterate, and all the stages in between (Maquet 1972, 3). Although generalisations about Africa and Africans are contested by African people (Shanklin 2007, 274), and it is necessary to be mindful of this (Palmer 2000, 30), there appear to be a number of overlaps in life-styles and work-styles, many of which are evident in specific cultural phenomena in scores of societies in Sub-Saharan Africa (Maquet 1972, 3-4, 54; Balogun & Olutayo 2006, 78). According to Kayongo-Male & Onyango (1984, 5-6), the most notable of these are aspects of family life that can be attributed, to a greater or lesser extent, to the black African peoples of a large number of African countries.

The members of these family and kinship groups are involved with one another at many levels in the provision of social support, such as assistance with child rearing and the provision of reciprocal assistance, to mediating in conflict between couples (Kayongo-Male & Onyango 1984, 6). Given the importance placed on kinship networks in African society historically, gaining an understanding of these networks is crucial. Achieving such an understanding, according to Siqwana-Ndulo (1998, 410), requires that one take note of and acknowledge that African family is itself part of a culturally based social system which bears little relation to that of Western society. It is a system of which most Westerners are relatively ignorant, with much of what is known about African family life having been mediated through Western understandings of family life, rather than African understandings (Siqwana-Ndulo 1998, 410; Shanklin 2007, 266; Nukunya 1992, 10).
Sociologists and anthropologists such as Dianne Kayongo-Male, Philista Onyango, Lucy Mair and Eugenia Shanklin have drawn attention to various cultural practices as relevant to an understanding of African family structure. Among the practices considered to be held in common in this context are such elements as a focus on strong parental authority, formal mores of communication between the parents and children, large and/or extended families living together, cooperation between relatives, community or family care for children and the elderly, involvement of parents in the choice of marriage partner, children reared by extended kinship groups, little or no privacy, the avoidance of public displays of affection between couples, an emphasis on the production of children rather than love-making, families not sharing leisure, separation of domestic roles - with husbands not involved in domestic work, polygamy, payment of bride wealth, and marriage being based on considerations of alliances (Kayongo-Male & Onyango 1984, 5; Mair 1969, 1-3; Shanklin 2007, 272-5).

Notwithstanding the inherent diversity within Africa, these commonalities tend to establish a shared, although by no means homogenous, cultural outlook. This could be said to have arisen out of early African modes of production, which were centred around hunter-gatherer and agricultural practices (Balogun & Olutayo 2006, 79). Individual and group survival was predicated upon the participation and labour of all family members, which fostered an ethos of inter-dependence and strong kinship ties – making this the “bedrock of mode of production and, finally, society” in Africa (Balogun & Olutayo 2006, 79). The importance of group cohesion, of the extended family/kinship group, rather than the two-parent household,
cannot be over stated (Kilbride & Kilbride 1990, 1, 242), forming as it does “the centrepiece of the social and economic fabric of most African societies” (Oheneba-Sakyi & Takyi 2006, 1).

The major organising principle of these kinship relationships is that of blood descent (Oyewumi 2000, 1096; Russell 2004, 7). The relationships are based on an assumption of descent from a common ancestor or ancestress, directly or more remotely (Radcliffe-Brown 1950, 3-4; 10). Kenyatta (1961, 9-19) describes the family as a complex web of relationships which includes direct blood relatives, such as parents, siblings and grandparents as well as aunts, uncles and more remote blood kin. These bonds are supplemented by bonds of marriage, which are also recognized as having great significance (Preston-Whyte 1974), and are clearly visible in the day to day working of African society. Broadly speaking, traditional African kinship systems are based on three factors: the family group, which brings together those directly related by blood ties; the clan, which brings together several family groups believed to have descended from a common family group in the remote past; and age-grading or peer-groups, which serve to unite and solidify a tribe or clan and its activities (Kenyatta 1961, 1-2). These networks of family interaction spread throughout African society, pervading it to the core with ties of obligation and shared responsibility; they provide a sense of identity and social recognition of an individual’s place within the scheme of things. Akilagpa Sawyyer, Secretary-General the Association of African Universities and former Vice-Chancellor of the University of Ghana, has stated that for society to function effectively in Africa there is no viable alternative to the extended family, adding that the way in which
family functions in Africa is “a major way to distinguish African society from that of Europe or the United States… Every single person you meet in Africa who has got anything is sharing it with his kin” (Harden 1991, 67).

This notion of ‘extended family’, however, is one that Siqwana-Ndulo (1998) and Nukunya (1992) suggest is Western, rather than African, maintaining that, in Africa, households tend not to be comprised of a man and his wife or wives and their children, but of an assortment of individuals. This group is flexible, being made up of a number of people living together, linked through ties of blood kinship (consanguinity) and/or marriage (affinity) and association, who consider themselves to be family by virtue of living together (Siqwana-Ndulo 1998, 415; Kilbride & Kilbride 1990, 97; Siegel 1996, 222). Thus, family is not seen as ‘extended family’ by Africans. This is supported by anecdotal evidence gained in conversations with participants in my research, many of whom have, at various times, shared their homes with friends and relatives, referring to them as ‘sister’ or ‘aunty’, ‘brother’ or ‘uncle’, depending on their age, and treating them accordingly.

Traditionally, this is a system that attempts to cater to the needs of everyone, from the youngest to the oldest in the kin-community (Kilbride & Kilbride 1990, 76). It is composed of an amalgamation of rights and duties, providing childcare for working parents, often a niche role for grandparents (Harden 1991, 63). The access to labour and wealth through kinship networks and the relative security that those networks can provide could be seen as Africa’s version of a social security or welfare system, a joint responsibility
for survival and sharing of resources. As one of the participants in this study observed, the African way is to share whatever you have - such as food, in the knowledge that when you are in need, someone else will provide for you. This outlook is carried forward, interdependency and mutual obligation working to keep groups cohesive and ensure their survival. Weisner (1997) suggests that the lack of these ties and the support they offer can, potentially, lead to poverty, and that “socially distributed nurturance” (Weisner 1997, 20-21) within African families lies at the heart of cultural values throughout the continent. This is a structure governed by intricate ties of tradition and obligation, and Harden (1991, 63), who has travelled extensively throughout Africa, notes that it continues to work to hold communities together in a continent that is under on-going assault from the rigours of poverty and political uncertainty. Whilst traditional African societies have indisputably been ravaged by the vagaries of drought, famine, war and disease, and will continue to be affected by them, it is these social bonds that provide support and a measure of stability.

At the core of this African system of family life lies reproduction and the raising of children, who are seen as both a gift from God and as family wealth (Kayongo-Male & Onyango 1984, 7). In much of rural Africa, where people continue to live agrarian lifestyles in which they are dependant on the labour of their family members for prosperity and, at times, survival, the legal marriage between one man and two or more women (polygyny) features (Kilbride & Kilbride 1997, 203,210; Mair 1969, 1). As large families are considered desirable, providing a source of ready labour and thus of maintaining or increasing family wealth, polygyny provides a
mechanism to achieve this outcome relatively easily. Theresa, one of the Sudanese participants in this study, told me that her father had five wives and that she had as many as 29 or 30 siblings -although only four of those shared both parents with her. Whilst polygyny is widespread in Africa and, in countries such as Kenya, even provided for under the customary laws of marriage (Kenyatta 1961, 174), research undertaken in 1990 revealed that polygamous relationships are becoming less common, with less than 20 percent of men interviewed either in, or planning to enter, polygamous relationships (Adams & Mburugu 1994, 150). Relatives acquired through marriage are, however, also added to the pool of consanguineal/blood kin to extend kin networks (Kilbride and Kilbride 1990, 97).

There is a complex system of name-giving within extended family to cover relationships such as co-wives, brothers/sisters-in-law, parents-in-law, relatives-in-law (Kenyatta 1961, 11). Each name positions the individual within the framework of the family and makes clear what their relationship is to the name-giver and thus to the family. Whether monogamous or polygynous, matrilineal or patrilineal, the day to day life in African society centres on the extended family grouping (Kilbride & Kilbride 1990, 92; Balogun & Olutayo 2006, 80) and an African child’s earliest experiences within this world are of structure and support from kin (Maquet 1972, 60).

In African society, the accepted head of the family is commonly the father. He is regarded as both the legal and the economic authority in the household and is treated respectfully and deferred to by all members of the family (Kayongo-Male & Onyango 1984, 28; Kenyatta 1961, 8-9; Kuper 1950, 96;
Siegel 1996, 226). Children spend their early years in close physical contact with their mother, who is expected to provide the emotional stability for her family, as well as to work to provide food, clothing and shelter (Kayongo-Male & Onyango 1984, 28; Kenyatta 1961, 9-10). The relationship between mother and child, established in those early years and cemented through ongoing socialization within the social group, has traditionally been seen as a bond of respect and support (Fortes 1950, 262; Kenyatta 1961, 9; Oyewumi 2000, 1097), and continues to be seen as such in the Africa of today.

There are a number of agents of socialization in this extended family system. Although parents take ultimate responsibility for the maintenance and rearing of their children, there is no exclusivity to this, as there tends to be in European/Western parenting (Mair 1969, 2; Kayongo-Male & Onyango, 1984, 21). Children are generally viewed as part of a larger social grouping, rather than as belonging to their biological parents (Isiugo-Abanihe 1985, 56) and are socialized by a large number of people, such as the actual parents, extended family, community members, and their own peer-group, who, in combination, fulfil the parenting role (Maquet 1972, 60; Mberengwa & Johnson 2003, 21; Weisner 1997, 24). Traditionally, children can be disciplined by any adult if they misbehave, thus spreading the load of parenting and, in effect, limiting the responsibility of the parents in the event that a child misbehaves or acts disrespectfully (Kayongo-Male & Onyango 1984, 19-20). The sense of common purpose and of belonging that the raising of children, and being raised collectively, provides, strengthens community ties (Mberengwa & Johnson 2003, 21; Shanklin 2007, 265). It
provides easy access to childcare, allowing parents time to carry out tasks unencumbered by concerns for the wellbeing of their children, and has been shown to act as a ‘moral community’, providing behaviour standards for couples and parents (Kilbride & Kilbride 1990, 237-238) dictated by social and community understanding of these roles.

Kama, one of the Sudanese participants in this study, commented that it came as a shock to her to find that this is not the case in Australia. She told me about an instance, relatively soon after her arrival in Perth, when she had taken her daughter to school a little early and was waiting for the teacher to arrive.

It had started raining and one of the boys left the veranda, went into the rain and started jumping. I said ‘Hi, why are you doing that when you know that you haven’t got any clothes for changing and you will be attending classes?’ And he said, ‘None of your business! How can you talk to me like that?!’ I cried that day. I couldn’t believe a little kid, year 2, to say a word… and that really put me off.

She added that, in Africa, the child would have respected her and would have known that if an older person had told him to stop doing whatever he was doing, what he was doing was probably wrong.

Maquet (1972, 60) claims that African children are socialised so that they are imbued with a clear understanding of what is expected of them and of what they can expect from their kinship group; from a relatively young age, children learn their social and productive roles within their household and the wider community. Many of the skills are acquired initially through
observation of the adults in the group and, later, by helping with various
tasks (Mair 1969, 2; Kayongo-Male & Onyango 1984, 22). By the age of
seven, children in Africa have started to take an active role in the household.
They run errands, participate in outdoor and household chores and with
child minding, although there is clear delineation even at this early age as to
which tasks are considered appropriate for boys and which for girls
(Kilbride & Kilbride 1990, 89).

Growing up within this environment, children come to understand the
kinship network that surrounds and supports them, that these bonds, more
than their nationality, profession, social class or religion, will provide the
mainstay of their lives and define who they are (Maquet 1972, 56). They are
expected to learn the skills they will need as adults, whilst also learning to
be responsible to other members of their community and the broader society

Grandparents play a significant role in the socialization and education of
children, introducing them to many of their social roles, teaching values and
traditions of their society through stories and song. Their role is also to
introduce and explain issues pertaining to both sexual and marital
behaviour, and it is often the grandparents who, later on, are called upon to
mediate if difficulties arise within a marriage (Kayongo-Male & Onyango
1984, 20). The grandparents’ role in socialization has become more limited
in situations where families have moved to urban areas, partly because they
often remain on the family’s rural holdings to maintain them and partly
owing to the difficulty in urban areas of finding adequate affordable housing to accommodate extended family (bid, 23).

The peer group has traditionally been a key element in on-going socialization in African society. These age/peer groups are generally sexually segregated, and have tended to support the socially inscribed duties and values of the larger kin group (Kayongo-Male & Onyango 1984, 20), interacting as groups from early on. Kenyatta (1961, 151) explains how, within the Gikuyu tribe in Kenya, children undergo initiation rites within their age-groupings, thereby cementing their relationships with one another. These relationships continue to exercise a significant degree of control of behaviour and outlook throughout the lives of the individuals (Kayongo-Male & Onyango 1984, 20; Cattell 1997, 189-191). The children’s relationship within the tribe or community as a whole is also cemented by these rites, in effect making them tribal sons and daughters (Kenyatta 1961, 151).

Whilst Kenyatta was explaining a tribe-specific case, he also noted that these bonds form within other tribes and groups in Africa under similar circumstances. The control that the peer-group exercises over its members is mostly achieved by social ostracism, usually by open displays of disapproval and even public rebuke. The role of peer-groups in African society has altered over time, however, becoming less supportive of the values and customs supported in the past, but they remain significant agents of long term socialization in Africa (Kayongo-Male & Onyango 1984, 23). A number of the participants in my project noted that they went to school
and grew up with girls of their year group and missed those supportive bonds. What remains to be established is whether these notions of interactive peer support and socialisation can be maintained and utilised within the African refugee diaspora.

Although the bond of kinship between children of the same mother and father is, according to Kenyatta (1961, 12), stronger than that between siblings having the same father and different mothers, siblings per se also play a very significant role in this process of group socialization. Elder siblings have significant authority over younger siblings and expect to command high levels of respect from these young members of the family (Kayongo-Male & Onyango 1984, 20; Weisner 1997, 23). There is an expectancy that the older siblings will take responsibility for the younger ones, making sacrifices for them which, in Western society, would tend to be expected only from parents (Kayongo-Male & Onyango 1984, 22). Participants in this study have indicated that these practices remain common in modern African life.

Another aspect of the socialization of children, and thus of the community as a whole, is the practice of fostering out children, either to adult relatives who have no children of their own or as an exchange between married siblings, where each may foster one or more child from the other (Kayongo-Male & Onyango 1984, 21). This tradition of fostering, which remains common in Africa today (Weisner 1997, 25), serves to provide children with opportunities that they may otherwise not experience but, more significantly, to reinforce existing kinship bonds (Kayongo-Male &
Onyango 1984, 21-22; Isiugo-Abanihe 1985, 56). Within the refugee diaspora, where many family members have been lost to war, this practice also provides a readily accepted mechanism for the adoption of orphaned children, as has been the case with Kama and Juliana, two of the participants in my project, who each adopted a sibling’s child under difficult circumstances prior to coming to Australia.

The changing face of Africa

According to Edwards (1997, 45), Oheneba-Sakyi & Takyi (2006, 9) and Siegel (1996, 221), core cultural values and much of the tradition associated with family in all its guises, remains intact in modern Africa. Shanklin (2007, 286) concurs, stating that

Although African kinship systems may be changing, they are not dying out. Despite problems and uncertainties, family remains the best hope for most Africans in a changing world. The only thing we can know with certainty is that African families and kinship systems are challenged as never before. But we can expect these dynamic institutions to adapt and respond today as in the past to meet the challenges that lie ahead.

The changes wrought during European colonisation of Africa have, however, had their impact. Rapid social and economic change brought about by industrialization, demographic changes, population growth, and the establishment of formal education, has affected African value systems and cultural priorities (Edwards 1997, 45; Balogun & Olutayo 2006, 81-82; Oheneba-Sakyi & Takyi 2006, 3). Changing economic and cultural practices resulting from colonisation and de-colonisation are also evident in most
African countries. Formal schooling, for example, has served to limit the
time that children are able to devote to family chores (Kayongo-Male &
Onyango 1984, 24). Although children remain highly valued, the cost of
maintaining children, of clothing and schooling them, is a drain on family
resources and reduces their short-term economic value to the family
(Kilbride & Kilbride 1990, 242; Nukunya 1992, 22). When these costs are
combined with the limits that attending schooling place on available time to
help with domestic duties, one of the major drivers for having large numbers
of children (their labour value) is substantially reduced. This is more the
case in urban areas, however; children in rural areas, particularly female
children, continue to bear the double burden of school and after-school
household chores (Kayongo-Male & Onyango 1984, 24).

There are a number of other changes within Africa that have impacted on
the core cultural ties of family and kinship. According to Ayisi (1993, 64),
the spiralling cost of living right across Africa, the pandemic HIV infection
rates, and decades of war are central to gradual changes in the family
dynamic. Nukunya (1992, 30) concurs, suggesting that these elements have
promoted an increasing shift from traditional life styles to urban lifestyles,
and have impacted on the role played by the extended family group. As
more men move to urban centres in search of work in order to provide for
their families, women have increasingly been left with the responsibility of
maintaining land and family in their absence (Harden 1991, 106-107;
Kayongo-Male & Onyango 1984, 23; Barends 1998, 48; Shanklin 2007,
285). These economic pressures have also begun to affect long standing
traditions of caring for the elderly, as the financial burden that this
The elderly in Africa base their expectations for care in their latter years on a system that has centred around customs of intergenerational reciprocity (Cattell 1997, 174), where care for one’s parents is an ‘enshrined responsibility’ (Nukunya 1992, 21). Increasingly, however, grandparents are required to take care of their grandchildren and their own children’s holdings/land as the parents themselves are often absent, employed or seeking employment elsewhere, sick or dead from HIV/AIDS, or lost to war. The grandparents help and advise their own children and grandchildren, as well as other members of their community (Cattell 1997, 173; Whyte et al 2004, 1), but it is of considerable concern among the elderly that they will not be provided with support or assistance by their children when they are no longer productive themselves (Weisner 1997, 21). Many elderly Africans face a future where, because they may be destitute, widowed, childless, or without family who can or will help them, they have no source of ongoing care in their declining years (Cattell 1997, 157).

According to Bradley & Weisner (1997, xix), this is the popular (western) picture that is painted of contemporary Africa – of crisis facing African families, individualism, over population, famine, HIV, war, and orphans. Bradley & Weisner (ibid) assert that contemporary literature on African families appears to place great emphasis on the disintegration of the multigenerational and extended family, the economic and political instability of the region and the loss of traditional values and culture.
However, whilst all of the above are persuasive insights on the Africa of today, what is also valid is that kinship networks remain major economic and social support systems (Kilbride & Kilbride 1990, 192), and that family solidarity may provide the crucial support necessary in these ongoing times of crisis (Weisner 1997, 21). Extended family has, from generation to generation, been supported and perpetuated by African cultural values and understandings. Although values and customs have undergone some changes, they have certainly not been eroded away, particularly in rural communities, where change is slowest (Mberengwa & Johnson 2003, 25).

In August 2006, the Australian Department of Immigration Multicultural Affairs launched a report entitled *Liberian Community Profile*, stating that

> Family could be said to be the cornerstone of Liberian society. Most Liberians, particularly those from tribal ancestry, have living arrangements that are inclusive of extended family members. As well as parents and their children, an extended Liberian family may include grandparents, siblings, and cousins. Kinship networks include not only family members related by blood, but also relatives by marriage and adoption. Raising children is undertaken by the community as a whole rather than solely by the child’s parents… Older members of the community are regarded with deference and respect (DIMIA 2006, 14).

Although the twentieth century has been a time of enormous upheaval for Africa, and despite the impact of globalisation on African social systems, Shanklin (2007, 284) argues that kinship has served as an anchor, providing a mechanism whereby day to day life and institutions can be managed. Ekeh (1990, 693) notes that the absence of reliable state institutions in post-
colonial Africa has resulted in the strengthening of these social connections, integrating them into every aspect of African society. Although Balogun and Olutayo (2006, 87-88) suggest that there has been a tendency for the African family system to adopt notions of individualism, resulting in social dysfunction, they acknowledge that many contemporary African leaders are promoting a return to values that may work to enhance African development.

The forms that some aspects of family support take, such as shared childcare, care for the elderly, and control of property, have certainly changed. In some instances they have become less reliable, but the values that underpin them appear to be as strong as ever. Shared support through kinship networks has not been replaced in the process of rapid social change in Africa. Weisner (1997, 24) states that it has instead become complimentary to these changes, adapting as necessary to accommodate them. Increased urbanisation, although impacting kinship networks, has not destroyed them; groups continue to aggregate, even in cities, along kin and/or ethnic lines and to provide support for one another (Shanklin 2007, 286). In essence, effective kinship networks continue to revolve around cultural values such as respect, harmony, interdependence and unity, offering the fulfilment of emotional and practical support; according to Edwards (1997, 82-83), these values remain the core virtues remembered, supported and aspired to in Africa (Edwards 1997, 82-83).
In the contemporary diaspora

Whilst the more traditional families, especially those from a rural background, may display more of these features than their more modern, urbanized counterparts, the diaspora incorporates most of these realities into their imagined and remembered Africa. Hall (2003, 234) suggests that this understanding of family shapes their sense of African cultural identity in the face of western social understandings. The loss of kinship networks, the knowledge that many of their kin have been killed or incarcerated, therefore, has an enormous impact on refugees in the emerging contemporary African diaspora. Coming from cultures so imbued with the traditions of the extended family, to be cast adrift, with at best only immediate nuclear family to anchor one, must be confusing and disorienting.

Akyeampong (2000, 209) suggests that African churches can, to some extent, serve in the place of kinship networks that have been lost in migration. These institutions not only provide religious teaching and support, but also act as information centres for people in the diaspora seeking housing or employment, and can facilitate interaction with government departments and bureaucracy (ibid). In addition to these factors, the church provides many of the African refugees with a sense of continuity and belonging. This notion is supported by many of the women with whom I have spoken, most of whom have received support of one sort or another from one or more church group since arriving in Australia. With the increase in numbers of African refugees in Perth, a number of African congregations have emerged, which compliment and work with existing church structures. In some instances, services are conducted in languages
other than English, such as Arabic, the South Sudanese languages of Dinka and Bari, and Swahili, promoting the emergence of a strong sense of community within these groups.

Hall (2003, 234) suggests that a sense of shared cultural identity can enable individuals to identify areas of difference, whilst simultaneously working to provide a frame of reference for commonalities within the diaspora. Anecdotally, many people in immigrant communities form friendship bonds within those communities and go on to construct what amounts to replacement families from a subset of these relationships. Within their changed social environment, fictive kin\textsuperscript{192} can come to replace not only the family that migrants have left behind, but more importantly to provide the emotional and practical support structure that they have lost. According to Foner (1997, 969), the absence of close kin creates the need to form new bonds of a similar nature, resulting in frequent occurrences of the creation of fictive kin from newly formed friendship relationships within immigrant communities.

Russell (2004, 7) notes that many African relationships are given meaning by describing them in kinship terms, with understandings of friendship closely tied to those of family.\textsuperscript{193} Thus, a female friend may be described or referred to as one’s sister or, if somewhat older, given the honorific ‘mother’ or ‘auntie’ – these terms of address in some instances honorific, but in many instances more an acknowledgement of the significance of the relationship as understood by the individuals. Whilst western society has tended to clearly delineates the roles of family and friends,\textsuperscript{194} this is less so in African
society. Although Africans maintain friendly relations with a wide range of individuals on a day to day basis, the relationships that move forward and become more intimate, caring relationships, tend to become subsumed into family-like relationships. Thus the notion of ‘friend’ is rolled into that of ‘family’ as less formal ties are given implicit formality by virtue of association.

In fictive kin relationships, where replacement bonds have been formed because direct kin are either unavailable or unsupportive, referring to one’s friends as family members works both to promote and reinforce the relationships (Ibsen & Klobus 1972, 619). Talking to African refugees in Perth, I have heard innumerable stories of supportive interaction between individuals and groups within individual ethnic groups as well as the broader African diaspora. In 2001, with the assistance of a local migrant resource centre, a group of refugee and immigrant women from Africa, Iran, and South America set up a cooking group in Perth, calling themselves Women Together. This group met weekly and provided the participants with an opportunity to talk about settlement and to share stories and recipes from their countries of origin over a number of years (Frith 2004). Through this interaction, networks were established and affirmed. The formation of these networks appears to support the views of Rubin (1985, 52-3) and Cocking and Kennett (1998, 505, 510-511), who argue that people in general need to feel a sense of belonging and that this is possibly one of the motivating factors that encourages people to band together in groups in which they feel accepted and secure.
According to Ebaugh & Curry (2000, 199), fictive kin can function to provide cultural support and continuity – particularly in the raising of children - as well as practical and economic support. In the instance of refugee women from Africa, the commonalities of history and cultural understanding appear, in many instances, to override differences and provide an arena in which fictive kin (as opposed to extended kin) networks could emerge, notwithstanding the very strong ties back to family in Africa. Friedman (1993, 246-252) states that the need for social interaction and support promotes the establishment of these quasi families. This could, potentially, be seen to be amongst the opportunities that the diaspora may provide for its members. How these and other relationships emerge, the ways in which they are nurtured and grow, will all play a role in shaping the African diaspora in Australia.

185 North, Central, and South America, and the Caribbean.
186 A comprehensive overview of literature on the African diaspora can be found in Unfinished Migrations: Reflections on the African Diaspora and the Making of the Modern World (Patterson & Kelley 2000).
187 A United Nations telecommunications source.
188 Referring to Sudanese communities in Australia and to the need for cultural continuity in the diaspora, Koch (2008) notes “they might have left Sudan in a hurry during their quest for survival… but their cultures in styles and fashions were never forgotten. They are cultures that must be preserved by all means, at least by any conscious Sudanese.”
189 See Shanklin (2007) for a very useful comparative discussion on kinship systems in Africa.
190 As in affinal, or related by marriage.
191 Alice; see Chapter Eight (I).
192 Non relatives adopted into kin-like relationships (Ibsen & Klobus 1972, 615).
193 This point is elaborated on in Chapter Eight.
194 This delineation has become increasingly contested, and fictive kin or ‘families of choice’ are receiving increased attention in the literature, for example Spencer & Pahl 2006, Watters 2004, Pahl & Pevalin 2005, Adams & Allan 1998, Weeks et al 2001.
Chapter Eight

Relationships in Different Contexts

Friendship and family – their importance in the diaspora and the difficulty of replicating already-always-there relationships left behind in Africa.

Friendship appears to occur, more often than not, owing to happenstance – people ‘thrown’ together by circumstances or an overlap of interests. In the African diaspora emerging in Australia these circumstances are often experiences such as forced migration and a need for support. Within that context, common backgrounds – broadly speaking – provide for cultural understanding that might otherwise take a long time to develop. Shared understanding, even if unspoken, of what it is like to flee oppression and/or war, to live in a refugee camp, to lose family and friends to war, and the complexities of the resettlement process can form a baseline for commonality. Add to that the African cultural context, and the feeling and experience of being ‘other’ in a western society, and relationships have the potential to start to emerge relatively readily.

As a counterpoint to these relatively easily established commonalities is the difficulty in the establishment of trust. As refugees, on the move or in a camp, trust is often not a luxury than can be afforded; it is not a survival trait. On settlement in a country of final refuge such as Australia, developing trusting relationships can take time. Superficial social relationships may emerge relatively easily, especially within ethnic communities, but the transition from acquaintance – to social-friend – and, finally, to true friendship is progressive and gradual, requiring interaction
and nurturing for it to occur. In some ways the very existence of common backgrounds and ethnic social ties can work against this outcome, as politics, rumours and gossip can function to undermine fledgling relationships. Knowing that when one confides in another, one’s confidante will not speak out of turn and make public what is felt to be private, is a leap of faith – but one predicated on knowing the person well enough to make such a judgement, and is not lightly undertaken in this – or any – context.

Many of the women with whom I spoke during this study readily acknowledged that sharing happy times provided little challenge in the diaspora, that there was always someone with whom one could share good news. The women said that, with difficult or emotionally challenging or deeply private matters, however, they tended to keep things to themselves – largely owing to the lack of a close female relative or trusted friend of long standing with whom they could share these things. Overall, the feelings that resulted from this lack were expressed as loneliness, isolation and sadness. At times like these, homesickness was particularly noticeable and the women longed for ‘home,’ for a familiar context and a mother, aunt, sister, or close/age-set friend195 – many of whom had been lost to war, sickness or a change in circumstances (resettlement).

I. Alice talks about friendship, family and loss

Alice has lived in Australia for just over two years. In that time she has actively attempted to further her education, attending Migrant English classes regularly to improve both her written and spoken English literacy. Once she has completed these classes, Alice hopes to enrol in a childcare certificate course at TAFE, and then look for employment in the childcare industry. A victim of
After months of indecision and fear, Alice finally left her husband and sought assistance from a women’s refuge. This had been a difficult step for her to take as it meant that she would be living away from her community and the emotional and practical support it could offer. When I asked if she could perhaps stay with a relative instead, so that she would not be so isolated, Alice said she had decided not to do so. She explained that, in Africa, you can go to your relatives if there is a problem, returning to your parents’ house or going to your brother’s house; they will look after you, even build a house for you, and let you stay for as long as you need to. She added that if she had a brother in Perth, or her parents, she could have gone to them for help, but to go to her more distant relatives with her marital problems would have just made life difficult for them in the community. People would have thought that they had told Alice to leave her husband, rather than seeing it as her own decision. She had concluded that it was better for her to go to the women’s refuge and to live independently of her relatives, to show that this was her choice. “It is how things are. What can you do? It is my problem, so it is not good to make them be involved.”

I went with Alice to retrieve her personal belongings from her aunt’s house, where they had been stored when she left her husband. She had packed most of her possessions into two suitcases and a few boxes and taken them there by taxi before going to the police station and, from there, to the women’s refuge. A few minutes after we arrived, Alice’s aunt asked her to have a
look through some mail and explain some of the forms to her. In turn, Alice asked me to explain some of the forms to her, after which she explained them to her aunt, who has very limited English. There were forms from Centrelink, requesting an update on family circumstances and income, and forms from a superannuation fund requesting details of a designated beneficiary. It was interesting to see Alice acting as the enabled English speaker in this situation, scanning the documents, explaining things to her aunt and advising her. In an aside, Alice told me that when she herself first arrived in Perth other people had done the same for her.

She and her aunt talked quietly in their home language for a while, and then Alice explained to me that her aunt had been telling her about her job. Alice’s aunt had been working at a commercial laundry for five weeks and had informed Centrelink of her change in circumstances when she started the job, as required. Centrelink had promptly stopped her social security benefits, which she had expected, but the laundry had not paid her yet and she had no money left. She told Alice that she was several weeks behind on her rent, but that she did not want to cause trouble at her workplace and possibly compromise her job. Alice advised her aunt to approach her employer and explain her situation, and she had agreed to do so at the start of the next week. As we got up to leave, Alice delved into her handbag, found her wallet and pulled out a fifty dollar note, which she pressed into her aunt’s hand. When she tried to refuse, Alice quietly insisted, closing her aunt’s hand over the money and patting her shoulder. We all exchanged fond goodbyes, with hugs and handshakes, Alice’s aunt wiping her eyes and smiling. As we drove away, I asked Alice if she would manage without the
fifty dollars. She replied that finances would be a little tight, because she
had to pay rent at the refuge and buy her own food and pay for transport, but
that she was in a much better position than her aunt, who did not even have
money to buy food. “She can’t even buy sugar. So, you do what you can.
Now I help my auntie, other times people help me. It is what you do.”198

After taking Alice’s boxes and suitcases into her room at the refuge, we
went back to my house for a cup of tea. I asked her if her family in Sudan
knew about her situation and her difficulties with her husband. She said she
had spoken to her younger sister on the telephone and that she, in turn, had
told the rest of the family about it. Alice said that her family worries that the
reason she is living with white people is because someone is making her do
so. “They worry that these people might be bad people and might kill me or
something.” Alice laughed, understanding their concerns and knowing that
she is living a life outside of their experience, and said that she had
explained to them about her husband, and about the people running the
refuge, and the situation generally so that they would understand. This put
their mind at ease, but they remained concerned that she was living so far
from the local Sudanese community and the support structure that they
assume she can depend on.

Alice and I had talked about family and friendship at various other times, so
I was well aware that she missed her family in Sudan enormously and that
she feels that the people she has come to know in Australia, whether African
or not, cannot take their place. She explained again that the bonds of family,
of knowing someone from birth, are bonds that she feels can be relied upon
absolutely. When things had been particularly difficult, she had given serious consideration to going back to Sudan, even though the situation there remained unsettled, because her family would look after her - and she could help to look after them. “But it is too dangerous to go back to live in Sudan now because of the rebels.” However, once she has Australian citizenship and an Australian passport, she will try to plan a visit. “If God wills, when. Ah, because I’m now in Australia, they give me maybe citizenship. I can, maybe, go back to Africa and see them and then I will be back to live in Australia.” As she spoke, I wondered how much safety that passport actually affords ‘new Australians’ like Alice when they return to the country of their birth, even if only for a visit. Perhaps the safety is in knowing that, as an Australian citizen, one has the right of return – without having to go into a camp and endure the process of application and refusal and appeal through the UN all over again.

She told me that she is one of nine children ‘from the same womb’ - five girls and four boys. Her mother died when Alice was in Khartoum living with her older sister, but her father and the rest of her siblings still live in their village in the southernmost region of Sudan. Although Alice has occasional telephone contact with a younger sister, she still feels very isolated from the family. Her father refuses to speak to her or to her older sister, saying that when they left the village during the war and no more was heard of them for so long, he thought they had died and he grieved for them. He has relayed a message to Alice via her younger sister, telling her that even though he now knows they are alive, it hurts him less to think of them as dead than to worry about them. He has given instructions to the family
that if Alice wants him to know something, then the information must be relayed to him by one of her siblings; he will not talk to her in person. Alice said that this makes her very sad and that it is one of the reasons she would like to go back to Sudan one day - to visit her father and to show him that she is alive and well. “If I am there, then he must look and see me. Then it will be okay.”

We talked about her siblings and Alice told me that she misses them, misses the support they provide during the good and bad times. I commented that siblings can be a mixed blessing, especially if you are younger than them, and explained that I am still treated as the ‘baby sister.’ Alice laughed. “Even when you are seventy years old, your sister will still be your older sister and she will still advise you!” She added that, although brothers tend not to, sisters always have advice to offer and that one should just accept that they have more experience and listen to what they say.

When I asked Alice who she confided in when she had problems, she replied that when she was in Sudan she would talk to her father and mother or her older sister and that they would help her to resolve issues. In Australia it is much more difficult, she continued. Although she has two sets of relatives in Perth, describing them respectively as ‘the brother of my mother and the sister of my father,’ she misses the support of her immediate family. She told me that it troubles her deeply that, because she is unable to visit them and see them in person, she has no real idea of how they are and that she worries that, like her mother, they may die before she sees them.
again. This leaves her feeling unsettled and anxious about her family to the point that she becomes unwell.

Living in the refuge for the first few weeks had been particularly hard on Alice. She said she had not seen one other black face in the suburb in all that time or even on the bus on her way into the city, that there was no-one with whom she could speak her language and feel at ease, and that telephone calls were not allowed at the refuge after 6pm or before 7am. She had felt very isolated and had worried about her family even more than usual, but was hopeful that her move to the medium term refuge accommodation would allow her to resume some contacts with people in her community - whilst simultaneously keeping her new location from becoming common knowledge, as she was still fearful of her husband.

Alice said that, since arriving in Perth, she had occasionally confided in Sarah or in her aunt; if she had needed advice on matters that did not require a woman’s point of view, she had asked her uncle. She added that this was, however, not the same as having her ‘really family’ to depend on. In Perth, Sarah is the closest Alice has to someone who can take on the role of sister/confidante. She is from the same village as Alice and, although they did not know each other then, it gave them common ground on which to build their relationship. Alice said that she trusts Sarah, that she is confident that she is not a gossip, and has come to think of her as a sister. Additionally, although Sarah is older than her, Alice also feels able to advise her if she is asked to, which makes her feel that their relationship is more like that of sisters.
We are from the same village… So I used her now like she’s my sister. Because I trust her. When I tell her something, she don’t go with this idea outside. And she, if she had some pain things, then she can talk to me - and I will advise her. I trust her.

Nevertheless, now that she is here in Australia, Alice said that she thinks it’s important to try to make friends with people who are not only from her community, so that she can learn about different things. She anticipates that the time for this to happen is when she has finished her schooling and gets a job. “

When I get a job, maybe is the time to make a friend in the place of the job. Because there, maybe, will be mixed - some Australian, some who are Indian, and some who are in different countries. They will be together and then, after that, you will make the friends with them.

Alice acknowledged, however, that real friendship is not something that happens easily, that it takes a long time for trust to build and for people to really get to know each other.

II. African women, family and friendship

Friendships are broadly viewed as capable of imparting a range of beneficial attributes, from material support to the provision of tolerance, trust and sharing, all of which contribute to a person’s sense of identity (Frith 1999, xiv-xv). Aristotle, who provides what could be considered the arch-narrative of friendship as it is understood in western society today (Heller 1998, 6; Pahl & Spencer 1997, 37), argues that it is friendship, rather than any other
relationship, which is centrally necessary to living a good and happy life. He suggests that people are by nature social creatures and inclined towards seeking out company, asserting that even if one had all the other good things that life may provide, no-one would choose to live without friends (Aristotle 1925, 1156b6-23; 1155a1-30). This understanding of friendship, as an active and positive component to a happy and successful life, has, arguably, played a pivotal role in recent interest in the topic of friendship in all social science disciplines (Pickstock 2002, 36). However, whilst the company of friends may well give one’s prosperity and success meaning, and make poverty and misfortune bearable (Aristotle 1925, 1155a1-30), friendship in the African context is framed somewhat differently. As previously mentioned, close association with family and extended kinship groups provides much of the social and emotional support that might typically be associated with friendship relationships in western society, and friendships tend to move gradually to assume family-like qualities.

In my discussions with the participants in this study, I asked them about their families in Africa and in Australia, enquiring as to whether they have close friends or confidantes, and how much they socialise with their own ethnic community and with members of the broader Australian community. Each person expressed a sense of loss of family, of close connections that could be relied on unquestioningly. Although several of the women had grown up with a peer group, many of whom they had considered as sisters, they all related more readily to the idea of family – rather than friends - as their backstop, as the foundation on which they could rely absolutely, and indicated that replacing those ties is virtually impossible. This was not only
due to the closeness of the family bond; it was connected to the establishment of trust, to knowing people well enough that trust is a given.

Individual and collective family roles appear, historically, to have been clearly defined in the African context (as evidenced in the previous chapter). These roles are, however, not necessarily uncontested – either in Africa or, more particularly, within the diaspora. Young people, Faye noted, seem to gradually lose the sense of family that is present in Africa, and to become increasingly self-focused rather than group-focused, after resettlement in Australia. “It’s not that they don’t have the love. They do. But they become much more self-focused and are not interested in helping other people very much, or in getting involved in the community.” Living in a country such as Australia brings with it a variety of pressures that many people living in the diaspora, especially those from rural or traditional backgrounds, may previously have had little exposure to. These pressures, ranging from economic to social, work to affect the outlook of individuals and can, in due course, impact on established cultural patterns of obedience and parochialism, and thus on the accompanying highly structured social order. With these elements fractured or even lost during the period prior to resettlement, individuals within the group may find it difficult to integrate effectively into the new society in which they find themselves. The breakdown of kinship groups resulting from war and flight is often further exacerbated by fractures stemming from conflicting needs, expectations, and demands in the new society. This, in turn, may limit people’s ability to make friends both across boundaries of culture and ethnicity and within their own ethnic group. The established and longstanding patterns of
‘extended family’ that have provided both familial and friend-like support do not necessarily enable individuals to make similar connections readily outside of those (defining) limitations.

In discussing friendship formation and structure with the participants in this study, it became apparent that forming personal relationships is a complex and interactive experience, more readily expressed as a tapestry of ideas and feelings than as a linear account. Several threads emerged, each with distinct texture, each strand touching on others - often overlapping in ways that made it difficult to consider them in insolation. Some participants considered the idea of friendship as a quite straightforward issue, tackling it head on, but most came to it from various and different angles, talking around it as a component of their social and emotional life and connecting it firmly back to family or long-standing associations. Four significant strands that emerged were: first, friendship as relating to trust and intimacy; second, friendship as a function of familiarity; third, friendship expressed as neighbourliness and in terms of practical help; and finally, making friends with Australians. Each of these complex and multi-faceted elements feed back into one another and will be explored in the context of the initial interviews and discussions held with the participants, some subsequent interaction between us, and my reflections on these discussions.

**Friendship as trust and intimacy**

The requirement for trust in close relationships was the most significant element to emerge in the discussions. Questions of trust appeared closely bound up with concerns over the propensity for gossip in the communities
and with the idea that it takes time to get to know someone well enough to establish whether they can be entrusted with information of a significant nature. Whilst the participants find it relatively easy to establish friendly relations based on commonalities such as country or continent of origin, children, or interests, for these relationships to deepen requires another dimension. Most of the women that spoke to me expressed a clear need for a mutual understanding of trust between them and any potential ‘really friend.’ The establishment of this trust, of who can be relied on not to gossip in the broader community or to outsiders, was expressed as sometimes quite easily established and at others rather a process of trial and error. Although all of the women ‘gossiped’ to some extent, telling me about people in the community and about things that had taken place, the implicit understanding was that one does not talk about the big things, the important things relating to one’s friends’ personal life; these things are kept in-house, respecting the intimacy of the relationship and the accompanying sharing of information and advice.

This kind of intimacy in friendship – the sharing of problems - is closely linked to the establishment of trust, an intangible and (almost) indefinable component of friendship tied up in cultural practices and familiarity. Finding someone with the same understanding of these codes is one of the challenges that the participants face in establishing close relationships in newly formed communities. In these artificially created communities, even if people are from the same originating country or area within a country, trust and understanding need to be established to attain the level and depth of friendship that is relatively easily achieved in Africa. Often this starts
with trust in the practical assistance provided by others, gradually - although not inevitably - evolving into trust in which confidence in the other and in the relationship is present. Although not all members of established kinship groups are necessarily considered to be ultimately reliable or trustworthy, commonly understood African social mores appear to privilege these relationships in terms of the investment of trust in family, the implicit acceptance of trust, loyalty, and general supportiveness.

Whilst all of the participants in this study have established social ties since arriving in Australia, few of these ties were described as close friendships or family-like relationships. Most of the women commented on the risk of sharing sensitive information with new ‘friends,’ and said that they tended to keep that sort of information to themselves until they had established the character of their friend, or that they would telephone a family member in Africa to discuss things if they needed a reliable, trustworthy listener who they would consider to have their best interests at heart. The ties back to members of established kinship groups, whether these family members have remained in the country of origin, have settled in other countries, or are in refugee camps themselves, remains very strong. Advice and comfort are sought and provided, usually via the telephone, otherwise by email or physical letters.

Sometimes Sarah telephones her parents in Sudan if she has problems to resolve, but said that they are too far away for them to be of any practical help. If she was still there, she would talk to her mother about things and rely on her father to sort out any significant issues. She added that gossip
often undermines relationships and causes distress to one or other party, including those with kinship bonds.

Yeah, I have my cousin, my really cousin ... but when you tell her something then is spoiled - it can’t keep secret. But now I have only this lady, eh… Theresa… She is good lady. I see her sometimes, then maybe I tell her. And Alice. Yah, Alice. Because she keep. Because if she say something I can’t say ‘Oh, Alice say this, say this’ to people. Then I keep. Then, if I have something I tell her. And Theresa is like that. But my cousin, she is not a good lady.

Before I trusted her, but now I say this lady is no good.

Wardah occasionally socialises with other people from Somalia. She said people find it expensive to entertain such a large family - and the children fight. Her children are young and she spends most of her time at home, cleaning and cooking and caring for them. She talks to some of the Somali women that she has become friendly with from time to time, often on the phone, but never about personal matters. These relationships are based on commonalities such as children, language, and religion, but do not embody the trust that Wardah requires in order to share intimate information.

“Sometimes I call. I talk to, sometimes the outside ‘Oh my children is no good, I tired…’ I talk to them.” But it is only about relatively superficial matters; Wardah concurred that sharing more personal information carries with it a risk of gossip within the community. “I can’t talk to them. Because if I talk to him, maybe tomorrow that other lady talk about that.”

When I asked Elizabeth if there was anyone she could talk to about personal matters, she shook her head. “No, except for Faye … there’s nobody in the
community I tell. If I tell them, they are not going to help me. Rather they will sit at my back and have a whole lot to say.” Elizabeth elaborated, telling me that community members are inclined to gossip about one another’s business and that she is unwilling to become involved in that. Her role as a leader in the community limits her options for close personal interaction, and she finds herself in the invidious position of having taken on a role that involves providing advice and assistance to members of her community whilst simultaneously having no-one to whom she can turn for similar support. I asked her if it was an issue of trust and, if so, how long it takes to build a trusting relationship. “You can meet someone, just today, and you develop trust in them. And you can meet someone and you can stay together for so many years and you don’t trust them.” This view appeared initially to be odds with that of other participants, who indicated that trust depends on knowing someone for a considerable time. It is also at odds with Elizabeth’s own experience of establishing trusting friend-like relationships in the diaspora, which has not included any instances of meeting someone with whom she has found trust to be immediate. Her use of ‘develop’ indicates that, whilst meeting someone may establish the groundwork for a relationship, trust emerges over time rather than at a first meeting. Elizabeth’s statement also indicates that she has experienced the disappointment of imbuing relationships of long standing with trust and of subsequently discovering that knowing people for a long time does not necessarily result in mutual and ongoing trusting relationships.

Faye mentioned that she finds herself in a similar position to Elizabeth, her status as a community leader limiting what she can confide – and to whom,
as she likewise does not want to become the target of gossip in the community. Friedman (1993, 189-192) suggests that the sharing of personal experiences between two individuals is based on and engenders a shared and mutual trust. Talking about friendship with Elizabeth and Faye, the consensus was that trust and sharing need to work both ways for friendship to be established and for it to grow, but that this is not something that can be scripted, predicted or planned. It emerges spontaneously through interaction, and is subsequently reinforced or diminished over time.

When she lived in Khartoum, Theresa had one particularly close friend and was also friends with numerous cousins and other extended family members. Relocating to South Africa to join her husband, Theresa made friends in the church community and established strong ties with one woman in particular. This woman, a white South African missionary, took the role that Theresa’s closest friend in Khartoum had previously filled and they have stayed in contact ever since. Theresa misses her companionship and the comfortable relationship that they had developed. Making friends in Australia has taken longer than it did in South Africa, she added, and although she has become friendly with a few people at TAFE, at church, and at the preschool her daughter attends, she thinks that it will take time for close, trusting bonds to develop. “Because one year and a half is not enough.”

Ghadir agreed that close relationships tend to be slow to establish, suggesting that the establishment of trust is closely linked to the complex and varied backgrounds that people come from. Trauma and relocation affect how people view themselves and the world, and the politics that have
shaped people’s flight from their county of origin continues to affect them profoundly in Australia; it has shaped the way they think and the way that they view the world. This, in turn, impacts on the establishment of trust which is so essential to friendship formation.

To be closer is so sensitive; our people, so sensitive. You can’t be open quick. The people have different thinking, different opinions, different – even, the politics. Problems affect us from inside. If we have different politics before, we can’t just meet in the middle. It affects our life, actually, affects people’s hearts.

Trust is thus a blend of mutual understanding, outlook and experience. It appears not to be defined by any one thing in particular, each set of circumstances and group of two or more people establishing for themselves whether particular relationships ‘work’ on this level or not. The cognitive, emotional and behavioural dimensions of trust (Lewis & Weigert 1985) merge to provide the conditions conducive to the establishment and development of trusting relationships. Although it may often appear that for these conditions to occur requires merely a fortuitous concatenation of circumstances, trusting relationships may develop opportunistically or by design. “Trust in everyday life is a mix of feeling and rational thinking” (Lewis & Weigert 1985, 972) and the combination of individual subjectivities, personal experiences of trust, and practical and emotional needs provide the context for trusting social relationships to develop. Such relationships may emerge and be sustained within a range of different situations, and individuals may actively seek out or promote these conditions in the interests of their generalized well being.
For many African refugees, living within an ethnic community provides support and a level of familiarity that promotes ongoing social interaction and, with that, the potential for trusting relationships to emerge. Others, however, actively seek interaction outside of that environment, looking to work and educational environments to provide an initial framework for relationships to be established and, potentially, nurtured and sustained over time.

**Friendship as a function of familiarity**

The absence of extended family and the support that it provides, emotionally, socially, and economically, was presented as an overall loss of the familiar – a gap that is almost impossible to fill. All of the participants left family members behind them in Africa when they came to Australia. When we spoke, they all expressed a strong connection both back to Africa and to the people left behind, as well as a clear desire to return there one day - even if only to visit. These connections promote an ongoing attachment ‘back home’ and an active interest in matters social and political in their country of origin.

Sarah, for example, when asked who she misses, told me, “My mum. My mum and my dad. And I have three brothers and three sisters behind there.” She said that she finds it very difficult to be in Australia, sometimes wondering what she is doing here while so many of her family members are still in Africa and are not safe. “I really miss Sudan. I miss it so much, because all my friends, my relatives. Lots of people dying now.” She has not seen her mother for over twenty years and, whenever she telephones her
in Africa, she sounds very distressed. Sarah finds this very upsetting as she is unable to visit her mother and comfort her.

When I phone them, she is really crying. She’s saying ‘I don’t know what to do to see you. And I’m saying ‘I don’t know. If I get money I will come and see you.’ She says she is now getting old, maybe she will die there.

Similarly, Theresa also left a large family behind in Africa. Her father was a wealthy man and had five wives, each of whom had a number of children. She has about thirty siblings, Theresa told me, although only four of those are full siblings, and it is to these siblings that she feels closest. Most of the family, including her parents, still live in their village in Southern Sudan, but Theresa’s four immediate siblings – all of whom were previously in refugee camps in Uganda - are now settled in London. All of these relatives would help her and support her if she was near them, she said, but here in Australia she has no relatives to depend on. She too would dearly like to go back and visit Sudan, to see her parents and the village she grew up in, but it is a very expensive undertaking and not one she can consider at present. Although accepting of the separation from her family, Theresa feels the loss of these bonds acutely.

Wardah told me that, in Somalia, she relied on her mother and on a few close friends she grew up with and interacted with from childhood onwards.

“They have some problem or secret, perhaps, I talk to them, my mum or friend - a few good friend. Because they, when younger, growing, school, everything. They best friend, they good best friend.” These friends were lost in the war and, for many years, Wardah did not even know where her
parents were. At the end of 2006, Wardah’s husband took their sixteen
year old son to visit family in Nigeria, enrolling him in school there with
the intention of having him remain there for a year. She and her husband,
she said, had become concerned that their son was ‘losing his way’ and they
anticipated that this visit would teach him more about their originating
culture, forcing him to speak Arabic rather than English and making him
connect more firmly with his Somali roots and his family.

Like Wardah, Elizabeth regrets the loss of close female friends that have
remained in Africa or settled elsewhere in the world.

While I was in Nigeria I had a friend – she’s is still now in Nigeria … and she
was very close to me. And in Liberia, I have two friends that are very, very
close to me. Like, the other girl, we were born the same time, the same year, the
same age group.

These are people with whom Elizabeth felt – and still feels – a strong
connection, and she has remained in contact with them over the years. This
sense of familiarity, of a history shared, is something she is finding very
difficult to replicate in the Australian context.

Juliana, who is also from Liberia, was the only participant to assert that it
had been quite easy to make new friends in Australia. She said that all of her
new friends are from within the African diaspora. "Some are Liberian, some
South African, Namibian. All different things, not just Liberian.” Juliana
does occasional hairdressing work for women and children in the African
community and has become friends with a number of her clients, regular
association and some commonalities of culture promoting friendly relations.
With seven children to organise, a household to maintain, school runs to make, TAFE classes to attend, and her hairdressing clients to service, Juliana has little free time. However, she and her family are quite involved in the West African community group, and attend events regularly. When I asked her who she could confide in or turn to for help, she said that in Liberia and Guinea she had depended on her uncle and on some friends. In Perth, their place has been taken by one particular friend and by her husband’s brother.

Leah has also made numerous contacts in the African community through her hairdressing work. Referred by word of mouth, Leah often goes to people’s homes to braid their hair or add in hair extensions, and has become quite friendly with a number of these women over the years.

I’ve got a lot of friends. All those ladies, I do their hair; they eventually become friends to me. Because, ah, I find, because they keep coming back and back, then that relationship is created - because they come back time after time. And maybe we meet in shops, and they have kids, I know their kids. When I go to their homes, if I’m plaiting them from their homes, my child will play with their kids. So I always invite them if my child has a party, and when they have parties they invite me too.

Whilst familiarity certainly appears to be a possible starting point for friend-like relationships to emerge, with common ties to Africa and the understandings of cultural practices potentially providing a landscape within which more meaningful, supportive relationships can grow, it does not necessarily provide a blank cheque to that end. This was highlighted by
Leah when she told me that although she misses her mother and siblings, family has not always been of benefit to her or a source of friendly association. Leah told me that she has found that the politics of religion can affect even close family relationships considerably. Although she and her aunt went through a great deal together in the early stages of their flight from DR Congo and became quite close, by the time they arrived in Australia there was active animosity on both sides. This was largely owing to the aunt trying to insist that Leah convert from Christianity to Islam. Since that time, Leah has severed contact with her aunt as the situation had resulted in her becoming increasingly distressed and depressed and was affecting all the other aspects of her life.

In each of these instances, the loss of the familiar – both in context and association – appears to be something that the participants have tried to compensate for in their new relationships by, either tacitly or actively, selecting people with some traits they find familiar by virtue of background, refugee status or language, and building on those foundations.

**Friendship as practical help and neighbourliness**

Contemporary research has established that positive close relationships foster an environment that promotes good health (Reeves 2004, 12; Taylor 2002, 70). Virtually all aspects of one’s health, from mental to physical well-being, are thought to be improved through interaction with caring, empathetic friends (Strote 2002, 132). The support that is gained from social contact ranges from advice and emotional support of a concrete nature, to the comfort derived from being in the same ‘space’ as someone that one
cares about. These elements all combine to provide a nurturing/supportive environment that is highly beneficial to physical and mental health, based on the clear human tendency toward caring for those with whom one is intimate, which includes behaving in supportive and nurturing ways in times of stress (Taylor 2002, 85-90).

This aspect of close relationships – the provision of practical help – was presented by the participants as an integral part of friendship and family. Helping people out with childcare, food, and/or finances was frequently mentioned, both in the African and the African-Australian context. In the case of the former, it was presented as the norm for extended family and neighbours to help out wherever necessary. In Australia, it appears to be a combination of the continuation of commonly understood social practices, the need for practical help, and the requirement for a familiar cultural space in a potentially alienating environment.

In the refugee camp in Sudan and later, when studying in Cairo, Ghadir had a number of close female friends. This group of young women were all much the same age and lived together, seven of them sharing accommodation in a boarding house when they lived in Cairo. In the absence of family, they provided one another with support and became “as close as sisters.” Although their studies took them all in different directions academically, and they have ended up living in different parts of the world – Kenya, Egypt, Canada, Saudi Arabia, Syria and Australia, they have remained close friends and all stayed in contact ever since. She has not really replaced these bonds since coming to Australia, although she does feel very close to the two Australian women who helped her in the early
days of her settlement. Ghadir said that it is to these Australian women, with whom she feels she has established family-like bonds, that she turns for advice if she has family problems. As Red Cross volunteers, they helped her with many aspects of early settlement, arranging an apartment for her and her children, explaining how the social security system works, taking her to doctors appointments, and encouraging her to be involved in the community. She said that they had made her feel very welcome and that this had made it much easier for her to settle and find her feet in Perth. “They are like my family, now.” Ghadir also has a sister in Perth; she has been here for the past eleven years and, whilst they did not know each other well in Africa - having spent long periods apart, they now live only three or four streets away from each other and have formed a close bond. She observed that having a family member to rely on for advice and practical help has been really helpful in her sister’s settlement process.

Elizabeth agreed that shared understanding or common ground makes a useful starting point for establishing friendship relationships, but pointed out that this can be as difficult to establish within an ethnic community as it might be outside it. She has found that, although she maintains an open door policy so that community members have somewhere that they can go when they need some help, she has not found anyone to stand in place of the friends and family she has lost during the war in Liberia. One of her sisters did survive and is currently living in Guinea with her two children, and Elizabeth told me how she has struggled to try to get approval for them to join her in Australia. The application was refused in the final stages on medical grounds, which has left Elizabeth feeling devastated. With tears in
her eyes, Elizabeth explained that she had pinned very high hopes on the idea of being reunited with a family member, someone on whom she can rely unconditionally for practical and emotional support, and has struggled to come to terms with the outcome.

Faye has made it very clear that she considers community bonds and community interaction within the West African community very important to facilitating positive settlement outcomes. She tries to promote cross-cultural interaction, encouraging the West Africans to interact with the broader community as well as each other, and has also sat on numerous boards and panels as an advisor to assist the Australian community to gain some understanding of the people from this region and, more broadly, from Africa. On a personal level, however, Faye has found that although she has many friendly relationships in the community, her role as a community leader and her education – which is of a higher level than that of most of the West African refugees – results in few truly close bonds being formed. Nevertheless, when Faye was ill recently and needed care, she turned to a Liberian family for support. They were her neighbours for over two years and Faye said that she came to view them as her family, so much so that she went to stay with them for a week when she was too ill to look after herself. This practical aspect of family-like relationship is largely glossed over by the participants, considered a given and mentioned more in passing than with emphasis.

Closely linked to the provision of practical help is what might be termed neighbourliness, the notion of generalised ‘friendliness.’ In Africa,
neighbours are often also family or extended family members; those that are not, tend to be ‘adopted’ – to take on family-like characteristics. Several of the participants mentioned that this closeness of interaction with one’s neighbours is not present in Australia and that it takes active involvement to even pass the time of day with a neighbour. They find this isolating and very difficult to come to terms with. Marcy and her husband mentioned that, in Africa – both in Burundi and, later, in South Africa, they would have known all their neighbours, would have felt welcome in their homes, known what was happening in their lives, and could have depended on them for help; in Perth they tend not to see their neighbours for weeks on end.

It takes time to adjust to the different social context and become part of the community, Kama told me, adding that she thinks it’s important for new arrivals to learn about the culture in which they’ve found themselves so that they can adapt. She herself always makes a point of introducing herself to new neighbours the day she moves into a new house and has found that everyone she has interacted with in this way has been very receptive. She said that she interacts with her neighbours reasonably frequently, always stopping to pass the time of day when they encounter each other on the verge. But, she said, it took her time to understand that, unlike Africa, in Australia people tend to ‘keep themselves to themselves.’ Her children and the neighbours’ children play together very happily, at home or at the local park, but Kama said that she thinks that if she did not actively keep neighbourly relations in place, they would probably not continue. “But sometimes it’s the way how you handle things. If I tend to keep myself alone, I think they will keep themselves far.”
In Africa, she depended on her neighbours – they were like family in that they had formed close, sharing bonds and could be relied on times of difficulty. Actual family members were often too far away to be of practical help and so neighbours took their place.

For me, all my life, is just the neighbours. Because when I got married, neighbours are only my closest relatives. Parents were far. I was just there, but neighbours have come to be my family. When I had my other child, the neighbour had to come and make me porridge, wash my clothes and do the ironing, things like that. This is why I keep saying, where I come from, neighbours are the most important thing to us. Because, if I’m here, and I have a relative in (another suburb), if I have a problem in the middle of the night, I can’t ring - you are too far to reach me. But the neighbour will run just straight away and give me a hand. So, neighbours are the most important persons in our lives as Africans. Back home, whoever the person is who is close to you, you can call on for help.

Kama added that she misses the closeness of neighbourly relations very much, particularly her neighbour in Uganda; they were very close and helped each other with the children, with any problems that might arise, had good times together, and could talk about anything. Despite all her efforts, she has not been able to form similar, family-like bonds with her Australian neighbours.

Kama gave another example of how different neighbourly relations can tend to be in Australia, compared to Africa. A Sudanese man she knows had tried to make friendly overtures to his Australian neighbour over several months, smiling at him or greeting him, but had had no success using the methods culturally familiar to him. Eventually he just ‘took the bull by the horns’ and
confronted the neighbour, notwithstanding that he found it an anomalous mode of behaviour - and was very pleased that he had done so.

The neighbour didn’t want to talk to him at all. All the time they just look at each other, they just look at each other and, when he tries to look at his eyes so that they will get the eye contact to say hello, he will turn away. So, one day he was mowing the lawn. He mowed the lawn then he saw the neighbour, then the neighbour looked, he put the eyes down. He said, ‘how will I really talk to this fellow?’ - the Sudanese guy. And the neighbour finished his lawn first, then he turn off his machine. What he decided, he turn off his one and he go and he say ‘Hello, I’m your neighbour, I come from Sudan.’ And the guy said ‘what do you want me to do now?!’

The Sudanese man explained to his neighbour that, in Africa, neighbours are very important and that they should know each other so that, if there is a problem, they can call on one another for help. The men shook hands and have subsequently become good friends.

Like Kama, Paula has found this relative formality, the separation of neighbours from one another, and the insular nature of the Australian community, difficult to come to grips with. For the first year she was in Perth, Paula did not know who her neighbours were, which she found very strange and extremely isolating and alienating.

Well, what makes it very difficult for me, in order to make friends with them ... Ah, like, for us, back home in Africa, what we were used to, if you got your neighbour next door, you speak to each other nearly every day. Like, in the morning, if you don’t see your neighbour outside, you go there, you knock at the door. ‘Hello, good morning, I’ve not seen you since morning.’ But in Australia you don’t do that. You don’t enter people’s premises without
informing them, without ringing them on the phone that I’m coming over, which is very, very difficult, it makes things very difficult.

Paula missed this closeness and her family so much once she was in Australia, that she has sponsored five of her seven siblings to immigrate to Perth since then. “Because we all lived together from childhood, so it is very hard for us to depart from each other.” None of her siblings are married and they all live with Paula, who stands in the role of mother to them as she is the eldest and they lost their mother during the war. Living together in one house is comfortable and easy, and allows them to provide mutual support – emotional, financial and practical. Paula works fulltime and having her siblings living with her has made her life in Australia much easier; she now has easy access to free childcare and the load of household chores and cooking duties are shared. Although she has the additional responsibility of ensuring that her siblings, some of whom are still of school-going age, settle effectively, it is something she has taken on board very willingly.

Leah’s estrangement from her aunt after she arrived in Perth left her without any family or close friends to depend on for the first three years of her settlement. She said that she had to cope with settling in and raising her daughter on her own, and that in Africa she would have had numerous relatives to help her. Living in Australia as a single mother with a young child resulted in her having to be more independent and to assert herself in ways that she would not have had to do in Africa. She added that although she would have appreciated the support, she found that she enjoyed the independence she won for herself outside of traditional cultural expectations which, whilst supportive, may have limited her personal growth and
ambitions. Nevertheless, when Leah was reunited with her mother and siblings in 2006, she soon arranged for one of her younger sisters to come and live with her to share the load of childcare and household duties. “My mum has seven, and I need some help here so that I can finish my course at uni.”

Clearly, despite there being potential for stress in close personal relationships, this is far outweighed by the practical help and support that they can offer. There is increasing evidence that our health is affected positively though strong, loving friendship bonds with others (Bruce 2000, 28). If people feel cared for and loved, they also feel valued and part of a reciprocally supportive social network. These supportive social bonds have been linked to an increased resistance to ‘the common cold’, and even to increased levels of protection against a variety of conditions such as arthritis, tuberculosis and depression (Pahl 2000, 144). In a western context, this may be because close friends are assumed have best the interests of their friend in mind and be inclined to provide a level of care and support that busy or stressed family members may be unable to. In the African context however, where notions of family and friend are so tightly intertwined, the delineation of derived benefit is less clear cut.

Making friends in Australia and with Australians

A television documentary aired in early 2008 related the story of a Sudanese family that was resettled in Dorrigo, a small town in regional Australia, after spending eight years in Kakuma refugee camp in Kenya. The documentary provided insights into some of the settlement issues that
the family faced, and highlighted the bond that was forged between Martin, the father of the family, and his Australian dairy-farmer neighbour, Wayne. Martin had worked with cattle in Sudan and found that spending time with his neighbour and talking to him about cattle and farming made him feel at home, which in turn enabled him discuss his hopes and plans for the future with Wayne and to feel more settled.

I love to be a friend with Wayne because this is my job when I’m in Sudan, this is my job. I am a cattle keeper and I like him because I think he’s sort of in our culture. He’s like in our culture and I like be around to help him with the cow. Because it makes me feel better. Like I am in place in my country yeah. (Doogue 2008).

A number of participants related their attempts to make friends with people in Australia, both in the diaspora and in the broader community. Theresa commented that people in Perth are friendly when you go to the market or catch a bus and that if you try to be open to their approaches and friendly in return you can extend your contacts. When I asked if this was people in general, Theresa noted that it was mostly church people and that they usually followed up and made contact if they initiated it. I asked if having children made it easier to make Australian friends and Theresa replied that the mothers at the playgroup were friendly and that she had made friends with a few of them, the children all going to each other’s birthday parties and having play dates. She said that language is the biggest barrier to making friends, and that living away from the Sudanese community, as she and her family do, encourages people to use English more, rather than only Arabic or their particular dialect. It would also help, she said, if people in
Australia realised that the Africans are friendly and that the language difficulties can be overcome.

Most people that cannot make friends, it’s because of the language. So when they say ‘hi,’ maybe you can come and talk to her. But she doesn’t know how to speak English and she is get shy. That’s why. But if you know a little bit English and you are friendly you can be able to make friends anywhere.

Kama is also of the opinion that English language competency makes it much easier to interact effectively in the broader community. She was schooled in English in Uganda and found that this made her transition to life in Australia much easier. When Kama arrived in Australia in 1994, there were relatively few Africans in Perth. Right from the beginning, it was the church community that made her and her family feel that they had an extended-family and a support structure to rely on. Most of the Australian friends Kama has made have been through the church and, later, through her children’s schools.

Leah entertains in her home occasionally, inviting some of her client/friends and cooking traditional food. She said that one lady in particular, a Zambian woman a little older than herself - her neighbour when she first arrived in Perth, had become her closest friend. They spend time together whenever they can, fitting meetings in around work and study commitments. She has, however, found it quite difficult to make friends with Australians, finding them reserved and difficult to understand and having to wrestle with differences in cultural understandings on an ongoing basis. Leah said that she does interact with many people from different cultural backgrounds,
including Australians, when she is at university, at her child’s primary
school, and at church.

I’ve made Australian friends… I’ve made Australian friends, but not many. I
find it a bit – I don’t know, should I say it’s hard to make friendships in
Australia? Because this thing they do, like when you meet somebody on the
way, then they’ll put on a smile. Then, when you turn back, the person doesn’t
look like they smiled to you before. So, I find it not real. So I feel
uncomfortable.

These differences in cultural understandings of what friendship and family
mean to people are sometimes clearer than at others, Kama told me. Using
Christmas celebrations as an example, Kama said that her Australian friends
arrange to spend time with her and her family before Christmas day, a
special get together outside of family.

Always when Aussies are arranging anything, family is family - should be
really a family, not outsiders. Even if we are really good friends, we are like
sisters, I’m not accepted there. If something is family, it’s family, and this is
something I have learned. If it’s a family gathering, I know I’m a friend, even if
I’m a sister to you, your brother or sister won’t accept me fully … so I have to
leave the distance.

Kama emphasised that this is something that new arrivals to Australia have
to learn and understand, that the social boundaries in Australian culture are
very different to those in African cultures. She said that because she
understands these things, she has not lost any friends that she has made here.
Understanding and complying with the social boundaries gives both her and
her Australian friends space in which to negotiate the relationship.
Kama added, however, that she has some African friends with and to whom she relates very differently. There are five families, she said, some from Uganda, some from Sudan, and they get together on special occasions to celebrate and have fun. Referring once again to Christmas, Kama said that the families take turns to host Christmas celebrations. They get together sometime beforehand to plan the event, each family contributing some money and deciding between them what they will do on the day and what food to prepare. They usually go to a park so that the children can to play, and there they relax and have a barbecue lunch before going back to the host’s house to socialise some more later on. These families have become Kama’s extended family, she told me; they have a common understanding of sociability, of family, and of friendship that makes interaction easy and uncomplicated.

Both Kama and Alice mentioned another very noticeable difference in the way that Australians and Africans view friendship. For Africans, when a friend loses a family member or loved one, it is a time to provide them with comfort and support in an ongoing way so that they know there is someone close at hand who cares about them. Kama elaborated: “For us, if my friend has lost somebody, I have to be there... even for three or four days. I have to comfort her because the pain you are taking is the pain I am taking. But it is totally different here.” African friends come together to support the bereaved person or family, spending time with them. Alice explained that friends and family all make a financial contribution, each according to what they can afford; this money is used by the bereaved to purchase food for people who attend the funeral and a number of visitors help to prepare and
serve the food. Kama said that she had observed that Australians, however, tend to ‘leave people to rest,’ and that grief is viewed as something private and very personal, not an arena that friends can readily step into. This lack of engagement, however, leads Africans to think that their new Australian friends are not fully committed to the relationship.

Based on comments from various participants, it is apparent that, for friendship to develop between Australians and Africans settling in Australia, an understanding of cultural differences and social boundaries needs to be established and incorporated. This takes time but, Kama assured me, is achievable. She said that she has gradually taught a few of her ‘Aussie friends’ about African hospitality and shared with them the idea that friends are automatically considered to be part of an extended family. Kama has one friend in particular with whom she has progressed to the point where they can just drop in on one another for extended periods or, as Kama puts it, “For a pot of tea, not just a cup.” A clear understanding of what friendship and hospitality mean to Africans finally came about when this friend arrived to visit at a mealtime and Kama invited her to join them. The lady demurred, saying that she had not been invited for a meal and did not want to intrude or inconvenience the family. Kama explained to her that this is what friends do in Africa – they drop in and they share a meal. “Back home we always cook with excess, so grab a plate!”

Paula, however, has not had very positive experiences in trying to make friends outside of the African community. Her experiences in the workplace, for example, have been quite negative, as the different cultures collided and
expectations weren’t met. She works in Aged Care and said that she used to get very distressed and depressed about the ways in which she interacted with her co-workers. They used to complain that she didn’t want to work as part of a team or pay attention to them, until she asked her supervisor to intercede and ask what they meant. The people concerned based their views on the fact that she did not make prolonged eye contact, not realising that in her culture one doesn’t look into people’s eyes continuously as it is considered rude. In order to allay her co-worker’s discomfort, Paula gradually changed the way she interacts with people from the broader community, making a point of establishing eye contact during interactions.

For the most part, however, she socialises within the African community groups where there is a shared appreciation of social practices and expectations. She has had a couple of white Australian friends, but has tended not to have much contact with them outside of work. “Like a friend I used to have before, we were so close at the working place, but we are not close when we leave the office because of the way she behaves – she smokes, she drinks and stuff like that.” Paula added that it takes time to settle into friendships in her new environment as she needs to feel comfortable with the person and their personal habits before moving forward with a relationship – she needs to know them.

I have to observe you, your behaviour, your appearance, your attitude, your way of approaching someone. I would study you first to see if you have all these qualities before I can approach you of having a friendship with you. I mean I can’t go up to someone and say I want to make a friend with you, but, through
your behaviour, it would make to get closer to you, more and more, so to be able to start communicating more and more and then perhaps start visiting.212

Faye commented that she feels she is sometimes out of step with the people from her home country, and yet not quite in step with the mainstream community. This, she said, was largely owing to cultural misunderstandings and assumptions – both of which play a big part in interactions with other people. Since 2001, Faye has become a key figure in the West African community and has also made numerous acquaintances in the broader Australian community. However, not many of her Australian acquaintances have progressed to friendship, although she has been very welcoming, has cooked for people and has tried to go out of her way to be approachable.

Faye noted that the nature of our emerging friendship has enabled her to discuss her views on family, settlement, and other associated issues with me – both from her academic and personal perspectives, sharing knowledge and building understanding. She said that I have come to fill the role of friend and mentor, and that she views me as a family member.

I reflect on the giggles and laughter and that made me feel good. It is pleasant having your relationship as a sister and a family relative.213 Your visits always reminds me of my cultural perspective, where relatives used to visit us with something in the hand to bring as a token of love and consideration. I am truly delighted seeing you… and relating latest developments.214

This outlook is consistent with my experiences of the African expression of friendship during this study, the intersection of family and friendship
emerging as a recurring theme. A third of the participants suggested that establishing common ground was a good starting point for getting to know new people and learning whether they could become close friends, be ‘like family.’ An understanding of one another’s culture and a familiarity with a shared language were also proposed as ways to facilitate this outcome. Most participants socialise largely within the African diaspora, often within their own ethnic community, but not exclusively so, possibly as a result of this need for shared cultural context. Shared understanding of a way of life, of difficulties faced and overcome, alongside the familiarity of language, is seen as easing and promoting interaction.

A few of the participants have, however, chosen to live outside of that social milieu in an active attempt to facilitate English language competency and their children’s integration into the broader community. Nevertheless, only fifty percent of the participants indicated that they had made friends within the broader Australian community, and these largely within church communities. Twenty five percent of the participants said that they had made friends with migrants from other parts of the world, coming into contact with them in migrant English classes at TAFE. Only two participants, Ghadir and Faye, said that they had established meaningful family-like relationships with Australians. Without exception, the participants all indicated that they were aware that building up new networks of friends and contacts would take time.

Current research into and debate around friendship and family in a Western context disputes the notion that friendship relationships are established and
maintained independently of any formal group-derived status or obligations. It suggests instead that families may now increasingly be seen to no longer necessarily be comprised wholly of kin - but rather of people who have strong emotional attachments to one another (Spencer & Pahl 2006; Allan 1998; Watters 2004). Rubin (1985, 15-18) notes that personal friends are increasingly frequently given honorary family status to signify the high level of closeness and commitment felt with and for the friend. Spencer and Pahl (2006) concur, adding that ‘friend’ and ‘family’ can no longer be considered to be mutually exclusive categories. African understandings of family, extended-family, neighbourhood relations and friendship do not fit neatly into a debate that frames this development as something moderately new. Study participants assured me that the practice of extended family-friendship networks is commonplace in the African context – that it is a way of life.

In discussions with Australian friends and colleagues, aimed at clarifying what is understood by ‘friend’ and ‘family’ in Australia, I found a relatively consistent belief that the blurring of friendship and family is a not a new development in western society either. People noted that, in their experience, it is not unusual for the lines that demarcate and differentiate friendship and family in western society to be flexible. They recalled being encouraged to call their parents’ friends auntie or uncle when they were children, and feeling that these close family friends were interchangeable with blood kin. Some commented that close friends often seem to provide a great deal of support and companionship at difficult times, often more than that provided by actual family members. This is a view supported by
research conducted by Spencer and Pahl (2006), which indicates such a blurring of family/friendship boundaries in western society. However, upon further discussion with this group, it transpired that the childhood recollections of friends-as-family in Australia seldom appeared to have translated into the visible dimensions of individuals’ adult lives. Although many people comment nostalgically on the idea of family and friendship being interchangeable, conventional family continues to remain very privileged in Australian society.

By comparison, in the African context, not only do children automatically call people aunt/uncle as a polite form of address, they readily make the transition from this quasi formality to actually considering adults other than their own parents to actively possess family-like positions. This might be explained by the combination of the cultural acceptance of group parenting, and the size of extended families / fictive kin groups. It may also be owing to the fact that both family and friends often fulfil many roles that are filled by more impersonal institutions, such as state services, childcare, and social security in Australia. The combination of cultural practices work to reinforce the understanding of friend-as-family, which translates readily into adult life - visibly and actively overlapping family and friendship, rather than nostalgically or wistfully.

It remains to be seen whether this aspect of African culture – the notion of friends and family being so readily interchangeable - will continue within the diaspora in Australia. Or whether, as Faye has suggested, the younger
generation of African migrants are gradually loosening those strong links to family and to Africa that their parents express so vividly.

195 Someone from their year-group, with whom they have grown up and who they regard as sister or brother in broad terms (Kenyatta 1961; Kayongo-Male & Onyango 1984; Cattell 1997), as discussed in Chapter Seven.

196 The refuge that provided Alice with assistance specialises in providing support for single women in crisis, often as a result of domestic violence. Because of the context, women using these services are not allowed visitors at the short term refuge accommodation and only limited visitors (no men or children) at the medium term accommodation. As most of Alice’s friends and contacts have children, but have no ready access to childcare, this meant that she had very few visitors during the seven months she lived in the refuge and felt increasingly isolated.

197 Bari

198 This notion of general reciprocity is not based in a conscious calculation or cost/benefit analysis in the friend/family relationship that Alice has with her aunt. Allan (1989, 20-22) suggests that in supportive relationships of this sort, reciprocity is not necessarily immediate, but achieves balance over time. The trust implicit in the sharing of information allows people to help one another, enhancing and reinforcing the relationship.

199 Sarah is another South Sudanese participant in this project.

200 This could be understood as what Cocking and Kennett (1998, 515-518) refer to as the secrets view of friendship, one that is based primarily on the sharing of intimacies and on the trust that this can engender.

201 Theresa and Alice are two of the other South Sudanese participants in this study.

202 Wardah has six children.

203 Faye is a member of the Liberian community in Perth and has been consulted in this project.

204 Wardah lost contact with her parents during the war, eventually finding out where they were years later with the help of friends in Nigeria, where they had found refuge; she is now in regular telephone and email contact with them.

205 Wardah’s parents.

206 Close physically, as in neighbours.

207 Leah’s family had been independently granted refugee status by the UN, relocated from a refugee camp and had been settled in Tasmania. She said that when she saw her family again after so long, having feared them lost to the war, it was like a dream.

208 Leah’s sister was approximately 17 years old and was enrolled in Year 11 at a senior campus when she moved to Perth.

209 As noted in Chapter Seven.

210 A Small Town Welcome (Doogue 2008) is discussed further in Chapter Nine.

211 Dorrigo is a small town in New South Wales, approximately 550 kilometres north of Sydney and 65 kilometres from the coastal town of Coffs Harbour.

212 This understanding of friendship - based on the good in the individual, mutual understanding, and the reciprocal goodwill of the participants – resonates with ancient western notions of friendship expressed by Plato and Aristotle. They espouse friendship as a positive core element of all human relations (Plato 1991, 16; Aristotle 1925, 1156b6-8), which is compatible with the notion of friend-as-family as expressed by Paula and other participants in this project.

213 From email received on 13/08/2007.

214 From email received on 22/10/2007


216 As discussed in Chapter Seven.

217 See Chapter Eight (II).
Part V: Discussion
Chapter Nine

Getting to Know You

In which we consider the insights provided by text and context that have allowed us to ‘get to know’ the lives and times of African humanitarian migrants in Australia.

Starting out as an exploration of supportive social relationships formed under difficult circumstances, this thesis turned into a journey with twelve women. Writing their stories of flight and settlement, coming to grips with wars in seven countries, and considering notions of self and culture – all of this and more overtook the original plan for the study. I set out to examine how effectively African humanitarian migrants establish supportive ties in Australia after resettlement. What emerged, as I spoke to the participants and discovered some of the things that are important to them, is an account of the life and times of these twelve African women. Incorporating aspects of the histories of the individuals and their countries, of African culture, and of social relationships, this thesis has journeyed through the participants’ lives and brought the details of their lived experience into focus for the reader.

As with other contemporary research into African refugee communities in Australia that tries to incorporate both theoretical and empirical research to provide insights into the lived experience of settlement,218 I found the process neither linear nor straightforward. There was continual movement backward and forward as I worked through texts to ensure that I had garnered adequate background information, held discussions with participants, attended meetings and community events, and back-tracked to
the texts to cross-reference details. It was an iterative process of information gathering, reflection, and gradual understanding.

Writing a conclusion that draws all the disparate threads of the thesis together presented a daunting task. The sheer volume of overlapping information, and the need to make it comprehensible to the reader, carries with it the ever-present concern that there is always something more that could be added – some point that could be clarified. However, as Cole and Knowles (2001, 212) note,

In research, as in life as in art, there is no possibility of completeness, certainty or closure. Representations of life, in research and in art, can only be partial.

I make no claim that the stories of the twelve participants in this study allow for any generalised positions regarding African humanitarian migrants in Australia. I have, however, focused attention on various aspects of their lives and times throughout the text in order to provide alternative ways of thinking about, and interacting with, this group. Martin (1986) suggests that narratives such as these, told from different points of view, enable the reader to re-evaluate the stories that form part of their own existing understanding of the world. The combination of ethnography, autoethnography and narrative provided a means by which I could articulate and present accessible accounts, both of a range of settlement experiences and of the process of acquiring and disseminating knowledge. Combining the stories that emerged out of the research with documentary data effectively allows for additional insights into the world of African humanitarian migrants. Together, however, these two sources of understanding emphasize the need
to pay close attention to detail in order to come to grips with the settlement experiences and expectations of this group in Australia.

The theme that holds the study together, however, and brings the thesis full circle, remains social interaction – specifically friendship: the value of friendship - the experience of friendship - and the need for friendship in settlement and social inclusion. As mentioned throughout the text, the participants in this study treated me as a friend, rather than as a researcher. Enacting friendship, observing it unfold in my engagement with the participants, particularly in relation to those with whom I had extended interaction, enhanced my understandings of how friendships emerge and are nurtured. I found that the process of being immersed in friendship formation, together with that of observing manifestations of friendship - within the diaspora and between members of the diaspora and the broader community, worked to expand these perceptions still further.

The participants’ stories clearly indicate that the lines between friendship and family are ‘fuzzy’ in Africa, and that this understanding has been carried forward into their new environment. The cultural expectations of supportive family-like behaviours from friends continue to frame new relationships in the diaspora. Most apparent from my discussions with members of the diaspora is that, overall, meaningful social relationships, whether framed as family-like or friend-like relationships, take time to develop. They start with some point of mutual understanding or shared interest, growing and expanding through sharing and active listening. This,
in turn, establishes the framework within which trust can develop and
individual relationships can flourish.

When I undertook this study, I assumed that friendship between members of
the diaspora might be more easily achieved than cross-cultural friendships
with members of the broader community. Although I understood friendship
to be the archetypal relationship of choice in Western society, this
understanding was ameliorated by the knowledge that friendship is
significantly affected by the social landscape in which individuals are
situated. I was aware that there is sometimes less freedom of choice in the
formation of social relationships than would appear to be the case, and
anticipated that social and practical constraints might limit opportunities for
African humanitarian migrants to get to know people outside the diaspora
and to establish friendships with them. In this I did not take into account the
involvement of church groups, community volunteers, support groups, or
researchers such as myself. Each of these groups has established bridges
between the diaspora and the broader community, which has facilitated
increased levels cross-cultural communication and relationship formation.

Further to this, whilst participants readily acknowledged that the existence
of shared cultural understandings and commonalities of experiences could
provide a starting point for friendship, many also noted that these same
elements could also carry with them pre-defined expectations that might
work to hamper such relationships. Leah, the young single-parent from DR
Congo, noted that her early years in Australia, during which she had little
engagement within the diaspora, allowed her to express other ways of
thinking and being. Although she missed the support of family and friends left behind in Africa, she acknowledged that the cultural expectations that are tied up in many of these relationships can be disempowering. Interacting with a broader community, she found that she was able to establish more clearly for herself what she required from friendship and family and felt empowered to make lifestyle choices predicated on her own preferences rather than those of others.

Kama, who misses so much about the way of life in Uganda and the closeness of family and neighbours, likewise provided keen insights into relationships within the diaspora. She explained that her teenage daughter had been critically ill a few years ago and was hospitalized for a lengthy period. As soon as news of the child’s condition became general knowledge, people from her ethnic community with whom she had little or no connection had descended on the hospital and on her home. In response, she prohibited most of these people from visiting the child, and enforced this preference with the hospital staff. Members of her community told her that her attitude was ‘un-African,’ and she found that the emotional pressure exerted on her to comply with cultural understandings of friendship and support was overwhelming. She said that community members showed little or no understanding of her personal situation, appearing more interested in satisfying their own need to be seen to provide support. But friendship, Kama noted, is not about whether one is from the same background or culture. Like Young (1997, 41), she frames meaningful relationships as embodying ethical care and moral respect, a reciprocal and ongoing acknowledgement of one another as other.
Friends are there for you no matter what, not just there in bad times, but in good times and in ordinary times. A friend is not someone who just visits when they think there is something interesting going on.\textsuperscript{222}

Kama chose to move in with an Australian friend, a member of her church, during this time, finding the level of attention from members of the diaspora, whom she seldom saw on other occasions, to be intrusive rather than supportive.

Kama, along with Ghadir, from East Africa, and Elizabeth and Faye, from West Africa, have commented that, as the African ethnic communities have grown, divisiveness has started to creep into interactions between people and groups within the diaspora. They noted that when the groups were relatively small and cohesive, interaction was generally openly supportive but that this appears to have changed somewhat over time. Political affiliations imported from various countries of origin have started to emerge, causing division within communities; in addition to this, they perceive that many people are becoming increasingly competitive with regards to social position and status. These changes present challenges and uncertainties for emerging relationships within the diaspora and, to some extent, facilitate the formation of friendships with members of the broader community. As Faye commented, “We just wanted to leave all that behind.”\textsuperscript{223}

Overall, the discussions on friendship reveal the value of social relationships in providing stability and support for humanitarian migrants. These relationships tend to work to enhance generalized well-being and promote
positive settlement outcomes. However, my attempts to convey these insights, to portray the fine detail of the particular and to meld it with the broad brush-strokes of the general, can only go so far. Words, as Charmaz and Mitchell (1997, 212) point out, mediate – they do not create, and may not tell the whole story. The participants’ words and mine together, however engaging, seem to fail to convey what is held in a look, an amused grin, a sigh, a gesture – all of which are intrinsically part of each individual and say so much about them. I find that words seem to fall short of capturing and conveying the richness of my impressions, the emotional intensity of the encounters, and have debated whether pictures or, indeed, film may have been a better medium for the thesis. Could pictures have filled the silences in representation in ways that words may not?

Actually seeing a picture of an individual appears to provide a wealth of information, not otherwise readily available. Referring to people who have experienced great hardship, Phil Collins sings that “from the lines on her face, you can see that she's been there” (Collins 1989), and it is with regret that I excluded the photographs I took of the participants in this study from this text. These photographs capture individual expressions of patience, experience, amusement, and interest. For the past three years, a collage of the photographs has been pinned up on the walls of my study. This has motivated me to continue - to think and to write about the women’s individual and shared experiences, to reflect on how their stories and their explanations of how they have coped with change and challenges has changed my outlook and my understanding of Africans, refugees and friendship. As Geertz (1986, 373) observes, one cannot live other people’s
lives, but one can try to make sense of the myriad of ways in which individuals tell us about those lives. Even when I did not see the participants regularly, their faces were in front of me on a daily basis. They focused my attention on the way each individual dresses, how they comport themselves, the stories they have told me, and how they interact with family/friends – and with me. All of this comes to mind when I see their pictures, and so much of it is lost to the reader as I fumble my way through trying to introduce these women and some small part of their experiences. Reading about war and loss of family and livelihood does not convey the intensity of the experience, reading about frustration regarding settlement issues likewise fails to fully convey the accompanying determination and pragmatism displayed by these physically expressive women.

Towards the end of my research programme, whilst considering the magnitude of the schism between what I wished to convey and what I might actually have achieved, I watched a documentary film about humanitarian migrant settlement in Australia. Documentaries such as *I’ll Call Australia Home* (SBS 2008) use visual images to take an audience to places and spaces not available in the texts I have explored, or in the one I have written. In many ways they encapsulate what I have tried to show in this thesis - the pragmatism and courage of the refugees, the complex settlement issues – including social isolation, inappropriate housing, confusion regarding social norms and practices, language difficulties, separation from family and known environments, and the paternalistic attitudes of the host society. They provide substantive insights into the experience of settlement, often seeming to work in parallel with my own thesis by giving form to much of
what I have observed, experienced and thought about over the past four years.

*I’ll Call Australia Home* (ibid) documents some aspects of the settlement experiences of humanitarian migrants in Australia, following the settlement journey of two refugee families, one from Burma, the other from Sudan, and provides viewers with insights into the difficulties and joys experienced by the families on this journey. We witness the conditions in the Mae La refugee camp on the Thai-Burmese border, where the Burmese family participating in the documentary lived for seventeen years after fleeing their homeland. This family is now newly settled in an outlying suburb of Melbourne, and the challenges facing them as they settle into life in suburban Australia are interposed with those of the Sudanese family, now living in Wagga, in New South Wales. Stoicism, humour, strength, family bonds and a willingness to adapt were all evident in both groups of people, the film portraying, as noted by Screen Australia (2008, 5), “the strength of family and the resilience of the human spirit.”

Pending their move to Australia, the Burmese family participated in the AUSCO programme in Mae La refugee camp. This documentary shows the bamboo and straw huts, the dirt tracks, and the rural lifestyle in this camp on the edge of the jungle in Thailand. It provides illuminating insights into one of the contexts in which information about Australia is delivered to humanitarian migrants prior to resettlement. Viewers see the adults in the group, Kaw La and Ma San Myint, attend a session where, with the aid of interpreters, the AUSCO instructor attempts to deliver information
regarding aspects of life in Australia. The process appeared stilted and, based on the limited footage in the film, seemed to provide little in the way of practical information regarding life in Australia.

Following the progress of this Burmese family of two adults and six children once they have arrived in Melbourne, the documentary goes on to show very clearly their confusion with language, with selecting and paying for groceries in supermarkets, and when accessing services at places like banks and Centrelink. Similarly, a number of the participants in my study commented at various times on their own difficulties with these aspects of early settlement; they too had little or no English on arrival, had to select groceries based on the pictures on the packaging of items, and found the use of cash cards, automatic tellers and personal identification numbers at banks to be highly daunting. Conquering the various aspects of the new environment was, they said, a case of trial and error, and required a period of on-going assistance and support from community workers and/or friends.

*I’ll Call Australia Home* also highlights the fact that humanitarian migrants often have large families, and that this often results in them being housed in relatively isolated outer suburbs, where accommodation is deemed both large enough and affordable (Screen Australia 2008, 7). This Burmese family is one such case; coming from an environment where they have lived in close proximity with 45,000 other refugees (SBS 2008), they find themselves alone in a large house with a concreted backyard in outer Melbourne. Away from the hustle and bustle of all that they are accustomed to, they face ‘suburban silence’ and isolation, and a two kilometre walk
along busy roads each day in order to get their school-age children to and from school. The distress that the mother, Ma San Myint, shows at things ranging from traffic noise to missing her sister left behind in Thailand demonstrates aspects of the culture-shock that families experience on settlement. Her reactions brought to mind stories told to me by Ghadir and Kama, which likewise indicated high levels of disorientation on the part of humanitarian migrants in the early stages of settlement. This generalised disorientation also speaks to the comments made by Ghadir relating to inadequacies of the AUSCO orientation programmes delivered offshore, highlighting the fact that such programmes do not necessarily offset the confusion experienced by humanitarian migrants on arrival to any significant extent.

Because my thesis has focused on African settlement, the stories that portrayed the lives of the Sudanese family in *I’ll Call Australia Home* caught and held my attention. Constance Okot and her family had made their way to Kenya during the war and had lived there in Kakuma refugee camp for six years. Constance’s brother, Phillip, and his wife, Betty Ochieng, had fled south to Uganda, where they lived in a refugee camp for ten years. The experiences that they related appeared, at least superficially, to be very similar to some of the stories I had heard from Africans during my research, and the individual Sudanese women in the documentary reminded me strongly of my study. The way they expressed themselves, physically and verbally, called to mind the many conversations I had with participants, and the relationships I had formed with them. It also made me
realise yet again just how much of our interaction and their stories I may not have managed to portray effectively.

As in Chapter Three of this thesis, the documentary draws attention to evidence of racism within the community. It makes a clear link between the statements made in 2007 by the (then) Minister for Immigration, Kevin Andrews, regarding the inability of African humanitarian migrants to integrate effectively into the community, and subsequent racially biased behaviour in Wagga. Following Andrews’ statements, the 300-strong Sudanese community in Wagga received hate mail and racial abuse, causing high levels of stress and concern in that community. As a counterpoint to this, *I’ll Call Australia Home* also provides insights into community solidarity with, and support for, the Africans in the Wagga community.

It shows a large community meeting at which it was unanimously agreed to form an association to promote understanding between Australians and Africans. Members of the Sudanese community interviewed after the meeting commented on the outcomes, saying that the meeting had given them strength and that “at least today, we go out fresh, knowing that there are people out there who think differently. Not everybody thinks the same” (SBS 2008). Constance Okot, a key figure in the Sudanese family in the documentary, was resettled in Wagga four years ago and said that the community meeting reaffirmed her view that the Sudanese migrants could make a new life in Wagga.

For me, the meeting shows we… shows that we are really having a lot of support in this community and proves that we are integrating. And we have
everything; all the ingredients which the Minister wants – we have here in Wagga (Constance Okot, SBS 2008).

Like all the participants in my study, Constance explained that she did not leave Sudan or settle in Australia by choice. “I didn’t decide to come. But the war made me to come.” She emphasises how little choice there is for people in times of war, recounting how the soldiers came to her village with guns and bombs early one morning, and how people ran for their lives. Her story is supplemented and given depth by archive news footage of similar attacks in Sudan. As in so many other stories I have heard over the past three years, she tells how families were separated and large numbers of people were killed, many shot in the back as they scattered - falling face down in the village, on the road, in the fields. As she fled the village in the ensuing chaos, Constance had scooped up her six month old niece, Lily, and taken her with her. Believing her brother and sister-in-law to have died in the attack on the village, Constance made her way to Kenya with her husband and three children - taking baby Lily with her and raising her as her own child.

This story reminds me very strongly of the stories told to me by Kama and Juliana, each of whom also adopted a dead relative’s child during the war in their respective countries and told me that this was common practise in such circumstances. They each raised the child as their own, and brought them to Australia when they were granted settlement. However, neither Kama nor Juliana experienced the combined joy and complication of the child’s parents being relocated and subsequently reunited with their child some
years later. Constance was overjoyed to discover that her brother and his
family were in Uganda, and sponsored their settlement to Australia four
years after her own settlement, some ten years after they had all fled Sudan.

The two families lived together in Wagga until suitable accommodation was
found for the new arrivals, and Constance draws attention to yet another
cultural difference when relating this part of her story. She notes that
Australians find it difficult to understand how two large families can live
together in one relatively small house for months on end. “We are 17 in the
house and people say ‘How can you live? 17 people in the house!’ But for
us, we were comfortable. We were very happy to be together.” These
statements held echoes of conversations I had with the participants in my
study, many of whom have had similar experiences of living in extended
family situations at various times after arrival in Australia and talked about
the comfort and support that these arrangements provide. Some of the
study participants also mentioned to me at various times that members of
the broader community had commented with surprise on their ability and
willingness to live in close proximity, and share their homes, with an
assortment of friends or relatives whenever necessary.

Later in the documentary, Constance’s brother observed that he and his wife
were very happy to find out that their daughter was alive, as they had held a
funeral for her many years before in Uganda. His words are so simple, and
yet his facial expressions, and those of his wife, when speaking of this
separation and reunification indicate very clearly how affected they have
been by these events, and by eleven year old Lily’s reluctance to go and live
with them when they moved into their own house. Like Kama and Juliana’s adoptive daughters, Lily had always believed her aunt to be her mother, and her cousins to be her natural siblings. This causes her birthmother, Betty, a great deal of distress.

She thinks I am a stranger... It seems life is difficult. Lily is my child so I need her to live with me so she knows I’m her mother. Lily thinks she’s being deceived because she’s a child. She’s used to Constance, but she knows I’m her mother (Betty Ochieng, SBS 2008).

Constance explains to Betty that it will take time for Lily to get to know her biological parents and for her to get used to the idea of leaving what she considers to be her home and family.

However, as mentioned in the chapter on African diaspora, relationships and culture, traditional African notions of child rearing tend to be somewhat more authoritarian than those practised in Australia. Betty therefore tries to insist that Lily should come with her, saying that it will only get harder as she got older and less malleable. Constance, having been in Australia for four years by the time these events took place, is able to point out the difference in attitudes to children here and in Africa. “If it is in Africa, you can force. But here in Australia the child has rights, you can’t force.” This sharing of knowledge, explaining how things are done in Australia, worked to ease the situation, and supports Ghadir’s suggestion that a period of communal living can work to assist with cultural understanding.

Watching *I’ll Call Australia Home* (SBS 2008) and seeing so many of the points I have articulated in this thesis captured visually, brought to mind a
documentary screened earlier in the year. This production, called *A Small Town Welcome* (Doogue 2008), also works to bring African humanitarian migrants and their situations to life for an audience in ways particular to visual mediums, calling attention to similarity and difference and the ways in which these can be mobilised to develop cross-cultural relationships. It focuses the public gaze on various aspects of the lived experiences of refugee settlement, highlighting the paternalistic attitudes that appear to permeate the host society.

Like Constance and her family in the previous documentary, the Sudanese family in *A Small Town Welcome* arrived in Australia from Kakuma refugee camp. Granted resettlement in Australia after eight years in Kakuma, Martin Majur Majak, his wife Martha Makur, and their six children were sponsored by the Sanctuary Refugee Foundation and settled in Dorrigo, a small country town in New South Wales. The kindness and generosity of the people in Dorrigo was plainly evident in this documentary. Members of the community had invited this refugee family from Sudan to come and live in the town and appeared to be making a concerted effort to assist them, succeeding initially in making the family feel safe and welcome. However, the documentary also calls attention to interference from community members. It was evident from the film that the Dorrigo community had a very limited understanding of African cultural norms and lifestyle when they embarked on their quest to bring a family of Sudanese refugees to live in their town. Rather like the community helper in Vana’s story, they then tried to shape the family to fit in with their personal understandings of ‘the Australian way of life.’
According to Helen Proud, who was instrumental in arranging for the family to settle in Dorrigo, Martin, Martha, and their six children needed a great deal of help when they first arrived in Dorrigo.

They needed us to help them in everything. How to do the washing, how to pack the sandwiches for school, and how to cook meals. They’d never had money before. And we had to explain everything, how the system worked (Helen Proud, in Doogue 2008).

Although this family of eight had had a life in Sudan prior to the war, and had then survived war, flight, and eight gruelling years in Kakuma refugee camp, this did not appear to be relevant when their ‘helpers’ assessed their life skills. There appeared to be no consideration given to the fact that, although using various electrical household appliances and packing Australian style school lunches may have been outside of the experience of this Sudanese family, they possessed a range of life skills that had brought them to Dorrigo in the first place. This is consistent with observations made by my study participants in Chapter Six, where they note that there appears to be a tendency for members of the host population to assume that limited education and a rural lifestyle equates to a lack of life skills on the part of humanitarian migrants. As with Australian-born Nancy, in Vana’s story, members of the Dorrigo community appeared to view the Sudanese family as children in need of guidance, displays of benevolence and beneficence loosely masking arrogance based in ignorance.

*A Small Town Welcome* emphasizes this point, whether intentionally or otherwise. It shows community members’ ongoing attempts to try to modify aspects of the family’s daily life, despite the family showing no desire for
their continued close involvement. Approximately two years after their arrival in Dorrigo, Martha had taken on a job picking blueberries to augment the family’s income. This job took her away from her family for six days of each week, and many of the daily household duties had been taken on by her children. As mentioned in Chapter Seven, African men traditionally have little involvement in household chores and it is the norm in Africa for girls to take on indoor chores and boys those outdoors from about the age of seven. The family would therefore have thought little of this, accepting that Martha was working for the good of the family and simply accommodating the change of circumstances. On Sundays, her one day off a week, Martha made the two and a half hour journey back to Dorrigo to spend time with her husband and children, to make arrangements for the week ahead, and to attend church. Displaying a marked lack of cultural sensitivity, Dorrigo community members unilaterally arranged a Sunday meeting to talk about how best to modify the family’s housekeeping arrangements. They wanted to discuss what they considered to be the disproportionate household workload that had fallen to the eldest daughter in the family, who was at that time twelve years old.

So, you know, a lot of us are feeling that this is a little bit too much for this girl as she takes on more and more responsibility for the family. I think some of the Sudanese aspects of gender will have to go (Helen Proud, in Doogue 2008).

However, in Sudanese culture, and in African culture more broadly, change is not imposed in this way by elders or community members. Change is achieved through mediation, through participation and discussion. My discussions with Alice regarding her problematic relationship with her
husband introduced me to notions of culturally appropriate community mediation and intervention in the early stages of my research. She explained to me how members of her Sudanese community discussed the couple’s marital issues with her and with her husband, together and separately, and then stepped back to allow them to resolve the issues for themselves. Likewise, Elizabeth and Faye have both mentioned that they are often called upon as leaders in the West African community to mediate and advise in family matters, and Ghadir has, on occasion, done so for families from the Horn of Africa communities. All interventions of this sort are collaborative, however, and intervention by culturally naïve individuals tends not to be well received.

In A Small Town Welcome, the Sudanese family give every indication that they do not intend to participate in the community meeting that has been arranged to discuss their home circumstances. Nevertheless, when they do not arrive at the meeting, the organising committee is clearly surprised and disappointed. The documentary captures their unwillingness to accept that their high level of involvement in the family’s day-to-day life is no longer required. This unwillingness is very evident as the group proceeds with the meeting despite the absence of the main protagonists, embarking on discussions as to how they might change the African family’s understanding of gender-specific household chores. Watching this documentary, I once again found the similarities to Vana’s story inescapable. Like Vana’s helper, members of the Dorrigo group acknowledged that they derived a great of satisfaction from helping ‘their’ refugee family. They, too, were
finding it difficult to pull back and allow the family to cope on their own.

As one member of the Dorrigo community noted,

Yes, it’s hard for us to let go because we love them and we want the very best for them, just like any parents in a way. But we’re not parents, we are friends, we can’t run their lives forever (Doogue 2008).

Some understanding of these complex interactions, and of the wealth of detail that surround them, is available in documentaries such as I’ll Call Australia Home and A Small Town Welcome. A great deal of information can be derived from watching – and re-watching – such accounts. However, as Scholes (1980, 20) points out, all narration involves a selection of what events will be told. One can often also learn a great deal from what is left out of the documentaries, from the silences that emerge when they fall short of following up or addressing significant points, or where compromises may have been made to balance information with audience appeal. Films, like photographs, can capture and portray ‘a thousand words visually in one frame, providing viewers with faces, expressions, and scenery in ways that text-based accounts like this thesis do not. However, the thousand words each frame provides selectively portrays only part of the whole. The stories are edited down to what is considered to be an acceptable viewing length, often dependant upon funding and budgetary constraints, perceptions of public interest, and having to compete with the entertainment available on commercial television.

All of these factors influence what documentaries are made, what content is retained, and what goes to air for public viewing. Thus, documentary films
of this sort on their own may be no more adequate in providing a comprehensive understanding of African humanitarian migrants and their settlement than a text-based account might be. Each provides an incomplete narrative, a partial view of the whole. Together, however, they can provide a rich and detailed understanding of a complex subject area – a thousand ‘visual words’ augmented by books, journal articles, and statistics to provide a more holistic view of the issue/s.

Similarly, this thesis has provided discrete, yet interconnected, mini documentaries and stories that address the lack of knowledge on specifics of the refugee experience. It, too, provides only a partial understanding of the subject matter, following an agenda prescribed by its academic context and research constraints. Getting to know individual African humanitarian migrants, visiting their homes, meeting their families and friends, likewise constrained the outcomes of the study. Identities needed to be masked, and confidences shared in friendship had to be respected. My personal journey as researcher, sociologist, and South African / Australian has become intertwined with those of the participants. Even those women with whom I spent relatively little time have made a significant impact on my understanding of self and of other, of culture, constraints, friendship and camaraderie.

The glimmers of insight that I have gained are made accessible to the reader, creating a space in which to consider - rather than assume - things about humanitarian migrants and about Africans. The nature of this thesis, the way it has described social interaction, allowed the women’s voices to be heard
and supplied documentary detail to augment and be augmented by the stories, has worked to provide an interactive journey into their world. Whilst not visual, this account nevertheless conjures up images, creating impressions that enhance the reading and learning experience. As a method of delivering information and explaining the relevance of that information, it is appropriate to the subject matter and to the people and cultures that it attempts to portray. The key point that this method has revealed is that, no matter how much one learns about others, such knowledge is always and inevitably partial. As Young (1997) elucidates, it is not possible to fully 'know' or comprehend the experiences of another; assuming that one may be able to do so merely serves to further limit such understanding as can be achieved. Young suggests that by accepting this inherent asymmetry in relationships, and by working from an assumed position of not knowing, a great deal can be learned. It is an approach that can, potentially, encourage people to be more attentive to the detail of another’s experiences. This, in turn, can result in one moving closer to gaining insights into lives of others - despite not having experienced these things personally.

Getting to Know You has traversed the fields of sociology, anthropology, cultural studies, psychology, and history, has listened to and reflected upon stories of flight and settlement, and has used a variety of methodologies to relate the complexity of the world into which I have delved. During the course of my research it has become abundantly clear to me that there will always be at least some aspects of my participants’ experiences and ideas that I will not understand, and that I will therefore be unable to relate or convey such understandings to others. To have learned so very clearly that
there are things I can never know, experiences that are incommensurate with
the reality in which I operate on a day-to-day basis, solidifies my view that
humanitarian settlement should be approached with care and respect, that
engagement needs to be more inclusive of the needs and desires of refugees.

Ultimately, this thesis serves to provide an enhanced understanding of the
life and times of African humanitarian migrants, particularly those living in
Australia. It has extended my ‘psychic map’ (Montello 1997, 189-90) such
that it now incorporates other ways of seeing the world. *Getting to Know
You* has uncovered a wide range of information about Africa, African
people, and African culture. It presents this information in such a way that it
remains with the reader not as twelve individual stories of the participants in
the study, or as a global historical understanding of the wars in seven
African countries, but as a range of transformative memories and altered
understandings of the subject matter. Neither the stories nor the global
context, whether or not they are augmented by images, could have achieved
this *gestalt* independently of each other. The combination, however,
augments an understanding of the trauma and difficulty associated with
leaving one’s home and the social networks that provide ongoing support. It
also underscores that the journey from African refugee to African-
Australian is not undertaken by choice. Without exception, the participants
in this study noted that, had war not come to their country, they would never
have left. However, as many of the stories coming out of African
communities in Australia emphasize, most African humanitarian migrants
are very willing to try to adapt and change to fit into their new environment.
This thesis has shown some of the reasons why it takes time to be ‘at home’
in Australia, and leaves one with the feeling that one did indeed ‘get to know’ something about the world of Africans humanitarian migrants in this country.

218 See Westoby, 2008.
219 As discussed in Chapters Two and Eight.
221 As expounded by sociologists such as Simmel (1971), Allan (1979; 1989), Pahl (2000), and Bell and Coleman (1999), the social, institutional and ideological constraints that form this social landscape include class, occupation, age, geography, domestic and economic circumstances, and gender.
222 In this, Kama’s view of friendship is also in keeping with the Aristotelian notion that true friendship is based on mutual caring – each of the other for their own sake, rather than as an expression of utility or self-interest (Aristotle 1925:1156b6-10).
223 This consistent with observations by Summerfield, (2000, 420), who suggests that some refugee / asylum-seeker families are wary of forming relationships in situations where political affiliations from the home country may be reproduced within the diaspora.
224 Nine of twelve participants agreed willingly to have their photographs taken, on the understanding that the images would be for me to refer to and not for publication. The participants were shown the (digital) photographs as soon as they were taken in order to ensure that they were comfortable with the image that was captured. The participants from Somalia and Eritrea declined to have their photographs taken, citing reasons of religion and culture, and no opportunity arose for a photograph to be taken of the Burundian participant.
225 The (ethnic Karen) Burmese family comprises Kaw La (father), Ma San Myint (mother), and six children ranging in age from seventeen years to seven months old.
226 The Sudanese family has two components: the Okot family and the Ochieng family. The Okot family comprises Will (father), Constance (mother), six children between nineteen and four years of age, and Constance’s eleven year old niece, Lilly. The Ochieng family comprises Constance’s brother, Phillip Odo (father), Betty Ochieng (mother), and five children between the ages eight and two.
227 Half of this Sudanese family was resident in a refugee camp in northern Kenya prior to their arrival in Australia, the other half in a refugee camp in Uganda.
228 Wagga Wagga – commonly known as Wagga, is an inland regional city in New South Wales; it is situated midway between Melbourne and Sydney – approximately 450 kilometres from each.
229 The Australian Cultural Orientation Programme delivered offshore to refugee/humanitarian migrants preparing to settle in Australia, as outlined in Chapter Five.
230 Chapter Five (I).
231 Chapter Six.
232 Chapter Five (I).
233 Paula, from Sierra Leone, for example, who has sponsored several of her siblings’ settlement in Perth, and Theresa, who currently has two of her brothers-in-law living with her family and has regularly had other family members and quasi family members stay with them for varying lengths of time.
234 Chapter Seven.
235 Betty gradually accepted that it might be better for Lily to stay with Constance and to get to know her birthparents slowly, as Constance had suggested, until they are able to communicate with her effectively in English. Lily is very articulate in English and appeared well integrated at school and at home with her Aunt Constance and quasi-siblings. Although not clearly stated by her mother, it is reasonable to assume from the discussion that Lily does not speak either Arabic or the Sudanese dialect of her parents.
236 Chapter Five (II).
237 As mentioned in Chapter Eight (II).
238 For information on the work that Sanctuary does, see http://sanctuaryrefugeefoundation.org/
The population of Dorrigo is approximately 1,000 people (Dorrigo Community 2008). See also Chapter Eight, footnote 213.

Malkki notes that the specificity of the life experience and history of refugees is frequently discounted as “unknowable, irrelevant, unconfirmed, unusable” (Malkki 1995a, 296), resulting in a tendency to assume that all refugees possess a “common condition or nature” (Malkki 1995b). Refugees thus come to be considered part of a generalized category of traumatized individuals requiring medical intervention or assistance, potentially limiting opportunities for social integration and meaningful participation in host countries (Summerfield 2000, 422).

Elders and community leaders.

The phrase ‘a picture is worth a thousand words’ has its antecedents in advertising, the phrases “One Look is Worth a Thousand Words” and “One Picture is Worth Ten Thousand Words” appearing in a trade journal in 1921 and 1927 respectively (Rees 2004, 538).
Appendices
Appendix 1: Flyer

Would you like to tell your story?

My name is Nicky. I would like to talk with and get to know women from Africa who have arrived in Perth as refugees, to hear about your experiences settling in Australia.

If you are:
* Female
* From Africa
* Arrived as a refugee
* Want to talk

Please contact me. We can have coffee and a chat.

Contact Nicky: Mobile: 0421551983 / Email nikmacd@gmail.com

These stories are being gathered as part of a research project into kinship and friendship in African communities in Perth, supported by Murdoch University. Further details are available on request.
Appendix 2: Consent Form

Project title:
African Women in Australia – the journey from refugee to African-Australian

I am a PhD student at Murdoch University investigating the experiences of friendship and kinship building in newly emerged African communities in Perth, under the supervision of Dr Peta Bowden and Professor Patricia Harris. The purpose of this study is to gather information on the formation and re-formation of social bonds within these communities and the level of support and stability these bonds provide for refugees settling in Australia.

You can help in this study by consenting to take part in an interview, which should be completed in approximately 2 hours. In this interview you will be asked to relate your experiences settling and making friends in Australia.

A few people will be asked to participate in a second stage of the project, which will involve spending part of a day (5 – 6 hours) with the researcher to provide an understanding of their everyday lives and to talk about culture and settlement.

Please be assured that only myself and my supervisors, Dr Bowden and Professor Harris, will have access to this information. Your participation is purely voluntary and you can stop the interview at any time or refuse to reply to a particular question.

An executive summary of the findings of the research will be generated as part of the thesis production. This will be forwarded to you as soon as it is completed.

If you are willing to participate in this study, please complete the details below.

If you have any questions about this project please feel free to contact either myself, Nicky MacDougall, on 0421551983/9360-6702 or my supervisors Dr Peta Bowden (9360 6328) or Professor Patricia Harris (9360 2252).

My supervisors and I are happy to discuss with you any concerns you may have on how this study has been conducted, or alternatively you can contact Murdoch University’s Human Research Ethics Committee on 9360 6677.
I, _______________________________________, have read the information above. Any questions I have asked have been answered to my satisfaction. I agree to participate in this interview, but realise that I can withdraw my consent or stop at any time.

I am / am not willing to participate in the second stage of this project, if requested to.

I understand that all information provided is treated as confidential and will not be released by the interviewer unless required to do so by law.

I agree for this interview to be recorded.

I agree that the research data gathered for this study may be published provided that my name or other identifying information is not used.

……………………………   ……………………………
Participant      Date
……………………………   ……………………………
Researcher      Date

246 Consent form (2 pages) for parts 1 and 2 of the project entitled *African Women in Australia – the journey from refugee to African-Australian*
Appendix 3: Guide to Interview 1

Task 1: Introductions and Explanations
- Recap the background to the study, including my interest and involvement, as explained at initial meeting. Once again verbally assure participants of the confidentiality and anonymity of the study.
- Remind participants that the session will be recorded and that I will also be taking some notes during the session.
- Assure participants that they can terminate the interview at any time and that they can choose not to answer any question.
- Encourage participants to ask for a question to be rephrased/re-iterated if they are unsure of the meaning.

Task 2: The Interview and Possible Questions
Start with the first guiding question and try to guide the discussion to cover as many of the areas listed in each section as possible.

2.1 The background circumstances of the participant.
- Please tell me your story before you came to Australia - about yourself and your family, where you’re from and why you left - how old you are, if you are married, if you have children, - where you were born and grew up <country of origin> - your family – is it big or small, how many sisters and brothers
- Where were you before you came to Australia <refugee camp/other?>
- Did you grow up there
- How long were you there for
- In <country of origin> did you live in a village/town/city
- What is the name of that <village/town/city> and how big is it
- Who did you live with there
- What was your main reason for your decision to leave <country of origin>
- Do you still have family back in Africa: who and where
- When did you see them last
- Do you miss <country of origin>
- What do you miss about it
- Would you go like to go back; if so – what prevents you

2.2 The current day-to-day social interaction of the participant
Settlement expectations
- When did you arrive in Australia
- Who came with you
- Are you here on a refugee visa / special humanitarian programme visa (sponsored)
- What did you expect Australia to be like
- Has it turned out to be what you expected
• Could you speak much English when you came to Australia
• Do you have any family in Australia

Social interaction I
• How many people live with you here, now
• Who are they
• Tell me about an average day for you – what sort of things do you do
• When you are here – at home - where do you spend most of your time
• How many people do you come into contact with / speak with on such a day
• Is this the same as if you were in <country of origin>
• Do you know your neighbours
• Do you go out to work / school / college
• Do you belong to any community groups / church groups
• How often do you see the same people
• Are they mostly from <country of origin> or Australians

Social interaction II
• What sort of food do you make – Australian food / traditional <country of origin> food
• Where do you get/buy ingredients to make traditional foods – who told you where you could find these things
• How many people do you usually prepare food for
• Do you have people to your home to visit you
• Do they stay and share meals with you
• Do you eat out much – at other people’s houses or other places

2.3 The current friendship / fictive kin circumstances of the participant
• In <your country of origin>, who was your closest family member – the person you felt closest to
• Did they come to Australia with you
• If not, who stands / performs in their place in Australia
• Who can you leave your children with if you need to go to the doctor or other appointments
• If you have problems – things you want to talk about – who would you have talked to about them in <country of origin>
• Who can you talk to about such things now
• Who do you spend special days – like Christmas or birthdays – with, here in Australia
• What makes it possible for you to make new friends here
• Is this a rapid process or does it take time; why

Task 3: Ending the Interview
• Ask participant if there is anything else she would like to add to / elaborate on regarding what she has told me.
• Ask participant if there is anything they want to ask me.
• Request feedback from the participant as to how they found the interview.

247 Comprehensive discussion regarding the study was undertaken at the initial meeting with each prospective participant, and signed consent for participation in the study and permission to tape interviews was received from the participants at this time.
TIMELINE OF EVENTS: SUDAN

1956: Independence
1969: Coup & civil war
1972: Truce
1983: War
1985: Coup
1994: Kano arrives in Perth

~1970: Kama to Uganda
~1970: Alice flees to Juba, then Khartoum
~1983: Alice arrives in Perth
2001: Alice travels to Cairo
2003: Alice arrives in Perth
2005: Peace agreement
2007: Civil war continues

TIMELINE OF EVENTS: ERITREA

1952: Federal relationship between Eritrea and Ethiopia established by UN
1961: Eritrea claimed as province of Ethiopia

1961: Guerrilla warfare ensues
1991: Ethiopian forces quashed
1993: Referendum and Independence

~1947: Ghadir to Sudan
~1975: Ghadir to Cairo
~1985: Ghadir returns to refugee camp in Sudan
1992: Ghadir arrives in Perth
2000: Theresa to South Africa
2004: Theresa arrives in Perth
TIMELINE OF EVENTS: SOMALIA


TIMELINE OF EVENTS: CONGO


TIMELINE OF EVENTS: BURUNDI


2001 Marcy goes to South Africa 2004 Marcy arrives in Perth
TIMELINE OF EVENTS: LIBERIA

1979
Riots

1980
Coup
(DoE)

1989
Attempted
coup

1990-93
Taylor's
forces enter
Liberia from
Guinea

1990-93
90% of
country under
rebel control,
ECOMOG forces
arrive

1991
Disarmament
agreement

1992

1993
Jubula flees to Guinea
Elizabeth flees to Nigeria
Faye flees to Guinea

1994
30% of
country engaged
in fighting

1995
August
Ceasefire

1996
Mid 1997
Elections

May 2003
Peace agreement,
transitional
government,
ECOMOG forces
arrive

August 2003
Elections,
reforms
introduced

November
2005

TIMELINE OF EVENTS: SIERRA LEONE

1961
Independence

1967
Two coups,
Civil unrest

1992
Coup
(Shiebe)

1991-95
RUF
campaign of
violence and
terror continues

1995
Late 1995
Coup
(Bio)

1996
Elections,
Peace
accord between RUF
and government

1997
Mid 1997
Coup
(Koroma)

1998
ECOMOG
forces arrive

Dec 1999
UN troops
arrive,
disarmament
commences

2002
Elections

2005
UN troops
leave

1997 Paolo
flees to Nigeria

2001 Paolo
arrives in
Perth
Appendix 5: Tables

Table 5.1 (United Nations data sourced from UNHCR 2005b; UNHCR 2007c).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>UNHCR statistics</th>
<th>Statistics from other sources</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Africa – Refugee Population</td>
<td>World – refugee population</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1995</td>
<td>5,972,881</td>
<td>14,896,087</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1996</td>
<td>4,361,232</td>
<td>13,357,087</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1998</td>
<td>3,345,407</td>
<td>11,480,860</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2000</td>
<td>3,627,130</td>
<td>12,129,572</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2004</td>
<td>3,022,606</td>
<td>9,574,840</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2005</td>
<td>2,767,575</td>
<td>8,661,994 - a drop of 9.53% from 2004</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Appendix 6: Africa Map

(University of Texas, 2007).
### Appendix 7: Glossary of acronyms and abbreviations

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Acronym</th>
<th>Full Form</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ABS</td>
<td>Australian Bureau of Statistics</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ADFL</td>
<td>Alliance of Democratic Forces for the Liberation of Congo-Zaïre</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AFL</td>
<td>Armed Forces of Liberia</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AI</td>
<td>Amnesty International</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AMEP</td>
<td>Australian Migrant English Programme</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AMES</td>
<td>Adult Migrant English Service</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>APC</td>
<td>All Peoples Congress &lt;Sierra Leone&gt;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ASeTTS</td>
<td>Association for Services to Torture and Trauma Survivors.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AUSCO</td>
<td>The Australian Cultural Orientation Programme</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CENTRELINK</td>
<td>The Australian Commonwealth Service Delivery Agency (CDSA) is known as Centrelink and is responsible for the delivery of a range of government and community services on behalf of Commonwealth.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DEST</td>
<td>Department of Education, Science and Training.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DIAC</td>
<td>Department of Immigration and Citizenship</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DIMIA</td>
<td>Department of Immigration and Multicultural and Indigenous Affairs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DRC</td>
<td>Democratic Republic of Congo</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ECOWAS</td>
<td>Economic Community of West African States</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ECOMOG</td>
<td>Economic Community of West African States Cease-Fire Monitoring Group</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ELF</td>
<td>Eritrean Liberation Front</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EPLF</td>
<td>Eritrean People’s Liberation Front</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ESL</td>
<td>English as a second language</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EXCOM</td>
<td>Executive Committee of the High Commissioner’s Programme</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Acronym</td>
<td>Description</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---------</td>
<td>-------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GBV</td>
<td>Gender based violence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HRW</td>
<td>Human Rights Watch</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IDP</td>
<td>Internally Displaced Person</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IHSS</td>
<td>Integrated Humanitarian Settlement Strategy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>INPFL</td>
<td>Independent National Patriotic Front of Liberia</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IRO</td>
<td>International Refugee Organisation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LOTE</td>
<td>Languages other than English</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MRC</td>
<td>Migrant Resource Centre</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NPFL</td>
<td>National Patriotic Front of Liberia</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NPRC</td>
<td>National Provisional Ruling Council (of Sierra Leone)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PTSD</td>
<td>Post Traumatic Stress Disorder</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RUF / SL</td>
<td>Revolutionary United Front of Sierra Leone</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SAC</td>
<td>Special Assistance Category</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SMC</td>
<td>Standing Mediation Committee (of ECOWAS)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SBS</td>
<td>Special Broadcasting Service</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SHP</td>
<td>Special Humanitarian Programme</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SLPP</td>
<td>Sierra Leone People's Party</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TAFE</td>
<td>Technical and Further Education (TAFE) – technical colleges that offer vocationally oriented courses specifically geared towards young people preparing for their first job, mature age people looking to train or retrain, people preparing for university studies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UNDOC</td>
<td>United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UNFPA</td>
<td>United Nations Population Fund</td>
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<tr>
<td>UNHCHR</td>
<td>United Nations Office of the High Commission for Human Rights</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UNHCR</td>
<td>United Nations High Commission for Refugees</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UNSTATS</td>
<td>United Nations Statistics Division.</td>
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