

**Negotiating the Rapids: Transitional Moments of the Filipino  
and Karen Diasporas in Regional Victoria, Australia**

**Cesar Escobido**

**Submitted in total fulfilment of the requirements  
of the degree of Doctor of Philosophy**

**December, 2015**

**College of Arts  
Victoria University, Melbourne**

## **Abstract**

The established Filipino and the newly emerging Karen/Karenni communities, although satisfied with their immigration journey, perceive forms and processes of closure in the socio-economic and cultural spheres of the Australian society. The resettlement of hundreds of Karen/Karennis into the regional City of Geelong, Victoria, coincides with rapid socio-economic changes and wide-ranging ramifications due to globalisation. Forms and processes of social closure coupled with the local resistance to the processes of globalisation are deployed by those who control, maintain, and dispense forms of power by ensuring that these 'Third World-looking' immigrants do not pose a threat to the competition of scarce desirable opportunities in the labour market.

In what could be considered times of turbulence and uncertainties, this study examines the lived experiences of the established Filipino and the newly emerging Karen/Karenni communities in the Geelong region. It addresses issues of difference hounding members of these diasporic communities, their engagement with access and equity, and relative positioning within the social inclusion/exclusion arena. By employing the Weberian theory of social closure in exploring the lived settlement and resettlement experiences of two immigrant communities, I aim to investigate the contemporary situation of members of these communities in regards to their positioning in the labour market relative to their qualifications and social capital, and the way they are included and excluded in many spheres of the mainstream of the host society.

This study has adopted an interpretivist/constructionist paradigmatic positioning employing narrative research as the overarching qualitative methodological framework. While also employing ethnographic methodology, this thesis has drawn heavily on a series of in-depth interviews with thirteen Filipinos and fifteen Karen/Karenni participants as the main method used in gathering data. Following an interpretivist ethnographic design framework, this study has also employed participant observation to facilitate triangulation and enhance the validity and trustworthiness of data. This holistic paradigm illuminates interpretations of the participants' lived experiences with reflexivity as an important aspect of the co-construction of meaning.

In exploring the lived experiences of members of the established Filipino community, who are mostly university-qualified professionals, this study reveal that the host society fails to maximise the human capital of its immigrants, by imposing systemic barriers that discourage these qualified immigrants from exploring and practicing their profession. As a consequence, they are relegated into inferior sorts of activities in the diaspora and totally abandon their profession and waste their human potential.

This study uncovered the disturbing reality that the constructed sense of difference based on ethnicity, 'race', accent and physical appearance has, in many ways, becomes a barrier to fully negotiate and participate in the mainstream of the host society, regardless of length of residence and educational background. I argue that an individual who aspires to a position but has different cultural stylistics from those who organise, maintain, and regulate forms of power and dominance, whether in the labour market or in any social

setting, is likely to be relegated to an inferior position than those aspiring individuals who possess the same social and cultural attributes of the power holders.

## Declaration

I, Cesar Escobido, declare that the PhD thesis entitled, *Negotiating the Rapids: Transitional Moments of the Filipino and Karen Diasporas in Regional Victoria, Australia*, is no more than 100,000 words in length including quotes and exclusive of tables, figures, appendices, bibliography, references and footnotes. This thesis contains no material that has been submitted previously, in whole or in part, for the award of any other academic degree or diploma. Except where otherwise indicated, this thesis is my own work.

.....

**Cesar Escobido**

**03 December 2015**

## Acknowledgements

My PhD candidature was supported by an Australian Postgraduate Award (APA) scholarship. I am grateful to Professor Michael Hamel-Green and Dr. Heather Wallace for their support of my PhD scholarship application.

I am extremely thankful to my principal supervisor, Dr. Leslie Terry, for his unwavering trust and support, encouragement, invaluable advice and guidance, unfathomable patience and superb wisdom from beginning to end of the research journey. His charisma, proven dedication and constant inspiration helped me navigate the preparation and submission of the PhD scholarship application, the development and presentation of the dissertation proposal, the submission of ethics application, the brainstorming and discussion of chapter drafts, and the submission of the final thesis.

It is an honour to work with Professor Anthony Love with his eagerness to perform the duty as my principal supervisor in the last year of my candidature. His excellent guidance and timely advice on the dynamics of thesis examination and classification processes are phenomenal.

I am also thankful to my associate supervisor, Dr. Nicole Oke and writing mentors and educators, Dr. Pauline O'Maley and Dr. Janis Webb for their academic writing advice, proofreading and insights on the structure of my thesis drafts.

I would especially like to thank, Professor Ron Adams, for the wonderful sharing, demystifying, deep reflections and thoughtful teachings during the conduct of *Demystifying the Thesis* thesis-writing workshop and during the *Writing Retreat: Performing the Word*

at Queenscliff, Victoria. Likewise, I would like to thank Associate Professor Jim Sillitoe for his series of research training-workshops that introduced and equipped me with the basic tools in surviving the doctoral studies.

My greatest debt of gratitude goes to the Filipino and Karen/Karenni research participants for opening their doors and hearts and for allowing me to enter into their world of experience. Their invaluable support, sharing of stories of lived experiences, thoughts and feelings paved the way for a deeper understanding of their situation. It is hoped that this thesis reflects and embodies their stories of an almost forgotten past, present dilemmas and future dreams and aspirations.

Finally, I would like to thank my wife, Ritzchi Ann, and our two sons, Clyde and Darren, for their endless emotional, physical, psychological and moral support, encouragement and boundless faith in me. They have been my constant companion and source of inspiration through the ups and downs, the twist and turns, and during the challenging and happy moments of this research journey.

**In memory of my beloved mother:**

**Colita Aban Escobido**



## Table of Contents

<b>Abstract .....</b>	<b>i</b>
<b>Declaration .....</b>	<b>iv</b>
<b>Acknowledgements .....</b>	<b>v</b>
<b>List of Figures .....</b>	<b>xii</b>
<b>Acronyms .....</b>	<b>xiii</b>
<b>Glossary .....</b>	<b>xiv</b>
<b>CHAPTER ONE: Introduction .....</b>	<b>1</b>
Contextualising the Social Closure Theory .....	3
Negotiating Identities in the Diaspora .....	6
Grounding the Background of the Study .....	14
Locating the ‘Translated’ Researcher .....	19
Overview of the Focal Communities .....	27
Mapping the Thesis .....	32
Identifying the Research Questions .....	34
Synthesising the Thesis .....	35
<b>CHAPTER TWO: Imagining Identities and Inclusiveness in the Globalised Diaspora .....</b>	<b>41</b>
Understanding Contemporary Migration .....	43

Revisiting the Policy of Multiculturalism .....	49
Interpreting Social Inclusion/Exclusion .....	52
Incorporating ‘Visible’ Immigrants .....	59
Absorbing the Impacts of Globalisation .....	65
Necessitating Social Capital in the ‘Age of Uncertainty’ .....	69
Studies of Filipino Diaspora .....	76
Studies of Karen Diaspora .....	78
Streamlining the Research .....	79
<b>CHAPTER THREE: Empowering the ‘Voices’ in a Cross-cultural, Reflexive, Narrative/Ethnographic Research .....</b>	<b>82</b>
Meaning Making in Narratives .....	84
Following the Principles of Cross-cultural Studies .....	86
Adopting the Principle of Reflexivity .....	91
The Research Participants .....	93
Negotiating the Complexities of the ‘Insider/Outsider’ Dualism .....	96
Empowering the Voice of the ‘Voiceless’ .....	99
Selecting the Participants in the Study .....	103
Navigating the Initial Stages of Fieldwork .....	105
Modes of Gathering and Analysing the Data .....	108
a. Interviewing the ‘Voiceless’ .....	110

b. Discussing Themes in Focus Groups .....	114
c. Participant Observation .....	117
<b>CHAPTER FOUR: Transitional Moments: Articulating Homes in the Diaspora .....</b>	<b>122</b>
Framing the Study Milieu .....	124
Performing Identities in the Host Society .....	127
Articulating the Notion of ‘Home’ .....	133
Defining the Reception of the Locals .....	149
<b>CHAPTER FIVE: Negotiating Institutional and Transnational Arrangements .....</b>	<b>163</b>
Drawing Support from Families and Friends .....	164
Accessing Social Services: The Experience of Ambivalence .....	175
The Imaginings of Inclusion/Exclusion .....	189
Empowering the Voices: The <i>Kae Htoe Boe</i> Festival .....	194
Maintaining Transnational Identities .....	198
<b>CHAPTER SIX: Participating in Productive Life: Social Closure in the World of Work .....</b>	<b>209</b>
Contextualising Closure Theory in the Labour Market .....	210
Perceiving Racism and Discrimination in the Workplace .....	215
Searching for Paid Work .....	219

Navigating Workplace Interrelationships .....	230
The Primacy of Racial and Ethnic Identity in the Workplace .....	238
Comparing Two Different Worlds .....	243
<b>CHAPTER SEVEN: Taking Chances: The Uncertainty of the Future .....</b>	<b>251</b>
Aspiring for Quality Education .....	253
Confronting Health Issues .....	265
Outlining Recommendations with Policy Implications .....	267
Reconfiguring the Social Closure Theory .....	275
<b>References .....</b>	<b>283</b>
<b>Appendices .....</b>	<b>302</b>

## **List of Figures**

Figure 1 – Map of Victoria, Australia ..... xv

Figure 2 – Map of Geelong, Victoria ..... xvi

## Acronyms

ABS	Australian Bureau of Statistics
CALD	Culturally and Linguistically Diverse
CES	Commonwealth Employment Services
CGTM	Constructivist Grounded Theory Methodology
DIBP	Department of Immigration and Border Protection
FGD	Focus Group Discussion
FSCGI	Filipino Social Club of Geelong, Inc.
GP	General Practitioner
HREOC	Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission
HSS	Humanitarian Settlement Services
MACS	Multicultural Aged Care Services
MUD	Moral Underclass Discourse
NESB	Non-English Speaking Background
RA	Research Assistant
RED	Redistributionist Discourse
SGP	Settlement Grants Program
SID	Social Integrationist Discourse
TNCs	Transnational Corporations
UNHCR	United Nations Higher Commissioner for Refugees
UWS	University of Western Sydney
VU	Victoria University

## Glossary

Terms (Tagalog)	Meaning
<i>Ate</i>	Older sister
<i>Balikbayan</i>	Returned Filipino immigrant
<i>Kuya</i>	Older brother

Terms (Karen/Karenni)	Meaning
<i>Kae Htoe Boe</i>	Pole of a wealthy nation
<i>Kyat</i>	Currency of Burma







Figure 2: Map of Geelong, Victoria

(Source: <http://www.weather-forecast.com/locations/Geelong>)

# CHAPTER ONE

## Introduction

*To be 'empowered' means to be able to make choices and act effectively on the choices made, and that in turn signifies the capacity to influence the range of available choices and the social settings in which choices are made and pursued.*

*(Bauman 2005: 124)*

Members of diasporic communities in western societies are still dealing, not only with the pain of being separated from loved ones, but also with the everyday reality of exclusionary closures in many aspects of life's chances in host lands. Despite the equal opportunity policies espoused by countries built on immigration such as Australia, 'many members of diasporic minority groups still struggle for recognition and inclusion' (Georgiou 2006: 3; see also Levitas 1998; Carter 2003; Ratcliffe 2004). Profound racism and discrimination against members of ethnic minority groups is still an everyday reality in many host countries, such as Australia (Castles 1996; Burnley 1999; Hage 2000; Castles & Davidson 2000; Tan 2006; Forrest & Dunn 2007; Castles & Miller 2009; Lobo 2010; University of Western Sydney 2011). However, there are some members of ethnic minority groups who have become successful in their integration project and are now living their 'dream' as members of established communities. Such success can be attributed to the presence of opportunities and multicultural policies, active engagement with appropriate, responsive and progressive organisations, and immigrants' ability to accept and abide by

the status quo. Integration success of immigrants could mean securing meaningful work for a stable income, owning a comfortable home, driving a safe car, sending children to university, having health care, and having enough savings to cater for the needs of the future. Some members of the established Filipino community are able to attain these integration success indicators despite undergoing forms and processes of social closure. The Filipinos and Karen/Karennis<sup>1</sup>, chosen in this study because of their distinct racial and ethnic differences from the dominant group, reveal forms of closure as they imagine and articulate their sense of home, engage with social institutions, and participate in the world of work. Though closures in everyday life are inevitable, many of them feel relieved living in Australia, especially when comparing life situations between countries of origin versus actual homes in the diaspora.

The regional City of Geelong, once considered the industrial hub of Victoria in the 1970s and 1980s, was selected as the study milieu, not only because of its rapid economic changes and wide-ranging ramifications due to globalisation, but also its recent engagement with the state project on resettling hundreds of refugees and asylum seekers into the region. According to Castles (1996), the globalised world has brought with it rising levels of joblessness in the developed world as its major industries have relocated to developing countries because of its cheap labour cost. This state of workplace insecurity, in turn, has created a hostile environment for immigrants and minorities who were blamed

---

<sup>1</sup>Most of the Karen and Karenni participants indicated that they belong to the same larger ethnic group called Karen, which is why the title of the thesis outlines only the Karen. However, some of the participants want to be identified as Karenni as being distinct from Karen. In order to present and empower the voices of both the Karens and Karennis, I chose to write Karen/Karennis to represent these former refugees who originally came from Burma all throughout the thesis.

by the marginalised members of the majority as the cause of their own fate (Castles 1996; see also Castles & Davidson 2000; Castles & Miller 2009).

Echoing the voices of ethnic minority groups sometimes perceived as ‘inferior’, this study comes at a time when the issue of legality and morality surrounding the asylum seekers arriving by ‘unseaworthy boats’ is a hot and divisive topic in Australian social and political circles. In trying to extend and apply Max Weber’s theory on social closure as a conceptual tool, I argue that although social closure can be deployed to explain the labour market segregation of the Filipino and Karen/Karenni research participants into inferior employment positions, the complexity and fluidity of their everyday lived experiences cannot be explained by this theory. As there are diasporic spaces and times where closure is nonexistent, this thesis deploys the interweaving concepts such as the notions of identity, migration, globalisation, social capital, multicultural policies, and transnational ideals to gain a holistic view of the situation of the communities under investigation. Many of the study participants were relieved, satisfied and grateful to be calling Australia home, especially when comparing lived experiences in transnational spaces of original versus host societies. In comparing lived experiences of original versus host societies, closure becomes incomplete, while in other circumstances, its forms and processes are still perceived as real and become barriers to meaningful participation to many spheres of life in the diaspora.

### **Contextualising the Social Closure Theory**

The life journeys of ethnic minority communities in Western societies are marked by subtle exclusions from employment and other socio-economic spheres in spite of the equal opportunity policies and rhetoric espoused by the dominant group (Carter 2003: 15).

In the same token, Carter (2003: 177) surmises that only a handful of studies have been conducted focusing on the application of the Weberian notion of social closure as a conceptual tool that examines the implicit and explicit barriers to meaningful participation of ethnic minority groups in the mainstream of the host society. Working as an academic during the time when Germany underwent massive expansion of its economic and political power in the early twentieth century, Weber used the term ‘closure’ as reference to,

... the process of subordination whereby one group monopolizes advantages by closing off opportunities to another group of outsiders beneath it which it defines as inferior and ineligible. Any convenient, visible characteristic, such as race, language, social origin, religion or lack of a particular school diploma, can be used to declare competitors to be outsiders (Murphy 1988: 8).

During those times of Germany’s domination of central Europe and the proliferation of capitalism, ‘Weber suggested that people form themselves into status groups to protect their privileges’ (Allen 2004: 86). The formation of such groups enables the performance of cultural exchanges among their members. Collins (1979: 58-9) calls these groups *consciousness communities* ‘since their distinguishing feature is the expression of utterances in shared symbols’ which leads to the establishment of strong bonds with tight-knit friends because of a common culture. Members of the status communities are engaged into closed relationships which make possible the ‘exercise of social closure in order to maintain their cultural exclusiveness, whereby the benefits of membership of the bloc are reinforced and reproduced’ (Holton & Turner 1989: 146).

In the contemporary context, social closure can be understood as those mechanisms and strategies employed by the dominant group to effect closure of social and economic

opportunities to outsiders. According to Carter (2003: 65) social closure operates on the notion of difference where social markers such as gender, ethnicity, age, skin colour, language and culture are social constructions used to identify outsiders. He argues that powerful social groups employ strategies of social closure, such as credentialism, sponsorship and patronage, and the use of informal networks to exclude ethnic minorities from exclusive spheres and strata of employment (see also Parkin 1974; Murphy 1988; Witz 1992). Following the works of Carter (2003), this thesis applies the Weberian theory of social closure in a qualitative research project to explain the lived experiences of two immigrant communities in a regional setting. Rather than devote a whole chapter of the thesis for a critical analysis of the social closure theory, I have chosen to apply the theory as a conceptual lens in expounding the argument of each chapter. At the core of this thesis is the notion of social exclusion and inclusion, and the deployment of this theory is influenced by the works of Max Weber who coined the notion of exclusion. It is assumed that the social closure theory can shed light on some of the issues facing the communities under study, especially on the preponderance of credentialism as the primary mode and mechanism of closure in contemporary societies.

Credentialism, says Carter (2003: 66), is a strategy of social closure which imposes educational requirements upon candidates before they can be considered for certain jobs. Many desirable professions, seemingly exclusive domains of white labour, become restricted and closed when overseas-qualified immigrants are asked to do a refresher course in their field before they could apply for professional positions in Australia. Having seen no cohorts working in a desirable profession, such as in the education and training sector,

coupled with the immediate need to send money back home to families in countries of origin, many education-qualified immigrants are discouraged from doing further studies. As a result, many of these professionals are relegated and confined to work in an occupational ghetto for Third-World looking immigrants – in an undesirable manual job in factories mostly abandoned by local Australians because of poor pay and abhorrent working conditions with minimal chance of upward mobility (Carter 2003: 85; see also Castles & Davidson 2000). Studies have shown that such social closure strategies are still deeply entrenched in Western societies despite much publicised racial equality policies and rhetoric (Carter 2003). While acknowledging the significance of social closure in explaining the labour market segregation of research participants into inferior positions, the multifaceted nature of settlement and resettlement experiences demand that I also explore other interweaving concepts to gain a holistic picture of the situation of the two communities under investigation. One of these concepts is the negotiation of identities in the diasporic space that seem to become heightened occurrences at times of societal transformations brought about by the movement of people.

### **Negotiating Identities in the Diaspora**

Human society in the ‘modern era was a time of great migration’ (Bauman 2004: 37; see also Papastergiades 2000). This constant movement creates cultural intermingling and many continuous displacements occur. It brings forth enforced diaspora which is a negotiated space where many ‘cultural identities undergo constant transformation’ (Hall 1994: 394). For Hall, enforced diasporas are dispersed peoples compelled to move across continents because of the experiences of colonisation and slavery, and they form identities

in ways they are positioned by, and position themselves, within the narratives of the past. The Filipino and Karen/Karenni communities can be considered as enforced diasporas because of their experiences of colonisation. Furthermore, this ‘age of migration’, a time when the ‘global movement of people in the modern world predominates, has rapidly transformed the lives of mankind and its consequences far exceeded earlier predictions’ (Papastergiadis 2000: 2; see also Castles & Miller 2009).

One of the consequences of this movement of people is the formation of diasporas in almost every country of the world, and the preponderance of contemporary realities of living with difference and cultural diversity in these modern times. This movement brings with it a ‘new world in which diaspora is the order of things and settled ways of life are increasingly hard to find’ (Appadurai 1996: 172). The term ‘diaspora’ is taken from the Greek word *speiro* (to sow) and the preposition *dia* (over) and signified particular meanings to a particular diaspora formation (Cohen 1997: ix). Diaspora formations occur when global flows of labour intensify and when voluntary migrations in search of economic opportunities proliferate to combat global inequalities. Diasporas also form as a consequence of major crises which may involve coercion, catastrophe, expulsion or other forcible movement involving conflict or persecution or they may occur from a combination of compulsion and choice (Van Hear 2010: 34-5). Such forcible movement signifies a collective trauma; banishment, where one dreams of home but lives in exile (Cohen 1997: ix). As a result, the increasingly ‘mobile’ diasporas has created significant transformation of the diaspora space, relational positionalities along with the emergence of diasporic



communities in host lands. These communities, in turn, develop transnational and cultural identities as they, by choice or otherwise, become ethnic minority groups in host societies.

Hall (1994: 393-4) posits underlying notions that define cultural identity in regard to the negotiation of space and positionalities in the host society, as he describes diasporic communities as those groups sharing common codes of meaning, values, languages and expectations as well as a sense of being and becoming, undergo constant transformation, subject to the continuous ‘play’ of history, culture and power. In discussing the idea of power dimensions in the relational navigation and positioning at the point of contact in host lands, Brah (1996: 182) emphasises that diasporic groups are ‘situated in and through a wide variety of discourses, economic processes, state policies and institutional practices’. This relational navigation and positioning at the point of contact defines:

the regimes of power which operate to differentiate one group from another; to represent them as similar or different; to include or exclude them from constructions of the “nation” and the body politic; and which inscribe them as juridical, political and psychic objects (Brah 1996: 183).

This deployment of power in segregating groups can be attributed to Weber (1978: 926), in which he defines “power” as ‘the chance of a man or a number of men to realize their own will in a social action even against the resistance of others who are participating in the action’ (cited in Murphy<sup>2</sup> 1988: 132). For nearly a century, Anglo Australians have

---

<sup>2</sup> In this dissertation, most of the interpretation of Max Weber’s work on power, domination and closure draw primarily on the scholarly work of neo-Weberian Raymond Murphy. According to Scott & Marshall (2009: 89), *Oxford Dictionary of Sociology*, Raymond Murphy’s *Social Closure: The Theory of Monopolization and Exclusion* puts forward the best overall assessment of closure theory.

established and exercised power to exclude people who were ethnically, linguistically and racially different from the dominant group, through the process of constraining the arrival and movement of immigrants of 'colour' from Africa, Asia and the Pacific. This exercise of power has trickled down to almost all aspects, facets and dynamics of contemporary social, political, cultural, and economic spheres of Australian society resulting in the constitution of rationalised and legitimised forms of exclusion of the 'Other'. For instance, the formal educational credentials and work experiences of immigrants acquired from a country not sharing the same cultural stylistics and attributes of the host society, such as Australia, are deemed 'inferior' and in need of upgrading. Many of these credentials are ineffective for accreditation with the relevant organisations or associations which control and monopolise their memberships, opportunities and rewards. This can be exemplified further by an overseas qualified teacher who wants to teach in a government school in Victoria. She needs to apply for registration with the Victorian Institute of Teaching in which she is required to have her qualification assessed, needs to pass the English language test, and complies with many other requirements and standards (VIT 2014). In this case, the sphere of influence which underpins membership to a strong and powerful network that lead to desirable opportunities and rewards, become off-limits to those considered outsiders. It appears that exclusion on the basis of formal educational credentials are now rationalised and legitimated. For instance, in a qualitative study involving skilled migrants, recruiters, and placement officers, it is found that systemic barriers to the recognition of qualifications, skills and experience impinge upon the skilled migrants' ability to secure professional positions in the Australian labour market (Wagner & Childs 2006). However, elements of other social markers on the basis of race, ethnicity, language, gender, or

religion can also be a significant factor in the power play of these exclusionary closures (Murphy 1988: 179; see also Witz 1992; Carter 2003).

The power of the dominant group to impose and rationalise linguistic requirements for participation even into entry-level jobs becomes synonymous with restricting the racially and linguistically distinct groups, such as the Karen/Karenni community from meaningful integration into the host society. For instance, during my time working in the meat industry, (I will expound later in this chapter how I ended up working in the abattoir), I invited a Karen friend to apply as a labourer in the abattoir. The human resource manager later on informed me that his job application was turned down because of his lack of ‘functional’ English. Murphy (1988: 183) contends that in a society where the Anglophones dominate and weave power, ‘someone without the skill of understanding and communicating in English cannot function’. He posits that one needs to share the same premises and the status culture with those who wield power to become functional in a community or organisation. However, most first generation Karen/Karennis believe that even with the mandatory attendance of 500-800 hours in formal English language classes, it is still apparent that such a linguistic undertaking of being ‘functional’ will constitute a lifetime project to implement. Moreover, there is a general sentiment amongst the Karen/Karenni research participants that factors, such as long periods of disruption in schooling at both the original and transitional homes during decades of displacement, as well as age and traumatic experiences, play significant roles on the Karen/Karennis’ difficulty to learn the English language. Nevertheless, in an effort to navigate such linguistic functionalities in the diaspora, some members of the Karen/Karenni community

rely on its interpreting and translation needs from co-ethnics who share similarities with what Murphy calls ‘status culture of those who control the context of power’ (1988: 183).

This power play can also be manifested in the local identity movement in host societies of today’s globalised world. The ramifications of globalisation and economic restructuring have clearly impacted the very social and economic make-up of immigration societies. If local workers, who lose their jobs in the process, and ‘find their social security and environment declining, they can blame the alien influences that are undermining the nation: hating immigrants helps to maintain an illusion of national unity and pride. Racism becomes a form of ‘identity movement’ (Castles & Davidson 2000: 145). This might lead to the ‘strengthening of local identities’ within the dominant group who ‘feel threatened by the presence of other cultures’, which is a strong reaction to the vagaries of globalisation (Hall 1992: 308).

Through the exercise of such power in a plural society, members of the dominant group can both explicitly and implicitly express their ambivalent sentiments towards other different groups. In suggesting that a nationalist paranoia exist in the Australian social and political landscape, Hage (2003) points out that although members of other different groups can be racist, it is the ‘saliency of the macro Australian public/national space that remains a space where Whiteness gives one more power to discriminate’ against ‘Others’ on the basis of race, class, religion, ethnicity and gender. In other words, ‘White racism is deeply entrenched in the very make-up of Australian institutions’ (Hage 2003: 118).

So deeply entrenched is racial discrimination in Australia that, according to a study by Colic-Peisker & Tilbury (2006), institutional discrimination such as the lack of qualification recognition and barriers erected by trade and professional associations, and everyday racism such as prejudicial behaviours of employers that keep certain marked groups out of the mainstream labour market which ensures that undesirable job vacancies are filled, have preserved and reinforced labour market segmentation and creating employment niches for refugees in Australia.

The findings of this research and its subsequent analysis showed that the labour market segmentation happening in contemporary Australian society has reproduced the effects of the *assimilationist* policies that were implemented in the 1940s and 1950s. This segmentation resembles a time when refugees, including those with university qualifications, were allocated jobs that the locals refused to take, such as cleaning jobs and aged care, as well as employment in abattoirs, poultry plants and farm work in regional areas. These jobs, which refer to as ‘3-D jobs’, that is, ‘dirty, difficult and dangerous’, have persisted as the major form of employment for immigrants in receiving countries, such as Australia (Castles & Davidson 2000: 186).

It is widely accepted that participation in the labour market, especially those jobs that are commensurate to workers’ skills and abilities, increases their social and economic capital and empowerment, and defines the parameter in which an immigrant is seen to be included and fully participated in the mainstream of society. For instance, Bloch (2004: 8) pointed out that being employed ‘increases both economic and social integration and, for refugees, offers the opportunity to gain self-esteem, to facilitate new social contacts and to

learn or improve English language skills'. However, Migliorino (2012: 1) reports that many immigrants cannot get a job pertinent to their skills because Australian employers do not recognise the skills immigrants accumulated overseas. Some of these immigrants 'even feel compelled to change their names just so they can be granted job interviews in equal measure to their Anglo-Australian counterparts' (2012: 1).

According to Collins (1996: 90), the danger lies in the 'conscious or unconscious racism and prejudice' among gatekeepers of public and private corporations that 'create negative stereotypes of a job applicant of Non-English Speaking Background (NESB)'. For Collins, the gatekeepers' recognition of an accent from the NESB applicant will mark one as a potential cost despite the NESB applicant possessing above average skills, suitable qualification, and excellent employability. The gatekeepers often use 'intimidation as part of omni-revised strategies of power exerted in the production and legitimation of knowledge' (Min-ha 1991: 20). NESB applicants do not possess the 'acceptability criteria' and this manifests in the way that discriminatory selection decisions are justified on the basis that ethnic minority candidates will not 'fit in' with existing workers (Carter 2003: 66-7). In addition, the suitability to the job or the capability to perform the task at hand is equally significant with 'acceptability' which 'relates to whether or not the job candidate will integrate smoothly into the managerial procedures and social routines of the workplace' (Jenkins & Parker 1987: 66). In this process of alienation, there is still a pervasive persistence of the 'migrant metaphor' that 'cultural and political identity is constructed through a process of *othering*' (Bhabha 1990: 219). Hence, in today's modern era, the 'power hierarchy is daily restaged where the inferior people are asked to take a seat and

keep waiting' (Bauman 2004: 104) until the desirable, skilled and acceptable people are selected for the job.

Central to the discussion of diasporas and the contemporary 'outcomes of migration such as the integration, assimilation, segregation or exclusion of people of migrant background and the changes in society that may result' (Van Hear 2010: 34), is the key question Vertovec (2007: 1045-7) posits, what are these new patterns of inequality and prejudice, new patterns of segregation, housing experiences and residential opportunities, new patterns of space and contact? I add subsequent questions in regards to these new patterns of inequality and prejudice such as, how are the disadvantaged ethnic minority groups addressing each dimension of these new patterns which impact on their way of life? How does the notion of social closure play a central role in the apparent marginalisation of ethnic minority groups despite the egalitarian policy and equal opportunity rhetoric espoused by the powerful dominant group?

### **Grounding the Background of the Study**

The Labor Government of Australia, shortly after winning office in 2007, puts forward a social policy alternative with the implementation of the *Social Inclusion Agenda* to address the paradoxically heightened social disadvantage currently experienced by vulnerable and marginalised citizens amidst Australia's economic prosperity (Vinson 2007). The notion of social inclusion as a government policy framework was 'first adopted and developed by the Government of South Australia in 2002' and was designed to provide opportunities for social and economic participation, especially for the most disadvantaged citizens of the state (Nelms & Tsingas 2010: 7; see also Hayes et al. 2008). The Australian

Labor Government officially implemented and made the *Social Inclusion Agenda* a major priority, with the ‘aim of alleviating poverty, welfare dependency and homelessness’ (Tascon 2008) amongst the marginalised sections of society. However, it remains to be seen whether the benefits arising from the implementation of this agenda actually trickle down to the disadvantaged communities, particularly in relation to the meaningful participation of marginalised diasporic communities. The resumption to power of the Liberal Coalition Party, after winning the 2013 Federal Election, saw the abandonment of the *Social Inclusion Agenda* in a bid to save government funds; while others presented an ideological view of this abandonment by arguing that the notion of social inclusion lacked meaningful substance (Boese & Phillips 2011; see also Dunlevy & Puddy 2012). Nevertheless, regardless of the policy orientation of the government, it is still of paramount importance to explore the situation of the diasporic communities in a regional setting of the host society.

Two of these seemingly marginalised diasporic communities that have settled/resettled in host societies, such as Australia, are the Filipino and Karen/Karenni communities. Waves of Asian migration into Australia proliferated decades after the government abolished the White Australia Policy in the 1970s (Castles & Miller 2009). In the contemporary Australian context, the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) reports in the 2011 census that 33% of the overseas-born populations in Australia are Asians and that they accounted for a 9% rise since 2001 (ABS 2012). The Philippines ranks fourth among top Asian countries of emigration with 171,233 Filipinos now calling Australia home, while there are 21,760 Burma-born immigrants. However, the 2011 census also reports that



only 18% of overseas-born people live outside the capital cities of Australia (ABS 2013). For instance, the Geelong region, which lies 75 kilometres south-west of Melbourne, the capital of the state of Victoria, only accounts for 857 Filipinos (ABS 2006) and 500 Karen/Karennis (Diversitat 2013). As a result, it appears that the inclusion/exclusion in the mainstream of this small, overseas-born, minority ethnic group settling/resettling in non-traditional destinations, as well as ‘several aspects of immigrant experiences remain understudied in these regionally-focused studies’ (Lusis & Bauder 2008: 2). It is acknowledged that ‘the adjustment of new migrants in regional communities and of the communities to the migrant is a topic of needed research’ (Hugo 2008: 568-9). For Hugo, ‘the bulk of our understanding of immigrant settlement in and adjustment to Australia is based on metropolitan-based research, and there is an urgent need to better understand regional migration and settlement processes and impacts’. Boese (2014), however, points out that there is now an increase in studies of settlement experiences of immigrants in regional areas because of the favourable Australian immigration program resettling immigrants in non-metropolitan areas in recent years. This thesis tries to add to the body of literature on immigrant groups’ lived experiences in regional areas, particularly in regards to the settlement/resettlement issues of diasporic communities, issues of diaspora and identity in unfolding debates surrounding social inclusion/exclusion. Despite more than four decades of Filipino migration to Australia, as well as the Karen/Karennis recent resettlement, very little research has focused on the situation of these communities particularly in the context of access and equity, issues of difference, and social inclusion/exclusion in regional settings.

When my family and I first arrived in the Geelong region in 2008, the Filipino community in the area welcomed and treated us like family members of a close-knit community by organising a traditional welcome dinner party. An immediate feeling of belonging engulfed us as we entered ‘the place of many, continuous displacements’ (Hall 1994: 401) as if we were the community’s long lost relatives. Since then, I have become acquainted with the way of life of the Filipino diasporic community in the Geelong region. As I attend the Filipinos’ many community meetings, birthday celebrations, and other occasions, I continually develop a self-conscious understanding of each community member’s ‘history in person’ (Smith 2010). Most of the Filipinos obtained university degrees in the Philippines but were unable to find jobs in Australia that are commensurate to these qualifications partly because of institutional restrictions biased against those whose educational attainments remain unrecognised.

Meanwhile, my close encounter with the Karen/Karenni people in the Geelong region began when a member of my family introduced me to some of her Karen/Karenni friends. They were classmates at Diversitat studying a six-month course on Certificate III in Aged Care in mid-2008. While, on the one hand, a member of my family was able to secure a job in a nearby aged care facility after finishing the course, and later on, was awarded a scholarship to study nursing and is now employed as an endorsed enrolled nurse; on the other hand, her aged care-qualified Karen/Karenni friends have not yet been able to secure jobs anywhere and still rely on welfare assistance for survival. Although some of the husbands of these Karen/Karennis worked in familiar entry level occupations such as labourers in farms and abattoirs, others dig deep into unfamiliar territory as quarryman in

the quarry industry. This unfamiliarity with the working environment and lack of safety warnings written in their language has created safety hazards for the Karen/Karenni workers. It resulted in one of the most serious work-related accidents in mid-2010 in Victoria, when one of the Karen/Karenni workers was airlifted and admitted to the Royal Melbourne Hospital, after suffering broken bones and lacerations to the body. The wife of the badly injured Karen worker eventually became one of my research participants. In the next two years, the life of Htoo Paw, who still nursing a baby at the time of her husband's terrible accident, revolved around looking after her children and her disabled husband.

Such a close encounter with the Karen's tragic situation, as well as my own experience of xenophobic and racist attacks both in public and in the workplace (which will be examined shortly in this chapter), motivates me to conduct an in-depth exploration on the new patterns of inequality, segregation and prejudice among diasporic communities in host lands (Vertovec 2007). In outlining a genealogical account on the proliferation of refugees at the turn of the twentieth century up to the present, while highlighting Zygmunt Bauman's work on the transition from solid to liquid modernity, Barmaki (2009) points out that the present state of fluid modernity with its negative globalisation has brought with it countless manifestations, instances and accounts of refugees subjected to increasing harassment, hatred, detention, discrimination, criminalisation and isolation. These refugees are adversely affected by what Bauman refers to as the 'changing forms of displacement, racism and criminalization' in the present era of liquid modernity (Barmaki 2009: 253). Hence, there is a need to explore the common denominator, closures and racism and discrimination, which underpins these new patterns of inequality, segregation and

prejudice not only among the newly emerging former refugee community, but also among a long standing community in a regional setting.

### **Locating the ‘Translated’ Researcher**

I draw the idea of 'translation' from Hall (1992: 310) who 'describes those identity formations which cut across and intersect natural frontiers, and which are composed of people who have been dispersed forever from their homelands'. For Hall, migrant writers like me, who 'belong to two worlds at once' are called 'translated men' in host lands. Translated men are 'products of the new diasporas created by post-colonial migrations. They must learn to inhabit at least two identities, to speak two cultural languages, to translate and negotiate between them'. In translating reflexivity, it mirrors my own lived experience as a 'translated man' in the diaspora and positions such translation with the other constructed meanings amongst members of the Filipino and Karen/Karenni communities.

As stated, this study investigates the inclusion/exclusion of the long standing Filipino and newly emerging Karen/Karenni communities in the Geelong region, in Victoria, Australia, in regards to the ways they are, and can, participate in the mainstream Australian social institutions. The regional area of Geelong is designated by the Department of Immigration and Border Protection (DIBP) as one of the centres for refugee and humanitarian resettlement in Australia. The rationale for choosing the Filipino and Karen communities for this study is their 'predominance' as Asian ethnic minorities in the area in regards to their respective community categories of 'established' (Filipinos) and 'emerging' (Karen/Karennis). Another factor in conspicuously choosing them is the close

connection of the researcher with these communities in the Geelong region, and their being distinct from the dominant group in terms of 'race' and ethnicity. At first glance, there are three similar attributes which paved the way for studying these two communities, namely: similarities of being diasporic communities living in the same regional area; being of the same 'race'; and seemingly similar resettlement experiences of being discriminated against because of 'race'. Hence, it is also crucial to look at the underlying anti-Asian sentiments in the Geelong region.

A recent study spearheaded by the University of Western Sydney (UWS) called *National Challenging Racism Project* has found an above average anti-Asian sentiments and a prevalence of racism in the Geelong region, an area marked by below average levels of residents born overseas and of people who speak a language other than English at home (University of Western Sydney 2011). Discourses of the 'Other' and 'Asian looking' are still explicitly and implicitly embedded in the dominant culture at a time when the recent arrivals of 'illegal' asylum seekers from Asia are 'hot' issues in the Australian public domain. Reports of the arrival of 'boat people' in remote areas of northern Australia can spark anti-Asian hostility in southern cities, such as Geelong, incited by those who have an irrational fear of Asian immigration (Zelinka 1996).

Within the same time period that the UWS study was conducted, some members of the emerging Karen/Karenni community, as well as a few Filipinos in Geelong, were occasionally bearing the brunt of angry local Anglo Australians. It is reported that many of these local Australians had recently undergone drastic involuntary redundancies as a result of the global economic restructuring (Castles & Miller 2009). The Australian Bureau of

Statistics (ABS) has listed in February 2013 approximately two million unemployed people, of whom 381,000 (or 19%) had become involuntarily unemployed, retrenched or had their job made redundant in the last twelve months (ABS 2014). Other contributing factors of these xenophobic and racist attacks by some members of the dominant group could be the locals' lack of experience living with culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) immigrants of 'colour', especially Asians; and the absence of meaningful interrelations and the local's lack of education with some of the newly emerging communities in Geelong, such as the Karen/Karennis. The Karen/Karennis initial resettlement experiences, as is mentioned in their narratives, which have included their houses pelted with rocks and eggs, and being yelled at while walking in the streets by local white teenagers using swear words accompanied by 'rude fingers', portray unwelcoming attitudes of the locals. Within the contemporary context of western societies, such as Australia, some people lack 'the skills of interaction with others – of conducting a dialogue, of negotiation, of gaining mutual understanding and of managing and resolving conflicts inevitable in every instance of shared life' (Bauman 2005: 125). Even though I have lived in Victoria for ten years (including seven years in Geelong) at the time of the culmination of this research in early 2015, and with good English language skills, I was not spared this unwelcoming and hateful behaviour from the locals.

My immersion in the Social Involvement Office as an undergraduate student at Xavier University, Cagayan de Oro City, Philippines in the 1990s, has imbued in me this passionate acquaintance and involvement with the social justice and equality issues. This orientation resurfaced and became apparent the moment I experienced xenophobic and

racist attacks from members of the dominant group in negotiating the diaspora space in Geelong, Australia. One of these instances of a xenophobic attack occurred when I embarked on searching for my Australian dream.

While job hunting along the busy Pakington (Pako) Street, Geelong in early 2008, four young and angry white men wound down their car windows and yelled out, ‘Go back to your country’. Conspicuously, the racial slur was directed towards me as I was the only ‘Third World-looking’ person walking along that strip of the street. Ironically, the denigration occurred along Pako Street, the multicultural heart of the city, where the Pako Festa<sup>3</sup>, a celebration of cultural and social diversity, is held annually on the last Saturday of February. This show of ‘threatened nationalism’ (Hage 2000) happened during the height of the global financial crisis when 39.4% (ABS 2010) of those unemployed were workers who were made redundant because of a massive shutting down of manufacturing industries, as a consequence of moving their operations overseas. For the next six months, I handed in several job applications mostly related to my qualification and overseas work experience. Unfortunately, these job applications were all turned down as I was deemed either to have no local work experience or to be over-qualified. I considered this time of my professional life as the harshest and longest period of closure presumably because of my lack of informal networks and bridging social capital in negotiating the diaspora space.

---

<sup>3</sup> Pako Festa has become Victoria’s premier multicultural event, attracting 100,000 patrons in each of the past three years to provide the local economy with a \$2.5 million windfall. It incorporates an extravagant street parade featuring around 90 floats and hundreds of performers representing 45 ethnicities and around 60 other community groups and organizations. The street is lined with stalls selling traditional foods, arts and crafts, while nine stages offer performances of music and dance as well as interactive workshops and exhibitions. Encapsulating the essence of Australian diversity, the festa promotes cooperation, community interconnectedness, creativity and humanity (Geelong Independent, 22 February 2013).

At this time we were on the brink of going back to our original home and abandoning our Australian dream.

When nearly all of our family's savings ran out, and we were on the verge of going back home to the Philippines, I persevered, swallowed my pride, and handed a pro forma job application form into a nearby abattoir. I was careful neither to affix my bachelor's and master's degree qualifications nor to include my overseas work experience while preparing the job application (as I was advised beforehand by some Filipinos) in order not to jeopardise my chances. Luckily, I secured the job and worked full time as a labourer in the abattoir for two and a half years. This entry into the meat industry was the epitome of what seems to be a forced deskilling process of my professional career. With temporary visa restrictions in the first two years' stay in the Geelong region, I was disallowed to apply for work in capital cities such as Melbourne, the capital of the state of Victoria. Aware of the many involuntary redundancies within the ranks of the local workers, the global financial crisis at the time, as well as my own family's financial constraints, I was forced to sell my labour for a cheaper price in the abattoir to survive.

During my stint in the abattoir, I observed first-hand how 'White' local Australians demeaned and stigmatised 'Third World looking' peoples of 'colour' from Asia and Africa. While working in the meat industry, many immigrants of 'colour' suffered racial slurs from local white angry Anglo Australians and called us 'not speaking English', 'lazy', 'faggot' and 'shortie', as if trying to generalise the kind of personality and racial traits of Asians. Even the supervisor (who was white and a company owner's son) who witnessed such event seemingly sided with the local Anglo Australians, with a ridiculous smile as if saying,



‘Good on yah mate for doing that to these “inferior” people’. Hiding my professional academic identity all throughout my shifts in the abattoir, I observed how immigrants of ‘colour’ were relegated to the nastiest, smelliest, dirtiest and the most backbreaking job of cleaning the ‘guts’ of lambs and sheep; while the ‘Whites’ were positioned in the upper echelon of the job hierarchy as meat inspectors, foremen, slaughtermen, and some easier labouring jobs. Many times I was assigned in the mutton ‘guts cleaning’ station. The mutton ‘guts’ go down to the cleaning table every twelve seconds and with only three of us working on each shift that means we have to work fast in opening the ‘guts’ and cleaning it inside and out. The fast and furious nature of ‘guts-cleaning’ meant that the greenish, formed material inside the ‘guts’ would many times splatter all over the worker’s body like a foul smelling bomb. In one of our shifts, a black African worker, while busy cleaning the ‘guts’ of the sheep, told me that he is not going to work in the abattoir for life and plans to go back to school with the hope of working in the real estate industry.

As mentioned, for nearly three years, I had been looking for jobs in the community sector within the regional city of Geelong but could not get one despite possessing a master’s degree from Victoria University (VU) in Melbourne, and ten years of work experience in community development overseas. My former master’s degree course coordinator at VU was a living witness to this predicament, as she acted as my job referee each time I attended job interviews. Of course, I had been participating in career development seminars and had been doing my homework on how to write good résumés and respond tactfully and intelligently to interview questions. However, it seems that there are underlying subtle criteria of closure that bars someone of ‘colour’ from entering the

desirable professional positions in a predominantly white society. This thesis reflects my sad experience during those three years of job hunting. As I applied for entry level jobs in the community sector, I was told blithely that I was over-qualified. Likewise, when I applied for jobs commensurate to my qualifications and work experience, I was told that I did not have enough local experience. This was the reason why I ended up working as a labourer in the abattoir which I was grateful of, in some sense, because it has enabled us to keep our 'heads above water'. As mentioned, I was forced to sell my labour cheaply to survive during the liminal moments of my migration journey.

The bumpy road of the liminal moments of my migration journey mirrors the frustrating and abhorrent lived experiences of immigrants trying to negotiate their own diasporic dream. This could be the result of underlying racism and discrimination that are still implicitly embedded in the 'culture of indifference', espoused by immigration societies such as Australia, towards undesirable, unwanted and different 'Others'. In the middle of the night, I am sometimes haunted by the ghost of White Australia which says, 'You do not belong here, go back to your country', as well as, 'This country is full, you do not have any future here because of the colour of your skin'. Despite these ghosts, I have embraced the opportunity of becoming a full citizen, and scored 100 per cent in just nine minutes in taking the Australian Citizenship Test, and recently was granted an Australian passport to symbolise my loyalty and allegiance to Australia. This citizenship act, in effect, renounces my citizenship of my country of origin. With officially belonging to the Australian society and being accorded citizenship rights and privileges with the grant of permanent residency on April 2010, I explored available positive choices and opportunities to usurp the rewards

and benefits of the dominant group.

In an attempt to usurp the benefits, rewards and opportunities of the dominant group, I applied for a Doctor of Philosophy (PhD) scholarship at Victoria University (VU), Melbourne, on October 2010. I sought the assistance of my former master's degree professors at VU as referees to my PhD scholarship application in a bid to further my academic pursuits and enhance my chances to compete with the scarce resources in the labour market, that is, the highly-competitive desirable professional jobs. The sweetest news of 'inclusion' came on December 2010 when I was informed that I won an Australian Postgraduate Award (APA) scholarship and that I could start my PhD journey on February 2011. This winning of a scholarship to embark on a PhD study at VU represents the greatest reward from someone not belonging to the dominant group. It brought tears of joy, a sense of prestige, and of once more being in control of one's destiny. The winning of a PhD scholarship symbolises those liminal moments of one's migration journey where the notion of closure becomes 'imaginary' as this opportunity could lead to further opportunities such as securing a desirable professional position. However, crucial to obtaining such a PhD scholarship reward involves the deployment, not only of recognised credentials as prerequisite such as my master's degree at VU, but also the wit and ability to tap into my own informal networks such as my master's degree professors at VU, in soliciting support for my own advantage.

These personal lived experiences influence the conceptual, theoretical and methodological frameworks of this narrative ethnographic cross-cultural study which includes reflections and interpretations of the informants' own construction of their social

realities. Willis (2000: 113) argues that a poignant ethnographic imagination always involves a 'form of reflexivity, emphasizing the importance of maintaining a sense of the investigator's history, subjectivity and theoretical positioning as a vital source for the understanding of, and respect for, those under study'. This meaning-making provides the building blocks of the foundational structure of this research and positions it theoretically towards the question why, on the one hand, the nationalists celebrate cultural diversity, especially in good times; and on the other hand, despise the immigrants who are told to 'Go back to your country of origin' in times of crisis and turbulence? It may well be that this ambivalence constitutes what some refer to as the paradox of multiculturalism (Galligan & Roberts 2003). This paradox is exemplified in the Geelong region's increasingly diversified socio-cultural landscapes which are governed by a 'political rhetoric which seemingly endorses multiculturalism but also denies the need to rethink the terms of social inclusion and spatial belonging' (Papastergiades 2000: 50). Nevertheless, my resilience in searching for favourable and positive life choices would pay off, hopefully upon conferral of the doctorate degree, and employ such credential to embark on a *usurpatory* strategy to bite the benefits, rewards and opportunities of the dominant group (Parkin 1974, 1979; Murphy 1988; Witz 1992; Carter 2003). My lived experience reflects in a way how the Filipino and Karen/Karenni communities can overcome the odds in the liminal moments of their migration journey.

## **Overview of the Focal Communities**

The Filipino communities in the Geelong region, with a population of 857 (ABS 2006), are mostly remnants of the 'Filipino Australian intermarriage' in the 1970s and

1980s at a time when the Philippines suffered severe economic, social and political downturn. Considered one of the darkest periods of Philippine history after independence in 1945, it was then marked by ‘increasing unemployment, human rights violations, a general feeling of uncertainty and worsening political situation of twenty one years of Marcos dictatorial and authoritarian regime’ (Zubiri et al. 2010: 51).

Most studies of the Filipino diaspora were conducted in the United States of America (USA) such as those that relate to the unsatisfactory health conditions, to the experiences of everyday racism and discrimination (Ying & Han 2007; Gee et al. 2007a; Gee et al. 2007b; de Castro et al. 2008; Hahm et al. 2010); dehumanising stereotypes of Filipino cultural identity (Baldoz 2004; Alvarez et al. 2006; Jung 2006; Mcvittie & Goodall 2009; Okamura 2010); racism and coping mechanisms (Alvarez & Juang 2010), theorising the bridal diaspora (Rosario 2008), and mapping the Filipino immigration in the United States (Espiritu 2003). There is a view that, although the Filipino communities are the second largest ‘Asian’ immigrant group, after more than a century of Filipino diaspora to the USA, they are still one of the most understudied groups in regards to their experiences highlighting barriers to mainstream participation. Three studies of the Filipino diaspora in the Australian context stand out. First, a study that addresses the social inclusion of Filipino women and deals with the Filipino women’s challenges in the public realm on issues relating to workforce barriers, thwarted careers, racial and gender discrimination (Limpangog 2011); second, the study of the myths about Australian Filipino marriages and ‘mail-order brides’ (Woelz-Stirling et al. 2000); and third, a study on the racialised and sexualised representations of Filipino women and the vulnerability of Filipino women to

abuses and violence in Australia (Cunneen & Stubbs 1997). Within the ambit of Filipino immigration to regional or provincial geographical areas in a traditional destination country, a notable study in Canada by Lusi & Bauder (2008) found that the socio-economic and transnational experiences of the Filipino Canadian community living in three provincial cities have generally been positive. However, these studies of the Filipino communities mentioned above are one-dimensional, as they do not explore the cross-cultural perspective in outlining lived experiences of two distinct immigrant groups, settling or resettling in regional geographical area, within the context of issues of difference, access and equity, and social inclusion/exclusion. By exploring the cross-cultural perspective of two distinct diasporic communities, the current study establishes triangulation of data that illuminates similarities and differences of lived experiences within and amongst the studied ethnic groups (Liamputtong 2010).

The Karen/Karenni communities, meanwhile, with a current population of about 500 (Diversitat 2013), are recently arrived ‘refugees’ resettling in Geelong under the Federal Government’s initiative called the *Humanitarian Settlement Strategy*. The Karen/Karenni people were forced out from their motherland ‘Kawthoolie’ during the Karen/Karenni’s armed struggle for self-determination against the ‘oppressive’ dictatorship of Burma’s military junta in the past six decades in what analysts refer to as the longest civil war underway in the world (Phan & Lewis 2010; see also AsiaNews 2008).

Studies of the Karen/Karenni people have shown that their shared identity is underpinned by intertwining common themes of culture, Christian faith, education, nationalism, oppression, displacement and resettlement (Worland 2010). A study on the

settlement experiences of young Karen people in Melbourne found that despite the resettlement support they received, the respondents still faced difficulties in participating in the mainstream because of language barriers, opposing cultural expectations, oppression and structural disadvantage (Singh 2007). Also, Bodde's (2011: v) study on the needs and priorities of Karens in Victoria, Australia pointed out a 'frequent mismatch between the rhetoric of social inclusion and outcomes and that more attention should be paid to transforming a suite of practices that exclude people, particularly from refugee backgrounds, from participating in community life'.

The Filipino and Karen/Karenni communities differ significantly in terms of their socio-cultural and economic make-up as defined by their linguistic ability, educational attainment, history, social networks, reasons for migration, visa entitlements, and length of stay characteristics, including their engagement with the mainstream. The first generation Filipino participants arrived in Australia on three well-known visa categories as tradesmen, fiancé-sponsored immigrants or 'mail-order brides', and skilled immigrants. The members of the Filipino community who are selected for this study have an average length of stay in the Geelong region of twenty six years and considered themselves established. All of them have either a university or trade qualification, and have a good command of the English language when they arrived into Geelong, Australia, although struggled in the first few years dealing with the Australian accent as they are used to the American accent back home in the Philippines.

By comparison, the first generation Karen/Karenni participants arrived in Geelong, Australia on a humanitarian and refugee visa to escape persecution and after years of living

as displaced people on the Thai-Burma border. They have an average length of stay of four years at the time of the study and considered as part of a newly emerging community in the region. Unlike the Filipino participants who have a good command of the English language when they arrived in the Geelong region, all but two of the Karen/Karenni participants do not speak English at all.

The Filipino and Karen/Karenni communities in Geelong are the two focal communities of this study. Though they offer a unique lens in understanding the understudied migratory patterns of Filipinos and Karen/Karennis in regional geographical areas, they are not representative of the totality of Filipino and Karen/Karenni communities of Australia. Rather, they are specific groups within these communities. Studying these two different communities provide an understanding of the ways in which these ethnic minorities differ or conform with their perceptions of inclusion or exclusion in the domains of labour market participation, accessing health, education and other services, as well as differences and similarities of experiences in the acculturation and intercultural relations with the mainstream society. Detailed characteristics and categories such as reasons for migration, English fluency, educational background, visa entitlements, community linkages, and patterns of employment of the two communities are compared and intertwined in the data analysis. The Filipinos and Karen/Karennis are over-represented in the labouring jobs in Australia. For instance, 18 percent of people born in the Philippines (at 30,822 Filipinos out of the total population of 171,233 Philippines-born) are engaged into some physically-demanding and low-skilled jobs, compared to only 9 percent of the total Australian-born population (ABS 2013). This is much higher for people born in



Burma, with 23 percent (at 5,005 of the total population of 21,760 Burma-born) are employed in labouring jobs.

Although the two communities under investigation represent only a micro-section of the spectrum of Asian immigration to the West, especially to Australia, Canada and the USA, this study details the complexity, diversity and fluidity of immigrant identities and experiences with particular emphasis on barriers to social inclusion and productive participation in the mainstream of the receiving society. Some studies of diasporic communities revolved around highlighting the ‘new ethnicities’ (Hall 1996) while others focused on the ethnographic presentation of identities and culture through performances in host lands (Gow 1999). The present study illuminates the ‘transitional moments’ of diasporic communities at their point of contact in the mainstream receiving society. ‘Transitional moments’ posited here as a continuous, never-ending, enduring and complex processes of social, economic, political and cultural transformation of diasporic communities in host societies in the light of negative effects of a globalised world.

## **Mapping the Thesis**

The thesis provides a ‘state of play’ and ‘transitional moments’ of the two selected communities in regards to how they are faring with the mainstream institutions. This is done through a comparative fine-grained situational analysis in making sense of the narratives portrayed in the interview data. Engaging with Max Weber’s theory on social closure, this thesis puts forward an argument that although the rationalisation and legitimisation of closure strategies is still perceptively, deeply and subtly embedded in the powerful dominant groups’ monopolisation of privileges, rewards, and opportunities; there

are diasporic spaces and times where closures are nonexistent and imaginary. These imaginary closures in diasporic spaces can be seen when members of the diasporic communities compare difficult life situations in the country of origin with the better life in the host society. However, it still remains to be seen whether the policy orientations of the government categorically address those exclusionary issues formed around attitudes and perceptions, such as on issues of difference, racism and discrimination that act as barriers to participation in the mainstream, especially for those who have undergone voluntary and forced immigration to Australia.

Moreover, this research project draws attention to the ‘comparative situational analysis’ comparing issues from the perspective of length of residence and settlement and resettlement situations of the two selected ‘South East Asian’ communities in the Geelong region. In this thesis, *settlement* connotes voluntary immigration where the settlers ‘frequently retain the right and possibility of returning to their original homes and social networks (and often maintain that option by holding on to some or all of their original assets)’ (Muggah 2011: 32). On the contrary, *resettlement* implies forced immigration, and displacement is its necessary precondition, and once resettled in the host society, people who undergo the resettlement processes normally do not have the options and choice of return to the homeland. The Filipinos in the Geelong region exemplify immigrants who underwent the settlement processes, while the Karen/Karennis are a typical example of people who underwent the processes of resettlement. A mapping of the situation of these communities is significant in a society where the ‘undesirables’ are excluded by spatial managers and a nationalist practice of exclusion and nostalgia of the dominant ethnic and

cultural groups who hold onto the fantasies of White supremacy in a multicultural society (Hage 2000).

This study brings to light the personal accounts and experiences of prejudice and discrimination particularly as participants relate their involvement in the labour market, as well as their attempts to access education, housing and health services. While most of the previous studies of the Filipino and Karen/Karenni communities were conducted in suburbs of capital cities, this research project draws particular attention to the diasporic experiences and way of life of the two selected small communities in a regional geographical setting – the Geelong region. Furthermore, this study aims to highlight the strategies and ways in which the two communities are attempting to ‘achieve equal rights and equal participation in society’ (Castles & Davidson 2000: 147), as well as empower themselves, so as to avoid the pitfall of dropping off the edge (Vinson 2007).

### **Identifying the Research Questions**

With this in mind, this study explores the following research questions: How are the Filipinos and Karen/Karenni communities faring in regards to their inclusion/exclusion in the mainstream social institutions in a regional setting? How do the two selected communities experience forms of social closure, as well as moments of inclusion and relief? What strategies do the selected diasporic communities employ to navigate around discriminating and prejudicial practices? How is the Weberian theory of social closure useful in explaining the lived experiences of an established community and an emerging community living in the same regional area, in terms of access and equity, issues of difference, and social inclusion/exclusion?

## Synthesising the Thesis

As mentioned, at the core of this thesis is the notion of social inclusion and exclusion. Max Weber coined the term exclusion and neo-Weberian theorists employed exclusion interchangeably with social closure in the analysis of inequality and social injustice. Murphy (1988: 1) argues that the dynamics of interest that pushed actions along designated tracks are ‘codes of social closure: formal or informal, overt or covert rules governing the practices of monopolization and exclusion’. Because exclusion is the obverse term of inclusion or its other side of the same coin, and each side could be determined by how the ‘codes of social closure’ are carried out by power holders, is the reason why I choose the social closure theory as the conceptual lens. Carter (2003) employs the social closure theory in analysing the lived experiences of Jamaican immigrants working in the health industry in the UK which focuses mainly on labour market participation. This research project attempts to extend Carter’s work by comparing and examining two diasporic communities’ transition, negotiation, and multifaceted interaction with the mainstream of the host society in a regional setting. It examines the lived experiences of the research participants, not only within the ambit of labour market participation, but also in their encounter with the social, cultural, and political complexities of everyday living in the diaspora. The theory of social closure underpins the analysis and discussions of the major intertwining themes such as the articulation and imaginings of the notion of ‘home’, engaging with social institutions, participating in productive life, and facing the uncertain future.

This thesis brings to the surface the ‘voices’ of the ethnic minority groups on how they negotiate their ‘diaspora spaces’ in their attempt to meaningfully participate in the

mainstream. It takes into account their way of living in a regional area conspicuously undergoing post-industrial transition due to the negative effects of globalisation. The aftermath of the economic liberalisation saw the traditional manufacturing industries in western countries moving off-shore to labour-saving countries, mostly in Asia, resulting to the loss of thousands of jobs in industrialised societies, such as Australia. The precariousness of the Australian labour market impacts the way locals relate with their 'Third World-looking' neighbours. This thesis highlights the local people's inexperience in responding to the massive influx of refugee and humanitarian visa holders now living in close to their own backyard. Migration of 'coloured' immigrants into the regional areas, such as in the Geelong region, is recent phenomena. Despite of its relative significance to the current immigration program of Australia, regional migration remains an understudied area in the robust sociological literature on migration and multiculturalism (Hugo 2008; Boese 2010). The evolving social attitudes that accompany the recent migration of 'coloured' immigrants into the regional areas today is not similar to the social responses experienced in the 1970s and 1980s. Discovering what is happening in regional Victoria is very important for informing our understanding on regional migration in particular and on the plight of immigrants in general. As mentioned, a study of the Filipino community in a regional area in Canada is one-dimensional, as they do not explore the cross-cultural perspective in outlining lived experiences of two distinct immigrant groups, settling or resettling in regional geographical area, within the context of issues of difference, access and equity, and social inclusion/exclusion. By exploring the cross-cultural perspective of two distinct diasporic communities, the current study establishes triangulation of data that illuminates similarities and differences of lived experiences within and amongst the studied

ethnic minority groups.

Central to the empowerment of the ethnic minorities is to hear their stories and lived experiences in regard to the barriers to inclusion and participation in the mainstream which they have been, or with which they continue to be confronted. It is widely shown in the literature that ‘everyday’ as well as ‘institutionalised’ racism and discrimination against immigrants or the unwanted ‘Others’ is still a contemporary reality in Australian society. Thus, issues of difference and barriers to inclusion will be the central themes to be explored in this study with the theoretical framework on social closure as the conceptual lens to make sense of the interview and ethnographic data.

**Chapter Two** surveys the related literature that provides the theoretical and conceptual lenses in understanding the diasporic journeys of the Filipinos and Karen/Karennis within the Australian context. This includes Australian multiculturalism and cultural identity, social inclusion/exclusion and closure, racism and discrimination and issues of difference, social capital and globalisation.

**Chapter Three** provides the epistemological and ontological underpinnings as well as the methodological approach used in this research. This research employs the narrative methodology with a blending of ethnographic and cross-cultural methods in making sense of the data, and follows the constructionist/interpretivist tradition. A thematic approach of narrative analysis is employed in making sense of the narratives of settlement and resettlement experiences of the Filipinos and Karen/Karennis.

**Chapter Four** outlines the findings and analysis of the data obtained from the series

of in-depth interviews on the perspective of settlement and post settlement experiences as the Filipinos and Karen/Karennis navigate their diasporic journey. It illuminates the ‘transitional moments’ of the point of contact in the mainstream of Australian society. It presents themes such as ‘outlining the globalising research milieu’, articulating and imagining ‘home’, and the perceived reception of the locals. It focuses on the research participants expressing ambivalence of living in the diaspora.

**Chapter Five** presents continuing analysis of the narratives and perspectives of the data that highlights the underlying experiences of Filipinos and Karen/Karennis in accessing services from government and not-for-profit organisations. This chapter illuminates ways in which the Filipinos and Karen/Karennis negotiate and navigate their everyday life in the diaspora. It highlights themes of social support and friendship, institutional engagements and performing transnational and cultural identities.

**Chapter Six** explores barriers to meaningful participation in the labour market as the Filipinos and Karen/Karennis embark on their journey of trying to reach for their Australian dream by joining the workforce. It also explores positive experiences in the workforce and its link in acquiring homes. This chapter highlights themes such as participating in productive life, perceived racism and discrimination in the workplace, experiences of looking for work, workplace interrelationships, and the primacy of racial and ethnic identity in the workplace.

**Chapter Seven** focuses on engaging with the social closure theory in the realm of a ‘credentialist society’ as the Filipinos and Karen/Karennis portray transitional moments

where closure becomes both real and nonexistent in particular diasporic space and time. It presents themes such as aspiring to quality education for children, confronting health issues, and reconfiguring the social closure theory. This chapter also concludes the dissertation and provides recommendations with policy implications, as well as outlining immediate action.

In a nutshell, this thesis can be captured in a song *Pilgrim's Theme* by Francisco & Go<sup>4</sup> that inspired moments of reflection and meditation, conversation and brainstorming, as well as in the writings and imaginings of this arduous but fulfilling research journey.

### **Pilgrim's Theme**

Tired of weaving dreams too loose for me to wear  
Tired of watching clouds repeat their dance on air  
Tired of getting tired of doing what's required  
Is life a mere routine in the greater scheme of things

Through with taking roads someone else designed  
Through with chasing stars that soon forget to shine  
Through with going through one more day - what's new  
Does my life still mean a thing in the greater scheme of things

#### **REFRAIN 1:**

I think I'll follow the voice that calls within  
Dance to the silent song it sings  
I hope to find my place so my life can fall in place  
I know in time I'll find my place in the greater scheme of things

Each must go his way, but how can I decide  
Which path I should take, who will be my guide  
I need some kind of star to lead me somewhere far  
To find a higher dream in the greater scheme of things

The road before me bends, I don't know what I'll find  
Will I meet a friend or ghosts I left behind

---

<sup>4</sup> The tune of the song can be played by following the link - <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8N-jlM8tYj8>



Should I even be surprised that You're with me in disguise  
For it's Your hand I have seen in the greater scheme of things (REFRAIN 1)

BRIDGE:

For Yours is the voice in my deepest dreams  
You are the heart, the very heart of the greater scheme of things (REFRAIN 1)

REFRAIN 2:

Why don't we follow the voice that calls within, dance to the silent song it sings  
One day we'll find our place, for all things fall in place  
For all things have a place in the greater scheme of things

## CHAPTER TWO

### **Imagining Identities and Inclusiveness in the Globalised Diaspora**

*We dream of a reliable world, one we can trust.  
A secure world.*

- (Sir Thomas More cited in Bauman 2007: 95)

The Filipinos and Karen/Karennis in the Geelong region are engaged in rebuilding their place in the greater scheme of things in the diaspora. Finding a place called home, feeling a deep sense of belonging, and realising the Australian dream is most likely to be a lifetime project for most of the Filipinos and Karen/Karennis. They have struggled during moments of closures, as the underlying covert manifestations of racism and discrimination directed towards these seemingly ‘inferior foreigners’ now becoming real and systemic. The preceding chapter suggested that in the exercise of power by the dominant group, the Filipinos and Karen/Karennis are assigned to lower levels of the hierarchy in the labour market as forms of closure such as the preponderance of credentialism and informal networks unfavourably worked against them.

This chapter provides the conceptual framework for understanding the inclusion and participation of permanent immigrants in the mainstream of the receiving society, and how these immigrants construct their complex sense of identities and belonging in response to the exclusionary closures they are experiencing. It explicates the deployment of the Weberian social closure theory to understand why and how immigrants of ‘colour’ are

showing subtle manifestations of exclusion from economic and social spheres of the mainstream of the host society. It highlights the concepts of multiculturalism and social inclusion underpinning contemporary governmental policies in addressing issues of difference and access and equity, and its paradoxical efforts in the smooth and swift transitioning of immigrants' settlement and resettlement. The chapter also outlines three discourses of exclusion, including the redistributionist discourse (RED), the moral underclass discourse (MUD), and the social integrationist discourse (SID), in societies that have incorporated them into policy frameworks for social inclusion such as in France and the United Kingdom. These discourses give impetus to the debates about social exclusion and inclusion, and in understanding the inclusionary measures and agenda, which Australia has previously adopted, but has been abandoned by the current Liberal Coalition Government. As this chapter argues, the powerful dominant group employ strategies of social closure, such as credentialism, sponsorship and patronage, and the use of informal networks to exclude ethnic minorities from exclusive social and economic spheres of the Australian society. The impacts of globalisation and economic restructuring, and the social construction of the declining social capital of 'coloured' immigrants, contribute to moments of closure including their discontents and worsening relational processes with the white majority. Lastly, the chapter provides a snapshot of related studies of the Filipino and Karen/Karenni diasporas in the past decades within the context of the unfolding complexities of surviving, negotiating and participating in the mainstream of the host societies. As this chapter indicates, the crux of inclusion and exclusion for 'coloured' immigrants, as they seek to fully participate in the mainstream of host societies, can be seen in relation to the state policies, the actor's social capital, and the vagaries of

globalisation, migration and settlement.

## **Understanding Contemporary Migration**

In mapping the trajectories of contemporary migration patterns in an era of globalisation, Papastergiades (2000) argues that understanding social transformation in relation to migration can no longer be explained by the mechanistic *voluntarist* ‘push-pull’ and the *structuralist* ‘centre-periphery’, but is best explained by the volatility and multidirectionality of complex current flows of global migration, and its dynamic relationship to the actions and understandings of individual migrants (see also Ratcliffe 2004). This global social transformation in ‘the age of migration’, in turn, resulted in the formation and political socialisation of diasporic communities, hybridisation and deterritorialisation of culture and diaspora identities, and the constantly changing nature of multicultural global cities (Papastergiades 2000; see also Rushdie 1992; Cohen 1997; Said 2003; Ratcliffe 2004; Castles & Miller 2009).

Ratcliffe (2004: 45-7) defines three approaches that are used to illuminate reasons for these contemporary movements of people: these are the ‘classical economic model’, the ‘neo-Marxian models’ and the ‘subjectivist explanations’. The ‘classical economic model’ or *voluntarist* ‘push-pull’ draws from the argument that there are factors that ‘push’ migrants out of their countries of origin; and there are causes that ‘pull’ them into destination or immigration countries. The ‘push’ factors include ‘demographic growth, low living standards, lack of economic opportunities and political repression’; while the ‘pull’ factors include ‘demand for labour, availability of land, good economic opportunities and political freedoms’ (Castles & Miller 2009: 22; see also Papastergiades 2000: 30-2;

Ratcliffe 2004: 45-6). The ‘neo-Marxian models’ or the *structuralist* ‘centre-periphery’ argues that colonialism and its legacy as well as the economic imbalances and contemporary disparities of societies are linked to movements of people from the colonial (postcolonial) periphery to the metropolitan ‘core’ and that workers in the peripheral societies constitute the ‘reserve army of labour’ (Ratcliffe 2004: 46; see also Papastergiades 2000: 32-4; Castles & Miller 2009: 26-7). While the first two explain the macro-economic and socio-political elements of migration, Papastergiades (2000) claims this is too narrow, and suggests incorporating the ‘subjectivist explanations’ which highlight the micro-level aspirations and decision-making processes among individual migrants and their families. While this model gives a more nuanced explanation, Ratcliffe (2004: 48), however, rejects this by concluding that because the ‘world system is too complex and constantly evolving in unexpected and unpredictable ways; there is no feasible model that could ultimately explain the movements of people’.

What is certain among scholars, nevertheless, is that these movements of populations across national borders and territories has given rise to the phenomenon of diasporic communities everywhere whose cultural identities are *in transition* in the evolutionary process of cultures of hybridity (Hall 1992; see also Bhabha 1990; Cohen 1997:131). For Hall (1994: 401-2), the diaspora experience in the ‘New World’ is defined ‘not by essence or purity, but by the recognition of a necessary heterogeneity and diversity; by a conception of ‘identity’ which lives with and through, not despite, difference; by *hybridity*. Diaspora identities are those which are constantly producing and reproducing themselves anew, through transformation and difference’.

Chambers (1994a) stresses that the forming of new identities is a more universal phenomenon, as compared to Hall's emphasis on postcolonialism and Said's exertion on exile entail (see also Cohen 1997). Chambers (1994a: 25) points to the 'ways in which identities are formed on the move'. This is the point where we construct our sense of place and belonging, individual stories and desires in continually embarking on a 'journey that is open and incomplete where there is no fixed identity or final destination'. In most cases, diasporic narration of life stories and recollections of the journey 'become a mechanism for (re-)producing community boundaries and for performing identity in public, diasporic community spaces' (Georgiou 2006: 59). Bauman (2004) argues that our socio-political, cultural, professional, religious and sexual identities are undergoing a process of continual transformation in an era of constant change and disposability in which identities are becoming more precarious than ever. Such liquid, incomplete, and 'translated' identities are more pronounced and heightened for diasporic communities.

In performing and imagining such identities, Cohen (1997) suggests four elements that should be present in articulating, defining and producing diasporic cultural identities in his case study of the Caribbean peoples as a cultural diaspora. For Cohen, these four elements should manifest in: firstly, evidence of cultural retention or affirmations of a particular identity; secondly, a literal or symbolic interest in "return"; thirdly, cultural artefacts, products and expressions that show shared concerns and cross-influences; and fourthly, indications that ordinary diasporic peoples abroad – in their attitudes, migration patterns and social conduct – behave in ways consistent with the idea of a cultural diaspora. Although transnational immigrants maintain close contacts with their countries of origin,

their ‘intention is to establish themselves and integrate into their adoptive country so that these contacts would weaken over time’ (Canales & Armas 2007: 232). However, I argue that these immigrants, at least amongst the Filipino and Karen/Karenni research participants, would still continue to maintain links with their country of origin and practice their traditional customs, as well as linking with transnational communities in other countries which are at the heart of their social identity and sense of belonging. While imagining and performing these transnational cultural identities, diasporas are also faced with trying to negotiate the social, economic and political realities in the ‘diaspora space’ of their host society.

Brah (1996: 208-9) conceptualises ‘diaspora space’ as the ‘intersectionality of diaspora, border, and dis/location as a point of confluence of economic, political, cultural and psychic processes’. It is a space which contours the ‘contexts for drawing geographical and symbolic boundaries of we-ness and other-ness, for experiencing, remembering and imagining placement and displacement, for living the pains of deterritorialization, the promises of mobility and the opportunities and exclusions’ (Georgiou 2006: 5). It is where multiple subject positions are juxtaposed, contested, proclaimed or disavowed; where the permitted and prohibited perpetually interact; and where the accepted and the transgressive imperceptibly mingle even while these syncretic forms may be disclaimed in the name of purity and tradition (Brah 1996: 208).

In featuring nationalist agenda’s attempt at undermining ethnic identity in ‘diaspora space’, Ratcliffe (2004: 30) lambasts the infamous ‘cricket test’ comments of Norman Tebbit, who suggested that people of South Asian origin in Britain should support the

English cricket team rather than the team from their homeland, by emphasising that it is 'part of coercing people into adhering to a narrow Anglocentric identity'. For Ratcliffe, 'one can be both Asian and British ... transnational migrants and their descendants have a complex sense of home'.

The notion of home can be inferred to two common areas of enquiry concerning the relationship to an *originary homeland* that focuses on 'material and symbolic transnational ties, myths of migration and dreams of return'; and *feeling at home* that traces the 'desires and (im)possibilities of making oneself at home in the different spaces diasporic subjects inhabit' (Stock 2010: 25). 'It is quite possible to feel at home in a place and, yet, the experience of social exclusions may inhibit public proclamations of the place as home' (Brah 1996: 193). This layered notion of home particularly in relation to the lived experiences of diasporic communities in hostlands on the negative experiences of exclusion creates a diasporic consciousness of ambivalence (Stock 2010). Contradictory emotions, such as of feeling relieved from the socio-economic and political problems in homelands, and experiences of exclusion in hostlands, envelop the contemporary lived experiences of diasporic communities. This may be heightened when the experience of social exclusions is embedded in the government policy discourses and its implications that govern social relations (Levitas 1998: 3).

As a response to the complexities and fluidities of human movement in the *age of migration*, governments of receiving societies have developed and implemented a whole set of social policies to cater for the needs of the changing times (Castles & Miller 2009). Like many other 'multicultural' societies in the world, Australia has adopted a plethora of



ideologically saturated policies to address issues arising from the persistence of ethnic and cultural difference. Well known among these government initiatives is the post-war policy of assimilation which according to Jakubowicz (2002) was used to describe the process for making minorities the same as majorities and has proven problematic as it strips away the human dignity of immigrants.

However, as a consequence of demands made by ethnic minority communities, the policy of integration became government policy in Australia during the 1960s. According to Castles (1995: ii), this policy embodies the idea that although it is not the role of the state to assist with integration and cultural maintenance, immigrants are granted equal rights, not being expected to give up their diversity but expected to conform to key values. Hage (2000: 238-9) contends that:

the tendency for migrants to integrate into society is as inevitable as the change they bring into that very culture. The speed, mode and degree to which they become integrated are determined by social variables such as education, regional background, class, gender, religion and so on. Those factors, along with the migrant's length of stay, work to bring about an inevitable integration of the majority of migrants regardless of what the state's social policy orientation is.

With the introduction of the integration policy, viewed by some as assimilation in disguise, because it could be seen as a sort of grudging acceptance of difference but underpinned by a desire to eradicate difference (Jakubowicz 2002), the government of the day was keen to find policy alternatives in addressing issues arising from the presence of cultural and linguistic differences in the Australian *ethnoscape*. This development paved the way to the implementation of various forms of multicultural policies in the 1970s to

1990s and of policies promoting social inclusion at the start of the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

## **Revisiting the Policy of Multiculturalism**

In a 1973 speech entitled *A Multi-Cultural Society for the Future*, Al Grassby, the Minister for Immigration under the Whitlam Government, presented the concept of multiculturalism as the basis for immigrant settlement, welfare and socio-cultural policy in Australia (Grassby as cited in Koleth 2010). In this event, Grassby had announced the abolition of the White Australia Policy. Lopez commented that ‘this was the first time the term “multi-cultural society” was used in an official government policy statement’ (2000: 245). The policy of multiculturalism has been implemented by the successive governments after Whitlam and the policy has evolved through several incarnations and revisions that reflect the changing needs of the times. For instance, the Fraser Government, which endorsed the Galbally Report, ‘pursued the development of a particular form of multiculturalism from 1978 to 1983’ (Terry 2007: 96-7; also see Jakubowics 1986). In a close analysis of the Galbally Report, Terry points out that the language of ‘Fraser’ or ‘neo-conservative’ multiculturalism emphasises the idea of cultural maintenance, while paying lip service to the issue of social ‘rights’ (2007: 97).

While Fraser’s multiculturalism revolved around a *welfarist* approach in dealing with the issues of cultural diversity, the succeeding Hawke and Keating Labor Governments’ implementation of multiculturalism revised it to include three dimensions: cultural identity, social justice and productive diversity (Koleth 2010). At the time, productive diversity is understood as increasing the number of non-English speaking background (NESB) employees in the public service and private sector and managing it holistically by

respecting and recognising their skills, overseas work experience, age, cultural, spiritual, gender and social attributes (Jupp 2002). The Hawke Government's implementation of the *National Agenda for a Multicultural Australia* in 1989, 'introduced a number of new multicultural policy initiatives such as an Access and Equity Strategy to improve access to government services and programs by people of non-English speaking backgrounds, as well as establish the Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission (HREOC)' (Australian Government as cited in Koleh 2010: 9). These initiatives signalled the new era of the 'equity driven model of multiculturalism with economic aspects linked to policy initiatives' (Terry 2007: 100). Moreover, the *National Agenda* framed multiculturalism as a model applying to all Australians. In addition, the *National Agenda* defined the fundamental principles of multiculturalism as being based on the right to cultural identity as well as a commitment to social justice, that is, equality of treatment and opportunity. The policy also expressed a desire for economic efficiency through the recognition of all Australians' cultural and linguistic resources. Another key aspect of the *National Agenda* was an acknowledgement that all people living in Australia are required to show an acceptance of the nation's basic structures and principles; as well as display an acceptance of others (National Multicultural Advisory Council as cited in Koleh 2010).

In recent decades, however, the policy of Australian multiculturalism has continued to be much debated in both political and social circles. On one hand, some would argue that this policy is still an appropriate model for addressing issues of cultural difference in a period in which Papastergiadis (2000) regards as a 'time of turbulence' (also see Castles 1995). Others have viewed this policy as divisive, lacking in substance and precision, and

one which fosters intolerance and extremism (Galligan & Roberts 2003), thereby undermining the concept of ‘one nation’ that is to say, a common culture and common way of life, an image of Australia espoused by John Howard (Birrell 1995; see also Terry 2007). In his essay the ‘Dynamics of Multiculturalism in Australia’, Birrell (1995) argues that multiculturalism has been a failure because of its lack of an integrationist stance towards the settlement of immigrants in the mainstream society. The principle of integration meant ‘recognizing that adaptation was a gradual process that required some degree of mutual accommodation. Acceptance of cultural maintenance and community formation might be a necessary stage, but the final goal was still absorption into the dominant culture – integration was often simply a slower and gentler form of assimilation’ (Castles & Miller 2009: 247).

In the post-September 11, 2001 period, it could be argued that the bipartisan support of the policy of multiculturalism had broken down and that ‘this period witnessed a retreat from multiculturalism in many democracies that espoused it in the 1970s or 1980s’ (Castles & Miller 2009: 15). Since then, there has been an ambivalent attitude in many countries, for example in Germany and Australia, towards the policy of multiculturalism which saw the resurgence of the assimilation and integration policy (Koleth 2010; see also Colic-Peisker & Tilbury 2006) for promoting ‘social cohesion’, streamlining labour market segmentation, and thwarting radical fundamentalism along religious lines. In this sense, multiculturalism is ‘losing its central importance within national policy agendas particularly in Euro-American/Australian societies and is being replaced not only by the discourse of interculturalism but by communitarian discourses of cohesion and social

inclusion' (Lobo, Marotta & Oke 2011: 3). Consequently, in recent times, while announcing its explicit support for multiculturalism, the Labor Government put forward a social policy alternative with the implementation of the *Social Inclusion Agenda* shortly after winning office in 2007, in trying to address the paradoxically heightened social disadvantage currently experienced by vulnerable and marginalised citizens amidst Australia's economic prosperity (Vinson 2007). When the Liberal Coalition swept back into office by winning the 2013 Federal Election, its first budget outlined several cost-cutting measures not only within welfare payments, but also abolishing agencies deemed 'redundant' such as the Social Inclusion Board. As mentioned, this act signalled the abandoning of the *Social Inclusion Agenda* not only to save government funds, but also represented the seemingly inadequate understanding about the nature and significance of social inclusion and exclusion.

### **Interpreting Social Inclusion/Exclusion**

In a report of the outcomes of research commissioned by Fair Work Australia, Nelms & Tsingas (2010: 9) point to the 'close link between the idea of social inclusion and the concept of social exclusion as it is difficult to discuss the former without delving into the literature of the latter'. Social exclusion has become an important paradigm in the interrelations between economy and society under conditions of social change (Daly & Silver 2008). It can be argued that the concept of social exclusion can be attributed to the German political economist and sociologist Max Weber who saw exclusion as the attempt of one group to secure for itself a privileged position at the expense of some other group (Carter 2003). Social exclusion is seen as the inability or the failure of one group to secure

advantages, rewards, and privileges in the ensuing competition for scarce resources. The notion of exclusion underscores the end result of the forms and processes of social closure. Parkin (1979) suggests two modes of the Weberian social closure theory – the exclusionary closure and usurpationary closure.

Exclusionary closure involves the exercise of power in a downward direction through a process of subordination in which one group secures its advantages by closing off the opportunities of another group beneath it, which it defines as inferior and ineligible, whereas usurpationary closure involves the exercise of power in an upward direction in order to bite into the advantages of higher groups (Parkin as cited in Murphy 1988: 10).

The modern use of exclusion was first coined in France in the 1970s in reference to groups of people not covered by the social insurance system (Silver 1994). Since then, the concept of social exclusion has spread all over the European community which in 1989 passed a resolution to fight social exclusion and promote integration (Silver 1994; Nelms & Tsingas 2010). In the United Kingdom, the term was ‘developed for policy initiatives under the Blair government where the focus was on fighting poverty’ (Tascon 2008: 23). Thus, the policy of social inclusion in Europe was developed as an initiative to combat the phenomena of social exclusion and disadvantage. It appears that the common feature of many of these exclusions is the imposition of barriers to equitable participation in desirable opportunities by the dominant white majority towards the ‘coloured’ ethnic minorities.

Levitas (1998) puts forward three insightful discourses of social exclusion and how these discourses unfold into overlapping policy frameworks as she examines the case of the United Kingdom’s New Labour in the context of addressing the economic, moral,

social, political and cultural disadvantage, marginalisation, and exclusion of some of its 'problematic' citizens. According to Levitas (1998: 7), social exclusion is embedded in a redistributionist discourse (RED), whose primary concern is poverty and calls for an equitable distribution of power and wealth; a moral underclass discourse (MUD), which 'centers on the moral and behavioral delinquency of the excluded themselves'; and a social integrationist discourse (SID), 'whose central focus is on paid work'.

Social exclusion is defined as the 'dynamic process of being fully or partially shut out from any of the social, economic, political and cultural systems which determine the social integration of a person in society' (Levitas 1998: 11). Within RED, one way of mitigating the manifestations of exclusions such as unemployment, homelessness, limited education, poor health, abject poverty, that is, lack of material resources to participate in the way of life of society, would be the equitable distribution of wealth and resources of the nation through a just welfare system. However, in an era of rapid globalisation, open borders and free movement of people undermine the very principle of solidarity of the welfare state. 'Welfare states can only function properly when the dividing line between insiders and outsiders is crystal clear, because anyone who contributes to one is also a potential beneficiary, and vice versa' (Entzinger 2007: 119-120). Hence, it is difficult to reconcile the openness that characterises immigration societies and the closed nature of the welfare state. Consequently, there is now a preponderance of what Sennett (2003: 186-7) refers to as 'short welfare reform' where the state is 'reducing its own responsibilities by limiting permanent or fixed guarantees, replacing these by more temporary acts of help', and 'shifts the management of fate back onto the individual'. Globalisation and modernity

has given rise to the progressive dismantling and phasing out of ‘welfare state’ institutions (Bauman 2004).

In the MUD, or moral underclass discourse, also referred to as ‘the underclass and the culture of dependency discourse’, the social, cultural, economic, sexual and moral agencies, on the part of individual victims, are demonized and problematized in a way that they themselves are blamed for their state of being in the “underclass”. The “underclass” are accused of causing the ‘worrying problems in today’s society, including poor educational attainment, drug use, crime, unemployment, early pregnancy and the transmission of social disadvantage’ (Levitas 1998: 14-21; see also Vinson 2009). In critically analysing the raging debate on social inclusion and exclusion, Cameron (2006: 396-7) warns that our inadequacy to understand inclusion focuses our attention to the problems and deficits of those labelled ‘excluded’, and places an enormous responsibility for the excluded to resolve their own problems. The problem of exclusion is seen as local and/or personal which can be mitigated by transformative process applied selectively to particular people in particular places to make them more like ‘us’ rather than examining it in a ‘wider histories and geographies of a complex polity, culture and economy’ (Cameron 2006: 398). In taking this wider lens to integration of immigrants, there has been a profound shift in ideological orientation and institutional practices that are taking place at various levels of immigration policy discourse. The dominant trend in state policies and practice, regarding the ‘integration of immigrants’, is quickly moving towards culturalizing ‘problematic immigrants’ rather than problematising structural restraints and institutional discrimination (Schierup & Ålund 2010: 11). A necessary precondition for social cohesion



and human emancipation is for immigrants to be able to fully participate in receiving societies as ‘people excluded from the society in which they live are likely to develop resentment and frustration’ (Pécoud & de Guchteneire 2007: 21).

In SID, participation in the labour market or paid work underpins the major factor in the social integration of an individual in a society where work, as Bauman (1998: 17) puts it, becomes the norm, a social placement, and stands ‘at the centre of the lifelong construction and defence of a man’s identity’. For Bauman, the type of work a person engages with colours the totality of life; it determines ‘not just the rights and duties directly relevant to the work process, but the expected standard of living, the pattern of the family, social life and leisure, norms of propriety and daily routine’. According to Levitas (1998), the over-all organisation of work in SID puts much emphasis on paid work that connects economic and moral integration in conferring identity and self-esteem, and subsumes the role of unpaid work such as volunteering, caring for children, and household work that are vital in the over-all formation of a caring and responsible citizenry. Nevertheless, putting every person of working age into paid work is seen as a mechanism for “social control” by the welfare state, that is, getting dependent people out of welfare and become contributors to nation-building. However, while on the one hand, the state is emphasising, urging and pushing its citizens to engage in paid work, on the other hand, the lack of work is now the norm rather than the exception in a rapidly globalizing world. As Bauman (2000b: 77) puts it, ‘however brave are the faces the politicians make and however audacious their promises, unemployment in the affluent countries has become ‘structural’: there is simply not enough work for everybody’. The imaginings of a socially inclusive society through paid work

could be seen as elusive and delusional as ever (Ratcliffe 2004).

Social inclusion, as an obverse to social exclusion, is loosely defined by Robinson (2000: 154) as a ‘situation where everyone is able to participate fully in society and no one is blocked from doing so by lack of political and civil rights, by lack of employment or income, by ill-health or lack of education’. However, the paradox lies in the actual situation of inequality in society and a political framework that supports it that makes social inclusion more of a project of utopianism rather than pervasive realism. Sennett (2012: 7) points to the dramatic increase of inequality in the last generation. For Sennett, ‘declining fortunes have increased internal inequality; loss of high-skilled manufacturing jobs has diminished wealth in the mass, while the wealth of the top 1 percent ... has shot up astronomically’. In other words, while we should use social inclusion to pursue as much equality as possible, the ‘political framework within which it operates is one which itself excludes the possibility of an equal society’ (Levitas 1998: 188). Indeed, ‘the truly inclusive society does not exist outside the realms of theory’ (Ratcliffe 2000: 181). Nevertheless, the resurgence of governments incorporating the principles of social inclusion into their policy frameworks has proliferated in recent decades, especially among immigration countries.

In Australia, the notion of social inclusion as a government policy framework was first adopted and developed by the Government of South Australia in 2002, and was designed to provide opportunities for social and economic participation, especially for the most disadvantaged citizens of the state (Nelms & Tsingas 2010: 7; see also Hayes et al. 2008). It was also ‘developed into policy initiatives by the Australian Capital Territory

Government in 2004, by the Victorian Government in 2005, and by the Tasmanian Government in 2008' (Nelms & Tsingas 2010: 7). Then after winning the 2007 election, the Australian Labor Government officially implemented and made the *Social Inclusion Agenda* a major priority, with the aim of alleviating poverty, welfare dependency and homelessness (Tascon 2008). In sustaining focus on this initiative, the national government established the Australian Social Inclusion Board and a Social Inclusion Unit in the Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet (Hayes et al. 2008). At the *2020 Summit*, one of the major agendas pushed through was to 'make social inclusion a national priority and that a *National Action Plan for Social Inclusion* should be developed and implemented'. Consequently, a number of social inclusion indicators have been put in place to assist in reducing the gap between those socially excluded or disadvantaged and the rest of the population.

Foremost among the social inclusion indicators is the emphasis on economic participation within and across vulnerable, disadvantaged and excluded members of the Australian society. Vinson (2009: 8) illustrates that 'participation in the workforce is associated with reduced crime and social problems and reduce demands upon welfare budgets'. For Vinson, social investment of the state in child development will create a ripple effect on the future socio-economic landscape of the country as it generates positive impact on 'worrying problems in today's society including poor educational attainment, drug usage, crime, unemployment, early pregnancy and the transmission of social disadvantage' (2009: 10). However, Tascon (2008: 23-4) argues that the Social Inclusion Agenda of the Federal Government focuses 'only on workers' participation rather than on

some other forms of inclusion such as those formed by attitudes and perceptions that can act as barriers to participation'. Even though the policy rhetoric appears to have good intentions vis-a-vis alleviating social disadvantage and in addressing the whole gamut of social issues, in reality it remains to be seen whether it does create a positive impact on the lives of the long standing and emerging culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) communities in regional areas. As already mentioned, the resumption to power of the Liberal Coalition Party, after winning the 2013 Federal Election, saw the abandonment of the Social Inclusion Agenda in a bid to save government funds by arguing that the notion of social inclusion lacked meaningful substance.

In this context, one of the features of social policies in recent decades has been the desire to incorporate immigrants, who were constructed as socio-culturally different and mostly disadvantaged, into the mainstream of society so that they could become active participants in all spheres of the host society. However, incorporation of immigrants of 'colour' has been seen as problematic because of the long racist history of Australia that are still deeply entrenched in the very fabric of its social and political make-up.

### **Incorporating 'Visible' Immigrants**

This incorporation of immigrants into the mainstream of the host society, however, seems problematic because of the 'deep-seated cultures of racism that are a legacy of colonialism and imperialism; social exclusion, discrimination and violence against minorities resulting from globalization and economic restructuring' (Castles & Miller 2009: 275). As mentioned in Chapter One, the globalised world has brought with it rising levels of joblessness in the developed world as its major industries have relocated to

developing countries because of its cheap labour cost (Castles 1996; see also Castles & Davidson 2000). This state of workplace insecurity, in turn, has created a hostile environment for immigrants and minorities who were blamed by the marginalised members of the majority as the cause of their own fate (Castles 1996; see also Castles & Miller 2009). Being an immigrant in many cases is stereotyped as having a phenotypical difference (skin colour, racial appearance) and is the main marker for minority status, which makes up the most marginalised groups; and may coincide with recent arrival, with cultural distance or with a specific socio-economic position, or it may serve as a target for racism (Castles & Miller 2009). Gilroy (1987: 143) has defined racism as:

...prejudice plus power where prejudice is an unfavourable opinion or feeling formed beforehand or without knowledge, thought or reason, often unconsciously and on the grounds of race, colour, nationality, ethnic or national origins. Power is the ability to make things happen or prevent things from happening. Thus racism is having the power to put into effect one's prejudice to the detriment of particular racial groups.

Through the exercise of such power in a plural society, members of the dominant group can both explicitly and implicitly express their ambivalent sentiments towards *Other* different groups. As mentioned, Hage (2003) suggests that a nationalist paranoia exist in the Australian social and political landscape. For Hage, although members of *Other* different groups can be racist, it is the 'saliency of the macro Australian public/national space that remains a space where Whiteness gives one more power to discriminate' against *Others* on the basis of race, class, religion, ethnicity and gender. In other words, 'White

racism is deeply entrenched in the very make-up of Australian institutions' (Hage 2003: 118).

These racialised anti-Asian sentiments can be traced back to the history of Australia with its highly documented racist relationship with Asia. Halse (2010) presents a brief account of this racist relationship. Indentured workers from China and India were brought to Australia to work in the sugar cane fields in 1832. Shortly thereafter, the gold rushes in the middle of the nineteenth century saw the influx of thousands of Chinese to work in the goldfields. Racism which stemmed from economic anxiety and concerns about the moral and religious purity of the British colony fuelled racial tensions. These racial tensions, beginning from anti-Chinese riots in the goldfields and culminating in the stricter restrictions on Chinese immigrations paved the way for the legislation of the 'White Australia Policy' in 1900 which was designed to restrict non-white immigration and continued until 1973 (Halse 2010).

The Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission (HREOC) pointed out that the 'White Australia Policy has had a lasting impact on the national social development of Australia as it allowed the construction of a populist national identity which excludes and marginalizes groups on the basis of ethnicity and race' (HREOC 2001: 9). Since the abolition of the White Australia Policy in 1973, social exclusion, marginalization, racism and discrimination against immigrants and ethnic minorities by the dominant group has continued to be an everyday reality in the contemporary Australian context. For instance, Hage (2000: 232-3) argues about a 'fantasy of White supremacy: a well-grounded disposition to imagine Australia as a place where White Australians should reign supreme;

an undisputed belief in the reign of White Australians over Third World-looking migrants'. It is a White nation fantasy characterised as 'a vision of a society divided into a class of White worriers and a class of Third World-looking problems' (Hage 2000: 233).

Narratives of anti-Asian sentiments and everyday racism have been recorded and contextualized by Tan (2006) wherein, the visible ineradicable racial markers such as looks, appearance and colour of skin continue to be read in the popular Australian discourse as a sign of 'un-Australianness', 'foreignness', 'alien', 'undesirable', 'others', and such construction is embedded in the person's 'place of origin'. She contends that the tyrannising power of race and looks stems from the popular notion wherein 'whiteness' is synonymous to 'Australianness' and obstructs the unconditional acceptance of 'Asians' as real Australians within mainstream society. Similarly, Hage (2000) argues that the rise of Asian middle class in Australian society has resulted in a crisis of 'identity' among 'whites' which characterise the disintegration of this group's sense of privileged belonging to the nation on the basis of cultural identity '*essentialisation*', and the subsequent experience of 'losing control' and 'being swamped'. This *racialised* anti-Asian discourse points to the fact that 'the Asians' have inadvertently led to the destruction of the 'White race' in Australia, by evidently showing that multiculturalism and Asian migration have undermined the very conditions of possibility of experiencing White identity as a potential, as a 'race' and/or as embodying a hope of social mobility. Consequently, this everyday racism has produced concentrations of socio-economic disadvantage in the city that are aligned with immigrant areas where people often experience difficult life conditions that

include unemployment, limited access to jobs and racialisation by the dominant cultural group (Burnley 1999; Lobo 2010).

In recent times, despite Australia's continued economic prosperity, immigrants and minorities still suffer discrimination because of their ethnicity, religion or colour. For example, in a study conducted by the Gifford, Correa-Velez & Sampson (2009) one of the key findings was an increasing trend of discriminatory incidences experienced by refugee youth living in Melbourne from Year One (18%) to Year Three (36%). In a survey about racism conducted by the University of New South Wales and Macquarie University, it was revealed that '83% of the respondents recognized that there is a general problem with racism in Australia' (Forrest & Dunn 2007: 705-6). Also, the Scanlon Foundation survey of 2000 Australian adults nationwide revealed that 47% reported having experienced discrimination because of their national or ethnic background at some point in their lives, compared with 20% of the Australian born (VicHealth 2008). This study revealed that people from non-English speaking backgrounds were three times as likely to experience discrimination in the workplace.

There is evidence of discrimination in the Australian labour market as manifested in the unequal labour market outcomes for many immigrants and indigenous people in terms of employment, labour market programs, labour market segmentation and earning differentials (Collins 1996). Furthermore, Collins (1996: 85) argues that in the labour market segmentation 'workers born in Australia and English speaking background immigrants are over-concentrated in the best, highest paid jobs in the male and female labour markets'. Mountain of evidence concludes that 'discrimination, direct or indirect,



individualized or institutional, still represents a powerful constraint on the career prospects of minorities' (Ratcliffe 2004: 102; see also Modood et al. 1997; Mason 2000; Pilkington 2003). In other words, racism and discrimination still presents as a 'huge barrier to entry and success in the labour market' (Brah 1996: 148).

A study by Colic-Peisker & Tilbury (2006) noted that institutional discrimination, such as the lack of qualification recognition and barriers erected by trade and professional associations, and everyday racism, such as prejudicial behaviours of employers that keep certain marked groups out of the mainstream labour market which ensures that undesirable job vacancies are filled, have preserved and reinforced labour market segmentation and creating employment niches for refugees in Australia. The refugees and other immigrants' overseas qualifications are not readily recognised because of the lack of trust in their authenticity or simply their 'qualifications are not necessarily in demand'. The findings of this research and subsequent analysis showed that the labour market segmentation happening in contemporary Australian society has reproduced the effects of the *assimilationist* policies that were implemented in the 1940s-1950s when refugees, even those with university qualifications, were allocated jobs that the locals refused to take such as cleaning jobs, security, taxi driving, aged care, and abattoir and poultry plant work in regional areas (Colic-Peisker & Tilbury 2006).

As stated, these so-called '3-D jobs', that is to say, 'dirty, difficult and dangerous', have persisted as the major form of employment for immigrants in a receiving country (Castles & Davidson 2000: 186). 'Labour markets are frequently segmented in a way that restricts social mobility and generates internal boundaries within the workforce, often along

ethnic lines. Migrants are then left to do the dirty work, in conditions characterized by precariousness, low wages and non-existent future perspectives' (Pécoud & de Guchteneire 2007: 21).

In understanding the context of labour market differentials, Ratcliffe (2004: 103-4), argues for outlining an “explanatory model” that ‘incorporates a complex interplay of enabling and constraining forces’; that features the different facets of racism and discriminatory practices both individualised and institutional, as well as the continuous engagement of these forces with different cultural, class, educational and human agency underpinnings.

Consequently, this everyday practice of institutionalised racism and discrimination in the workplace has had negative impacts on the health and wellbeing of ethnic minorities (de Castro et al. 2008). These impacts have been exacerbated by the negative effects of globalisation as manifested by the insecure nature of present jobs; downsizing and redundancy have become an everyday reality; and precarious economic and social conditions have become a worldwide trend (Bauman 2000a).

### **Absorbing the Impacts of Globalisation**

Globalisation is a multi-domain, multi-level and multi-faceted phenomenon which is characterised by market liberalisation where economic forces dominate, technological advancement and free flow across borders of communication, transportation and finance, and movement of people in search of better economic opportunities (Stromquist 2002). It is a social process in which the constraints of geography on social and cultural

arrangements recede and in which people are becoming increasingly aware that these arrangements are receding (Waters 1995). Scott & Marshall (2009: 286-7) define globalisation as the ‘emergence of a global cultural system which is brought about by a variety of social and cultural developments’ such as:

the existence of a world-satellite information system; the emergence of global patterns of consumption and consumerism; the cultivation of cosmopolitan lifestyles; the emergence of global sport such as the Olympic Games, world football competitions, and international tennis matches; the spread of world tourism; the decline of the sovereignty of the nation-state; the growth of a global military system; recognition of a world-wide ecological crisis; the development of world-wide health problems such as AIDS; the emergence of world political systems such as the League of Nations and the United Nations; the creation of global political movements such as Marxism; extension of the concept of human rights; and the complex interchange between world religions.

With its wide array of definitions, consequences and developments, globalisation has, and will continue to, impact on the formations, resettlements, lived experiences and ways of life of diasporic communities. Drawing on the works of Cohen (1997: 157) on the relevant aspects of globalisation with particular bearing on the study of diasporas, there are five elements, aspects or characteristics of globalisation that have opened up new opportunities for diasporas to emerge, survive and thrive. For Cohen (1997: 157), diasporas have to deal with:

First, *a world economy* with quicker and denser transactions between its subsectors due to better communications, cheaper transport, a new international division of labor, the activities of the transnational corporations and the effects of liberal trade and capital-flow policies; second, *forms of international migration* that emphasize

contractual relationships, family visits, intermittent stays abroad and sojourning, as opposed to permanent settlement and the exclusive adoption of the citizenship of a destination country; third, *the development of “global cities”* in response to the intensification of transactions and interactions between the different segments of the world economy and their concentration in certain cities whose significance resides more in their global, rather than in their national, roles; fourth, *the creation of cosmopolitan and local cultures* promoting or reacting to globalization; and fifth, *a deterritorialization of social identity* challenging the hegemonizing nation-states’ claim to make an exclusive citizenship a defining focus of allegiance and fidelity in favour of overlapping, permeable and multiple forms of identification.

Cohen (1997) contends that despite some diasporic communities experiencing feelings of uncertainty, isolation, destructive individualism and the destruction of sense of solidarity because of the predominance of unemployment and the precarious nature of jobs, many are able to acquire a good education and become professionally qualified, and others able to engage in collective capitalism that provides flexibility and avoidance of the worst impact of global restructuring.

Global restructuring is one of the inherent features of the dynamics of economic globalisation through a neoliberal development model which ‘calls for a less interventionist state in economic and social arenas and proposes such measures as deregulation, decentralization and privatization’ (Stromquist 2002: 6-7). There is a shift now in the balance of power in favour of the transnational corporations (TNCs) which are located in global cities that are ‘responsible for an important chunk of world employment, productions and trade’ (Cohen 1997: 158). TNCs control the political, social, and economic dimensions of many countries, as well as significant decisions on which market to enter or

leave; corporate expansions, acquisitions, mergers and consolidation (Stromquist 2002; Cohen 1997). With their highly profit-orientated *modus operandi*, TNCs can relocate production plants, regulate the flow of raw materials, components and finished products, reengineer technological, organisational expertise and skilled personnel, as well as declare redundant those who 'do not fit' in the drive towards corporate cost effectiveness and efficiency.

One of the consequences of 'negative globalisation' and modernity is redundancy and to be redundant 'means to be supernumerary, unneeded, of no use', and there is no self-evident reason and justification for someone to be around (Bauman 2004: 12). As mentioned, the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) has listed in February 2013 approximately two million unemployed people, of whom 381,000 (or 19%) had become involuntarily unemployed, retrenched or had their job made redundant in the last twelve months (ABS 2014). As Linhart (cited in Bauman (2004: 13) suggests, 'these men and women lose not only their jobs, their projects, their orientation points, the confidence of being in control of their lives; they also find themselves stripped of their dignity as workers, of self-esteem, of the feeling of being useful and having the social place of their own'.

With the negative effects of globalisation and economic restructuring impact around the world as a result of the decline of the manufacturing industry or deindustrialisation in countries of immigration, members of the dominant group, who lose their jobs in the process, have found their social security and environment decline. They blame the alien influences that undermine the nation, and hate the immigrants to maintain an illusion of national unity and pride. Racism becomes a form of identity movement (Castles &

Davidson 2000). ‘Inflows of unskilled immigrants could make matters worse as they are likely to compete with those at the lower end of the labour force. The average wage of these local workers will then fall and they may very well feel that their jobs are threatened’ (Ghosh 2007: 100; see also Castles & Miller 2009). These massive inflows of foreigners will lead to institutions and social services of the host country under heavy strain undermining social stability. As there are no local solutions to the globally-produced problems, Bauman (2004: 90) stresses that ‘erratic conditions of employment buffeted by market competition were then, as they continue to be, the major source of the uncertainty about the future and the insecurity of social standing and self-esteem that haunted the citizens’. As the state can no longer able to provide for secure jobs to ensure a brighter future of its citizens, government leaders call on the electors to be ‘more flexible’ (that is, to brace themselves for yet more insecurity to come) and to seek individually their own individual solutions to the socially-produced troubles.

These ‘new forms of capitalism emphasize short-term labour and institutional fragmentation; the effect of this economic system has been that workers cannot sustain supportive social relations with one another’ (Sennett 2012: 279). This precarious situation that fosters individual solutions to globally-produced problems entails people to reach for those connections and networks in order to challenge these global forces.

### **Necessitating Social Capital in the ‘Age of Uncertainty’**

These individual solutions can mean a return to the local, a familiar place where networks, friends, families, relatives can be found for solace and comfort, at a ‘moment when people reach for those groundings’ (Hall 1991: 35-6). Cohen interprets this ‘reach

for groundings’ as a ‘retreat from global realities, an incapacity to the challenges of the ever widening market place and to the new ethical and cultural demands stemming from globalization’ (1997:170). In the principle of migration systems, this can be seen as an interaction between macro- and micro-structures; between the political economy of the world market and the informal social networks developed by migrants (Castles & Miller 2009). Informal networks, such as personal relationships, family and household patterns, friendship and community ties ‘provide vital resources for individuals and groups’ where it binds the complex interpersonal relationships (Castles & Miller 2009: 28). These informal networks enable immigrants to reach for those grounding and call for a social organisation that can respond to global challenges. This social organisation parallels with what Putnam (2000) refers to as social capital.

According to Putnam (2000: 19) social capital is defined as the ‘connections among individuals – social networks and the norms of reciprocity and trustworthiness that arise from them and calls for a civic virtue that is most powerful when embedded in a dense network of reciprocal social relations’. He outlines two distinct forms of social capital – the *bridging social capital*, which is ‘outward looking’ and encompasses people ‘across diverse social cleavages, for example, civil rights movement’; and *bonding social capital*, which is ‘inward looking’ and tends ‘to reinforce exclusive identities and homogenous groups, for example, ethnic fraternal organizations’ (p.22). Van Alstyne & Bulkley (2004: 165) emphasise that the bigger the social network, the better it is for the individual because ‘information about new opportunities is time dependent and flows through existing contact’. Putnam (2000: 20) points to the importance of social capital in the form of

connections and networking in finding a job, ‘for most of us get our jobs because of whom we know, not what we know’.

Hampton (2004: 218-9), however, suggests that ‘over the past thirty years there has been a significant decline in community in the form of social capital’. A report of outcomes of research by Putnam (2000: 238), reveals that ‘people are spending less time with friends, relatives and neighbours; they are more cynical and less likely to be involved in clubs and organizations’. He points to excessive television viewing as the main cause of the decline of social capital as well as ‘suburbanization, globalization, changing family structures, and financial and temporal pressures’ (see also Hampton 2004). ‘More time for TV means less time for social life’ (Putnam 2000: 238). The image of Putnam’s *Bowling Alone* in society is linked to ‘cooperation by saying that passive participation now marks civil society; people may belong to many organizations but few ordinary members become active’ Sennett (2012: 134).

The link between social capital and cooperation is exemplified by Sennett (2012: 135-6) in his depiction of the Chinese *guanxi* which ‘invokes honour as a key ingredient of social relations’. Quoting the systems analyst Yuan Luo, *guanxi* is described as ‘an intricate and pervasive relational network which Chinese cultivate energetically, subtly, and imaginatively’. *Guanxi* is likened to an old Western business code, ‘my word is my bond’, in which ‘you can count on other people in the network, especially when the going gets tough; they are honour-bound to support you rather than take advantage of your weakness’. The rise of the Chinese businessmen into the high echelon of world business



conglomerates can be attributed to *guanxi*<sup>5</sup> which exemplifies ‘how a social bond can shape economic life’ (Sennett 2012: 135). However, the preponderance of insecurity in an ‘age of uncertainty’ can more than jeopardise this social bond.

One of the prominent features of modern society in an “age of uncertainty” is the proliferation of “gated communities” in cities around the world as ‘separation and keeping a distance becomes the most common strategy these days in the urban struggle for survival’ (Bauman 2007). Quoting Caldeira, Bauman (2007: 77) provides an example of this phenomenon featuring the second largest Brazilian city; ‘São Paulo is today a city of walls. Physical barriers have been constructed everywhere – around houses, apartment buildings, parks, squares, office complexes and schools ... A new aesthetics of security shapes all types of constructions and imposes new logic of surveillance and distance’. Instead of building social bridges and bonds, easing passages, providing meeting places, and facilitating communication to bring residents together, our cities are designed to promote spatial segregation on its landscape where ‘interdictory spaces’ have ‘become landmarks of the *disintegration* of locally grounded, shared communal living’ (Bauman 2007: 77-8).

Hage (2003: 22-3) argues that ‘in shrinking the shared space of the public sector, neo-liberal policies have loosened the social bonds, diminishing our hopes for a better life and making us anxious and worried’. According to Hage, the ‘culture of worrying’ in Australia is mostly pronounced when the fate of belonging to the nation is at stake as

---

<sup>5</sup> An example of the positive result of *guanxi* can be found in the Philippines’ own Chinese community that highlights seven Filipino Chinese belonging to the top ten of the country’s richest people according to the Forbes Magazine’s annual listings for the year 2013, with Mr. Henry Sy on top of the list with US\$12 Billion net worth followed by Mr. Lucio Tan with US\$7.5 Billion (Forbes 2013).

expressed in the public discourse and media portrayal of Hansonism, the Tampa crisis, illegal refugees and detention centres, crime, migration, race riots and fear of terrorist attacks. This culture of worrying, in turn, has confronted us with the ‘dilemma of getting along with those who are different’ (Sennett 2012: 230).

One of the consequences of this dilemma is what Bauman (2007: 86-8) refers to as “mixophobia” – the fear of mixing with strangers or those who are different and when confronted choosing the escape option. This fear of the outsider has eroded the very skills necessary to build social capital, as Bauman (2007) says:

[T]he longer people stay in a uniform environment – in the company of others ‘like them’ with whom they can ‘socialize’ perfunctorily and matter-of-factly without incurring the risk of miscomprehension and without struggling with the vexing need to translate between distinct universes of meaning – the more they are likely to ‘unlearn’ the art of negotiating shared meanings and agreeable *modus covivendi*. Since they have forgotten or neglected to acquire the skills necessary for a gratifying life amidst difference, there is little wonder that the seekers and practitioners of escape therapy view the prospect of confronting the strangers face-to-face with rising horror (p.88).

On the one hand, the ‘in-between stranger does not have complete access to the cultural and language code of the host and while this causes anxiety and stress, it also provides the ground for a different understanding of the host’s world’ (Marotta 2011: 184). On the other hand, “mixophobia” can also be attributed to the failure of the host society to interact, tolerate and embrace the newly arrived, visibly different neighbour/stranger who can create a minor infraction that becomes a trigger to unleash one’s fears and anxieties concerning the threat to one’s identity from other cultures (Morgan 2011).

Yet, despite being anxious of strangers, people nowadays resort to using the electronic media such as the internet for networking and connecting to like-minded people of their choice. The popularity of the social media such as Facebook, Twitter, Instant Messaging, Email, Chat Rooms, Skype Video Conferencing and Blogs provide avenues for individuals to communicate, network, keeping in touch, form associations, and organise projects of belonging.

Hampton (2004: 229) argues that computer-mediated communication ‘helps overcome obstacles to interaction within existing patterns of relations; they are local, affording and reinforcing connections within existing realms of activity: the home, neighbourhood, and workplace’. In a study among internet users, Kraut et al. (2002: 61) found that ‘more frequent internet users increased the size of their social networks, had greater face-to-face interaction with friends and family, and became more involved in community activities and enhanced new friendship ties’. ‘The internet can break down barriers to local involvement, coordinate public participation, and provide new opportunities for place-based interactions’ Hampton (2004: 229). Norris (2003) suggests that ‘participation in online communities can deepen connections among similar people (bonding social capital) and it can increase linkages of different sorts of people (bridging social capital)’.

A study by Jaafar & Jaber (2011: 172) on the introduction of online communities to multi-ethnic Malaysia put forward seemingly paradoxical revelations in its findings. On the one hand, online communities have potential benefits to enhanced inter-ethnic social activities and information sharing among Chinese and Indian minority groups (bridging

social capital). It also conveyed bonding social capital among dominant Malays for it 'served as a medium of opportunities to generate durable ethnic identities and reinforced a sense of solidarity amongst its own community'. On the other hand, the introduction of online communities failed to integrate the three ethnic groups, and such online communities 'may have even increased ethnic division and prejudices due to differential policies, language barriers, cultural and/or religious differences'. While the issue of integrating the three distinct ethnic groups of the Malaysian *ethnoscape* is a lifetime project as it defines the complexities and everyday social relations, the introduction of the online communities can be a point of departure to open up and discuss issues of ethnic division, prejudices and differences. It could pose a huge challenge to the Malaysian society.

So, goes the challenge of Putnam (2000: 405), for every one of all ages in the twenty-first century, by posing a daring question in regards to civic duty and enhancement of one's social capital: "How can I participate effectively in the public life of my community?" To renew its stock of social capital, Putnam (2000: 404-414) suggests many spheres of challenges for the next decade:

[T]argeting a level of civic engagement surpassing their grandparent's bridging social capital; workplace will be substantially more family-friendly and community-congenial to replenish stocks of social capital both within and outside the workplace; spend less time traveling and more time connecting with neighbors; live in more integrated and pedestrian-friendly areas; designing of communities such that the availability of public space will encourage more casual socializing with friends and neighbors; spur a new, pluralistic, socially responsible "great awakening" to be more deeply engaged in one or another spiritual community of meaning, while at the same time becoming more tolerant of the faiths and practices of others; spend less leisure

time sitting passively alone in front of glowing screens and more time in active connection with fellow citizens; foster new forms of electronic entertainment and communication that reinforce community engagement rather than forestalling it; more people will participate in (not merely consume or “appreciate”) cultural activities from group dancing to songfests to community theater to rap festivals; discover new ways to use the arts as a vehicle for convening diverse groups of fellow citizens; more people will participate in public life of the communities – running for office, attending public meetings, serving on committees, campaigning in elections and voting.

These challenges, if seriously taken on board, can more than define and illuminate the inclusiveness within communities not only in social settings, but also within work environments, especially with the way diasporic communities are incorporated into the mainstream of the host society.

### **Studies of the Filipino Diaspora**

In this context, the Filipinos are one of the ethnic minority communities which resettled in immigration societies in this ‘age of migration’. Despite the significance of the Filipino contribution to the receiving societies only a small number of studies have been conducted with regards to the migration journeys, gender discourses, needs assessments, cultural identity stereotyping, racism and discrimination, health and wellbeing. These studies, however, were mostly conducted in the United States such as those that relate to the unsatisfactory health conditions, to the experiences of everyday racism and discrimination (Ying & Han 2007; Gee et al. 2007a; Gee et al. 2007b; de Castro et al. 2008; Hahm et al. 2010); dehumanising stereotypes of Filipino cultural identity (Baldoz 2004; Alvarez et al. 2006; Jung 2006; Mcvittie & Goodall 2009; Okamura 2010); and racism and

coping mechanisms (Alvarez & Juang 2010), theorising the bridal diaspora (Rosario 2008), and mapping the Filipino immigration in the United States (Espiritu 2003). There is a view among these researchers that, although the Filipino communities are the second largest 'Asian' immigrant group, after more than a century of Filipino diaspora to the USA, they are still one of the most understudied groups in regard to their experiences highlighting barriers to mainstream participation. Studies of temporary Filipino migrants in Asia in a globalised world are also gaining interest among scholars (Asis, Huang & Yeoh 2004; Oishi 2005; Hugo 2009).

In Australia, Cooke (1986) examined the myths about Australian Filipino marriages and found that only 30% of women interviewed were technically 'mail-order brides' and the rest came through informal networks, and were driven by the socio-economic and cultural constraints suffered by Filipinas in the Philippines. Also, Woelz-Stirling et al. (2000) found that social respectability and economic security were some of the reasons why Filipinas married an Australian, although these relationships were marred by marital conflict because of unmet expectations and financial disparity on both sides. On the other hand, 'tolerance and understanding on the part of the Australian partner of the Filipina's customary familial obligation to send financial assistance to parents or siblings in the Philippines was also a big factor in the Filipinas marital fulfilment and happiness' (Hennessy 2004: 89). Nevertheless, Cunneen & Stubbs (1997) argued that racialised and sexualized representations of Filipino women and particular images of masculine desire, both of which are formed against a background of colonial and post-colonial practices, are central to the vulnerability of Filipino women to abuses and violence in Australia.

Limpangog's (2011: i) study of skilled Filipino women in Melbourne spoke of the research participants 'encounters with challenges in the public realm, pertaining to workforce barriers, thwarted careers, racial and gender discrimination, while their altered class positions disturbed relationships in the household'. Aside from Cunneen & Stubbs (1997) study, there are no investigations conducted on the Filipino diasporic experiences highlighting barriers to social inclusion in regional geographical settings.

### **Studies of Karen Diaspora**

Studies of the Karen people have shown that their shared identity is underpinned by intertwining common themes of culture, Christian faith, education, nationalism, oppression, displacement and resettlement (Worland 2010). In a study conducted in Mae La Refugee Camp, Fuertes (2010) revealed the way the Karen people describe their political, social and economic aspirations for societal change is by using the metaphor of a 'bird in a cage'. Kanska (2007) pointed out the creation of Karen transnationalism in diasporic communities in the third country but serious restrictions in communication posed a limited connection to motherland "Kawthoolie" and to those remaining in the refugee camps. Using five in-depth interviews, Singh's (2007) study of the experiences of young Karen people living in Melbourne recounts how the five young Karen people narrated about their lives in Burma and their travelling from Burma to Australia, as well as their resettlement. The study found that despite resettlement support provided by various service agencies at the local level, the respondents still faced difficulties in participating in the mainstream because of language barriers; opposing cultural expectations - that is, homeland culture at odds with the dominant culture of the receiving society - and

oppression and structural disadvantage such as learning occupational English before being accepted into the workforce (Singh 2007). Also, Bodde's (2011) study on the needs and priorities of Karens in Victoria, Australia pointed out a frequent mismatch between the rhetoric of social inclusion and outcomes and lack of attention given on how to transform a suite of practices that exclude people, particularly from refugee backgrounds, from participating in community life. Nevertheless, many of these scholars have pointed out the immediacy, priority and necessity of conducting research on the social inclusion and participation of Karens in regional areas of Australia.

### **Streamlining the Research**

It is apparent from the selected studies and policies that there is limited research focused on the diasporic experiences of the two selected communities in regards to issues of difference, access and equity and social inclusion/exclusion in regional geographical setting. More specifically, this research project will draw attention to the fine-grained comparative analysis of the situation of these two selected South-East Asian communities in regard to their inclusion in key institutional life, and comparing issues from the perspective of length of residence and settlement and post-settlement experiences. A mapping of the situation of these communities is significant in a society where the 'undesirables' are excluded by spatial managers and a nationalist practice of exclusion and nostalgia of the dominant group of the fantasies of White supremacy in a multicultural society (Hage 2000).

This study will investigate personal accounts and experiences of prejudice and discrimination particularly as participants relate their involvement in the labour market as



well as their attempts to access education, housing and health services. While most of the previous studies of the Filipino and Karen/Karenni communities were conducted in suburbs of capital cities, this research project draws particular attention to the diasporic experiences and way of life of the two selected communities in a regional geographical setting. The Geelong region seems currently undergoing a ‘crisis of modernity’ which espouses a cultural environment where global influences make national culture so precarious that members of minority groups appear as a serious threat (Castles 1996). The regional area of Geelong, classified and designated by the Department of Immigration and Border Protection (DIBP) as one of the regional centres for the resettlement of newly arrived refugee and humanitarian entrants, is the focus locale of the study.

Although the two communities under investigation represent only a micro-section of the spectrum of Asian immigration to the West, especially to Australia, Canada and the US, this study details the complexity, diversity and fluidity of immigrant identities with particular reference to the barriers to social inclusion and productive participation in the mainstream of the receiving society. It is apparent that the social transformation of these communities in regional Victoria needs to be investigated and highlighted in the context of social access, social justice and social inclusion.

Employing the Weberian social closure theory as the conceptual lens, this study will make a significant and new contribution to knowledge through its comparing of the ‘state of play’ in an established community with that of an emerging community living in the same regional area, in regards to how they experience barriers to participation in the mainstream. As the lived experience of the research participants are complex, some

situations are inexplicable by theory. Hence, this study puts forward the intertwining and underpinning themes of identities, social inclusion, transnationalism, multiculturalism, racism and discrimination, globalisation and social capital within the context of the transitional moments of diasporic communities negotiating the diaspora space of the Geelong region, Victoria, Australia. This will be done through a fine-grained situational analysis employing narrative research as the overarching qualitative methodological framework in meaning making.

The Filipino and Karen/Karenni communities in the Geelong region have endured experiences of the processes of global migration and settlement/resettlement in a receiving society. The researcher has also experienced the same and is considered both as an ‘insider/outsider’ to the Filipino community and ‘outsider’ to the Karen community in the geographical area. Due to the investigator being both an insider and outsider in the intended research communities, the research will employ an interpretive approach, avoiding an a priori design, such as a positivist one, that could limit the discovery of unexpected understandings (Denzin & Lincoln 2000). In this study, an interpretivist/constructivist paradigmatic positioning is adopted which employs a narrative/ethnographic methodology using a balanced reflexivity in the gathering and analysing of data. This research methodological positioning that underpins the empowerment of the voices of the ‘voiceless’ will be the subject matter of the next chapter.

## CHAPTER THREE

### **Empowering the ‘Voices’ in Cross-cultural, Reflexive, Narrative/Ethnographic Research**

*We need to rethink and to reconceptualize objectivity so that it will have legitimacy for diverse groups of researchers and will incorporate their perspectives, experiences, and insights.*

- James Banks (1998: 6)

The preceding chapter introduced some of the interweaving concepts that illuminate the everyday realities of the Filipinos and Karen/Karennis’ settlement/resettlement in the host society in the past and in the contemporary socio-economic, political and cultural context. This chapter dovetails these everyday realities with discussions of the epistemological and methodological underpinnings of the narrative/ethnographic cross-cultural research, how it establishes reliability and validity of qualitative in-depth interview data and the subsequent analytical findings. It highlights the methodological considerations including the modes of data collection and analysis that inform the best and most consistent way to answer the research questions. Also, this chapter outlines the reflexivity and subjective interpretations that are part of conducting a cross-cultural study. As this chapter indicates, the narratives provide avenues of co-construction of meanings that are most pertinent in the everyday life of the participants. These ‘collective stories’, in turn, as this chapter argues, empower the voice of the ‘voiceless’ and enable the ‘unheard’ to be heard in a given socio-cultural space where ethnic minorities seldom have the arena to express

their concerns and interests.

This thesis has adopted an interpretivist/constructionist paradigmatic positioning, employing narrative research as the overarching qualitative methodological framework. While also employing ethnographic methodology, this thesis has drawn heavily on a series of in-depth interviews with thirteen Filipinos and fifteen Karen/Karenni participants as the main method used in gathering data. Following an interpretivist ethnographic design framework, this study has also employed participant observation to facilitate triangulation and enhance the validity and trustworthiness of data. This holistic paradigm illuminates interpretations of the participants' lived experiences with reflexivity as an important aspect of the co-construction of meanings.

The epistemological assumption or the theory and nature of knowledge embedded in this paradigmatic positioning, on how individuals connect themselves with the bigger knowledge picture, have been adopted to be consistent with the interpretivist and constructionist paradigm because of the socio-cultural issues underpinning the research question. The research question concerns with investigating the ways in which research participants interpret their lived experiences of settlement and resettlement in the host society, and their social reality being a product of their engagement with the social and cultural surroundings is consistent with the constructionist epistemology. According to Crotty (1998) the epistemology, or the philosophical theory of knowledge of how we know what we know, of the constructionism paradigm underscores that truth or meaning comes into existence only through our engagement with the realities in our world; meaning is constructed; the nature of reality is socially-constructed and ever changing; subject and

object are partners in the generation of meaning. The epistemological assumption of an interpretivist tradition of inquiry focuses on the knowledge that arises from interpretation and insight and is grounded by emphatic communication with the subjects of the research. Symbols, meanings and hidden factors are essential to understanding. Interpretive meaning making arises from social constructionist assumptions that inform narrative analysis (Charmaz 2006).

The Filipino and Karen/Karenni communities in the Geelong region have endured the experiences of the processes of global migration and settlement/resettlement in the host society. The researcher has also experienced the same and considered himself as an ‘insider/outsider’ to the Filipino community and ‘external insider’ to the Karen/Karenni community situated in the regional geographical area of Geelong, Victoria. Due to the investigator being both an insider and outsider of the intended research communities, the research has employed an interpretive approach which allows for the generation of multiple meanings, avoiding a priori design, such as a positivist or post-positivist one that could limit the discovery of unexpected understandings (Denzin & Lincoln 2000). Employing the interpretive approach allowed for flexibility throughout the research process that subsequently led to more nuanced and complex findings, as this theoretical approach is based on the assumption that there is ‘no one reality, no one truth, but that perception of truth is relative and is based on personal experience’ (Smith 2010: 30).

### **Meaning Making in Narratives**

Aligning to the hierarchical relationship of the constructionist/interpretivist epistemological assumption was the adoption in this study of narrative research as the

overarching methodological framework. Although there is no straightforward definition of 'narrative' because of the complex categories on which to focus; clear accounts of how to analyse the data are rare; with no overall rules about suitable materials or modes of investigation; nevertheless, by using narrative methods, researchers are 'able to see different and sometimes contradictory layers of meaning, to bring them into useful dialogue with each other, and to understand more about individual and social change' (Squire, Andrews & Tamboukou 2008: 1). Narrative in human sciences can refer to the multilayers of meanings in the text, that is, those 'stories told by research participants, interpretive accounts developed by an investigator based on interviews and fieldwork observation, and even the narrative a reader constructs after engaging with the participant's and investigator's narratives' (Riessman 2008: 6). Andrews (2012: 34) contends that narratives are very effective tools for bringing people into conversations about their unique and culturally inscribed stories that 'have a great potential for bridge building, making vital connections between individuals and the world of ideas'. Narratives 'serve as a key for unlocking an oftentimes blocked door of making sense'. Narratives illuminate 'texts which brings stories of personal experience into being by means of the first person oral narration of past, present, future or imaginary experience' (Patterson 2008: 37).

With a deep interest in studying the settlement/resettlement experiences of ethnic minorities, I originally adopted the principles and procedures of a constructivist grounded theory methodology (CGTM) in the initial stages of this research project. CGTM lies squarely in the interpretive tradition, as it theorizes fine-grained analysis of how and why people construct actions and meanings in establishing reasons for it (Charmaz 2006). The

logic of this lies in ‘learning how, when and to what extent the studied experience is embedded in larger and hidden positions, networks, situations, and relationships’. The same methodological approach was employed by Smith (2010) in a study about the ‘Somali Bantu resettlement experiences in a globalized world’ and was deemed appropriate and effective in extracting research participant’s ‘relationships, memories and history in person, and highlighting barriers to successful integration into the receiving society’. Charmaz (2006: 10) contends that ‘grounded theory serves as a way to learn about the worlds we study and a method for developing theories to understand them’. However, in the middle of my data analysis, I lost my conviction that developing theories from doing CGTM would help me to highlight the themes that I would like to passionately convey in the write-up. Rather than developing theories, the analytic process in this study has instead navigated my interest towards doing thematic analysis of the similarities and differences of narrative accounts of the participants’ lived experiences and how meanings in the text were co-constructed. Nevertheless, this shift in the methodology still adheres to the constructionist/interpretivist paradigm which I make explicit as my positional standpoint as a researcher. As Mishler (1986: 68) points out ‘there is a wide recognition of the special importance of narrative as a mode through which individuals express their understanding of events and experiences’. This narrative research also parallels, draws, and follows the principles of cross-cultural studies in empowering the voices of the Karen/Karenni people.

### **Following the Principles of Cross-cultural Studies**

According to Ryen (2001: 335), cross-cultural studies have gained ground in recent decades in an increasingly multicultural world as indicated by the growing trend of

publications reporting in this area and manifested by now close to eighty journals that cover cross-cultural research topics and interests. Liamputtong (2010: ix) advocates for this type of research because of her profound interest in the lives of ‘cultural Others’. She makes explicit interesting aspects of cross-cultural research by exploring the subtleties of lived experiences of those who are marginalised in society due to their race and ethnicity. For her, researchers who wish to carry out their work in different cultures ought to know the issues surrounding the well-being of the research participants by doing their research sensibly and responsibly (p. ix).

In agreement with the views of scholars of cross-cultural studies, my outsider identity in the conversation with the Karen/Karenni community at the start of the research journey was transformed into a partial insider, as I explored the ways in which this newly emerging community navigate their resettlement in a regional geographical setting in Australia. Such a research setting is embedded in a completely different social, cultural, economic and political environment than their previous communities in Burma and years of displacement along the Thai-Burma border. I have shifted my identities at times depending on the changing context as an insider-outsider of the close knit Filipino community in Geelong. Following Limpangog’s (2011) shifting relationships with her informants, as she equates her being an ‘outsider’ as an overseas student who is new to the country and a new member of the Filipino community in Melbourne, I also feel the same during the initial stages of data gathering. It also resonates in me, that over time, the feeling of an ‘outsider’ dissolves into being an ‘insider’ as I incorporate with the Filipino community’s way of life in the diaspora. In assuming such identities, I was mindful of all the sensitivities, protocols,



complexities and fluidities outlined by scholars in conducting cross-cultural research (Banks 1998; Marvasti 2004; Liamputtong 2010).

Cross-cultural research pertains to the study or analysis that compares and contrasts various social elements of two or more communities' practices, beliefs, values, social roles, expressions, and norms and their intertwining relations within an historical context and the physical and social environments in which people reside; and examining the 'commonalities and contradictions across both different and similar cultures of varying time periods' (Sullivan ed. 2009: 123). Qualitative cross-cultural research emphasises interpretation and flexibility and aims to capture lived experiences of the social world and the meanings people give these experiences from their own perspective; the reliability of data is based on the notion that the researcher document the world from the point of view of the researched (Hammersley 1992; Corti & Thompson 2004; Liamputtong 2010). This study listens to, reflects on and highlights the voices of the 'voiceless' and makes visible those that are unseen within the ranks of the 'dominated communities' in the realms of the socio-cultural spheres that dominate modern society (Briggs 2001: 914). In addition, this qualitative inquiry allowed the researcher to hear the voices of those who are 'silenced, othered, and marginalized by the dominant social order' (Liamputtong 2010: 11).

As stated at the outset, this study has deeply considered the effects of cross-cultural research on the past and present situations, as well as future implications on the research participants from different cultural, ethnic and linguistic backgrounds, who have been caught in research endeavours where they have been exploited, abused and their cultural integrity have been utterly disregarded (Liamputtong 2010). Furthermore, the subtle nature

of the present study of the Karen/Karennis parallels with Ryen's (2001: 335) argument in that it has been 'faced with the perennial problems of understanding local nuances in the languages and cultures of respondents and the difficulties associated with using interpreters'.

In seeking to understand these local nuances in the language and culture of the Karen/Karennis in Geelong, I sought the help of a member of my family's friend whom she met while they were doing a course in aged care at Diversitat. She introduced me to Htoo Paw who has a working knowledge of the English language and has been living in Geelong for five years by the time I asked her to be one of my research assistants. Before asking Htoo Paw to be my research assistant, a member of my family and I made several visits to her home where we exchanged stories of life in Australia, shared traditional food, befriended her husband who was on crutches and in agonising pain due to a work-related injury, in order to establish rapport and a friendly relationship and learn about their culture. Htoo Paw shared stories of some sort of 'culture shock' when her house was pelted with rocks and eggs, resulting in a broken window, with the aftermath of incurring skyrocketing costs of replacing the glass window. Htoo Paw reported the incident to the police authorities who could not do anything because of lack of witnesses. Listening to such stories, together with my experience of racism and discrimination in the abattoir and along the streets of Geelong, and in my job search, reawakened my social justice philosophies deeply entrenched in my undergraduate training and professional career. Apart from sharing the same racial background (South East Asian), this encounter with Htoo Paw became the crux or the heart of the matter of, why I chose the Karen/Karennis in Geelong

to co-construct meanings of their world realities. A wonderful but challenging research project was born the moment Htoo Paw agreed to be one of my research participants, and more importantly, a research assistant (as Phan) interpreting and translating meanings of the Karen/Karennis' narrative accounts. It shall be noted here that before I hired Htoo Paw to be my research assistant in interpreting meanings of the Karen/Karennis, I interviewed her first as a research participant without any mention of transforming her into an interpreter/translator. This was done in anticipation and avoidance of any potential conflict of interest that might occur in dual roles (research participant and research assistant). A few weeks after my interview with Htoo Paw, I offered her the position of research assistant and in the process transforming her from Htoo Paw (the research participant) to Phan (the research assistant).

Consistent with the principle of a qualitative study, this thesis 'provides detailed description and analysis of the quality, or the substance, of the human experience' (Marvasti 2004: 7) in making sense of the participants' social realities in the diaspora. Hence, qualitative cross-cultural interviewing was employed with the aim of thematising the informant's experience as well as being vigilant to the flexibilities and attentiveness of the variety of meanings that may emerge including being alert to developing and changing contexts of meaning (Warren 2001). Like many qualitative research projects, this meaning making of the informants intersects with my personal experience and echoes my historical, social, political, economic and cultural understanding of the diasporic space which we commonly share. Ellis & Berger (2001: 853) point out that the 'interviewing process becomes less a conduit of information from informants to researchers that represents how

things are, and more a sea swell of meaning making in which researchers connect their own experiences to those of others and provide stories that open up conversations about how we live and cope’.

### **Adopting the Principle of Reflexivity**

Reflexivity, that is, the profound effect of the personality or presence of the researcher on what is being investigated, aligns with the narrative methodological and analytical underpinnings of this research project. Reflexivity is underscored by the positioning of the researcher within the text of the narrative.

By positioning our ‘selves’ within the text, alongside the stories others tell about their lives, and viewing those stories within the contexts of dominant discourses, without privileging one story over another, we can create new and reflexive knowledge that can include the researcher’s story, thus making transparent the values and beliefs that have inevitably influenced the research process and its outcomes (Etherington 2006: 81).

Reflexivity is a way of viewing data as ‘mutually constructed by the researcher and the researched; neither data nor the subsequent analyses are neutral but reflect the positions, conditions, and contingencies of their construction’ (Wertz et al. 2011: 169). Furthermore, ‘the principles of reflexivity require that the researcher regard findings as relative to his or her standpoint as an observer’ (Wertz et al. 2011: 226). However, overtly acknowledging the life and presence of the researcher as part of the research has contributed to the so-called ‘crisis of representation’ (Denzin & Lincoln 2000). This crisis stems from the falling away of traditional notions of truth, reality, and knowledge that provide the foundations to present findings. Nevertheless, Elliott (2005: 154) argues that one way of getting through

this crisis of representation, that is, when adopting the reflexive approach to research, is for qualitative researchers to have a profound ‘commitment to producing research that has a capacity to make a difference in the social world’, such as research projects that illuminate inequalities in society. By drawing on the principles of reflexivity, this study intends to highlight inequalities in society brought about by subtle forms of social closure imposed by the dominant group to the seemingly ‘inferior’ members of ethnic groups with the aim of maximising benefits, privileges and opportunities. Reflexivity values my experience of suffering from subtle forms of closure as it forms part of the essential elements of the argument that I have brought forward in this study.

In his epistemological travel as a scholar, Banks (1998: 4) believes that ‘the biographical journeys of researchers greatly influence their values, their research questions, and the knowledge they construct. The knowledge they construct mirrors their life experiences and their values’. As is implicit and explicit in this dissertation, reflexivity focuses on the ‘underlying theories and the linguistic formulation of the research topic and problem, the social and political situatedness and implications of the research and the personal experiences, and the history of the researcher prior to and in the research process’ (Wertz et al. 2011: 379). Addressing qualitative researchers, particularly those that espouse the constructionist/interpretivist paradigm and employ narrative methodology, Etherington (2006: 89) emphasises that:

Reflexivity challenges us to be more fully conscious of our own ideology, culture, and politics and those of our participants and our audience; this adds validity and rigour by providing information about the contexts in which data are located and enables us to recognise and address the moral and ethical issues and power relations

involved.

In this study, careful considerations have been made in representing a balance in the co-construction of meaning between the significant and relevant life stories of the research participants and the values and socio-cultural history of the researcher.

## **The Research Participants**

The two communities being studied here differ significantly in terms of their socio-cultural and economic make-up as defined by their linguistic ability, history, social networks and length of stay characteristics, including their engagement with the mainstream, as well as reasons of migration as outlined in Chapter Two. They also came to Australia in two different time periods of the nation's multicultural history. The first generation Filipino participants arrived in Australia in the 1970s and 1980s on three well-known visa categories as tradesmen, fiancé-sponsored immigrants or 'mail-order brides', and skilled immigrants. In the study sample of thirteen first generation Filipino Australians, eight were women and five were men. Among them, seven were fiancé-sponsored immigrants, four were skilled immigrants and two arrived as tradesmen; they have an average length of stay in the Geelong region of twenty six years and considered themselves established. The established Filipinos in Geelong were particularly selected to participate in this study, as opposed to the recently-arrived skilled Filipino immigrants, as they deemed to provide a depth and breadth of understanding and knowledge of lived experiences in the diaspora. All of them have either a university or trade qualification, and have a good command of the English language when they arrived into Geelong, Australia, although struggled in the first few years dealing with the Australian accent as they are used to the

American accent back home in the Philippines. The two tradesmen of the sampled Filipino research participants were recipients of the so-called ‘supported passage’ of the Australian government where airfares, accommodation and even paid work were provided for free. My strong connection and sense of belonging with the Filipino community in Geelong encouraged me to dig deep into their migration journeys. Even though there is an absence of blood relations with the members of this community, they want me and my family to call them aunties and uncles or *Ate* (older sister) and *Kuya* (older brother) shortly after our arrival in the region, and until now, signifying their intention of including and embracing us as part of their extended families in the diaspora. They also provided us with basic needs, from furniture to winter clothes and appliances, and even extended help in looking for paid work.

In contrast, the first generation Karen/Karenni participants arrived in Australia on a humanitarian and refugee visa to escape persecution and after years of living as displaced people along the Thai-Burma border. They resettled in the Geelong region under the Federal Government’s Humanitarian Resettlement Program. Of the fifteen sampled Karen/Karenni participants, eight were women and seven were men with an average length of stay of four years at the time of the study and considered as part of a newly emerging community in the region. Unlike the Filipino participants who have a good command of the English language when they arrived in the Geelong region, all but two of the Karen/Karenni participants do not speak English at all. The two Karen/Karenni participants who have basic English language ability were recruited as research assistants to interpret/translate the stories of the Karen/Karenni people. The reason for choosing the

Karen/Karenni community for this study is their close connection with my family as mentioned in Chapter One.

The Filipino and Karen/Karenni communities in Geelong are the two focal communities of this study. Though they offer a unique lens in understanding the understudied migratory patterns of Filipinos and Karens/Karennis in regional geographical areas, they are not representative of the totality of Filipino and Karen/Karenni communities of Australia. Rather they are specific groups within these communities. For example, the Filipino participants comprise individuals who have lived in Australia for decades, seven out of the thirteen participants were married into families that were born in Australia and had established social networks and seemingly acquired the sense of belonging. This is different from the larger groups of Filipino migrants in Australia today that have come as skilled immigrants. By targeting this specific group of Filipinos, who arrived in the Geelong region in the 1970s and 1980s, an inference can be made regarding nuances of experiences rather than generalisations, and this approach is consistent with the narrative research methodology.

The aim of narrative research is not to generalize – one cannot offer generalizations based on small samples that are not gathered to be representative. Instead, narrative research offers the possibility of exploring nuances and interrelationships among aspects of experience that the reader might apply to better understand other related situations. Narrative explicates layers of meaning (Wertz et al. 2011: 238-9).

Studying these two different communities provide an understanding of the ways in which these ethnic minorities differ or conform with their perceptions of inclusion or exclusion in the domains of labour market participation, accessing health, education and



other services, as well as differences and similarities of experiences in the acculturation and intercultural relations with the mainstream society. Detailed characteristics and categories such as reasons for migration, English fluency, educational background, visa entitlements, and community linkages of the research participants are compared and intertwined in the discussions of the succeeding chapters to contextualise their interpretive and reflexive meanings which highlight their socio-cultural *situatedness*. Moreover, exploring the voices and the socio-cultural *situatedness* of the dominated in relation to the taken for granted values and norms of the dominant society is unfathomable without delving into the insider/outsider dualism as it pertains to the diverse roles of the researcher in an ethnographic cross-cultural study. Knowing the grounded situation of the participants cannot be ascertained without the researcher's ability to play different roles as an integral part of the context.

### **Negotiating the Complexities of the 'Insider/Outsider' Dualism**

Establishing rapport, immersing into the world of the informants, gaining trust and accessing data through interviews and participant observations can be enhanced if one is knowledgeable of the debates, boundaries, limitations, advantages and disadvantages and complexities and fluidities of the insider/outsider dualism in cross-cultural research (Rye 2001; Marvasti 2004; Webster & John 2010). According to Banks (1998: 7) the typology of the insider and outsider is contingent on the notion that 'individuals are socialized within ethnic, racial, and cultural communities in which they internalize localized values, perspectives, ways of knowing, behaviours, beliefs, and knowledge that can differ in significant ways from those of individuals socialized within other microcultures'. The

notion of ‘insider’, which indicates the researcher is identifying closely with a group, has a disadvantage because the researcher is unable to distance from the accounts of those being researched (Hammersley & Atkinson 1996). However, ‘individuals within a particular ethnic or cultural community are more likely to exemplify the institutionalized beliefs and knowledge of that community than are individuals outside it’ (Banks 1998: 7). In other words, active engagement with those researched contributes to the ‘shortening of distance between the researcher and the environment and adds to personal enskilment of the researcher’ (Webster & John 2010: 183).

One of the problems of ‘going native’ or being involved in full membership of the studied community is that it undermines the sense of being an ethnographer who aims to ‘remain objective and to accurately report their observations’ (Marvasti 2004: 39). Ethnographers are then ‘expected to maintain a polite distance from those studied and to cultivate rapport, not friendship; compassion, not sympathy; respect, not belief; understanding, not identification; admiration, not love’ (Tedlock 2000: 457; see also Marvasti 2004: 39) in order to maintain objectivity. However, ‘going native’ was deemed to be appropriate at times in the current study with the Filipino community because of the researcher’s inherent ‘insider’ status by living within the same milieu and social network as with the informants for years. Furthermore, throughout the research process, I have adopted Marvasti’s (2004) strategy of assuming multiple roles in the field either being partially, actively or completely involved in the research from one day to the next and from one setting to another as this study was employing a partial ethnographic method.

Based on the typology of cross-cultural researchers by Banks (1998: 7-8), it is likely

that I assumed mostly the role of ‘indigenous insider’ and shifted to ‘indigenous outsider’ depending on the contexts, times and situations with my study of the Filipino community. For Banks (1998: 15), a social science researcher is likely to function at some point as an indigenous-insider, an indigenous-outsider, an external-insider, and an external-outsider depending on contexts, times and situations. My family and I were accepted as ‘legitimate members of the community’ within days of arrival in Geelong and were welcomed with a huge banquet; we made acquaintances with and took part in socialising activities with community leaders and members. Through the years, I was able to socialise with the circle of friends and networks in the Filipino community in Geelong and have familial reciprocal relationship with them, that is, I can count on them in times of need and vice versa just like a typical family. As I was using their pseudonyms in the entire interview process, I switched back to calling my Filipino participants auntie, uncle or *Ate* and *Kuya* preceding their real first names before and after their interviews, as a sign of respect and reciprocal belongingness inasmuch as they would also like to be called the same culturally.

In the case of the Karen/Karenni community, it is likely that I more often assumed the role of ‘external insider’ because of my assumption of being accepted as an ‘adopted’ member of the community. The relationship is a kind of mutual understanding where they knew my identity as a Filipino postgraduate student willing to listen to their life stories and predicaments in Australia. By telling their personal stories of resettlement, which will likely contribute to the enhancement of my future career progression, they hope that one day I can go back to their community and repay them by assisting their children access quality education. There is hope that one day redemption will come, that is, from being

excluded mainly perceptively because of language barriers, to being included in all schemes of things enjoyed by the local white Australians. Their hopes for redemption will become a reality not only in academic and political discourses, but also in their everyday living, when local Australians will reach out to help them in their needs. Such connection with the Karen/Karennis is slightly different to what I have established with the Filipino community which is more of a reciprocal and familial kind of relationship. I have attended Karen/Karenni community special occasions one after the other but have been mindful of cultivating only professional rapport and building trust rather than expanding personal friendships in keeping with the ethnographic tradition. Nevertheless, I have promised my Karen/Karenni research participants that I will go back to their community and assist in whatever capacity I can extend to them, especially now that I have a deeper understanding about their social, cultural, economic and political history and their contemporary situation. In performing these shifting roles, I was able to draw a holistic representation of the reality of the research participants' settlement/resettlement experiences and connect this to the bigger picture of the globalised world. In the meantime, it is imperative to focus on providing a voice to their voiceless status, and also to support and enable them in being seen and heard.

### **Empowering the Voice of the 'Voiceless'**

The empowerment of the voice of the participants and the study of their responses as narratives are closely linked. They lie solely in the contention that 'one of the significant ways through which individuals make sense of and give meaning to their experiences is to organize them in a narrative form' (Mishler 1986: 118). It was emphasised during the

invitation to participate in the study and in the interview process that the findings of the research could become a catalyst for policy and social change to make things better for the individual member of the community. I wanted to let the research participants know that the ‘role of informants has moved from treating them as simple vessels of information to seeing them as partners in a venture to gather data and to improve the quality of their lives’ (Marvasti 2004: 54) by educating members of the dominant society about their current situation. However, in supporting them to find their voice and empowering them in the process, particularly in the case of studying the lived experiences of the Karen/Karenni research participants, it is imperative that I overcome and successfully hurdle the communication barrier.

The argument of the naturalistic assumption, that is, a belief that social reality is transparent in people’s words and actions, poses insider-outsider challenges because of how culture and communication are viewed as a nexus for interviewing. These challenges inform the methodological imperatives which ‘move in the direction of overcoming the communicative hurdles put in place by cultural differences’ (Ryen 2001: 336). Language is a ‘fundamental tool which allows qualitative researchers to understand human behavior, socio-cultural processes and cultural meanings’ (Hennink 2008: 23). Language differences in cross-cultural research can be a ‘potential hurdle’ when participants do not speak English as their first language and researchers are not familiar with the language of the research participants (Liamputtong 2010: 136-7). However, scholars have pointed out that to overcome linguistic barriers in cross-cultural research, ‘bicultural or bilingual research assistants were employed to work on the research project’ (Liamputtong 2010: 137; see

also Hennink 2008).

While there has been no communication issues encountered with the case of studying the Filipino community because of the researcher's active engagement in undertaking an 'indigenous insider' role in terms of linguistic, cultural and social realms; there was a big challenge as to how to overcome communicative hurdles in the case of studying the Karen/Karenni community. As an outsider to the latter's linguistic, cultural and communication means, I gained access to their 'world of meanings' by hiring the services of two Karen/Karennis, and assigned the roles of research assistants (RAs) to work as translators/interpreters because of their inherent working knowledge of the English language, and their shared linguistic and socio-cultural traits with the Karen/Karenni participants. As mentioned, before I hired these two Karen/Karennis as RAs, I arranged an interview with them on separate occasions as research participants, without any mention of hiring them as future RAs, as I was aware of a potential conflict of interest that could arise in performing dual roles. Except for the two RAs who were also study participants, all of the Karen/Karenni participants either do not speak English at all or speak very little English even though most of them have already finished the mandatory 520 hours of English lessons at Diversitat. Day by day, I was transformed from being an 'outsider' to 'external insider' as I became socialised with their culture and slowly gained access to their knowledge, attitudes, values and beliefs (Banks 1998: 8).

The Karen female Research Assistant (RA), whom I called Phan<sup>6</sup> in this study, is a friend of a member of my family. Long before the research commenced, I had already established good rapport to her and her family to gain their trust and confidence. At the initial stages of the data gathering process, I hired Phan to assist in the conduct of my fieldwork in the Karen/Karenni community. But I soon found out that she has difficulty relating to Karen/Karenni men because of some inherent culturally-defined gender roles. This was the reason why I hired another RA, a Karenni male, whom I named Elmer in this study. The RAs then functioned as ‘point person’, that is, they were given a free hand to determine who is going to be interviewed, with guidance from the researcher.

In supporting the participants to find their voice and empower them in the process, it was made clear in the ‘invitation to participate in the research project’, that their stories of settlement and resettlement may contribute to ways and means of informing the Australian public about the Filipino and Karen/Karenni communities’ concerns, aspirations and problems encountered in accessing services and other settlement/resettlement issues. Drawing on the notion that ‘stories are lived before they are told’, that is, ‘we understand our own lives in terms of the narratives we live out that the form of narratives is appropriate for understanding the actions of others’ (MacIntyre 1981: 197), the stories of the participants may influence the multicultural policies and programmes of the government and other non-profit organisations. It was known to the prospective participants during the selection process that their story could make a difference to the lives of ethnic groups. This

---

<sup>6</sup> As mentioned, all names appearing in this thesis are pseudonyms to preserve the confidentiality of real people playing a particular role.

is illustrated with the notion that ‘when we enable other people (and ourselves) to give voice to our experiences, those voices create a sense of power and authority’ (Etherington 2006: 82).

This emphasis on empowering the voices of the participants is done in congruence with the normal ethical principles, that is, the participant’s responses to all questions, and their interpretations, comments and discussions that arise from the interviews and focus group discussions, and their identities is made confidential. The practice of explicit confidentiality is ‘consistent with the aim of empowering respondents in the sense that they retain control over the circumstances under which their personal views enter into the discourse with others in their social worlds’ (Mishler 1986: 125). Also, it was made apparent to participants that their interview transcripts would be returned for comments; and that they were free to withdraw from the study at anytime. These were the guiding principles employed in encouraging and selecting the participants for this study.

### **Selecting the Participants in the Study**

In identifying and selecting potential informants, ‘gatekeepers’ and snowball approaches were used. ‘Gatekeepers’ are someone who can give access to the particular places and have local knowledge of information and people residing in the area (Lofland & Lofland 1995; Marvasti 2004). In the case of the Filipino community, a ‘gatekeeper’, who has knowledge about the names and contact details of established Filipinos living in Geelong, was tapped. The criteria for inviting participants to the study were emphasized, such as they shall be living in Geelong region for twenty or more years, and shall have only one participant per household. Length of residence (twenty years or more) in the Geelong



region presumed to provide more breadth and depth of settlement experience amongst ethnic minorities negotiating the rapids of the mainstream of the host society. Since the majority of the identified Filipino participants were brides of Anglo Australian husbands, each time a Filipino couple (both husband and wife are Filipinos) was identified; it was usually the Filipino husband who was invited to participate in the study to achieve gender balance. One Filipino respondent was chosen via a snowball approach, that is, one respondent leads to another. There were eight women and five men Filipino participants. Aside from using pseudonyms, I avoided writing detailed descriptions of family history, personal attributes, and demographic data to ensure that research participants will not be identified, even if they will be able to read the thesis.

In the case of the Karen/Karenni community, sampling was conducted by Phan and Elmer, the two Karen/Karenni Research Assistants (RAs). As mentioned above, Phan, the Karen woman RA, is also known in this study as Htoo Paw, the research participant. Likewise, Elmer, the Karenni man RA, is also known as Maw, the research participant in this study. But, in order to avoid any conflict of interest, I have first interviewed them as research participants. A few weeks after their research interviews, and after realising their good English language abilities, and my immediate need for a local Karen/Karenni interpreter/translator, I approached them and asked if they could be my research assistants. They have wilfully accepted my offer and I immediately arranged the paper works, including the signing of the Confidential Disclosure Agreement to comply with the Human Research Ethics protocol. Assigning a specific pseudonym to a particular role will prevent confusion in the presentation of data later on in the succeeding chapters. On other days,

Phan and Elmer performed vital roles helping the newly arrived members of their own community, in conjunction with Diversitat. As a non-government organisation, Diversitat is contracted by the Federal Government to provide assistance to the newly arrived Karen/Karenni refugees. Due to performing these vital roles, these RAs obviously know everyone from their community particularly those humanitarian entrants who arrived within the last five years or those who arrived from the year 2007 onwards. Phan identified the potential women participants, while Elmer selected the men participants. Every interested Karen/Karenni was welcome to participate and was informed of the requirement of upholding the rule of 'one participant per household' to present distinctiveness of data in the analysis and to provide a wide variety of narratives. There were eight women and seven men participants in the Karen/Karenni study.

### **Navigating the Initial Stages of Fieldwork**

The initial stages of the fieldwork consisted mainly of testing in-depth interview questions as well as learning 'about the emergent key themes of the discussion and people's responses, the dynamics of the interaction, and the mechanics of the discussion' (Litosseliti 2003). The researcher conducted initial visits to agreed sites to establish rapport and arranged the schedule of the first meeting with the participants.

Parallel with establishing rapport with the participants, was the joint undertaking of framing and refining the in-depth interview and focus group discussion questions. Based from my regular conversations with the Filipinos and Karens/Karennis in Geelong, it was very apparent that they explicitly wanted to be heard about their current situation, particularly on their difficulties accessing government services, and barriers to securing

desirable jobs in the labour market. They were, implicitly, keen on understanding the subtleties of their perceived treatment as ‘coloured’ immigrants in a predominantly white Australian society. Furthermore, this everyday encounter with immigrants from South East Asia unearthed research themes that echoed discussions found in migration studies, which were also incorporated into the current study, such as social networks and interrelations, accessing social services, nuances of transnational identities, and transitional moments of living in the regional area. Consequently, the interview and focus group discussion questions were framed out of these themes as pointed out by the informants themselves within the course of living and discussing with them a few months before the study formally started. In other words, these thematic guidelines embedded in the interview questions can be interpreted within the categories of access and equity, issues of difference, and social inclusion and exclusion jointly constructed by the researcher and participants. Aside from informal conversations, some formal meetings were also conducted to signal the start of the data collection.

In the case of the Filipinos, I informed prospective Filipino participants of my intention to interview them during the initial stages of my pre-candidature when I attended special occasions such as birthday parties, anniversaries, and Christmas and New Year celebrations and at community meetings. In one of the community meetings, I was given the floor to explain the nature and purpose of the research project, handed out information to participants, fact sheets, which were written in everyday, simple English language, about how they could engage as participants, as well as some ethical considerations to be adhered to in the entire research process. During the meeting, it was reiterated by one of the

members that not only their stories would be heard and published in a thesis, they will also help a 'co-ethnic' achieved new heights of academic success.

The participants were informed that this research is their once in a lifetime opportunity to narrate their life stories of settlement in Australia that could provide significant 'voice' to everyday taken for granted social realities. It was made clear to the research participants that they could tell their untold stories of experiences of perceived racism and discrimination, and how they engaged with accessing government services. The participants were also informed of their rights during the entire research process as well as the provision of ample decision-making time of approximately seven days after invitation to decide whether or not they will participate in the study. Schedules for interviews on an individual basis were then arranged shortly after for those who had decided to participate.

In the case of the Karen/Karennis, prospective participants were visited by the researcher individually at their place of residence. I was accompanied by Phan to visit and invite the prospective women participants, and by Elmer to invite the men participants. During these visits, the prospective participants were informed about the nature and purpose of the research project, the ethical considerations as well as the benefits of the study for their community. It was made clear to the prospective participants that although there would be no monetary benefits for their participation, their stories could open doors of opportunities and inform the government of their current situation in ways that might contribute to policy and social change for the betterment of their lives. Schedules of individual meeting were set up for those who agreed to participate in the study in order to conduct in-depth interviews.

## **Modes of Gathering and Analysing the Data**

The primary data of this investigation were collected using 28 in-depth individual interviews and two focus group discussions using semi-structured, open-ended questions (see Appendices 1 & 2). Direct translations were employed using the services of the Karen/Karenni research assistants as local interpreters in the case of interviewing the Karen/Karenni participants. Before commencing their role as interpreters/translators, Phan and Elmer read, understood and signed a Confidential Disclosure Agreement for Research Assistant which stipulated, among others, that all confidential information, including stories told by the Karen/Karenni participants during the course of the interview process and focus group discussions, shall not be used or disclosed to any third party. Likewise, before commencing interviews, the research participants were told that their stories will be made confidential, and were also informed that the RA will not use or disclose their stories to a third party. The interview data were captured through digital audio recording and field note taking. As soon as the first in-depth individual interview was done, transcribing of the data followed immediately, in order to familiarise with the relevant and significant themes deemed to be helpful in answering the research questions. In transcribing the audio recording of the interviews, I have employed a ‘repeated listening to ensure the most accurate transcript possible’ (Mishler 1986: 49) approach. As I intently listened to the first audio recording and transcribed the interviews in an almost verbatim or word for word fashion, I discovered gaps in the participant’s story that may be lacking or inaccurate to answer some issues embedded in the research questions. I noted these informational gaps and subsequently incorporated further probes into the next interview process of the next

participant. In other words, thematic analysis was simultaneously performed while transcribing the interview data.

In helping manage mountainous and complex qualitative data, coding was systematically employed using ‘colour coding’ of texts. Reading and re-reading of transcripts was done to construct major themes (Wertz, et. al. 2011). This allowed the researcher to analyse and make sense of the data rather than do a descriptive and impressionistic account of the narratives. Such an undertaking is guided by the fundamental principle of the analytic process which affirms that ‘all of us bring to our research knowledge which we have acquired through our life’s experiences’ (Andrews 2008: 86) and such personal dispositions influenced the way we interpret the realities around us. In constructing identities in key narratives of participants, I have focused on ‘accounts that construct emotions, worldviews, characters or events in ways that illuminate why particular accounts are produced in particular ways – i.e. on sense-making processes’ (Phoenix 2008: 67). I have identified thematic accounts of convergence that created a community of experience, as well as divergence that split apart their experience, because making sense of them analytically supports trustworthiness (Riessman 2008).

This convergence and divergence of experiences generated data that describes the situation of established Filipino communities and emerging Karen/Karenni communities in regional Victoria. It was achieved through a comparative fine-grained situational analysis and the use of narrative research as the overarching methodology in congruence with ethnographic research. In-depth individual interviews, focus group discussions, and participant observation were the methods employed to gather data.

### **a. Interviewing the ‘Voiceless’**

According to Gubrium & Holstein (2001: 10), we are now living in an ‘interview society’ in which ‘interviews seem central to making sense of our lives and ninety percent of all social science investigations exploit interview data’ (see also Silverman 1997: 248; Briggs 1986). As already mentioned, in-depth interviews were conducted to elicit from each participant their interpretation of his or her experience (Charmaz 2006) regarding issues of difference, racism and discrimination, and barriers to participation in the mainstream social institutions employing open-ended questions. In-depth interviewing seeks ‘deep’ information and understanding held by participants in some everyday activity, event or place (Johnson 2001: 106). The goal of in-depth interviewing is one of subjecting the researcher’s own social situation, to the set of contingencies that play upon a set of individuals, so that the researcher can physically and ecologically penetrate the informants’ circle of response to their social situation, their work situation, or their ethnic situation (Goffman 1989: 125; see also Johnson 2001: 106). The point of departure in this interviewing approach is the ‘commonsense perceptions, explanations, and understanding of some lived cultural experience and aims to explore the contextual boundaries of that experience or perception, to uncover what is usually hidden from ordinary view or reflection about the nature of that experience’ (Johnson 2001: 106).

The subsequent interviews were preceded by telling the participants of the significant and unique opportunity to tell their life stories of settlement/resettlement in Australia. As briefly mentioned, this was followed by the explication of ethical protocols such as the strict adherence to the principle of anonymity and confidentiality, informed consent, the

right to withdraw from the research at any time, freedom to choose their own language and the verbal consent of being tape-recorded, or not, as well as the power to decide on the final outcome of their own full interview transcripts. One week before the start of each interview, a consent form for participants involved in research was signed by a participant to certify that she/he was voluntarily giving her/his consents to participate in the study. In the case of the Karen/Karenni participants, such consent form was written in their own language. The rationale for doing this is that the ‘informed-consent procedures are intended to minimize negative social and personal consequences and serve the purpose of allowing subjects to assess the risks of their participation in a study’ (Mishler 1986: 121). Each of the participants was asked to provide their own pseudonym to safeguard them when disclosing sensitive issues such as their personal experiences of racism and/or discrimination and expressing critical views with the ways the government provide services. In invoking confidentiality of a participant’s identity, I agree with the ‘common assumption among researchers that this guarantee of anonymity is more likely to produce “truthful” and candid responses’ (Mishler 1986: 123).

After I introduced myself and explained ethical protocol, the in-depth interviews commenced employing open-ended questions (see Appendix 1). This type of questioning allowed freedom for the participants to explicate their interpretations of their lived experiences. Although a set of open-ended questions guided the interview process, there was an unimpeded narration of stories by the participants that unearthed the richness of people’s lives in their acculturation and integration process. Facial expressions and other non-verbal clues shown while telling stories were recorded providing clarification of their



verbal accounts. Additional interviews were conducted as required to clarify ambiguous responses and gather more insights about a theme until the researcher has achieved enough material explaining the relationships of the themes.

The unfolding of personal narratives of the Karen/Karenni lived experiences with mainstream social institutions and culture was sifted through the interpretive mechanism of the Karen/Karenni Research Assistants (RAs). I have taken onboard their interpretations of stories at 'face value' as they promised, after signing the Confidential Disclosure Agreement for Research Assistant, that they would uphold the dignity of the participants and preserved the cultural integrity of the Karen/Karenni community.

One time there was difficulty and hesitation in interpreting meanings which can be illustrated when I asked sensitive questions in our first interview with a Karenni man. The participant answered with an elaborated narrative combined with facial expressions signifying anger, passion and being upset but Elmer, the RA, interpreted his answer to me in a mild manner I was not satisfied with. So I stopped the conversation and asked the participant for a break. I, then, asked Elmer for a one-on-one closed-door meeting and reiterated that we need to do justice to the participant by revealing the real sense of what he had to say. I assured Elmer that his identity as well as the participant's will be kept secret, and will be safeguarded at all times, and the conversation will be kept confidential. I explained this is why we are using pseudonyms within the interviews, and then I explained to him again the ethical considerations. After the Elmer had promised to uphold the closest real meaning of what the participant has to say, we moved out from the secluded room and continued with the interview. I have the interview question rephrased for the Karenni

participant and Elmer subsequently translated the response in a manner that corresponded to the participant's facial expression and other non-verbal clues. I have done this following the principle of a 'story as a joint production' in which 'the interviewer's presence and form of involvement – how she or he listens, attends, encourages, interrupts, digresses, initiates topics, and terminates responses – is integral to a respondent's account' (Mishler 1986: 82).

During the individual interviews, participants were given the free hand to talk about their lived experiences of living in regional Victoria. Most of the time, they opened up stories of struggles living in an unfamiliar land, difficulties in accessing social services, experiences of racism and discrimination in the labour market and in the streets of their neighbourhood. In other words, they were engaged into telling their uninterrupted episodes of life history that focused mostly on negative experiences. It was a moment in time and place where they were given a free hand to talk about settlement and resettlement experiences that matters to them, not only about their eagerness to re-present the past, but how it influences their present situation, and its connection and implication in the future.

After transcribing the audio-recording of the interviews, the interview transcripts were returned to respective participants for establishing accuracy through member checks (Lincoln & Guba 1985). Each participant was asked to check for the accuracy of their stories and make subsequent comments and corrections if needed. They were asked to return the transcript with their comments written on it. The interview transcripts were transcribed almost verbatim so they could be deemed genuine and an exact representation of what participants had said during the interviews. In the case of the Karen/Karenni

participants, a reverse translation was done where the Karenni RA read the interview transcripts directly to the Karen/Karenni participant using their own native language – either in Burmese, Karen, Kuyoh or Kayah – depending on the dialect preferred by the participant. The individual interview data were supplemented by the comments and insights brought up during the conduct of the focus group discussions.

### **b. Discussing Themes in Focus Groups**

Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) were employed to expand the scope of the themes found from the initial data gathering and ‘checked for the validity of findings in later stages of the investigation and the triangulation of data’ (Litosseliti 2003: 17). Focus groups can mean ‘small structured groups with selected participants’ and are ‘set up in order to explore specific topics, and individual’s views and experiences, through group interaction’ (Litosseliti 2003: 1). The participants of the FGDs were the same people, who have been selected for the interviews, to provide a venue for the verification and clarification of interview data, and build upon it and uncover more interpretive experiences. The same principles of ethical standards, as in the interviews, were adopted. Before commencing discussions, group protocols were explained, and as the discussions progressed, ‘participants responded to and built on the views expressed by others in the group in a synergistic approach that produced a range of opinions, ideas and experiences, and thus generated insightful information’ (Litosseliti 2003: 2).

When I applied for my candidature, I was mindful about being objective in the research process. Objective, according to Scott & Marshall (eds. 2009: 521-2), refers to the ‘attitude of mind deemed proper to a scientific investigator: detached, unprejudiced, and

open to whatever the evidence may reveal’, and may be applied to the method of investigation employed or procedures designed to protect investigations from biases and ensure objectivity. This approach is characterised by remaining separate and distant from research participants and their realities, by assuming the role of authoritative expert who brings an objective view to the research. In doing so, the researcher applies suitable procedures in generating objective knowledge that can be verified, and does not require self-reflexivity of the researching process (Charmaz 2006). However, opponents to the scientific and positivistic model for sociological inquiry contend that ‘objectivity in the results of sociological research may be rejected on ontological grounds where social action and relations are constituted by shared meanings not amenable to objective analysis; human social life is radically unpredictable because of special properties of voluntary agency’ (Scott & Marshall eds. 2009: 522). Thus, in a sociological inquiry striving for objectivity ‘is an unattainable, idealized goal’ (Banks 1998: 6). As a consequence, halfway through the preparation of my candidature proposal, I was faced with a contradictory dilemma in maintaining a sort of distance, where I could bring forth an objective study while reflecting subjectively about the perspectives and interpretations of lived experiences through the individual narratives of participants, and preserving trust and good familial relationships with them.

This dilemma turned my attention to the interpretive tradition of a constructionist paradigm employing narrative analysis as the overarching methodology. This methodology recognised that the interpretations of the data collected during interviews and focus group discussions (FGDs) represented a joint construction between the researcher and the

research participants. The quest for a deeper understanding of the social reality of the research participants requires that I have to position myself within the interpretive/constructionist paradigm, which I believe is the better way to search for concrete answers to the questions brought forward in this study.

Rather than form a limiting hypothesis for this study, I reviewed the literature about immigration and settlement/resettlement issues of ethnic minorities in regional Australia, particularly focusing on the topics I am passionate about, such as access and equity, issues of difference, and social inclusion and exclusion, and identified gaps on knowledge about these contexts. After six months of reviewing the literature, I went on to consult my prospective community and conducted an informal and impromptu focus group discussion during one of their community meetings. We discussed the research project which would be centred on storytelling about their experiences of living in regional Victoria. I pointed out in the beginning that it is alright to open up sensitive issues, such as experiences of denigration, racism, and discriminating practices in the labour market because their identity would be made confidential. The bottom line of the focus group discussion was their unanimous desire of the need to alleviate their social, economic and cultural situation. The second focus group discussion was conducted to present the initial findings found in the data.

Initial findings in the form of major themes were presented in the focus group discussion, including the participants' experiences of denigration and racism in the streets and in the workplace, the longing to be 'at home' in the diaspora, and their difficulties accessing social services. The focus group discussion, although it was done in a friendly

way, revealed a slightly different story telling compared to the individual interviews. Stories of positive experiences living in regional Victoria were opened up as compared to the more negative stories in the one-on-one interviews. The final stages of the fieldwork focused on the validation of data, as well as getting feedback and comments from the participants through focus group discussions, in which the majority of the participants have agreed to the major findings of the study. The focus group discussion and in-depth interview data were juxtaposed and enhanced by my own interpretation of their world as an observant participant.

### **c. Participant Observation**

As has been pointed out, participant observation was also employed in this study following the method used in conducting an ethnographic study to facilitate triangulation of data. Participant observation can mean ‘spending long periods watching people, coupled with talking to them about what they are doing, thinking and saying, designed to see how they understand their world’ (Delamont 2004: 218). Being a permanent resident of Geelong for seven years at the time when this study was conducted and of the same race of the research participants (South East Asian), I was not immune to the complexities and fluidities of settlement/resettlement realities living in the diaspora. As mentioned in the preceding chapter, physical attributions and stereotypes associated with one’s race and ethnicity still pervade amongst members of the dominant white population’s perception of a ‘different’ person, rather than preserving the universal value of respect based on human dignity. In a sense, part of the story presented in this study was my own experience dealing with issues of difference and social inclusion and exclusion. By sharing the social and

cultural milieu of the participants, I can be considered a credible observant participant in this study as much as I am a participant observer.

As a participant observer, I employed the strategy of action – reflection – action which I frequently used in the field in my many years of being involved with the peasant groups in the Philippines as a community organiser. According to Freire (1976: 149), action and reflection become creative when consciously allowed to take place at the same time as they ‘constantly and mutually illuminate each other’. In the study of the two communities, action and reflection work collaboratively in order to facilitate the process of transformation and for me to become an effective change agent. For Freire, ‘human beings are called to be re-creators, not mere spectators, of the world’ (1972a: 49) as the world needs to be seen not as some kind of static reality but as a reality in process, and people are called to transform their world for the better. This has been my guiding philosophy as a participant observer – to be able to write accounts of the participant’s realities and contemporary context that could help to transform their lives from being passive to active agents of change. The written accounts of my observation could spark a dialogue to achieve conscientisation, that is, the pursuit of humanity through fellowship and solidarity (Freire 1972b).

This dialogue among human beings could hold the key to become active and be in control of their situation; to be able to break free from, what Freire (1972b: 30) refers to as, the ‘culture of silence’. For Freire, the ‘culture of silence’ is a condition of oppression where people are voiceless, and excluded from any active role in the transformation of their own society. As an observant participant, I have witnessed many participants in this study

who have perhaps lost hope about their present situation. This ‘culture of silence’ is prominent and explicit in the traits of the participants as I observed and interpreted them because of, perhaps, disunity among them, and perhaps they would just like to preserve the status quo, or are willing to adapt the main characteristic of the mainstream society, that is, individualism. This individualistic attitude can be further illustrated with my field interaction with Pawpaw, a Karenni woman participant. Our interaction goes like this:

*(CE) What do you think about attending community meetings?*

(Pawpaw) I do not like attending meetings. I just stay at home. Even though we are all invited, we just feel lazy and this is what is not nice with our people. We are easy going people. Some will say, ‘Ah, it is okay, I do not need to attend, they can decide, they can do whatever they want to do, and I will just follow and agree to what they have decided in the meeting’. It does not mean that we do not want to go, it is just that we are lazy and do not want to give our time.

*(CE) How do you feel about the benefits of attending community meetings?*

(Pawpaw) No, we do not feel anything. It is like no positive or negative. We just do not want to attend and do not want to give our time and just happy with ourselves in front of the television with the family. This is what is happening to all. Another thing is we are very forgetful. We do not have a diary. They say, ‘Hey there is a meeting tomorrow’. Then we forgot. I would rather watch TV and lie on the couch. We are different people, you know.

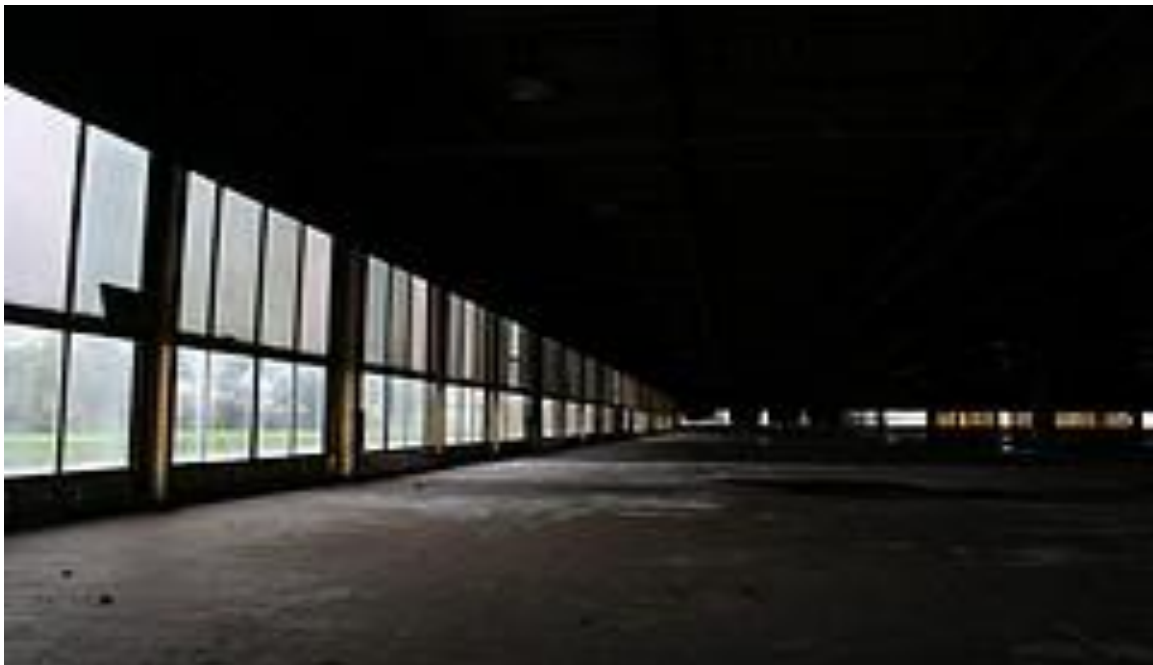
By providing the arena to have their voices heard and being empowered in the process, the participants may be able to take control of their fate and transform their lives, from being passive to active agents of change to make their world better, or overcome the odds of a ‘let it be’ attitude. This chapter has shown how the proper platform of storytelling



can illuminate deeper understanding of the contemporary situation and world of meanings of the research participants. Mixed with how the researcher positions himself, ontologically and epistemologically in this study, the resulting narratives and their analytical representation provides a unique prism in which the world of the participants can be better understood. The following chapter focuses on the cultural and social dimension of their unique prism, giving emphasis to how they lived their transitional moments in the diaspora, especially the complexities of home and belonging in a seemingly hostile environment for ‘coloured’ immigrants in the host society.



The abandoned cement factory in Geelong, Victoria



The abandoned chassis plant of Ford Motor Company in Geelong, Victoria

(Source: <https://www.flickr.com/photos/legoblock/8568321574/in/photostream/>)

## CHAPTER FOUR

### Transitional Moments: Articulating Homes in the Diaspora

*Now that the old house of criticism, historiography and intellectual certitude is in ruins, we all find ourselves on the road. Faced with a loss of roots, and the subsequent weakening in the grammar of 'authenticity', we move into a vaster landscape. Our sense of belonging, our language and the myths we carry in us remain, but no longer as 'origins' or signs of 'authenticity' capable of guaranteeing the sense of our lives. They now linger on as traces, voices, memories and murmurs that are mixed in with other histories, episodes, encounters.*

- (Chambers 1994a: 18-19)

The preceding chapter suggested that the conversations with the Filipinos and Karen/Karennis brought with it a sense of empowerment of being heard, and mirrored varied experiences of barriers and enhancers to access equitable and meaningful participation in the mainstream. This complexity and fluidity of the presence or nonexistence of social closure and its multifaceted nature faced by members of the Filipino and Karen communities in the diaspora can be seen in relation to the imaginings and articulations of the notion of 'home'. As argued throughout this thesis, closure provides the common link to the multifaceted barriers to social and economic opportunities as experienced by some members of the Filipinos and Karen/Karennis; while others are experiencing a sense of inclusion when comparing everyday life in Australia to their country of origin. As this chapter elaborates, the physical and imaginary homes become expressions of the reality of some of these closures, and also serve as the rallying point for

resisting closures, as well as feeling relieved when comparing the host to the original society.

It will be recalled that at the core of this thesis is the notion of social closure, and the inclusion and exclusion of immigrants in the mainstream of the host society, and these are the concepts that guided the researcher in posing the questions to the participants. In this context, these notions which from here lead into understanding the initial and ongoing contact of participants with the mainstream at the early stages of arrival, and onwards on their liminal journey in the diaspora which form the basis of the following questions: To what extent do these communities feel that they gain access, both in the short term and in the long term respectively, to mainstream society? To what extent do these communities feel that they are able to balance their cultural needs and the needs of the contemporary context? How do they negotiate and navigate the imaginings of the original home and the realities of the new home? Consistent with the ethnographic practice espoused by Appadurai (1996:52), ‘the task of ethnography now becomes the unraveling of a conundrum: what is the nature of locality as a lived experience in a globalized, *deterritorialized* world’? This chapter expounds aspects of immigrant experiences that resonate with the participants such as performing identities in the host society, articulating the notion of ‘home’, and defining the reception by the locals. In exploring these themes, the chapter not only echoes the feelings, emotions and lived experiences of the participants but also blends the subjective experiences and agencies within the contemporary ideas, insights and context found in the literature. To start unravelling these themes, it is important to create at the outset a vivid picture of the research milieu that features the globalised

environment in Geelong, which impacts on the way the Filipino and Karen/Karennis imagine and articulate their sense of home.

### **Framing the Study Milieu**

It was in the middle of spring 2012, a beautiful Friday morning. I was on my way to interview a Karenni research participant. As I departed from my rented house in a middle-class suburb of Bell Park, north of the city of Geelong, I was mesmerised by the beauty of nature: the astonishing and elegant landscape of front yards full of brightly-coloured flowers, in the backdrop of the morning mist hovering in the sky. The backyards were full of life, with apple trees filled with flowers, like snowflakes teeming with busy bustling bees gathering pollens for food alongside different kinds of birds tweeting and dancing freely and happily from one branch of tree to another. All heavenly creations were coming to life after a long hibernation period in the cold months of winter. While there was so much life in the many front and back yards in my neighbourhood during spring, a sharp contrast was occurring in the bigger picture of the city.

As I drove around the neighbourhood and into the industrial area about three kilometres from my residence, I witnessed the many realities and faces of the negative consequences of globalisation and the ongoing turbulence of the modern economy. This turbulence is marked by closures and abandonment of services and vital sources of local livelihood. Along the way, I noticed a huge vacant lot abandoned since 2002 where the Western Heights Secondary College in Bell Park once stood. The car yard where I bought my second-hand car in 2008 had gone bankrupt and disappeared, which signalled the unviable business environment around this area. For instance, on 12 June 2013 tears flowed

when one of the retail giants Target announced that 260 workers were to be made redundant at their headquarters in North Geelong. Affected employees had only a fortnight to look for another job in a society where the lack of work is now the norm, rather than the exception, in a globalised world. The Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) has listed in February 2013 approximately two million unemployed people, of whom 381,000 (or 19%) had become involuntarily unemployed, retrenched or had their job made redundant in the last twelve months (ABS 2014). As Bauman puts it, ‘unemployment in the affluent countries has become ‘structural’: there is simply not enough work for everybody’ (2000: 77).

The most notable casualty of globalisation was one further down the road, the engine plant of Ford Motor Company of Australia, founded in 1925 in Geelong, which slashed two-thirds of its workforce in the first decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, based on decisions made elsewhere on the planet. Like a nuclear bomb dropped into the city, its demise came, on the 23<sup>rd</sup> of May 2013 when Ford senior staff at its headquarters located halfway across the globe in Detroit, Michigan, USA, announced the full closure of the Geelong engine plant facility, costing 580 more jobs by 2016. It was announced that Ford cars manufactured in Australia can no longer compete with the world market, whose competitors manufactured their cars in labour-efficient countries like South Korea, China and Thailand. This explains the eerily quiet workshops of Ford Geelong, once the heart of the busy, bustling industrial hub located in a regional city of Australia. On the other side of the bay lies Alcoa, an aluminium smelting plant that was completely shutdown in mid-2014 despite the A\$44 million rescue package provided by the Australian Government in

mid-2012. These examples reveal that Geelong is suffering an unprecedented economic downturn, with a grey and bleak future looming ahead. This socio-economic turbulence surely must impact on how the local community behaves, as manifested in the inhospitable and unwelcoming attitude shown by the locals towards the Karen/Karennis and Filipino communities. The ramifications of this negative globalisation are felt across to the nearby suburbs of Corio and Norlane, where most of the Karen/Karenni and Filipino participants in this study reside.

Upon entering the suburbs of Corio and Norlane, on this day I observed some of the abandoned government housing precincts once home to hundreds of Ford and Shell workers. A general perception among the participants has evolved, particularly the Filipinos who are long standing members of this community, that the two suburbs are notorious for rising crime rates for years, with the problems of pervasive binge drinking and drug abuse among the youth still prevalent. This perception was confirmed by a study at Deakin University, which indicated that drugs and alcohol misuse is a big problem and widespread in this community (Savage, Meade & Taket 2007). A few of the Karen/Karenni participants reported incidence of burglary with money and goods stolen from their property. Most happened when nobody was home; these desperate teenagers are driven to secure instant cash to fund their alcohol and drug habits. The naïve character of the Karen/Karennis, coupled with their improperly maintained and secured houses, make them an easy target for burglary.

Residential segregation is in the making within these suburbs. Not only are the members of the white community leaving in search of work, the government is steering

hundreds of humanitarian and refugee visa holders to resettle in regional areas, and their obvious choices are residential areas that offer cheaper rent. Corio and Norlane become prime destinations because rents in these suburbs are on average A\$50 per week cheaper compared to their neighbouring suburbs (Real Estate Institute of Victoria 2014). Young (2000) reminds us that the dynamics of segregation is inhumane because it restricts the freedom of people to choose appropriate and desirable housing conducive to the needs of their communities. In addition, limited income and the desire to live closer to their co-ethnics subject these newly emerging communities to the processes of housing and racial segregation. However, in the meantime the two suburbs are far from being segregated neighbourhoods to the extent described by Young (2000), as they have well placed socio-economic infrastructures such as shopping centres, an abattoir, a public library, a leisure swimming pool, a police station, schools and churches in what could be seen as structural remnants of the industrial era of predominantly white working class society. Furthermore, Young (2000) argues that group clustering in terms of kinship and similarities of background is acceptable because it creates a positive contribution to the holistic make-up of everyday living.

### **Performing Identities in the Host Society**

As I continued my drive on that beautiful morning, a few minutes later, I arrived at the house of my Karenni informant, into the world of 'difference' but one among others in the diaspora. The front yard is in sharp contrast to my neighbourhood, my *transitional home* about nine kilometres away. A little rubbish was littered the front yard beneath the overgrown grass, and it seemed that it was thrown by some irresponsible passersby judging



by the way it was scattered near the brick fence of the house. As I climbed the stairs and knocked on the door, I rehearsed mentally my purpose for coming to this place and have prepared for any possibilities that might occur.

It seemed like a familiar face opened the door for me – a man in his mid-forties, brown skin and black hair, the kind of man I used to know in my country of origin. His petite body frame is similar to the people I knew during my years of community organising and research in the hinterland villages of Bukidnon, Philippines, a mountainous province located in the heart of Mindanao Island. It is a sort of human body that can withstand hours or even days of travelling by foot on difficult terrains and in the harshest of weather conditions. Despite staying in Australia for three and a half years now, he has still maintained that body feature, which is accustomed to being constantly on the move and ready to go in a moment's notice. Indeed, this man had been subjected to a torturous ordeal in his country of origin, enduring constant battering from the Burmese soldiers since birth.

As I introduced myself, I offered my right hand and warm smile as an explicit gesture that I came in 'peace' even though the meaning of the word 'peace' has been elusive for him and his people for more than six decades. He smiled back, introduced himself as Maw<sup>7</sup> and took my hand. As we shook hands, I felt vibrations resonating from his inner self, perhaps hinting that peace and freedom has finally reigned on him and his family and a few lucky former refugees now calling Australia home. It was a kind of body language

---

<sup>7</sup> As mentioned in Chapter 1, pseudonyms have been used throughout this thesis in place of real names so as to preserve the confidentiality of research participants in the Geelong Region.

that is situated in a space and time that features a new beginning, a new chapter and new episode, living in a new land and new home, finally stamped by peace, freedom and democracy. On the other side of the coin, such body language also locates him in a home full of new challenges, and a new identity that 'lies at the intersection of dwelling and travelling and is a claim of continuity and discontinuity, and vice-versa' (Minha 1994: 14). He is now engaged in 'other taxing and longer-run journeys of incorporation' (Paine 1992). For Maw, to have a meaningful experience along the way, in the midst of these 'journeys of incorporation', would entail not only learning the economic and political norms, but also embracing the cultural values and social navigational systems of the mainstream. The host society has put the onus on him to perform most of the work associated with this 'taxing journey'. Nevertheless, he is now proud and grateful to live like a normal person, like a human being ought to be living in the free world, equal to all, as opposed to being treated like a second-class citizen in his country of origin and in the refugee camp.

There was a familiar set-up inside his house that is so central to the very make-up of his living room - an altar featuring the replicas of Mother Mary positioned alongside the crucified Jesus Christ with the Holy Bible, rosary beads, and candles decorated with dried palm leaves. The scene is in total contrast to a typical westernised living room showcasing the entertainment unit such as a television, DVD player, and stereo component system. He had chosen to have these religious symbols as the central feature of his house. I feel an instant belonging at that moment for I know, even without asking him, that indeed he is a devoted Catholic and in that sense at least we share the same religious faith. I grew up in

devotion with such religious belief most pronounced during my high school days when I had to live in a parish convent to escape poverty, despite winning a high school scholarship.

I started the conversation along this avenue of commonalities by pointing out that I was once a devout Catholic and knew the meaning of the palm leaves. The palm leaves are made holy by Jesus Christ through his follower, the priest, sprinkling holy water on them during Palm Sunday. They symbolise the reign of Jesus Christ as King and are believed to have extraordinary powers that can protect the house and its inhabitants from evil spirits and natural catastrophes such as those that caused by lightning, floods, earthquakes, drought and famine. Most of the Catholic families in the Philippines are decorating with these palm leaves emblematically on the front doors of their houses. Maw responded that aside from being a devoted Catholic, he has committed himself for more than three years now as one of the dedicated members of the Legion of Mary<sup>8</sup> in Geelong.

As I looked around the house, I noticed a fading black and white photo of people in their old age in a rural village background hanging on the side of the wall. When I focus my attention on them, he points out that they are the memories of his parents who are still alive and now living in one of the villages in the Karenni State in Burma. The photos represent a form of continuity amidst discontinuity in his search for identity and meaning. For while Maw reminisces about the past, of the good old days with his parents in a familiar Karenni village and continues it through his imaginings, the reality haunts him that he is

---

<sup>8</sup> The Legion of Mary is the largest apostolic organisation of lay people who serve the Catholic Church on a voluntary basis. Active members of the Legion serve God under the banner of Mary where they are primarily engaged in the performance of the Spiritual Works of Mercy rather than works of material aid. ([http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Legion\\_of\\_Mary](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Legion_of_Mary). Accessed 3 January 2014)

now unable to physically carry on those remembering as he has no home to go back to. He has found a home in the diaspora but acknowledges that, at the moment, he does not feel at home because of the social and cultural differences of everyday living. In his conscious being and subconscious mind he realises that ‘once uprooted in this way from a first and ‘original’ social milieu, no succeeding one becomes truly home; in transit between a plurality of life-worlds, individuals come to be at home in none’ (Berger et al. 1973 cited in Rapport & Dawson eds. 1998: 31).

Maw sends money by whatever means to his sister in the Karenni village to buy medicine and food for their ailing and aging parents. He recognises that sometimes he cannot help his family in Burma because of his unstable income, not to mention that he is still supporting his three children and unemployed wife. He feels that it is very difficult to get a permanent job in Geelong because of the ‘language problem’, even though he can speak basic English. Yet, despite his meagre income, he was able to save enough money in two years and bought his first ever car. For him, owning a car is a necessity in Australia, especially in looking for a job. He perceived that his people, especially the adults, have struggled looking for paid work even in entry level jobs and have difficulty making friends with the locals because of the ‘language barrier’. He is aware that the adult Karen/Karennis are too old and tired to learn English and it will take a long time for them to have a good grasp of even the basic English language ability. After my interview with Maw, we developed a special professional bonding as he became my research assistant interpreting meanings that the Karen/Karenni participants conveyed in the interviews. Shortly after the interview, Maw (the research participant) was transformed into Elmer (the research

assistant). As mentioned, I interviewed Maw first as a research participant without any mention of employing him as a research assistant. A week after his interview, I went back to ask Maw if he would like to be a research assistant and continue the work of Phan (the female Karenni research assistant) since at that time Phan has difficulty recruiting male Karen/Karenni participants. Maw gladly accepted the offer.

In the interviews that I have conducted, most of the former refugees expressed their hopes that their children will make-up for their impediments particularly with adjusting to the socio-economic and cultural aspects of the mainstream such as securing permanent paid work, achieving good English language proficiency and having friends outside the Karen/Karenni community (This will be expounded more on Chapter Seven). It seems that their situation is filled with uncertainties because according to one Karenni, most jobs that are offered to them are only those related to farm work such as tomato picking, growing vegetables and fruit picking with low pay and have appalling working environments and conditions. Peter, a Karenni man perceptively said, ‘At the tomato farm where I worked, I have to stand the whole time because of endless pruning, weeding and cleaning the ground. They gave me \$18 per hour and worked for 30-35 hours per week. My legs were painful because of hours of standing’. He consciously said that he would try to look for another job to escape the torture that he suffered in doing farm work. He felt that he wanted to be included in the case management load of his case worker for people actively seeking paid work.

Struggles of the participants in negotiating working spaces in the diaspora will be expounded more in detail on Chapter Six. The mentioning of working spaces in this chapter

foregrounds its link to the globalisation of the nature of work where the traditional factory work in manufacturing industries of western societies is now replaced by precarious, contractual and seasonal jobs in the service industry. The precarious nature of work impacts on the construction of identity, not only in the maintenance of the physical home but also the underlying interrelationships of inhabitants within and outside home.

### **Articulating the Notion of Home**

The notion of *home* is a ‘contested domain: an arena where differing interests struggle to define their own spaces within which to localize and cultivate their identity’ (Olwig 1998: 226). For Olwig, home sites are not just ‘important spaces where travellers may search for self-knowledge and establish sources of belonging, these homes also demarcate relations of inclusion and exclusion, which reflect structures of power beyond the domain of those searching for identity’ (p. 230). In the fluid and complex dynamics of interrelationships within diasporic communities, ‘power is always a key feature of the contextual relations of neighbourhoods, and even “first contact” always involves different narratives of *firstness* from the two sides involved in it’ (Appadurai 1996: 187). Hence, it could be argued here that inasmuch as the Karen/Karennis and some Filipinos suffered xenophobic attacks from the locals reinforced by the media’s negative portrayal of asylum seekers arriving into Australia’s shore by boat; they were also subjugated into the powerful underlying identities of ‘localism’ as locals responded to the dramatic and unprecedented change of the nature of ‘home’ in a globalised world. This subjugation has been compounded by the institutional, familial and community issues that affect the everyday negotiation and existence of the participants in the diaspora. These liminal moments of

being seemingly excluded from the mainstream as described above triggered feelings of homesickness and many participants mirrored these emotions in their cognitive and physical imaginings of the original home.

The contemporary situation of the participants portend elements of cultivating identities now mixed with others and ‘encoding practices of accommodation, as well as resistance to host society’s norms’ (Clifford 1997: 251). The study participants demonstrated constant search for belonging and engaged into daily struggles of inclusion and exclusion. On the one hand, they exude strong characteristics of diaspora which involve ‘dwelling, maintaining communities, having collective homes away from home and articulate both roots and routes to construct forms of community consciousness and solidarity’ (Clifford 1997: 251). On the other hand, the participants experience loss and nostalgia in transitional moments upon arrival at the point of destination, and constant longing for familiar milieus in an unfamiliar place haunt them, especially during the liminal moments of their travelling.

When asked if there were times they have felt homesick since arriving in Geelong, some participants responded affirmatively, especially in the initial stages because the place and the way of life in the host society were very different from their country of origin. Emely, a Filipina perceptively stated:

Of course, I was homesick. I worked in Manila for 5-6 years in the hospital and you suddenly came here in a bushland. There were only a few people here unlike in the Philippines where there are lots of people. In there, you smile and visit friends. In here, you cannot visit anyone as it was all farms. You got lonely.

She perceived that it was a gamble coming to Geelong as she was not sure how her marriage with an Anglo Australian husband would develop through the years, and how she was going to cope with the new environment. She arrived a few days into winter on May 1980 and stated, 'When I arrived, I looked for a job straight away because it was too lonely. You have to go out. It was too lonely place. I was looking for rice, and where the shop was. Every time you see a Filipino, you always asked for their contact details'. It was normal for immigrants to seek out their own kind and do some activities performed in their country of origin to alleviate homesickness. This was perceptively echoed by Christrom, a Filipina when she said:

Yes, I feel homesick every now and then because it is different from everything. The place is empty and the streets do not have people around. You do not see anybody unless you go out. You have to go out and walk to be able to see some people. Unlike in the Philippines, you just go to your neighbour and say hi, hello, how are you, would you like to go to the market and we will go for a walk. You know everybody. Here, you also know everybody but they are not home. Either they are at work or just inside the house does not want to be disturbed.

While others also felt homesick, there were some who felt the opposite and loved every moment of their stay in the actual home in the diaspora. This is mostly apparent with the Karen/Karennis as they feel a much better life in the diaspora compared to their precarious situations on their two previous homes (original village and refugee camp). Besides, 'they do not believe that there is 'a home' to which they could 'return', since the homes they remember have been either gutted or stolen' (Bauman 2004: 79). ChoMyint, a Karenni man remarked, 'I am not homesick because our home is in a very terrible situation. I have brothers and sisters at home but do not have communications with them for a long



time now. I have no more parents'. For many Karen/Karennis, it could be inferred that Australia is now home as it provides them their good future and plenty of opportunities which are nonexistent in their country of origin. Htaik, a Karenni man noted:

I do not feel homesick as I have my family with me here. Comparing my life here in Australia and in the refugee camp, it is much better here. In the refugee camp, you just stay inside and you cannot go outside; and if you go outside the camp, even just in the jungle, if you get caught, the Thai police will arrest you. The Thai authorities do not allow us to go even in the Thai village.

Other former refugees are longing for their original home but at the same time would dislike going back and staying there. This was the sentiment of Echo, a Karen man as he looked back, 'Sometimes I miss home and it is very difficult to sleep at night but it is also very difficult to go back to my country. I miss my village but I do not want to go back and stay there'. This is also the sentiment of Htoo Paw, a Karenni woman when she reminisced, 'I am not homesick here in Australia, not at all although I miss my home (place of origin) sometimes but not homesick. Sometimes you see some old photos at the place where you grew up with and you will say "Oh I used to live here"'.

At the juncture of the original and diasporic homes, the Filipinos and Karen/Karennis demonstrate feelings of ambivalence towards everyday living in the diaspora as well as feelings of nostalgia which have marked the narratives of the Karen/Karennis particularly during moments when they question their sense of belonging and becoming 'new' Australians after they suffered various kinds of hostilities from the locals. They were proud to be 'new' Australians but doubtful whether or not the wider community had accepted them as 'one of them'. For while the government and ethnic

councils have made their acceptance of the Karen/Karennis explicit by encouraging them to embrace and be a part of the Australian tradition of 'fair go', a contradictory reception emerged on the ground with the way the 'locals' treated their new neighbours. Such ambivalent attitude towards interrelating with different diasporic actors guided the emotions, imaginings and longings for a 'true' home as they grapple with that continued search of meanings and identities. Peter, a Karen man relates, 'Of course, I miss my home in Karen State because I was born and grew up there. My mother is still there in Burma as well as my brothers and sisters. I have two siblings in Karen and one brother in the refugee camp. I call them by phone but very limited because of the poor signal'.

The imaginings of 'home' inevitably compelled the participants to enumerate experiences of difficulties living in the new home in the diaspora. When they struggle with their everyday existence in the diaspora, their minds wander and articulate experiences and myths left behind that are still minted both in their conscious and subconscious self. They then compare these wanderings to their current 'journeys of incorporation' in the mainstream that seems so fluid and complex. This complexity is manifested even when undertaking daily tasks such as taking the train which can turn out to pose challenges and frustrations during liminal moments of resettlement of the Karen/Karenni participants. Peter, a Karen man complained:

I needed to go to Werribee but the VLine train did not stop at Werribee and it was a wrong train. I did not know that I took the express train directly to Southern Cross and I nearly cried. I could not talk even though I met many people and try to explain to them. Finally, a man knew that I have a problem. He came to me and asked where I am supposed to go. He understood when I said, 'Werribee'. So he took me to the

Werribee train. I am glad there are still very good people willing to help you. Now, I know how to read the VLine timetable, which time and train to take.

Furthermore, this fluidity and complexity of living in the new and unfamiliar environment and way of life is compounded by the lack of social capital so prominently narrated by the Karen/Karennis. This was revealed by the story of Htoo Paw, a Karenni woman, as she engaged with the complexities of accessing a range of government services. She identified some difficulties such as the language barrier and lack of interpreter support in accessing vital services. In her narrative, she was not only referring to her own experiences but also outlining the lived experiences of the majority of the newly emerging Karen/Karenni community. She discerns:

One of the obstacles we encounter in accessing government services is the language barrier. With visiting the GP, we find it a little bit better because GPs can access interpreter service. Sometimes you can get an interpreter sometimes you don't. For instance, at the optometrist, there is no interpreter. At the Barwon Health or booking an appointment at the Geelong Hospital as an outpatient, we can request for an interpreter and that's good. However, in the emergency department, they cannot provide an interpreter because of lack of access to interpreters during emergency situations. At the department of housing, there is no interpreter. If there is no interpreter, I need to find someone to accompany and help us go around these services. I find it easy to access their services if there are interpreters who could help us especially to do with the language. Our number one hindrance is the language.

Bourdieu (cited in Thompson ed. 1991: 12-17) points out that each one of us has acquired a certain 'habitus', a set of learned and unlearned dispositions as we go about living our life history that determines how we 'act and react in certain ways'. The 'regular' production

of ‘practices, perceptions and attitudes’ within each individual underpin these dispositions. Furthermore, these dispositions exercise influence on the ‘linguistic practices of an agent’ and the way its linguistic products is received in the field. In other words, the acquisition of the linguistic *habitus* of the mainstream which is deemed necessary for inclusion and participation in everyday life in the diaspora is perceived to be lacking, if not totally nonexistent, among the newly emerging Karen/Karennis. This also works the other way around, that is, the mainstream does not possess the linguistic *habitus* of the multi-lingual Karen/Karennis. As a result, frustrations in proper dealings with each other are imminent leading to the Karen/Karennis to often continuing to long for the myths of the frozen past in their life of the original home.

Life in the original home is regarded as simple that they can still eke out a living without any government assistance and paid work. In their original home in Burma, the Karen/Karennis recognise that, they do not need cars; they do not pay bills and a mortgage; they get all their food from their own farms and gardens all year round; and they do not need good education to survive. This engagement into a simple kind of living in their villages is perhaps discontinued by the man-made political turmoil of six decades of relentless civil war. The Karen/Karennis forced themselves into safety along the Thai-Burma border to escape the constant barrage of cruel attacks from the Burmese military. On the border, they waited years and even decades to be resettled into a third country. Once resettled in the host country, they found themselves living an opposite lifestyle, a sharp contrast from their simple living mantra where money is unnecessary; and into the complexities and fluidities of living in the diaspora where paid work is central for survival;

and learning to interrelate with the locals and the immigrants who have arrived ahead of them is crucial. They have to swiftly undergo ‘learning to walk on quicksand’ and empower themselves to make choices at a time when uncertainties and precariousness predominates (Bauman 2005: 124). Suddenly, the lives of the Karen/Karennis are changed completely as they are headed into a new frontier armed with nothing but a glimmer of hope and freedom as well as memories of a tumultuous past.

This new frontier constantly involves comparing ‘homes’ in which the participants resort to articulating the social, cultural, economic and political differences as well as the present realities and situations between the original, transitional, and present homes. They narrated a sort of ‘home’ which ‘brings together memory and longing, the ideational, the affective and the physical, the spatial and the temporal, the local and the global, the positively evaluated and the negatively’ (Rapport & Dawson eds. 1998: 8). In explicitly revealing the positive and negative attributes of the original and diasporic homes, BP, a Filipino retiree, remarks:

The quality of life is better here in Australia than over there [Philippines]. Let us say you are staying over there in an exclusive subdivision, you got a good house and everything is nice. Once you step out of that subdivision, all you see is poverty, pollution, the smell, and it is no good. The *jeepneys*<sup>9</sup> are noisy and smoky. I think even though you live here in Norlane, there is no comparison than living in the Philippines. Everything here is pretty well set up and well planned. Over there,

---

<sup>9</sup> The *Jeepney* is the cheapest mode of transportation in the Philippines. The *Jeepney* contributes to noise and air pollution not only because of its omnipresence but also of its expensive maintenance costs. <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/business-23352851>. Accessed 28 November 2013.

there's nothing. You build good, high rise buildings there and then very nearby there are shanties, and no good.

BP perceptively portrays a deepening inequality, the widening gap between the rich and the poor in his country of origin, as well as its worsening social and environmental situation. He also realised the significant difference in the quality of life between his original home in the Philippines and his actual home in Norlane. He felt that he is in a much better position at his present home than the one he left behind. The mostly negative evaluation of his original home (Philippines) has made him appear to be more comfortable staying in his actual home (Norlane), even though the latter has been notorious for rising crime rates related to drug abuse and binge drinking for years compared to other suburbs in the Geelong region. Nevertheless, it can be inferred from the narratives of BP the exemplar of positive experience of migration is achieved because of pure hard work. He acquired rental properties by always staying back late at work every time overtime work was on offer. Now enjoying his retirement, the purely positive experience of BP in the diaspora is regarded as a clear example of the absence of closure. In living his dream in the diaspora, he further feels that:

It's less hassle here. There is too much population in the Philippines. Everything is here in Geelong - my kids, all the good food, the cars are here. It is easier living here. There is too much hassle over there. You go back there (Philippines) and you see your relations; you see your friends and all of them got financial problems.

For BP, it seems that one of the hassles is the way family relations left in the Philippines conscientiously obligate dollar-earning relatives overseas to provide help for their financial

needs. This false consciousness stem from images, transnational stereotypes and agencies<sup>10</sup> of diasporic communities with the way they implement economic projects in the original home which, in turn, develop the mindset that relatives living overseas who earn dollars must be rich. This concurs with how Esperanza, a Filipina, unravels her story when she shares that:

The last time I went back home to the Philippines was eleven years ago. It is too expensive to go back home all the time. And then, you come back broke anyway because you have to spend for everyone. I would rather offer financial assistance to relatives left in the Philippines than go home. They always think that because you are from overseas you have lots of money. That is what they think but you work hard for it.

The articulation and comparison of 'homes' among the Karen/Karennis, meanwhile, involve a tri-dimensional approach which include the memories of the original home (Karen/Karenni village), the sufferings in the transitional place (refugee camp), and the euphoria of freedom in the actual home (present home in Australia). Echo, a Karen man, remarks that:

The most significant difference is travelling. In Australia, it depends on you if you have money you can travel anywhere. You do not need to worry like you do not need to be scared. In the refugee camp on the Thai-Burma border, if we want to go and buy something in the Thai village, we were scared meeting a Thai police because we will be surely arrested. Also, in Burma, if we travel from place to place we have to show our identification card. Sometimes, the Burmese soldiers treat us

---

<sup>10</sup> Transnational and cultural agencies of Filipinos and Karen/Karennis will be explicated more in Chapter Five.

as someone from the resistance group. They always suspect, watch, and treat us like their enemy. We are not free to go anywhere. There is no freedom of movement in Burma.

Here the underlying categories of freedom and ease of movement that are perhaps missing in the original and transition homes are emphasised. Most of the Karen/Karenni participants deeply reminisce about and lament in what seems to be a lifetime entanglement in a prison-like situation in the original (Karen/Karenni State) and transition homes (refugee camps) where they were treated as undesirables and unwanted ‘human waste, with no useful function to play in the land of their arrival and temporary stay and no intention or realistic prospect of being assimilated and incorporated into the new social body’ (Bauman 2004: 77).

In their two previous homes, it seems that they were reduced into a ‘waiting game’ of Russian roulette where every move could involve a life and death situation. At the height of the civil war in the 1980s and 1990s, many Karen/Karenni participants in this study recalled living in the jungle for months on their way by foot to the refugee camps on the Thai-Burma border. They have to survive against all odds including the chances of being killed by wild animals such as the venomous snakes, stinging bees, and ferocious Bengal tigers. According to them, the Burmese Military Government are perceived as more brutal than the wild beasts in the jungle. Their experience of suffering and sorrow is likened to an ancient quotation about a government’s use of oppressive power:

In passing by the side of Mount Thai, Confucius came on a woman who was weeping bitterly by a grave. The Master pressed forward and drove quickly to her; then he sent Tze-lu to question her. “Your wailing,” said he, “is that of one who has



suffered sorrow on sorrow.” She replied, “that is so. Once my husband’s father was killed here by a tiger. My husband was also killed, and now my son has died in the same way.” The Master said, “why do you not leave the place?” The answer was, “there is no oppressive government here.” The Master then said, “Remember this, my children: oppressive government is more terrible than tigers” (Russell 1960: 185).

The Karen/Karennis’ recollection of their lives in the jungle articulated the seemingly only choice open for them to survive at the time when the Burmese Government implemented the notorious “Four Cuts” policy, that is, cutting the information, relation, communication, and ration. The Four Cuts, designed to crush the Karen, was aimed at cutting off ‘all supplies, information, recruits, and food to the Karen resistance’ (Phan & Lewis 2010: 16). Rather than stay in their villages and be at the mercy of the Burmese soldiers, the Karen/Karennis felt that they have chosen the lesser evil of embarking an exodus to the *place for displaced people* (as it is being called by the Karen/Karennis rather than the western-imposed concept of ‘refugee camps’). Even in the prospects of encountering deadly wild Bengal tigers in the jungle, the Karen/Karennis chose this route, as they would certainly be suspected of nurturing a brother or a sister in the resistance group if they choose to stay in their villages. As Peter, a Karen man remarks, ‘If you are suspected of having a brother or a sister in the resistance group, or suspected of having in contact with them, you will be in trouble’.

On arrival at the place for displaced people, constriction of freedom is imminent as thousands of people compete for limited space and scarce resources along the Thai-Burma border. Through the years, this constriction of freedom for almost everything and limited

movement, while waiting for safe return to their homeland or being resettled in a third country, is so unbearable that some of them make their way into Thailand and become 'illegal' immigrants. On the contrary, those who are granted the refugee and humanitarian visas, like the Karen/Karenni people in the Geelong region, now savour the very freedom many generations of our forefathers have fought for.

In the articulation of the physical home in the diaspora, meanwhile, a few Filipino women participants who are married to Australian husbands are perceptively battling another kind of lack of freedom and limited movement. It is the imprisonment of the husband's strict 'domestic credo' which states that wives should stay at home, not engage into paid work, look after the kids, do most of the domestic jobs, and become a housewife forever. This is how Tracy, a Filipina, unravels her story of 'being controlled' as she complains:

My husband is so strict. Sometimes when we go to town, he does not like me to talk to someone like a fellow Filipino. He does not like me to always eat rice. He taunts me that because I always eat rice that is why I am skinny and not getting fat. There are times that everyday there is always complain. I do not have much freedom because of my husband's strict rules.

Wallace (cited in Cunneen & Stubbs 1997: 118) contends that 'men expect exclusivity and control over their partners and there is often only a fine dividing line between socially approved images of masculine protectiveness and possessive jealousy and an extension of this into an attitude of total possessiveness and control of a woman by her husband'. It is becoming clear that Tracy has been subjected to her Australian husband's imposition of power for her to subscribe to an 'appropriate' behaviour that he fantasised. This fantasy is

partly stemming from the ‘representation of Filipino women as submissive and obedient’ (Cunneen & Stubbs 1997: 105). For instance, the internet represents an important international site through which Filipino women are portrayed as good partners for sex or marriage because of their submissiveness and obedience (Cunneen & Stubbs 2000).

For Tracy, being submissive, understanding and committed to her husband and her unconditional love to their three children are qualities that carried her through the years, even in uncertain times during her thirty one years of marital relationship with her very rigid Australian husband. In this case, ‘the family is often defined by the task of caring... Mothering involves small children’ (Fincher 2007: 15). ‘Mothering, from the Filipino perspective, characterises physical presence and emotional attachment with the child, and the ability to provide focused if not one-on-one attention’ (Limpangog 2011: 166). Although Tracy finished a Bachelor’s Degree in Education and taught high school in the Philippines, she had not engaged into paid work in her thirty one years of stay in Australia because of her husband’s perceived strict prohibition. Although most of the Filipino participants have been engaged in paid work at some stage of their immigration, Tracy’s life is regarded as mostly devoted to home duties in Australia and resiliency in the face of the rigidity of her husband’s seemingly powerful rules. This is why perhaps a new life may emerge for her when recently her husband did not survive from his second heart attack and passed away. When asked how she feels now that her husband had died, she remarks:

There is lots of freedom. I can do anything that I like which is the good things that I like to do. There is freedom, in the sense, that I can now rest whenever I would like to have a rest. I can go anywhere I like. There is not much pressure at all. Nobody would say, “Do this, do those”. Sometimes he does that and I answered him that I am not a slave here.

She seems to relish her newly acquired freedom and devotes most of her time volunteering in a charitable organisation. For thirty one long years, Tracy was perhaps subjected to a form of closure, a kind of domestic familial closure in a traditional home, a constriction of freedom, wherein she was forcibly barred from participating in public and working life enjoyed by most western women. It comes at a time when many Filipinos grapple for recognition and alienation in a society still undergoing reawakening and transformation from its racist past.

In an effort to acquire much-valued recognition as a distinct ethnic minority group in the articulation of diasporic home, as well as to feel ‘at home’ away from home, Filipinos perform traditional cultural dances in public spaces. Many Filipinos from Geelong in the 1970s and 1980s would gather together to perform dances everywhere in Victoria. The purpose of the performance is seen, not only as a way of easing out the loneliness but also as an information dissemination exercise about the ‘existence’ of the country named, the Philippines, a nation perceived as ‘unknown’ generally amongst the Australian public during those times of newly opened immigration program for ‘coloured’ immigrants. The predominantly Anglo Australians would construct the Filipinos as Vietnamese along the lines of race because of the latter’s popular denigrated identity among the general public. It can be recalled that the Vietnamese are very much associated with the ‘boat people’ in the popular Australian public discourse in the 1970s and early 1980s. This was the story of Ella, a Filipina, as she recalled:

One time I heard when we were in the bus with my children when someone said, “You boat people go back to your country”. When I arrive here in Geelong I do not think the local people know much about the Philippines. People think that all Asians

are ‘boat people’. They are not aware that there is such a thing as the Philippines that time. If they see an Asian, straight away they say that he is a refugee. You cannot really blame their racist attitude because they thought I am a Vietnamese. That time I was treated as a Vietnamese not as a Filipino. We also made known to the migrant resource centre that we Filipinos can offer something to the community. It was the folk dancing that really made a lot of name because we were asked to perform some charity work at Jaycees, from one school to another. We performed because we wanted them to know about the Philippines.

The ‘boat people’ phenomenon first came into the Australian public consciousness in the 1970s when the first wave of immigrants arrived from Vietnam seeking asylum from the aftermath of the Vietnam War (Phillips & Spinks 2013). While there was wider public sympathy for the Vietnamese ‘boat people’ at the time, the succeeding waves of boat people arrivals in the 1980s and 1990s had raised public concern as they were deemed ‘jumping the immigration queue’ and not ‘genuine refugees’. This perceived misperceptions of Filipinos as ‘boat people’ in the 1970s and early 1980s overshadowed the mainstream consciousness in those times, as revealed in the interviews of fiancé-sponsored participants, rather than their being associated to “mail order bride” ascriptions.

The story of Ella reverberates in the present time when the Karen/Karennis are implicitly and explicitly mistaken as ‘boat people’ by locals seemingly induced by the power of ‘localism’, as well as the media’s over exaggeration in reporting on issues surrounding the asylum seekers arriving by boat. In the contemporary context, the ‘boat people’ are socially and culturally constructed as unskilled, unwanted, possible terrorists, and a burden to Australia’s skills-intensive economy (Stratton 2011). A widespread perception by the Australian public that the country is being swamped by ‘illegal’ asylum

seekers arriving by boat from Asia would result to racial lumping and stereotyping where Asians may become targets for racism and racial attacks which I have described in Chapter Two. To counter such misperceptions, the Karen/Karennis are showcasing socio-cultural performances in the form of exhibitions, festivals and participation in cultural celebrations. They want the public to know how they suffered grievously at the hands of the Burmese military and in the refugee camp. They are appealing to the mainstream consciousness to be accepted as ‘one of them’ in the diaspora, as genuine ‘refugees’ in need of humanitarian assistance, sympathy, inclusion and the freedom to share the ambits of Australian liberty. Nevertheless, these perceptions on the experiences of exclusion in negotiating public spaces in the diaspora have been compounded by perceived hostilities and inhospitable attitudes of the locals towards the participants in a city that is undergoing economic restructuring and rapid deindustrialisation.

### **Defining the Reception of the Locals**

As stated, the globalised world, characterised by the unprecedented movement of capital and investment into labour-saving countries, has brought tremendous economic, social, cultural and identity crises mostly pronounced in old industrial societies. These crises ‘coincided with the settlement of large numbers of immigrants in the cities’ who were blamed by the marginalised members of majority population as the cause of their own fate (Castles (1996: 38-41). The crisis of modernity espouses a cultural environment where ‘global influences make national culture so precarious that immigrant minorities appear as a serious danger’. Given the setting mentioned in the introduction of this chapter, the Geelong region, most likely preconditioned itself with the inevitable ‘crises’ described by

Castles and others (see also Rizvi 1996) particularly with how the local people treat the 'Other'. Geelong could be ripe for another instance of future 'urban breakdown' associated 'with the sheer circulation of persons, often as a result of warfare, starvation, and ethnic cleansing, that drives people into such cities in the first place' (Appadurai 1996: 193).

Perceptions of hostilities from the locals, mostly from the 'white, young people', are experienced by the research participants. Clearly, in the interviews it was found that some Karen/Karennis felt that they suffered from intensified exclusion and racism in a seemingly non-traditional destination area for refugee and humanitarian entrants. While their previous cohorts, such as the Karen community in Sunshine, west of Melbourne, are able to 'blend-in' unnoticed in the mainstream of capital cities, because of the community's prior experience with the successive waves of post-war migration; some refugee and humanitarian entrants in regional geographical areas, such as in Geelong, experienced humiliation, denigration and xenophobic attacks of every kind from seemingly angry, jealous, local white Australians. Pelting of rocks and eggs into their house windows, smashing of mailboxes, dumping of rubbish into property premises, yelling of profanities and obscenities into their faces, among others, were revelations of some of the Karen/Karennis and a few Filipino participants I interviewed.

These xenophobic attacks appear to signal the unwelcoming behaviour of the local Australians in the Geelong region inexperienced in relating to hundreds of 'Third-World looking' people now living close to their own backyards. Echo, a Karen man, shows and wants me to take photos of his house where the window glass was stoned and broken, and walls smeared with eggs as he narrates that, 'I experienced it two or three times like they

threw rocks into my house window and glasses were broken. They also threw eggs at my house. Until now you can still see the broken window glasses and the egg-throwing markings on the wall. The egg-throwing incident happened just last Saturday’.

These incidents were similarly experienced by a few other Karen/Karenni participants including Hto Paw, NoLoEh, Pawpaw and Noah, all Karenni women. These xenophobic attacks have drastically changed the outlook and expectations of these former refugees towards the local people. The first impression of Noah, a Karenni woman, mirrored these contradictory expectations when she stated, ‘I thought and expected that there will be good people in Australia. When I first came here and of course very new to this place, my first experience was someone threw a stone at my house window. It happened twice. Even though the window was not broken but I got scared’. These moments of experiencing the seemingly unwelcoming behaviour of the locals represent spaces of closure in the community, of being not wanted within the locals’ immediate neighbourhood because of issues of difference; perhaps reinforced by media images bedevilling people seeking refuge in foreign land by locking them up in detention centres and treating them like convicted criminals. These images of closure of the unwanted, hopeless and bedevilled people from Asia may inculcate in the developing minds of the youth and they emulate the actions of the government by becoming indifferent to the refugees, genuine or not.

It appears that there are now noticeable changes in the last few years with the way the locals, especially the youth treat those who are ‘different’ from the mainstream. As pointed out in Chapter Two, discourses of the ‘Other’ and ‘Asian-looking’ are still explicitly and implicitly embedded in the dominant culture at a time when the recent



arrivals of 'illegal' asylum seekers from 'Asia' is a 'hot' issue in Australian society.

Leonora, a Filipina who came to Geelong in 1981, thought that:

I have been living in Geelong for thirty one years and in the last fifteen years it really changed a lot. You cannot walk without someone screaming and insulting at you. Before, I can walk anywhere because I love walking and no one bothers and screams at you. Now, the young ones are yelling at you with the swear words while you are walking and it is very scary.

Occasions of being denigrated and shouted at with swear words by local teenagers were perceptively revealed by a few Karen/Karennis and in relation to such happenings many of them did not understand what was going on. Such was the case of Echo, a Karenni when he consciously said that:

I have experienced them mostly from the white teenagers. When I walked in the footpath, they came around, winded down their car windows and shouted nasty remarks like, 'Fuck you, Fuck you'. They said many words but I did not understand. I experienced them three or four times. The remarks came with the rude finger. Because I do not know the meaning of the swear words and the flipping of the middle finger, I just feel that they are naughty children. I just ignored them and I did not feel so much.

The Karen/Karenni's transition could be marked by both content, for untangling themselves from the hardships and suffocating entanglement in the refugee camps, and distress, for being unwelcomed by the local Australian community. A revelation by Pawpaw, a Karenni woman, portrayed a disturbing story of racial vilification after being shouted at by the local white people and thrown with eggs afterwards, as she expressed her opinion that:

The first time it happened when the English school finished and when I went to catch the bus in Norlane. While waiting for my bus at the bus stop, somebody yelled at me and threw some eggs towards me. It happened once with the eggs thrown. The second when I was walking in one of the streets of Corio, and one of the local white people here winded down their car windows and yelled at me. I really did not know what they were saying. What I knew was that they shouted and threw the eggs at me. The yelling did happen twice, one with eggs thrown and one without eggs. Since that time, I do not want to walk in the streets alone. I am scared to go outside alone.

Feelings of ambivalence prominently and explicitly outline the narratives of the participants. On the one hand, they feel ‘at home’ with the way the host government and humanitarian organisations cared for their needs which is attentive and humane, at least in the eyes of the Karen/Karennis. On the other hand, they are also aware that they ‘do not feel at home’ and are therefore, ‘not belonging’ because of the hostilities and denigrations thrown by some of the locals towards them. Along this juncture with the encounter of ‘difference’ in public spaces comes the awakening of the sense of strangeness. Georgiou (2006: 87) contends that ‘the condition of strangeness, more than anything, symbolizes the nostalgia for the old permanent and fixed home, of the sequence in the placement in space and the assumed continuation of the significance of one place through time’.

According to Bauman (2005: 76-8), strangers live near each other in cities and their presence are ‘always frightening’ because ‘their intentions, ways of thinking and responses to shared situations are unknown’. Strangers are the embodiment of risk. They occupy public spaces, a place where anyone can enter freely and perform, and where ‘the creative and life-enhancing value of diversity’ is recognised. ‘Fear and insecurity are alleviated by

the presence of difference along with the ability to move freely through the city' (Ellin cited in Bauman 2005: 78). For Bauman:

It is the tendency to withdraw from public spaces and to retreat into islands of sameness that turns in time into the major obstacle to living with difference – by causing the skills of dialogue and negotiation to wilt and fade. It is the exposure to difference that in time becomes the major factor in happy cohabitation by causing the urban roots of fear to wilt and fade.

It is the regularity of meaningful encounters and contact with difference that seems to be lacking in context and practice for both the locals and the Karen/Karennis. The lack of necessary commonalities of 'language' and the lackadaisical effort for emphatic dialogue and negotiation could be exacerbating the situation of an inability to build bridges towards a liveable and peaceful coexistence. This is the revelation of Htoo Paw, a Karenni woman as she observes:

Building networks and friends in my own community or co-ethnics is not hard because we always come together, especially during special occasions such as New Year. However, it is very hard to make friends and networks outside my own community because of language barrier. You cannot communicate – you cannot make friends. Sometimes the Community Centre is organising a community meeting with the wider community, such as the local white people and the black people. During these meetings, all the Karen/Karenni people sit together because they can relate and speak the same language. The Karen/Karennis do not usually mix with the other people but mix a little bit with the Africans because they go together every day at the English classes and recognised and familiarised each other. It is okay for them to speak a little English.

As mentioned, to borrow the words of Bourdieu (cited in Thompson ed. 1991: 12-18) the ‘linguistic habitus’ necessary to acquire ‘linguistic capital’ and which, in turn, enable the Karen/Karennis ‘to exploit the system of differences to their advantage and thereby secure a *profit of distinction*’, seems lacking or nonexistent. Because the onus of securing informal networks with members of the majority group, which could lead to eliciting future opportunities and rewards, lies heavily with the Karen/Karennis, they need to acquire first that valuable ‘linguistic capital’. However, as mentioned in Chapter One, learning the ‘linguistic habitus’ of the mainstream could be a lifetime project. To the Karen/Karennis, factors such as old age, disruptions in formal schooling and normalcy of way of life, and traumatic experiences in moments of displacements, may continue to hound them as they pick up bits and pieces of everything in the diaspora to reform and reorganise their shattered lives.

In contrast, while the Karen/Karennis struggle in their fervent desire to build networks and friends with members of the majority group during the initial stages of resettlement; the Filipino tradesmen, skilled workers, and fiancé-sponsored Filipinas formed networks and friendships with the local white Australians either through interactions in the workplace or in acquaintanceships with the local friends of their Anglo Australian husbands. Aside from the Filipinos’ inherent friendly nature, they also possessed the necessary social and cultural capital profoundly deployed during their daily encounter with the mainstream. Leonora, a Filipina, remarked, ‘When I got here and before I joined the Filipino Club, me and my husband were active members of the Movie Club

and Camera Club and I was the only Asian for a year. I am generally mingled well with white Australians that time’.

As Leonora entered the public space<sup>11</sup>, however, and performed her daily routine, she was being stereotyped as a ‘Vietnamese’, a seemingly denigrated identity within the Australian public sphere during the 1970s and 1980s characterised by being associated with the ‘boat people’. Filipinos were seen to be Vietnamese refugees arriving in Australian shores ‘illegally’ to escape the Vietnam War. She perceptively said:

Sometimes, when I walked along the riverbank, the ‘locals’ would ask if I am a Vietnamese. I said, ‘No’. Maybe because the facial features of Asians are more or less the same. Sometimes I have experienced being yelled at and told to go back to my own country and these were people who were narrow-minded.

Perceptions of the locals’ utter disrespect towards the ‘Other’ are also narrated by the Karen/Karennis. This is particularly expressed by NoLoEh, a Karenni, as she observes, ‘I put the rubbish bin outside and they just come and throw all my rubbish into the streets... They are teenagers. They are white Australians here. One day, two girls and three boys, they are our close neighbours; they have eaten some pears and throw it at our front yard; no *respect* at all’.

The ‘culture of respect’ is very pronounced in the countries of South East Asia including the Philippines and Burma. This is shown with the way Filipinos and Karen/Karennis value respect as the pinnacle of family dynamism and human virtue and

---

<sup>11</sup> ‘Public spaces are sites where strangers meet, and so they are condensations and encapsulations of urban life’s defining features’ (Bauman 2005: 77).

manifest in its dealings with the elders, professionals, and teachers, leaders of the community, and others in their country of origin and practiced in the diaspora. As the Filipino and Karen/Karenni participants encounter contradictory practices that challenge a particular, or in this case a universal norm, they begin ‘soul-searching’ and discern how parents of the ‘misbehaving’ youth inculcate values and good discipline.

As NoLoEh narrated and interpreted what she perceived as a form of ‘disrespect’ of her private space displayed by the local teenagers, I quickly trace back my own frozen past on the exercise of power used to install order at the original home. It has brought back memories on how parents in the Philippines would castigate their children, impose firm discipline and emphasise respect. In the olden days, Filipino parents subjected their children, when caught misbehaving or name-calling in public, to brutal punishments. Such disciplinary measures, included but were not limited to, whipping children several times with a branch of a tree, or pushing them to kneel on table salts in front of the altar to atone for the sin committed, or if it was deemed a grave offence, locking them up for days without food and water. Of course, these disciplinary practices are now banned in the Philippines. But these brutal ways of disciplining kids, in addition to the ‘reward system’ afforded to someone who behaves appropriately, prompted Filipino kids to show utmost respect to their parents and the elderly. The ‘culture of respect’, practiced within the immediate family home, is eventually carried forward to the community and everywhere one goes. In short, most Filipino children are brought up by strict discipline coupled with rewarding and loving care by parents. Filipinos accord much value to respect.

NoLoEh pointed out that the Karen/Karenni culture also emphasises respect. This was may be the reason why she was shocked when some local teenagers ‘ran amuck’ destroying her rubbish bin and mailbox as well as throwing rocks and eggs into her property. She was scared to apprehend them for fear of reprisal. Instead she moved house with some of her friends into a ‘richer and more peaceful’ suburb about twenty kilometres away from Corio. According to Sennett (2003: 63-4), ‘society shapes character in three ways so that people earn, or fail to arouse, respect’ – self-development, care of the self, and giving back to others, and in this sense it could be that NoLoEh and the Karen/Karennis fail to arouse respect from the locals. For Sennett:

Care of oneself can mean additionally not becoming a burden upon others, so that the needy adult incurs shame, the self-sufficient person earns respect. This way of earning respect derives from modern society’s hatred of parasitism; if society fears waste, it even more fears– whether rationally or irrationally–being sucked dry by unjustified demands.

When asked about the reasons behind the mistreatment by the locals towards them, many Karen/Karennis thought that the local Australians were jealous at them with the way the Australian government looked after them. It seems that the locals could not reconcile the fact that their government is looking after the ‘strangers’, the same way as the government looks after them where they pay taxes and these ‘strangers’ are ‘useless’, unskilled and do not work, and a ‘drain to the system’. In other words, the locals may think that these ‘strangers’ are receiving social security benefits from the government through their taxes, hence, they can be considered as ‘parasites’. Neither the family members of the earlier immigrants who seek to join them in Australia nor the recently-arrived refugee and

humanitarian entrants have been 'selected on the basis of their potential contribution to the economy, hence, they constitute a potential challenge to the welfare state' (Entzinger 2007: 127). Over time in Australia many migrants are 'accused of draining the resources of the country and stealing jobs and homes; they were held responsible for the decline in the areas in which they had settled; they were blamed for 'overcrowding' rather than the result of exclusionary treatment' (Ratcliffe 2004: 108).

It could be inferred, however, that the Karen/Karennis did not think of themselves as a 'drain to the system' or 'parasites' because it has never been their choice to leave their country of origin and come to Australia; they are victims of the vagaries and cruelties of 'life on the run' and; sooner rather than later they will be able to find jobs and contribute to the economy of the host society. ChoMyint, a Karenni man, perhaps speaking on behalf of the Karen/Karenni people stated:

We will do whatever we can, will it be a work for the environment or cleaning or whatever. We have to work hard in any job and in whatever we can. We want to return and pay back something to the Australian Government and become good citizens. If we can work and pay taxes to the Australian Government, it is like returning back to the government.

The impression of ChoMyint to 'pay back something to the Australian Government' can be seen as a gesture of reciprocity and honouring the 'debt of gratitude' for embracing the 'gift of freedom' offered by Australia. Nguyen (2012) contends that the generous act of giving 'passage toward freedom' for many refugees, for instance, passage from refugee camps to a supported resettlement in host countries, constitutes the offering of the 'gift of freedom'. For Nguyen, this 'gift of freedom' has an underlying hegemonic ambition that



perpetuates imperial power and imposes an everlasting ‘debt of gratitude’ on its subjects. Nevertheless, the Karen/Karennis feel that it will take a long time for the locals to accept the reality that their own neighbourhood, the place they have called ‘home’ since they were born, is now undergoing dramatic change. The contemporary and future generations of locals continually invoke the power of ‘localism’, of the sense of *firstness*, of being rooted, hence, having legitimate claim of the area.

It could be surmised that the local Australians in question engage and immerse into a state of what Wallman (1998: 199) refers to as ‘localism’ which signifies ‘how much local people identify themselves by the area, how they visualize it, how loyal they are to its needs or peculiarities’. For Wallman, these identifications are ‘sensitive to other things happening in each person’s life – the distribution of their kin, the support of friends – as much as on the qualities and the structures of the area itself’. In this case, the place the locals are so familiar with becomes occupied by people who are ‘different’, who speak different languages, hence, are very difficult to interrelate with, and are a treat to the harmony of the local ‘home’.

By seeking understanding from the mainstream, the Karen/Karennis and the Filipinos clearly experienced multifaceted closures in the social and economic spheres brought about by racial ascriptions and other social markers. This chapter has shown that social closure marked the place and time where the participants navigated and negotiated their ‘homes’ in the diaspora. Subsequently, their liminal moments of the ‘journeys of incorporation’ are marked by ambivalent attitudes. The interweaving themes of the globalisation of the research milieu, articulations of the notion of ‘home’, and perceived

receptions of the locals, and comparisons of articulating the original, transitional and physical ‘homes’ all underpin moments of inclusion or the participants’ feeling of exclusion and closure from the mainstream society. The following chapter focuses on insights of the Filipinos’ and Karen/Karennis’ engagement in social institutions and the underlying performance of transnational and cultural identities to navigate towards inclusion and resist the vagaries of exclusionary closures. It discusses themes of social support and friendship, institutional engagement, and performance of transnational and cultural identities as the Filipino and Karen/Karennis continue to unravel moments of subtle closures as well as portray moments of the absence of closure on everyday living in the diaspora.



Karen families settling in Corio (Source: Migration Action, Issue 2, September 2008)



The *Kae Htoe Boe* Festival held at the backyard of The Hub, Diversitat, Norlane, Victoria

(Note: No one appearing in these photographs is a research participant or a member of their family.)

## CHAPTER FIVE

### Negotiating Institutional and Transnational Arrangements

*To people who are smarting under the pressures of an insecure existence and uncertain prospects, it promises more, not less insecurity: in a drastic change of tune still difficult to assimilate, its spokespeople call for more 'flexibility'; they admonish individuals to exercise their own wits in the search for survival, improvement and a dignified life, to rely on their own guts and stamina and blame their own lassitude or laziness in the event that they suffer defeat.*

- (Bauman 2001: 112)

The preceding chapter suggested that amidst forms of closure imminent in the participants' interrelations with the locals, the articulation and negotiation of 'home', especially when the Filipinos and the Karen/Karennis compared the original to the actual homes, featured some positive moments of settlement in the diaspora. The 'journeys of incorporation' into the mainstream becomes central to their narratives mostly driven by the wide-ranging repercussions of globalisation and the imposition of localism, as the locals redefine inherent rooted identities. Processes of closure can also be seen in the way in which the Filipinos and Karen/Karennis engage with the social institutions. As this chapter indicates, while a not-for-profit organisation in Geelong implements well-received community projects for refugee and humanitarian entrants, a few government agencies pay lip service to the everyday needs of the retired Filipinos and recently arrived Karen/Karennis. This chapter highlights themes of social support and friendship,

institutional engagements and performing transnational and cultural identities. As this chapter argues, perceptions of mistreatment by these government agencies towards the way the Filipino and Karen/Karennis access vital services resemble forms of social closure wherein ethnic minorities are seemingly barred from enjoying the benefits and privileges accorded to Australian citizens. These setbacks in the integration process create boundaries that push the participants in this study to maintain transnational connections with co-ethnics around the world, and at the same time display traditional cultural identities to continue nostalgic memoirs.

At the initial stages of resettlement, the Karen/Karennis encountered difficulties of fostering good interrelationships with the locals primarily because of the former's perceived lack of cultural and social capital. In performing the everyday life in public spaces in the diaspora, both the long standing Filipinos and the newly emerging Karen/Karennis felt hostile moments stemming from the complexities and fluidities in navigating institutional engagements, as well as the stereotypical constructions thrown at them by members of the majority group. In many years of settlement and resettlement in the host society, the participants 'have to cope not only with the pain of separation but often with the resentments of a hostile population' (Sarup 1994: 94). In the liminal moments of settlement, the study participants relied heavily on the support provided by families and friends already living in the diaspora.

### **Drawing Support from Families and Friends**

As stated earlier, the communities chosen for this study differ in their circumstances of migration to Australia. The thirteen Filipino participants were unanimous in saying that

they came to Australia voluntarily to improve their living conditions and escape the deteriorating social, economic and political situation in the Philippines in the 1970s and 1980s. The majority of the Filipino women participants arrived on fiancé-sponsored visas, hence, were immediately provided much-needed support by their Australian husbands and their husbands' direct family, especially in navigating the everyday life and in accessing services. The Filipinas' Australian husbands, who were all born in Australia and mostly of Anglo-Saxon origin, already considered themselves established, with all of them having been in or currently engaged in paid work, owning properties, and with considerable family support systems. This was the perception of Emely, a Filipina who arrived in Australia on a spouse visa in the 1980s, and had to go straight to the country town of Marshall, in the Geelong region where her husband lived. She narrated, 'The only persons living in the house that time were my husband and my father-in-law. They were alright and welcomed me. Before I arrived in Australia, my husband had already established himself. He was the only son, and was working and lived at their own house'. Del Rosario (2008) argues that the love, emotion, and marriage to a white man underpins the cultural logic of desire that is seen as a way to advance the Filipino women's social status. Emely felt that her social status had improved after marrying her Australian husband and felt lucky for the support of her husband during the early days of engaging with the mainstream of the host country. Such experience of voluntary human movement is in contrast to the forced migration experiences of the Karen/Karennis.

The fifteen Karen/Karenni participants were forced to find refuge in a third country and arrived in Australia on refugee and humanitarian visas. As already mentioned, they

were driven away by the Burmese military government into exile along the Thai-Burma border as a result of more than six decades of civil war. The Karen/Karennis' resettlement in the Geelong region has been facilitated by the Federal Government's Humanitarian Settlement Program (HSP). Just like any other immigrant group, their narratives revealed that the presence of friends and family members, who had arrived ahead of them in the diaspora, helped facilitate the smooth transitioning in host societies, especially in their readiness to extend a helping hand upon their arrival. It made a lot of difference to participants the support provided by friends, family members, and their own community, especially at the initial stages of settling-in in an unfamiliar territory. This is revealed by BoMe, a Karenni man, who arrived in Australia in 2010, as he recounts that 'In the beginning I do not know how to take the bus and buy a ticket. I just followed my friend who arrived here ahead of me and who taught me how to buy the ticket and how to catch the bus and how to go to Footscray for shopping and then later I can do it on my own'. It made a lot of sense, the information provided by families and friends.

Emotional, material, and informational support provided by families already in the destination areas eased the burden in negotiating the 'diaspora space'. BoMe is one of a few lucky ones who have friends and family members who arrived ahead of him in Geelong, and he expresses gratitude of their presence in dealing with everyday living. He stated that 'My son's family had arrived six months ahead of me. In the beginning, I went with my daughter and son because they have experience in shopping. I followed and learned from them. Later on, I did it by myself and was happy to know that I can do it'. Even though BoMe spent only two years of formal schooling in Burma because of the

conflict, his will and determination to learn the way of life in the new home is unparalleled and with the help of his son he slowly acquires the skills of being independent. He shared one of his experiences and said, ‘We received the bills and with my son who has an experience already, we went to the post office at the Corio shopping centre and pay the bills. Later on, I can do it by myself paying bills such as electric bill, water bill and any kinds of bill’. Similarly, this family support is also evident amongst the Filipino participants I interviewed.

Sentiments of family support were also echoed by Esperanza, a Filipina who came to Geelong in 1976 on a fiancé-sponsored visa and whose Australian husband died of a heart attack barely six years after their marriage. She said:

If I was not feeling too good, my husband’s uncle and auntie would come to our place and cook for me. They were really good. I was not struggling with everything because they were really good to me. In return for their kindness, when they got old and sickly, I ended up looking after them in everything. They were like substitute parents because my husband’s mother died long time ago and his dad remarried. I did not find any obstacles in accessing government services because my uncle and auntie and my husband were always there to help me with everything.

Christrom, another Filipina, also emphasised the significance of familial support by choosing to have her entire pregnancy at her Anglo Australian in-laws in Gippsland while her husband worked in Geelong about three hours drive away:

In Gippsland, the place where we used to live, the people looked after each other. Though my husband worked here in Geelong for a fortnight and had a week off, I opted to have my entire pregnancy there because of the support from his family. The people there, such as the neighbours and family members, were really looking



after me. My husband's brothers and sisters, and relatives, aunties, they came to say hello. They were so welcoming and that was the amazing part.

However, while the presence of some family-in-laws of Filipino participants was helpful in their settling-in, other Filipinos I interviewed have expressed feelings of enmity because of not getting along well with their new in-laws. This is the case for Nelly, a Filipina when she narrates:

Some of the relatives are very nice to me except for the sister and the brother. The brother is the one holding my husband's money and by the time my husband was about to go to the Philippines to marry me, he tried to discouraged my husband from Geelong to Melbourne airport and reminded him not to marry me. They are scared that another people, not related to the family will share their farm and break their family tradition. They do not want that someone will be with my husband so that no one can share with his money. Yeah, they did not even visit me when I had my children delivered in the hospital.

The same sentiment was also shared by Leonora, a Filipina who married an Anglo Australian who was a long time bachelor, when she said:

Actually, before he got married, his sister and niece were a bit jealous and disagreed with our relationship. He told me in the end that because he has been a bachelor for a long time, his niece and sister thought that I am only after his money.

Thus, while some participants married to Anglo Australians have experienced being cared for by their Australian family circle; others felt mistreated by their husband's family members because of jealousy and perceived exploitation of the families' wealth. In a sense, these mistreated Filipina wives are 'portrayed as manipulative and self-seeking, as women who abuse the naivety of their Australian husbands' (Cunneen & Stubbs 1997: 125). There

are social stigmas, stereotypes and prejudices attached to women who marry through the so-called 'mail-order brides' as they enter into marriages that are judged to be culturally, socially and even racially incompatible, and where commercial transactions involving the purchase of wives are common occurrences (Williams 2010). By not being accepted within the family circle of the Australian husband, many Filipinas suffered a form of social closure where they were barred from participating in the economic activities of the husband's family, and this has reduced the Filipinas to begging for opportunities. As a result, a few found solace in the support provided by their own community where they narrated shared meanings, formed extended families and felt a deeper sense of belonging.

These narratives of shared meanings, formed through many years of embarking on the same journey of primarily seeking better opportunities, echoed the many practices in the 'diaspora space', and became symbols of unity and celebration of 'being' and 'becoming' a community with common socio-cultural and political interests. Papastergiades (2000: 16) contends that 'people felt a belonging through a communion of certain structures of belief; and communities were established with less regard for geographic proximity and more attention to a common language and shared ideals'. With regards to Nelly's tumultuous life story mentioned above, she did not mind being neglected and abandoned by her husband's family, as she was grateful that the Filipino community in Geelong showed their love and affection towards her. She shared stories such as, 'I got an extended family here because of the Filipino Club. We helped each other and they were like my family. Instead of waiting for my husband's relative's help, the Filipino club members helped me. They even visited me in the hospital when I delivered my children'.

In desperate times of experiencing closure, Nelly and other Filipino Club members converge to form alliances and create reliable extended families to foster an environment of hope, love and caring for each other no matter what happens.

According to Putnam (2000: 21), 'extended families represent a form of social capital' because 'social networks and the associated norms of reciprocity come in many different shapes and sizes with many different uses'. Nelly showed a form of identity which 'implies belonging – a sense that can be as real as imagined, but which, in either case, is central to understanding people's political and emotional attachment to other individuals and groups' (Georgiou 2006: 40). As there were only a few Filipinos around in Geelong in the 1970s and early 1980s, some would seek out profound attachments with compatriots to ease the loneliness of living in different milieus of the diaspora. Ella, a Filipina and retired nurse, and one of the Filipino pioneers in Geelong recalled how important it was to talk to someone who shared the same traditions and values as hers when she reiterated:

Being the only Filipino in the Geelong Hospital where I worked, I started longing for somebody I can speak to. I used to catch a train going to Melbourne and I looked around for an Asian-looking. As I find an Asian-looking I said, 'Are you from Malaysia or Indonesia'? I do not straight away ask if they are Filipino. When they say they are Filipino, we are so happy and then we start talking, you know. There were very few Filipinos then that time. In here, maybe there were only ten more or less that time.

However, through the years of engaging into their own organisational dynamics, the close-knit Filipino community in Geelong in the 1970s and 1980s began to disintegrate, especially as there was a perceived dominance and control of the Filipino Club by the

Anglo Australian husbands, who were accused of trying to change the Club's constitution. This eventually led to the split of the Club into two separate organisations as the pioneers were irked with the way they were overpowered by the 'Whites' in the administration and running of the Club. After being asked in the interview why the Club was split into two, Ella, one of the organisers and pioneers of the Club, shared the root cause of the split and stated:

When this new president got in with their friends and husbands who are Whites, they want the constitution to be changed. The Whites are now controlling the Club. The constitution suits the needs of the Filipinos and not the Australians. I said, 'That constitution is for Filipinos, not for you Australians, get out'. I showed the Whites the door. I got angry because it seems that we are oppressed. The Whites scrutinised the Filipino Club constitution and they wanted it to be changed. I got angry and I said, 'The constitution embodies the ideals of the Filipinos and not you Australians'.

This split resulted in the creation of what are now the two main Filipino organisations in Geelong, namely: the Filipino Social Club of Geelong, Inc., where most of the Filipinos I interviewed are members, and the Filipino Australian Friendship Association, where the Anglo Australian husbands of Filipinas predominate. The former is where most of the Filipino pioneers of Geelong choose to affiliate and are still active members of the club while the latter is mostly governed by Anglo Australians. Nevertheless, the Filipino leaders of the two organisations still invite each other's members every time one is conducting social functions such as Christmas parties, New Year celebrations and Independence Day parties. The sole purpose of such social gathering is to raise funds for community projects and to provide financial assistance for Filipinos in need.

D'Mello (2010: 99) points out that 'being part of a group helps Filipinos feel a little less isolated from the cultural, social and physical environment in which they live. The groups – sometimes chaotic, often dynamic – provide a haven when the distance from loved ones and the feeling of loneliness takes hold of them'. Most long standing members of the Filipino community in Geelong in the 1970s and 1980s showed grit, empowerment and sense of belonging and togetherness particularly in the initial stages of settlement.

The emerging Karen/Karenni community, likewise, found camaraderie and friendship with co-ethnics, who stood shoulder to shoulder with each other in times of need, and formally organised their community group or association. Being new to the country, the Karen/Karenni participants, who have an average of four years of living in Geelong at the time of this study, largely rely more on friendships with co-ethnics to navigate their way around the everyday living in the mainstream society. The Karen/Karenni community have engaged in what Putnam (2000: 22-3) refers to as 'generalized reciprocity'. For Putnam, a society characterised by 'generalized reciprocity', that is one where, 'I will do this for you without expecting anything specific back from you, in the confident expectation that someone else will do something for me down the road, is more valuable and more efficient than a distrustful society'. This 'generalized reciprocity' is testament to the way the Karen/Karennis relate to each other, especially in times of emergencies and other difficult situations.

One of the recurring or frequently mentioned difficulties encountered by the Karen/Karenni participants during the initial stages of the resettlement process is the 'language problem'. Almost every aspects of their daily lives has been marred by the

‘language barrier’ in their resettlement journey, and most often than not they seek help from a friend who has the ‘cultural capital’ navigating both worlds, from translating daily mail to calling 000 for emergencies. Peter, a Karen man, shared his experience when a friend who knew how to speak English, Karen, and Burmese languages arrived one year after they settled in Australia:

At that time, when I got a letter I have to go to the community guide who lives far away from me but when the translator of this interview arrived, I was so happy because at least another one can read and translate my letters anytime. The translator of this interview is the one reading and translating my mails. He is my friend and I always invite him to my barbecue.

Elmer, the Karenni Research Assistant (RA), not only shared with Peter commonalities of ethnicity, culture and gender, they also suffered the same fate of having to endure the brutalities of the armed conflict as both lost important parts of their bodies to landmines planted by the Burmese soldiers. In sharing the same painful experiences of the past, Elmer and Peter cemented their mutual friendship and would come to each other’s mutual aid if the circumstances so dictated. This strong friendship and the readiness to extend a helping hand were narrated by Peter himself in his interview when he said, ‘We went to the same driving school together with the interpreter of this interview. We sat in each other’s back seat when we took each other’s driving lessons... I have friends who can always help me. If someone moves house, we come and help each other’.

The memory of such significant and crucial assistance lingers especially in a situation where it involves life and death circumstances of loved ones. MonHto, a Karenni man, who cannot speak English despite finishing the mandatory 510 hours of English

lessons, related his experience of how a friend lent him a helping hand and said, ‘It happened to me when my wife was about to deliver the baby. I wanted to get an ambulance fast and I just called my friend who can speak English, and my friend called 000 and directed the ambulance to my home’. While many have, indeed, accessed valuable assistance from compatriots who can navigate between two cultural worlds, with that of the host society and of their co-ethnics, others find remarkable partnership with established members of other diasporic ethnic groups. Htoo Paw, perhaps due to her pioneering status as one of the first beneficiaries of the government’s Humanitarian Settlement Program in Geelong, describes the importance of fostering good helping relationship with the local white people. Francis (not his real name), for example, is one of the local white people who responded to the call of actively engaging with the newly emerging Karen/Karenni community. I knew Francis when he was at Htoo Paw’s house during one of my home visitations and I had a lengthy conversation with him. Francis came to Australia as a ten-year old immigrant from the Netherlands and has been in Australia for fifty two years. He is a devout member of the Baptist Church, and their pastor has been encouraging volunteers to actively engage in various tasks with the newly arrived refugees living in the area such as conducting English language tutorials, assisting in everyday life and helping them to access services. Francis is one of those who volunteered. Htoo Paw shares her experience with Francis:

Francis, who is a Dutch Australian, is my husband’s English tutor. He comes to our place two hours every week to do English tutorials to my husband. During his visits, we gather around and talk and do some English lesson exercises. We came to know him. He is a good man. He is a very open person. If he doesn’t like something about

you, he tells you straight away right into your face, that's why I like him. He is a reliable person. One time our car broke down; he provided help by ringing the right people, the insurance company. If you have no idea where to go, he helped. We have known Francis since we came here, about four and a half years now.

It may be worth noting here that Francis's volunteering work with the Karen/Karennis could be seen as a type of the evangelical mission currently undertaken by the Baptist Church because most of Francis' clients are actually enticed to join the church. Also, Gandhi (2006: 29) warns that 'any sort of friendship (local or global) is emotionally risky, as it might bedevil the tranquil Epicurean sage with anxieties of affective dependence'. Nevertheless, in navigating the mainstream of the receiving society, the participants emphasised that not only the support of the immediate family members, community and friends are needed, holistic institutional support of Diversitat<sup>12</sup> is also crucial to enhance their capability of achieving meaningful adjustments and incorporation into the mainstream of the host society.

### **Accessing Social Services: The Experience of Ambivalence**

At some point of their migration to Geelong, most of the participants have engaged the services of the government and non-government institutions. The Australian state appears to be implementing the combined elements of redistributionist (RED) and social integrationist (SID) discourses discussed in Chapter Two, in mitigation of impact on their

---

<sup>12</sup> Divesitat is an organisation governed by the Geelong Ethnic Communities Council and is contracted by the Federal Government to 'assists these newly arrived refugees to settle in Geelong by providing assistance with English language classes as well as every day things like finding accommodation, enrolling the children in school and even getting a driver's license'. [www.diversitat.org.au](http://www.diversitat.org.au). 12 June 2013.



lives of those who have been uprooted and are thrust into the transitional moments within the mainstream society. Some Filipino participants who were tradesmen recalled how they have benefited from the ‘assisted passage’ implemented by the government in the 1970s and early 1980s which included subsidised, if not free, airfares; free food and accommodation, full social security benefits and employment assistance. For instance BP, a Filipino, who was working in Saudi Arabia and then pursued his Australian dream in 1981, recalled how grateful he was for getting the opportunity of a subsidised airfare during that time and said, ‘They changed the policy that instead of only 10 percent I now have to pay 50 percent. So I have to pay half of the airfare which is still good’.

Ben, a Filipino tradesman who came to Australia in 1976, remembered how grateful he was upon arriving in Melbourne and said, ‘For me, as a permanent resident in Australia, it was very good because when we were housed in the Springvale Hostel everything was free – food, accommodation, and Medicare. There was also assistance from the government to find me a job to look around in that area in Springvale’. All these services were provided by the Commonwealth Employment Services now known as Centrelink, and since these assisted migrants found paid work, they have not dealt much with this government agency until a few years after retirement when the superannuation payments of these skilled and tradesmen Filipinos ran out. This is in contrast to the Karen/Karenni participants where the

combined assistance of Centrelink<sup>13</sup> and Diversitat are needed for a much longer period than the Filipinos in the liminal negotiation and navigation with the mainstream.

For while the Filipino tradesmen and skilled workers had social and cultural capital in their arsenal upon migration, such as recognised qualifications and work experience (except for the fiancé-sponsored professionals), supportive Filipino community already in the diaspora, and good English language ability which were deemed necessary for successful incorporation; the Karen/Karenni lacked the social capital and required more interventions, assistance, and intensive case management provision from concerned agencies. The lack of necessary social, economic and cultural capital to negotiate in the mainstream of the Australian society necessitates the Federal Government, through its community-based pseudo-government organisation, Diversitat, to implement a comprehensive combined Humanitarian Settlement Services and Settlement Grants Program for the Karen/Karennis and other former refugees.

Diversitat has developed and implemented a two-stage case management within five years for the Karen/Karennis. The first stage, which is called the Humanitarian Settlement Services (HSS) program, involves the case working activities for the first twelve months of arrival where the Karen/Karennis undergo intensive assistance and orientation to access basic services such as Centrelink, for the payment of Newstart allowance; Medicare, for health check and medical follow-ups; as well as accessing Diversitat's

---

<sup>13</sup> Centrelink is a government agency attached to the Department of Human Services that delivers a range of payments and services for retirees, the unemployed, families, carers, parents, people with disabilities, Indigenous Australians, and people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds, and provides services at times of major change. <http://www.humanservices.gov.au/corporate/about-us/> 17 June 2013.

institutional services such as Adult English language classes, facilitating the entry of children to formal school, the one-on-one guidance of how to open a bank account and withdraw money, and conducting orientation activities for other services. The HSS program aims to strengthen clients' ability to participate in the economic and social life of Australia and provide them with the skills and knowledge to independently access services beyond the initial settlement period (Diversitat 2014). Once clients are able to navigate the mainstream such as being referred to major services, being in long term accommodation and have gained major competencies in respect to various aspects of life in the new country, they are seamlessly transferred to Diversitat's Settlement Grants Program.

The second stage, which is called the Settlement Grants Program (SGP), relates to individual case management within the next four years commencing right after the twelve months of undertaking the HSS program, and is primarily designed to assist the Karen/Karennis' readiness to participate in the workforce, with the eventual outcomes of landing them in available jobs. SGP is aimed at enabling individuals and families access the correct information in regard to settlement including immigration, housing, health, education, employment, legal, schooling, language, referrals, orientation and social support (Diversitat 2014). Also, during this second stage, regular visits by case managers and community guides are conducted to ensure that the Karen/Karennis' physical, emotional and even spiritual wellbeing are primarily looked after. The second stage is followed by the evaluation of clients within the succeeding months after undertaking the SGP that looks at how the Karen/Karennis have resettled so far and to ascertain the level of personal and family independence from case management. It is assumed that after undertaking the HSS

and SGP programs, all case management ceases and the individual client is expected to be self-sufficient and able to navigate on his own the vagaries of negotiating the mainstream. Echo, a Karen man, has narrated his experience with his case worker and said, ‘The six-month case worker is finished and another case worker took over for the next four years... I always go to my case worker for assistance. One time I asked her to have my internet connected at home. She organised for it and now I enjoyed my internet’.

It appears that the case management for five years for the Karen/Karennis in Geelong which is implemented by Diversitat is a much more realistic option than the United States Department of Workforce Services’ federal resettlement system primarily ‘designed with the expectation that refugees will be employed and will be automatically self-sufficient, on average, within six months of arrival’ (Smith 2010: 60). For the Karen/Karennis, achieving self-sufficiency and total independence within six months of arrival is beyond the bounds of real possibility since most, if not all, are preliterate before they embark on their journey into Australia. This means that the processes of adjustments and incorporation into the host society involve enormous tasks and human agency that demand a lifetime of constant engagement, interrelationships, and everyday practice. Learning to skilfully negotiate the rapids, uncertainties, and unpredictable movements of the flows of the mainstream is a lifetime challenge which requires unconditional commitment and adherence to the host society’s rules while practicing one’s own traditional norms, mores and values.

In addition to longer periods of case management interventions, Diversitat not only hired Karen case workers but also hired Karenni community guides who can navigate both

worlds and can speak English, Karen and Burmese dialects to increase the chances of empowering the community and having their voices heard. However, due to the increasing caseloads of Diversitat's case workers and lack of funding, there is an eventual delay of services and an imminent preponderance of long queues for people seeking necessary assistance. The Karen/Karennis, for example, have to book an appointment to see a case worker and wait for at least a week before being looked after. BoMe, a Karenni man stated:

Mostly I have to make an appointment with the case worker. I go to the Diversitat reception and tell them that I need to have an appointment with a case worker and they will find any available time and date and the reason why I want to see the case worker. We just leave a message there and the reception will check the schedule of the case worker.

The Karen/Karenni participants reported that there is a frequent turn-over of staff at Diversitat, and it seems that this is the reason why the organisation has hired the services of community guides coming from the Karen/Karenni community, who can navigate the social and cultural milieus of both their own and the mainstream communities. Instead of waiting for their case workers to resolve immediate issues and concerns, most Karen/Karennis rely more on the community guides' assistance in negotiating the everyday life in the diaspora, from reading and interpreting mail to accompanying them to Centrelink. Maw said that many times a community guide has admitted to being overwhelmed with the huge tasks demanded by his/her own people.

Maw participates in the Karen/Karennis' seasonal group site cleaning such as during the Lorne Arts and Music Festival, the Geelong Air Show Festival, and other local community activities. Group site cleaning is a kind of group paid work where about twenty

to thirty Karen/Karennis gather together to provide cleaning services to festivals, socio-cultural shows, events and fiestas throughout the Geelong Region. Participants to this group site cleaning do not need English language skills because the team leader, who can navigate both worlds in terms of language, does all the coordination and liaison activities. Community guides, while performing the task of team leaders in group site cleaning, also do counselling and visit each family once a month to find out the difficulties their people are facing. These services are seen by community guides as their vocation and the reason for their being here in the diaspora. Their multilingual attributes are seen as their gift from God despite suffering miserable lives in their country of origin and in refugee camps. However, what despises most community guides fervently is the tremendous amount of paperwork which Centrelink require for people receiving their *Newstart* allowances.

Interviews with members of the Filipino and Karen/Karenni communities revealed a few intriguing issues with the way they engaged with Centrelink, a government agency tasked to provide social security payments. Issues, ranging from difficulty reporting of regular incomes on sporadic casual jobs by the Karen/Karennis to alleged unfair deductions from a Filipino aged pension, were reported. Maw, a Karenni, summed up the following scenario of regular reporting of income to Centrelink:

Most of us received a *Newstart* allowance so every fortnight we have to report our income like how many hours we have worked and how much income we have got. After that, they have to decide how much we can keep. Like, right now we are receiving A\$450 a fortnight and if your income is more than A\$800 or A\$600 then the allowance will stop. If the next fortnight you do not have an income or a job, you can get the allowance. So we have to report the paperwork. Later, we can fill

up the form in the internet so I do not have to go to the Centrelink to fill up the form. Every two months we are required to report to the Centrelink for a face to face interview just to make sure that we are still here. I am still doing that until now. If you have full time, permanent job, you do not have to report to them. In my case, because I still do not have a permanent job yet that is why I need to report.

Many Karen/Karennis reported that this tedious undertaking of reporting their income regularly, and on a medium of instruction that is not written in their own language, compounded daily hassles and frustrations of everyday living in a different and complex milieu. As already mentioned, most of the Karens/Karennis are preliterate before coming to Australia. However, it seems that they are still being subjected to reporting processes similar to the local people who received *Newstart* allowances, which employ a reporting system that does not suit the Karen/Karennis' understanding or present circumstances. Community guides instruct their people to tick all the 'no' boxes in the form if they do not have any income for the fortnight. However, community guides admit that the difficulty is when they acquire an income because they need to understand the contents of the form line by line and answer accordingly and this is where they need guidance and an interpreting service. Most of the time community guides are the ones filling out the necessary Centrelink paperwork for their people.

Aside from the challenges associated with filling out the income report forms, some Karen/Karennis also experienced dealing with long queues at the Centrelink office and some of them reported being mistreated when accessing services. For instance, Pawpaw, a Karenni woman, narrated her story that:

If you have to deal with Centrelink, you have to wait for a very long queue and it happened lately. There are very nice staffs but some staff does not even care. Maybe they have many customers or clients or whatever or maybe they are tired but it is not an excuse, they have to serve and do what they are supposed to do. Sometimes staffs are rude to us. Sometimes you meet nice person. They are half-half. Half of the staffs are nice and half are not nice. It is happening.

There was a subjective perception among the participants that Centrelink has made it harder for their clients to access its services so that they will be compelled to look for a permanent job and become self-sufficient. While this may only be a superficial perception, an in-depth discussion of Centrelink's policies and systems that affected the participants, revealed some distressing reality. Disapproval of a few Centrelink policies and procedures reverberate even amongst the long standing Filipinos who are now mostly retired and some are receiving the aged pension. While there is no denial of the real benefits of the pension payments for everyday living among the retirees, it is a big issue for them if Centrelink applies the rules inconsistently particularly on pension deductions. Ella, a Filipina and a former nurse, who has been paying for her government housing's 'granny flat' for seventeen years, complains of this inconsistency and states that, 'Sometimes there is a discrepancy with the pension I receive because when I go over my records, after they deduct all this housing thing, the amount is not the same. They say, they deduct 25 percent from my pension to pay the housing but sometimes it is more than 25 percent'. Furthermore, she pointed out that it has never been a level playing field out there because not only have her requests for flat maintenance been frequently denied, she also has been treated unfairly by Centrelink even though she worked for fifteen years at the Geelong Hospital as a nurse, paid her taxes, and has stayed in Australia for thirty four years. The



narratives of Ella are full of seemingly intriguing and polemic revelations of an unhappy ending of what seems to be a long and winding journey in negotiating the mainstream in the diaspora. Perhaps, her untold story with the way she was mistreated by the state she served for fifteen long years and her feeling of powerlessness over her current fate is disturbing to this 'country of immigrants'. She perceives that the policy of twenty five years residency limit between date of arrival into Australia and retirement age for inclusion in full aged pension is, according to her, absurd, unfair and inhumane. There could be more immigrants suffering the same ordeal as Ella's as there are 40 percent of Australia's current population who are born overseas. She narrated:

They built this thing and I have been staying in this house for seventeen years. I asked them to fix some maintenance problems like the locks broken but they did not fix it and yet I paid 25 percent of my pension every fortnight for this house... They do not really care maybe because I am too old... In the latest, within the first three months you will receive your normal pension but after three months certain amount will be deducted from your pension. Actually, I was contesting. One time I wrote the Centrelink why I am treated like any pensioner that comes to the country who did not work and they have the same privilege as I have, where I worked and I have paid my taxes... But the thing is they have a policy which to me is wrong. Their policy is that if you come to Australia, the time in between your retirement age and your arrival in Australia is less than twenty five years then you are not entitled for the full pension... I was told that I am not entitled for the full pension because I do not have twenty five years of residency between my arrival and my retirement age.

Her mobile, prefabricated, and unmaintained 'granny flat', government housing which according to her is made up of light materials could have been paid off already after

seventeen years of paying for it out of the 25 percent automatic deduction from her pension. Unlike real properties which tripled their commercial values in recent years, her 'granny flat', which was installed in the backyard of her son's property, is implied to be worthless; just like what seems to be the state's treatment of her as worthless, a fraught old lady, a burden to the state and a drain to the system. She further stated:

I have been paying this flat for too long and it is only made of light materials. My grandson went to the Housing Commission to have the issue resolve like the maintenance problems but they said they could not do anything about it. My grandson said, 'What about if we will just sell it'? They said, 'You cannot sell it, we will just remove it after your grandma dies'. For me, this house is rubbish because of lack of maintenance yet I have been paying for it for seventeen years. You do not get anything because they do not maintain the property. I retired at sixty five years of age. I have terrible experience with the Housing Commission and Centrelink.

Ella had to dig deep in order to discover the information on the reasons behind this unfair treatment. After finding out in her records the discrepancies of her pension deductions, she wrote to the Centrelink about the issue only to be told that she is excluded from the full pension benefits because of the lack of twenty five-year residency requirement between arrival and retirement. Even in the few remaining years of her life, there is a seemingly disrespect of her humanity which she does not deserve, having served her entire life for the service of mankind as a 'travelling' nurse. Centrelink and the Housing Commission are two of the government agencies she frequently deals with but feels unhappy with their policy and service.

Another notorious government agency that is perceived to be making life miserable, instead of supporting the resettlement of Karen/Karenni and other immigrants in the Geelong region is VicRoads, an agency responsible for issuing driver's licences. Owning and driving a car is necessary in regional areas because of the lack of reliable public transportation; and most employers, especially on the farms where most of the Karen/Karennis are working, do have explicit requirements for their prospective employees to drive owing to the remoteness and the long distance travel to the farming areas. In fact, most job advertisements in Geelong have the phrase, 'Must have a Victorian Driver's Licence' written on them and one could be excluded from participating in the labour market if the job applicant does not possess a valid Victorian driver's licence. While VicRoads' aim of reducing the number and severity of road crashes is highly commendable, its implementation of the practical driving tests among the culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) driver's licence applicants, however, is arguably perceived as appalling, seemingly 'militaristic', arrogant, money-making, very strict and inhumane. These were the revelations of the Karen/Karenni driving licence applicants including Htoo Paw, a Karenni who came to Geelong in 2007, when she says:

I feel nervous when doing a drive test. Even though my driving instructor is nice to me, every time I do the driving test, the VicRoads testing officer is not nice and they are like 'Burmese soldier'. If the VicRoads testing officers just talk nicer, I would not fail four times in the test. I got scared and felt very nervous when VicRoads testing officer commanded me like a soldier. To me, that is when you commit many mistakes.

The metaphor of juxtaposing the attitude of the VicRoads testing officer, to the Karen/Karennis' experience of hostility and brutality under the hands of the Burmese military, brings back traumatic episodes and tragic memories of civil war in the country of origin to the everyday experience of accessing government services in the diaspora. This revelation echoes with the other Karen/Karenni participants' perception with the way VicRoads in Geelong carries out practical driving tests. One of them is NoLoEh, a Karenni woman, as she recounts the way she feels mistreated by the VicRoads testing officer. She says:

You know, if the testing officer is only good and nice to me, I will probably feel calm a little bit. But if the testing officer assigned to me is mean like a 'Burmese soldier', how could you be calmed? I have not met people who were rude to me except the drive testing officers and some people in the streets. The testing officers speak rudely to me as he gives driving instructions. They need to learn to speak nicely to us. They should understand that we feel nervous every time we are behind the wheel. We always have panic attack when drive testing officers speak loud to us. It is always awful when you go to the drive test.

Clearly, in this case, these participants who have been in traumatic situations felt that some of their experiences with Geelong VicRoads, and the way they perceived the situation during the actual driving tests, were done in a manner that subjected them to a similar authoritarian system or rigidity which they experienced from the military in their country of origin. Although cars are unheard of in the Karen/Karenni villages and in the refugee camps, the necessity to drive a car in order to be included in the mainstream of the host society, including the substantial amount of actual driving experience they have done, gave them enough motivation and encouragement to book a practical driving test at VicRoads.

The Karen/Karenni participants expressed longings to be treated nicely, like a human being and without prejudice. In addition, most of the driver's licence applicants from this community are unemployed; hence, their meagre income from Centrelink's *Newstart* allowance could be pushed to the limit particularly during those times when they failed the driving tests. This was echoed by the sentiments of NoLoEh, a Karenni, when she said:

I have been on a learner's permit for two years and no good. I have done the driving test ten times but I keep on failing. I lost lots of money for the driving test. I have to pay the driving supervisor every time we have a driving lesson. Every time I do the drive test and book an appointment, I pay some money for it.

Smith (2010: 59-62) contends that Westernised perspective on refugee management at all levels of governmental hierarchy is characterised by the 'homogenization of services without regard to cultural differences and variations in refugee experience'. For Smith, government services and assistance are 'often 'packaged' and delivered without due consideration of the distinctive values, norms and social organization of the afflicted population' (see also Harrell-Bond & Voutira 1992: 8). Furthermore, Smith points out that 'refugees are essentially treated as economic units that require funding in order to be supplied with housing, nutrition and other basic services and supplies'. This is exemplified in this study by the seemingly inappropriate driving lesson program for the Karen/Karennis that disregard the process of achieving readiness to undertake driving tests.

While on the one hand, the Karen/Karenni participants perceived experiences of challenges and difficulties in accessing services at VicRoads in Geelong, particularly in securing a probationary driver's licence, on the other hand, a few long standing Filipino

participants, however, portrayed a contrasting and different perception as they revealed experiences of a seemingly easy life with VicRoads in the 1970s and 1980s. For instance, Esperanza, a Filipina, recalled:

Everything was easy before. I had to go through driving lessons to learn to drive. It was very cheap then and it was like A\$9 an hour. I got my driving licence thirty five years ago. A year after I arrived in Geelong, I got my learner's permit and three months after that I got my probationary licence. My husband really pushed me how to drive because he said it is necessary, especially if we have got kids – to go to the doctor. It took me only once to pass the driving test.

There are obviously different and contrasting experiences with the way the Filipinos and the Karen/Karennis have accessed government services, with the latter experiencing compounding difficulties because of language barriers, frustration, and being overwhelmed with the unfamiliar systems and ways of living in the host society. However, despite these feelings of dissatisfaction with the services of some government institutions, while some made the transition sometime ago, other participants in this study are slowly finding their roots in the diaspora, by imagining aspects of inclusion in the host society while comparing these aspects to the exclusionary experiences in the country of origin.

### **The Imaginings of Inclusion/Exclusion**

Despite being dissatisfied with some government services, some participants expressed feelings of being relieved and grateful for calling Australia home. This is echoed by the narrative of Htoo Paw when she shares:

We are better off in Australia than staying in Burma. If you go to any government office in Burma, the officer will look at your overall physical outlook, and if they

know you have some money, they treat you nicely, but if you have no money, they treat you like rubbish. This has happened in almost all government offices in Burma and in services like the hospital and the police office. But here in Australia, even though you don't speak English, if you go to any office, they are very nice, very professional and good. If you go to the police office, they treat you like the same way they treat the others, like equal human being. However, I can still see some people here that are not nice to you in the streets but they cannot do anything to you and they just let you do your own thing. You feel happy when you are safe. In Australia, people cannot treat you like rubbish, in the shops, or wherever. It is very good here because you have every right. What I see as not safe in my country (Burma), even though you have saved some money, but when you get sick, all your savings are gone, no help, no Medicare, no nothing. The government (Burma) doesn't support you with anything. You have to pay with everything in the hospital. Here, in Australia, if you don't have any, you can still live normally; if you don't do drugs, don't drink and live a frugal life like we live now, even though we have very little income, but overall, we do very well.

In the narratives of the research participants, a similar finding unfolds a common realisation that when their current situation is positioned against their lived experiences in the country of origin, the Filipinos and Karen/Karennis reported perceptions of being better off; a sense of security and inclusion is paramount because of the way the system of government in Australia is looking after their needs. Such government services which have contributed to a much better way of life in Australia are seen as nonexistent in the country of origin. However, when their current situation is juxtaposed against the local white Australians, they feel a sense of exclusion and closure because of the huge differences of class, status and prestige brought about by the wide disparities of income, access to leisure activities and general way of life, with the local white people having a huge advantage. Espiritu

(2003: 47) argues that immigrants from the colonised nation-states are undergoing the process of 'differential inclusion' once (re)settled in host countries. She defines 'differential inclusion' as the 'process whereby a group of people is deemed integral to the nation's economy, culture, identity and power – but integral only or precisely because of their designated subordinate standing'. For Espiritu, 'even as citizens, Filipinos continue to be racialized as outside the cultural and racial boundaries of the nation' (2003: 68). In this case, the practice of 'differential inclusion' may have designated the Filipinos in the lower spectrum of the labour market hierarchy which could partly explain why they are overrepresented in certain jobs such as in aged care, labouring, cleaning and factory work and other '3D' jobs. In the same manner, the ongoing system of 'differential inclusion' may have designated the Karen/Karennis in a particular position in the labour market which may be the reason why they are overrepresented in the labouring jobs in agricultural farms.

In a comprehensive study commissioned by the Challenging Racism Project, Dunn & Nelson (2011: 593) report of a widespread acknowledgement of the persistence of racial prejudice in Australia, with 85% of those surveyed across the country affirmed the presence of racial prejudice. However, the government of the day, including sections of the public who are more exposed to racism, such as those born in the Middle East and South Asia, still deny the existence of racism. The latter case points to the continuing presence of 'cultural hierarchies, uneven constructions of belonging, and an unequal power to complain' (p. 597). Similarly, the study also pointed out a clear evidence for the presence of Anglo cultural privilege in Australia with a strong affirmative response coming from non-English speaking background respondents. According to Dunn & Nelson (2011: 588),



the analyses of minority employment in the public sector, at all levels, which showed the over-representation of the Anglo-Australians and the under-representation of other groups, provide concrete examples of the Anglo cultural privilege in Australia (see also, Hage 2000). Hence a deeper multiculturalism should confront structural hierarchies of belonging and citizenship, promulgate an official acknowledgement and address the persistence of racism and Anglo cultural privilege in Australian society (Dunn & Nelson 2011).

Meanwhile, this act of designating the Filipinos and Karen/Karennis according to their prescribed traits and labour market positions are implicitly carried out by the members of the majority group as they uphold the power of localism. The local people would most likely invoke their length of residence and being rooted in the locality, with having established formal and informal networks, as well as of being locally educated in the dispensation of the power of localism. However, this length of residence and being rooted in the locality may now be situated in shaky grounds because of today's globalised world where you do not know who will live next door to you tomorrow, as our place of residence is driven by our search for better employment, and greener pastures is undergoing constant change and transformation (Bauman 2000). On the one hand, even in these uncertain times, white workers from other English-speaking countries, upon arrival into Australia to search for opportunities, almost immediately enjoy the same income, status, prestige, leisure activities and way of life of the local white Australians. On the other hand, the Filipinos, the Karen/Karennis and other immigrants of 'colour' are most likely to be condemned as subordinates to the white majority population, hence, are likely to endure less income, social status and positions of power (Carter 2003). This is when race, ethnicity, country of

origin and cultural stylistics come into play. Driven by a colonial mentality, that immigrants from the former 'colonies on the periphery' have a poor upbringing and poor quality of education, white employers and gatekeepers would be more likely to employ white candidates in filling up vital and desirable positions.

Unable to break into the positions of high influence and power in the Australian society, as political leaders or company managers or union leaders, the Filipinos and Karen/Karennis resort to performing traditional values and norms in an arena where they can show influence and control over their lives. Rather than demonstrating opposition, they seem to preserve the status quo and be contented with their current situation, or are perhaps afraid to 'rock the boat'. This preserving of the status quo is exemplified in the celebration of traditional events that prove to be not a direct assault of positions of power but encouraging the acceptance of 'difference' in a multicultural society. The *Kay Htoe Boe Festival*, for instance, showcases the cultural tradition of celebrating the New Year amongst the Karen/Karennis in the diaspora. It is done in a way where it signifies community cohesion, empowerment and freedom deemed nonexistent in the country of origin undergoing decades of civil war. For the Karen/Karennis I interviewed, the host society has afforded them freedom and empowerment, as well as safety from being accused of sedition and imminent torture by the Burmese oppressors. The host society has provided the platform to freely express common bonds, community traditions, cultural norms and socio-political aspirations for their homeland which they perform in the public space of the diaspora. Pawpaw, a Karenni woman, whose husband was killed by the Burmese soldiers, became emotional when we talked about the Karenni traditional events performed in

Australia. Perhaps sensing that I am a friend and ‘one of them’, she extended a warm invitation for me to join in one of their community celebrations and said:

There is an upcoming event on the 27<sup>th</sup> of April, if you are available, there is a Karenni ethnic group event happening and I will just give you the invitation. This is a community event. We celebrate as a community, as a group the New Year. Each one cooks their own food and shares it within the group. We also celebrate a political event called the National Day. We celebrate them all here in Australia. The Karen and the Karenni celebrate the same New Year but differ in celebrating the political celebration like the National Day or the Resistance Day.

### **Empowering the Voices: The *Kae Htoe Boe* Festival**

The Karen/Karennis religiously gather together every year to *celebrate the pole of a wealthy nation* or the *Kae Htoe Boe* Festival, and it is regularly conducted in the last week of April, when the dry season ends and the rainy season is welcomed with a bountiful celebration. According to Maw, a Karenni, it is performed in the open space to give thanks to the gods and spirits of the mountains and forests, land and water for the bountiful harvest the previous year. It is also a way of praying for rain and good weather to nourish the crops and have a good harvest in the incoming year.

I was fortunate to be invited and witnessed the festival on two different occasions, on the last weeks of April 2013 and April 2014. The New Year celebration was performed by the Karennis signifying their traditional rituals while wearing brightly-coloured traditional costumes, in the spacious backyard of Diversitat’s Norlane Hub in Geelong. This ceremony which spans three days, culminates in performing the ritual which is composed of praying, erecting the poles (the male and female), and dancing, and playing

native musical instruments, around the poles. It resembles a theatrical performance as the Karen/Karennis hope for a more blessed and bountiful New Year. What is so significant, from my point of view, about the ceremony was the unified effort, of the Karen/Karennis and friends from different cultural backgrounds, to raise and erect the big and heavy poles using just ropes and big muscles. The raising of the poles signifies camaraderie, cohesion, and tolerance amidst difference and uncertainties. On top of the pole are replicas of the star, sun, and moon which are believed to be sources of good weather for bountiful agricultural production, and a ladder believed to be where God descends to spread good fortune (Moedu, pers. comm., 26 April 2013). The transformation of Diversitat's backyard into a holy place represents an exemplar of 'how the reproduction of memory goes hand in hand with the construction of monuments and other symbolic and sometimes also functional places that constitute the instruments for a re-rooting in the host country' (Bruneau 2010: 38-9).

The ritual is followed by sharing together the deliciously prepared Karenni native foods. While sharing the food, the Karen/Karennis conduct film marathons for the invited guests to keenly watch. They are films showing lives of the Karen/Karennis and depicting the actual celebration of the *Kae Htoe Boe* Festival in Burma. A few Karen/Karennis who have good command of the basic English language scatter around the dining hall to answer queries from the invited guests about the meaning of each scene of the film. With the logistical support from Diversitat and funding assistance from the Ethnic Communities Council of Victoria, and other generous sponsors, the Karen/Karennis are able to perform and celebrate the *Kae Htoe Boe* Festival with success. In a way, the festival creates

conscious awareness amongst the local community of the cultural tradition of the Karen/Karennis and the plight of its people in the diaspora. As the Karen/Karennis appeal for public understanding, empathy and sympathy for their current situation, many members of this community, especially those who can navigate the English language, are seen as engaging in a fruitful conversation and purposive interaction with the invited guests. In a way, this festival fosters a proactive stance on the part of the Karen/Karennis to lobby for their contemporary issues and concerns to the representatives of the government and non-government organisations present in the festival. Such actions reiterate their desires to be a part of the Australian community and make explicit their intention to make a valuable contribution to the local community rather than be seen as ‘parasites’ to the welfare system as discussed in Chapter Four. The festival also fosters and celebrates community unity, camaraderie, and friendship even as the Karen/Karennis are hoping that one day Burma will be free from the bondage of authoritarianism, civil war, backward development and massive poverty and corruption.

During the festival, my conversation with a few members of the Karen/Karenni community mostly revolves around the social, economic and political situation in Burma and their longing for autonomy and self-determination. At the festival, I happened to meet Peter, a Karenni man and a participant in this study, after the casual exchange of pleasantries, he returned to our interview conversations conducted three months prior to the festival. He shared:

After the military got the power, the ethnic groups want to have autonomy like self-determination and we want to manage our own state but the Burmese Government

wants to control all the natural resources in the ethnic areas. They (Burmese Government) employ a centralised power and cut the communication from outside world because they want to follow the communist, socialist government but they couldn't implement it. Then, they destroy everything that is in English, and wants everything written in Burmese language. Before the independence, our country started to learn English in the beginning. But after independence, they translated English to Burmese and you can only start learning English after Year 4 or Year 5. The education is very behind after independence. They don't want the people to be educated. They close the economic and government system and they don't want international relations. The aftermath of that is an isolated and poor country.

Amidst celebrating the convivial culture, the Karen/Karennis still engage into imagining and discussing the state of the political economy of the country of origin, such as how the military government of Burma seize and control power and constrict education for its people in order to minimise resistance. In this sense, Peter has felt like an outsider and excluded from the way the Burmese Government runs the affairs of the nation that affected the wellbeing of the ethnic people, such as not being accorded proper education. The Burmese Government's exploitation of the natural resources is seen as damaging the environment and the subsequent way of life of the Karen/Karennis. Peter notes that the way of life of the Karen/Karennis depends heavily on the deeper and closer interconnected relationship with the environment and is primarily the reason why they celebrate the *Kae Htoe Boe* Festival because of these complex interrelationships with the 'mother nature'.

My conversation with Peter in the middle of the *Kae Htoe Boe* Festival was interrupted by Htoo Paw, another participant in this study, when she talked about her finalised travel arrangements back to her village in Burma. With her official travel authority

only for Thailand, she would find a way to make a side trip to her village in the Karenni State and plans to stay there for two weeks. Now an Australian citizen, Htoo Paw's journey back to Burma would be her first trip since being resettled into Australia six years ago. Her main reason for this travel back to her country of origin is to look for her 'missing' relatives with the hope of finding and reconnecting with them. The constant imagining and longing to be reunited someday with close relatives left in the country of origin, who are displaced by more than six decades of civil war, now becoming real with her proposed travel back to her homeland, signifies an identity many transnational Karen/Karennis associate with. This practice of reconnecting with relatives left in the country of origin represents forms of transnational identities many members of diasporic communities, such as the Filipinos and Karen/Karennis in Geelong, share and maintain for years.

### **Maintaining Transnational Identities**

In-depth understanding of immigrant realities requires not only a study of how immigrants are incorporated in host societies, but also equally significant is to 'understand how migrants relate to their countries of origin in their imaginaries, in the cultural forms they practice, the political identities they associate themselves with and the discourses they engage in' (Mazzucato 2010: 207). It is clear in the current study of the Filipinos and the Karen/Karennis in the Geelong region that they are engaged in some form of transnational identities. The theory of transnationalism invokes the 'process by which transmigrants, through their daily activities, forge and sustain multi-stranded social, economic, and political relations that link together their societies of origin and settlement, and through

which they create transnational social fields that cross national borders (Basch, Schiller & Blanc-Szanton 1994: 6).

The Karen/Karennis are hoping that one day they will be able to go back to Burma and help rebuild the country. Peter, a Karen man, shares that unless the Burmese constitution is amended, the military will continue to hold power in Burma and democracy will continue to be an elusive dream amongst many of the Burmese people including the Karen/Karennis.

After the Burmese independence in 1947, the constitution was drafted and there was a multi-party system and a quasi democracy. When the military took over, the ethnic people clamoured to amend the constitution especially in dividing the power between the central government and the ethnic groups. Most of the power lies in the central government. But the Burmese central government didn't allow for the amendment of the constitution. Then the military controlled the country and only allowed for a one-party system. But after twenty to forty years, the country becomes poorer and poorer and becomes one of the poorest and the lowest income countries in the world today. The military government has incurred a lot of debt to the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and were able to control the country because of the poor knowledge skills of the people. They just want to make easy money from the natural resources and invited the Chinese companies to exploit the natural resources.

At the core of this thesis, is the notion of social exclusion not only in understanding barriers to participation within the socio-economic and political realm of the host society, but also the interconnectedness of how research participants make sense of their world. By making sense of Peter's world, we are able to dig deep into the complexity of the causes of Karen/Karennis' human suffering, and the reason for their existence in the diaspora. In



maintaining his transnational identity, Peter presents an in-depth interpretation of the state of the political economy, within the historical and contemporary context of Burma that reveals a deeper interweaving of issues and a well-informed situational analysis of his country of origin. While in the safe haven of Australia, he provides some concrete interwoven reasons of why Burma is lagging behind in development despite its rich natural resources. The current Burmese Constitution, according to Peter, engenders not a democratic, but a totalitarian form of government which tolerates only one political party thereby perpetuating power at the hands of the military. For Peter, while millions of Burmese are suffering from abject poverty, including many who are displaced and endured miserable lives along the Thai-Burma border because of the conflict, the Burmese military are enjoying luxurious, gluttonous, and superfluous lives. Peter contends that the Burmese military ‘imports a lot from Singapore and have trade agreement with Singapore because the companies owned by the military are mostly backed-up by Taiwan and China. Burma sells lots of good timber that come from the forest, come from our area, to the Chinese. Every day they cut the trees in our area and they don’t replace them’. Our conversation continued like this:

*(CE) The government are not following the ceasefire agreement. According to what I read, the resistance group doesn’t have the trust anymore to put their lives at risk when they do enter into a ceasefire agreement with the government. What they do is to ignore the offer of ceasefire and continue fighting.*

(Peter) The trust side of the issue is something to do with the one-sided content of the constitution in favour of the central government. The central government has offered to draft a new constitution but in the end it still serves their interest. The constitution that they drafted only protects the interests of the military leaders. That

is why, in order to have a trust in the government, we have to talk about the contents of the constitution. It is not democratic. What we wanted in the constitution is for the members of the military not to go into politics after they retire from service, install government leaders that are elected by the people, release the political prisoner, and give the press full freedom of expression, freedom of demonstration and rights on the road. But they reject all of these demands and didn't allow for the revision of the constitution. The constitution is our life but when you look at the current constitution, all provisions there are bias in favour of the military government. For example, it says in the current constitution that the president shall be nominated by the military commander. The current president is also a former military general and they just change uniform and name. The military still controls the government and also the business interests are run by the military themselves... That is why there is still fighting in Kachin in the northern part of Burma.

Peter, a former student activist in Burma in the 1980s, fled to the refugee camp in the Thai-Burma border to help educate the Karen/Karenni people. Even though the Karen/Karennis are now in a safe refuge in Australia, they are still monitoring and engaged in a patriotically, and emotionally, charged conversation with like-minded people, such as the researcher in this study. As I had my conversation with Peter, I could sense by the tone of his voice and his body language how patriotic and emotional he is about the past and current political and economic affairs of his country of origin. He hopes that the totalitarian form of government currently espoused by the Burmese military government and seen as the cause of more than six decades of civil war in Burma, would soon be replaced by a democratic form of government, where the military would relinquish power to the people and the civilian government would reign supreme over the military. Peter believes that societal transformation in Burma is inevitable and can only be achieved through a national

referendum for a constitutional change duly facilitated by the international community. For Peter, the resettlement of Karen/Karenni refugees to a third country is only a superficial solution to the human suffering of hundreds of thousands of refugees in the refugee camps, but what is needed is a coordinated effort by the international community to facilitate the change of government in Burma, from a totalitarian form into a democratic form of government, and the transfer of power from within a few military generals now towards the future reign of the sovereign, multi-ethnic people of Burma. Many Karen/Karenni research participants share the same sentiments with Peter of the ‘myths of return’ to their country of origin, especially when the right time comes for democracy to be finally installed in Burma, in order to contribute to the social, economic and political development of the country. The current events happening in the country of origin are closely monitored by the diasporic communities using the social media.

With the preponderance of modern advancement in information and communication technologies, especially with the use of cheaper alternative in social media such as Skype, YouTube and Facebook, members of the Filipino and Karen/Karenni communities in Geelong are able to sustain closer relationships with family relatives left in the country of origin. Continuous exchanges of images, symbols and messages that criss-cross in social media update members of diasporic communities and relatives and friends left in the country of origin and anywhere in the world regarding their current status, issues and concerns, and way of life. This is exemplified by the narrative of Ella, a retired Filipina nurse with tour of duties with a few other countries in the region, and points out that her friends overseas still remember her as they have updated, and keeping in touch with each

other through Facebook. With more time to spare for leisure activities, most Filipinos spend substantial amounts of their typical day in Facebook keeping in touch with families and friends scattered around the world. This *cycle of close ties* that starts in regular communication in social media is reinforced by sending remittances and *balikbayan* (returned Filipino immigrant) boxes full of goods to families in the Philippines, and culminates in circulatory travels between the homeland and host country. This is supported by sporadic visits of family members left in the country of origin to relatives in the diaspora as short or long term visitors. These visits of relatives to family members settled in host countries renew, reaffirm and strengthen ties, with the push to realise familial obligations in the country of origin become explicit and imminent. This is exemplified by Nelly, a Filipina, who usually sends remittances of Php5,000 or A\$125 a month and about two to three *balikbayan* boxes a year to her sister in the Philippines. Nelly was able to sponsor her brother and sister on two separate occasions for tourist visas of three to six months stay for them to get acquainted with the life in Australia. Aside from regularly going home to the Philippines annually, Nelly financially supports the construction of a family house in the Philippines.

Apart from searching for better opportunities in the host country, one of the driving forces that catapulted many Filipinos to the Antipodes is the underlying intention to provide for the educational, medical, and burial or any other needs of families left in the Philippines. Even in the initial stages of migration, once they were able to secure jobs, the Filipinos would send remittances for purposes of sending brothers, sisters and other relatives to school, paying for the medical bills of aging and ailing parents, or paying for funeral fees

when loved ones die. This is expressed by Christrom, a Filipina, who sends money regularly to the families in the Philippines to pay for the medical bills for her ailing mother who suffered a stroke, and also to pay for the university fees of nieces and nephews. This practice of fulfilling their duty signifies the intention of many Filipinos in the diaspora to maintain connections with the homeland and they consistently continue to do so even after retiring from the labour market in host countries. This contradicts the contention of Canales & Armas (2007: 232) which stipulates that the close contacts of immigrants with their countries of origin would weaken over time. At least in the case of the Filipinos, these close contacts with the homeland have sustained over time as immigrants established themselves in the host country and the continuum of commitment to social, cultural and economic projects in the homeland has endured through the years. This is because according to Nelly, a Filipina, 'even though we are here in Australia, our hearts will always be Filipino'. This is reinforced by the likelihood that all of the first generation Filipinos and Karen/Karennis, those who have married their compatriots, and those Filipinas married to Australians, will continue to foster closer family relationships with relatives in the diaspora and vice-versa over time. This is illustrated by the narrative of Esperanza, a Filipina married to Anglo Australian, when she says:

I always send money to the Philippines, especially when someone died; you know that. That is normal, we always do. I paid for all the funerals. Whoever got died, I always send money to the funerals. I do not have to worry about sending money every month. But when it comes to funeral, you are the one paying for it. I sent money also during Fiestas and Christmases. Every now and then, I sent a balikbayan box for everyone. I just did and got picked up the other day. It is about an average of one box per year. I used to send balikbayan box often when my

parents were still alive but now that they are dead, I only seldom send. They (brothers and sisters) can look after themselves. There were ten of us in the family but only six of us left now. I don't really maintain connections with my brothers and sisters but they ring you every time they need help.

Sending money and *balibayan* boxes to the families left in the Philippines are common practices of all Filipino research participants to signify their intention of forever belonging to transnational families in the diaspora and the original home. Sharing one's blessings, has been, and continue to be, a part of the Filipino tradition, especially in providing financial assistance to struggling family members in the Philippines. The typical closer family ties amongst the Filipinos are likely categorised in the *localised mobile transnational formations* because they make the 'home and host society a single arena for social action by moving back and forth across international borders' (Dahinden 2010: 55). In this case, transnational actions are 'conducted mainly through the family networks: remittances, but also other goods and services circulate through these social networks between the receiving and sending countries' (Dahinden 2010: 56). The Filipinos maintain these social networks despite of barriers they face, which is reinforced by socioeconomic constraints where they are confined to the 'low-wage sector offering very limited opportunities for advancement'; and where they 'establish transregional identities, maintained through travel and telephone circuits, that do not stake everything on an increasingly risky future in a single nation' (Clifford 1994: 311). Such transregional identities are similarly experienced by immigrants who underwent forced migration into the host society such as the Karen/Karennis in the Geelong region.

The Karen/Karennis forced migration to Australia represents a diasporic community where at the moment mobility is restricted due to security reasons, as it is deemed not safe for them to make a return travel to Burma. Also, they are currently do not have local connections due to their being recent immigrants to the Geelong region. They are most likely to be considered as *transnational outsiders* (Dahinden 2010: 57) because they do not circulate between Australia and Burma due to persecution in the country of origin and at the moment it is difficult for them to secure travel documents from the Australian immigration authorities. For example, Htoo Paw, a Karenni woman, had to wait for more than five years or shortly after becoming an Australia citizen, before she was allowed to travel back to Thailand, and hopefully make a side trip into her village in the Karenni State to search for her remaining family relatives. During this agonising waiting period, many Karen/Karennis would try all means to know the current situation in Burma, particularly in finding out the wellbeing of families left in the refugee camp on the Thai-Burma border or those still living in the Karen/Karenni State. The use of mobile phones and the internet are deployed in searching for missing loved ones and communicating with families still negotiating with the difficulties of life in the refugee camp. In one of my home visits to Maw, a Karenni man, I noticed his nephew busily learning how to type Burmese language characters to the computer which signalled his intention to communicate with families or compatriots unreachable by mobile phones. The use of mobile phones is crucial for sending financial assistance to families left in the country of origin. It can be recalled from Chapter Four that most Karen/Karennis in the Geelong region send remittances to families left either living inside the refugee camp or in the Karen/Karenni State. This transnational identities can be illustrated by the narrative of Maw, a Karenni man, who

despite having children still under school age, reiterates his desire to train his children to become transnational by hopefully sending them back to Burma to assist in the reconstruction and development of the country. Our conversation went this way:

(CE) *Tell me about your story, your family and your life in Burma.*

(Maw) My parents are still alive, very old and living in Burma. Of the six siblings, I was the only one who came to the refugee camp. My siblings are also alive although for ten years I did not have contact with them until now. They also have phones now. I call them once a week. They are alright. I send some money to them. I told my sister to buy some medicine for my mum. They also use the money to buy food and sometimes my mum uses it to send her grandkids to school. It is getting better their now not like five years ago. I really wanted to visit my family in Burma because my father wants to see my children. I still wait to become an Australian citizen and get a passport. The Australian Government do not allow us to go back to Burma for security reasons. It is not safe for us. More people now are starting to go back after they acquire their citizenship. I plan to go back in 2015 because there is going to be an election in Burma that year so we can find out the situation there. I look forward to it, especially for the future because I want our children here to keep in contact with their relatives in Burma, and anytime they can go back and learn their (Burmese) culture. Later, after they finish school here maybe they can go back and help, maybe to teach English in Burma.

There is an overwhelming desire for a return to the homeland, at least in the case of the Karen/Karennis, not only to reconnect with families, but also to assist in the social reformation, economic reconstruction and countryside development of Burma. This is manifested in the ongoing socio-cultural training of the next generation to undertake these tasks of rebuilding their homeland.



The Filipinos and Karen/Karennis may have shown some ambivalence in the liminal moments of their settlement and resettlement in the host society which constitute the negative and positive diasporic experiences, particularly in accessing social services. In moments of their negative experiences in the diaspora, the Filipinos and Karen/Karennis are longing for a return to their country of origin which is manifested in the way they inculcate their own socio-cultural values into the next generation in preparation for such myths of return. Diasporic experiences are constituted positively when the Filipinos and the Karen/Karennis juxtapose their settlement and resettlement experiences in the host society with the imagined realities in the country of origin. The perception that they are much better off living in the host society than their previous life experiences in the country of origin may signify moments of inclusion. As argued throughout this thesis, although there are times when the participants of this study suffer closure in the capture of opportunities in the mainstream of the host society, they nonetheless, feel the sense of inclusion when comparing their better lives in host society against their country of origin. This feeling of inclusion could represent transitional moments where social closure becomes imaginary and nonexistent. But what is interesting in these moments of closure is the power play deployed by members of the majority in the capture of opportunities in the labour market. As the following chapter elaborates, the labour market portrays meaningful interpretations with the way the Filipinos and Karen/Karennis negotiate the everyday diaspora space; in a working environment where ethnicity, colour of skin, gender, race, appearance, and accent continue to be seen as central to the suitability, acceptability and adaptability of workers in the world of work.

## CHAPTER SIX

### Participating in Productive Life: Social Closure in the World of Work

*The work career marked the itinerary of life and retrospectively provided the prime record of one's life achievement or one's failure; the career was the principal source of self-confidence and uncertainty, self-satisfaction and self-reprobation, pride and shame.*

- (Bauman 1998: 17)

*The use of strategies of social closure to exclude ethnic minority groups from prestigious spheres and strata of employment, as well as from other desirable life-chances, reinforces a Weberian notion of ethnic minority groups as negatively privileged status groups. Or to put it another way, racism runs from the shop floor to the boardroom. What this suggests is that racism cannot be subsumed into a Marxist model of class relations since aspects of ethnic identity assume a primacy in all sorts of occupational niches and spheres.*

(Carter 2003: 12)

*These men and women lose not only their jobs, their projects, their orientation points, the confidence of being in control of their lives; they also find themselves stripped of their dignity as workers, of self-esteem, of the feeling of being useful and having a social place of their own.*

- (Daniele Linhart cited in Bauman 2004: 13)

The preceding chapter suggested that the liminal moments of the Filipinos and Karen/Karennis have been marked by forms of closure in public spheres, and paradoxically moments of inclusion and times when closure becomes 'imaginary'. The ambivalence of negotiating with governmental and non-government institutions to access services mirrored everyday realities in translocations of life's journeys. As mentioned in the previous chapter,

in many years of resettlement and settlement in the host society, the participants in this study 'have to cope not only with the pain of separation but often with the resentments of a hostile population' (Sarup 1994: 94). These resentments can also be seen in relation to the participation of Filipinos and Karen/Karennis in the workforce. As this chapter indicates, these two minority ethnic groups have experienced, and continue to face, the processes, dynamics and consequences of discrimination in the labour market because they are not 'one of us' (Carter 2003: 1). This chapter illuminates past and current issues faced by the participants in this study in regards to their attempt at inclusion in the labour market. Drawing on the works of sociologists such as Carter (2003), Murphy (1988), and others in extending Max Weber's theory on social closure, it discusses concerns of structural inequality deeply felt by the participants during their struggle to recover their lost self-esteem and identity, and be in control of their lives through paid work. As this chapter argues, the mechanisms and strategies of social closure subtly employed by the dominant group as processes of subordinating the ethnic minority groups are felt by the Filipinos and Karen/Karennis who are locked into 'occupational ghettos', that is, spaces within the sphere of employment that are 'abandoned by white labour and characterized by a lack of occupational mobility, poor working conditions and poor pay' (Carter 2003: 85; see also Castles & Miller 2009: 225).

### **Contextualising Closure Theory in the Labour Market**

Motivated by the central idea of exploring the notion of social closure, I have tried to understand what prompted the fiancé-sponsored Filipinas to persevere and thrive in the unskilled and semi-skilled manual jobs for years. Since I arrived in Geelong at the height

of the global financial crisis in 2008, I asked taken-for-granted questions of lived experiences of the Filipinos in the labour market. Aside from doing the formal interviews, I also did some spontaneous queries during moments of elation and celebration at birthday parties and occasional gatherings in order to check consistencies or inaccuracies of lived experiences. I was deeply puzzled when the long standing Filipinos shared stories of plentiful jobs available in the 1970s and 1980s yet they ended up working at the lower level of job hierarchy such as in factory work and aged care. In a sense, the outcomes and patterns of employment of the fiancé-sponsored Filipinas have remained locked up in an ‘occupational ghetto’ which could be due to spousal resistance and lack of credentials.

Understanding the Filipinos and Karen/Karennis’ work predicament requires that I also have to know the mechanisms and structures erected by the dominant group to keep these ‘inferior’ immigrants outside the sphere of desirable jobs for the sake of keeping the economy running and maintaining the status quo. As I argued throughout this thesis, the engagement of long standing Filipinos and newly emerging Karen/Karenni communities in the social and economic sphere of opportunities of the mainstream have been marked by subtle closures erected by the dominant group. The structures of social closure ensure that they will be locked in occupational ghettos abandoned by white labour (Carter 2003). How are the mechanisms and strategies of social closure felt by the Filipinos and Karen/Karennis, and how subtle is its practice that it has become marginal to the consciousness of the mainstream? How does social closure affect the health and wellbeing or the performance of productive life of these long standing and newly emerging communities in the roller coaster ride of their immigration journey? Is it likely that these

struggles of everyday living in the diaspora are compounded by sweeping socio-economic changes currently occurring in the City of Greater Geelong?

The rapid economic and social changes brought about by intensified deindustrialisation coupled with an unprecedented influx of hundreds of refugees and asylum seekers into Geelong have created ramifications that have affected the way participants in this study are engaging in productive life. Widespread perceptions of barriers to labour market participation such as lack of English language proficiency for the newly emerging Karen/Karenni communities and redundancies among the long standing Filipinos were narrated by the study participants. While age has caught up with the Filipino participants in their desire to reengage with the labour market; the Karen/Karennis' perceived 'socio-cultural distance' from the mainstream and the lack of social capital or networks are the most profound underlying causes of the latter's inability to participate in middle and higher level jobs. Perceived 'cultural distance' of the Karen/Karennis as explained by Castles & Miller (2009: 264) could be due to their coming 'from rural areas with preindustrial cultures, and [they] may find it hard to adapt to industrial or postindustrial cultures' (see also Vasta & Castles 1996). This socio-cultural distance, as Carter (2003: 65) suggests, becomes one of the boundary markers used by the dominant group to exclude the 'Other' from social and economic opportunities.

In applying the Weberian concept of social closure, Carter (2003: 65-75) argues that powerful social groups employ strategies of social closure such as credentialism, sponsorship and patronage, and the use of informal networks to exclude members of ethnic minority groups from the exclusive sphere and strata of employment. For Carter, social

closure operates on the notion of difference where social markers such as gender, ethnicity, age, skin colour, language and culture are social constructions used to segregate outsiders from insiders. As a result, the Filipinos and Karen/Karennis in their liminal moments are most likely to be allocated with the lower level jobs, that is, the '3D' (difficult, dirty, and dangerous) jobs which the locals refuse to take (Castles & Davidson 2000: 186) or unskilled jobs involving 'unsocial hours', 'poor work conditions' and 'low pay' which the locals had abandoned (Sarangi 1996: 362; see also Carter 2003).

The interviews with some of the 'established' members of the Filipino community reveal stories of ambivalence towards their inclusion/exclusion in the host society. Some are now enjoying the fruits of their hard labour as self-funded retirees. Many of them were able to graciously flow with the strong current of the mainstream by their highly-favoured social capital and strong network. However, many Filipinos have narrated perceptions on experiences of racism and discrimination in the form of colonising the lower level jobs either in factory or aged care work with no chance of upward mobility; and being predominantly associated with the Vietnamese 'boat people' who were highly featured in the Australian public consciousness in the 1970s and 1980s. Nevertheless, the Filipinos were able to participate in the labour market immediately or shortly after arrival, with the particular exception of the fiancé-sponsored Filipinas. It is likely that the bipartisan support of the policy of multiculturalism and the subsequent adoption by the three-tier governments of the day facilitated the smooth transitioning of Filipinos, who are skilled immigrants and tradesmen, into the labour market in the 1970s and 1980s. The RED and SID elements of

inclusion featured profoundly during their initial stages of settlement though some were made redundant, especially during those years leading to the global financial crisis in 2008.

The current situation of the majority of the participants features uncertainties due to unemployment that is, being forced out of retirement and made redundant in the case of most Filipino participants in this study, and of being newly-arrived immigrants in the case of the Karen/Karennis. They are similarly engaged into a 'redistributionist (RED) discourse' (Levitas 1998), discussed in Chapter Two, in addressing issues of inclusion and exclusion. The precariousness of their current situation prompted the participants to avail themselves of the government's redistributionist program in the welfare system, in response to the seemingly exclusionary landscape of participation in productive life. The Filipinos and Karen/Karennis are grateful for the seemingly RED approach being undertaken by the government to provide social safety nets and avoid disadvantaged communities 'dropping off the edge' (Vinson 2007).

There are elements of *redistributionist* (RED), which emphasises the welfare system, and *social integrationist* (SID), which focuses on paid work, (Levitas 1998) approaches align with the way the Filipinos and Karen/Karennis have addressed their inclusion/exclusion in mainstream society. However, the Filipinos and Karen/Karennis could be seemingly headed to a *moral underclass* (MUD), with its culture of dependency, discourse of exclusion if engaging, empowering, mutually-beneficial and closure-free structures are not properly in place. The precariousness of the current situation of the Karen/Karennis is marked by limited opportunities available for them to secure jobs even in 'migrant industries' and unskilled work because of their perceived 'difference' from the

mainstream culture including limited ability to navigate the English language. Haunted by the challenges of the new frontier, the Karen/Karenni people have endured the rigidity of working on farms, in farming environments completely different to what they have been used to in their country of origin, and physically demanding jobs in quarries and abattoirs.

### **Perceiving Racism and Discrimination in the Workplace**

Work is the epitome of life's project and, whether paid or not, symbolises social status of either prestige or being left behind. According to Bauman (1998: 17), 'work stood at the centre of the lifelong construction and defence of a man's identity... work was the main orientation point, in reference to which all other life pursuits could be planned and ordered'. The importance of work as a pathway to one's success manifests in many ways including more people suffering from depression because of their experiences of unemployment (Bauman 2004: 9). By the same token, 'individual identity as well as individual integration into society is primarily constituted through work' (Levitas 1998: 181). In the context of this thesis, work here means paid employment although unpaid work such as domestic work and volunteering are also recognised as vital to the social, cultural, and economic wellbeing of the participants in this study, particularly among the mostly retired Filipinos. Carter (2003: 9) contends that 'the sphere of employment is central to the discussion of inclusion and exclusion since it is through work that we earn money and gain status... a crucial part of integration into wider society'.

The thirteen first generation Filipino Australians in the study, who originally came to Australia in the 1970s and 1980s, although they had similar socio-economic motivations in their migration journeys, differed significantly in their employment patterns and



outcomes. The Filipino skilled immigrants and the tradesmen workers were able to land jobs related to their prior experience and qualification shortly after arriving, primarily because of job placement assistance given by the Australian Federal Government or the company that sponsored their migration. The story of BP, a Filipino tradesman who originally came to Australia in 1981, is featured as one of the success stories of the 'journeys of incorporation' (Paine 1992). He has not only worked in the oil industry in Geelong for 31 years as a fitter and turner but also acquired a number of rental properties in Corio and Norlane because of working extended hours during his productive years. He stated:

There was a small Commonwealth Employment Services (CES) like a Centrelink. It was an employment office during that time. Because I had experience working in the oil industry as a fitter and turner at Shell, CES sent me for an interview here at the Geelong Refinery. During that time there were a lot of tradesmen retiring and they needed fresh tradesmen to take over. I was lucky to have the interview and I passed straight away because I worked for Shell in the Philippines for 7 years. I worked here at the Shell Refinery in Geelong for nearly 31 years. I just retired last January 2012 so I never looked back. I was just very lucky working in one company and they were very good.

BP exemplified an immigrant success story which featured profound flexibility and adaptability in every situation thrown at him by going with the flow despite sometimes confronted by experiences of everyday racism: He stated:

I felt welcomed by the employer. Some of the co-workers were welcoming. During that time, because of being Asian and I think there were only two of us Asians; some co-workers try to make fun of you. Well, as time goes by, they come to know

you. Some people are not really friendly and not nice. Even though you are nice to them still you can hear nasty remarks sometimes an ordinary Filipino cannot tolerate. But for me, I just being easy and close my eyes, that's it, and I just go with the flow and ignore them because what is the use. It is not worth it and if you confront them it might cost you your job, yeah. But, in the end there were more good people than bad people.

Those unpleasant remarks from co-workers, according to BP, stemmed from his attitude of willingness and being able to stay back and do overtime; mostly undertaking dirty but necessary maintenance jobs offered first by management to local Australian workers who refused to accept them. This longer than normal hours at work meant that BP's wife, a qualified school teacher in the Philippines, but not able to practice her education profession in Australia because of forms of credentialism imposed by governing bodies of the Australian teaching profession, (the same circumstances with Nelly and Tracy) had to work full time attending to domestic jobs such as looking after their children and doing all the housework. BP's wife's concentration on household chores is also a familiar set-up amongst fiancé-sponsored Filipinas in the Geelong region. The concentration of the Filipinas in household work after migration is partly stemmed from the unequal distribution of labour on domestic duties and their 'strong cultural traditions of familial responsibility and maternal nurturance' (Limpangog 2011: 168).

The fiancé-sponsored Filipinas obviously came to Australia on family reunion, rather than as skilled immigrants looking for work. The Filipinas had to contend with their Anglo Australian husbands' seemingly disapproval of them engaging in the labour market. However, the necessity to send money to the Philippines, mainly due to 'pressure' and high

expectations from family relatives left in the original home for the much-needed financial assistance, compelled the Filipinas to seek readily available jobs, mostly manual work, in defiance to their husband's wishes. Leonora exemplified one of those instances of rebelling against his husband's will. She professed:

I finished the Hospitality and Tourism course for a year as a full time student. After finishing the course, I applied for jobs and my resume was made by my son with my husband not knowing any of these developments. This was because my husband was really opposed to me getting a job. I was I think 40 years of age when I finished the course. I handed in many job applications. When I applied at MACS (Multicultural Aged Care Services) for the first time, I got offered the job. Since then and until now, I work at MACS without my husband's permission. Even now, he does not accept the fact that I am working maybe because of pride. I have been working as a cook at MACS for 13 years now.

Woelz-Stirling et al. (2000: 1) contend that unforeseen financial issues such as remittance of money to families in the Philippines and the disapproval of Australian husbands of their Filipina wives' participation in the paid workforce become points of disagreements in many Filipina Australian marriages.

Meanwhile, the nature of forced migration that characterise the diasporic journeys of the fifteen first generation Karen/Karenni meant that English proficiency was not a prerequisite for border entry into Australia unlike most of the country's migration streams. All but two of the participants have little or cannot speak, read or write any English, hence, are on constant look-out for readily available jobs that do not require the English language. Sarangi (1996: 363) contends that in as much as English proficiency is not a requirement for entry among this group of immigrants, however, once resettled in the host society, 'the

newcomers often find themselves facing social, economic, and political consequences' purportedly because of their lack of mastery of the English language (see also McKay & Wong 1988: vii). In their fervent desire to address issues of 'identity, social ambivalence and alienation', many of the participants 'sought employment in industries where at least some fellow workers could speak their (migrants') language' (Sarangi 1996: 363). This is exemplified in the seasonal group site cleaning discussed in Chapter Four. In addition, the story of Peter, a Karen man, is a case in point. He said, 'There are about 3 Karen/Karenni workers at the tomato farm and one of us can speak and understand English. There is no problem because they usually show us what we have supposed to do. Every day the work is the same.'

### **Searching for Paid Work**

The lived experiences of the study participants becomes emotional and polemical when revealing aspects of working life marred by inequality as manifested by the sort of jobs they have been engaged in. Interview conversations normally commenced with how they were able to gain entry into the labour market, either through contact with an 'insider friend' or undergoing rigorous 'gatekeeping' processes. For those who underwent formal job application processes, the emphasis was on the unforgettable encounter with 'gatekeepers', such as the personnel officers. There is a perception of systemic structural discrimination employed by the 'gatekeepers' towards those who are 'different' from the mainstream. The unrivalled power of narratives in regards to how gatekeepers exercise their influence to preselect job candidates for particular desirable positions have been immanent and profound.

The experience of Ben, a Filipino, while looking for work in the 1970s mirrored this perceived discrimination by the gatekeeper as he embarked on a mission to pursue his Australian dream. In articulating his encounter with a 'gatekeeper' in a seemingly impenetrable labour market destination for Asians in the 1970s, the Ford Motor Company of Australia, Ben perceptively assessed elements of racial discrimination on the gatekeeper's affrontive behaviour towards him. He stated:

It was on a Saturday when I read a job advertisement from *The Age* newspaper that Ford in Geelong needs a First Class Machinist. On Monday morning, I cut out that job advertisement, brought it with me to the personnel's office, and showed it to the personnel assistant at Ford. He read my qualification as well as my application form. And, after reading my papers, he said, 'No vacancy.' I told him, 'If there's no vacancy how many tradesman did you already hire from this time because I just arrived around 10.00 o'clock in the morning on a Monday and I read the newspaper on a Saturday?' The personnel assistant did not respond. I looked at his eyes and said nothing. Then the manager, who was sitting in the cubicle at the back, overheard our conversation. He told the assistant, 'Let him in.' Then, I went inside, talked to the manager and showed my papers. Then the manager said, 'When are you going to start?' I said, 'I need to give one week's notice first to my employer and then I am going to start in here after a week.' You know the reason why the personnel assistant said that there is no vacancy in the First Class Machinist, because he was from Yugoslavia. Most of the people working at Ford were mostly Yugoslavs. They were hiring their own people first. I will never forget that experience in my entire life.

The narratives of Ben demonstrate a form of discrimination inflicted by a gatekeeper in a multinational company, Ford, on the basis of his indelible markers of identity such as appearance, colour of skin, race and ethnicity. Despite being suitably qualified and with

five years work-related experience when he applied, he was initially unfairly denied the chance to prove his case with the Ford Company's decision-makers. Showing due diligence and perseverance as well as sheer determination and persistence, he argued his case by presenting evidence – Ford's very recent job advertisement in the local newspaper. The job Ben was trying to apply for was still vacant. He had a stroke of luck when a decision-maker, the manager, overrode the gatekeeper's daring affront and exclusionary behaviour. The manager was decisive and firm on his resolve to give Ben a 'fair go'. Had Ben given up easily with the straightforward comment of the gatekeeper 'no vacancy', he would not have worked for the Ford Motor Company for 27 years. It should be noted here that for the 27 years that Ben worked at Ford, he was only moved once, that is, from First Class Machinist to Toolmaker. The opportunity to become a Leading Hand, a much higher position compared to the two mentioned jobs, was offered but he was subjected to credentialism, one of the foremost strategies of social closure. Ben, who aspired to become a Leading Hand, sat on a written test, of which he believed he have passed but was told by a 'gatekeeper' that he failed the test because of one incorrect answer.

In his analysis involving Asian immigrants' encounter with British gatekeepers in job interviews, Sarangi (1996: 366-371) suggests that deeply held prejudice and discrimination on the part of British gatekeepers' exercise of power in job interview situations restricts chances of many Asian applicants for a successful entry into the job market. Wagner & Childs (2006: 61) suggest that 'university and labour market gatekeepers find it difficult to value the professional knowledge and skills of skilled migrants as they enter and manoeuvre within the Australian labour market' because of the

subterranean racism that are embedded within institutional hiring practices. In an archival research involving cases of racial and gender discrimination in the labour market filed in the State of Ohio, USA, their findings suggest that ‘actors within organization environments oftentimes filter evaluations of others and their interactions with others through preset cultural views and stereotypes; such beliefs are by no means the creation of a given workplace, but rather of societal culture and history’ (Roscigno, Garcia & Bobbitt-Zeher 2007: 46). Recalling the discussion in Chapter Two, there is sufficient evidence to conclude that ‘discrimination, direct or indirect, individualized or institutional, still represents a powerful constraint on the career prospects of minorities’ (Ratcliffe 2004: 102; see also Modood et al. 1997; Mason 2000; Pilkington 2003), and discrimination still presents as a ‘huge barrier to entry and success in the labour market’ (Brah 1996: 148). Ben’s perception of the gatekeeper’s prejudice towards hiring his own people, as well as the predominance of Yugoslav employees at Ford, affirm Putnam’s (2000: 320) finding which indicates that ‘the practice of using ethnic networks as employment networks goes a long way to explain why certain ethnic groups perennially dominate certain services and industries’.

For Putnam (2000: 320), many unemployed people have to ‘look first to friends and relatives for leads on job openings’. This was the case for the Karen/Karennis as well as the fiancé-sponsored Filipinas who resorted to tapping personal networks to gain leverage to find employment. Such practices enabled them to bypass a series of rigorous job application processes and being at the mercy of gatekeepers in formal hiring situations. These friends and relatives who are already engaged in paid work would readily vouch for their inclusion. Such recommendation was mostly done through ‘word of mouth’ in an

informal conversation with workplace decision-makers. Echo, a Karen man, secured a job through a friend. Echo is aware that the company he is now working with is the same workplace where a Karenni worker had a tragic accident in 2010. He understands both the dangerous and precarious nature of this work. He states:

My friend who works there helps me apply for that job. I got that job through a friend. I got a job just last month and still continue working until now. I work in the stone quarry industry where a Karenni man met a tragic work-related accident in 2010. I have not signed any paper works yet and whether the work will continue or not, I do not know. I have been on provision period. I work for 40 hours a week.

Similarly, the story of Christrom, a Filipina, mirrors this means of securing paid work through informal network. She relates how a friend's relative, who was an 'insider' to the meat factory in Geelong, facilitated her entry into the paid workforce. Despite having a two-year old baby and strict prohibition from her Anglo Australian husband, she was compelled to look for a job because of her mother's deteriorating health. During this critical time, Christrom's mother, who lived in the Philippines, suffered a stroke. She narrated:

I got my job through my Balinese friend and we have the same babies, all boys. A week after we met, we started talking about how to get a job. She needs to work too. I said, 'I need to work because of my mother's medical condition otherwise my husband cannot afford to provide assistance for my ailing mother. I cannot send his money home because it makes me feel guilty. She is my mother so I have to find a job.' My friend said, 'Would you like to work in the factory?' I said, 'It doesn't matter what kind of job, for so long as I know how to do the job, may it be a factory, sewing, packing chicken, picking eggs from the farm, for me it does not matter so long as we get some income.' But we have to work in the afternoon when our husband is home because of our babies. My baby was two years old at that time and



my friend's baby was one year and a half old. She said, 'I will ask my father-in-law because he was once adopted by a lady whose husband now owns a meat processing factory.' I said, 'Okay.' She said, 'Would you mind the blood in there from the animals?' I said, 'We will just have a look.' She said, 'Okay, I will tell my father-in-law that we are interested to work so long as it is in the afternoon because of our babies.' So I said, 'Okay.' The next day, her father-in-law informed us, 'Yes, the manager said, you can come for an interview tomorrow.' So that was quick, it was only a week since we met. She rang me up and said, 'Are you ready to be interviewed?' I said, 'Yes.' The interview was in the afternoon at 4 o'clock. So we went in there. There were no qualifications required so long as we know how to write our name and be able to read.

Clearly, there is an ongoing recruitment processes informally happening here with Christrom and her Balinese friend's employment what Grieco (1987: 40) refers to as *agency of information*, while the Balinese's father-in-law uses his *agency of influence*. For Grieco, 'a kin network may affect recruitment processes either as an *agency of influence* or as an *agency of information* or as both. Both these roles have parts to play in the capture of opportunities'. The informal network of Christrom becomes the 'bridging' social capital enabling her to find assistance in searching for opportunities in the diaspora. However, Jenkins & Parker (1987: 64) warn that the 'word of mouth' social networks exacerbate labour market disadvantage for 'coloured' workers, simply because they only 'come into contact with information about vacancies broadly similar to the kinds of jobs' which 'coloured' workers already do. Despite being placed in this labour market position, the Filipinas significant and immediate priority is to respond to the compounding obligatory financial responsibilities in the original home, the need to meet those responsibilities by whatever means, and the necessity to balance domestic duties with participation in the

labour market (Limpangog 2011; see also Ho 2006). Christrom is compelled to look for any immediate work available to respond to impending financial needs for her mother's hospitalisation in the Philippines. She continued:

So we went for the interview. The supervisor said, 'You ladies want to work?' We said, 'Yes.' I said, 'Is it okay to work part time because we have our babies?' He said, 'Okay. You have a look inside.' The supervisor took us for a walk around. That time the other workers were already ready to go home and the afternoon shift is coming in. So the entire job is more or less finished and some were just starting to clean up. So we looked around. I cannot stand the smell of the meat and everything. When we came out, the supervisor said, 'How did you find the place?' Because we were interested to get the job, we said, 'It is alright, we do not mind.' He said, 'So your job this afternoon is to clean; you will be cleaning instead of packing meat.' I said, 'That is alright.'

It is clear in the narrative that there is no 'intimidating' gatekeeper that would have been likely to discriminate against the two Asian women had they applied for a white collar, higher level and desirable job. The father-in-law became the bridge between the employer and the two women friends. In as much as Christrom and her friend had applied for an unskilled, 'dirty', 'smelly' and probably 'low pay' job which the locals refused to take, it was made readily available for them right there and then. Being contradictorily juxtaposed between doing the lowest level job in a meat processing factory she was not accustomed to do, and the necessity to send money home to the Philippines because of her mother's life and death situation, Christrom is compelled to sell her labour at whatever cost and no matter how dirty and difficult the job is. Against her better judgement, she opted to accept the job offer and swallowed her pride in order to earn some income to pay for her mother's highly

expensive hospital and other medical bills in the Philippines. Hence, despite having an easy way into the labour market, maintaining that lowest level job coupled with minimal chances of upward mobility posed a greater challenge for her, and was compounded when confronted with moments of hostilities from co-workers.

In this sense, most of the fiancé-sponsored Filipinas have been relegated to work in factories despite having undergraduate degrees prior to migration. Nelly, a Filipina, who worked as a meat processing worker in a chicken factory had completed a formal university qualification before coming to Australia. She completed a Bachelor's Degree in Education and was a practicing primary school teacher in the Philippines before marrying her Anglo Australian husband in the 1970s and arriving in Geelong at the age of 33. Her love for adventure and constant search for a better life elsewhere prompted her to engage into a writing correspondence with her Anglo Australian husband in the 1970s. Shortly after settling down in country Victoria with her husband, she had her university qualification in education evaluated. She stated that she was asked to do a two-year conversion course so she could practice her teaching profession but opted to work in factories because of financial responsibilities in the Philippines. Our conversation went like this:

*(CE) What happened to your teaching profession after arriving in Australia?*

(Nelly) I did some volunteer teaching in reading when my boys went to school. I went to have my education qualification evaluated. They did not recognise my overseas qualification unless I go back to school. They gave me two years conversion course. Two years to study again to become a teacher here in Australia... My qualification is only recognised as a high school graduate here in Australia... I ended up working at the chicken factory for nearly 10 years... The management at

the chicken factory were very nice... It was really good because that time there were no forms to fill up, no interviews for as long as you show yourself to them that you are hard worker. I enjoyed working there because there were so many Filipinos. We used to bring our own food and eat together. Then, I worked in a clothing factory and worked there for more than two years. I was in the inspection, cutting all those thread that come out and have to clean it up. Then I retired from paid work and withdrew all my superannuation and I used the money to build a house for my sister in the Philippines. After I retire from paid work, I do these volunteer works.

The stories of Christrom, Nelly and most fiancé-sponsored Filipinas revealed a labour market segmentation in which they were confined to factory work or industries abandoned by the local Australians. Nelly was subjected to a credentialism strategy of social closure. Carter (2003: 66) contends that ‘credentialism, as a strategy of social closure, imposes educational requirements upon candidates before they can be considered for certain jobs’. As mentioned in Chapter One, the desirable profession of teaching, clearly an exclusive domain of white labour became restricted and closed when Nelly was asked to do a two-year refresher course in teaching before she could apply for a teaching position in Australia. Having seen no Filipinos working in the education and training industry and the seemingly ‘different’ classroom culture of Australian students as well as the immediate need to send money back to families in the Philippines, Nelly was discouraged to do further studies. Instead, she chose to undergo a deskilling process of her professional life and wasted years of studies and practice as a teacher. Carter (2003: 66-7) agrees with Jenkin’s (1986) conclusion that the imposition of suitability criteria of qualifications, experience and skill and the acceptability criteria of being able to ‘fit in’, which are implicit or explicit during selection processes, means ‘that discriminatory selection decisions are justified on the basis

that ethnic minority candidates will not fit in'. This is because 'groups are seen to compete for scarce opportunities and to draw boundaries around resources to which only their members have access, whilst actively exploiting opportunities to usurp the resources of others' (Loveridge 1987: 12).

Meanwhile, of the fifteen Karen/Karenni participants that I interviewed, four are currently engaged in paid work. Peter works in a tomato farm, while Echo recently found a job in a bluestone quarry. The other two, Htoo Paw and Maw, work as community guides at Diversitat and do some interpreting work at Centrelink. Echo was able to find employment through a friend, while Peter took advantage of the employment services offered by Diversitat Job Network. The holistic package of assistance offered by Diversitat includes case management for former refugees with the ultimate aim of engaging them into paid work. The Karen/Karennis are expected to become independent and self-sufficient after five years from initial resettlement. Peter, a Karen man, who I interviewed on 21 January 2013, outlines some of these aspects of job network assistance. Our conversation went like this:

*(CE) How did you find out about the job at EcoWaste?*

(Peter) The Diversitat Job Network was the one provided me the job. That was my first job. However, since EcoWaste has stopped operating in Corio, so I lost that job.

*(CE) I heard you are now working at the tomato farm?*

(Peter) I have to go back on February 16 or 17 to the tomato farm. It is a seasonal work. Right now, I have a medical leave because of my hand operation.

(CE) *What happened to your hand?*

(Peter) I could not feel anything. Neither can I move my two fingers nor feel anything. I had a medical operation recently to correct my condition they call carpal tunnel syndrome. The vein becomes narrow because of repetitive work and the blood stops to flow to my fingers. I feel better after the operation.

(CE) *How did you find out about the work at the tomato farm?*

(Peter) It was provided to me by Diversitat Job Network. The tomato farm is located in Torquay and it is a half an hour drive from where I live.

Here, the conversation unearths some polemical consequences of undertaking physically-demanding work characterised by repetitive routines that took its toll on Peter's hands. In the middle of the conversation, he begs for an *agency of information* that might pave the way for someone, like perhaps the interviewer, to lead him to a different but 'lighter and easier' job. He further said:

Right now, I am on the lookout for another job. I do not like the job at the tomato farm because it is very hot during summer days and my legs are painful and numb. I have not met with the Job Network yet since my operation and maybe one of these days I will make an appointment and tell them everything that I am not happy with the job at the tomato farm. Once I can tell them all, then I will ask them to find another job for me. For the meantime, I will just stick to my work at the tomato farm.

Peter's perception of lack of necessary skills, experience and qualification needed to find a desirable job has compelled him to work in unskilled and lowest level job despite succumbing to physical work-related injuries. This could lead to labour market segregation as many of these former refugees would likely end up undertaking the same kind of job.

Hence, no matter how hard the physical battering Peter succumbed to and no matter how hard he tried to move into ‘lighter and easier’ job, he would likely end up doing manual work. Self-sufficiency, which has been the primary objective of case management efforts of humanitarian organisations for the newly emerging Karen/Karenni communities, could be an unreachable aim. Sennett (2000: 285) argues that self-sufficiency ‘is more than a state of mind; it requires money, status and education.’ Achieving status and education through ability and effort is what constitutes meritocracy. Getting a good education can be a distant reality among the first generation Karen/Karennis, who feel that English classes are boring, and would rather go to work than attend long hours of English language classes. As a result, the Karen/Karennis point out that they would be able to learn the English language in a real interpersonal dynamics and actual interrelationships in a workplace setting.

### **Navigating Workplace Interrelationships**

Getting along well with co-workers is the universal mantra of fostering harmonious organisational and interpersonal dynamics in the workplace. This is because the workplace is a ‘site rich with meaningful relationships and power politics that directly affects the material experiences of its participants’ (Reitman 2006: 268). Life in the workplace is synonymous with acquiring ‘virtues and beneficial effects’ that translates into wealth, status and the elimination of misery (Bauman 2000: 137). Engaging in paid work is construed as delivering inclusion and defining an individual’s place in society as it underpinned identities arising from acquiring skills, winning friends, gaining status, and asserting one’s existence (Levitas 1998: 59). However, the dramatic change in the nature

of work whereby it ‘can no longer offer the secure axis around which to wrap and fix self-definitions, identities and life-projects’ (Bauman 2000: 139) has brought with it a ‘disintegration of human bonds’ (p.165). The reason behind this phenomenon is that ‘in the world of structural unemployment no one can feel truly secure. Secure jobs in secure companies’ (p.161) have been seen as the thing of the past. For Bauman, the precariousness of work and the contemporary society’s new emphasis on consumerism has produced social environments not conducive to human bonding; and it has proliferated in insecure people that ‘tend to be irritable’ and acquired the behaviour of intolerance to ‘anything that stands in their way of their desires’ (p.164).

This description of ‘insecure people’ and intolerance seemingly exemplifies the everyday encounter of some Filipino participants in the workplace. Christrom, a Filipina who worked for nearly fourteen years in a meat processing industry in Geelong, had an appalling narrative in regards to how she was perceptively annoyed by a co-worker. She believed that there were elements of racism involved in the regular offensive behaviour directed towards her by her ‘insecure’ co-worker. Our highly charged conversation went like this:

(CE) *So even once you did not have trouble with your co-workers and supervisors?*

(Christrom) I had a confrontation at work with an Australian co-worker who seemed to be jealous in my job. She did not work in our area as she worked in the sausage area which was a few metres away from us. They were in a different and secluded area. The supervisor would always come to us every time an overtime work is on offer. One time there was this young silly girl who got jealous. So, at the start she threw some nasty remarks to me such as, ‘What kind of job is this shit?’



So I said, 'Why don't you go back to your area and do your work? Do not worry about us.' And another time she said, 'Why are you still here? You should be going home.' I said, 'I was asked to stay back. Who are you to speak to me like that?'

(CE) *Did she work there ahead of you?*

(Christrom) No. I was already working for five years there before she came in. She managed to get the job because her boyfriend was also working there. So the boyfriend got her the job. Then, of course they eventually got married and had children. But at that time, she kept on annoying me. I thought maybe because she wanted to get rid of me. It could be that she wanted to work in my area. But during that time I do not want her because she is lazy. Honestly when I looked back, I think there was something wrong inside her. Most of the time, I just ignored her because I am a lot older than her. In our Filipino culture, the older people would normally ignore these annoying younger ones. The younger ones should not annoy the older ones but should respect the older people. This is Australia so maybe these annoying young ones do not know how to behave here, especially if they come from broken homes.

(CE) *What did you do to correct the situation?*

(Christrom) Sometimes one of my friends would say to her, 'Why are you doing that for?' I said to my friend, 'Just ignore her.' She did not like it. So she went to the ladies room and I was there. So I looked at her. I was really going to have a go at her and she hurried up to get out. And I did not see her for a few weeks. She did not pass my area for a few weeks. No, I did not report it to my supervisor. Even the driver said I should report her but I said, 'What is the use? Do not worry about her. She might be passing through something or maybe she has her period and got something wrong with her head.' I got mad every time she comes by my area and throw a nasty remark.

(CE) *How often did that happen?*

(Christrom) Not very often. She would watch me for a few weeks and sometimes would go on the other side to avoid me. But if we bumped in the ladies room which seldom happens, she would look at me. One time she came to my area and criticized what we were doing. She said, 'I am not going to say anything to you.' And I said, 'You just watch outside.' I have this metal steering lock in my car and there she was looking at me. I bend down and pick up the metal steering lock. (*Interviewee did a fighting stance while pretending to hold the steering lock*). I said to her, 'I had enough of you.' She was quick to jump inside her car and ran. Then I did not see her for a few weeks and I heard that she is going to have an operation in the throat. I said, 'That is what you get, when you try to annoy people who had done nothing wrong to you. It would have been easy if your tongue got chopped off so you cannot talk nasty remarks about other people.' Then she left. I said to the other girls, 'You know what, she deserves it.' And one of the girls said, 'Yeah, because she likes to come to our area and annoy and criticize us that our work is shit.'

On the one hand, this confrontation could be the result of a workplace environment which demonstrates that 'in modern production processes, work can be boring, repetitive and mindless, as well as heavy, difficult and dangerous. Work takes a physical toll of health, safety and mental balance' (Willis 2000: 92). On the other hand, the story of Christrom reinforces the notion that even in the meat factory floor, a local white Australian worker perhaps exercising her 'privilege belonging', tries to get back the job she is suppose to be doing. Ratcliffe (2004: 19) contends that workers of colour are 'subjected to attack not simply because they were regarded as 'racially' inferior, but because they were occupying jobs which might be done by those, that is whites, who were assumed to be more entitled to them (by virtue of birthright and 'race')'. Christrom felt that her white Australian co-worker showed signs of jealousy towards the kind of job and small privileges given to her by the management, such as working in an easier job (ham shaving and packing) and being

afforded overtime hours. There seemed to be an attached stigma working in the sausage area where her white Australian colleague was assigned at that time. Being five years senior than her annoying co-worker, Christrom invoked her cultural identity of respect for elders as quite distinct from the local culture while simultaneously demanding the universal value of respect from her co-worker. The nature of frequent staff turn-over at the lowest level job in the meat industry meant that intimate human bonding is lacking or nonexistent resulting in this case in near fistfight confrontation arising from the seemingly offensive remarks. This is a classic example of *essentialising* which according to Hage (2003: 112), 'is a mental operation associated with classical racist thinking.' *Essentialising* is in operation, for instance, with the way Christrom and her co-worker showing part of their character that echoes the essence of their cultural and racial identities. For Hage (2003: 117-8), while members of ethnic minority groups can be racist, 'white racism is the most important form of racism in Australia exactly because of the power dimension' associated with the practice of privileged belonging. Christrom believes that her white co-worker initiated the 'annoying and offensive' behaviour directed towards her so she would be involved in a physical confrontation and would eventually be terminated. While it is obvious that both of them may lose their jobs the moment they engaged in an altercation, it is likely that Christrom would be on the losing end as it would then be very difficult for her to find another job; while her white co-worker is more likely able to land a job presumably for being a member of the dominant group. After working in the meat factory for nearly fourteen years, Christrom was made team leader in her section (ham shaving and packing) with added responsibilities and tasks, but admitted that her pay and other benefits remained the same. Also, during that same time of her being promoted, in an unfortunate turn of

events, her mother passed away. She used all her leave entitlements (vacation, sick and long service leave) to look after the funeral of her mother in the Philippines. She said that she lost her inspiration in life and realised that along with the passing away of her beloved mother, she also lost her interest to work. The burning zeal to work which she felt during the initial stages of working in the factory has gone dramatically along with the reason for being at work so she eventually ‘hung up her boots’ for good. Unable to find another opportunity outside the meat factory, she decided to retire early.

The hierarchical nature of factory labour means that the fiancé-sponsored Filipinas are likely to occupy the entry level labouring jobs in the factory floor with minimal chance of upward mobility as power holders imposed strategies of social closure such as sponsorship and patronage. Carter (2003: 71-74) points out that the social closure strategy of sponsorship and patronage works in the notion that a powerful sponsor within the organisation is crucial for someone aspiring for upward occupational mobility. However, in practice ‘much of the evidence suggests that forms of sponsorship tend to reinforce existing social divisions as sponsors rarely act as a patron to someone from a different social background.’ In other words, those who are able to sponsor, that is, those who are in the positions of power, choose to sponsor people who possess and share the same cultural stylistics and ‘social characteristics such as ethnicity, gender and class’ with them. As most powerful and influential positions in the labour market are usually held by Whites, upward occupational mobility for Blacks and Asians no matter how senior they are likely to be in the organisation is stalled and left on the periphery (Carter 2003). This sometimes leads to perceptions of ‘unfair’ treatment and frustrations even in the mundane routines of

performing the job. Nelly, a Filipina who worked at the meat processing industry for ten years, shared her experiences of mistreatment from a newly appointed white leading hand.

Our conversation went like this:

(CE) *How did you deal with co-workers and supervisors?*

(Nelly) It was good, yeah. They were all friendly people. I have no problems with my supervisors. But I have one supervisor (the leading hand) that as if they discriminate you. She keeps on watching you. They will always keep an eye on you when you are working. When you will just a little bit slower, they will tell you, 'Faster, faster.' One time I got so upset. One of my leading hand as if she is watching me all the time. She keeps on telling me what to do as if she is nasty. I told our supervisor that she is very rude to me. I have to tell the supervisor what she is acting. Her attitude is no good to Asians.

(CE) *Did the supervisor do something about it?*

(Nelly) Oh yes, of course. I said to my supervisor, 'That lady, the leading hand, is so very nasty to me. She does not know how to say nice things to her workers. Because we are under her, she thought that we are like machines.'

Nelly, Christrom, the other fiancé-sponsored Filipinas and the refugee and humanitarian visa entrants constitute the 'reserved army of labour' who could easily be 'hired' when the economy is booming and are usually the first to be made redundant when the economy is constricting. They occupy the lower levels of the job hierarchy where no one is indispensable and power holders make sure that they will stay in their position by constraining their upward mobility. This constriction of upward mobility not only is the domain of the unskilled, factory worker, fiancé-sponsored Filipinas but also imminent amongst skilled workers such as the Filipino nurses.

The narrative of Ella, a Filipina who worked in the Geelong Hospital for fifteen years, recounts how she was bypassed by white ‘power holders’ when a vacancy for the top job was available despite being the most senior and qualified among the prospective candidates. She stated:

I was very angry one time. There was a turn-over of staff at the top... This was the first time I had experience racism... I usually take over when the in-charge nurse goes on a holiday. This time I asked somebody who does the assignment. I said that the in-charge is going on holidays so I can get her job but she said that it was already given to somebody... To me that was wrong because normally I was the one taking over that position... Of course, she does it on purpose because she is old in that Geelong Hospital and she should know everyone... I started snubbing everyone even the superintendent... I did not open it up to my superiors because they are all Whites anyway. I am the only one who is Asian in the hospital that time and all the rest are Whites... So what I did was to do excellent and be the best of my work... I related very well with everyone except with the upper positions. I snubbed my superiors, the superintendent and anybody who is higher than me ... Then one day the superintendent approached me and informed me that I was given a higher position and I have to make an application... I think they realize that by snubbing them there must be something wrong.

This is a case in point in which a worker who is next in line to be promoted seems to be lacking in significant political connections inside the organisation. Ella, in the first instance of staff movement at the top of the hierarchy, seems not to have an influential sponsor who could actively nominate and vouch for her promotion. Conscious of being bypassed, she made some radical moves such as being excellent in her work while at the same time snubbing her superiors, perhaps so she would be recognised and make the power holders aware that a worker has been mistreated. This is a classic example of Ella’s *usurpatory*

strategy. While cooperatively working well those under her such as the nurses, the student nurses and the domestics by making good relationships with them, she works extra hard on her job to be recognised by her superiors, and by snubbing her superiors creates an information vacuum that creates difficulty at the top level.

### **The Primacy of Racial and Ethnic Identity in the Workplace**

Elements of racism in the workplace have been a constant feature in the narratives of the research participants. It could be argued that the stereotypical constructions associated with the social identity of 'race' connotes not only being used as leverage to achieve higher status and education among members of the dominant group but also as a 'triggering device' to exclude ethnic minorities from exclusivities in the labour market and other life chances. Carter (2003: 6) warns that the 'use of the term 'race' is now controversial because of the connotations of inferiority and superiority that are said to be associated with it.' However, it could not be denied that in the realities of everyday life, participants revealed clearly that 'race' is central to unfolding constructed identities that manifest in the feelings of estrangement to universal praxis of humanities no matter what and where they may be in the diaspora. Choosing to be silent on the issue of 'race' would run the risk of 'whitewashing' the highly racialised experiences of the participants in the labour market by preserving the whole gamut of the persistence of white supremacy in every arena of the western society. Reitman (2006: 268) argues that whitewashing is explicitly used 'to describe the purpose, method and result of racializing the workplace as white.' For Reitman, the purpose of whitewashing is to wash away undesired racial politics in the workplace; the method employed is to deny that racial politics exist and to cover

them with white culture, with the end result of seeing the workplace as colourless even though it is fully immersed in white culture. In the host society, the study participants found out that there are implicit boundaries which define exclusive criteria of desirability, suitability, and acceptability in many aspects and facets of employment spheres that build permanent imaginary barriers for meaningful participation of members of ethnic minorities in working life. As a result, frustrations with life, disjunctures from being a worthy individual, and dislocation of a sense of belonging are felt by the participants.

These feelings of frustrations, disjunctures and dislocations are exemplified in the narrative of Htoo Paw, a Karenni woman, who despite possessing a working knowledge of the English language, struggled to ‘fit in’ as a result of the unwelcoming behaviour of white teachers directed towards her in a classroom setting. She narrated her experience working as an interpreter/translator for Karen students in a public school in Geelong. Her revelation went like this:

My job in the public school classroom was a very stressful experience because sometimes the classroom teachers here were not very nice. I was not happy with the job of helping Karen students in the classrooms. The classroom settings at the English classes where we went in Diversitat are good because the teachers can understand our predicament, but in the real classroom where the Karen students go, such as in public school here, it was not a good experience for me. The running of the classroom is too fast for us and is not design to help us learn something. It was good for the local students because they can keep up but not good for us. The teachers did not set up any rules of engagement. I do not know if you have experienced it too but sometimes the “White people” (*Spoken in whispery fashion perhaps because of the presence of White people in the public library where the interview was conducted*), they look at you something, you can feel it and there is



something about you that they won't like and then you feel uncomfortable, then you are not happy.

Here, it is clear that Htoo Paw was made to feel like an 'outsider' who did 'not fit in' by the teachers in a public school as she performed her job of interpreting and translating for Karen/Karenni students. She bemoaned being treated rudely not only with the way the teachers relate to her but also with the absence of clear rules of engagement. She also lamented on the system of teaching she did not think it was conducive for learning and more likely unfamiliar to Karen/Karenni students. The Karen/Karenni students were pushed to swim with the strong current of the mainstream Australian education without the school doing a thorough assessment of whether or not the Karen/Karenni students can swim. As pointed out by Htoo Paw, the Karen/Karenni students had difficulty learning and adapting to the Australian method of teaching. They felt it was not tailored for them because the teachers in the public school insisted on continuing the curriculum in order not to disrupt the learning progression of the local students. In a sense, the Karen/Karenni students had a lot of catching up to do as there was no school curriculum designed to enhance their learning needs. To counteract this fallout, Divesitat implemented a volunteer tutor program so Karen/Karenni students could be taught how to swim the strong currents and navigate the rapids of the mainstream Australian education. Tutorials, conducted at the student's home or on-campus after school hours, are specialised and mainstream school subjects are taught by volunteer tutors. Htoo Paw continued:

It is a very stressful job and the workmates are not nice and they make it hard for you to do the job. I am not happy, just like my friend, with the way our co-workers deal with us (*There was a big pause and Htoo Paw looked outside the window with*

*teary eyes, perhaps moments of emotional grief and despair enveloped her*). They looked at you and they did not say anything. They cannot say something. If only they say anything, I would then be able to respond. They might think, ‘What could this woman do?’ And they seem to denigrate you. There is both little racism and discrimination. But some people, they are very good. (*When the researcher asked about what percentage of people that are good and bad?*) About half-half, half of them are nice people, half are not nice. If you meet the nice ones, you are very happy, you can talk to them and everything will work out right. But if you worked with the one that are not nice, they did not even look at you nicely and how can you approach them and ask for help. If someone is very accommodating, you go to them and you are happy to ask. But if someone is rude to you, you avoid that person and forget about asking. With my Diversitat job as an interpreter and translator, I was happy because the boss was very nice and you are free to ask help with anything and you feel comfortable to sit in the office. You feel comfortable to go to Diversitat building each day, unlike in the public school, the place where I helped the Karen students translating, where you are scared to enter the classrooms because of the teachers not nice to you and it make you not good.

Htoo Paw made a stark comparison between a working space where she is welcomed and treated well like the working environment in Diversitat, and a working space where she felt unwelcomed and mistreated such as in the public school classroom. In both situations, her racial and ethnic identity was profoundly invoked. On the one hand, Diversitat, a charitable organisation that provides resettlement assistance to former refugees and asylum seekers, has competently developed among its staff sensitivities to Htoo Paw’s racial, ethnic, cultural and other social backgrounds. On the other hand, it seems that the public school teachers’ oblivious, naïve and intolerant attitude towards her could be primarily informed by negative social constructions and stereotypes surrounding the onslaught of asylum

seekers coming to Australia ‘illegally’ by boat (Zelinka 1996). As mentioned in Chapter Two, Tan (2006) points out that the visible ineradicable racial markers such as looks, appearance and colour of skin continue to be read in the popular Australian discourse as a sign of ‘un-Australianness’, ‘foreignness’, ‘alien’, ‘undesirable’, ‘others’, and such construction is embedded in the person’s place of origin. Along this line of negative stereotypes, there were also perceptions of unwelcoming treatment towards Htoo Paw by the general public as she tried to seek approval from me being of similar racial background in regards to incidence of denigration, racism and discrimination in public spaces. Htoo Paw further commented:

If ever I enter the workforce again in the future, I won’t go back to that job of translating/interpreting for Karen students in the public school classrooms. Maybe I will work in a working environment where many of my people also worked because by then you will have friends. I am happy to work in a place where there are Karen/Karennis working because you can relate to them properly. If you have friends at work, even though the work is hard, you are tired, you go home and you sleep and then you energise and look forward to another day of working with friends. On the other hand, if your workmates are rude to you, you go home after work feeling very tired and struggle to go back to work the next day. For me, I don’t mind the work is hard for as long as I have good working relationships with my co-workers. You don’t have to think much and you are happy. You eat, go to work, go home, you sleep and wake up happy because you are going to work the next day not feeling stress and looking forward to meet your friends at work.

These experiences of denigration, in turn, reinforces Htoo Paw’s decision that if given the chance she would like to work in a workplace environment where her co-workers share the same social and cultural identities with her. Htoo Paw’s pursuit of happiness revolves

around working with her own people where she could feel a sense of belonging, friendship and security in the precarious workplace environment of the postmodern capitalism. Wording such as ‘I wanted to work with people who were like me’ is a kind of response which underpins a racial dimension without making it an explicit topic (DeVault 1995: 617-8; see also Green et al. 2007: 484). Perhaps Htoo Paw’s desire to work with her own people is aimed not only at escaping racism and discrimination but also in response to the fallouts of what Sennett (2012: 279) refers to as ‘new forms of capitalism’. This system emphasises ‘short-term labour and institutional fragmentation; the effect of this economic system has been that workers cannot sustain supportive social relations with one another.’ The precarious economic and social conditions that characterise today’s rapidly globalising world have resulted in ‘the fading and wilting, falling apart and decomposing of human bonds, of communities and of partnerships’ (Bauman 2000: 162-3). Such encounter of precariousness would imprint a nostalgic imagination upon Htoo Paw’s consciousness whereby comparing two different worlds between societies of origin and host is the only avenue of escape.

### **Comparing Two Different Worlds**

It could be surmised, however, that despite these fallouts of modern capitalism, and the resulting racism and discrimination that goes with it, many participants of this study perceived their situation as much better off compared to the way of life they left behind in the country of origin. The moment the participants have finished conveying their struggle of relating to members of the majority, especially in the workplace, I asked taken for granted inquiries of their life situation in the diaspora in relation to their previous way of

living in the country of origin had they stayed there and chosen not to migrate to Australia. When I asked how he thinks his life in Australia is, so far, as compared to Burma, Peter, a Karen man who has lived in Norlane for four years and five months at the time of the interview, responds:

Yeah, my life is much better here in Australia because it is like heaven. In Burma, it is like living in hell. Australia is like heaven; Burma is like hell. Burma as a country is very good because it is very rich in natural resources but the people are not good, especially the leaders. There are also good people in Burma but there are those that control the power and keep that power for as long as they can because they want to control the rich natural resources of Burma. Now, there is still fighting in the northern part, and the Burmese Government use fighter planes in the air force to commit genocides there. The government are still killing our people. The natural resources in Burma includes timber, minerals and gas but exploring them can also cause damage to the environment and that is why there are also demonstrations going on there.

Peter presents concrete metaphors for the two countries that are significant to his life. Metaphoric language ‘clarifies, or perhaps brings to its only articulation, an abstract idea, or brings out and highlights the abstract quality or essence of something by comparing it to something else, usually concrete, in the world’ (Willis 2000: 11-12). Peter features his adopted home in the diaspora which is likened to a paradise where freedom reigns and anyone can live their dream if they work hard for it. This is juxtaposed against the ambivalent attitude towards the country of origin which is, on the one hand, likened to a place full of misery with its chaotic and tumultuous decades under the military rule that is seen as continuing to oppress the Karen/Karenni people. On the other hand, the narrative also defines the inherent beauty of Burma with its rich natural resources which are seen as

the main cause for the military leadership's clinging to power even by desperate means, and suppressing those who are opposed to its rule. The connection of the Karen/Karennis to the environment, as the integral part of their way of life, means constant friction and deadly encounters with the government forces, that readily uses its might to establish control in all areas belonging to the ethnic groups for the intended exploration of its rich natural resources. This has eventually led to more than six decades of civil war, and the displacement of millions of people. Many ended up seeking shelter in refugee camps along the Thai-Burma border. Due to the appalling conditions in the refugee camp, some did return to their villages in Burma, others find their way into Thailand and became 'illegal' immigrants, while others were resettled into a third country under the United Nation Higher Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) program of resettlement. Peter is among the few who were resettled into Australia and considers himself better off in the diaspora than living the miserable life he left behind in the country of origin. For Peter, the taunting and everyday racism he encounters in the Australian mainstream is only an *ant's bite* compared to the life and death situation many of his compatriots suffer in the country of origin. Australia cares for his needs and provides services such as health, housing, social security, education, and mostly a peaceful environment which he never experienced before in his country of origin. He emphasises health care as one of the best services of the Australian Government, not only because of the presence of the best health practitioners and facilities, but also because of its highly subsidised nature, which does not pose a financial burden if someone in the family gets sick. These refugee experiences of peace, freedom, and better life in Australia as being compared to the miserable life in the country of origin may constitute the passage to what Nguyen (2012) refers as the 'gift of freedom'. For Nguyen,

the acceptance of the 'gift of freedom' with its underpinning resettlement support binds these refugees into everlasting indebtedness to the liberal empire.

Health care is also cited by John, a skilled Filipino working in the petrochemical industry in Geelong, as the main reason why he is better off living in Australia than in the Philippines, although he figures out that he could have enjoyed relatively the same Australian living standards in the Philippines had he chose to stay there to work. When asked about his situation had he stayed in the Philippines and not migrated to Australia, he said:

I think it will be relative although I am happy with my job here in Geelong. Had I stayed in the Philippines, I think I would be in a similar situation. Before I left the Philippines, I also worked in a big, established company there. I think my prospect of growing there is good. So relatively, had I stayed there, I would probably be also owning a house, cars, and self-supporting a family, probably almost the same. Although the things that make living in Australia better off are the economic stability and the health system where you do not really need to set up money. In the Philippines, even if you are well-off and you are established there, you have to be prepared spending the medical bills especially if something happens and you want higher medical services for you and your family. I think, had I stayed in the Philippines, I would still be relatively good with regards to living standards.

John portrays a skilled immigrant who is attracted into and works in Australia because of its economic stability and health care system which is envied worldwide. A medical emergency in the Philippines is prohibitively expensive, while in Australia the medical services is highly subsidised, if not free.

The skilled Filipinos, on the one hand, look at the economic and political stability and health care system of Australia as factors that contribute to the betterment of living standards. On the other hand, the fiancé-sponsored Filipinas think that a much better life could have been achieved in Australia had they enjoyed the same privileges as they had in the Philippines, such as being able to afford the services of a domestic worker or maid, to unload the domestic burden of doing housework onto and more time focusing on workforce participation. Emely, a fiancé-sponsored Filipina and still working in a footwear industry, says:

Of course, it is better here in Australia. We got everything here; we got cars, a nice house, good food, and easy life. It is alright if you are young here. But when you get old, what are you going to do? Take a look at the nursing home here. Maybe I will get somebody from the Philippines, some servants, to look after me. When you get old, you got no servants here and you have to work on your own. Maybe one day if I will be on my own, I will go back home to the Philippines. You know you only missed the Philippines because you work so hard here but when you get sick, how hard life can it be when you come from work, and you do everything here. Over there in the Philippines, we are in the middle class, and can afford to hire a maid who looks after the cooking or cleaning of the house. But here we do everything. That is the only thing we missed in the Philippines. But we are better off here. We have a better life here. But you have to work so hard of course.

The absence of domestic help in the households of the fiancé-sponsored Filipinas means that they have to juggle paid work and unpaid domestic chores including looking after their aged Anglo Australian husbands. Limpangog (2011) reports that many Filipino skilled immigrants in Melbourne suffer stress because of heavy domestic workloads. This domestic support is the envy of life in the Philippines amongst the Filipinas and is primarily



the reason why many of the Filipino informants would like to spend months of their retired life in the Philippines. Nelly, a retired Filipina, portrays this happier aspiration to live in the Philippines. She says:

Yeah, we are happier there in the Philippines. Even how poor you are, you're still feeling relax, go shopping, walking slowly. In the Philippines time is not so quick, but here in Australia time is so precious because you have to do everything. In the Philippines, if you go shopping you will just stay there as if time is so long. No matter how long you stay outside it doesn't matter, because you don't think about how to clean the house, how to cook food as someone is doing the cooking for you. But here you have to be always wary of time, time for lunch, time for dinner, time to pick up the kids. I think I will be busier if my grandchildren are going to school because both my son and his wife are working.

The imagining of a poorer but happier life in the country of origin is juxtaposed with the contradictory rich but stressful life in the host country. Such contradictory comparison reverberate in the consciousness of Nelly, Emely and most fiancé-sponsored Filipinas when faced with struggles juggling unpaid domestic jobs and paid work. This imagining becomes apparent in moments when some 'annoying' circumstances arise such as being sick or out of work, busy looking after the grandchildren, or bringing the aged husband to a doctor's appointment. In other words, the productive life in the diaspora of the research participants is always positioned and compared with the reality of life in the country of origin. Most often, they would prefer to stay for good in the host society, such as Australia, because the lifestyle and way of living is more conducive for achieving a brighter future for children than in the country of origin.

The Filipinos and the Karen/Karennis may have experienced forms of closure in the participation of productive life, particularly in the world of work in the host country, but they felt included by the way the host government looked after them, and they reiterated their desire of staying in Australia for good. This ambivalent attitude of the research participants towards the host society, such as Australia, in regards to their settlement and resettlement experiences underscores the incomplete nature of the social closure theory. While the closure theory emphasises credentialism, sponsorship and patronage and informal networks as factors that enhance or inhibit success in the world of work, the theory does not consider inclusionary factors such as governmental interventions in defining the mostly better lives of the Filipinos and Karen/Karennis in the migration chain. Combining individual hard work with community and government assistance in the liminal moments of migration hastens the impact of being uprooted from traditional homes and facilitates smooth transitioning into the mainstream of the host society. As argued throughout this thesis, while it is true that the participants in this study suffer social closure at some point in their lives, especially when juxtaposed against the economic and social wellbeing of the local Australians; overall, they reported being much better off in Australia than in the country of origin. The resilience of the participants in their engagement in the world of work together with their getting used to the everyday racism and discrimination has helped them to move on with their lives and focus on the attainment of their Australian dream. But what is valued in the inclusion and exclusion of Filipinos and Karen/Karennis in their incorporation into the mainstream is their inherent aspiration for the success of their children in striving for academic excellence and professional competence. As the following chapter elaborates, achieving a brighter future for children means helping them to be

exceptionally good and to be competitive in the real world. In the absence of privileged belonging, this means that children of Asian descent have to be doubly qualified in comparison to their white counterpart to have a fair chance of capturing the scarce resources and opportunities in an implicitly hierarchical society such as Australia.

## CHAPTER SEVEN

### Taking Chances: The Uncertainty of the Future

*In Burma, I need to work hard to find something to eat. But here in Australia, even though I am not working because I am still going to English school, the Australian Government look after us. That is why we want to stay here in Australia for good. Even though there are local people who yell at us here, our life is still better here than what we have experienced in Burma. In here, we can provide good future for our children, while in Burma, you are not sure if your children can go to school or end up joining the resistance movement when they grow up.*

- (An interview with Pawpaw, 15 October 2012)

As we end the onerous journey of liminal moments, let us draw some conclusion by abstracting the core arguments of this thesis. The preceding chapter suggested that the reality of life of the Filipinos and Karen/Karennis in the workplace was marked by perceptions of denigration and racial prejudice, and modes of resistance were employed. Some have confronted the denigration and racial prejudice head-on, while others simply ignored them, and swam with the stream for fear of losing their valuable jobs. This chapter argues that the Weberian theory of social closure can also be deployed to understand the persistence of ‘credentialist society’ in host societies, such as Australia, or using education to segregate immigrants based on race, ethnicity and status. This study uncovered the disturbing reality that the constructed sense of difference based on ethnicity, ‘race’, accent and physical appearance has, in many ways, becomes a barrier to fully negotiate and participate in the mainstream of the host society, regardless of length of residence and

educational background. I argue that an individual who aspires to a position but has different cultural stylistics from those who organise, maintain, and regulate forms of power and dominance, whether in the labour market or in any social setting, is likely to be relegated to an inferior position than those aspiring individuals who possess the same social and cultural attributes of the power holders. Despite these negative experiences, and as this chapter demonstrates, the majority of the Filipinos and Karen/Karennis are satisfied and relieved for having been accepted into the Australian society, as most of the participants echo the narratives of Pawpaw above. Pawpaw's story outlines a comparative judgement of transnational spaces as a glimpse of the reality and imagined possibilities for the future. She echoes similar hopes and aspirations that most diasporic families are longing for such as how to provide a brighter future for children. The narrative echoes voices of relief, gratefulness and hope most first generation Karen/Karennis demonstrate during moments of reflections and sharing of experiences. As this thesis shows, the Weberian theory of social closure, although useful in explaining the labour market segmentation, cannot critically explicate the complexity and fluidity of the lived experiences of the Filipino and Karen/Karenni research participants, especially in abstracting socio-cultural inclusion facilitated by not-for-profit organisations. For many Filipinos and Karen/Karennis, their lives are considerably better off in Australia compared to the lives they left behind in the country of origin. This chapter concludes the dissertation and puts forward recommendations with proactive measures designed to hopefully enable the Filipinos and Karen/Karennis to achieve a holistic, positive and meaningful participation in the mainstream. At this juncture, it is imperative to look at the high hopes of the participants in regards to achieving brighter future for their children through good education.

## Aspiring for Quality Education

As briefly mentioned in Chapter Four, many Karen/Karennis are hoping that their children will overcome their impediments, particularly in learning how to swim with the current of the socio-economic and cultural spheres of the mainstream of the host society. Such hope is embedded in the firm desire that their children will be able to attain quality university education, secure permanent paid work, own a comfortable house, drive a safe car, and expand informal networks and friends outside the Karen/Karenni community in the near future. Indeed, these desires for a brighter future for children and its eventual realisation, not only become the cornerstone of the Karen/Karennis dreams but also the benchmark of success amongst the Filipinos. They would never let go of that dream; they are prepared to work hard for it whatever it takes. Filipinos value education more than anything else as they see it as the gateway to success, opportunities, and rewards. This could partly explain why most children of the first generation Filipinos in Geelong are able to finish university degrees. There is a universal mindset that acquiring a university degree is synonymous with easier access to desirable positions in the labour market; it is not only a way of conforming to the requirements of a ‘credential society’ (Collins 1979), but also a means of taking advantage of forms of ‘*agency of influence* or *agency of information*’ (Grieco 1987: 40) secured through friends and informal networks within the Anglo Australian mainstream.

I can still remember how my parents taught me the value of education, when as an elementary school student; they inculcated the value of academic excellence into my developing mind. I was reminded countless times that education is the only inheritance

they could pass on to me, as they did not possess any real property for me to inherit. With this upbringing, I have worked my way up capturing academic achievements by never skipping school and winning scholarships one after the other to support my studies. Hard work, determination, and perseverance are the tools I often deploy to gain valuable opportunities. My educational journey can be a living proof that poverty is not a hindrance to reach one's dream of attaining academic success. However, while I was able to successfully employ this educational attainment in securing desirable positions in the labour market in my country of origin, I was made to struggle in using the same credentials in my search for desirable jobs in the host society. Even a master's degree completed from an Australian university did not guarantee securing a desirable job in a society where nuances of racism and discrimination based on accent, physical attributes and stereotypes still pervade amongst those who organise, maintain, and regulate forms of power and dominance (Tator & Henry 2006; Halse 2010).

This struggle of negotiating the liminal moments of my migration journey comes at a time when Australia is undergoing a massive transition into post-industrialism, where downsizing or complete shutdowns of manufacturing industries are regular occurrences. Sennett (1998: 49) pointed out that 'downsizing has had a direct connection to growing inequality, since only a minority of the middle-aged workers squeezed out have found replacement labor at the same or higher wages'. I have had to compete for jobs with those Australians who have been made redundant. Consequently, I found myself working in an environment I have never dreamt of working, in an entry level job in what Pachirat (2009) refers to as the 'killing floor', in an Australian abattoir. Once inside the abattoir, like

Pachirat, I experienced the many facets and forms of racism and discrimination, and the exercise of power, made explicit by whites dominating the 'coloured' workers. Complying with my visa conditions, I worked in the abattoir for two and a half years and resigned only when I could no longer bear the battering and denigration I suffered at the hands of the white workers. My last day of work was when I was transferred to the tripe room where I have to slice open the 'stomach' of the cattle, and as it was only my first time working in that room I was way behind, and the bulging cattle 'guts' kept on coming and overwhelmed the tripe table. The worst aspect of the scenario was, while I was busy keeping up, the white workers just stared at me, as if seeing nothing, and did not even offer a hand. A few minutes later, I totally abandoned my job in the tripe room when a white worker called me 'Not Speaking English', 'Lazy Asian' and 'Slow'. Such experience of being denigrated, of being made to feel different and not belong to the 'white world' has left an indelible mark of my questionable Australian identity. I have the feeling that they were jealous of the way I received top marks for the written exam of the meat inspection course, a course offered in-house and duly accredited by an educational institution for a worker aspiring to become a meat inspector. The incident in the tripe room destabilized the very foundation of my loyalty to Australia, as if I was hit by a powerful earthquake as I questioned the reasons why I came to this country. At that particular moment I wished to turn back the clock in order to go back to where I was professionally before coming to Australia, that is, I wanted to get my position back as a Director for Research and Development at MASS-SPECC, a non-government organisation assisting and ensuring financial viability of primary co-operatives in Mindanao, the Philippines.



As I mentioned in Chapter One, I applied for jobs in the community sector in Geelong while working in the abattoir because I felt that abattoir work was mindless, repetitive, physically-demanding, and employees used ‘rude’ words, such as ‘fuck’, ‘shit’, ‘fucking shit’, ‘bugger’, ‘wanker’ and other derogatory words as part of normal workplace conversation of which I was not accustomed to hearing on a daily basis. In effect, I handed in many job applications and was invited for interviews a few times but all had the same ending, that of being refused a job. At each moment of being refused a job offer, it was made clear that there was ‘nothing personal about being excluded, yet in a rationalized society which presents success in a bureaucratic career or in the market as the ultimate goal, not being selected implies individual failure and inferiority and strikes at the core of individual identity’ (Murphy 1988: 221). Of course, after all these negative fallouts of my life in the abattoir and in my search for desirable opportunities, I learnt to face my problem and did not run from it. I began to get used to the ‘indifference’ of the Australian white majority with the way they treated the ‘coloured’ immigrants in all spheres of life. As I have no intention of going anywhere else in the world, but will live and die in Australia, it could mean that I will end up working in a factory or in other ‘3D’ (dirty, difficult, dangerous) jobs to support my family, as there are no guarantees that I will be able to capture desirable opportunities even perhaps after completing my doctorate degree.

Yet, despite being positioned in a professionally deskilling process, I have shown flexibility, strength and resilience, like bamboo trees that go with the flow of the wind graciously; despite strong and violent forces of nature, bamboo trees would just dance with it. While the big trees could be toppled when visited by strong cyclones, bamboo trees

would remain strong and would withstand the destructive forces of the damaging winds and relentless floods. As there is no turning back for most us in the diaspora, we have to acquire the attitudes and characteristics of bamboo trees in the turbulent environment of navigating the mainstream of host lands.

In navigating the mainstream of host lands, I feel the effects of colonisation and realise that I have become part of what Said (1993: 403) refers to as ‘one of the unhappiest characteristics of the age to have produced more refugees, migrants, displaced persons, and exiles than ever before in history, most of them as an accompaniment to and, ironically enough, as afterthoughts of great post-colonial and imperial conflicts’. With weak governments and socio-economic and political disarray commonly underscoring the former colonies, such as the Philippines and Burma, many of its inhabitants are looking for answers to everyday problems by longing to be with the motherland. Many inhabitants of the former colonies have looked to the ‘motherland’ as the source of career opportunities (Bheenuck 2010). However, once in the host country, many immigrants are forced to adhere to the cultural norms of the dominant white majority, that is, to act, speak, look and be named like Australians, for instance, by changing one’s ‘difficult to pronounce’ native name to western name in order to be granted a job interview.

The enforced adherence to Western culture, as well as the subordination of ‘coloured’ workers in the abattoir, the relegation of the qualified Filipina teachers into the factory floor, and the predominance of the Filipinos and Karen/Karennis in the lower end of the job hierarchies, are significantly linked to the ‘cultural legacies of colonialism’ (Kelly 2010: 172). The history of colonialism in the Philippines (under the Spanish,

American and Japanese rules), and in Burma (under the British rule) deeply influences the racialised, gendered and classed status of the Filipinos and Karen/Karennis in the diaspora. Their immigrant lives are formed ‘not only by the social locations of their group within the host country but also by the position of their home country within the global racial order’ (Espiritu 2003: 6). The Filipinos and Karen/Karennis denigrated identities are entrenched in the ‘racial hierarchies established by colonialism’ (Kelly 2010: 172).

Within the Australian public discourse, tolerance and acceptance of difference and diversity is widely celebrated and embraced. However, this study found a disturbing reality that the constructed sense of ‘difference’ based on ethnicity, race, accent and physical appearance have, in many ways, becomes a barrier to fully negotiate and participate in the mainstream of the host society regardless of length of residence and educational background. Hence, I argue that an individual who aspires to a position but has a different cultural stylistics from those who organise, maintain, and regulate forms of power and dominance, whether in the labour market or in any social setting, is likely to be relegated to an inferior position than those aspiring individuals who possess the same social and cultural attributes of the power holders.

I featured the story of Nelly in Chapter Six, a qualified and practicing teacher in the Philippines before coming to Australia, who reported feelings of being excluded from practicing her teaching profession in Australia perceptively because of an ‘inferior’ and unrecognised education degree. Had Nelly been a qualified and practicing teacher in the United Kingdom or New Zealand or Canada or the United States, she would have no problem getting a teaching position shortly after arrival in Australia. According to the

Weberian closure theory, education, like ethnicity and social class, is perceived as a status culture that often has little proven relationship to on-the-job performance. Education is treated as ‘pseudoethnicity’, in that it involves the imposition of a particular ethnic or class culture. The powerful educated group sets up job requirements in its own favour and discriminates against those who deemed to have ‘inferior’ knowledge (Collins 1979; Murphy 1988).

Those who share that knowledge are the bearers of specific conventions, share a sense of identity, and make a claim to social esteem and social honour; hence they constitute a particular type of status group. Those who do not hold that knowledge are declared inferior outsiders, deemed ineligible for specific opportunities. This is essentially a process of subordination and the mobilization of power by which scholarly status groups monopolize particular types of opportunity by closing off the opportunities to all those defined as outsiders (Murphy 1988: 17).

Nelly, Tracy and other bachelor’s degree holders who completed their university education in the Philippines are deemed as not bearing specific conventions, and not sharing the same intellectual and cultural identity with educated members of the dominant group in Australia. Hence, they are treated as outsiders and not worthy of being offered a desirable position, and their skills and abilities are good only for jobs in factories, aged care, cleaning, farm and abattoir works and other ‘3D’ jobs. The reason for this obvious segregation is that ‘employers have the power to change their job requirements in order to profit from autonomously produced school credentials, seemingly based on necessary cognitive skills, as superior criteria for legitimating exclusion from jobs they control and as a means of increasing the prestige of these positions and of their companies’ (Murphy 1988: 148). I am not specifically labelling these fiancé-sponsored Filipinas as excluded in a way

described by Cameron (2006) and that could be seen as an ‘act of considerable social violence’. Instead, I am arguing that the host society, such as Australia, fails to maximise the human capital of its immigrants, by imposing systemic barriers that discourage these professional immigrants from exploring and practicing their profession. As a consequence, they are relegated into inferior sort of activities in the diaspora and totally abandon their profession and waste their human potential.

Instead of deploying individual agency in order to usurp the benefits and rewards enjoyed by the white majority by undertaking further studies in teaching, Nelly, having no better options available to her, chose to become a full time mother and tutor to her three boys, who turned out to be intelligent children who have all acquired university degrees and are now securely employed in reputable organisations. Her hard work and perseverance in raising her three boys have paid off as Nelly regularly receives rewards ranging from house appliances to cruising trips around the world, all paid for by her professionally successful sons. It may be noted, however, that Nelly’s three children were all born in Australia and inherited the physical features of their Anglo Australian father, most notably of his being white. It seems that Nelly’s children’s success in the labour market and other socio-economic spheres may be attributed to their belonging to the dominant group. Although her three sons always refer to themselves as the so-called, ‘Filoz’ or Filipino Australians, they undoubtedly acquired the linguistic and cultural *habitus* of the white Anglo Australian.

Some children of ‘All-Filipino’ couples (both husband and wife are Filipinos) have also excelled academically in Australia, as these ‘All-Filipino’ couples have made the

education of children their highest priority. As most Filipino research participants have some university level education, they are willing and able to do academic tutorials for their own children, especially that pertaining to finishing academic homework and essays. They push their children to read school books rather than allow them to watch TV or play the computer. It is rather unlikely that this kind of parental support for the academic pursuits of their children is being similarly undertaken by the Karen/Karennis, because of their being considered 'preliterate' to the linguistic and socio-cultural *habitus* of the dominant white majority in all spheres of life in Western societies.

As already mentioned, the majority of the Karen/Karennis who came to Geelong are considered to be 'preliterate' because of the many moments of *disruptures* that came with those processes of displacement in escaping the civil war in war-torn Burma. To the Karen/Karennis, schools are nonexistent in the Karen/Karenni villages and most of their lives have been preoccupied with evading the brutalities of the Burmese soldiers and surviving in the refugee camps. Although formal schools, until high school, are offered in the refugee camps, most of the Karen/Karenni participants in this study did not attend these schools because of their age. Hence, most of them could not read, write, and understand any English. Their children, however, having been to school in the refugee camps, and having swiftly learnt the Australian school system, now are slowly beginning to function as *de facto* English language interpreters and translators for their 'preliterate' parents. I had the privilege to perform conversations to some of these Karen/Karenni children in the sideline of conducting my fieldwork. It seems that they are doing well in school and dream of becoming nurses, mechanics, and engineers someday. For many of these young

Karen/Karennis, although a good university education is considered the best way to success, their immediate priority now is how to provide financial help to their parents, especially as after five years of staying in Geelong resettlement assistance from Diversitat runs out, at that time the Karen/Karennis are expected to be self-sufficient and independent. It is quite possible that these young Karen/Karennis will enter into the workforce soon to augment family income rather than stay longer in school to do university degrees. Clearly, it is at this juncture that the Australian Government ought to engage in the project of 'lifelong learning' for its disadvantaged citizens.

Continuous education and learning is now recognised as a widespread intervention empowering citizens in readiness for rapid global changes and uncertainties (Bauman 2005). The significance of lifelong learning is illustrated in an ancient Chinese proverb which says, 'When planning for a year, plant corn. When planning for a decade, plant trees. When planning for life, train and educate people' (Bauman 2005: 118). Education and learning encompasses the social investment for children in combating today's worrying problems such as 'poor educational attainment, drug usage, crime, unemployment, early pregnancy and the transmission of social disadvantage' (Vinson 2009: 10). The narratives of the Karen/Karennis show that within the next three to five years, their two main priorities will be how to get a job and send their children to school. ChoMyint, a Karenni man, shares the same sentiments as most of the Karen/Karennis when he said, 'My main priority now, after finishing the English classes, is how to get a job. This is more important. It is difficult for us to do further studies because of our age. The equally important priority is for our children to study hard, get good education and become clever children and good citizens'.

However, attaining higher education for their children seems to be a hurdle for some Karen/Karennis, especially in regards to the financial worries associated with getting into further education. Maw, a Karenni man, foregrounds this concern when he says:

My only problem is when my children will finish high school and they want to continue their studies in the university. We have to think of the financial aspect, you know, the university fees. I think we can approach the church to get like a scholarship or like a government loan. I think there will be no problem if my children are clever enough. They have to study hard.

At this point, I shared my conviction and passion for education to Maw by pointing out that poverty has had never been a hindrance in my fervent desire to attain university degrees. I outlined my experience in applying for and winning academic scholarships one after the other from high school to doctorate studies. I highlighted the idea that amidst financial difficulties, there emerged the intense motivation to work hard for intellectual wealth. Such intellectual wealth can then be exchanged for a reasonable price in the labour market, and the reward is more than enough to alleviate one's poverty. Whilst listening to my sharing, Maw seemed to wait intently for valuable information that might be applicable to his children in the near future, especially on how to apply for scholarships. I assured him that help will always be there for his children if they are also willing to help themselves. This sharing of my academic journey triggered a response from Maw when he opened up that he finished a bachelor's degree in Mathematics at Rangoon University in Burma in the 1980s.

Rather than work for the Burmese Government, Maw left his Karenni village during the height of the civil war in the 1990s and followed his people to the refugee camp along



the Thai-Burma border where he taught Mathematics for ten years at a refugee camp high school. He stated:

In 1993-94 there was a lot of fighting in our area, and the government forced the people to relocate to nearby town near the government military base. Many people did not follow the government's orders thinking that they cannot survive in relocation areas, and so they have to hide in the jungle. Most of the people in our area fled to the Thai-Burma border under the armed resistance group controlled area. So many villagers followed and the teachers set up a school in the Thai-Burma border. I was in the refugee camp for almost fifteen years. I was a Mathematics teacher in the secondary school for almost ten years. Then later became the Education Program Coordinator for almost four years until I came to Australia. I used to work with the counterpart of the international non-government organisation like the Program Coordinator, so I had the time to practice my English language.

The narrative of Maw demonstrates that amidst the terrible conflict, a Karenni can still be lucky enough to be educated. For Maw, his unparalleled passion for education is like a bonfire in the middle of the jungle that draws people together to learn the very basics of education. He believes that helping his people in getting out of the bondage of ignorance is his calling. This vocation enables him to relentlessly provide education to his people not only in the refugee camps, but also in the diasporic space of the Geelong region. He believes that educating his people about the basics of negotiating the rapids of Geelong's treacherous mainstream can be achieved, although living independently will take some time to be realised. As mentioned, he provides orientation programs to newly-arrived Karen/Karennis in the Geelong region, and conducts everyday counselling to his people on matters relating to family and money problems, as well as in accessing social services from

the government and not for profit organisations. He organises and facilitates tutorial sessions for the young Karen/Karennis during weekends and after school hours. The tutorial is imperative to enable the young Karen/Karennis to catch up with the ebbs and flows of the Australian education system. While the young Karen/Karennis may well be able to adapt to the system of education in Australia, the Karen/Karenni research participants may end up forgoing the dream of getting educated, let alone of learning the English language, because of old age and the many health issues starting to occupy them as major concerns as they approach the dusk of their tumultuous lives.

### **Confronting Health Issues**

The majority of the Filipino and Karen/Karenni research participants are confronting major health issues and taking regular medications as well as frequent visits to the general practitioner for regular medical check-ups. The Karen/Karennis, after decades of 'life on the run', from the Karen/Karenni villages to the jungles of Burma, and into the refugee camps along the Thai-Burma border, have now succumbed to different kinds of ailments, even as they live their well cherished freedom and 'easy' life in Geelong, Australia. Enduring months of travelling by foot in Burma's treacherous jungles, and surviving only on food found in the forest as 'hunter gatherers', reminiscent of the Stone Age, many Karen/Karennis could have been poorly fed and undernourished. Upon arrival in the refugee camps, they had to compete for scarce food and water, overcrowded shelter, and poor sanitation with hundreds of thousands of displaced people who had already fled and settled in the refugee camps. Unable to sneak into Thai villages to buy food and other necessities because of fear of being caught by Thai police, they relied on the forest for their

food and drugs and engaged into a barter system of trading goods and services. With the coming of non-government organisations into refugee camps in the 1990s, relief was provided at least in the provision of basic commodities such as rice, fish paste and clothing. Aside from being poorly nourished, clothed and sheltered in the refugee camps, many Karen/Karennis endured emotional and psychological trauma for bearing witness to the loss of lives of many of their family members due to the civil war (Falla 1991).

In Geelong, they are often restricted to the four corners of their house for fear of being lost or yelled at in the streets if they decided to go out for a walk. Also, they are now consuming mostly processed foods and seem to enjoy the convenience of take-away foods at the many leading fast food chain outlets. All these circumstances have contributed to the many facets of health issues they are now suffering. Maw, one of my Karen/Karenni research participants, points out that some of his people in the Geelong region have internal organ issues and weight problems while others are complaining of back problems, high blood pressure, diabetes, rheumatism, chronic headaches and other ailments.

The Filipino research participants, meanwhile, have not escaped the normal wear and tear associated with working long hours in the factories, nursing homes, food processing plants and other labouring jobs. Complaints, such as joint and back pains, shoulder and other muscle pains, are common, signifying the consequences of more than twenty years of doing repetitive and manual work, including long hours of standing on factory floors. Aged in their sixties and seventies, it is not uncommon for them to queue in the general practitioner clinics to have their medical check-ups and secure their prescriptions to buy their medications. Looking after their grandchildren is one of the few

things that preoccupy their fast approaching later years of life. Regular return travel to the homeland for short visits, especially during the winter months of June to August, are undertaken to escape the winter chill and avoid the flare ups of rheumatism and arthritis, the most common bodily complaints they reported during the winter time. For Christrom, a Filipina research participant, these return visits to the homeland are also undertaken to escape the seemingly ‘indifferent’ attitude of her neighbours towards her. Such indifferent attitudes could be partly caused by local resistances to the processes of rapid globalisation as described in Chapter Four, as well as the lack of education of the socio-cultural, political and historical knowledge about Asia, and in this case South East Asia.

### **Outlining Recommendations with Policy Implications**

All research participants similarly express their desire for the white majority to acquire a conscientious awareness of the socio-cultural, political, and historical knowledge about Asia by incorporating such conscientious awareness in the curriculum of the formal primary and secondary Australian education. In the present official agenda of integrating immigrants, Asians are required to study the socio-cultural, political and historical context of the white majority Anglo Australians, and these are made prerequisite before one can become an Australian citizen. However, while there are formal ways in which the socio-cultural, political and historical knowledge about the white majority can be studied and deeply understood, there are no formal avenues in which Asian studies are delivered except when one is able to do undergraduate studies in Arts and other social science courses in universities. This practice is seen as developing only a ‘one way traffic’ of cultural understanding and awareness (Halse 2010). Mainstream schools in Australia are reluctant

to incorporate Asian studies into the school curriculum as powerful groups within schools have argued that,

... despite Australia's geographical location in Asia, Studies of Asia was irrelevant and a 'waste of time' for Australian pupils because Europe was the cradle of Australian civilisation; there were too few 'Asian students' in the school to warrant a Studies of Asia focus; and learning Australia's history was a more important curriculum imperative (Halse 2010: 33).

This lack of proactive stance about the necessity of Asian Studies in the early stages of the student's learning processes, eventually results in the majority of the white Australian youth taking information about Asians directly from exaggerated reports from the media, or from the storytelling of parents and grandparents who could have negative stereotypes about Asians embedded in them. As most information in the media portrays Asians as 'illegal' immigrants who arrive into Australia by boat, and are being detained behind metal bars of detention centres, many white Anglo Australians express naivety, hostility, feelings of strangeness and foreignness, and may instigate racist attacks against 'Asian-looking' but 'legitimate' immigrants now living close to their own backyards. Such expressions of hatred directed against these 'Third World-looking' Asians in Geelong are mentioned in Chapters Four and Five. Hence, there is a need to educate the white majority of Australians about Asia; about the effects of colonialism and the globalisation of culture; about why Asians are forced to, or voluntarily, migrate; about the root causes of asylum seekers risking their lives to seek asylum in Australia; and, about the interests, culture and life of Asians in Australia.

Searching for identity within Asia, the Labor Government recently released the White Paper, *Australia in the Asian Century* (2012) to outline Australia's perceived role in the century of the fast growing tiger economies in many countries in the Asian region. The optimistic White Paper would position Australia in the right direction to navigate the Asian Century (Commonwealth Government 2012). However, some critiques argue that the White Paper exaggerates Australia's capacity and capability particularly in 'skills, education, innovation and relationship development' (Mascitelli & O'Mahony 2014: 540). These critiques suggest that, haunted by its past, Australia is still a long way to go to attain mutual relationships with Asia and to advance its 'standing in the region so that future engagement is based on trust and friendship rather than purely economic imperatives' (Mascitelli & O'Mahony 2014: 563). Australia is seen as not leading the way in creating a mutual relationship and understanding with countries in the Asian region.

As a starting point, there ought to be a two-way flow of socio-cultural, political and historical understanding about Australia and Asia not only within Australian public discourse, but also within the formalities of the primary and secondary schools within Australia, in order to enhance conscientious awareness, deeper understanding, and peaceful coexistence amongst people from different cultural backgrounds and origins. Cultural sensitivity is the key to harmony and not cultural homogeneity and dominance and hegemonic ambitions. Cultural sensitivities can be enhanced when one is knowledgeable about the socio-cultural and political history of the origin of people we engage, relate and interact with everyday. If schools refuse to take this challenge, it could be a prelude to a more incessant overflow of ignorance from white Australian youth who will continue to

assert nationalistic ideals and subjugate and discriminate or even undertake racist attacks towards Asians. These hostilities could eventually lead to the sowing the seeds of hatred, and eventually, race riots.

Sowing the seeds of hatred can be ideally replaced by the pragmatic sowing of the seeds of love through the radical transformation and paradigm shift of the dominant white majority's thinking, stereotypes, prejudices, and feelings of racial superiority directed against immigrants of 'colour'. This is easier said than done because of the deeply entrenched racist history of Australia and nuances of its existence are still deeply felt. But the ideals of this pragmatic positioning are achievable through conscientious awareness – a kind of awareness based on the human conscience – of the humanisation of human beings as transformers of the world involve in a dialogue in the pursuit of a joint project (Freire 1972a). This joint project could mean the emancipation of the 'coloured' immigrants by giving them a fair go, by treating them as human beings, by sharing with them the opportunities of acquiring desirable positions, by totally abandoning the sense of racial superiority and inferiority, by embracing peaceful coexistence through power sharing and eradicating hierarchical segregation in all facets of human living. Of course this is more like a utopian project and a society of this kind clearly does not exist. This is because capitalism, through globalisation of the means of production and the ensuing competition to profit from it, undoubtedly breeds, espouses, and proliferates inequality (Stromquist 2002). Nevertheless, by disturbing the hearts, minds and consciences of those who wield, control, and dispense forms of power and dominance, transformational and societal change can be achieved through an increased political will, as manifested in the enactment of a

legislative agenda that promotes racial equality and social justice. However, despite the presence of special government bodies such as Australia's Equal Opportunity Commission, and of policies such as the Racial Discrimination Act, racial equality and social justice in all spheres of life continues to be an unreachable dream for Australia's ethnic minorities, because of the persistence of White groups' resistance to change in overcoming and eradicating different forms of discrimination and racism (Carter 2003).

As this thesis shows, labour market segmentation based on race, ethnicity, gender, class, status and socio-cultural attributes continue to play significant roles in the segregation of ethnic minorities in host societies, such as Australia, into subordinate and inferior positions in the labour force. As mentioned, the Filipinos with university qualifications completed in a country not sharing the same cultural stylistics with Australia are relegated by cultural decree of the host society to '3D' jobs mostly abandoned by white Australians. Once accepted in entry-level jobs in factories and aged care, the Filipinos are locked-up until retirement with limited upward mobility (Kelly 2010). The Filipinos are over-represented in the labouring jobs in Australia, with 18 percent of people born in the Philippines are engaged into some physically-demanding and low-skilled jobs, compared to only 9 percent of the total Australian-born population (ABS 2013). This is much higher for people born in Burma, with 23 percent of the total population of 21,760 Burma-born are employed in labouring jobs. However, the statistical data did not show the relative educational attainment of those who are employed in the labouring jobs, especially within the ranks of the Filipino immigrants. It is likely that many Filipinos who are employed in the labouring occupation either have university qualifications acquired in the Philippines,



or some technical and further education level qualification not recognised by gatekeepers of the Australian labour market.

With the destructive forces of globalisation now engulfing and crippling every corner of Geelong's manufacturing industry, it is a matter of paramount importance for the government to intervene in the transition of these 'wasted professionals' into useful, productive, and highly dignified citizens. Rather than leave it to themselves to fix their own problems, the government has more than enough resources to show and act upon its moral responsibility to assist these people to reclaim their moral dignity, through inclusion and placement into professional and desirable positions in the labour market. There is more to be done in the drive towards enhancing the diversity of the workplace. The government, being the largest employer, can take the lead in this diversity project by employing a substantial number of employees coming from the disadvantaged ethnic minorities. Another avenue to meaningfully incorporate the overseas-qualified professionals into the mainstream of the Australian labour market is for the government to support them in work placements in desirable positions. I think it is plausible if there is a way that overseas-qualified professionals are encouraged and supported by the government in applying for positions in their respective field of expertise even for entry-level jobs but will eventually lead to the award of a much higher positions after two years of performing the entry level job. Hence, there ought to be clear and systematic progression of immigrant professionals into desirable positions. Similar initiatives of collaboration between the government and immigrant professionals should be undertaken across all industries in the labour market which could enhance the participation of 'coloured' immigrants into their chosen

profession without the need of a ‘back-up’ from one’s social network. This drive for diversity in the workplace not only alleviates the pain of competing in the uneven playing field of the labour market for ethnic minorities, but also counterbalances the white group’s resistance to change. However, the irony lies in the fact that these issues are not within the priority programs of the government so it is indeed a challenge to elicit political will towards this diversity drive project. One arena in which this resistance to change can be illustrated is the ‘indifferent’ attitudes of some public servants to the cultural sensitivities and needs of the recently-arrived immigrants such as the Karen/Karennis.

There is a growing resentment about the way some public servants provide services to the newly emerging communities in regional Victoria. As the narratives of the Karen/Karennis in the Geelong region demonstrate, some employees at VicRoads and Centrelink naively and clumsily express cultural, social and historical insensitivity when performing everyday duties and responsibilities particularly in dealing with the needs of the newly arrived Karen/Karennis. For instance, VicRoads driving test officers’ seemingly arrogant and indifferent attitude appears to be seen as the main cause resulting in many Karen/Karennis’ failure in their many attempts to secure probationary driver’s licences, yet driving one’s own car is deemed vital to actively and successfully participate in the mainstream of the host society. These perceived cultural insensitivities of public servants not only repeat past traumatic experiences in the civil war in Burma, but also bar and discourage the Karen/Karennis from becoming active and productive citizens in the host society. Rather than implement a ‘one-size-fits-all’ mode of providing government services, government agencies, particularly those that directly service the needs of newly

emerging communities, would do the community a service if they amend their policies and procedures to be culturally sensitive and responsive to individual clients. Coupled with this, an intensive and progressive cultural awareness training for public servants to cater effectively to the individual needs of their clients, creates a holistic approach to public service that generates a more fulfilled, satisfied and happy client-base. However, we have to admit that this is easier said than done because of the persistence of negative stereotypes brought about by the exaggerated media reporting of 'illegal' asylum seekers arriving in Australia by boat that considerably fuels the increasing racial tensions now dominating the Australian consciousness.

As the narratives of the Filipinos and Karen/Karennis demonstrate, the highly sensationalised reporting in the media, either in print or broadcast media, of asylum seekers arriving by boat and being detained in inhumane conditions behind bars not only creates divisiveness along party lines, but also sows fear and hatred within the Australian public towards the asylum-seeker-looking immigrants, including the South East Asians. These South East Asians, who have been subjected to racist attacks partly because of this irresponsible media reporting, could have been living in Australia longer than those who perpetrate such attacks. Rather than sowing fear and hatred within the Australian public, the media has a social and moral responsibility to educate the Australian public by showcasing the immigrants', - including those refugee and humanitarian entrants, positive contributions to the socio-economic success and cultural make-up of Australia. Portraying migrant labour as the 'oil of the economic engine' of Australia rather than reporting asylum seekers behind bars in primetime news, may well be a turning point of changing the

Australian public's negative attitude and stereotypes towards Asians. Australia is likely to continue to depend on migrant labour to propel its economic engine because of Australia's low fertility rate, and the overly materialistic attitude of Australian young men and women who increasingly postpone entering married life and birthing until their late thirties which also impacts on population growth. Media programs that damage the image and reputation of Asians should be banned as this moulds negative stereotypes, propels hate attitudes, and fuels racist attacks. On the contrary, media programs that showcase stories of immigrant's integration success, such as how an immigrant attained meaningful work for a stable income, owned a comfortable home and safe car, sent children to university, have health care and enough savings to cater for the needs of the future, should be aired and broadcast in primetime media programs. This kind of media program will not only inspire the next generation of immigrants and their kin and outline the positive contributions they all make to the Australian way of life, but will also counter the narrow, xenophobic mindset of the nationalist. This would contribute to the reconfiguration of closures or barriers minority ethnic groups experience in many realms of living in host lands.

### **Reconfiguring the Social Closure Theory**

This dissertation has set out to explore and analyse the contemporary situation of the Filipino and Karen/Karenni communities in a regional setting around issues of access and equity, issues of difference, and social inclusion and exclusion. Employing narrative research as the overarching methodological framework with a blending of ethnographic and cross-cultural methods, this study puts forward a contribution to our understanding of the Weberian theory of social closure. The theory can be applied not only among groups

and communities within a given diaspora space, but also can be extended when comparing different societies that are distinctively and uniquely positioned in terms of their social, political, economic and cultural characteristics. The implicit or explicit assumption of closure theory is that there is no such thing as society: merely individuals and groups entering into relationships with each other (Scott & Marshall 2009). The findings of this study reveal lived experiences of the Filipinos and Karen/Karennis who are reporting a sense of inclusion when juxtaposing their privileges, rewards, benefits and opportunities of the host society (Australia) with the imagined realities of their societies of origin (the Philippines and Burma) in a globalised world. The provision, for instance, of highly subsidised health care and education, affordable housing, and well-placed social safety nets and better standards of living in Australia are reported as nonexistent in the countries of origin, such as in the Philippines and Burma. However, there are also revelations that when the Filipinos and Karen/Karennis positioned themselves in relation to the social and economic situations of the local Australians, especially in the realities of the division of labour in the Australian labour market, they found themselves at a disadvantage and excluded from the privileges, rewards and opportunities such as the acquisition of exclusive, well-paid and desirable professions enjoyed by members of the dominant group.

Regardless of length of residence, the participants in this study are subtly barred from entering into the exclusive and influential local social network of the dominant group; and this coupled with the societal imposition of credentialism made legitimate by the principle of meritocracy, many highly educated Filipinos find themselves working in '3D' (dirty, dangerous and difficult) jobs, as abattoir labourers, aged care workers, cleaners,

factory and farm workers; jobs mostly abandoned by members of the dominant group. Within a given industry, in meat processing in the abattoirs for instance, job hierarchies on the basis of race and ethnicity are evident wherein immigrants of 'colour', such as Asians and Africans, usually occupy the low paid and dirty labouring jobs, while the white workers are situated in well paid and desirable positions as foremen, administration and quality assurance workers, meat inspectors, and slaughtermen. Thus, in the local context of the immigration society, the structures and agencies of social closure are still alive and deeply entrenched although subtly made implicit in many different transformations and legitimisations. In the midst of the overarching inclusive nature of societal benefits and privileges offered by the state, there are underlying remnants of the processes and forms of closure in the social, political, economic and cultural spheres of everyday living in the diaspora.

These findings have profound implications in terms of the ebbs and flows of the movement of people between emigration countries, such as the Philippines and Burma, and countries of immigration, such as Australia. The benefits, rewards, rights, opportunities and privileges of Australian citizenship will continue to attract immigrants from South East Asia. However, upon settlement and resettlement within the host society, the university educated Filipinos and Karen/Karennis, find themselves way behind the local Australians' positions of power, status, class, belonging, socio-cultural capital, and labour market placements. They are relegated to working side by side with other immigrants and local Australians who may not even have graduated from high school. I have found this through my own experience of working in the abattoir, where many of my white co-workers who

were unable to spell English words correctly, turned out to be evident when we became classmates in doing an in-house Certificate III in Meat Processing, a prelude to becoming meat inspectors. While working in the abattoir, I befriended an Anglo Australian male who have not had any formal schooling and could not read or write. He had been to a special school but lost interest in studying when his father died of heart attack during the early stages of attending special school. This goes to show that the lack of options to employment opportunities, especially in acquiring positions commensurate to one's skills and qualifications, force the Filipino professionals to accept whatever is there on offer, even if it means succumbing to the highly degrading deskilling process and work alongside with those who have similarly limited options in the labour market.

There are gaps and limitations in this study which can be explored in future research projects that could provide a wider perspective of the phenomena being investigated in this study. An exploration of the insights of gatekeepers responsible for power dispensations in universities, bureaucratic organisations, private companies and multinational corporations, and even not-for-profit organisations in a regional setting, regarding inclusion or exclusion of possible candidates for a desirable position, would greatly enhance and expand our understanding of the situational issues under investigation. There is also a necessity to explore the lived experiences of similarly 'coloured' immigrants from the African continent in regional areas regarding issues explored in the current investigation to widen the scope, depth and breadth of similarities and differences of lived experience. Likewise, there is also a significant need to study the lived experiences of local white Australians in a regional setting, regarding interrelationships and inclusion and exclusion of immigrants

of 'colour' in all spheres of local Australian life, in order to understand the world of realities of local resistances, the meanings of racially 'indifferent' attitudes and denigrating actions, and the many different ways of untangling and transforming the negative stereotypes local white Australians harbour against 'Third World-looking' immigrants.

In the midst of our differences and unique racial and cultural traits and identities, it is apparent that we ought to appreciate and accept each other's humanity, historicity, and dignity to be able to share the scarce resources of desirable opportunities in our constant quest for happiness and fulfilment. In light of the landmark achievement in the twentieth century, of increasing equality in many spheres of life amongst African Americans in the US, it is inspiring and motivating to continue working in a similar struggle for equality, this time in the acquisition of desirable professional positions within and amongst the ranks of the 'coloured' ethnic minority men and women in host lands. It is but fitting to end this research project, in what could have been an endless and winding road of adventures of lived experiences, with a couple of salient quotes. The first quote synthesises the inherent identities of the research participants in the diaspora.

So, the aura of loss is augmented and interrogated by a critical mourning: for we can neither return to that earlier form of life nor simply deny it. We cannot go home again but neither can we simply cancel that past, or eradicate the desire for the myth of homecoming, from our sense of being and becoming. But in the throw of the dice it is to choose to cast that heritage into the game and to oppose the close teleology of identity and authenticity with the interrogations that emerge from the radical historicity of language and existence, with that excess of transitivity in which we encounter not only the grammar of being but the fact that it speaks in many accents. In these encounters, in the transit and travel of languages, what we refer to as our



cultural, historical and individual identity is continually constituted and performed (Chambers 1994b: 248-9).

The second quote below encapsulates the realities of the processes of social closure and how to redress the problem of exclusion subtly suffered by ethnic minorities.

Opportunities for core and periphery work are systematically structured by the conscious and unconscious acts of employers, trade unions and employees holding privileged positions in the market. Without intervention, those who have traditionally occupied the most valued jobs and positions of authority will continue to do so unless steps are taken to intervene in the operation of the labour market. This means that at present, a large proportion of the working population and those facing unemployment are not realising their occupational potential. Thus society is failing to utilise its human capital in the most effective ways possible. This situation could be redressed with ingenuity and a measure of goodwill on the part of those best placed to create an environment for change – those with responsibility for organisational strategies, the management, those representing organised labour, the trade unions and government at central and local levels (Lee 1987: 208).

In a tragic ending to this research journey, I received the terrible and disheartening news that my Karen research assistant, Phan, was diagnosed with stage four gastric cancer. Days later, a member of my family, who is a friend of Phan, and I paid her a visit. We brought her fresh flowers and fruits to signify how dear she is to us not only for being the bridge to the world of the Karen/Karennis in Geelong for my research project, but also as a dear friend who we have known as a strong-minded, dreamer, willing to sacrifice herself for the greater good of her people. With only the three of us at the lounge room, Phan opened up what triggered her to have a medical check up that led to her being diagnosed with the deadly gastric cancer. While working on the farm as a nursery room attendant, she

felt tired and dizzy, and had difficulty swallowing food during lunch break. Being strong-minded, she continued to perform her job for the rest of the day ignoring the symptoms. Waking up the next day, she had difficulty getting out of bed and could not get up without feeling dizzy, so she decided to call in sick at work, and book an appointment with a general practitioner. Puzzled by her difficulty swallowing food and her sudden weight loss, her doctor ordered a series of test, including blood tests, x-ray examination, and a gastroscopy. All the tests revealed a positive and conclusive finding of an advance stage of gastric cancer. She is now undergoing a course of intensive chemotherapy.

Having survived the brutalities of the civil war in Burma, Phan is hopeful that she would be able to overcome another tragic event of her life by waking up one day cancer free – just like the many Karen/Karennis settling in the Thai-Burma border, who have not given up hope that one day they will be free from the bondage of the societal cancer of military dictatorship. But Phan realises that if it is really her time to meet her Creator, then so be it. As if saying her last words, she wants me to help her son, who is graduating from high school in 2014, to find a scholarship to go to university and study architecture. My reply was reassuring, compelling, and positive-minded words of hope that ‘I will do everything I can to help your son’, because at that moment I believe that all things fall in place in the greater scheme of things. Later, I realise that it is up to the university gatekeepers out there who control and dispense powers for Phan’s son to be able to get a chance of being granted a scholarship. Nevertheless, my words of hope seemed to lighten the heavy loads of suffering Phan endured for years, including the heaviest load of the unthinkable and unimaginable magnitude, that of currently being a cancer patient.

We, too, have to defeat the cancer that lies within each one of us. Our greed for power, money and prestige are cancers that besiege the very foundation of our humanity. They corrode the sense of who we are as a person, and what we ought to be as a society of civilised men and women. These cancers distract us from our constant search for meaning, and in defining the purpose of our lives. Our insatiable addiction to material possessions, and greediness to positions of domination over the actions of others, blinds and paralysis us from attaining our genuine purpose in life, that is, to act on our moral and social obligation to lighten the heavy loads of our needy brethren. We have so much love, hope and happiness to share. After all, we are all pilgrims in this world, and in the end, we will be judged accordingly, not on how much material things and power we possessed, but how many good deeds we made, that will be remembered for generations to come.

## REFERENCES

- Allen, K. (2004). *Max Weber: A Critical Introduction*. London, UK: Pluto Press.
- Allender, S. C. (2008). Settlement of Karen Refugees in Corio. *Migration Action*(2), 28-31.
- Alvarez, A. N., & Juang, L. P. (2010). Filipino Americans and Racism: A Multiple Mediation Model of Coping. *Journal of Counseling Psychology*, 57(2), 167-178. doi: 10.1037/a0019091
- Alvarez, A. N., Juang, L. P., & Liang, C. T. H. (2006). Asian Americans and Racism: When Bad Things Happen to "Model Minorities" *Cultural Diversity and Ethnic Minority Psychology*, 12(3), 477-492. doi: 10.1037/1099-9809.12.3.477
- Andrews, M. (2008). Never the last word: Revisiting data. In M. Andrews, C. Squire & M. Tamboukou (Eds.), *Doing Narrative Research*. Los Angeles: Sage.
- Andrews, M. (2012). Learning From Stories, Stories of Learning. In I. F. Goodson, A. M. Loveless & D. Stephens (Eds.), *Explorations in Narrative Research* (pp. 33-42). Rotterdam, The Netherlands Sense Publishers.
- Appadurai, A. (1996). *Modernity at Large: Cultural Dimensions of Globalization* (Vol. 1). Minneapolis, United States of America: University of Minnesota Press.
- AsiaNews. (2008). Burmese in Thailand, refugees of the "longest civil war in the world". *AsiaNews.it*.
- Asis, M. M. B., Huang, S., & Yeoh, B. S. (2004). When the light of the home is abroad: Unskilled female migration and the Filipino family. *Singapore Journal of Tropical Geography*, 25(2), 198-215.
- Baldoz, R. (2004). Valorizing racial boundaries: Hegemony and conflict in the racialization of Filipino migrant labour in the United States. *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, 27(6), 969-986.
- Banks, J. A. (1998). The Lives and Values of Researchers: Implications for Educating Citizens in a Multicultural Society. *Educational Researcher*, 27(7), 4-17. doi: 10.3102/0013189X027007004
- Barmaki, R. (2009). Criminals/Refugees in the Age of Welfareless States: Zygmunt Bauman on Ethnicity, Asylum and the new 'Criminal'. *International Journal of Criminology and Sociological Theory*, 2(1), 251-266.

- Bauman, Z. (1998). *Work, consumerism and the new poor*. Buckingham: Open University Press.
- Bauman, Z. (2000a). *Liquid Modernity*. Cambridge, UK: Polity Press.
- Bauman, Z. (2000b). What it Means 'To Be Excluded': Living to Stay Apart - Together? In P. Askonas & A. Stewart (Eds.), *Social Inclusion: Possibilities and Tensions* (pp. 73-88). London, UK: Macmillan Press Ltd.
- Bauman, Z. (2004). *Wasted Lives: Modernity and its Outcasts*. Cambridge, UK: Polity Press.
- Bauman, Z. (2005). *Liquid Life*. Cambridge, UK: Polity Press.
- Bauman, Z. (2007). *Consuming Life*. Cambridge, UK: Polity Press.
- Bhabha, H. (1990). The Third Space. In J. Rutherford (Ed.), *Identity: Community, Culture, Difference* (pp. 207-221). London, UK: Lawrence & Wishart.
- Bheenuck, S. (2010). Interrogating identity and belonging through life history: experiences of overseas nurses in post-colonial Britain. In A.-M. Bathmaker & P. Harnett (Eds.), *Exploring Learning, Identity and Power through Life History and Narrative Research*. London: Routledge.
- Birrell, R. (1995). The Dynamics of Multiculturalism in Australia. In D. W. Lovell (Ed.), *The Australian Political System*. Melbourne: Longman.
- Bodde, R. (2011). Karen Refugee Ministries: Needs and Priorities Study. Retrieved from <http://www.melbourne.anglican.com.au/ServingCommunity/src/Documents/Karen%2520Refugee%2520M...> website:
- Boese, M. (2010). The stranger who comes today and leaves after-tomorrow. An analysis of current concerns with migrants' and refugees' regional settlement and mobility. *TASA 2010: Social Causes, Private Lives. Australia*, 1-14.
- Boese, M. (2014). The role of employers in the regional settlement of recently arrived migrants and refugees. *Journal of Sociology*, 1-16. doi: 10.1177/1440783314544994
- Boese, M., & Phillips, M. (2011). Multiculturalism and Social Inclusion in Australia. *Journal of Intercultural Studies*, 32(2), 189-197.
- Brah, A. (1996). *Cartographies of Diaspora: Contesting Identities*. London, UK, Routledge.

- Briggs, C. L. (1986). *Learning How to Ask: A Sociolinguistic Appraisal of the Role of the Interview in Social Science Research*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Briggs, C. L. (2001). Interviewing, Power/Knowledge, and Social Inequality. In J. F. Gubrium & J. A. Holstein (Eds.), *Handbook of Interview Research: Context and Method*. Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications.
- Browning, R. (2006). Burma's Hidden Diaspora. *Eureka Street*, 16(1), 16-17.
- Bruneau, M. (2010). Diasporas, transnational spaces and communities. In R. Baubock & T. Faist (Eds.), *Diaspora and Transnationalism: Concepts, Theories and Methods*. Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press.
- Burnley, I. (1999). Levels of Immigrant Residential Concentration in Sydney and their Relationship with Disadvantage *Urban Studies*, 36(8), 1295-1315.
- Cameron, A. (2006). Geographies of welfare and exclusion: social inclusion and exception. *Progress in Human Geography*, 30(3), 396-404.
- Canales, A. I., & Armas, I. M. (2007). A world without borders? Mexican immigration, new boundaries and transnationalism in the United States. In A. Pecoud & P. De Guchteneire (Eds.), *Migration Without Borders: Essays on the Free Movement of People* (pp. 221-241). Paris, France; Oxford, UK; New York, US: UNESCO Publishing; Berghahn Books.
- Carter, J. (2003). *Ethnicity, Exclusion and the Workplace*. New York, USA: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Castles, S. (1995). *Multicultural Citizenship* Canberra: Commonwealth of Australia.
- Castles, S. (1996). The racisms of globalization. In E. Vasta & S. Castles (Eds.), *The teeth are smiling: The persistence of racism in multicultural Australia* (pp. 17-45). St Leonards, NSW, Australia: Allen & Unwin Pty Ltd.
- Castles, S., & Davidson, A. (2000). *Citizenship and Migration: Globalization and the Politics of Belonging*. London: Macmillan Press Ltd.
- Castles, S., Kalantzis, M., Cope, B., & Morrissey, M. (1992). *Mistaken Identity: Multiculturalism and the Demise of Nationalism in Australia*. Sydney: Pluto Press Australia Ltd.
- Castles, S., & Miller, M. J. (2009). *The Age of Migration: International Population Movements in the Modern World* (Fourth ed.). New York: Palgrave Macmillan.

- Center, R. H. R. (2007). Experience of discrimination among refugee youth in Melbourne. *GoodStarts for Refugee Youth*.
- Centre, R. H. R. (2009). Promoting wellbeing in the first three years of settlement in Melbourne, Australia. *Good Starts for recently arrived youth with refugee backgrounds*. Retrieved 31 July 2011, 2011, from <http://www.latrobe.edu.au/larrc/documents-larrc/reports/report-good-starts.pdf>
- Chambers, I. (1994a). *Migrancy, Culture, Identity*. London: Routledge.
- Chambers, I. (1994b). Leaky habitats and broken grammar. In G. Robertson, M. Mash, L. Tickner, J. Bird, B. Curtis & T. Putnam (Eds.), *Travellers' Tales: Narratives of home and displacement*. London: Routledge.
- Charmaz, K. (2006). *Constructing Grounded Theory: a practical guide through qualitative analysis*. London: SAGE Publications Ltd.
- Clifford, J. (1997). *Routes: Travel and Translation in the Late Twentieth Century*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press.
- Cohen, R. (1997). *Global Diasporas: An Introduction*. London, UK: UCL Press.
- Colic-Peisker, V., & Tilbury, F. (2006). Employment Niches for Recent Refugees: Segmented Labour Market in Twenty-first Century Australia *Journal of Refugee Studies*, 19(2), 203-229.
- Collins, J. (1996). The changing political economy of Australian racism. In E. Vasta & S. Castles (Eds.), *The teeth are smiling: The persistence of racism in multicultural Australia*. St. Leonards, NSW: Allen & Unwin Pty Ltd.
- Collins, R. (1979). *The Credential Society: An Historical Sociology of Education and Stratification*. Orlando, Florida: Academic Press
- Commonwealth, G. (2012). *Ken Henry White Paper: Australia in the Asian Century*. Commonwealth Government Retrieved from <http://asiancentury.dpmc.gov.au/>.
- Cooke, F. M. (1986). *Australian-Filipino Marriages in the 1980s. The Myth and the Reality*. Nathan, Queensland: Griffith University, School of Modern Asian Studies, Centre for the Study of Australian-Asian Relations
- Corti, L., & Thompson, P. (2004). Secondary Analysis of Archived Data. In C. Seale, G. Gobo, J. F. Gubrium & D. Silverman (Eds.), *Qualitative Research Practice*. London: Sage Publications.

- Crotty, M. (1998). *The Foundations of Social Research: Meaning and perspective in the research process*. St Leonards, Australia: Allen & Unwin.
- Cunneen, C., & Stubbs, J. (1997). *Gender, 'Race' and International Relations*. Sydney: The Institute of Criminology, University of Sydney, Faculty of Law.
- Cunneen, C., & Stubbs, J. (2000). Male Violence, Male Fantasy and the Commodification of Women through the Internet. *International Review of Victimology*, 7(1-3), 5-28.
- Dahinden, J. (2010). The dynamics of migrant's transnational formations: Between mobility and locality. In R. Baubock & T. Faist (Eds.), *Diaspora and Transnationalism: Concepts, Theories and Methods*. Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press.
- Daly, M., & Silver, H. (2008). Social exclusion and social capital: A comparison and critique. *Theory and Society*, 37, 537-566.
- de Castro, A. B., Gee, G. C., & Takeuchi, D. T. (2008). Workplace Discrimination and Health Among Filipinos in the United States. *American Journal of Public Health*, 98(3), 520-526.
- Delamont, S. (2004). Ethnography and Participant Observation. In C. Seale, G. Gobo, J. F. Gubrium & D. Silverman (Eds.), *Qualitative Research Practice*. London: Sage Publications.
- Del Rosario, T. C. (2008). Bridal Diaspora: Migration and Marriage Among Filipino Women. In R. Palriwala & P. Uberoi (Eds.), *Marriage, Migration and Gender* (Vol. 5). Thousand Oaks, California, USA.
- Denzin, N. K., & Lincoln, Y. S. (2000). *Handbook of Qualitative Research* (2nd ed.). London: Sage Publications.
- DeVault, M. L. (1995). Ethnicity and Expertise: Racial-Ethnic Knowledge in Sociological Research *Gender and Society*, 9(5), 612-631.
- Diversitat. (2014). Human Settlement Services. Retrieved June 4, 2014, from <http://www.diversitat.org.au/settlement-community/95-settlement-community-support/1373-humanitarian-settlement-services-ihss-5>
- D'Mello, A. T. (2010). Filipino Community Organisations in Victoria. In R. G. Zubiri, A. Z. Esmaguel, A. T. D'Mello & A. B. Wilks (Eds.), *The Filipinos in Victoria* (pp. 97-124). Melbourne, Australia: Filipino Community Council of Victoria.
- Dunlevy, S., & Puddy, R. (2012). Liberals to exclude social inclusion portfolio. *The Australian*. Retrieved from <http://www.theaustralian.com.au/higher->



education/libs-to-exclude-social-inclusion-portfolio/story-e6frgcjx-1226236848356

- Dunn, K., & Nelson, J. K. (2011). Challenging the Public Denial of Racism for a Deeper Multiculturalism. *Journal of Intercultural Studies*, 32(6), 587-602.
- Elliott, J. (2005). *Using Narrative in Social Research*. London: Sage Publications.
- Ellis, C., & Berger, L. (2001). Their Story/My Story/Our Story. In J. F. Gubrium & J. A. Holstein (Eds.), *Handbook of Interview Research: Context and Method*. Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications.
- Entzinger, H. (2007). Open borders and the welfare state. In A. Pecoud & P. De Guchteneire (Eds.), *Migration Without Borders: Essays on the Free Movement of People* (pp. 119-134). Paris, France; Oxford, UK; New York, USA: UNESCO Publishing; Berghahn Books.
- Espiritu, Y. L. (2003). *Home bound: Filipino American lives across cultures, communities, and countries*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Etherington, K. (2006). Reflexivity: using our 'selves' in narrative research. In S. Trahar (Ed.), *Narrative Research on Learning: comparative and international perspectives*. Oxford, UK: Symposium Books.
- Falla, J. (1991). *True Love and Bartholomew: rebels on the Burmese border*. Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press.
- Forrest, J., & Dunn, K. (2007). Constructing Racism in Sydney, Australia's Largest Ethnically Diverse City. *Urban Studies*, 44(4), 699-721.
- Foundation, A. K. (2011). The Karen People. Retrieved 10 October, 2011, from [http://australiankarenfoundation.org.au/karen\\_people\\_18.html](http://australiankarenfoundation.org.au/karen_people_18.html)
- Francisco, M. S. J., & Go, J. S. J. (Producer). (2000, 3 August 2014). Pilgrim's Theme. Retrieved from <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8N-jlM8tYj8>
- Freire, P. (1972a). *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. Harmondsworth: Penguin.
- Freire, P. (1972b). *Cultural Action for Freedom*. Harmondsworth: Penguin.
- Freire, P. (1976). *Education: The Practice of Freedom*. London: Writers and Readers Publishing Cooperative.
- Fuertes, A. (2010). Birds Inside a Cage: Metaphor for Karen Refugees. *Social Alternatives*, 29(1), 20-24.

- Galligan, B., & Roberts, W. (2003). *Australian Multiculturalism: Its Rise and Demise*. Paper presented at the Australasian Political Studies Association Conference, University of Tasmania, Hobart.
- Gee, G. C., Delva, J., & Takeuchi, D. T. (2007a). Relationships Between Self-Reported Unfair Treatment and Prescription Medication Use, Illicit Drug Use, and Alcohol Dependence Among Filipino Americans *American Journal of Public Health*, 97(5), 933-940.
- Gee, G. C., Spencer, M. S., Chen, J., & Takeuchi, D. T. (2007b). A Nationwide Study of Discrimination and Chronic Health Conditions Among Asian Americans. *American Journal of Public Health*, 97(7), 1275-1282.
- Georgiou, M. (2006). *Diaspora, Identity and the Media*. Cresskill, New Jersey, USA: Hampton Press.
- Ghosh, B. (2007). Managing migration: towards the missing regime. In A. Pecoud & P. De Guchteneire (Eds.), *Migration Without Borders: Essays on the Free Movement of People* (pp. 97-118). Paris, France; Oxford, UK; New York, USA: UNESCO Publishing; Berghahn Books.
- Gifford, S., Correa-Velez, I., & Sampson, R. (2009). Good Starts for recently arrived youth with refugee backgrounds: Promoting wellbeing in the first three years of settlement in Melbourne. Melbourne: La Trobe University.
- Gilroy, P. (1987). *There Ain't No Black in the Union Jack*. London: Century Hutchinson.
- Glaser, B. G., & Strauss, A. L. (1967). *The Discovery of Grounded Theory: strategies for qualitative research*. New York: Aldine Publishing Co.
- Goffman, E. (1989). On Fieldwork. *Journal of Contemporary Ethnography*, 18, 123-132.
- Goodall, H., Jakubowicz, A., Martin, J., Mitchell, T., Randall, L., & Seneviratne, K. (Eds.). (1994). *The New Racism, Communal Identities and the Nation*. St Leonards, NSW: Allen & Unwin Pty Ltd.
- Gow, G. (1999). *The language of culture and the culture of language : Oromo identity in Melbourne, Australia*. (Doctor of Philosophy Ph.D.), Victoria University, Footscray.
- Green, D. O. n., Creswell, J. W., Shope, R. J., & Clark, V. L. P. (2007). Grounded Theory and Racial/Ethnic Diversity. In A. Bryant & K. Charmaz (Eds.), *The SAGE Handbook of Grounded Theory* (pp. 472-492). London, UK: SAGE Publications Ltd.

- Grieco, M. (1987). Family Networks and the Closure of Employment. In G. Lee & R. Loveridge (Eds.), *The Manufacture of Disadvantage: Stigma and Social Closure*. Milton Keynes: Open University Press.
- Gubrium, J. F., & Holstein, J. A. (2001). From the Individual Interview to the Interview Society. In J. F. Gubrium & J. A. Holstein (Eds.), *Handbook of Interview Research: Context and Method*. Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications.
- Hage, G. (2000). *White Nation Fantasies of White supremacy in a multicultural society*. New York: Routledge.
- Hage, G. (2003). *Against Paranoid Nationalism: Searching for hope in a shrinking society*. London: The Merlin Press
- Hahm, H. C., Ozonoff, A., Gaumond, J., & Sue, S. (2010). Perceived Discrimination and Health Outcomes: A Gender Comparison Among Asian-Americans Nationwide *Women's Health Issues*, 20(5), 350-358.
- Hall, S. (1991). The local and the global: globalization and ethnicity. In A. D. King (Ed.), *Culture, globalization, and the world-system : contemporary conditions for the representation of identity*. Binghamton, New York: Dept. of Art and Art History, State University of New York at Binghamton.
- Hall, S. (1992). The Question of Cultural Identity. In S. Hall, D. Held & T. McGrew (Eds.), *Modernity and Its Futures* (pp. 273-325). Cambridge, UK: Polity Press.
- Hall, S. (1994). Cultural Identity and Diaspora. In P. Williams & L. Chrisman (Eds.), *Colonial Discourse and Post-Colonial Theory: A Reader* (pp. 392-403). New York: Columbia University Press.
- Hall, S. (1996). New Ethnicities. In D. Morley & K.-H. Chen (Eds.), *Stuart Hall: Critical dialogues in cultural studies*. London: Routledge.
- Halse, C. (2010). A process of (un)becoming: life history and the professional development of teachers. In A.-M. Bathmaker & P. Harnett (Eds.), *Exploring Learning, Identity and Power through Life History and Narrative Research*. London: Routledge.
- Hammersley, M. (1992). *What's wrong with ethnography?* London: Routledge.
- Hammersley, M., & Atkinson, P. (1996). *Ethnography: Principles in practice*. New York: Tavistock.

- Hampton, K. N. (2004). Networked Sociability Online, Off-line. In M. Castells (Ed.), *The Network Society: A Cross-cultural Perspective* (pp. 217-232). Cheltenham, UK; Massachusetts, USA: Edward Elgar Publishing.
- Hayes, A., Gray, M., & Edwards, B. (2008). *Social Inclusion: Origins, concepts and key themes*. Canberra: Social Inclusion Unit, Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet.
- Hennessy, N. B. (2004). *A Journey in Antipodean Land: The Filipino Heritage in Australia*. Henley Beach, South Australia: Seaview Press.
- Hennink, M. M. (2007). *International Focus Group Research: A Handbook for the Health and Social Sciences*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Hennink, M. M. (2008). Language and communication in cross-cultural qualitative research. In P. Liamputtong (Ed.), *Doing cross-cultural research: Ethical and methodological perspectives* (pp. 21-33). Dordrecht: Springer.
- Ho, C. (2006). Migration as Feminisation? Chinese Women's Experiences of Work and Family in Australia. *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*, 32(3), 497-514.
- Holton, R. J., & Turner, B. S. (1989). *Max Weber on Economy and Society*. London & New York: Routledge.
- (HREOC), H. R. a. E. O. C. (2001). *I want respect and equality: a summary of consultations with civil society on racism in Australia*. Canberra: Retrieved from [http://www.humanrights.gov.au/racial\\_discrimination/consultations/consultations.html#t1](http://www.humanrights.gov.au/racial_discrimination/consultations/consultations.html#t1).
- Hugo, G. (2008). Immigrant Settlement Outside of Australia's Capital Cities. *Population, Space and Place*, 14, 553-571.
- Hugo, G. (2009). Best practice in temporary labour migration for development: A perspective from Asia and the Pacific. *International migration*, 47(5), 23-74.
- Ife, J. J. W. (2002). *Community Development: community-based alternatives in an age of globalisation*. Frenchs Forest, N.S.W.: Pearson Education Australia.
- Jaafar, J., & Jaber, M. Y. (2011). Online communities as a medium for social capital and social integration : the case of Malaysia. In M. Lobo, V. Marotta & N. Oke (Eds.), *Intercultural relations in a global world*. Champaign, Illinois: Common Ground Publishing.

- Jakubowicz, A. (1986). Ethnicity, multiculturalism and neo-conservatism. In G. Bottomley & M. De Lepervanche (Eds.), *Ethnicity, Class and Gender in Australia*. Sydney: Allen and Unwin Australia Pty Ltd.
- Jakubowicz, A. (2002, 9 May 2002). Hot terms keep debate on the boil - The Cultural Divide. *The Australian*. Retrieved from <http://0-search.proquest.com.library.vu.edu.au/docview/357800342?accountid=14844>
- Jenkins, R., & Parker, G. (1987). Organisational politics and the recruitment of black workers. In G. Lee & R. Loveridge (Eds.), *The Manufacture of Disadvantage: Stigma and Social Closure* (pp. 58-70). England, UK: Open University Press.
- Johnson, J. M. (2001). In-Depth Interviewing. In J. F. Gubrium & J. A. Holstein (Eds.), *Handbook of Interview Research: Context and Method*. Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications.
- Jung, M.-K. (2006). Racialization in the Age of Empire: Japanese and Filipino Labor in Colonial Hawaii. *Critical Sociology*, 32(2-3), 403-424.
- Jupp, J. (2002). *From White Australia to Woomera: The Story of Australian Immigration*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.
- Kalantzis, M., & Cope, B. (1984). Multiculturalism and education policy. In G. Bottomley & M. de Lepervanche (Eds.), *Ethnicity, Class and Gender in Australia*. Sydney: Allen & Unwin Australia Pty Ltd.
- Kanska, M. (2007). Resettlement of Karen Refugees: the Creation of Karen Transnationalism and its Limitations - A Minor Field Study May-July 2007: University of Lund.
- Kelley, J., & McAllister, I. (1984). Immigrants, socio-economic attainment, and politics in Australia. *The British Journal of Sociology*, 35(3), 387-405.
- Kelly, P. F. (2010). Filipino migration and the spatialities of labour market subordination. In S. McGrath-Champ, A. Herod, & A. Rainnie (Eds.), *Handbook of Employment and Society: Working Space* (pp. 159-176).
- Koleth, E. (2010). Multiculturalism: a review of Australian policy statements and recent debates in Australia and overseas. Canberra: Parliamentary Library.
- Kraut, R., Kiesler, S., Boneva, B., Cummings, J., Helgeson, V., & Crawford, A. (2002). Internet Paradox Revisited. *Journal of Social Issues*, 58(1), 49-74.
- Lee, G. (1987). Implications of the Social Construction of Stigma. The Principle, Policy and Practice of Equal Opportunity. In G. Lee & R. Loveridge (Eds.), *The*

- Manufacture of Disadvantage: Stigma and Social Closure*. Milton Keynes: Open University Press.
- Leser, D. (1996, 30 November 1996). Pauline Hanson's bitter harvest;: [Late Edition]. *Sydney Morning Herald*, p. 18. Retrieved from <http://0-search.proquest.com.library.vu.edu.au/docview/363317455?accountid=14844>
- Levitas, R. (1998). *The Inclusive Society? Social Exclusion and New Labour*. London, UK: Macmillan Press.
- Liamputtong, P. (2010). *Performing Qualitative Cross-Cultural Research*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Limpangog, C. P. (2011). *Moving Identities: The lived experiences of skilled Filipino women immigrants in Melbourne*. (Doctor of Philosophy Ph.D.), The University of Melbourne, Melbourne.
- Lincoln, Y. S., & Guba, E. G. (1985). *Naturalistic Inquiry*. Beverly Hills, CA: Sage Publications.
- Litoselliti, L. (2003). *Using Focus Groups in Research*. London: Continuum.
- Lobo, M. (2010). Interethnic Understanding and Belonging in Suburban Melbourne. *Urban Policy and Research*, 28(1), 85-99.
- Lobo, M., Marotta, V., & Oke, N. (2011). Intercultural relations in a global and transnational world. In M. Lobo, V. Marotta & N. Oke (Eds.), *Intercultural relations in a global world*. Champaign, Illinois: Common Ground Publishing.
- Lofland, J., & Lofland, L. H. (1995). *Analyzing Social Settings: a guide to qualitative observation and analysis*. Belmont, California: Wadsworth.
- Lopez, M. (2000). *The Origins of Multiculturalism in Australian Politics 1945-1975*. Melbourne: Melbourne University Press.
- Loveridge, R. (1987). Stigma: The Manufacture of Disadvantage. In G. Lee & R. Loveridge (Eds.), *The Manufacture of Disadvantage: Stigma and Social Closure*. Milton Keynes, England; Philadelphia, USA: Open University Press.
- MacIntyre, A. (1981). *After Virtue*. Notre Dame, Ind.: University of Notre Dame Press.
- Magazine, F. (2013). The Philippines' 50 Richest. Retrieved 25 August, 2014, from <http://www.forbes.com/philippines-billionaires/list/>

- Marotta, V. (2011). Interculturalism and cross-cultural contact - The idea of the in-between subject in social and cultural thought. In M. Lobo, V. Marotta & N. Oke (Eds.), *Intercultural relations in a global world*. Champaign, Illinois: Common Ground Publishing.
- Marvasti, A. B. (2004). *Qualitative Research in Sociology*. London: Sage Publications.
- Mascitelli, B., & O'Mahony, G. B. (2014). Australia in the Asian Century - A Critique of the White Paper *Australasian Journal of Regional Studies*, 20(3), 540-566.
- Mason, D. (2000). *Race and Ethnicity in Modern Britain*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Mays, V. M., Cochran, S. D., & Barnes, N. W. (2007). Race, Race-Based Discrimination, and Health Outcomes Among African Americans. *Annual Review of Psychology*, 58(1), 201-225.
- Mazzucato, V. (2010). Operationalising transnational migrant networks through a simultaneous matched sample methodology. In R. Baubock & T. Faist (Eds.), *Diaspora and Transnationalism: Concepts, Theories and Methods*. Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press.
- McKay, S. L., & Wong, S. C. (Eds.). (1988). *Language Diversity: Problem or Resource*. New York: Newbury House.
- McVittie, C., & Goodall, K. (2009). Harry, Paul and the Filipino Maid. *Journal of Health Psychology*, 14(5), 651-654. doi: 10.1177/1359105309104906
- Mesch, G. S., Turjeman, H., & Fishman, G. (2008). Perceived Discrimination and the Well-Being of Immigrant Adolescents. *Journal of Youth and Adolescence*, 37(5), 592-604.
- Migliorino, P. (2012). A Call for an Equal Playing Field for Australia's Diverse Communities. *Equality Law Reform Project*. Retrieved 15 May, 2013, from <http://www.equalitylaw.org.au/elrp-guest-blogs/a-call-for-an-equal-playing-field-for-australia-s-diverse-communities>
- Mishler, E. G. (1986). *Research Interviewing: Context and Narrative*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.
- Modood, T., Berthoud, R., Lakey, J., Nazroo, J. Y., Smith, P., Virdee, S., & Beishon, S. (1997). *Ethnic Minorities in Britain: Diversity and Disadvantage*. London: Policy Studies Institute.

- Morgan, L. (2011). Paki on-a-bike: negotiating the racialised terrains of Britain and Australia. In M. Lobo, V. Marotta & N. Oke (Eds.), *Intercultural relations in a global world*. Champaign, Illinois: Common Ground Publishing.
- Muggah, R. (2011). A Unified Approach to Conceptualising Resettlement. In K. Koser & S. Martin (Eds.), *The Migration-Displacement Nexus: Patterns, Processes, and Policies* (Vol. 32). University of Oxford: Berghahn Books.
- Murphy, R. (1988). *Social closure: the theory of monopolization and exclusion*. New York, USA: Oxford University Press.
- Nelms, L., & Tsingas, C. (2010). Literature review on social inclusion and its relationship to minimum wages and workforce participation. In F. W. Australia (Ed.), *Research Report 2/2010*. Canberra: Commonwealth of Australia
- Nguyen, M. T. (2012). *The Gift of Freedom: War, Debt and Other Refugee Passages*. London, UK: Duke University Press.
- Norris, P. (2003). The Bridging and Bonding Role of Online Communities. In P. N. Howard & S. Jones (Eds.), *Society Online: The Internet in Context*. Thousand Oaks, California, USA: Sage.
- Oishi, N. (2005). *Women in motion: Globalization, state policies and labor migration in Asia* Stanford University Press.
- Okamura, J. Y. (2010). From running amok to eating dogs: a century of misrepresenting Filipino Americans in Hawaii. *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, 33(3), 496-514.
- Olwig, K. F. (1998). Epilogue: Contested Homes: Home-making and the Making of Anthropology. In N. Rapport & A. Dawson (Eds.), *Migrants of Identity: Perceptions of Home in a World of Movement* (pp. 225-236). Oxford, UK: Berg.
- Paine, R. (1992). The Marabar Caves, 1920-2020. In S. Wallman (Ed.), *Contemporary Futures*. London: Routledge.
- Papastergiadis, N. (2000). *The Turbulence of Migration: Globalization, Deterritorialization and Hybridity*. Cambridge, UK: Polity Press.
- Parkin, F. (1974). Strategies of Social Closure in Class Formation. In F. Parkin (Ed.), *The Social Analysis of Class Structure* (pp. 1-18). London, UK: Tavistock Publications.
- Parkin, F. (1979). *Marxism and Class Theory: A Bourgeois Critique*. London: Tavistock.
- Patchirat, T. (2009). The Political in Political Ethnography: Dispatches from the Kill Floor.



- Patterson, W. (2008). Narratives of events: Labovian narrative analysis and its limitations. In M. Andrews, C. Squire & M. Tamboukou (Eds.), *Doing Narrative Research*. London: Sage Publications.
- Pecoud, A., & de Guchteneire, P. (2007). Introduction: the migration without borders scenario. In A. Pecoud & P. de Guchteneire (Eds.), *Migration Without Borders: Essays on the Free Movement of People*. New York: Berghahn.
- Phan, Z., & Lewis, D. (2010). *Undaunted: My Struggle for Freedom and Survival in Burma*. New York: Free Press.
- Phillips, J., & Spinks, H. (2013). Boat Arrivals in Australia Since 1976. Retrieved 7 November, 2015, from [http://www.aph.gov.au/About\\_Parliament/Parliamentary\\_Departments/Parliamentary\\_Library/pubs/rp/rp1314/BoatArrivals](http://www.aph.gov.au/About_Parliament/Parliamentary_Departments/Parliamentary_Library/pubs/rp/rp1314/BoatArrivals)
- Phoenix, A. (2008). Analysing Narrative Contexts. In M. Andrews, C. Squire & M. Tamboukou (Eds.), *Doing Narrative Research*. London: Sage Publications.
- Pilkington, A. (2003). *Racial Disadvantage and Ethnic Diversity in Britain*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Putnam, R. D. (2000). *Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community*. New York: Simon & Schuster Paperbacks.
- Ratcliffe, P. (2000). Is the Assertion of Minority Identity Compatible with the Idea of a Socially Inclusive Society? In P. Askonas & A. Stewart (Eds.), *Social Inclusion: Possibilities and Tensions*. London: Macmillan Press.
- Ratcliffe, P. (2004). *'Race', Ethnicity and Difference: Imagining the Inclusive Society*. Berkshire, England, UK; New York, USA: Open University Press.
- Reitman, M. (2006). Uncovering the white place: whitewashing at work. *Social and Cultural Geography*, 7, 267-282.
- Riessman, C. K. (2008). *Narrative Methods for the Human Sciences*. Los Angeles: Sage Publications.
- Rizvi, F. (1996). Racism, reorientation and the cultural politics of Asia-Australia relations. In E. Vasta & S. Castles (Eds.), *The Teeth Are Smiling: The persistence of racism in multicultural Australia* (pp. 173-188). St Leonards, NSW, Australia: Allen & Unwin
- Robinson, P. (2000). Employment and Social Inclusion. In P. Askonas & A. Stewart (Eds.), *Social Inclusion: Possibilities and Tensions*. London: Macmillan Press.

- Roscigno, V. J., Garcia, L. M., & Bobbitt-Zeher, D. (2007). Social Closure and Processes of Race/Sex Employment Discrimination. *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, 609(Race, Ethnicity, and Inequality in the U.S. Labor Market: Critical Issues in the New Millenium ), 16-48.
- Rushdie, S. (1992). *Imaginary homelands : essays and criticism 1981-1991*. London: Granta in association with Peguin.
- Russell, B. (1960). *Power: A New Social Analysis*. London: Unwin Books.
- Ryen, A. (2001). Cross-cultural Interviewing. In J. F. Gubrium & J. A. Holstein (Eds.), *Handbook of Interview Research: Context and Method*. California, U.S.A.: Sage Publications, Inc.
- Said, E. W. (1993). *Culture and imperialism*. London: Chatto and Windus.
- Said, E. W. (2003). *Orientalism*. London: Penguin Books Ltd.
- Sarangi, S. (1996). Conflation of Institutional and Cultural Stereotyping in Asian Migrants' Discourse. *Discourse & Society*, 7(3), 359-387. Retrieved from <http://das.sagepub.com/content/7/3/359> website:
- Sarup, M. (1994). Home and identity. In G. Robertson, M. Mash, L. Tickner, J. Bird, B. Curtis & T. Putnam (Eds.), *Traveller's Tales: Narratives of home and displacement*. London, UK: Routledge.
- Savage, S., Meade, L., & Taket, A. (2007). *Corio and Norlane neighbourhood renewal community survey 2007*. Geelong, Victoria: Deakin University and Department of Human Services.
- Schierup, C.-U., & Alund, A. (2010). Beyond Liberal Pluralism: Migration and Politics of Exclusion in Europe. *Themes on Migration and Ethnic Studies*, 32.
- Scott, J., & Marshall, G. (Eds.). (2009) *Oxford Dictionary of Sociology*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Sennett, R. (1998). *The Corrosion of Character: The Personal Consequences of Work in the New Capitalism*. New York: W. W. Norton & Company.
- Sennett, R. (2000). Work and Social Inclusion. In P. Askonas & A. Stewart (Eds.), *Social Inclusion: Possibilities and Tensions*. London, UK: Macmillan Press.
- Sennett, R. (2003). *Respect: The Formation of Character in a World of Inequality*. London: Penguin Books.

- Sennett, R. (2012). *Together: The Rituals, Pleasures and Politics of Cooperation*. London: Penguin Books.
- Silver, H. (1994). Social Exclusion and Social Solidarity: Three Paradigms. *International Labour Review*, 133(5-6), 531-578.
- Silverman, D. (1997). *Qualitative Research: Theory, Method and Practice*. London: Sage
- Singh, R. (2007). *The Experiences of Young Karen People Living in Melbourne*. (Bachelor of Social Work, Hons. Honours Type), Victoria University, Melbourne.
- Smith, F. (2002). The forgotten war. *Correspondent*.  
<http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/programmes/correspondent/2151458.stm>
- Smith, Y. J. (2010). *They Bring Their Memories With Them: Somali Bantu Resettlement in a Globalized World*. (Doctor of Philosophy), The University of Utah, Utah.
- Squire, C., Andrews, M., & Tamboukou, M. (2008). What is Narrative Research? In M. Andrews, C. Squire & M. Tamboukou (Eds.), *Doing Narrative Research*. London: Sage Publications.
- Statistics, A. B. o. (2007). *Key Economic Indicators*. Retrieved from  
<http://www.abs.gov.au/AUSSTATS/abs@.nsf/mf/1345.0?opendocument?opendoc ument#from-banner=LN>.
- Statistics, A. B. o. (2012). 2011 Quickstats Country of Birth. Retrieved 12 May 2013;  
<http://www.abs.gov.au/ausstats/abs@.nsf/Lookup/2071.0main+features902012-2013>.
- Statistics, A. B. o. (2013). 2011 QuickStats Country of Birth: People in Australia who were born in Philippines. Retrieved 25 December 2014;  
[http://www.censusdata.abs.gov.au/census\\_services/getproduct/census/2011/quickstat/5204\\_0](http://www.censusdata.abs.gov.au/census_services/getproduct/census/2011/quickstat/5204_0).
- Statistics, A. B. o. (2014). Retrenchments. Retrieved 25 August, 2014, from  
<http://www.abs.gov.au/ausstats/abs@.nsf/Lookup/8C13D89B985E36D0CA257D0E001AC312>
- Stock, F. (2010). Home and Memory. In K. Knott & S. McLoughlin (Eds.), *Diasporas: Concepts, Intersections, Identities* (pp. 24-28). London, UK; New York, USA: Zed Books.
- Stratton, J. (2011). *Uncertain Lives: Culture, Race and Neoliberalism in Australia*. Tyne, United Kingdom: Cambridge Scholars Publishing.

- Strauss, A., & Corbin, J. (Eds.). (1997). *Grounded Theory in Practice*. Thousand Oaks, California: SAGE Publications, Inc.
- Stromquist, N. P. (2002). *Education in a Globalized World: The Connectivity of Economic Power, Technology, and Knowledge*. Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc.
- Sullivan, L. E. (Ed.) (2009) *The SAGE Glossary of the Social and Behavioral Sciences*.
- Sydney, U. o. W. (2011). National Challenging Racism Project. Retrieved 2 Nov 2011; [http://uws.edu.au/\\_\\_data/assets/pdf\\_file/0009/174294/VIC\\_Characterisations.pdf#VIC11](http://uws.edu.au/__data/assets/pdf_file/0009/174294/VIC_Characterisations.pdf#VIC11).
- Tan, C. (2006). The Tyranny of Appearance: Chinese Australian Identities and the Politics of Difference. *Journal of Intercultural Studies*, 27(1-2), 65-82.
- Tascon, S. M. (2008). Social Inclusion of Refugee Families and Children: Examples from Arts Programs in Melbourne. *Migration Action*, (2), 23-27. <<http://0-search.informit.com.au.library.vu.edu.au/documentSummary;dn=471519691683040;res=IELBUS>>
- Tator, C., & Henry, F. (2006). *Racial profiling in Canada: challenging the myth of "a few bad apples"*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press.
- Teaching, V. I. o. (2014). "Overseas Qualified Teacher." Retrieved 26 November, 2014, from <http://www.vit.vic.edu.au/registration/apply-for-registration/Pages/OverseasQual.aspx>.
- Tedlock, B. (2000). Ethnography and Ethnographic Representation. In N. K. Denzin & Y. S. Lincoln (Eds.), *Handbook of Qualitative Research* (2nd ed.). Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications.
- Terry, L. (2007). Nationalist Posturing and the Demise of Australian Multiculturalism in a Time of Turbulence. *Journal of Pacific and American Studies*, 91-107.
- Timmermans, S., & Tavory, I. (2007). Advancing Ethnographic Research through Grounded Theory Practice. In A. Bryant & K. Charmaz (Eds.), *The SAGE Handbook of Grounded Theory* (pp. 493-512). London, UK: SAGE Publications Ltd.
- Van Alstyne, M., & Bulkley, N. (2004). Why Information Should Influence Productivity. In M. Castells (Ed.), *The Network Society: A Cross-cultural Perspective* (pp. 145-173). Cheltenham, UK; Massachusetts, USA: Edward Elgar Publishing.

- Van Hear, N. (2010). Migration. In K. Knott & S. McLoughlin (Eds.), *Diasporas: Concepts, Intersections, Identities* (pp. 34-38). London, UK: Zed Books.
- Vasta, E., & Castles, S. (Eds.). (1996). *The teeth are smiling: The persistence of racism in multicultural Australia*. St. Leonards, NSW: Allen & Unwin Pty Ltd.
- Vertovec, S. (2007). Super-diversity and its implications. *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, 30(6), 1024-1054.
- (VicHealth), V. H. P. F. (2008). Ethnic and race-based discrimination: as a determinant of mental health and wellbeing.
- Victoria, R. E. I. o. (2014). 3 bedroom houses, median rent by suburb, 12 months ending September 2014. Retrieved 12 December, 2014, from <http://www.reiv.com.au/Property-Research/Rental-Data/Median-rents-by-suburb/3-bedroom-houses>
- Vinson, T. (2007). *Dropping off the edge: the distribution of disadvantage in Australia*. Melbourne; Canberra: Jesuit Social Services; Catholic Social Services Australia.
- Vinson, T. (2009). *The Origins, Meaning, Definition and Economic Implications of the Concept Social Inclusion/Exclusion*. Canberra: Commonwealth of Australia.
- Wagner, R., & Childs, M. (2006). Exclusionary narratives as barriers to recognition of qualifications, skills and experience - a case of skilled migrants in Australia *Studies in Continuing Education*, 28(1), 49-62.
- Wallman, S. (1998). New Identities and the Local Factor - or When is Home in Town a Good Move? In N. Rapport & A. Dawson (Eds.), *Migrants of Identity: Perceptions of Home in a World of Movement* (pp. 181-205). Oxford, UK: Berg.
- Warren, C. A. B. (2001). Qualitative Interviewing. In J. F. Gubrium & J. A. Holstein (Eds.), *Handbook of Interview Research: Context and Method*. Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications.
- Waters, M. (1995). *Globalization*. London: Routledge.
- Webster, J. P., & John, T. A. (2010). Preserving a space for cross-cultural collaborations: an account of insider/outsider issues. *Ethnography and Education*, 5(2), 175-191.
- Wertz, F. J., Charmaz, K., McMullen, L. M., Josselson, R., Anderson, R., & McSpadden, E. (2011). *Five Ways of Doing Qualitative Analysis*. New York: The Guilford Press.

- Wessler, S. L., & De Andrade, L. L. (2006). Slurs, Stereotypes, and Student Interventions: Examining the Dynamics, Impact, and Prevention of Harassment in Middle and High School. *Journal of Social Issues*, 62(3), 511-532.
- Williams, D. R., & Williams-Morris, R. (2000). Racism and Mental Health: the African American experience. *Ethnicity and Health*, 5(3/4), 243-268.
- Williams, L. (2010). *Global Marriage: Cross-Border Marriage Migration in Global Context*. Basingstoke, Hampshire, England: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Willis, P. (2000). *The Ethnographic Imagination*. Cambridge, UK: Polity Press.
- Witz, A. (1992). *Professions and Patriarchy*. London, UK; New York, USA: Routledge.
- Woelz-Stirling, N., Manderson, L., Kelaher, M., & Gordon, S. (2000). Marital conflict and finances among Filipinas in Australia. *International Journal of Intercultural Relations*, 24(6), 791-805.
- Worland, S. (2010). *Displaced and Misplaced or Just Displaced: Christian Displaced Karen Identity after Sixty Years of War in Burma*. (Doctor of Philosophy PhD Thesis), The University of Queensland. Retrieved from <http://espace.library.uq.edu.au/view/UQ:218907>
- Ying, Y.-W., & Han, M. (2007). The Effect of Intergenerational Conflict and School-Based Racial Discrimination on Depression and Academic Achievement in Filipino American Adolescents. *Journal of Immigrant and Refugee Studies*, 4(4), 19-35.
- Zubiri, R. G., Esmaguél, A. Z., D'Mello, A. T., & Wilks, A. B. (2010). *The Filipinos in Victoria*. Melbourne: Filipino Community Council of Victoria Inc.

## **APPENDICES**

### **Appendix 1: In-Depth Interview Guidelines**

1. Can you talk about your first impressions/feelings/opinions about Australia (in detail) and how you came to be in Geelong? Did you feel welcomed? How were you treated as an immigrant from the Philippines/Burma?
2. Can you talk about your experiences of living in Geelong (e.g. dealing with public transport, going to schools, shopping, finding accommodation, withdrawing money and pay your bills)? What are the differences between living in an Australian suburb and the original home/local community/family?
3. Can you talk about your experiences of accessing with a range of government services (e.g. getting a driver's licence, visiting a GP for health concerns, availing education and training to improve your qualification and job prospects, and housing assistance? Do you feel you were being given enough information about government services? What obstacles did you encounter in accessing these services?
4. Can you talk about those experiences of building friends and networks in your own community (e.g. attending community meetings, events, and special occasions)? Can you talk about your experiences in expanding your friends and networks outside your own community (e.g. participating in neighbourhood activities)?
5. Can you talk about your experiences of seeking work in Australia?
6. Can you talk about your experiences in the workplace – type of work, the conditions and how you deal with co-workers and supervisors?

7. Do you feel homesick? How do you maintain connections with your country of origin? Can you see yourself staying in Australia for good or are you thinking of going back home? Are you worse off here in Australia than staying in your country of origin?
8. In general, how do you find living in Geelong (compared to Melbourne)? How do you see your current situation in Australia? How do you perceive your present overall condition and wellbeing and what is your overall outlook for the future?

## Appendix 2. Focus Group Discussion Guidelines

1. How do you feel about accessing government services? Do you have a say with issues of community importance? Do you feel you are being heard in expressing these issues?
2. What obstacles did you encounter of living with Australia's mainstream social institutions such as with getting a job, accessing good education, health and housing assistance?
3. Do you participate in Filipino/Karen/Karenni community activities that promote togetherness and closeness within the community? In what ways do you participate? Have you established networks outside your own community?
4. Tell us about how do you establish communication and maintain connection with relatives and friends left at home (in the Philippines or Burma) or elsewhere?
5. How do you find your overall migration and re/settlement experiences in the Geelong region?