

School of Psychology

**The phenomenon of the refugee experience in
Western Australia: A grounded theory study**

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Doctor of Philosophy
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DECLARATION

To the best of my knowledge and belief this thesis contains no material previously published by any other person except where due acknowledgement has been made. This thesis contains no material which has been accepted for the award of any other degree or diploma in any university.

Signed: _____

Date: 16.6.2008

ABSTRACT

There have been studies worldwide that involved the exploration of numerous key aspects of the refugee experience in terms of psychopathology, adaptation, national identity development, help-seeking process, etc. However, these studies have not involved the examination of the refugee experience in its entirety from the emic perspective of the refugees. Therefore, I adopted the qualitative grounded theory method with the aim of generating a substantive theory of the refugee experience. I collected data through semi-structured, open-ended in-depth formal and informal interviews with refugees in Western Australia, and through the examination of literature, multicultural policy documents, and newspaper articles. Seventeen refugee participants, aged between 18 and 63 years, were obtained through purposeful and theoretical sampling methods. All interviews were conducted in English. I applied the constant comparative method of data analysis to gather, code, and analyse data. The management of data was facilitated by using NUD.IST. The analysis of the data resulted in the identification of the basic social psychological problem experienced by all refugees. This is labelled *self-environment incongruity* (SEI) which refers to the misfit between refugees and their environment while they are in their homeland, in a transition place away from their homes, and in Australia. The basic social psychological process adopted by refugees to deal with their SEI is identified as *adapting to minimise SEI*. The process of *adapting* involves five stages: (1) Coming to terms with the past, (2) Maintaining self-identity, (3) Rebuilding a new life, (4) Integrating perspectives and balancing identities, and (5) Consolidating identity towards a new life. Conditions that influence the process of *adapting* are identified as length of residence in Australia, age of arrival in Australia, the presence of an established ethnic community, social and psychological support, financial support, and intervening major life events. Personal factors that influence the refugees' process of *adapting* are identified as preparedness, the presence of trauma, resilience, and motivation. The development of this substantive theory labelled "Adapting to Minimise SEI" has several implications for mental health counselling, education, government policy changes, and ongoing research.

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DEDICATION

To the loving memory of my father, Swee-Leong Lee, who very much anticipated this thesis but did not see its completion.

This is for you, dad.

"I have no doubt that questions have their own magic, their own charm, and their own immortality."

"Whoever survives a test, whatever it may be, must tell the story. That is his duty."

*Elie Wiesel
child survivor of the Holocaust
winner of 1986 Nobel Peace Prize*

"Ye are the flowers of one garden, the waves of one sea, the leaves of one tree."

*Abdu'l-Baha
On the Oneness of Humanity*

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY

1.1 OVERVIEW OF THE THESIS

This thesis is presented in six chapters. Chapter One comprises the introduction and a cursory review of the literature on the refugee experience. It includes the rationale for the study in which the deficits in research in this area are identified. The research purpose and objectives are then presented. In Chapter Two, the grounded theory method used to address the research objectives is described. Chapter Three involves a detailed description of the basic social psychological problem experienced by the refugees in this study. Chapter Four comprises the description of the basic social psychological process used by the refugees to deal with their basic social psychological problem. In Chapter Five, the influencing conditions and personal factors that facilitated and inhibited the basic social psychological process are examined. In Chapter Six, comparisons of the generated substantive theory are made with other related theories and research findings. This is followed by a discussion of the limitations of the study. Finally, implications of the findings for mental health counselling, education, government policy changes, and ongoing research are addressed.

1.2 INTRODUCTION

There has been growing worldwide concern for the plight of millions of refugees who are suffering the disturbing consequences of modern warfare and other forms of socio-political upheaval. The influx of asylum seekers and refugee groups worldwide has raised many issues, which include the provision of appropriate services in countries that have traditionally been the host or receiving countries such as Australia. According to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees' (UNHCR) report in March 2007, more than 675,000 refugees and people of humanitarian concern have resettled in Australia since the end of World War II. According to the latest annual report of the Refugee Council of Australia (2006b), of the 13,000 places allocated in Australia's Humanitarian Program for 2005-2006, 6,000 were for refugees, 6,400 were Special Humanitarian Program places, and 600 were nominal onshore places. The proportion of refugees from Africa dropped to 61% of the total, while there was an increased intake

from the Middle East and South West Asia (Refugee Council of Australia, 2006b). The Refugee Council of Australia (2006a) recommended that the offshore program be increased to 14,000 in 2006-2007. The regional priorities for the program in 2006-2007 have been established at 50% for Africa, 30% for the Middle East and South West Asia, and 20% for Asia (UNHCR, 2007). In a more recent submission to the Australian Government for 2007-2008, the Refugee Council of Australia (2007) recommended a total intake of 15,000 places for Australia's Humanitarian Program, with 7,500 allocated for refugees. As shown in the Refugee Council of Australia's figures, there are more refugees who are residing permanently in Australia now than ever before, and the number is predicted to increase. Thus, there continues to be an urgent need to provide appropriate assistance for these refugees.

Refugee and humanitarian settlers should not be regarded as comparable to other immigrants to Australia (Jupp, 1994) because they have been exposed to trauma and in many instances, torture (Carlsson, Mortensen, & Kastrup, 2006; Holtz, 1998; Hooberman, Rosenfeld, Lhewa, Rasmussen, & Keller, 2007). As refugees have lived in refugee camps for an extended period of time, their normal lives have been destroyed. Refugees are likely to have fewer English skills (and other skills) and face long-term unemployment. It was shown in the Census birthplace data and visa information collected by the Department of Immigration and Ethnic Affairs (DIEA) that a large percentage of refugees has little education and poor skills, although the education of many is above the Australian average (Jupp, 1994). According to the Refugee Council of Australia (n.d.), refugees are forced to leave their homeland because of their fear of being persecuted. They seldom have the opportunity to plan for their departure, for instance, to pack their possessions and to bid farewell to families and friends. Some refugees have escaped without notice, taking only the clothes they are wearing. They have little knowledge about Australia and thus cannot prepare themselves psychologically or physically for their new lives here. In contrast, other immigrants make a conscious decision to come to Australia. They have the opportunity to read about Australia and increase their understanding of the country from friends and families. They can also study English and explore job opportunities before deciding to move. These voluntary immigrants are able to prepare themselves for a life in Australia. They

can return to their homeland any time if their plans do not work out or if they feel homesick (Refugee Council of Australia, n.d.). Understandably, refugees who arrive in Australia under the aforementioned circumstances can be at risk of developing mental health problems (Bauer & Priebe, 1994; Beiser & Hyman, 1997; Mghir, Freed, Raskin, & Katon, 1995; Santos, 2006; Tousignant, 1997). The increased concern for the refugees' well-being has been accompanied by the burgeoning of worldwide research on various refugee groups. In keeping with this, the mental health concerns and social needs of refugees in Australia have been the major impetus for this study.

Studies of refugees have been typically conducted in countries that receive refugees, including the United States (e.g., Birman & Tyler, 1994; Wong et al., 2006), Canada (e.g., Beiser & Hyman, 1997; Dorais, 1991; Lamba, 2003), Norway (e.g., Dybdahl, Christie, & Eid, 2006; Fangen, 2006; Sveaass & Johansen, 2006), the United Kingdom (e.g., Kohli & Mather, 2003; Robinson & Coleman, 2000), Sweden (e.g., Ekblad, Abazari, & Eriksson, 1999; Wallin & Ahlstrom, 2005), Australia (e.g., Allotey, 1998; Rosenthal, Ranieri, & Klimidis, 1996), New Zealand (e.g., Cheung, 1995; Cheung & Spears, 1995), South Africa (e.g., Ley, 2006), Denmark (e.g., Zand, 2006), Finland (e.g., Liebkind, 1996), Germany (e.g., Gabel, Ruf, Schauer, Odenwald, & Neuner, 2006), and the Netherlands (e.g., Feldmann, Bensing, & de Ruijter, 2007; Gerritsen et al., 2006). Refugees from diverse ethnocultural backgrounds have been the participants of these studies. These ethnic refugee groups include Oromos (e.g., Halcon et al., 2004; Jaranson et al., 2004; Robertson et al., 2006), Cambodians (e.g., Clarke, Sack, & Goff, 1993; Hinton, Pich, Safren, Pollack, & McNally, 2006; Kinzie, Sack, Angell, Manson, & Rath, 1986; Sack, Angell, Kinzie, & Rath, 1986), Miens (e.g., Rungruangkonkit, 2007), Central Americans such as Hispanics (e.g., Merali, 2004, 2005), Vietnamese (e.g., Chan, 1987; Desbarats, 1980; Jenkins, Le, McPhee, Stewart, & Ha, 1996; Smith Fawzi et al., 1997; Tran, 1987), Croatians (e.g., Naumowicz, 2000), Bosnians (e.g., Fitzpatrick, 2002), Somalis (e.g., Ellis, Lhewa, Charney, & Cabral, 2006), Afghans (e.g., Feldmann, Bensing, de Ruijter, & Boeijs, 2007), Eritreans (e.g., Hughes, 1999), and Estonians (e.g., Tammeveski, 2003).

Research on refugees to date has been conducted across numerous disciplines, including social work (e.g., Briskman & Cemlyn, 2005; Butler, 2007; Fong, 2004), public health (e.g., Lamott, 2005; Marshall et al., 2006), nursing (e.g., Drennan & Joseph, 2005; Robertson et al., 2006), sociology (e.g., Kelly, 2003; Simich, 2003), psychiatry (e.g., Allotey, 2005; Bauer & Priebe, 1994), clinical psychology (e.g., Hsu, Davies, & Hansen, 2004; Powell, Rosner, Butollo, Tedeschi, & Calhoun, 2003), social psychology (e.g., Celano & Tyler, 1991), community psychology (e.g., Goodkind & Deacon, 2004; K. E. Miller, 2004), and cross-cultural psychology (e.g., Birman, 2006; Nicassio, 1985). In these disciplines, research has been conducted to explore various issues relevant to the mental health, experiences, and well-being of refugees. A cursory review of the research on refugees is presented in the following section.

1.3 CURSORY LITERATURE REVIEW ON REFUGEES

In accordance with the principles of *grounded theory* (Strauss & Corbin, 1990), an extensive literature review is not covered here because it is imperative that themes and concepts are allowed to emerge during analysis of the data. Instead, a cursory review of the literature, consistent with grounded theory studies, is presented. A grounded theory is a theory that is inductively derived from the study of the phenomenon it represents, which means that the theory is discovered, developed, and verified through systematically collecting and analysing data relating to the phenomenon (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). In order to contextualise this grounded theory study, findings from both quantitative and qualitative studies of refugees are discussed as follows.

1.3.1 REVIEW OF QUANTITATIVE RESEARCH ON REFUGEES

In this section, key aspects that have been identified from quantitative studies on refugees in the disciplines of psychology and psychiatry and are relevant to the experiences of refugees in general are described. The following domains have been key areas for researchers who explore the experiences of refugees: (1) the acculturation experience of immigrants, (2) adaptation, (3) psychopathology, and (4) the use of psychological measures and their validity in the refugee population. A cursory review of current perspectives, findings, and theories in these four domains is presented as this will

provide an overview of the major findings relevant to the refugee experience, which is the primary focus of this study.

1.3.1.1 The acculturation experience of immigrants

Upon arrival in Australia, refugees begin to interact with their new environment. This encounter can be regarded as a form of intercultural contact from which comes the refugees' experience of *acculturation*. In cross-cultural psychology, the main processes that immigrants (including refugees) experience in their new country can be represented by models of acculturation developed by Berry and his colleagues over the last three decades (Berry, 1974, 1980a, 1984, 1994, 2001, 2005; Sommerlad & Berry, 1970). In the following section, theories and research findings on immigrants' acculturation experience in terms of their acculturation strategies and cultural identity are described.

1.3.1.1.1 Acculturation strategies

According to Berry (1990), while the term *acculturation* has been defined as the process which results in population-level changes due to contact with other cultures, the term *psychological acculturation* refers to the process by which individuals change due to contact with another culture and by taking part in the overall acculturative changes under way in their culture of origin. This process encompasses some input from, and continuity with, the person's traditional psychological features (Berry, 1990). In a more recent text, Berry (2003) simply defined acculturation as the process of cultural and psychological change following intercultural contact. Theoretically, acculturation has been perceived as either unidirectional or bidirectional. When defined from the unidirectional perspective, acculturation has been equated with *assimilation*, which has been referred to as the alteration of patterns of culture to be like those of the host culture (M. M. Gordon, 1978) and as the learning of values of the host culture by a minority or immigrant group (Garcia & Lega, 1979). In the 1970s and onwards, Berry (e.g., Berry, 1974, 1980a, 1984, 1994, 2001) postulated two independent dimensions underpinning the acculturation process – the individuals' connections to their culture of origin and to the culture of their country of resettlement. To date, this two dimensional framework developed by Berry and his associates (e.g., Berry, 1980a, 1990, 1994, 1997, 2001; Berry, Kim, Minde, & Mok, 1987; Berry, Kim, Power, Young, & Bujaki, 1989; Berry &

Sam, 1997) has been regarded as the most-studied, the most influential, and the most popular psychological acculturation framework. His model has been frequently presented in acculturation literature and is depicted in Figure 1.1.

		Question 1: Is it considered to be of value to maintain cultural identity and characteristics?	
		Yes	No
Question 2: Is it considered to be of value to maintain relationships with dominant society?	Yes	Integration	Assimilation
	No	Separation	Marginalisation

Figure 1.1. Acculturation strategies (Berry & Sam, 1997, p. 296).

This bidirectional or bicultural context framework developed by Berry and his associates takes into account the issue of maintaining one's ethnic distinctiveness (question 1) and whether it is desirable to seek relationships with other ethnic groups (question 2). Each question represents a continuum, but conceptually, each is treated as a dichotomy (either "yes" or "no"), creating a fourfold model. This model involves four main strategies of acculturation; these are assimilation, integration, separation, and marginalisation (Figure 1.1). These strategies can be considered as attitudes held by acculturating individuals regarding the manner in which they wish to involve themselves with, and relate to, other individuals and groups they meet in the acculturation environment. The *assimilation* strategy is defined when individuals do not want to maintain their cultural identity and prefer to have daily interactions with other cultures. On the other hand, the *separation* strategy is chosen when individuals in the non-dominant group retain and value their own original culture and simultaneously avoid interaction with other cultures. The *integration* strategy is preferred when individuals wish to retain their cultural identity and simultaneously participate in the social networks of the larger society. Finally, *marginalisation* is defined when there is little cultural maintenance (usually due to enforced cultural loss) and little interaction with other cultures (usually due to

discrimination or exclusion). Attitudes regarding these four options and their associated behaviours make up a person's acculturation strategy (Berry & Sam, 1997).

The most recent supporting evidence for these four distinct ways of acculturating can be found in a large international study of 5,366 immigrant youth in 13 countries (Berry, Phinney, Sam, & Vedder, 2006a, 2006b). Cluster analysis was performed with a large range of variables related to the acculturation process. These variables included attitudes towards the four ways of acculturating, ethnic and national identities, the use and knowledge of ethnic and national languages, ethnic and national friendships, and family relationship values. Four distinct acculturation profiles resulted from this cluster analysis. The largest number of youth fell into the *integration* cluster, defined by a preference for integration, positive ethnic and national identities, knowledge and use of both languages, and friendships with both ethnic and national peers (Berry, 2007; Berry et al., 2006a, Phinney, Berry, Vedder, & Liebkind, 2006). This finding also replicated previous results with adult immigrants (as indicated in a review by Berry & Sam, 1997). The second largest group of youth was in the *ethnic* cluster. They were mainly oriented towards their own ethnic group whilst rejecting involvement with the national society (showing a preference for separation and a rejection of assimilation). They also had high ethnic and low national identities, with ethnic language proficiency and usage, and many ethnic peer contacts. The third group of youth fell into the *national* cluster, defined by a strong orientation towards the society in which they lived (or a preference for assimilation), a high national identity and low ethnic identity, proficiency in the national language, and predominant associations with national peers. The final group of youth fell into the *diffuse* cluster, which was not easily interpretable. They reported high proficiency and use of the ethnic language with low proficiency and use of the national language. They also had low ethnic identity and low national identity, suggestive of non-attachment to both cultural groups. They reported high contact with their ethnic peers and low contact with national peers. The youth in the diffuse cluster accepted three contradictory acculturation strategies (assimilation, separation, and marginalisation) and rejected the integration strategy. Seemingly, the youth in this cluster desired to be part of the larger society but lacked the skills to do so (Berry, 2007; Berry et al., 2006a; Phinney, Berry, Vedder, & Liebkind, 2006). It has been further suggested that the youth

in this cluster were akin to the young people portrayed in the identity development literature (e.g., Marcia, 1966, 1980, 1994) as “diffuse,” as they did not commit to a purpose in their lives (Berry et al., 2006a; Phinney, Berry, Vedder, & Liebkind, 2006).

It is noteworthy that the assumption of Berry’s bidirectional framework was that the acculturation experience of immigrants, including refugees, should fit his four category system of integration, separation, assimilation, and marginalisation. Although the results of Berry et al.’s (2006b) international study have provided support for this framework, I argue that pre-existing categories in this framework may not reflect the experiences of refugees in Australia. Furthermore, Berry’s bidirectional framework is categorical, reductionistic, and is based on a Western perspective. I further argue that the complexity of the experience of acculturation in refugees cannot be reduced to, and understood within, this simple bidirectional framework.

Notably, earlier researchers (e.g., Berry, 1970; Taft, 1977) have explored the perspectives of the non-dominant ethnocultural groups with regards to their orientation towards their own group and the other group (Figure 1.1). Berry in his later work (Berry, 2001, 2005, 2006, 2007) added a third dimension for the dominant group or the larger society. The third dimension represents the strong role of the dominant group in affecting the manner in which mutual acculturation occurs. This is necessary as the original anthropological definition of acculturation stated that *both* the nondominant ethnocultural group and the dominant group become acculturated when there is contact (Berry, 2007). The differences between intercultural contact and cultural maintenance and between the perspectives of the dominant (or the larger society) and nondominant groups (or the ethnocultural groups) are illustrated in Figure 1.2. The two main dimensions of the immigrant group on the left and the national society on the right are shown as independent of each other. For both issues 1 and 2, there is a positive orientation at one end and a negative orientation at the other, represented by bipolar arrows. The nondominant ethnocultural groups deal with the question of “How shall we deal with these two issues?” The main issue for the receiving or larger society is “How should they (the immigrants) deal with them?” (Berry, 2001, 2007). The point of view of the nondominant group, which is on the left of Figure 1.2, has been presented earlier in

Figure 1.1. The perspective of the dominant group is portrayed on the right side of Figure 1.2.

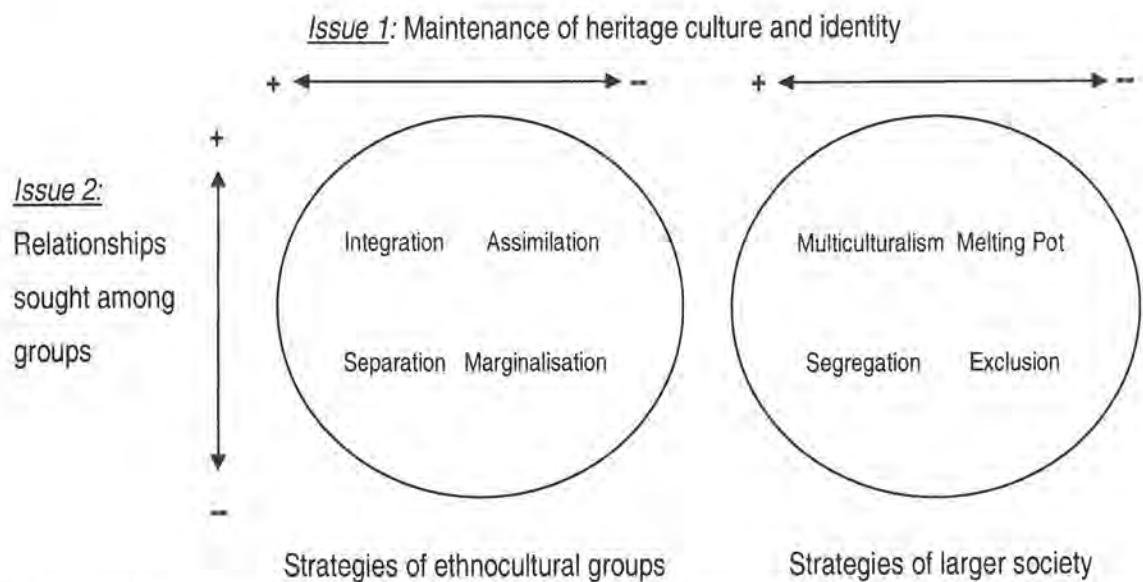


Figure 1.2. Four acculturation strategies based upon two issues, in ethnocultural groups, and the larger society (Berry, 2005, p. 705).

According to Berry (2007, p. 551), when the dominant group seeks assimilation, it is termed as a “melting pot.” However, when assimilation is demanded or powerfully enforced by the dominant group, it is termed as “pressure cooker.” “Segregation” takes place when separation is demanded and forced by the dominant group. “Exclusion” occurs when marginalisation is imposed by the dominant group. Integration is termed as “multiculturalism” when the larger society as a whole accepts cultural diversity and various ethnocultural groups (Berry, 2007, p. 551). Between 1943 and 1998, opinion polls in Australia revealed widespread support for multiculturalism (Berry et al., 2006).

It has been argued that acculturation is more than just the outcome of firsthand contact between two cultural systems. In fact, to reduce the probability of overgeneralisation and stereotyping, the study of the acculturation process should include the moderating effects of sociocultural variables which result in variations within a cultural group (Atkinson, 1983; Casas, 1985; Sue, 1983; Sue & Zane, 1987). In general, acculturation has been found to be a function of certain sociocultural and demographic variables such

as ethnicity, generational status, immigration status (voluntary immigration versus refugee immigration), religion, gender, length of residence, education, occupation, income, socioeconomic status, age of entry into host country, family structure and size, geographic locality, ethnic density of neighbourhood, and rural versus urban residence (Garcia & Lega, 1979; Le, 2005; Lee, 1998; Phinney, Berry, Sam, & Vedder, 2006; Sodowsky, Lai, & Plake, 1991; Sodowsky & Plake, 1992; Trickett & Jones, 2007). For example, length of residence has been found to be very important in understanding the acculturation experience. In a large scale study of immigrant youth described earlier (Berry et al., 2006b), it was found that the longer immigrants spend in the new society, the greater the involvement they have with their new country; this is accompanied by little change in ethnic identity over time and somewhat lower proficiency and usage of their ethnic language (Phinney et al., 2006). Depending on the effects of the sociocultural and demographic variables, the response to acculturation varies in multidimensional aspects such as language usage, perception of prejudice, maintenance of original cultural values, customs and festivals, reliance on self versus family and community, and acculturative stress (Berry et al., 2006b; Cuellar, Harris & Jasso, 1980; Sodowsky & Plake, 1992). Another important aspect in the process of acculturation is the emergence, changes, or development in the social identities of refugees. The issues that concern immigrants' identities in the new countries (in terms of their cultural, ethnic, and national identities) are described in the following section.

1.3.1.1.2 Cultural identity in immigrants including refugees

Generally, the term *identity* has been defined as the person's psychological relationship to certain social category systems (Frable, 1997). There are many types of identity in an individual. Frable (1997) highlighted the importance of considering the complexity of people's multiple social identities and described how people create and negotiate their gender, racial, ethnic, sexual, and class identities. There is an indication in the research that these identities are fluid, multidimensional, and personalised social constructions that reflect the person's present context and sociohistorical cohort (Frable, 1997). Weinreich (1986), who modified the term *identity* for application to cross-cultural psychology, defined identity as the "totality of one's self-construal, in which how one construes oneself in the present expresses the continuity between how one construes

oneself as one was in the past and how one construes oneself as one aspires to be in the future” (p. 154). According to Erikson (1968), identity formation is particularly crucial during adolescence because at this time, the child’s wants, capabilities, and beliefs are negotiated with adult norms. Here, the child’s individual identity and social identity have to be compatible in order for him or her to belong to the adult world. An achieved identity is the consequence of exploration during adolescence which results in commitment to various aspects of life such as occupation and religion (Erikson, 1968).

The exploration of ethnic identity has been central in studies of acculturation. Weinreich (1985) defined ethnic identity as “that part of the totality of one’s self-construal made up of those dimensions that express the continuity between one’s construal of past ancestry and future aspirations in relation to ethnicity” (p. 158). It has been well-established that the central components of ethnicity are ancestry, a sense of peoplehood (Dashefsky, 1976), and folklore (Dundes, 1983). In relation to the psychology of acculturation, a migrant’s ethnic identification can be referred to as the degree to which the migrant “retains the attitudes, values, beliefs, and behaviours of his or her ethnic group as his or her own” (Nesdale, Rooney, & Smith, 1997, p. 570). Weinreich (1987) explained that except for cases of the isolated migrant or the children of mixed marriages, children are likely to identify with others in their ethnic group in daily interactions at kindergarten and school. They take part in birthdays, rites of passage such as the school to employment transition, marriage, and procreation. They apply the moral rules of such activities defined by the ethnic culture they follow (Weinreich, 1987).

A related aspect of the immigrant’s identity is *cultural identity*. Berry et al. (2006b) conceptualised *cultural identity* as thoughts and feelings with respect to belonging to one’s heritage or ethnocultural group (ethnic identity) and to the dominant or larger society (national identity). It is a sense of belonging to, or attachment to, one or more cultural groups and the feelings related to group membership (Berry et al., 2006b; Kalin & Berry, 1996; Phinney, 1990). Similar to the acculturation dimension described earlier, ethnic identity and national identity are usually independent of each other (in terms of not being negatively correlated). They are also nested, that is, a person’s heritage

identity can be kept within the larger national identity (Berry, 2001). For instance, one can be a Vietnamese Australian.

Within the acculturation theory literature, there are two ethnic identity models: a linear, bipolar model (e.g., Andujo, 1988; Makabe, 1979; Ullah, 1985) and a two-dimensional model (e.g., Berry's bicultural framework of acculturation). The assumption underpinning the linear model is that as people strengthen their identity in the new culture, they tend to weaken their identity of their culture of origin, and their ethnic identity weakens with increasing acculturation. In contrast, with the two-dimensional model, the person's association with the original culture and connection with the new culture are independent dimensions (Phinney, 1990). This two-dimensional model corresponds to Berry and Sam's (1997) model on the four strategies of acculturation described earlier. However, this bicultural or bidirectional framework of acculturation developed by Berry did not go unchallenged. For instance, Persky and Birman (2005) explored the ethnic identity of 351 Russian-speaking Jewish refugees from the former Soviet Union currently residing in the United States. Using Berry's bidirectional acculturation model, the authors were only able to examine two ethnic identities, that is, Russian and American. A third aspect of Jewish identity was postulated and was found to be the most salient among the three identities (i.e., Russian, American, and Jewish). This Jewish identity was also found to be associated with feeling more comfortable in the larger American society. The authors concluded that the bicultural acculturation model devised by Berry and his colleagues might need revising to include more than two cultures in its explanatory framework. They proposed that this framework should also be expanded to involve a wider spectrum of intercultural experiences. However, Persky and Birman (2005) did not examine the change in meaning of identities due to migration and did not assess to what degree the identities change in meaning across contexts. They further suggested that qualitative methods may be adopted to address these issues, which I have endeavoured to do. In the following section, the relevance of social identity theory in studies of acculturation is addressed.

1.3.1.1.2.1 Social identity theory

Theoretically, the concept of ethnic identity emerged from *social identity theory* (Tajfel & Turner, 1979). Tajfel (1972) defined social identity as “the individual’s knowledge that he/she belongs to certain social groups together with some emotional and value significance to him/her of the group membership” (p. 31). According to Tajfel and Turner’s (1979) social identity theory, becoming a member of a group endows the person with a sense of belonging that builds a positive self-concept. In sum, it refers to self-conception as a group member (Tajfel & Turner, 1979). According to Brown and Capozza (2006), there are two underlying concepts to the social identity theory. The first concept relates to the need for self-esteem, whereby people wish to evaluate themselves and be evaluated favourably. The second concept is that through comparisons, both the value of the self and the value of the ingroup can be defined. If the ingroup is considered to be superior compared to outgroup on salient dimensions, the ingroup is positively evaluated. The need for self-esteem is therefore the main focus in the social identity process (Brown & Capozza, 2006). Self-esteem (or the sense of personal self-worth) has been largely acknowledged as the fundamental aspect of psychological functioning and is strongly associated with certain variables, such as life satisfaction and psychological health (Nesdale & Mak, 2003).

The aspect of social identity theory that has been investigated in the acculturation field is the impact of identification (including ethnic identification) on self-esteem. In general, researchers have established that a high degree of ethnic identification is positively related to self-esteem and psychological well-being (e.g., Phinney, Cantu, & Kurtz, 1997; Roberts et al., 1999). This relationship, however, was not always replicated. For example, in a study of adult Vietnamese immigrants to Australia, through the use of path analyses, it was found that ethnic identity was a significant and indirect predictor of psychological distress (Nesdale et al., 1997). Self-esteem was found to account for a large proportion of the variance of immigrant psychological health. However, ethnic identity was not strongly associated with self-esteem as ethnic identification accounted for only a small proportion of the variance of self-esteem. Nesdale et al. (1997) speculated that the relationship between ethnic identification and self-esteem is affected by the level of acceptance from members of the larger society. The authors further

argued that there is evidence that in more stigmatised groups of immigrants (who lack the acceptance of host country members), ethnic identification is less related to self-esteem (cf. Lalonde & Cameron, 1993). With time, as immigrants (including refugees) acculturate in their new country, some long-term adaptation can be achieved. The concept of adaptation relevant to the experiences of refugees is further explored in the following section.

1.3.1.2 Adaptation

Adaptation can be defined as both strategies employed during, and as a consequence of, acculturation (Berry, 1994). When assimilation or integration strategies are chosen and when the dominant culture accepts the acculturating person and the group, strengthening of the fit between the person and the new surroundings has been found. However, conflict, acculturative stress or psychopathologies often result when separation (or segregation) and marginalisation take place (Berry & Sam, 1997; Berry et al., 2006a, 2006b). In general, the acculturating person who adopts the integration strategy experiences less stress and attains better adaptation than a person who adopts the marginalisation strategy. Those who choose the assimilation and separation strategies experience intermediate stress and adaptation (Berry, 2005).

In the literature on adaptation during cross-cultural transition, a distinction is often drawn between the concepts of psychological adaptation and sociocultural adaptation (Ward, 1996, 2001; Ward & Kennedy, 1993; Ward & Searle, 1991). Good *psychological adaptation* refers to a good sense of well-being (including self-esteem and life satisfaction) or internal psychological features (such as a good sense of identity whether personal or cultural), good mental health (including few psychological problems of anxiety, depression, and psychosomatic symptoms), and having fulfillment in the new culture (Ward, 1996, 2001; Ward & Kennedy, 1993). On the other hand, *sociocultural adaptation* refers to the ability to “fit in” or negotiate interactive situations with the host culture and it involves external psychological consequences which relate the person to the new environment. This includes the person’s competence in dealing with everyday life situations, especially in areas of family, employment, and education (Ward, 1996, 2001; Ward & Kennedy, 1993). Psychological adaptation can be predicted by

personality variables, life changing events, and social support. On the other hand, sociocultural adaptation can be predicted by the level of cultural knowledge, the extent of contact, and positive intergroup attitudes (Ward, 2001).

As described in section 1.3.1.1.1, there was a recent and comprehensive international study by Berry et al. (2006a, 2006b) that involved the examination of data from 5,366 immigrant youth from diverse cultural backgrounds living in 13 countries of settlement. Evidence from this international study substantiated the theoretical distinction between psychological adaptation and sociocultural adaptation. As both psychological adaptation and sociocultural adaptation are related to the four profiles of acculturation, consistent results were revealed as follows. A strong relationship was found between how the immigrant adolescents acculturate and how well they adapt. Immigrant adolescents in the integration profile have the best outcomes, having the highest scores in both psychological and sociocultural adaptation. Immigrant adolescents in the diffuse profiles have the worst outcome; they rated lowest on both types of adaptation. Furthermore, adolescents in the ethnic cluster have moderately good psychological adaptation but poor sociocultural adaptation. Immigrant adolescents in the national cluster have moderately poor psychological adaptation and slightly poor sociocultural adaptation. These patterns can be further replicated with the use of structural equation modeling (Berry et al., 2006a). The concepts of psychological adaptation and sociocultural adaptation may be relevant to the refugee experience as refugees may face identity challenges when they encounter a different sociocultural environment in Australia. Another important aspect related to the refugee experience is the possibility that refugees have certain mental health issues.

1.3.1.3 Psychopathology

In the fields of psychology and psychiatry, researchers investigating refugees have largely focused on the refugees' psychopathology or mental health sequelae arising from the experience of being refugees (Bhui et al., 2006; A. Keller et al., 2006; Turner, Bowie, Dunn, Shapo, & Yule, 2003). According to Sack (1998), there are three main stressors encountered by refugees: (1) traumatic stress, which includes pre-migration stress and migration stress; (2) resettlement stress; and (3) intercurrent stress or stressors

arising from intervening major life events. There was an indication in the literature that traumatic stressors experienced by refugees include starvation, violence, bombing, imprisonment, torture, loss of family members, illness, escaping, enduring a lengthy relocation, and further distress arising from their uncertain residency and legal status (Becker, Beyene, & Ken, 2000; Hagan, Schoenfeld, & Palloni, 2006; Herlihy, Ferstman, & Turner, 2004; Izutsu et al., 2005; Kinzie, 2006; Marshall, Schell, Elliott, Berthold, & Chun, 2005). Sack (1998) listed the following main resettlement stressors: language use, school attendance, peer relationships, frequent family moves, familial conflict about doing things the traditional way versus the new way, strange foods, not knowing how to use the bus, discomfort with the climate, and not having access to a place of worship. Other resettlement stressors for refugee families include economic strain and poverty as well as low socioeconomic status after migrating with resulting limited vocational choices (Arroyo & Eth, 1985; Westermeyer, Vang, & Neider, 1983). According to Sack (1998), refugees continue to face intercurrent stressors (or stressors arising from intervening major life events) even after reasonable adjustment and having worked through their multiple losses. They may experience school problems, work stress, and discrimination (Sack, 1998). There was some indication in the literature that other intercurrent stressors faced by refugees include marital discord such as domestic violence (Allotey, 1998; Shiu-Thornton, Senturia, & Sullivan, 2005; Sullivan, Senturia, Negash, Shiu-Thornton, & Giday, 2005), death of a spouse (Chou, 2007), unemployment (Carlsson, Olsen, Mortensen, & Kastrup, 2006; Marshall et al., 2006), and perceived discrimination (Sedighdeilami, 2004). Although these three stressors – traumatic stress, resettlement stress, and intercurrent stress – may constitute an important part of the refugee experience, it is not clear what roles they may play in the social realities of refugees in Australia.

In a review of quantitative studies on refugees and their mental health status, Keyes (2000) stated that refugees are at risk for mental health outcomes such as posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD), depression, anxiety, psychosis, and dissociation. She cited the following reasons that made refugees a vulnerable group: the experience of trauma before and during their flight from their homeland, cultural conflicts and adjustment problems in the receiving country, and the experience of many losses (including loss of

family, community, country, and their way of life). The author further highlighted the inadequacies in the majority of current published quantitative studies on refugees in terms of a lack of diagnostic measures and culturally sensitive knowledge.

More recently, different results on the rates of psychopathology have been revealed in studies of immigrants. It was found in a recent study (Kinzie, 2006) that the rates of schizophrenia and possibly other psychopathology among immigrant groups were low compared to the native-born population when the immigrants' country of origin and the receiving country were socially and culturally alike. However, higher rates of psychopathology were found for immigrants when the immigrants' country of origin and the receiving country were socially and culturally less alike. Additionally, refugees often experience traumatic events which might lead to PTSD and chronic impairment. Asylum seekers who arrive without legal permission might have experienced multiple traumas in addition to their psychological distress regarding their residency and "illegal" status (Kinzie, 2006). This can lead to suicide and self-harm among asylum seekers, which constitute another area of concern (Dudley, 2003; Procter, 2005, 2006).

One of the most cited types of psychopathology that has been explored in the refugee population is PTSD (e.g., Almqvist & Brandell-Forsberg, 1997; Charney & Keane, 2007; Eisenbruch, 1991; Hinton et al., 2006; Kia-Keating & Ellis, 2007; Kinzie, 2006; Mghir, Freed, Raskin, & Katon, 1995; Mollica et al., 1992; Sack, Clarke, & Seeley, 1995; Smith Fawzi et al., 1997). The concept of simple PTSD was developed to capture the psychological effects of traumatic exposure. According to the fourth edition of the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorder (DSM-IV; American Psychiatric Association, 1994), four criterion symptoms must be met to diagnose PTSD. The individual must (1) have been exposed to a traumatic event, (2) repeatedly re-experience the traumatic event, (3) persistently attempt to avoid the stimuli relating to the traumatic experience or experience numbing of general responsiveness, and (4) experience persistent symptoms of increased arousal. In a review of the prevalence of serious mental disorder in 7,000 refugees who resettled in Western countries, Fazel, Wheeler, and Danesh (2005) found high variability in the prevalence of PTSD, ranging from 3% to 44%. In more rigorously designed studies with at least 200 participants, the authors

stated that the average PTSD prevalence was 9%. However, De Girolamo and McFarlane (1996) reported that out of twelve studies of refugees, half of these studies had a PTSD rate of 50% or more. Differences in prevalence rates might be attributed to the nature of the sample and the trauma, length of time since trauma, and a dearth of validated PTSD measures for refugees (Hollifield, Warner, Lian, Krakow, & Jenkis, 2002; Keane, Kaloupek, & Weathers, 1996).

Herman (1995) postulated the usage of a complex form of PTSD to capture the sequelae of prolonged and repeated trauma. The *complex PTSD* psychiatric nomenclature attempted to elucidate the multiple dynamics occurring in complicated interpersonal exploitation beyond the symptoms of PTSD. Complex PTSD has been referred to as disorders of extreme stress (DES), disorders of extreme stress not otherwise specified (DESNOS), associated features of PTSD, and complicated PTSD (Herman, 1992a, 1992b; Pelcovitz et al., 1997; van der Kolk et al., 1996). Basically, complex PTSD is a syndrome with a range of chronic symptoms consisting of seven categories. All comparisons are made relating to "alterations" prior to traumatic exposure (van der Kolk, Mandel, Pelcovitz, & Roth, 1992; van der Kolk, Pelcovitz, et al., 1992). These categories are listed as follows: alterations in affect or impulse regulation (e.g., severe anger, suicidality, risk taking); alterations in consciousness or attention (e.g., pathological dissociation); alterations in self-perception (e.g., self viewed as damaged, shamed, or misunderstood); alterations in perception of the perpetrator (e.g., distorted view of an abuse perpetrator); alterations in relationships with others (e.g., distrust, revictimisation, victimising others); somatisation (e.g., unexplained or exacerbated physical complaints); and alterations in systems of meaning (e.g., hopelessness, distorted beliefs) (Pelcovitz et al., 1997). Complex PTSD is predicted to occur when extreme traumatisation affects the basic sense of self and relational trust at critical developmental stages (Herman, 1992a; van der Kolk et al., 1996) and is therefore thought to be a set of associated features of PTSD related to interpersonal childhood trauma (Roth, Newman, Pelcovitz, van der Kolk, & Mandel, 1997).

Another type of psychopathology that has been studied in the refugee population is depression (e.g., Fenta, Hyman, & Noh, 2004; Mghir et al., 1995; Santos, 2006). In a

recent study by Tran, Manalo, and Nguyen (2007), an inverted U relationship was found between length of residence and depression in a community-based sample of Vietnamese Americans. Specifically, levels of depression in both immigrants and refugees were high in the first decade of resettlement and declined after 12.5 years. There were other studies of refugees (e.g., Beiser & Fleming, 1986; Westermeyer, Neider, & Collies, 1989) that documented the decline in levels of depression over time. On the other hand, Briggs and Macleod (2006) systematically reviewed the presence of a non-specific psychological distress found in many refugee and migrant clients in mental health services. Although many clients were categorised as having a Major Depressive Disorder, they did not improve in a treatment program. Instead, *demoralisation syndrome* was conceptualised and was postulated to be a distinct diagnostic entity that was different from affective disorders such as low mood and depression. The diagnostic criterion of *demoralisation* has been suggested to be a better concept in encapsulating distress in refugee and migrant clients (Briggs & Macleod, 2006).

Psychopathology in refugees has been found to be associated with certain physical symptoms. For example, it was found in a study on Cambodian refugees that those suffering from tinnitus had significantly higher levels of PTSD than those who did not have tinnitus (Hinton, Chhean, Pich, Hofmann, & Barlow, 2006). As well, researchers studying physical symptoms in refugees have compared different ethnic groups in terms of their presentation of certain cultural syndromes. For instance, Cambodian refugees who experienced a cultural syndrome consisting of catastrophic cognitions about gastrointestinal symptoms (leading to gastrointestinal-focused panic attacks) were found to have greater levels of psychopathology than those who did not experience this cultural syndrome (Hinton, Chhean, Fama, Pollack, & McNally, 2007). This, however, was not evident in an earlier study on Vietnamese refugees. Although the Vietnamese refugees also experienced multiple traumas, they did not have a cultural syndrome of catastrophic cognitions about gastrointestinal symptoms (Hinton et al., 2001). In another study, D. Hinton, S. Hinton, Pham, Chau, and Tran (2003) surveyed 60 Vietnamese refugees in order to phenomenologically characterise the "hit by the wind" syndrome in a multidimensional manner. The authors stated that "hit by the wind" appears to be a cultural syndrome that leads to catastrophic thoughts about certain physical sensations.

Also, episodes of “hit by the wind” frequently meet the panic attack criteria where two symptoms of bodily coldness and dizziness are involved.

Anxiety disorders have been found in the refugee population and have been previously studied (e.g., Bouwer & Stein, 1998; Hinton, Pich, et al., 2006). Researchers have also evaluated the risk of complicated grief presented in the refugee population (e.g., Momartin, Silove, Manicavasagar, & Steel, 2004b), the various types of somatisation underlying depression (e.g., Iqbal, 2006), as well as comorbid disorders such as the comorbidity of PTSD and depression (e.g., Momartin, Silove, Manicavasagar, & Steel, 2004a; Thabet, Abed, & Vostanis, 2004).

As refugees are at risk of mental health problems due to their experience of particular stressors and traumas (Keyes, 2000; A. J. Pumariega, Rothe, J. B. Pumariega, 2005), increased attention towards providing culturally sensitive services for refugees is warranted. However, although psychopathology is an important aspect of the refugee experience, Brody (1990) warned that there is a danger of assessing the migratory or refugee experience as the only factor affecting refugees’ mental health. He stated that refugees vary in their personal features and past experiences, just like any other individuals. Brody (1994) further suggested that refugees’ emotional states and their ability to adjust to their new surroundings are not only affected by the migratory experience but also by their innate biological and psychological characteristics, culturally conditioned attitudes and responses, past learning opportunities, and acquired skills. In the following section, the development of suitable measures to assess certain aspects of the refugee experience is explored.

1.3.1.4 Psychological measures and their validity in the refugee population

While Berry et al. (2006b), who conducted an international study on immigrant youth, reported results that were consistent with their previous acculturation studies (see section 1.3.1.1.1), they emphasised the necessity to further develop and evaluate measures of acculturation in order to reliably capture the construct of acculturation with all its complexity. Furthermore, with regards to Berry et al.’s (2006b) study, Phinney et al. (2006) pointed out that the variables explored and the measures applied to evaluate them

were selected from a wide range of constructs and measures. This could have affected the results that they obtained. For instance, they assessed two dimensions independently (an ethnic identity and a national identity) in order to examine cultural identity, instead of only one dimension or more than two dimensions. Thus, one of the disadvantages was that they could not explore other dimensions of cultural identity such as an identity as a member of worldwide youth culture. Phinney et al. (2006) further commented that Berry et al. (2006b) assessed four strategies of acculturation instead of its two main dimensions (of cultural maintenance and participation in the larger society); this could have led them to discover only four acculturation profiles. It is therefore possible that additional profiles might be revealed in studies that use other measures (Phinney et al., 2006).

Researchers who explore certain aspects of the refugee experience have used numerous measures or structured interview questionnaires. For example, in an electronic index to the Published International Literature on Traumatic Stress (PILOTS) Database Instruments Authority List (National Centre for PTSD, 2007), an analysis of the studies revealed numerous war-related questionnaires on issues such as family functionality, psychopathology, social support, events specific to war, and acculturation. To ascertain their validity and utility in different refugee groups, researchers often assess the psychometric properties of these measures or questionnaires after administering them to refugees from non-Western backgrounds. For instance, Palmieri, Marshall, and Schell (2007) used a confirmatory factor analysis to explore the factor structure of the Cambodian version of the Harvard Trauma Questionnaire (HTQ) in Cambodian refugees living in the United States for the last two decades. The authors found that the best fit to the data was four correlated factors related to the symptoms of re-experiencing, avoidance, emotional numbing, and hyperarousal. This was the first study which was conducted to evaluate the structure of PTSD symptoms in severely traumatised refugees after two decades of resettlement in the United States. It was also the first confirmatory factor analysis study to investigate the HTQ, which was commonly used for measuring PTSD. The authors concluded that the basic factor structure of the HTQ obtained from Cambodian refugees in the Khmer language was comparable to the measure of PTSD symptoms' severity in English speakers (Palmieri et al., 2007). However, although the

HTQ has been culturally validated as appropriate for the assessment of PTSD symptoms in Cambodian refugees, its use has yet to be validated for other refugee groups. In a recent study, Peddle (2007) evaluated the psychometric properties of the Multidimensional Trauma Recovery and Resiliency Scale (MTRR) with war-affected refugees of diverse cultures, family of origin, age, gender, and time since the war. The MTRR was found to meet reliability, validity, and utility criteria for this group of refugees. The author concluded that the MTRR could be used to reflect cultural complexity and to assess various trauma responses. As well, Ellis, Lhewan, Charney, and Cabral (2006) assessed the psychometric properties of the UCLA PTSD Index in a sample of English-speaking Somali adolescent refugees. The authors concluded that the UCLA PTSD Index was reliable and valid as a screening tool for PTSD symptoms in this group of adolescent refugees.

In sum, structured interview questionnaires (including the Strategies of Acculturation Scale, HTQ, MTRR, and the UCLA PTSD Index) were derived from the etic perspective or the researchers' point of view. The psychometric properties of these measures should be assessed when they are used in different refugee samples. The use of such structured questionnaires (mostly developed in the United States) involves the assumption that the experience of these refugees actually fit into certain pre-existing classifications of war events and mental conditions. This may not be relevant, sensitive, and reflective of refugees in Australia.

1.3.2 REVIEW OF QUALITATIVE RESEARCH ON REFUGEES

Qualitative studies of refugees have been conducted across numerous disciplines and fields, including social work (e.g., Bowes & Sim, 2006; Butler, 2007), nursing (e.g., Davis, 2000a, 2000b; Pavlish, 2005), social psychology (e.g., Colic-Peisker & Walker, 2003), community psychology (e.g., Goodkind, 2006; Keel & Drew, 2004), clinical psychology and psychiatry (e.g., Whittaker, Hardy, Lewis, & Buchan, 2005), and consumer studies (e.g., Jentsch, Durham, Hundley, & Hussein, 2007). In particular, in the fields of psychology and psychiatry, research of refugees has become increasingly more qualitative (e.g., Colic-Peisker & Walker, 2003; Gross, 2004; Keel & Drew, 2004). Importantly, a qualitative approach has enabled the examination of refugee issues from

the emic perspective of the refugees and thus overcoming one of the limitations of quantitative studies.

A wide range of issues concerning refugees' lives have been explored in qualitative studies. These issues include the adaptation of refugee families in their receiving countries (e.g., Prendes-Lintel, 1996; Weine et al., 2005; Weine et al., 2004; Weine, Ware, & Klebic, 2004), the development of certain interventions (e.g., Weine et al., 2006), refugees' perceived social support (e.g., Barnes & Aguilar, 2007), refugees' national identity development (e.g., Tammeveski, 2003), refugees' struggles with trauma and trust (e.g., Gross, 2004), refugees' help-seeking process (e.g., Hrycak, 2001), traditional healing (e.g., Ensign, 1994), refugees' healthcare experiences (e.g., Carroll et al., 2007), domestic violence in refugee families (e.g., Shiu-Thornton et al., 2005; Sullivan et al., 2005), and drug and alcohol problems (e.g., Dupont, Kaplan, Verbraeck, Braam, & van de Wijngaart, 2005). Additionally, in qualitative studies of refugees, researchers have examined the effectiveness of, and thus provided insights into, specific intervention programs for refugees (e.g., Goodkind, 2003, 2005, 2006; Goodkind, Hang, & Yang, 2004). Analysis of these findings has shown that these researchers have concentrated on certain facets and themes that are related to the experiences of being refugees in receiving countries.

In refugee studies, researchers have adopted different forms of qualitative inquiry. These include the hermeneutic phenomenology (e.g., Rungruangkonkit, 2007), phenomenology (e.g., Davis, 2000a, 2000b), the narrative inquiry (e.g., Barnes & Aguilar, 2007), ethnography (e.g., Greer, 1999; Reiboldt & Goldstein, 2000), and grounded theory (e.g., Prendes-Lintel, 1996). Although many researchers have adopted a grounded theory approach in their analysis of data, they have not developed a comprehensive and broad substantive theory (e.g., Hughes, 1999; Tammeveski, 2003). To date, two grounded theory studies (i.e., Catolico, 2005; Prendes-Lintel, 1996) have been conducted that involved the exploration of certain segments of the refugee experience. Specifically, Catolico (2005), in her grounded theory study, explored the perceptions of health of Cambodian women resettling in the United States. The perceptions of health of these Cambodian women constituted only part of the refugee experience. The first grounded

theory study was conducted by Prendes-Lintel (1996) who examined the process and outcome of adaptation of three refugee families from the former Soviet Union. However, the grounded theory developed by the Prendes-Lintel was not a substantive theory, and adaptation was not fully studied as a process. She recommended that future researchers investigate adaptation as a process to confirm, amend, or expand her grounded theory.

Although in qualitative studies of refugees, researchers have explored facets of the refugee experience from an emic perspective, there have been no studies to date that involved exploration of the refugee experience in its entirety through the development of a substantive theory. The development of a substantive theory is important as a theory can link facets of the refugee experience (such as psychopathology and cultural identity) in a logical manner. A theory is also a “systematic abstraction of reality that serves some purpose” (Chinn & Jacobs, 1987, p. 17). Glaser and Strauss (1967) suggested that a theory generated through the grounded theory approach is accurate, relevant, and useful. They also stated that theories “enable prediction and explanation of behaviour” which will “give the practitioner understanding and some control of situations” (p. 3). It follows that a substantive theory of the refugee experience may be potentially a useful tool, for example, to counsellors as they can predict with more confidence what lies ahead for their refugee clients. Moreover, the development of a theory will contribute to the exploration of explanatory models of the refugee experience. Therefore, a substantive theory that includes the exploration of all facets of the refugees’ lives has explanatory and predictive value.

1.4 SUMMARY AND RATIONALE FOR THE STUDY

The importance of exploring the experiences of refugees is underscored by the continuous and increasing concern of the risk in the refugee population of having certain mental health and adjustment problems in their receiving countries. In the fields of psychology and psychiatry, researchers have explored extracted or isolated key aspects of the refugee experience in terms of psychopathology, acculturation, and adaptation. It was apparent from the review of the literature on refugees that these researchers have mostly placed their emphasis on scientific theories and research techniques based on the researchers’ perspectives. Most of these studies documented certain associations among

aspects of the refugee experience without revealing any new and meaningful theories or framework from the perspective of the refugees. In these fields, there were few studies that were conducted to examine the experiences of refugees from the emic perspective (e.g., Keel & Drew, 2004; Whittaker et al., 2005). The trend has been the sustained emphasis on the imposed etic quantitative approach, which is the quantitative testing of various hypotheses derived from findings of earlier empirical studies. These hypotheses are rarely novel. The emphasis on statistics overshadows the importance of the meaning and complexity of the refugee experience. To achieve statistical power, quantitative studies are concerned with sample size, overlooking a multitude of variables which may interact to affect the refugee experience. This has limited our understanding of refugees in Australia. What is missing also from such findings are individual stories that can resonate with readers. In my opinion, the best voices for advocating for refugees are the refugees themselves. In line with Brody's (1990, 1994) suggestion, I stress the importance of delineating the refugee experience rather than focusing merely on one aspect of the refugee experience such as psychopathology.

Notably, the model developed by Berry and his colleagues as depicted in Figure 1.1 (Berry, 1980a, 1990, 1994, 1997, 2001; Berry et al., 1987, Berry et al., 1989, Berry & Sam, 1997) and Figure 1.2 (Berry, 2001, 2005, 2006, 2007) as well as Berry's conceptualisation of cultural identities in immigrants provided a partial description of what the refugee experience may be like in terms of refugees' acculturation and adaptation in their receiving countries. More recently, Berry et al. (2006b) conducted a comprehensive large-scale international study of acculturation and adaptation of immigrant youth across 13 countries. This international study and other quantitative studies (e.g., Berry, 1990, 1992, 1994; Ward & Kennedy, 1993) involved the usage and development of a few data driven frameworks which described immigrants' acculturation and adaptation. The focus was on immigrants in general, and these researchers have not adequately explored the acculturation and adaptation of refugees from an emic perspective. As refugees arrive in their receiving countries under very different conditions compared with voluntary immigrants (as explained in section 1.2), it becomes important to delineate their experiences. Furthermore, Berry's bidirectional

acculturation model is categorical in that it is devoid of a model that includes identification with more than two cultural groups.

The use of qualitative inquiry in studies of refugees can overcome the shortcomings of quantitative inquiry based on the imposed etic perspective. That is, qualitative inquiry enables the exploration of facets of the refugee experience based on the emic perspectives of refugees (e.g., Greer, 1999; Keel & Drew, 2004). By focusing on the refugees' perspective, insights into social psychological processes that are not conveyed at the group level can be explored. Researchers using a qualitative approach can further capture the depth, meaning, complexity, and intricate details of the experiences of refugees (e.g., Prendes-Lintel, 1996). However, in qualitative studies of refugees, the building of a broad and comprehensive substantive theory of the refugee experience is still largely absent.

Although researchers of both quantitative and qualitative studies of refugees have identified and explored numerous key aspects and facets of the refugee experience, they fell short of shedding light on (1) the basic social psychological problem and the basic social psychological process of refugees; (2) the intricacies, responses, and the meaning attributed to the refugee experience; (3) the variability of the refugees' experiences; and (4) the development of a broad substantive theory that integrates the relevant aspects of the refugee experience. I argue that the *grounded theory method* (Strauss & Corbin, 1990) is the methodology of choice for this study. Here, the grounded theory method becomes useful in integrating numerous aspects and facets of the refugee experience and in developing a story line using the voice of refugees.

1.5 PURPOSE AND OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The purpose of this study was to generate a substantive theory that describes the refugee experience in Western Australia from the perspective of the refugees. Consistent with grounded theory studies, the objectives of this study were as follows:

1. To identify, explore, and integrate the relevant aspects of the refugee experience.
2. To identify and explain the basic social psychological problem faced by refugees and the basic social psychological process they adopt to deal with this problem.

3. To identify, explore, and integrate the contextual conditions and personal factors that contribute to the variations in the experiences of refugees.
4. To generate a broad and comprehensive substantive theory to describe the refugee experience and to compare this theory with other existing theories and research findings.

1.6 DEFINITIONS OF TERMS USED IN THIS THESIS

Asylum seeker: Someone who is seeking protection as a refugee under the 1951 Convention (see definition of **Refugee**), but whose application for refugee status has not yet been decided by the relevant authorities (Crock & Saul, 2002; Mares, 2001).

Boat people: This term was originally coined to describe people fleeing Vietnam after communist forces reunified the country in 1975. In Australia, it has come to be applied to anyone who arrives in Australia by boat in an unauthorized manner. Some people find the term pejorative; however, it is a useful and apt description and now so widely used as to be part of the general lexicon (Mares, 2001).

Code: The essential relationship between the data and the theory (Glaser, 1978).

Coding: A process that “gets the analyst off the empirical level by fracturing the data, then conceptually grouping it into codes that then become the theory which explains what is happening in the data” (Glaser, 1978, p. 55).

Dimension: Location of properties along a continuum (Strauss & Corbin, 1990).

Dimensionalising: The process of dividing a property into its dimensions (Strauss & Corbin, 1990).

Emic: Findings or observations which are different across cultures. They are truths specific to a culture (Matsumoto, 1994a, 1994b).

Ethnocentrism: The belief that one’s own culture is superior to other cultures and the judging of other cultures by the standards of one’s own culture. Ethnocentrism is a

cultural universal that is displayed to some degree by members of all cultures (Levinson, 1998, p. 85).

Ethnography: “The process and product of describing and interpreting cultural behaviour” with an emphasis on the centrality of culture (Schwandt, 1997, p. 44).

Etic: Findings or observations which are similar, universal, and consistent across different cultures. They are universal truths or principles (Matsumoto, 1994a, 1994b).

Explanatory models: Models that contain explanations of certain issues, including mental illness (Rooney, Wright, & O’Neil, 2006), etiology, the course of sickness, and treatment (Kleinman, 1978). Explanatory models are linked to certain systems of knowledge and values; they are historical and socio-political products (Kleinman, 1978).

Hardiness: A constellation of personality characteristics that function as a resistance resource in the encounter with stressful life events (Kobasa, Maddi, & Kahn, 1982, p. 169).

Illegal: This is the commonly used (and derogatory) term for an unlawful non-citizen (Mares, 2001).

Larger society: The overall society that incorporates all ethnocultural groups, including both immigrants and nationals (Berry, Phinney, Sam, & Vedder, 2006b).

Narrative inquiry: The means of generating data in the form of stories, the means of interpreting data, and the means of representing data in a narrative or storied form. This involved working with various types of stories of life experiences, including life histories, long interviews, journals, diaries, memoirs, autobiographies, biographies, and so forth (Schwandt, 1997, p. 98).

Offshore/ onshore: Australia has an “offshore” refugee and humanitarian program which encompasses people who are overseas; they are selected by Australia for permanent resettlement from refugee camps and other places of need. “Onshore” refugees and asylum seekers are people who travel to Australia under their own steam,

either legally or illegally, and whose claims for refugee status or humanitarian entry are determined after their arrival in Australia (Mares, 2001).

Phenomenology: The description of ordinary conscious experience of daily life (or the *life-world*), including “perception, believing, remembering, deciding, feeling, judging, evaluating, all experiences of bodily action, and so forth” (Schwandt, 1997, p. 114).

Refugee: Defined in the Refugee Convention 1951 as someone who is outside their home country and who is unable or unwilling to return because of a well-founded fear of persecution for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group, or political opinion (Crock & Saul, 2002).

Substantive coding: Consist of open and selective coding, substantive coding gives rise to categories and their properties (Glaser, 1978, 1992).

Systematic discrimination: In the context of this study, systematic discrimination refers to the type of discrimination that is planned in advanced and acted with malicious thoroughness, persistency, and exactness (Cowie, 1990; Webster’s New Encyclopedic Dictionary, 1993).

Theoretical coding: An aspect of coding and constant comparative analysis that produces the conceptual link between categories and their properties (Glaser, 1992). Theoretical coding puts together the substantive codes to form a hypothesis and theory (Walker & Myrick, 2006).

Trauma: An event experienced or witnessed by a person that “involves actual or threatened death or injury, or threat to the physical integrity of others” (Friedman & Jaranson, 1994, p. 208).

CHAPTER TWO **METHODOLOGY**

2.1 OVERVIEW OF THE CHAPTER

The phenomenon explored in this study was the refugee experience in Western Australia. The grounded theory method (Strauss & Corbin, 1990) was used to achieve the research objective of fully exploring and integrating the experiences of refugees in the context of Western Australia. Specifically, the aim was to generate a substantive theory to explain the basic social psychological problem faced by refugees and the basic social psychological process that they adopt to deal with the problem. In this chapter, the grounded theory method and its development, research design, data collection and analysis procedures, methods used to ascertain trustworthiness of the data, and ethical considerations are described.

2.2 THE GROUNDED THEORY METHOD

Qualitative inquiry, which was adopted in this study, refers to a research process in a natural environment aiming to understand social problems by establishing a complex emic view using the participants' words and reporting their perspective (Creswell, 1994). In this study, the refugee experience was explored in a natural environment from the perspective of the refugees. This is in line with the focus of a qualitative inquiry, which also includes the emphasis on processes, meanings, socially constructed reality (Lincoln & Guba, 1985), the close connection between the researched and the researcher, the recognition of the value-laden nature of the research, and the situational confines of the research (Denzin & Lincoln, 1998). Specifically, the *grounded theory method*, as developed by Glaser and Strauss (1967) and later guided by Strauss and Corbin (1990), was adopted in this study. According to Strauss and Corbin (1990), a grounded theory is a theory that is inductively derived from the study of the phenomenon it represents, which means that it is discovered, developed, and verified through systematically collecting and analysing data relating to the phenomenon. This method provides a way to study human behaviour and interaction using symbolic interactionism and is especially useful for conceptualising behaviour in complex conditions (Chenitz & Swanson, 1986).

2.2.1 ORIGIN AND DEVELOPMENT OF THE GROUNDED THEORY METHOD

The grounded theory method was derived from the theory of symbolic interactionism as espoused by Mead (1964) and Blumer (1969a, 1969b). Symbolic interactionism is “a philosophical belief system based on the assumption that humans learn about and define their world through interaction with others” (Streubert & Carpenter, 1999, p. 332). The symbolic interactionist perspective is founded upon three premises. First, people respond to events based upon the meaning the events have for them. Second, the meaning of the events comes from social interactions. Third, the meaning of, and the response to, the events can be altered through interactions and immersion in social settings (Blumer, 1969b). The focus is on the daily worlds people live in and how, by using symbols and language, order and meaning are established through everyday interactions. The interpretation of opinions, emotions, and behaviours of individuals in a given context is facilitated by symbolic interactionism (Slattery, 1991). Through such interaction, humans develop shared meanings that in turn lead to their reality (Patton, 1990). In this study, symbolic interactionism was considered to form an appropriate basis for studying the daily world of refugees – how they learn about and define their world through everyday interactions with others, which in turn facilitates the development of common meanings that form the refugees’ realities. Refugees interact with other people socially across numerous eco-sociocultural contexts. Here, the grounded theory method was applied to explore and conceptualise the complexity of their experiences spanning these different contexts.

The two co-originators of the grounded theory method were Glaser and Strauss, who co-authored *The Discovery of Grounded Theory: Strategies for Qualitative Research* in 1967. Throughout the years, the method evolved and proliferated. It has two approaches today, the Glaserian approach and the Straussian approach. In 1990, Strauss co-authored a textbook with Corbin, entitled *Basics of Qualitative Research: Grounded Theory Procedures and Techniques*. This book was designed to guide grounded theory students by describing a step by step approach to using the grounded theory method. Glaser (1992), however, responded in his book, *Basics of Grounded Theory Analysis*, and criticised the guide as being too prescriptive and thus imposing a paradigm for asking questions of the data. Glaser (1992) argued that Strauss and Corbin’s way of labelling

and grouping categories by using open, axial, and selective coding is not necessary as it distracts from theoretical coding. Notably, Glaser (1978, 1992) espoused substantive coding (consisting of both open and selective coding) and theoretical coding; he did not support axial coding. However, several authors (Melia, 1996; Walker & Myrick, 2006) pointed out that Strauss and Corbin (1990) have already equated axial coding to theoretical coding. Moreover, Melia (1996) argued that Strauss and Corbin (1990) also stressed the importance of using the method of constant comparative analysis. Walker and Myrick (2006) further asserted that the differences between the Glaserian approach and the Straussian approach do not matter; what is important is the knowledge of these differences and to be able to make a decision based on “informed and knowledgeable choices” (p. 558). While Strauss and Corbin (1990), and Glaser (1992) had a philosophical difference over the analysis of data in the grounded theory method, the principles of grounded theory are maintained in their writings (Henderson, 1998). For example, both approaches lead to theory discovery. Both approaches are being used today. In this study, I have applied the Straussian approach based on Strauss and Corbin’s (1990) book in conjunction with the original Glaser and Strauss’ (1967) book.

2.3 RESEARCH DESIGN

The grounded theory method was chosen after observing and assessing the current trend in refugee studies. It was deemed the most suitable qualitative approach in addressing the current research purpose (which was to generate a substantive theory based on the social realities of refugees) while drawing from the symbolic interactionism perspective based on the premise that people extract meanings from social interaction, and these meanings are altered through an interpretative process with the use of symbols (Chenitz & Swanson, 1986). Furthermore, the experience of being a refugee is a sociohistorical, ethnocultural, developmental, and psychological process (Dien, 2000; Frable, 1997; Hsu et al., 2004; Phinney, 2000; Procter, 2005), and the grounded theory method is particularly useful for conceptualising experiences of refugees in complex conditions.

2.4 DATA COLLECTION

Prior to the study, I presented each participant with an information sheet and a written consent form (see Appendix A). Informed consent was obtained from all participants,

following the guidelines specified by the university's Human Research Ethics Committee, which is based on the National Health and Medical Research Council (NHMRC). I assured all participants of the confidentiality of their responses. I informed them that their participation was voluntary, and they might withdraw without prejudice at any time. Anonymity of the participants was maintained at all times as no names were transcribed from the tape. In this thesis, all participants were given pseudonyms to protect their privacy and their family members who might still be at risk of being persecuted.

I gathered data primarily through semi-structured, open-ended formal in-depth interviews. Saturation was reached when no new information could be extracted on the phenomenon of the refugee experience (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). This occurred after twenty-five interviews were conducted. All twenty-five interviews were conducted in English. Up to thirty phone conversations were registered as follow-up informal interviews for half of the participants. These data were supplemented by examination of relevant literature, multicultural policy documents, and newspaper articles on refugees.

2.4.1 DATA COLLECTION PERIOD

I collected data over three years from 2001 to 2005 (I took one year leave of absence in 2004). The majority of the interviews (the first 22) took place over the first 21 months of the study (from October 2001 to June 2003). Analysis of the data indicated that age was an important factor that influenced the refugee experience. Therefore, I recruited an older participant in July 2005 in the form of theoretical sampling.

2.4.2 THE SAMPLING STRATEGY

The participants consisted of seventeen adult refugees (age 18-63 years) who had experienced war, revolution, and other forms of oppression in the past. The purposeful sampling technique required choosing participants on the basis of their knowledge about the topic and their *willingness* and *ability* to provide information on their experiences of war and relocation (Hutchinson & Webb, 1989; Morse, 1989). As long as the participants were willing and able to share their experiences, no other requirement such

as ethnicity was necessary, although ethnicity was potentially a relevant factor in the analysis.

In the beginning of this study, *purposeful sampling* within the context of grounded theory was used. This entailed a three-stage process beginning with interviewing refugees who were seen as typical of adult refugee groups in Western Australia. When categories started to emerge, I interviewed refugees who still fell into the typical category but who had expanded or specific experiences or knowledge. Lastly, to ensure that the entire range of experiences was captured in the sampling process, I also considered recruiting refugees who would meet the criteria of negative cases (Morse, 1989). These negative cases would present me with information that something regarding certain instances was different. Negative cases would also add to the variation and depth of understanding to the theory (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). However, in this study, I did not encounter any negative cases. Notably, *concepts* and not participants were sampled as the purpose was to reveal as many potentially relevant categories as possible. Categories were more convincing when they were derived from a sample of refugees who came from diverse backgrounds and experiences within the phenomenon of the refugee experience. According to Strauss and Corbin (1990), selection of participants might be as arbitrary as going through a list or interviewing every third individual who came through the door as long as they had the willingness and ability to share their experiences within the realm of purposeful sampling. Following this recommendation, I interviewed refugees who were willing and able to divulge their experiences. The first fourteen refugees were purposefully sampled over 21 months. Notably, throughout all stages of the study, data collection, coding, analysis, and memo writing took place concurrently.

According to the grounded theory method, a theory emerges or is induced after commencing data gathering. Deduction is used minimally to derive, from the induced codes, conceptual guides as to where to go next to obtain a comparative group or subgroup (Glaser, 1978, 1992). Hence, as the theory emerged in this study, subsequent (i.e., the last three) participants were theoretically selected. *Theoretical sampling* is the process by which later data collection is continually directed by theoretical

developments which emerge from the analysis (Punch, 1998). When the constant comparative analysis revealed that the sample of the study needed expanding, theoretical sampling was used to include, for example, older adult refugees to allow for the emergence of a comprehensive, broad substantive theory. The constant comparative method of data analysis will be described later in this chapter (section 2.5.5).

In this study, demographic information was not considered to be important until it emerged as being relevant from the data. Irrespective of gender, age, socioeconomic, or cultural backgrounds, participants' information was viewed as valuable (Mullen & Reynolds, 1994). Thus, at the early stage of this study, no specific requirement with regards to demographic background was necessary in order to interview a refugee. Age was eventually found to be an important factor in influencing the way the basic social psychological process was applied by the refugees, and thus I interviewed an older refugee as a form of theoretical sampling. Another factor that was revealed to be important was cultural background because perceived discrimination, especially by refugees of Middle Eastern origin, was found to negatively influence the basic social psychological process.

The collection of data was modified according to the developing theory. Here, false leads were excluded while questions relevant to the purpose of the study were raised. This process was in accordance with grounded theory procedures whereby important constructs were identified from the data from which the theory had evolved (e.g., Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Streubert & Carpenter, 1995). For instance, one participant held different jobs over the years in his attempts to discover what his ambition was; however, this information was not considered to be relevant to the refugee experience, and hence it constituted a false lead. On the other hand, the stage of *rebuilding a new life* was found to be important, and I formulated questions in order to obtain more examples relating to this stage.

2.4.3 PROFILE OF THE REFUGEE PARTICIPANTS

A total of 17 participants, aged between 18 and 63 years (mean = 34 years), contributed to this study. Of these, eight were females, and nine were males. Twenty-five formal

interviews were conducted in addition to approximately 30 phone conversations that were registered as follow-up informal interviews. The duration of the interviews varied from 30 minutes to 120 minutes. One interview lasted 3 hours as the participant enthusiastically related details of his life. Under the item on religion (see Appendix D: Demographic information), two participants stated Islam, five wrote down Christianity, two were Buddhists, four participants did not state their religion, and four were Baha'is. Length of residence in Australia varied from 5 months to 27 years (mean = 8 years). All participants spoke language(s) other than English. One participant spoke four other languages. The countries of origin of the participants were as follows: Iran (4), Iraq (1), Vietnam (2) Poland (1), Burma /Myanmar (4), Somalia (1), Ethiopia (2), and the former Yugoslavia (2). Of the four participants from Burma, two were members of the Kachin tribe, and one was a member of the Karen tribe. Both participants from Ethiopia were members of the Oromo tribe.

2.4.4 ACCESS TO REFUGEE SAMPLE

Most participants were recruited through various organisations that provided services for refugees in Perth. These included three Migrant Resource Centres, Communicare, and the Multicultural Centre for Women. Some participants were recruited through religious organisations (e.g., members of the Baha'i community), cultural/ethnic clubs (e.g., the Tribal Refugee Welfare group), and adult English classes (including the Adult Migrant Education Service and Adult Migrant English Program). In most instances, permission was given to place advertisements on the notice boards. In other cases, the receptionist or social worker agreed to hand out the advertisements to potential participants.

Advertisements were also placed in seven community newspapers in the year 2002 to assist in the recruitment of participants from the broader community in Western Australia. However, these advertisements were found to be largely unsuccessful in terms of attracting responses from refugees. I discovered that refugees were more likely to respond when I approached them individually, usually through various organisations, with a brief description of what the research involved. In the year 2002, I approached two counsellors who worked with migrants at the adult migrant English classes and obtained some advice on the best ways to recruit refugees who had arrived more recently

in Australia. One refugee responded to the advertisement the counsellors placed on the notice boards. An interview with a university radio station conducted on 15 Nov 2001 was successful in recruiting one participant, who stated that he wanted to contribute to the welfare of refugees in Western Australia.

2.4.5 CONDUCTING THE INTERVIEWS

Prior to the interviews, each participant received an information sheet and a written consent form (see Appendix A). All participants, except one older participant, read the information sheet. The older participant was able to converse in English but had to be assisted with reading the information sheet. All participants were reassured from the beginning of the interviews that confidentiality would be maintained at all times and they could phone me if they wished to further contribute to the data or if they had issues that were troubling them. However, none of the participants took up the offer to contact me.

All interviews were organised to be conducted at a mutually agreed place and time. Seven of the interviews were conducted at the participants' workplace at a scheduled break time. Of these, two interviews with the same participant were interrupted with numerous breaks as the participant had to attend to his customers. As this participant did not have any other time to be interviewed, he insisted that this was the best arrangement as he was the owner of this store and therefore was not answerable to anyone. Six interviews were conducted at the participants' home and thus provided more privacy with minimal interruptions. One interview was conducted in a quiet conference room in a public library with permission given by the attending staff. Two interviews with the same participant took place in the vicinity of the university library as the participant preferred to sit outside on the lawn. One interview was conducted in the vicinity of the participant's education institute, where as a new arrival, he attended English classes. During the interview, this participant took me to his education institute to show me certain websites related to his experience as a refugee. This interview was conducted outside his education institute at a bench at a quiet spot and later in a nearby quiet café. Another participant was also interviewed at a quiet café after hot beverages were already served; there were no interruptions. Notably, it was more convenient for two young adult

male participants to be interviewed outside their homes as their parents were always at home; this allowed them to divulge family matters more freely. An interview with an older refugee was more difficult to secure. She was interviewed at my home after rapport was established over five phone calls. As well, this participant was not familiar with the nature of my research; thus, I assured her that all information she provided would be kept confidential. I also took the time to explain what the research was about. Many participants expressed their gratitude for being given a chance to talk about their lives and their experiences as refugees. A few felt that "somebody cared enough to ask them."

A total of twenty-five semi-structured, open-ended formal interviews were conducted. The questions asked in the first round of interviews were broad, open-ended, and non-specific, for example, "Tell me about yourself" and "Tell me about your life before you came to Australia." Additionally, I used an interview guide (see Appendix B) that contained questions and prompts led by the objectives of the study. I asked the following questions:

- What was it like when you first arrived at Australia?
- Will you tell me about your life when you first arrived here?
- How is your life at the moment?
- How is your health?
- How are your family members?
- Is there anything else relevant to what we are talking about?

During the interviews, I followed the leads presented by the participants as much as possible and asked open-ended questions to clarify and explore the issues they had previously brought up. These probing questions were not asked in a particular order but were brought up at a time that seemed appropriate during the interviews. Some of the actual questions asked were:

- Tell me more about your jungle life.
- Tell me more about handling yourself and not worrying about anything.
- You mentioned that with many people, the feeling about refugees is not positive, can you give me an example or can you explain more?

At the beginning of data collection, I encountered a methodological obstacle which I noted down.

The biggest methodological obstacle is the tape recorder I have borrowed – a Panasonic, not an auto-reverse, tape recorder from the School of Nursing, Curtin. Since it doesn't click at the end of the tape, I have no idea when it stopped taping. I have lost 10-15 minutes of my interview with my first participant. (14 Feb 2002)

In this situation, I made a conscious effort to recall the lost segment of the interview, and notes were made. Since this mishap, an auto-reverse audiotape was purchased, and I did not encounter any other methodological obstacles.

As the research progressed, the interviews were increasingly led by the emerging theory and by the phenomenon that was uncovered. I raised specific questions pertaining to the identified categories in order to explore the categories further. Hence, the interview guide was modified after the interviews revealed further lines of enquiry. For example, when the findings of the interview pointed to the existence of the concept of *refugee identity*, I began to probe subsequent participants on how they felt about being refugees in Australia with particular emphasis to identity. I attempted to ask questions appropriately with sensitivity and in a non-traumatising manner (see Appendix C: Consideration of potential harm). I let the participants know that they did not have to respond to the question if I sensed that they were becoming uncomfortable. Although the information sheet clearly specified this, I made this option clear at various stages of the interview on the understanding that the participants needed to be reminded of their rights.

In the advertisements and on the information sheet, I requested for refugees who must not be currently receiving counselling or feel the need for counselling. This was because the objectives of this grounded theory study involved discovering the *basic social psychological problem* and the *basic social psychological process* of the participants, rather than the specific experience of trauma. My questions did not include direct probing into previous traumas unless the participant volunteered the information. I was aware that nonverbal facial expressions and body language could provide cues with regards to the participants' emotional state. I was prepared to say, "You look

distressed/worried, should we talk about something else?” and “Should we talk about it another time?” as well as “Do you prefer to write down some experiences instead of talking?” However, occasions such as these did not arise in the interviews. I was also aware that I might have to deal with the issue of dissociation or numbing if the participant’s trauma was discussed. As far as I was aware, none of the participants were traumatised by the interviews – although for some, the interviews brought back some sad and troubling memories. I was prepared to refer the participants to a practising counsellor who agreed at the start of this study to assist with counselling should a problem arise. Again, this situation did not arise in this study. A few phone conversations took place with a young adult refugee who was aware of his trauma and grief work, but he reassured me that he was much better. As a precautionary measure, I informed him of the availability of a counsellor and the services provided by the Association for Services to Torture and Trauma survivors (ASeTTs) in Perth. Since the participants might have known that I studied psychology, the distinction between clinical and research responsibilities had to be clarified. I was not at any stage involved in counselling but had recommended to participants that they might like to seek out a professional counsellor for any psychological distress. For instance, I was prepared to say, “You seem upset, I can give you a referral to a counselling service if you like.” This service was not requested by any of the participants. Additionally, I used a demographic data sheet (see Appendix D) to obtain demographic details of each participant.

A research assistant of African background was employed from June to September of 2002 to assist with the recruitment of African participants. As the research assistant was able to speak several African languages, I found this to be useful at this stage of my study. However, only one English-speaking participant was successfully recruited through the assistant. The research assistant further cited many problems with recruitment of his community in Perth. Some had a lot of grief to deal with at this stage of their lives. For instance, a particular incident occurred when he approached a refugee from Sierra Leone for the possibility of securing an interview. The assistant stated that due to the nature of her trauma and issues of distrust, she was angry at any interview of, or research into, refugees. Her anger is captured in the following excerpt as reported by the research assistant.

Why do they want to know our problem, why do they need to interview us? For they know that we are suffering, and it's an international issue that everybody knows. But they just want to have the research and then put in the library shelf. (Quotation of refugee reported by research assistant, 11 June 2002)

The research assistant further explained to me what the refugee was trying to say to him.

There is a word that she used, that people are taking advantage of the people, the problem that we are going through. They do what helps them but not really trying to reach us, putting the story on the shelf in the library and then sell it. That's what they are doing, but they are not really reaching our people. If they want to reach, the news that they already have is enough. That's what she tried to say. (Research assistant, 11 June 2002)

The preceding excerpts highlight the sensitive nature of research into refugees, in particular any probes into issues of trauma. Although I anticipated that the initial interviews should take approximately 60 to 90 minutes, no attempt was made to force the participants to fit into this allocated time. Of the seventeen first-round interviews conducted, fourteen interviews lasted between one and two hours. One interview lasted only 30 minutes. Two interviews took more than two hours to complete, as the participants were very eager to relate their experiences. I informed all participants that it might be necessary to conduct a shorter follow-up interview at a later date in order to clarify any issues that arose from the first interview. Eight follow-up formal interviews were conducted. Five of these interviews lasted between one to two hours. Three of these lasted between 30 to 40 minutes. Six participants were interviewed the second time; of these, two were interviewed the third time. I had chosen these participants for follow-up formal interviews because they had specific information that would further contribute to the data.

During the interviews, field notes relating to the setting of the interview and nonverbal communication were made. These field notes contributed to the contextual content of the study and were recorded immediately after the interview. All formal interviews, including all follow-up formal interviews, were audiotaped and transcribed verbatim. A total of 31 hours and 35 minutes of recorded transcribed interviews contributed to the data source. Three verbatim transcribed interviews were sent back to the participants by mail for their viewing, and corrections were made if mistakes were found. Usually, the mistakes were related to the spelling of various places or the names of refugee camps.

Additionally, up to thirty follow-up informal interviews were conducted through phone conversations with half of the participants. During the phone interviews, notes were taken. After the interviews, these notes were expanded upon and conversations were transcribed immediately. To further enhance credibility (see section 2.6) of my interpretation of the findings, I asked three refugees who had not been previously interviewed to comment on and verify my interpretations. This ensured contextual relevance of the study and enhanced transferability of the findings to other contexts.

2.4.6 EXAMINATION OF THE LITERATURE, MULTICULTURAL POLICY DOCUMENTS, AND NEWSPAPER ARTICLES

During all phases of the study, I supplemented the data with examination of relevant literature, multicultural policy documents, and newspaper articles. Most of the relevant newspaper articles were retrieved from the Factiva database. These data provided the context in which the study was conducted. For instance, a newspaper article cited a study which found that Arab and Muslim Australians experienced an increase in offensive remarks and physical violence against them following the September 11 terrorist attacks on America and the Bali bombings ("Muslims report," 2004). This information supported similar claims by a few participants of this study.

2.5 DATA ANALYSIS

In this section, the concept of theoretical sensitivity is explained, followed by a description of the way I explicated my personal beliefs. The three stages of coding as suggested by Strauss and Corbin (1990) are then presented. Finally, the constant comparative method of data analysis will be described.

2.5.1 THEORETICAL SENSITIVITY

Throughout the study, I applied *theoretical sensitivity* in order to minimise bias. *Theoretical sensitivity* represents the personal attributes of the researcher, including having insight, the skill to provide meaning to the data, the ability to understand, and the competence to distinguish what is relevant from what is not (Glaser, 1978; Strauss & Corbin, 1990). Theoretical sampling is enhanced by having familiarity with relevant background information through readings on theory, research, and documents. It is also

increased by having professional experience through practice in the field as well as personal experience. It can be further obtained with continuous interactions with the data through data collection and analysis (Strauss & Corbin, 1990).

2.5.2 EXPLICATING MY BELIEFS

My role as the primary data gathering instrument necessitated the detection of personal history, paradigm, personal values, assumptions, and any biases at the outset of this study. In order to approach the topic honestly and openly as well as to refrain from making judgments about the topic based on personal views, I attempted to put myself aside by explicating my beliefs, assumptions, emotional distortions, preconceived ideas about the topic, personal perceptions, and biases. Using theoretical sensitivity, I tried to view the research data in new ways and attempted to explore the potential of the findings for generating theory without fitting them into any preconceived ideas (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). Prior to the study, as much as possible, I detailed my preconceived ideas on the topic in a journal to avoid imposing them on data collection and analysis. This form of self-discipline, of making room for the incorporation of fresh information, was essential for the discovery of new knowledge (Strauss & Corbin, 1990) that would lead to greater understanding of the basic social psychological problem and the basic social psychological process of the refugees from the emic perspective.

I was aware that my interest in the subject was based on my own migration experience as a voluntary immigrant to Australia in my late teens. I had suspected that the nature of refugees' forced departure from their homeland was very different from my own voluntary departure. My perception was that most refugees, if not all, have experienced some difficulties in resettling in Australia. There was a probability that they would face acculturative stress (e.g., Berry, 2006; Berry & Annis, 1974) and language problems (e.g., Sondergaard & Theorell, 2004; Tran, 1990). I also assumed that the use of English would always constitute a challenge when it was not one's first language, as in the case of refugees. Additionally, in facing losses in my own life, I easily related to the feelings of grief experienced by many refugees. However, I did not find it easy to pick up on feelings of "shame" and "guilt" and had to look up the dictionary for definitions. If I had not examined my perceptions and emotions, it was possible that the participants would

be led to illustrate their experiences in the direction of my personal perception through the questions I might ask. It was important that the questions asked were not value-laden. If I asked specific questions in order to obtain verification of my beliefs, the participants' views might not emerge during the interviews. Thus, during the initial interviews, I took extra care to ensure that the questions were broad and open-ended so that the perspective of the refugees would be revealed with minimal bias from my part.

2.5.3 THE THREE STAGES OF CODING

To generate a substantive theory, I used the three stages of coding as suggested by Strauss and Corbin (1990) to analyse the data. These were open-coding, axial coding, and selective coding.

2.5.3.1 Open-coding

Once collected, the data were *open-coded*. This involved forming initial categories of information about the phenomenon of the refugee experience by breaking down, assessing, comparing, conceptualising, and categorising the data. Here, "category" refers to the classification of concepts. Categories were revealed when concepts were compared with one another and were related to a similar phenomenon (Creswell, 1998; Strauss & Corbin, 1990). I also uncovered numerous properties or subcategories within each category and searched for data to dimensionalise or demonstrate the extreme possibilities on a continuum of each property (Creswell, 1998).

2.5.3.2 Axial coding

After open-coding, I used *axial coding* to assemble the data back together in new ways by making associations between a category and its subcategories (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). I adopted the paradigm model espoused by Strauss and Corbin (1990). This model entails the association between subcategories and categories by specifying a category in terms of a *central phenomenon* (i.e., the central/core category about the phenomenon), *causal conditions* (i.e., categories of conditions that lead to the development of the phenomenon), *strategies* (i.e., the action/interaction strategies developed to respond to the central phenomenon), the *context* (i.e., its specific set of properties) in which it is embedded, *intervening conditions* (i.e., the conditions that

facilitate or constrain the strategies), and the *consequences* (i.e., the results of the strategies) for this phenomenon (Creswell, 1998; Strauss & Corbin, 1990).

2.5.3.3 Selective coding

After gathering and analysing the data, I integrated the categories to generate grounded theory by *selective coding*. This involved the identification of a story line and writing of a story, which integrated the categories derived from axial coding. Here, propositions or hypotheses were presented (Creswell, 1998). I carried this out in several steps. First, the core category or story line (or conceptualisation of a story) was explicated. The second step involved relating subsidiary categories around the core category by using a paradigm – conditions, context, strategies, and consequences. The third step entailed relating categories at the dimensional level. The fourth step was validation of the relationships against data. The last step involved filling in categories that required further refinement and/or development. These steps were not necessarily linear or distinct, and I moved back and forth between them (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). The outcome of the process of data gathering and analysis was a substantive-level theory. This theory could be further evaluated empirically as the variables or categories were now known. However, the research could be considered completed because the development of a theory was a legitimate result of the research (Creswell, 1998). Thus, in this study, no further empirical assessment of the theory was carried out, and the substantive theory of the refugee experience was presented in this thesis as the end result.

2.5.4 MEMOS AND DIAGRAMS

Throughout the study, I conducted field notes, memo writing, and diagramming of ideas in relation to the categories concurrently with ongoing coding and analytical procedures. The memos were records of my analytical process, and they showed how the theory was evolving step by step. Here, propositions were recorded, compared, verified, modified, or altered as new data arrived. Through diagramming, I was able to develop the links between different categories and subcategories. Memoing and diagramming began at the inception of the study and proceeded until my final write-up (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). An example of my memo is: “It is interesting to observe the emergence of a *refugee*

identity in this study. The participants either strongly identified with being refugees, or avoided being associated as refugees, or felt a sense of pride in being refugees.”

2.5.5 THE CONSTANT COMPARATIVE METHOD OF DATA ANALYSIS

The constant comparative method of data analysis has been described in the original work of Glaser and Strauss (1967). This method involves comparing incidents related to each category. Specifically, the researcher codes the data or each incident into as many categories as possible. The categories are then integrated with their properties to ascertain similarities and differences as well as to create boundaries between categories and their relationships. Following that, some categories are subsumed under a higher order category or higher level of conceptualization and thus reducing the total number of categories. These categories evolve as the researcher searches for incidents from the data that are relevant to each category. This process continues until theoretical saturation is reached where no new categories emerge (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Strauss & Corbin, 1990).

In this study, data analysis initially occurred at the descriptive level in which the raw data consisting of the participants' perspectives of their refugee experience were compared and fractured into as many codes as possible. For example, one data segment was coded “loss of mental health,” “frustration,” “indecisive,” “helplessness,” “hopelessness,” and “depression.” This open-coding process identified more than 200 codes in this study. Coding then progressed to a conceptual level where I identified patterns across the data and subsumed many codes into broader code words of a higher conceptual level. Here, I applied the constant comparative method to help reduce the number of codes as concurrent analysis of further data supported, modified, or threw out certain codes. For example, initial codes of “being stereotyped as poor,” “desperate,” “uneducated,” “queue-jumpers,” “free-loaders,” and “illegal” were subsumed into the category of “stigma.” Many code words also became categories and subcategories. Throughout this data analysis process, I constantly wrote memos about ideas that emerged from the data and any descriptions regarding codes, propositions, categories, and the evolving grounded theory. The categories were compared with one another to ensure that they were mutually exclusive. I also questioned the data repeatedly and

constantly compared new data with previous data in order to identify the relationships among categories as well as between the categories and subcategories (i.e., axial coding). For example, both "loss of trust" and "disintegration of identity" were found to be "psychological consequences of experiencing losses." I further applied theoretical sampling (Glaser, 1978) as an ongoing activity together with the constant comparative method of analysis. The categories were further refined, and the relationships among them were determined. The substantive theory of the refugee experience was then generated. Data analysis was complete, and saturation was achieved when the final interview did not indicate any new information that did not fit the pre-existing categories (Strauss & Corbin, 1990).

2.5.6 NUD.IST COMPUTER SOFTWARE

The transcribed data from formal and informal interviews were managed using the NUD.IST (Non-numerical Unstructured Data Indexing Searching and Theorising) software package (L. Richards, & T. Richards, 1997). However, I did not use this software in primary data analysis. Instead, I used it primarily to store and assist in locating slices of the data at nodes which represented the emerging categories. The interview extracts were placed in nodes that were labelled so that they could be easily retrieved, analysed, relocated, cut, or pasted on other nodes. By printing out copies of the extracts placed at certain nodes, axial coding where connections were made between categories and sub-categories was facilitated. However, it was not feasible to use NUD.IST to assist with selective coding because the size of the computer monitor restricted the amount of data that could be seen at any one time. Data were placed at different levels of nodes. Thus, new fields had to be opened on the computer monitor to view other data, which then concealed the original field. During selective coding, a large amount of the data needed to be seen together, sorted out, and moved around physically so that new associations could be made. I handled this large amount of information by using cards (3x5 and 8x10) and A4 size paper to record the categories, memos, and codes. These cards and paper were shifted around to enable me to see the "big picture" and different possible connections among categories. New memos recorded these relationships. In this study, I found NUD.IST to be particularly useful in retrieving

nodes for constant comparative analysis and to locate relevant excerpts during the writing of the basic social psychological problem and process.

2.6 TRUSTWORTHINESS OF THE DATA

The trustworthiness of the data was addressed by following the methodological process recorded in the grounded theory method as developed by Glaser and Strauss (1967) and guided by Strauss and Corbin (1990). Grounded theory strategies that increase the rigour of the research findings include triangulation of data sources, the constant comparison of data, theoretical sensitivity, and the explication of the researcher's beliefs. Triangulation across data sources through formal face-to-face interviews, informal phone interviews, relevant literature, multicultural policy documents, and newspaper articles served to authenticate what the participants had stated. The three stage coding process involved the constant comparative analysis procedure to ensure continuous checking and rechecking of data. Since theory emerged out of the data, the elements which constituted the theory were related directly back to the data. The importance of theoretical sensitivity and the explication of my beliefs have been described in the preceding sections. Generally, in qualitative research, rigour is determined by the researcher's focus on and confirmation of the information discovered. The aim is to explore accurately the participants' experiences (Streubert & Carpenter, 1999). Some authors (Guba, 1981; Guba & Lincoln, 1994) applied the terms credibility, dependability, confirmability, and transferability as the operational techniques to demonstrate rigour. These techniques are described as follows.

Credibility involves engaging in activities that increases the likelihood that credible findings will be obtained (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Credibility of the findings in this study was ensured by prolonged contact with participants, triangulating across data sources and data collection procedures, and having independent researchers analyse segments of the data so as to compare the coded categories and interpretations (Guba & Lincoln, 1982; LeCompte & Goetz, 1982; Sandelowski, 1986). I regularly attended a postgraduate grounded theory seminar group from 2000 to 2004. I requested members of the seminar group to code segments of my interview data independently. Thus, I was able to compare my coding with their codes, thereby facilitating the consideration of

their perspectives and enhancing the credibility of the findings. As well, I had the opportunity on four occasions to present my preliminary findings and evolving theory on the board in front of the group members for their review. Group members provided feedback and asked further questions to which I sought further verification from the data. Any bias on my part was therefore minimised. After the initial completion of data analysis, I presented the evolving theory and important findings throughout the research process to three refugees for their review. This helped to verify the accuracy and credibility of the findings as well as to further authenticate my interpretation of the findings. Additionally, providing an abundance of direct quotes as recommended by Glaser and Strauss (1967) enhanced the credibility of the present research. This strategy is reflected in this thesis. Here, I demonstrate the connection of the concepts and categories to the actual interview excerpts. Readers are then able to compare their interpretation of the interview data with my interpretation. All interviews were audiotaped and transcribed verbatim. Field notes and phone conversations that served as follow-up interviews also contributed to the depth of description of the refugee experience. In this study, once the credibility of the findings was determined through engaging in the aforementioned activities, the criterion of *dependability* was achieved (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Confirmability of the findings can be documented by leaving an audit trail or a recording of research activities which others can follow (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). The aim is to demonstrate as explicitly as possible all the evidence and cognitive processes that lead to the conclusions (Streubert & Carpenter, 1999). In line with this criterion, I provide a comprehensive explanation of the application of the grounded theory method in this thesis and make all the analytic processes transparent. The comprehensive description in this written thesis also enables the potential users of this study to make *transferability* judgment, which is to evaluate to what degree the findings are transferable to other similar contexts and populations (LeCompte & Goetz, 1982).

Transferability (or "fittingness") is the probability that the research findings can provide meaning for other people in similar situations (Streubert & Carpenter, 1999). In qualitative research, according to Morse (1999), each participant in a small sample is

selected purposefully so that he or she can contribute to the emerging theory. This ensures that the theory is comprehensive, complete, and saturated. Knowledge from the findings should fit all possible scenarios in the larger population. The theory should be applicable to all similar contexts and issues irrespective of the comparability of the demographic composition of the groups. The main focus is the fit of the topic or the comparability of the problem and one of generality of the findings (Morse, 1999). *Generality* refers to the need for the theory to be sufficiently abstract to be applied to the setting, regardless of changing conditions and daily situations (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). In this study, in order to increase contextual relevance or transferability, I collected rich descriptive data through purposeful and theoretical sampling so that variation in data was maximised and the context was clearly described (Guba & Lincoln, 1982). I also compared the different sources of data collected and reviewed my journal for any assumptions and biases.

2.7 ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS AND PARTICIPANT PROTECTION

All data collection material and equipment were stored in a locked cabinet in my home. Once the tapes were transcribed and the data coded and analysed, they were erased to avoid voice identification. I did not use the data for any other purpose. All information was kept confidential by the use of coding. Finally, in writing this thesis, excerpts of the interview data with participants are reported with pseudonyms.

2.8 SUMMARY

I applied the grounded theory method in this study to explore the phenomenon of the refugee experience in Western Australia. Data were gathered through semi-structured, open-ended formal and informal interviews with 17 refugees (age 18 to 63 years), and through examination of the literature, multicultural policy documents, and newspaper articles. The constant comparative method of data analysis was applied to gather, code, and analyse data until theoretical saturation was achieved where no new categories were forthcoming. The NUD.IST computer program (L. Richards & T. Richards, 1997) was used to manage the data. I addressed the issues of trustworthiness of the data by taking appropriate steps to increase the rigour of the application of the grounded theory method and by leaving a clear audit trail.

CHAPTER THREE
THE BASIC SOCIAL PSYCHOLOGICAL PROBLEM:
SELF-ENVIRONMENT INCONGRUITY

3.1 OVERVIEW OF THE CHAPTER

Using the grounded theory method, the first focus of this study was the identification of the basic social psychological problem, which was commonly shared by the refugee participants. The basic social psychological problem was identified as *self-environment incongruity* (SEI), which was also found to be the core category. In this chapter, I will explore the experience of SEI, in conjunction with its causal factors, its properties, and the conditions that influenced its occurrence. The second focus of this study was the discovery of the basic social psychological process adopted by the refugees to deal with their problem of SEI. This process will be described in Chapter Four.

3.2 DEFINITION OF SELF-ENVIRONMENT INCONGRUITY (SEI)

Self-environment incongruity (SEI) can be defined from the findings as the misfit between the refugees and their environment. Due to a series of socio-political events that occurred in their homeland, the phenomenon of SEI emerged as the lives of the refugee participants became disorganised and derailed from the usual set path. The disruption of the refugees' lives and the experience of SEI sprang from the unstable socio-political environment of their homeland and continued into the transitional phase away from their homes where the refugees attempted to seek asylum or apply for refugee status. They experienced a state of confusion and chaos because the society and situations they encountered were no longer familiar to them. This state of chaos that coincided with many "unknowns" reflected the experience of SEI – the familiar sociocultural and political rules as they knew them no longer held true either in their homeland, in their transition place, or in Australia. There was a lack of harmony and congruity among the various aspects of their self-identity. This lack of accord was the crux of the experience of SEI.

In this study, the definition of *self* is borrowed from Brewer and Gardner (1996), who defined three aspects of the self. First, the *personal* self refers to the differentiated and

individuated self-concept. Second, there is the *relational* self or the interpersonal part of the self that originates from the direct functional relationships with significant others. Third, the *collective* self refers to the self that emerges from being a member in a wider impersonal social environment. For the purpose of this study, the relational self and the collective self refer to the aspects of the self that interact with the social environment. Throughout this thesis, the personal self of the participants as they incorporated their experiences as refugees in Australia is described.

As derived from the analysis of the data, the *environment* of the refugees refers to the ecological, political, social, and cultural conditions and circumstances that affect the lives of the refugees and their communities. It was further revealed that the *environment* affecting the lives of the refugees can be divided into four main aspects: ecological environment, political environment, living circumstances and conditions, and sociocultural environment. A brief introduction of each of these aspects is presented as follows and examples from the perspective of the refugees will be presented throughout this thesis.

As inferred, the *ecological or natural environment* of the refugees includes the climate, the geographical features of their living space, the natural world of living things, and natural resources. The main premise from Segall, Dasen, Berry, and Poortinga (1990) can be considered: The ecological environment is the mover and shaper of culture and behaviour; ecological factors can restrict, force, and nurture cultural forms, which in turn lead to certain behaviours. These background variables are the ones that give rise to culture. The problem of SEI can be seen in older refugees who found it difficult to endure extreme temperatures in Western Australia. Thus, the ecological environment of Western Australia contributed to their SEI. For example, a 63 year old participant in this study described the winter season in Perth as being "cold to the bones," and she believed that it exacerbated her arthritis.

The *political environment* of the refugees includes the global political influences on refugees, the politics of their homeland, and the political climate in Australia. For example, the unstable political environment of the refugees' homeland contributed to

their problem of SEI and was the primary reason for their forced departure. In general, the political environment of the refugees in this study was found to be the predominant underlying theme that significantly influenced their lives and will be described further in this chapter.

The *living circumstances and conditions* constitute part of the environment of the refugees that came about due to the political environment of their homeland and the living conditions during their transitional phase away from their homes. For example, the infrastructure of a country could be devastated by war, where hospitals, schools, houses, and roads were destroyed. There could be a lack of basic necessities such as food, medicines, clothes, shelter, and clean water. *Self-environment incongruity* appeared to be deeply experienced as the refugees might not have legal permission to stay in the country of asylum and had to escape from place to place. The conditions of the refugee camps were crowded, and the struggles to obtain the basic necessities continued. Upon arrival in Australia, the new living circumstances and conditions continued to contribute to the SEI experienced by the refugees. For example, the refugees had to learn how to rent a place, pay bills, set up a budget, speak English, and find employment.

The *sociocultural environment* plays a major role in affecting the lives of the refugees. As indicated in the findings, there are several aspects to the sociocultural environment: society level, ethnic community level, family members level (including significant others), and close friends level. At the society level, the refugees in this study related to people outside their circle of familiarity. Here, they sought education and employment, and, at times, faced acceptance, indifference, or discrimination. This was also the context where they experienced SEI in Australia. For some refugees, their ethnic communities became a source of initial guidance and comfort and thus aided their resettlement in Australia. Ethnic communities often helped the maintenance of their customs and traditions. For most refugees, family members and close friends provided the main form of social psychological support.

3.3 PRE-MIGRATION AND POST-MIGRATION SELF-ENVIRONMENT INCONGRUITY

The refugee experience consisted of three main phases. The first phase occurred in the refugees' homeland. The second phase was a transitional phase away from the refugees' homes as they anticipated their acceptance as refugees. Phase three was the post-migration phase that occurred in Australia. The SEI that refugees experienced in their homeland and in a transitional period away from their homes is referred to here as pre-migration SEI. Post-migration SEI is the basic problem of SEI that the refugees experienced as they became aware that they were inharmonious with their new environment in Australia. The basic social psychological problem of SEI is depicted in Figure 3.1. Each of the three phases of the refugee experience, the causal factors of SEI at each phase, the properties of SEI, its consequences, and influencing conditions are elaborated in the following sections.

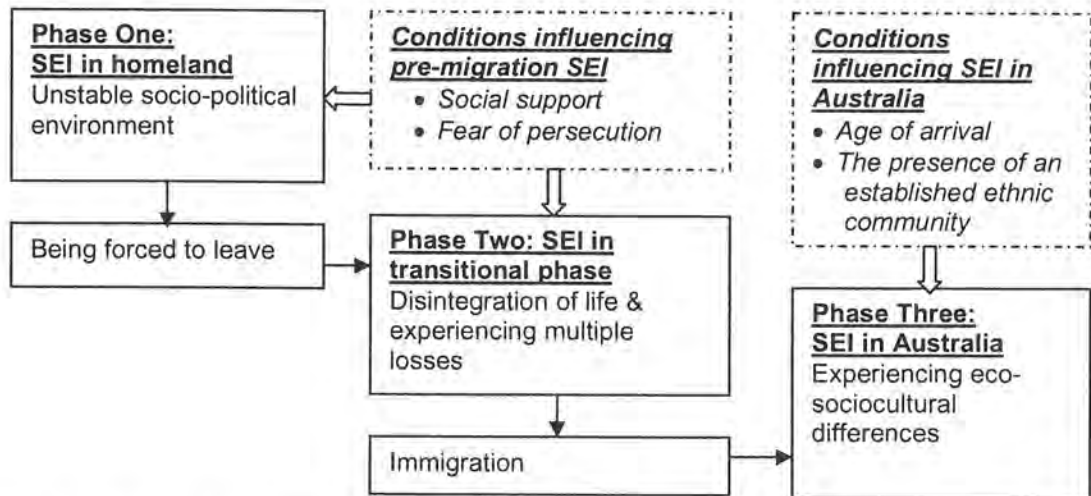


Figure 3.1. The basic social psychological problem of *self-environment incongruity* (SEI)

3.4 PHASE ONE: SELF-ENVIRONMENT INCONGRUITY IN HOMELAND

In this section, the experiences of the refugee participants in their homeland are explored. Specifically, the causal factor that led to the experience of SEI in their homeland will be described.

3.4.1 CAUSAL FACTOR OF SELF-ENVIRONMENT INCONGRUITY IN HOMELAND: THE UNSTABLE SOCIO-POLITICAL ENVIRONMENT

For most refugee participants, the unstable socio-political environment in their homeland had seriously affected their lives. In this study, the unstable socio-political environment refers to the socio-political upheaval and unrest in the refugees' homeland that originated from political revolution, civil war and war with other nations, and other less-specific causes. In the following sections, numerous aspects that formed the unstable socio-political environment of the refugees are further described. These aspects include socio-political upheaval (such as revolution and war), the threat of persecution (imprisonment, torture, and genocide), and discrimination.

3.4.1.1 Socio-political upheaval

Revolution or the use of force to overthrow a government system (Cowie, 1990) was one form of socio-political upheaval commonly experienced by the refugees. When revolution occurred, civilians could be caught up "in the middle of it" as one refugee put it. For some refugees, the main outcome of revolution was the unexpected and sometimes drastic changes made to their social, political, and education environment. In the following section, some of the statements the refugees made are presented. In Payam's case, he had difficulty realising that revolution had taken place because they "were in the middle of it," and he was trying to adapt to the changes brought on by the 1979 revolution in Iran.

When things were happening, it was very hard to know because we were in the middle of it. Wait [for] what was coming along everyday. Everyday was this giant thing called revolution expanding its net, and we didn't feel that. We were in the middle of it. We were just adapting ourselves with it. (Payam)

Common to other participants' first reaction to unexpected political upheaval in their countries, the primary emotional reaction Payam had towards the revolution was *shock*. He later "woke up" to the reality that the political environment of his country had drastically changed in conjunction with major shifts in social attitudes.

Everything had changed – the lecturers, teachers, principals, everybody else. The attitude has change – people who were never unfriendly, now they are looking differently at us. And day-by-day, there were oppositions against Baha'is, increasing and increasing. Many people were basically executed for being

Baha'is. And it was so shocking to me, and I was so like a person who has just woken up and realising what was happening. (Payam)

As a consequence of revolution, several school-aged refugees experienced bullying and were also ostracised.

I was harassed because the kids found out that I was a Baha'i. Just bully me or making fun, calling you names ... try to loosen the bolts from the bench, so when you sit, you fall down, pulling your sort of like hair. Or write things, rude words, at the back of your jacket. And the teachers started to be agro, talking to us as if we were like down there, or they will tell kids not to sit next to us. I was standing alone by myself all the time. (Shahrooz)

Towards the end of that high school year, I realised that it is serious because the teachers were also afraid of being persecuted or being dobbed in as anti-revolutionarists. So they were trying to somehow please people, kids, and authorities, all the revolutionary people. The very first thing and easy thing for them is to pick on a Baha'i kid in school and say something. (Payam)

Revolution also brought a lot of uncertainty and fears into the lives of the refugees as their military government became suspicious of those they thought would rebel against them. As indicated in the following passage, the Kachin tribal people who were residing in the city of Rangoon lived a very fearful life.

We all left Burma because when you become over 18, the government they always watching you because they don't like a lot of tribal people, teenagers living in the city. The government always looks at you for any underground movement. Maybe you can disappear; what I mean disappear is sometimes if you do something wrong, [even] if it is not the big one, they can just lock [you] up. Sometimes, if it is political, then they can kill you and try to bury your body somewhere else – your parents cannot find you. (Ken)

The preceding excerpts show that as a consequence of revolution, those who were members of a minority group from different religious and cultural backgrounds could be persecuted. Victims of persecution experienced acute SEI, which disrupted their lives.

The majority of the refugees in this study were faced with civil war or war with other nations. Civil war had occurred among the different nationalities of the former Yugoslavia and within many African countries, often with very devastating consequences for civilians. In the following excerpt, Aziza describes the changes that took place in her country, in particular the damage done to the infrastructure (such as education and medical care) that had been previously put in place.

At that time, we have free education. Sometimes, people have donations like social security. Everything now is gone because there is no government. There is no hospital at all. Just one hospital but just private, which you pay American dollars; there is no Somalian money. People can't afford it [sic] to go to such a place like that. So they keep whatever they have, the disease, until they die. That's civil war is worse than fighting with another country. (Aziza)

Civil war also forced civilians to move frequently from place to place. Being unable to live in a fixed location, many civilians were internally displaced, and their lives became very uncertain.

Civil war is terrible. They [My family] have to move from region to region. They have to move a lot. So if there is war, they have to move to the other side; and if the other side has war, they have moved back to where they were. It's not only them; a lot of people move around, there is no certain place. (Nadia)

In some countries, as indicated by Aziza, civilians were also exposed to life-threatening landmines.

And now they start burying land mines, millions of land mines. I think [Somalia] is one of the top ten countries in the world that has land mines ... I was like ... God, I thought it was only Afghanistan and Angola. They bury everywhere – countryside and somewhere in the city. Mines, which is really worst. (Aziza)

As demonstrated, the devastating outcome of revolution and war had led the refugees to escape their homeland. Additionally, a more direct threat to the lives of the refugees came in the form of imprisonment, torture, and genocide.

3.4.1.2 The threat of persecution: Imprisonment, torture, and genocide

The threat of persecution took many forms. A few refugees in this study fled their homeland because they had been imprisoned or faced the possibility of imprisonment and torture (e.g., Baha'is from Iran, Oromo tribal people from Ethiopia). The oppression they experienced and the threat of persecution they faced, as they indicated, sometimes arose out of changes in leadership as an outcome of political revolution. A number of refugees experienced initial feelings of fear and threat that commenced with the use of violence by the military government against those who were seen as threats to its governing position. As an example, the use of violence included acts of atrocities and genocide committed by the Burmese soldiers towards the Karen tribal people living in

villages and jungle. The fear of persecution experienced by the refugees is further described in the following section.

3.4.1.2.1 Experiencing imprisonment and/or torture

The experience of imprisonment and/or torture constituted the most severe form of persecution because the lives of the refugees were under direct threat. The following excerpts provide examples of the events surrounding two refugees who were wrongfully accused and imprisoned. Payam recounted the events that led to his imprisonment as a high school teenager.

I saw the revolutionary guards standing by the door. They have got weapons and talking to my mum, "The revolutionary attorney general wants to inspect the houses of suspected people, suspected of committing crimes against the revolution, crimes against humanity, basically any crime." They went through the house. I went through extra effort to make sure that they see everything. (Payam)

Members of a minority religious group also became vulnerable as they could not voice their defence due to a lack of a built-in justice system. Payam, for instance, was imprisoned without having committed a crime.

[The guard] said, "I want you to come with us to sign a paper that we haven't taken anything from your house. That is nothing here, no problem here." They took me in and I went there [jail] for a week. After a few days, they took me for interrogation. I said, "Why don't you tell me what is the crime?" "Because you are accused of assisting..." he mentioned some unlawful political parties, which have been military activist and terrorist groups. And I said, "Did you find anything?" He said, "That's not for you to know." (Payam)

In his young adulthood, Payam was once again imprisoned and interrogated for being a member of a religious minority group in Iran.

They took us all in, interrogating everybody. I was let go that night but the second night, I was taken in again. I was sitting in that cold concrete on the floor, and we had this questionnaire. "What crime have you been brought in?" Three of us said, "No, what is our crime?" The guard said, "The crime is being a Baha'i, you think we are afraid of saying that? You just write it there, and we can give you paper, and you can go and show it to anyone." (Payam)

The nature of interrogation, which involved questioning the refugees' personal lives and activities, is revealed as follows:

All the questionnaire was all about how I became a Baha'i, who was there when I signed the card accepting being a Baha'i, who are my Baha'i education teachers,

and they wanted me to introduce them to members of the Baha'i LSA and committees. We didn't lie, we said the truth. They let most of us go, but they kept a few older Baha'is ... and gradually they were released, but some of them were badly beaten. (Payam)

Although I had specifically requested for refugees who did not require counselling, Morathi from the Oromo community in Ethiopia volunteered for the study. He had been severely tortured and had counselling in the past.

I have been tortured many times, been beaten under my feet. They also put a rope on my hand and pull it like this, and then they immerse you in the water. And sometimes, they [put] something that holds like this on the nail, and they pull it [my nail] out. So I have gone through that, and I have been also kept underground where I cannot see any light. There is no any food. You would be given a loaf of bread daily and dirty, dirty water that can really kill you. (Morathi)

Morathi also described how his interrogators threatened his life to make him reveal activities that he was not a part of.

They kill people, and they take you in the middle of the night and said, "Well, this is a fresh dead body and you can see the blood, unless you work hard, and tell us what you have been doing, and what you people are planning to do in the future, and what they are planning to do and everything." They did this and many many other things that are really horrible to tell. (Morathi)

Morathi was eventually forced to confess to crimes he did not commit.

And finally, they failed to get anything from me. They said they brought the paper for me to sign to say I am the top spy for OLF [Oromo Liberation Front] around Addis Ababa and so on and that I agree not to communicate with any OLF member or supporters or do anything which relates me to OLF. And they told me that I should sign this and I signed, they took my picture. (Morathi)

Eventually, Morathi was released on the condition that he agreed to spy on behalf of his torturers. For the sake of being released, Morathi agreed to work with them.

"We can release you if you can tell us where they stay, when the meeting will be held and on what topic that the meeting will be and everything. And we will give you the right for you to go to the meeting and contact everybody." And I was shocked and I said, "It was really bad for me to keep staying there." And I said "Okay, I will do it," just for the sake of going out of the prison. (Morathi)

Following his release, Morathi approached the human rights committee to seek help. However, suspicion arose within him that the committee itself was working for his persecutors. He had no choice but to escape to the neighbouring country of Kenya.

When I left the prison, I contacted an office which called Ethiopian Human Rights League. They took all the information that I have told them and again, they said to me, "We can't do anything for you but give the information that you have given us to the concerned people." And I don't know which offices really concerned to do that if they are not. So I heard again the league is said that are kept there by the Ethiopian government themselves to spy on people. (Morathi)

As demonstrated in the preceding excerpts, both Payam and Morathi had no choice but to escape these atrocities. Another form of atrocity that forced the refugees to escape their countries was the act of genocide.

3.4.1.2.2 Experiencing genocide

In this study, genocide was the main act of violence used to destroy the tribal people in Burma /Myanmar, the Oromo people in Ethiopia, and the Baha'is in Iran. Such atrocities were acted out with the intention to destroy partly or completely a national, ethnic, racial, or religious group. They included (1) killings of members belonging to a group, (2) inflicting serious physical or psychological damage to members of a group, (3) imposing on the group certain life conditions which result in partial or complete physical destruction, (4) implementing ways to obstruct births within a group, and (5) moving children involuntarily from one group to another group (Levinson, 1998). In this study, for instance, Mike related the horrific and grotesque events of genocide carried out by Burmese soldiers on the Karen tribal people in Burma. Mike further stated that many young Karen children became soldiers out of passion for avenging the horrific deaths of their parents.

It's like their parents have been killed in front of them, just like shot them in front of them. I heard one of the stories, what they do is they killed the mum, like a young kid like 10, 11, 12 ... Killed the mum, cooked the mum, and asked her children to eat it. That's why the kids now they want revenge – they have no parents, no nothing, and no education. All they want is revenge, they don't want anything any more, just want revenge. (Mike)

Genocide was also carried out to completely wipe out the existence of a particular community that had its own and unique cultural identity.

Without the willing of our community, we have been called Ethiopian. We really don't believe that we are Ethiopian. Our country is Oromia, and we wanted to be called Oromo. And our language is Affa Oromo. We have got a lot of problems in the past centuries that we have been colonized, and that happened to us without

our willing. So we really didn't want to be part of Ethiopia. We want to have our own country, use our own language, and develop our own culture. (Morathi)

The following excerpts illustrate the act of genocide committed against the Oromo community, in which individuals from all walks of life came under suspicion for helping the Oromo Liberation Front (OLF). The perpetrators made false accusations to justify the capture and imprisonment of these individuals.

Students, farmers, the whole nation is in trouble. They are just out of their minds. They arrest families, and the soldiers rape a wife when the husband is still around. The way they raped them is horrible. At this place that I was kept, there were musicians, university students, doctors, lawyers, and even some merchants ... You will be interrogated as if you are [an] active OLF member when you are not really; you don't even know what is going on. (Morathi)

Perpetrators of genocide also found excuses to annihilate the entire culture and existence of an ethnic community as reflected in Morathi's statements. There was no freedom of speech or media for the victimised community members to voice their rights, nor were there any means for them to defend themselves.

The only reason they have been caught is because the musicians want to say their feelings about their country in their songs, that they really in need of freedom, that there is no justice and rights for our nation. Some of the musicians want to promote the language that the government really don't want us to use ... and also the culture and the dancing like that. (Morathi)

They [merchants] are not very rich, but they want to share the little that they have with people that don't really have anything to eat. They sometimes go into the countryside and give away from what the God blessed them ... many many other things, basic necessities for human beings, the clothing and things that they want to reach poor people of the community was interpreted as they are talking to the rebels, to the OLF fighters, which is not true. They are there [in the prison] for that. (Morathi)

For a few refugees in this study, while the threat of being directly persecuted was less obvious, discrimination and oppression were blatant and became a way of life. The experience of discrimination is further explicated in the following section.

3.4.1.3 Experiencing discrimination

As indicated in the findings, the practice of discrimination often involved singling out a person or group of individuals for victimisation of various types, including imprisonment. Daily experience of discrimination, which contributed largely to the

refugees' experience of SEI, was described by a refugee as being "ostracized" and losing a sense of belonging in his homeland.

It wasn't something like we wanted to leave our country for a better life here – we were happy in our country. But then again, how can I put it? We were also ostracised in our country, okay, and they took that from us, you know, like we didn't feel that we belong to that country any more. (Shahrooz)

Discrimination could also take place as an outcome of civil war.

3.4.1.3.1 Discrimination as a consequence of war or revolution

Sometimes ethnic tension and racial hatred could be so strong that a country became divided into different nationalities. For example, Sabrina lived a comfortable life free from any ethnic tension or discrimination prior to the civil war in the former Yugoslavia. During the civil war, there was an instantaneous change in social attitudes whereby her mixed ethnic background was frowned upon and amplified by her fellow country people, and she became a target of discrimination.

For me, personally, it was even worst because I came from a mixed marriage, and we belong to both sides. [We are] Serbian people living in Croatia, but we belong to a mixed marriage [Bosnian father and Serbian mother]. It was very very hard for us. According to them, we are "not clean." Suddenly you find yourself to "pull out" overnight and it's scary. (Sabrina)

[The tension] is very hard to describe. People treat you differently. They talk to you differently; they approach you differently. They see you as a lower race. We get these attacks. I personally was terribly troubled because I came from a mixed marriage. So I was forced from the bus so many times and emotionally, verbally abused by police. (Sabrina)

Sabrina further described how she was pulled out of a bus and interrogated.

There were several times they pulled me out of the bus, and they keep you there for two hours; and you can see that these people are investigating you, like you are a criminal, a terrorist, whatever. They don't even know how to write proper their names, and the next thing, you look at them and you see a stone age person treating you like a piece of something. (Sabrina)

When requested to describe what she meant by "lower race," she explained:

I am from a mixed marriage, my father is Bosnian, my mother is half-Croatian half-Serbian, and we lived in Croatia. So according to unwritten rule, during the war, you don't belong to any of the sides, you are not clean. If you have a chance to talk to anyone who is from mixed marriage, they are going to say to you the same thing because you lost your identity. (Sabrina)

3.4.1.3.2 Systematic discrimination as a cause of departure

A few refugees in this study experienced a lifetime of ethnic or religious discrimination in their homeland. Systematic discrimination, which became a pervasive practice in countries ruled by military governments, occurred daily in the areas of health, education, and employment. For example, the tribal people from the original states of Karen and Kachin have been at war for more than fifty years with the Burmese military government. Instead of living in their own state, a few tribal refugee participants opted to stay in the capital city of Rangoon and thus escape the devastation of civil war. However, pervasive discriminatory practices by the Burmese military government in Rangoon (with regards to education, employment, and other opportunities) had forced many tribal people to leave in search of a better quality of life. One Kachin refugee, who lived in Rangoon, describes his school days in the following passage.

Ah, all these schools, all these teachers, or principals, most of them are Burmese. And some schools have Christian teachers, and you got Christian teacher, it's all right, they will forgive you – I mean they just ignore you. But if you got some strong Buddhist teacher, then you are in trouble. They always punish you like, for example, beating you. (Ken)

These tribal refugees continued to face discrimination in employment after they had completed their education.

In Burma, most of the jobs are government jobs; so if you are not a Burmese, it will be very hard for you to get a job again. So, it's really hard. So most of my parents' family or tribal people, they only studied until high school, then everybody went overseas to continue their studies. (Ken)

A few participants faced severe discrimination because they were members of a minority religious group in their homeland. Payam explained what it was like to be a Baha'i living in Islamic Iran in the 1980s and described the overt discrimination he witnessed.

I was watching them with their spray paints on the door: "Down with the Baha'is. Baha'is are followers of American." That was easy for anyone to see who is a Baha'i because it was written on the door. Baha'is are banned to do things like selling fresh vegetables, groceries. Baha'is are out of work, no government employment as such. Even if you were the most qualified trade person, you couldn't get a license to operate. (Payam)

Thus, in this study, discrimination was found to be one of the consequences of war or revolution as well as the reason for the refugees' departure.

3.4.2 SUMMARY OF SELF-ENVIRONMENT INCONGRUITY IN HOMELAND

In their homeland, the refugees in this study were faced with the threat of persecution and often systematic discrimination because of their ethnicity or tribal origins, religious beliefs, nationality, political orientation, or because they belonged to a certain social group. Some participants were simply civilians who had no particular political orientation but were unfortunate enough to be caught up in the political conflicts (including revolution and war) of their country. A few participants were political refugees who had to escape due to the danger of being captured and imprisoned. Several participants were religious refugees as they were part of religious minorities in their homeland, and their lives and means of livelihood were threatened by the discrimination they faced. Therefore, at phase one, the experience of SEI was manifested as the misfit between the refugees and the unstable socio-political environment of their homeland. As a result, the refugees were forced to leave and enter a transitional phase away from their homes.

3.5 PHASE TWO: SELF-ENVIRONMENT INCONGRUITY DURING THE TRANSITIONAL PHASE

Self-environment incongruity (SEI) continued to exist as the main problem for the refugee participants during the transitional phase prior to migration to Australia. Life continued to be difficult and unsettling. The predominant factor that caused the experience of SEI during this phase was the refugees' forced departure from their homes. The main consequence of the refugees' forced migration included experiencing a multitude of losses in all segments of their lives and the resultant disintegration of their previous lives. The causal factor is fully examined as follows.

3.5.1 CAUSAL FACTOR OF SELF-ENVIRONMENT INCONGRUITY DURING THE TRANSITIONAL PHASE: BEING FORCED TO LEAVE

Being forced to leave their homeland was the causal factor for the refugees' SEI during the transitional phase. The decision to leave could be a quick one if the refugees had to escape immediately (e.g., Sabrina, Morathi, as mentioned earlier) or a process that took many years, as in the case of Tuba.

And after stress, and stress, and stress, no, I am not going out, this is my country. I am born in Iran. I grew up in this country. K [my son] going doesn't matter because very danger for my son. I am still, I am still here, not going, not going, not going somewhere, not going somewhere because my country, my family, everybody grew up here. (Tuba)

Tuba, who waited another ten years to leave her homeland, described how she came to this decision.

After ten years, stress, stress, stress, my husband get too old, no energy. Children grew up have no money, nothing. My son said, "Please, mum, please, my father not young, very stress for my dad because the martyrdom of the Baha'i people. Can you please come to Australia?" I said, "Okay." I have to go because no money, no you working, no job, nothing. (Tuba)

There were numerous routes undertaken by the participants in their escape from their homeland. A few were internally displaced before leaving their countries. Some sought shelter in various refugee camps and in the jungle. Most participants sought refuge in a transition country before coming to Australia. One refugee arrived in Australia using forged papers and had to stay in a detention centre. Each of these routes is described as follows.

3.5.1.1 Being internally displaced

Refugee participants who were internally displaced still resided in their homeland but were no longer living in the comfort of their own homes. Although they had not arrived in another transition country, their lives had altered dramatically once they left their homes. The challenges faced by the internally displaced refugees also contributed largely to their problem of SEI. For example, Nadia had to endure discrimination as an internally displaced person who escaped from Croatia. Although she was ethnically a Serb who had returned to live in Serbia, the locals could tell by her accent that she was from Croatia.

From Croatia where I lived before the war started, then I moved to the other part of former Yugoslavia, Serbia, where majority Serbs live. But I had dialect, like accent from where I lived before. And because of wartime, everybody knew, and I couldn't hide it that I wasn't from this part. (Nadia)

Life continued to present Nadia with many problems, which came about because of the civil war. Some of these problems arose because of imposed sanctions. There was also a lack of various necessities.

It was very hard time for people there because of sanctions, it was wartime, there wasn't enough food, enough jobs. Life wasn't normal, and then people just became very competitive to get jobs to buy something when the market never has enough food and stuff. Unemployment rate is very very high. (Nadia)

Nadia described what inflation was like during war.

Inflation was, I think, it was world record, like thousands and thousands percentage – something that you just can't imagine. Like today for one dollar you can buy one bread, tomorrow you need thousand dollars to buy. It looks impossible, but it was life like that there. Like you just add three zeros. (Nadia)

You can have it [electricity] four hours per day, not more than four. During wintertime, it was horrible, like temperature twenty below zero and you can't have your heating ... It was so many different things, like people freezing, couldn't read, couldn't watch TV, couldn't work, not enough food. (Nadia)

As a result of living under these adverse conditions, internally displaced people like Nadia could be made scapegoats by the local people.

If they see that you are refugee, that you speak differently, they are angry with you because of you they don't have enough. I don't blame them because it was real crisis and it was not enough jobs for locals. And probably that is the reason why we were not welcome there ... they felt that because of us, people coming from war-affected part of former Yugoslavia, that the locals can't work, they don't have enough food. (Nadia)

Many tribal refugees residing in Burma were also internally displaced in Burma due to the revolution and the civil war. These refugees continued to face many challenges such as enduring extreme weather conditions, a lack of medical treatment, and having to work very hard to get food. The life of a Karen child refugee, Mike, who lived in the jungle with his family, is portrayed in the following excerpts.

My parents have to go to farm. It's not a farm, it's a rice field, that's uphill. They burn down the whole hill, they grow rice. It's really hard work. Like before they burn down the mountain, they have to cut it down, it's really hard. The whole mountain is really huge. They have to work there half the year, to harvest. We help each other. (Mike)

The weather just changed, and I got malaria for a few months. And I get better and I get sick again, like one whole year. I always get sick. (Mike)

Mike believed that the lack of medicine and the adverse living conditions in the jungle contributed to the death of his brother.

The other brother died in the jungle. In the jungle, we have no medicine at all. Life is really hard down there. I think what happened was he got sick a few times. My dad feed him some kind of medicine. It affects his eyes, become blurry, after that he become paralysed like disabled. Then, we left because of the revolution. We went to live in the jungle for two years, that's where he got sick again because of the weather and everything. (Mike)

Life in the transitional phase was also unsettling as the tribal refugees constantly feared their enemies would turn up any time.

Suddenly, villagers would probably run around and saying, "Ah, Burmese are coming, we have to run." When they left, we become peaceful village again; no worries at all. Otherwise, they will take us hostage and carry big mortars, guns, M16. Like when they get sick and can't carry anymore, they [the Burmese soldiers] kill them. And when they come to the village, they usually take stuff from village, take chicken, take stuff, pigs, calf. (Mike)

Instead of being internally displaced, most refugees in this study entered a transitional phase in another country. As demonstrated in the following section, their experiences varied considerably.

3.5.1.2 Experiences during the transitional phase in another country

It was indicated in the participant demographic forms (Appendix D) that the length of residence in a transition country or a country of asylum varied from 10 months to 6 years. These transition countries were Pakistan, Syria, Kenya, Austria, Malaysia, Indonesia, and Thailand. In this study, two refugees were internally displaced in the former Yugoslavia and therefore did not state another country as their place of asylum. One refugee stated that she did not have a country of asylum but rather a transition country where she waited for a reunion visa to join a family member. Two refugees did not state a transition country because they arrived in Australia via student visas but obtained their refugee status later. One refugee was detained at Port Hedland Detention Centre upon arrival in Australia, and thus Australia was stated as the transition country.

3.5.1.2.1 *The wait*

Life in another country during the transitional phase before migration was often portrayed as unsettling. Here, the refugees experienced a sense of being uprooted but were not able to resettle or rebuild their lives peacefully and permanently. Their lives had disintegrated, and they started to experience their multiple losses more deeply and thus worsening their experience of SEI. Negative feelings and depression were common among the refugees during the waiting period. For example, Mariam felt extremely isolated and depressed while staying temporarily in Syria. Other than looking after three young children without any support, she experienced financial problems and a lower standard of living, all of which contributed to her depression.

When I left my country, I lived in Syria for almost three years because my husband came here before me. I had to wait for my reunion visa. It was very hard time for me in Syria because I was living there alone with just my children. It was very hard, very hard time. We were facing financial hardship at that time. You know, how three children, it wasn't easy for me to take care of them. And accommodation – Syria wasn't good. (Mariam)

Mariam also endured an unexpected lengthy wait to enter Australia, which contributed to her hardship in Syria.

I was expecting that I would stay in Syria for just a few months, just for two or three months, and then I will follow my husband. I wasn't expecting that, but it was harder for me because I had to stay, to work for my visa. My visa took a long time, more than two years. So the procedure was very slow. (Mariam)

It was common among the refugees to compare what they had before they left their homeland and their dispossession after departure. In Mariam's case, she endured a lower economic status and a loss of independence and thus aggravating her experience of SEI.

I don't want to talk about Syria. It was very hard because in my country, my home was very good and furnished and everything was available. I have private transport because I was driving. I was like independent person. But in Syria, there is nothing, we lived there in a temporary time. We don't have transport, we don't have furnished house, just with basic furniture. It was very hard for me to take care of my children, and I was alone without my husband. (Mariam)

For refugees who were living “illegally” in another country, life was extremely stressful as they constantly feared getting caught by the local police. For example, one Karen refugee explained that his family had to be vigilant at all times in Thailand.

My parents and my brothers really hate those town police. We just feel like the boat people. I think I know how they feel right now ... it's like illegal immigrants. At day time, my sister had to run around. At night time really late, 10 o'clock, she comes back at night, went to sleep. Next day, go somewhere else, find a place. It's like police won't catch them. It's like here, if anyone finds illegal immigrants, they send them back. (Mike)

3.5.1.2.2 Boat people

The term *boat people* has been used since 1978 to refer to refugees from Southeast Asia, particularly the Vietnamese, who fled their homeland by boat to find refuge in other countries such as Hong Kong, Thailand, Malaysia, Indonesia, and the Philippines (Levinson, 1998). Among the refugee participants, Ho and Ming were in a group of "boat people" who arrived in Australia as children more than 20 years ago. Ho recalled the events that led to his escape from Vietnam as a child.

We saw a lot of soldiers moving into our neighbourhood and kicking out families. Like they say, "This house belongs to the government now, you don't own it." Just normal uniformed soldiers, I don't know if it's the Viet Cong or whatever, no idea. But we know it's the Communist soldiers, and they came to our house, and the demand was, "Get out, or I'll shoot your kid." Heh heh. And obviously, my dad decided to go. (Ho)

Ming, on the other hand, could not remember the events that led to his escape. He spoke very little about his journey by boat as he was asleep most of the time.

Journey by boat, I was unconscious most of the time, but I think we left at night and we landed at night time. Yeah, pretty sure we landed at night. We landed in Malaysia first. I don't know the name of the island, but a small island in Malaysia. That's a coconut plantation island. (Ming)

A more detailed account of escape was provided by Ho who stated that the refugees cooperated and used whatever financial resources were available. Ho also heard of many tragedies as well as successes in people's escapes.

There are a lot of people chipped in – they built a ship to escape. My dad just got a few friends and would build a ship with the money that we had because they freeze everything, freeze your bank account. All the assets were freeze; all your properties were taken away. So we had virtually nothing, but because we were Chinese Vietnamese, we like to buy gold. (Ho)

Ho explained that they did not arrive in Australia and Indonesian boats brought them to an island in Indonesia.

My dad more or less used them [the gold] with among quite a few friends to build a ship. We actually got into Indonesia and the navigator, he was a fake [laughs]. He didn't know what he was doing. Five days at sea, he got seasick, he got really scared. So when he saw land, which was only a small island of one kilometre apart, he just kept going, going until we hit this rock, that's when we all jumped. That's when all the Indonesian boats or canoe boats came and took us to another island three days later. (Ho)

It is important to note that not all experiences were negative for the refugee participants. Possibly due to his young age and lack of responsibilities, Ho only remembered the “good bits” of the island where the boat people temporary resided.

I am not sure. I think it is called Malang or Kuku. It's one of that. But it was like paradise, there is no electricity, there were no cars. There was nothing, it's just sand, trees, and people. And it was all like a family, a huge family. I only remember the good bits of it ... There wasn't anything negative about it, you know. No mortgages and no cars. Your car doesn't get wrecked ... I was 7, 7 to 10 [years old]. (Ho)

The problem of SEI was exacerbated when the refugees tried to survive in an unfamiliar transition environment. The state of *unpreparedness* that was typical of the refugee experience is illustrated in the following excerpt. Ho reported that the refugees were willing to swap their gold and diamonds for food and shelter.

We got charged from the Indonesian people to live there. Money wasn't important any more because we come to this primitive land. So with gold, we've got a lot of gold, diamonds, they were swapped for food or for shelter, so we just accept. Because we had no food, and 350 boat people were business people ... they were not like out to dig holes, things like that. Anything easy, “Yes, whatever, just take it.” (Ho)

The refugees learnt to make the most of what was available to them in order to survive and fit into their new surroundings.

We spent about six months in the first island that was very primitive, you had trees and straw. That was it [laughs]. There was no electricity, there was nothing there and you lived. Palm leaves, you know, for rooftop. There was no wall, there was nothing. I called it trees and straws, but I think probably coconut leaves as roof tops, and probably I don't know what type of wood for beds that we used. We sort of like built [them ourselves]. (Ho)

Most refugees who escaped had to assess their priorities in order to survive in their new environment. Ho vividly remembered his family's desperation for survival as they quickly realised that “staying alive” was more crucial than “wearing all these nice gold.”

But after a while, my parents settled down a bit and think, what is more important, like staying alive or wearing all these nice gold. A lot of people just swapped it for can food because they will last longer than just biscuits or apples. That's the first thing they show, junk food. We've never seen these types of food before. It was like, very enticing. (Ho)

Ho even remembered how willing people were to swap their gold for a box of biscuits.

But a lot of people just give you a 24 carat gold ring that costs 200 dollars for a box of biscuits. And we didn't even think twice about it. If you think about it now, it's like, "O God, we got totally ripped off," heh heh, heh heh [Laughs]. But back then, we didn't care (Ho).

Eventually, the refugees adjusted better to the new environment and acquired the skills to obtain food for themselves.

So after that, people started to learn how to fish, how to catch food. About a week, people started going fishing, we eat a lot of fish [for] three years. I mean tuna was plentiful, and we had tuna everyday [laughs]. Tuna for breakfast, tuna for lunch, tuna for dinner. Sometimes, clams, big clams. If we can find a big one, we used it as a bath tubs for the kids to wash (Ho).

Notably, while Ho did not have horrific experiences, many Vietnamese boat people had suffered unbearable tragedies. Willmoth (2005), in *Sunday Age*, wrote about those who suffered greatly and those who perished as they fled Vietnam by boat. The Red Cross estimated in 1981 that half the Vietnamese fleeing Vietnam by boat were killed by pirates.

3.5.1.2.3 "Illegal entry" into Australia and experiences in detention centres

There has been a lot of controversy regarding the more recent treatment of asylum seekers who were detained in Australia. Peter Mares (2001) in his book, *Borderline: Australia's treatment of Refugees and Asylum Seekers*, pleaded for a more generous and compassionate attitude towards refugees and asylum seekers. He warned that "the more we seek to deter asylum seekers and refugees through harsh treatment, the more Australia comes to resemble the repressive nations from which they flee." (p. 202). The term "illegal" has continued to invoke a lot of debate and this term will be further explored in Chapter Five. In this study, only one asylum seeker arrived in Australia

without correct documentation. Aziza, a 23 year old refugee, confessed that she flew to Australia using forged papers.

I first came as migrant, but the document wasn't real. I was with a group of 22 people, and we decided to apply as Australia refugees. Then, they sent us to the detention centres, and I was there for one year. Yeah, I got permanent residence after one year; and they gave only 4 people including me, 18 they sent back to Somalia. (Aziza)

The negative aspects of life in the detention centre were described by Aziza as being similar to being in prison.

I used to live with my family, I never ever ever ever thought some day will happen to me like this – end up in prison, got jailed. I mean, detention is like prison, you can't go out, you can't do anything. They counted you every night with torch, and it's like prison. You can't lock the door, you can't have privacy. Anything you need to do, even if you need to cut your hair, you have to let know the manager and get permission. (Aziza)

Although more horrific conditions in Australia's detention centres have been reported elsewhere in the literature (e.g., Mares, 2001), these conditions are not explored here as they are outside the scope of this study.

3.5.1.2.4 Experiences in refugee camps

Participants who had lived in refugee camps or who had seen the conditions in the refugee camps commonly described the unpleasantness of such living conditions. Refugee camps were commonly depicted as crowded and ridden with disease and death.

I have been through all refugee camps. Like a whole bunch of Karen people, we have to sleep in a house. The house is full of people, like full of refugees, in a house crowded in a small house. It's really, I couldn't even sleep like kids crying, screaming. Like a whole bunch of us, it's like kids everywhere, crying. (Mike)

There are a lot of diseases. Most of the victims are children. Children are worst no matter which age they are, they are the most deteriorates [sic] and vulnerable. Second is women especially if she is pregnant because she can't get whatever a pregnant woman needs, like vitamins, like health food. And it's easy to die during delivery time, and so many women die in delivery time. (Aziza)

The refugees also reported a lack of food, clothes, medicine, and shelter. A lack of medical supplies and treatment could be life threatening for refugees in camps.

Actually at camps, they die like cholera or malaria. They don't die very soon, but they die slow ... they finish, no energy, nothing, their feet swell. And at that time, the person is finish, they die in life (Aziza).

The experience of SEI was worsened with a shortage of food and with the constant moving among various refugee camps. This inability to settle down has been described as “no comfortable place” by Emanuel.

I have been in different refugee camps for six years. Two years in Hagadera, about one year in Maradarka, Mobasa, and then three years in Nairobi. So, there is no comfortable place for refugee. That was the most terrible place I found because sometimes there is shortage of food. Sometimes there are security problems, you can't deliver [food]. And sometimes during rain time, there is more problem, the road gets muddy. So the truck cannot pass. (Emanuel)

Emanuel further provided a detailed description of the size of the rations in the refugee camp.

We were given 6 kg maize – sometimes when there is no maize, we were given 3 kg of maize – and 3 kg of wheat flour, about 2 kg of salt, and a cup of oil. This is all for 14 nights. If you are family, you get more. Every 14 nights, you get the same. Sometimes there is no maize, there is no wheat flour. You got to survive this for a month, even if there is shortage of rations. And many children are dying [due to] lack of food, and there [are] no medical facilities. (Emanuel)

Some refugees were exposed to a merciless ecological environment and had to make the best out of their living conditions. For Emanuel, life became more uncomfortable due to a lack of clothes and the hot climate.

We were given a plastic sheet to cover up [the top] and the floor. And we plant different woods at the sides and just build something like a house because it is not cold. This place is very hot, 40 [degrees]. No clothes, no one give clothes, only these rations. It was really difficult life. (Emanuel)

As shown, the appalling living conditions in the refugee camps had contributed largely to the experience of SEI in the refugees during the transitional phase.

3.5.2 SUMMARY OF SELF-ENVIRONMENT INCONGRUITY DURING THE TRANSITIONAL PHASE

After escaping their homes, most refugee participants entered the second phase, which was the transitional phase where they sought temporary refuge. The problem of SEI continued as the refugees waited for varying lengths of time for their refugee status and

eventually their entry visas into Australia. The consequences of their pre-migration SEI were the disintegration of their lives and the experience of multiple losses.

3.6 CONSEQUENCES OF PRE-MIGRATION SELF-ENVIRONMENT

INCONGRUITY

It was evident that the lives of the refugees fell apart and disintegrated as they experienced their pre-migration SEI. The refugee experience at this stage was overshadowed by multiple losses when the refugees were forced to leave their homeland. Their lives were still uncertain as they could not live permanently and peacefully in their place of transition. Aspects that are related to multiple losses and disintegration of life are further explored in the following sections.

3.6.1 DISINTEGRATION OF LIFE AND EXPERIENCING MULTIPLE LOSSES

As inferred from the analysis of the data, *disintegration of life* refers to the process whereby the lives of the refugees fell apart, turned turbulent and chaotic, and eventually became hard to manage or actually became unmanageable. A deep sense of impermanence, turbulence, and anxiety was often experienced. There were many aspects of disintegration related to various types of losses such as material losses, sociocultural losses, and a loss of livelihood. Additionally, there were varying degrees to which the refugees in this study perceived and responded to these losses that constituted the emotional or psychological aspects of loss. These losses are examined as follows.

3.6.1.1 Material losses

In this study, many refugees reported the loss of their material possessions, assets, and their homes. Typically, those who had to escape quickly became dispossessed, destitute, and homeless. Their state of impoverishment was often described as having “lost all things.”

[Everything] changed. You lost all things. You can't carry your house on your shoulders and run away to save your life. You are just running away to save your life, nothing else. What you have on are clothes you have with you, and the things you bring are things you can bring in two hands – not joking, you know – or in car. It's hard. Suddenly you have to think about how to survive. And you may not be mature enough to know that. I was 15. (Sabrina)

Life also became very difficult as the refugees experienced a loss of basic necessities such as food, shelter, clothes, medical treatment, clean water, and electricity while they escaped from their homeland. Such losses have been described earlier.

3.6.1.2 Sociocultural losses

The sociocultural aspect of losses involved (1) the loss of one's country and thus becoming stateless and (2) the disintegration of the social structure and networks.

3.6.1.2.1 Statelessness

Becoming "stateless" was the situation that most asylum seekers and refugees found themselves in after forced departure from their homeland. Statelessness refers to the situation whereby asylum seekers or refugees had no documents such as passports or identity cards to prove their nationality, and thus they had no citizenship in any country (Seymour-Jones, 1992). Payam described this condition: "There is no protection for you because there is no state for you. No one owns you, you belong to no one." Due to becoming "stateless," many refugee participants were particularly vulnerable as they had no protection from any country.

3.6.1.2.2 Disintegration of social structure and networks

The disintegration of social networks – consisting of the refugees' community, family, and friends – was a common outcome of the refugee experience. Most participants lost their communities because either (1) they escaped from their communities or (2) many members of their communities were missing or had been killed. Additionally, the disintegration of social networks could occur through a drastic change in social attitudes of the refugees' community that had its origins in civil war. Sabrina explained this scenario, whereby amicable neighbours in a multi-ethnic society turned on each other at the outbreak of civil war and became antagonistic towards other ethnic groups. Such contention and dissension broke out overnight (see section 3.4.1.3.1).

I am still not clear about why it has happened because we had been accepting all nationality and we had grown up together, and suddenly overnight, we hate each other because of different religions. (Sabrina)

Loss of family members and friends had significantly contributed to the disintegration of life for many refugee participants. Sabrina linked the loss of friends with losing a sense

of belonging. She stated, "You feel you don't belong there any more. There isn't any more of the people you grow up with, your friends – everything [has] changed."

The loss of an older family member, especially a parental figure, through death, could force younger refugees to shoulder responsibilities beyond their age. Sabrina, who experienced war as a teenager, perceived that she had to carry the emotional burden of the family after the death of her father.

Fifty-five, very young, [age when father died]. So, there left the three of us. My brother is sort of shy person. All these sort of huge things, I have to face them. Suddenly, you find yourself at 18 years old, take care of two of them and yourself. It's not financial, it is emotional. It was, at that time, hard. You cannot accept where you are at first. Looks like a bad dream honestly. Something you are going through, like you are pushing it. (Sabrina)

The reaction to the death of family members could vary depending on certain factors such as age and any close ties with the deceased. Mike described how his brother died and his own lack of reaction because he was only five or six years old.

That was when he [my brother] was 15. He got really sick and died, and my father left. I could actually see my mum, like she was holding him like that. I was really younger at that time. I didn't cry or anything, like I was really young. (Mike)

3.6.1.3 Loss of livelihood

Some refugees also experienced a loss of their livelihood. This included the loss of income, jobs, employability, and the loss of youth and education. The loss of livelihood severely impacted on the lives of refugees who faced systematic discrimination. Many were banned from employment and business. For example, not only was Payam not being paid for the work he had completed, he could no longer maintain his business.

I had some business dealings with a company. That money was owed to me by this company, but every time I went and asked for it, they gave me cheque, it was bounced back, and there was nothing in it. Towards the end, they kept on telling me, "You know you are standing on very slippery ground, you shouldn't really be demanding." It was obvious to me that they were saying that I can't go anywhere and complain. I have to basically accept whatever I get from them. (Payam)

Consequently, refugees who lost their livelihood could not plan for their future and were well aware that they could not sustain a life for themselves.

I was at that stage that I couldn't get my money out of anybody. I couldn't do my business and no hope for the future. I had all these thoughts – couldn't even think

about marrying and having a family or start establishing a family. I never knew when I was going to be taken to frontline [war] or whether I will be able to manage feeding a family because of not having a job as such. (Payam)

My husband lost [his] job because Baha'i. If you become Muslim, you stick to your job. Twenty-six years, my husband [worked as a clerk in the] army. He said, "Twenty-six years I am working in this army in the office. I am not a thief, I am not an enemy. I am Baha'i. I like my country, I like my job." (Tuba)

It was found that at times, adolescent and young adult refugees were required to mature quickly even though they were totally unprepared to deal with certain situations. Sabrina vividly described her loss of youth and how she achieved maturity as she had to "face reality growing up." Initially, she was unable to accept the reality of war but was later forced to think and cope like an adult, especially after her father's death.

You know, having your teenager years running around. You can't take anything, you know, nothing. And suddenly, you find yourself overnight grew up and really think - you sort of have a mature approach to life. (Sabrina)

The loss of education was found to be common among school-age refugees, especially among those who experienced discrimination and revolution.

All the universities closed down because all the students started to fight the government ... the government always takes control over everything. They have many soldiers. So, the soldiers beat them whenever they have a fight. I still remember before I left, there was a student revolution, all the universities closed down. (Larissa)

3.6.1.4 Psychological consequences of experiencing losses

As indicated in the findings, psychological consequences of forced departure and experiencing multiple losses included unpreparedness, disintegration of identity, loss of trust, loss of control and desperation, and loss of mental health. Each of these psychological consequences is described as follows.

3.6.1.4.1 Unpreparedness: Shock and fear

Most participants found themselves to be unprepared when they first experienced SEI in their homeland. There could be overwhelming emotions such as feelings of shock and fear over how to survive a variety of situations. For example, Sabrina described her shock and fear in finding herself destitute when she had to escape with her life.

I went through war. At home I had everything ... honestly in that time in our country, you have good work. The worst thing I went through was ... to suddenly find yourself, don't know how to handle this because previously you have everything. (Sabrina)

The way Sabrina dealt with her unpreparedness was to make attempts to comprehend the situation she was in and to “face reality” that she had to “grow up.” As with most refugees, her survival fear was intense as there were constant worries about how to find food and money.

Everything, you need to understand situations, to face reality growing up. Again, you experienced cut off all the things teenagers go through. You are afraid of hunger, of not having enough money, no electricity and no water, not be able to work. It was very very hard. It was unbelievably hard. One day you have everything and the next day, you have nothing. (Sabrina)

In the following example, Payam presents one of the most fearful experiences of escape. To survive this unprepared situation, all he could do was to prepare himself to run.

I escaped, I escaped ... And they [camel-riders] showed us the border patrols that, the last and there were about 20 kilometres away from each other and that's the borderline. And they will shoot us to kill, they won't tell us “stop.” So get everything together, once you move, you can't stop, you can't talk, you just have to run. (Payam)

In the following excerpt, Mike demonstrates how unprepared he was in the face of danger. Mike and his family did not pack their belongings due to their sudden escape.

Explosion, long range mortar, like they shoot from far from somewhere and explode. We knew the Burmese are here this time. We didn't have time to pack up. We have to run with our shirts on. Like shooting everywhere, explosion everywhere like long range mortar like exploding ... I could still hear it in my mind right now. It's like it was really noisy ... I could hear machine guns, M16, AKRER, everything. Soldiers who were running around beside me ...we jumped on the boats. We fled. We didn't have time to take anything, just run, like basically naked. (Mike)

3.6.1.4.2 Disintegration of identity

The aforementioned multiple losses corresponded to the aspects that contributed to the identity of the refugees. Thus, intrinsically related to the concept of *disintegration of life* was the concept of *disintegration of identity*, meaning the weakening or loosening of various aspects that previously contributed to the refugee's sense of identity. In the context of this study, the term *identity* was applied to refer to the self in a context,

usually the sociocultural political context. Specifically, *self-identity* refers to “a life story which is socially constructed and constantly being revised throughout the life span, and which provides a sense of continuity despite change” (Dien, 2000, p. 1). The original definition of *identity* proposed by Erikson (1968) is also appropriate, in which *identity* is defined in relation to developmental psychology as “a sense of personal sameness and historical continuity” (p. 17). It is the formation of a sense of sameness, a harmony of personality perceived by the person and noticed by other people as having a consistency over time (Erikson, 1963).

All participants described a past identity before migration and a present identity in Australia; many also described their future aspirations. The crux of the identity issue in the refugees was the concept of “continuity.” The loss of *sense of continuity of self* means the loss or disintegration of self-identity when the refugees faced the fear of being persecuted, were forced to leave their homeland, and were relocated to various places. Thus, as the refugees’ lives became increasingly disrupted, they lost a sense of continuity of self. In the context of this study, *disruption of life* means having one’s life thrown into disorder, possibly becoming unmanageable and chaotic due to a loss of continuity or logical sequence of one’s life. Sabrina provided a good example of disintegration of self-identity. During the civil war in the former Yugoslavia, ethnic conflicts rose to such unprecedented levels that there was a change in people’s attitude from acceptance of others from all nationalities to sudden antagonism. The loss of Sabrina’s identity and sense of belonging were depicted respectively as not knowing *who* she was and *where* she was. A loss of a sense of belonging in one’s homeland could also lead to a disintegration of identity, as described by Sabrina in the following excerpt.

[During war] you lose your identity, and then it is very hard to see yourself anywhere, to see yourself really to stay. Like you are here, and you are going to stay here because of what has happened in my country with the war, and because I come from a mixed marriage. Because it was ethnic war, it was neighbour with neighbour, you feel you don’t belong there any more. There isn’t any more of the people you grow up with, your friends – everything [has] changed. (Sabrina)

In the following excerpt, it is indicated that forced migration itself had made it difficult for the refugees to “find themselves” again even during peaceful times.

I couldn't agree with this because I have a multicultural background. So I didn't hate anyone, I wasn't trained that way. But also at the same time, you feel you are scared, you don't belong to any side. They don't see you as part of them. You are not like pure. This is the sort of stuff and identity also, and once you leave your hometown, it is very hard to find yourself, even if it was peace. (Sabrina)

The disintegration of life arising from multiple losses was found to occur at all levels – at the personal level (self-identity) as well as the collective level (including family, society, tribe, and community). These multiple losses had a disunifying effect on the refugees – the refugees often questioned themselves as to who they were (a self-identity issue), where they were (a belongingness issue), and what to do next when confronted with novel situations. For example, the loss of identity was even more severely perceived because Sabrina did not have the choice of returning to her homeland. Her sense of loss was instantaneous and came as a shock.

If my parents decided to move somewhere in the neighbourhood country, you would feel the same thing, but then I have an option, it was peace, I could go back. This is different circumstances. So I think that's why identity was lost totally, and you don't belong there. You suddenly woke up ... O God, what is happening, where I am or who I am, you ask yourself – how can someone treat someone [badly] because he is a different religion, he is different nationality. And it is very hard to come to terms with that. (Sabrina)

As the refugees' lives became disrupted and eventually disintegrated, their previously established identity became less rigidly held together or weakened so that other aspects of life became part of their new identity. Refugee participants described the disintegration of their identity in terms of loss. However, this did not automatically imply a total loss of a previously established identity; rather, there was a continuous change to one's new identity with partial loss or weakening of the previous identity. For example, a refugee participant might adopt a new identity, termed *refugee identity*, which was difficult to shake while another refugee might have a weaker refugee identity (The concept of a *refugee identity* will be explained in Chapter Four).

3.6.1.4.3 Loss of trust

A loss of trust and negative feelings towards others were found in those who have experienced life-long discrimination and oppression. A refugee from the Kachin tribe (Ken), who experienced discrimination since birth, distrusted those of a certain ethnicity.

Even in Australia, we have a lot of people from Burmese all different ethnic background. But for me, as a Kachin, I can make friends with Karen or Chin or Shan, very easily we can become friends, even though we don't know each other because we trust each other. We can communicate and discuss whatever we want, like political. But we never get involved and make friends with Burmese students. They wanted to talk to us, but we don't want to talk with them. No matter what they are, we see them as Burmese. (Ken)

Ken further explained how his negative attitude towards Burmese people came about.

Wherever Burmese people go, they always have a spy. You can't tell who is the real student or who is the spy. Some of the students were accepted by the Kachin territory, but they didn't show them where the Kachin army is located. So Burmese people know that the Kachin people don't want to help them. So they flee to Karen territory, so they stay in the refugee camps. What happened is that there are a lot of Burmese spying inside those students ... the Burmese government knows where the Karen army is located. (Ken)

A loss of trust in others could also come about as the aftermath of being imprisoned and tortured. For instance, Morathi realised that he often suspected other people and feared the possibility that they would come after him and put him back in prison.

I was really traumatized. I was experiencing very bad nightmares, a burning sensation at below my foot, and also burning sensation on the top of my head. They said that it was because of the torture. I suspected everybody, that they are after me, that they are going to tell the government that I am this and that, then they put me back where I was detained. That's really disturbing me. (Morathi)

3.6.1.4.4 Loss of control and desperation

A sense of having lost control over one's life, which came from varying degrees of fear, was found to persist through many phases of the refugee experience. During his escape, Payam candidly described his fear as "scared to death," and he had no control over his own safety. In the following excerpt, he vividly relates the crucial moments of his life as having to put all his energy into escaping.

Then we ran with the camel actually, it was so painful riding on a camel... I was scared to my death, had to run for my life because we had no device that these guards have, patrolling the whole area. Until now I still think I never run that fast, never run like that in my life before and ever since. It's just as if I have put my whole energy in life and hope and belief and everything in my feet and run because I knew – if I got caught, I would be dead. (Payam)

The waiting period for the processing and approval of a visa to live in Australia varied among the refugee participants. Nadia described this situation as "nowhere." She stated,

“War started in 1991 and I came to Australia in 1995. So for four years, I was like nowhere and waiting for some country to accept me.” This wait had been reported to be one of the most stressful times for the refugees and was a major contributing factor towards their pre-migration SEI. The longer the refugees waited for the processing of their visas, the more they reported experiencing distress, vulnerability, desperation, and the fear of having lost control over their destiny (see section 3.5.1.2.1). Additionally, the waiting period amplified feelings of temporariness of the refugees’ stay and anxiety concerning the future. In the following passage, Payam describes his reactions to the waiting period and the cognitive processes he had as an asylum seeker taking temporary refuge in Pakistan. His initial reaction was one of optimism as he believed that he now had control over his life.

I remember first few months when I was [a] refugee back in Pakistan. First few months after recovering from sickness and everything, all my thoughts was that sort of pride, maybe not pride probably that’s that wrong word, something like ... hits me – I have control over my movements, I have control over what I want to do. I was thinking, “Yes, I will move in six months time. I will find my way. I will make something out of my life.” (Payam)

Payam’s initial hope was replaced by feelings of shock upon the realisation that he in fact had no control over the lengthy waiting period, and he began to associate a lack of control to being a refugee.

But gradually that [hope] crushed ... In my dream, I was counting the number of months that I was there. And in my dream, I realised that I have been there for about two years, actually a bit less than two years, twenty months or something. I jumped up from my sleep ... “I have been here two years!!” Then I calmed myself, “No, no, no. It’s not two years, it’s twenty months, twenty-one months.” But then I said, “It doesn’t matter, I have lost it!” (Payam)

Payam further explained what he meant by having lost control over his life.

For almost two years, I haven’t been able to do anything. I haven’t had any control of my life. Just have to wait for this and wait for that. Then that was the beginning of understanding that this is it, this is what being a refugee is – that means don’t have any control. (Payam)

Payam’s testimony of not being in control paralleled the condition of “provisional existence” as explained by Viktor Frankl (1984) in his book, *Man’s Search for Meaning*. Frankl (1984) noted that there was consensus among former prisoners that the most depressing existence was one of not knowing the duration of imprisonment, when no

date of release was given, and when the prison term was uncertain and unlimited. Frankl (1984) further defined this condition as “provisional existence of unknown limit.” (p. 91). A person who could not envisage the end of his “provisional existence” would not set important goals. Unlike a person with a normal life, there was no future to live for (Frankl, 1984). Eventually, Payam’s sense of loss of control was quickly substituted by feelings of desperation to get out of his “provisional existence.” He also “realised now how much time was passing by and nothing was happening.” Although Payam finally came to Australia, he candidly described his desperation during his transitional phase and his powerlessness over his destiny as having “no choice and freedom.”

You can't go backward, forward, unless you choose in a radical way, I go back to my country. I will see the consequences. I will escape this way again, or I submit my fate and everything to the hands of the authority ... So many temptations for me to find another way to escape ... I entertained that thought for a couple of weeks – I go on this boat and work as someone who is sweeping the deck basically and do anything, any unhuman ... so I get, for instance, to a country like Australia or somewhere I can work out my destiny a bit better. (Payam)

The sense of having lost control over one’s life could be further translated into depression, as in the case of Fariba (see section 3.6.1.4.5.1).

3.6.1.4.5 Loss of mental health

A loss of mental health was apparent in a few participants, commonly in the form of varying degrees of depression. In one participant, several symptoms of posttraumatic stress emerged as an aftermath of being torture.

3.6.1.4.5.1 Depression

To recapitulate, it was evident in most participants that being forced to leave their homeland resulted in multiple losses: the loss of their countries and homes, possessions, community, friends, and relatives. There were also various psychological aspects of loss such as loss of trust, loss of sense of continuity of self, and loss of control or helplessness. These feelings of overwhelming loss could translate into sadness and in a few cases, depression. The act of crying itself was reported by Sabrina in giving her a form of relief. She stated, “Of course we all need some relief. To me, I was before when the war started, crying was very good for me.”

Fariba described the loss of her family upon arrival in the country of first asylum, which contributed largely to her depression. She also admitted to crying a lot during her stay in Pakistan, and this was the beginning of her depression. She explained, "Family was the most important thing for me. I used to cry every night. I haven't done that before you know, to get separated from my family, my parents." Fariba further attributed her depression to having lost control over her life.

I used to wake up in the middle of the night maybe like two o'clock, two-thirty, three o'clock and then couldn't go back to sleep maybe for a few hours. Then sometimes, I used to cry, cry a lot, sob. Yeah, just feeling hopeless, helpless, like not having any control over my life and that's the key point to my depression ... crying a lot, being sad, being very sad. (Fariba)

Fariba's prolonged depression, which she thought might have started in her country of asylum, persisted well over ten years after her arrival in Australia.

I can't really say when it started, but I know that when I just started crying, I used to cry in the middle of the night, like I couldn't go to sleep in Pakistan [country of asylum] at night. And so, it must have started then ... When I came here as well, I had a lot of bad experiences. (Fariba)

The loss of support networks could also lead to severe depression. Mariam reported her extreme isolation and depression from having to look after three young children by herself while waiting for her reunion visa (see section 3.5.1.2.1). Homesickness, loss of community and culture, and loss of physical health related to aging also contributed to depression in older refugees. This aspect of depression is highlighted under "Sense of Displacement" (see section 3.9).

3.6.1.4.5.2 Posttraumatic stress and disintegration of self

It is important to note that while most participants endured a disintegration of their *previous lives*, only one participant suffered a *disintegration or fragmentation of the self*. The term *self* has been widely used in psychology, for instance, the real self and the false self (Masterson, 1990), the conscious self (Peck, 1990), the collective self (Ellemers, Spears, & Doosje, 2002), and self-identity (Dien, 2000). In the context of this study, the term *self* refers to the psyche (Webster's New Encyclopedic Dictionary, 1993) or the core of the person, and *disintegration of the self* implies an aftermath of severe trauma that has shaken the person's core beliefs. In a similar vein, the phenomenon of

fragmentation of the self was elaborated by Day (2002) in her book, *Putting Together the Pieces*. According to Day (2002), the posttraumatic stress process is “a complex, phasic and variable natural reaction to an event that is outside the range of our usual human experience” (Day, 2002, p. 1). I adopt the phrase *disintegration of the self* when describing a particularly traumatised refugee participant (i.e., Morathi) who perceived his sense of self or psyche to be shattered or broken. The associated emotions included extreme fear, suspicion, and re-experiencing the trauma during the day and during sleep. Additionally, the concept of *mental death* espoused by Ebert and Dyck (2004) can be used to encapsulate the effects of serious forms of physical and psychological torture. The authors defined *mental death* as a loss of the victim’s pre-trauma identity, featured by loss of core beliefs, distrust and alienation from others, shame and guilt, and a sense of being permanently damaged. In this study, Morathi appeared to have certain features of the phenomena of *disintegration of the self* and *mental death* as he lost his pre-trauma identity (see section 3.6.1.4.3: Loss of trust).

3.7 CONDITIONS INFLUENCING PRE-MIGRATION SELF-ENVIRONMENT INCONGRUITY

It was evident in the findings that there were individual differences in terms of the experiences of refugee participants who had escaped and were waiting for their visa to enter Australia. Hence, the extent to which the refugees experienced their pre-migration SEI differed. It was found that pre-migration SEI was influenced by certain conditions such as social support rendered by other people and interaction with those in the same situation as well as the fear of persecution. It should be remembered that although disintegration and the experience of losses arose as a consequence of pre-migration SEI, various forms of disintegration and feelings of loss continued to be experienced by the refugees to varying extents during resettlement in Australia.

3.7.1 SOCIAL SUPPORT AND INTERACTION WITH OTHER PEOPLE IN THE SAME SITUATION

It was consistently demonstrated that having social support and interaction with other people in the same situation dramatically reduced the refugees’ experience of SEI throughout all phases of the refugee experience. The importance of pre-migration social

support is highlighted in this section. For example, Aziza reported a lower SEI during her stay at the detention centre because she had the opportunity to learn to trust and to build friendships with asylum seekers from various cultural backgrounds. This positive outcome, which reduced her SEI in the detention centre, also extended to reduce her experience of SEI after she left the detention centre.

Port Hedland, terrible, but it was fun. I learnt how to communicate with other people whom we don't share any culture, any religion, we don't share anything, just human beings. And I learnt how I can communicate with them. I made good friends really very good friends; we don't even understand and we became really close friends. And I am really proud of what I have learnt there. (Aziza)

But when I came out, I got encouragement from what I have learnt – more confidence, be myself. And now I got wonderful friends – they are like family, I can just ring them up ... When I was sick, they go to the hospital with me. When I met them also, I didn't speak English, but I know I can trust and I learnt from detention centre. It was fun. I never ever regret in a second, ever. I always said, "Oh, that was good journey." (Aziza)

In stressing the importance of human connectedness, Day (2002) wrote, "We will feel safer when there is a connection with another human being whom we feel has some comprehension of our internal experience. It is then possible to experience some of the emotion without being overwhelmed completely. If we feel that we can begin to test out with the person the validity and normality of our own intense emotions. Then eventually, we will be able to begin to risk feeling the emotions again" (Day, 2002, p. 108).

Conversely, a lack of support from family members, friends, and the community at large could greatly exacerbate the refugees' pre-migration experience of SEI. For instance, during her temporary stay in Syria without much social support, Mariam experienced an extreme form of SEI as she felt very alone and depressed while waiting for the approval of her reunion visa to Australia. In addition, having to look after her three young dependent children all by herself and having to worry about their well-being became another stressor during the waiting period.

Nobody, nobody [helped me]. I had to help myself. I was renting a house - very small flat for me and my children. My husband left me for Australia to seek refuge. My little daughter was very young. She was one and a half years, and she needed many help, many things, and I was alone. Sometimes when they get sick

... it was very hard for me. I don't want to remember that. I want to forget it. It was very depressed time for me. I even lost weight. I was all the time sick, and I was alone in my flat. (Mariam)

Another factor that influenced the refugees' pre-migration SEI was the extent of their fear of persecution.

3.7.2 FEAR OF PERSECUTION

The experience of the fear of persecution was found to vary greatly among the refugee participants, especially among those who had escaped their homeland as children. As indicated in the findings, the experience of SEI worsened as the fear of persecution intensified. The fear of persecution was affected by the interaction among factors such as age, being protected by other people (or social support), experiencing direct threats of persecution (e.g, imprisonment, torture, and genocide), and carrying a "psychological burden" of being responsible for others. For the refugees in this study, the fear of being persecuted was minimised when (1) the refugee was young and was not fully aware of the nature of the threat, (2) the refugee was protected by other people or accompanied by others, (3) there was no direct threat of persecution, and (4) there was no "psychological burden" of being responsible for others. Of these factors, the most important one affecting the fear of persecution was the presence of a direct threat to one's life; this was most apparent in Morathi, who was severely tortured, and in Payam, who was imprisoned several times. Where the fear of persecution was great, the basic problem of SEI intensified, and the need to escape increased.

Most participants did not bury the ghosts of their past experiences; instead, during the interviews, they recounted their past to varying degrees and a few were comfortable in providing a vivid description of how they escaped their homeland. While some participants preferred not to remember their past experiences (e.g., Fariba, Mariam), one refugee recalled his experiences as pleasant and even "fun" due to his young age (e.g., Ho). At one end of the spectrum of fear of persecution, Ho reported no fear and actually confessed that he "had fun" during their journey to Australia simply because he "was only a kid." It was possible that he was too young to realise the enormity of the threat of persecution. He experienced war as a child (up to the age of 7 years) but did not

remember anything horrific. His lack of awareness of the potential danger his family faced was a protecting factor against the fear of being persecuted. He was further insulated from fear because he did not experience nor witness any life-threatening events, and he was never left alone during the escape. Thus, his experience of SEI was minimal.

I had fun wherever I go because I was only a kid, I didn't see any, er, I know there was curfew, and I know there were soldiers coming ... I haven't actually witnessed one [bridge] being bombed at all but already damaged. And I don't remember anything horrific about it. I see the aftermath of it. We saw a lot of soldiers moving into our neighbourhood and kicking out families. (Ho)

At the middle of the continuum of the fear of persecution, Mike, who had experienced civil war as a child, had extensive and direct knowledge about guns and mortars used during armed conflict because his father was a soldier and because of his direct exposure to war. A direct threat to his life occurred when he was exposed to explosives and gunshots at the age of ten. Although bombs and bullets endangered his life, the knowledge that he still had his family members sheltered him from extreme fear.

I get to run when I was in Zawta, that's when my whole family, the whole village gets to run. It's like no choice, had to run ... because there were five thousand Burmese soldiers who came. Then they [were] just shooting everywhere, bombing the whole village, and everyone had to run – that's the time I had to run. (Mike)

In a follow-up interview, Mike confessed about feeling “excited,” which further pointed to his relatively young age and his lack of the burden of being responsible for others. He was quite animated while describing in detail what it was like to see the Karen soldiers that he admired.

When I was young, I was mostly excited, happy to see the soldiers. I always wanted to be a soldier. They came and they stayed only one night, like they come for help basically. We give them things to eat, rice they carry in a little fabric ... We helped them with the food. When they come, they have to disappear straight away because the village will get into trouble. (Mike)

Although Mike admitted to being “scared” when the village was deserted, he was not completely afraid because he was not “the one to be taken as a hostage” and he “wouldn't get hurt at that time.” As shown, although age played an important role in terms of whether refugee children were aware of the threat of persecution, the more

important aspect was the direct exposure to the threat of persecution. Due to his young age, the Burmese soldiers did not take Mike as a hostage.

When they [Burmese soldiers] come, all the guys have to run away, they leave all the old people at home. The women leave as well, if they don't want to leave, they disguise themselves to look really ugly if they were beautiful. Usually only family with children will stay. When the Burmese came, I was scared because everyone was leaving. The town is like ghost town, empty, quiet, so quiet. I wasn't really scared, fully really scared because I wasn't the one to be taken as a hostage, I wouldn't get hurt at that time. (Mike)

It was found that vicarious fear of persecution, which constituted an indirect threat, could still elicit the fear response. As derived from the analysis of the data, *vicarious fear of persecution* refers to the second hand experience of someone else's persecution through sympathetic participation. Vicarious fear of persecution could be experienced at a young age. For instance, the interaction between age of exposure and fear of persecution (including vicarious fear of persecution) was demonstrated in Shahrooz. His fear came about because he was highly exposed to stories of imprisonment and torture when his neighbour's house was turned into a prison. At a young age of six years, his experience of a vicarious fear of persecution was presented as loss of sleep and sadness. He continued to experience the vicarious fear of being persecuted until the age of fifteen years.

My dad lost his job, our neighbours were killed, so their house changed into prison cell. I was six up to the time that I was almost fifteen, we had to endure ... hear the torture of these people. Like they would grab Baha'is, and they would bring into the cells and beat them up. We could hear and visualise what they were doing to them. For a six year old, it was absolutely a very very difficult thing to bear. So it was like "cannot cope," you know. (Shahrooz)

Shahrooz's inability to cope with hearing the torture of others also affected his sleep.

Everyday we go to school, and we were like very sad. And the other kids were questioning, "Why you feel this way?" And the teachers said that, "Couldn't you sleep last night?" Because we basically couldn't, and it showed when you lost sleep. We were all six years old. I just started primary school. (Shahrooz)

At the age of six, Shahrooz became aware that people he knew were being tortured. He subsequently developed a general fear of Muslim people.

I developed this fear of Muslim people around me because I didn't have the basic comprehension that not all people are the same. For a six year old, I could see that the person I knew and attended the feast [Baha'i gathering] at my place like

ten days ago is now next door [prison], and it is just like being tortured. I thought that, okay, Muslim people are doing this, so I felt that all the Muslim are like that. So I developed this fear of playing with the kids that I used to play with or even going to school. (Shahrooz)

It should be noted that although certain aspects of personality may contribute to the fear of being persecuted (explaining why some refugees may be more afraid than others given the same exposure), these factors are considered to be beyond the scope of this study. Personality theories and biology are not explored.

3.8 PHASE THREE: SELF-ENVIRONMENT INCONGRUITY IN AUSTRALIA

Upon arrival in Australia, which was the third phase of the refugee experience, the refugee participants perceived themselves to be strangers in a new country. They realised that their former lifestyle and culture were incompatible with their post-migration lifestyle in Australia. Thus, the basic problem of SEI was precipitated and perpetuated by the refugees' experience of ecological, social, and cultural differences in Australia. The refugees perceived a sense of strangeness or foreignness as they were unfamiliar and out of harmony or out of sync with their new surroundings. Consequently, in Australia, life could no longer proceed in the way that the refugees were used to while in their homeland. It became apparent that their old lifestyle, to different degrees, needed some alterations so that they no longer felt "out of place." The problem of SEI that occurred during the third phase of the refugee experience, its causal factor, and the conditions that influenced its occurrence are described as follows.

3.8.1 THE CAUSAL FACTOR OF SELF-ENVIRONMENT INCONGRUITY IN AUSTRALIA: EXPERIENCING ECO-SOCIOCULTURAL DIFFERENCES

The causal factor of post-migration SEI in the refugee participants was their *experience of eco-sociocultural differences* upon arrival in Australia. The experience of these differences involved (1) identifying and comparing the eco-sociocultural differences between the homeland and Australia and (2) experiencing the anxiety of not knowing how to behave and how to fit in because of a lack of knowledge regarding the social norms in Australia. Numerous aspects that constituted the eco-sociocultural differences that the refugees experienced in Australia are described as follows.

3.8.1.1 Unpreparedness and cultural distance

Unpreparedness, in this study, can be described as a condition whereby refugees perceive that they are not ready to cope with the demands that come along with the sudden changes upon their resettlement in Australia. Refugee participants often stated that they did not know how to behave in their new environment. To varying degrees, most participants initially compared the Australian way of life to the standards of their own culture, with some comparing only a little and others comparing more extensively. Generally, participants from countries that were more similar linguistically and culturally tended to make fewer contrasts with the Australian way of life. One of the possible reasons for the refugees' unpreparedness was their perceived cultural distance between their homeland and Australia. According to Triandis (1995), *cultural distance* can be assessed by taking into account the following factors: language, social structure, economic structure, religion, political system, educational level, standards of what comprises "truth," and aesthetic standards. The greater the cultural distance between two countries, the more challenges the refugees need to face in their adjustment (Triandis, 1995). For example, Mike perceived a large cultural distance between his homeland and Australia. A shift from a rural-jungle environment to a city-urban environment had contributed to his sense of SEI. He continued to miss his previous way of life in his transition country, Thailand: "I miss Thailand, I miss the jungle. City life here in Perth is not for me." Even though Mike and his family came to Australia in search of a better life, he further described the sudden change he faced as he resettled in Perth.

I live in the jungle for five years. At that time, I was young and like, I was a kid, I went out in the jungle hunting with my brothers, with my dad, and we used to like the mountain in the jungle. We go to the rice field, grow rice, like jungle life. Suddenly, I came to the city, everything is different. In the jungle, there is no transport, no, nothing at all. (Mike)

In the following excerpt, Matt alludes to the concept of *cultural distance* as he argues that there are wider cultural differences between Asians and Australians, whereas American culture has more similarities with Australian culture.

When we came here, culture is different. I don't mean only Burmese, all of Southeast Asia. For example, if you come from America to here, culture maybe the same, but we are Asians, culture is different. We don't really suit into the culture, we don't know how to behave. (Matt)

Specifically, the refugees in the state of *unpreparedness* were often unsure and anxious about where they stood in relation to other people and what they should do in novel situations because they did not initially understand the norms in the Australian society. As the experience of eco-sociocultural differences permeated through various areas of the refugees' lives, they often found that they did not really know how to behave among members of the larger society, and therefore they became fearful of not fitting in easily.

The refugees perceived the large cultural distance in terms of their lack of understanding of the way of life in Australia and their struggles in starting life from the beginning. In the following example, Ania expresses her regret and reluctance in having to start life right from the beginning. Upon arrival in Australia, she realised that although she had more freedom, it was a different kind of freedom because she had to "start from the beginning." This notion coincided with the title of Peters' (2001) book, *Milk and Honey – but no Gold*. In short, life for Ania had improved in some ways, but she faced a different kind of challenge in Australia.

When I come to Australia, initially I felt one side there is freedom for me, but I don't if you can say there is freedom because there is different type of freedom. No one is chasing you, but it is not freedom from the other side because you have to start from the beginning. You have to rely mostly on yourself and your own intelligence and how bright you are. I didn't know English at all. I didn't even know one word. (Ania)

Ania found "no gold" as she had to "learn everything from the beginning" and "was struggling." This struggle came about because she was used to a different way of life. She even stated she regretted coming to Australia.

I was nearly 26 when I came to Australia, so I [was] used to different style of life, different sceneries, different language, different people, different culture. I have to learn everything from beginning, and I was struggling. I would like to be in my country. Sometimes, what am I doing here? I never should have come here because I have to start from the beginning like a baby. (Ania)

Payam echoed Ania's experience of feeling like "a baby" who had to start from the beginning.

I realised I had to start a life all over again, and that is to me, what being a refugee means. And every step that you take, you start from the beginning, was just like a baby growing up, and I have to do this growing up twice to get to this stage. (Payam)

Thus, the state of unpreparedness, described in terms of a perceived large cultural distance, was characteristic of the refugees' experience of SEI in Australia.

3.8.1.2 Unfamiliarity with daily practical issues

It was found that the refugees were initially unfamiliar with numerous daily practical issues in Australia. Upon arrival, the refugees were exposed to different foods, ways of obtaining food, and clothing, as well as unfamiliar ways of paying for accommodation, budgeting, and paying bills. In my journal, I recorded an observation of the surroundings of ASeTTS, which was an organisation dedicated to assisting survivors of torture and trauma. The following notes underscore the importance of learning from the perspective of the refugees.

The walls in the activity room were filled with photos taken by refugee clients. One picture stood out for me – a photo of a McDonald's burger, a Happy Meal box, a fork, a knife, and a tin of Coke. I was puzzled, why did this photo matter at all? A burger was way too ordinary. It later dawned on me – the refugee who took the photo had intended to post it to his family back home to show them the food they were now eating in Australia. (Personal Journal, Dec 2001)

One of the early challenges for the refugees was to learn how to rent a home and manage their finances in Australia. Sabrina described her early days in Australia: "We have our own houses, and we are not in [a] position to rent, we never rent before. And when we came here, and suddenly you live and you need to rent." This challenge was especially relevant for refugees who have lived as refugees for many years in a state of uncertainty and war.

Because they were living as refugees for a long time; some people are refugees for ten years, they have sort of lost their sense of prioritising their expenses during that ten years in this state of war. And when they come here they face with paying their bills. The way they have become, they need to adjust again. This rental accommodation is not for them. Suddenly you live, and you need to rent, you need to pay for that so that's a huge thing. (Sabrina)

An example of having to learn to budget was demonstrated in Morathi. He admitted that he had difficulties managing money because he sent some money to friends in the refugee camps. He was markedly distressed when he suddenly received a Telstra bill of \$80. My notes documented this event.

I went to meet Morathi at X for an interview, but he did not show up. I rang him later at night, and he sounded depressed, he told me that he [had] waited a long time for the interview at DSS [Department of Social Security] and he left straight for home after that. When I questioned him about how depressed he sounded on the phone, he said, "Ah, you noticed?" He said it was because he had to go to DSS, and when he got home, he received the big Telstra bill of \$80. (Personal Journal, 30 April 2002)

Most refugee participants did not speak about the differences in the clothes they used to wear and the clothes Australians wore. The distinction only became obvious for refugees of certain religious backgrounds.

At first, I have to adjust to everything. I was very uncomfortable with my hair covered and everything. But now I have gotten used to it. It was very difficult. I cover my head because of my religious beliefs – I am a Muslim. When people asked me why, I explain to them about my religious and cultural beliefs. If they are not happy with my beliefs or attitudes, I tell them now that it is not their business. (Aziza)

Although financial assistance was given by the government when the refugees first settled in Australia, Ken highlighted and compared a different way of life between his homeland and Australia. Ken believed that if there was freedom in Burma, life would be easier in Burma than in Australia. He explained that it would be his father's role to support him financially while he studied in Burma, even though he was nearly 30 years old.

I am nearly 30. Even though I got a job, I got a job only 4 months ago because until then, my parents will support me. Not only me, my brothers and sister, they all study, and only my father got a job. He works hard, and he supports everybody. But in here, everybody has to get a job and stand on their own feet. That's the difference. (Ken)

Ken also resented the high tax and other fees he had to pay in Australia compared with his homeland in Burma.

Very high tax, too much tax. I mean not only government, all these banks or agents, they all try to suck the money from you, all these banks, insurance. It's like every week you get paid, but every week in every month, you have to pay the bills. So for example, I got paid on Friday, maybe on Monday all the money gone because you have to pay all these bill, bill, bill. Ah yeah, so not much money left, so the life is on and on every week. (Ken)

The preceding excerpts demonstrate that Ken also perceived a loss of his family structure and the loss of family support. In a nutshell, the refugees encountered daily

practical differences in Australia. The term *cultural shock* has been previously used (e.g., Oberg, 1960) to reflect this condition. However, in this study, the term *unpreparedness* was applied to depict the experience of SEI of refugees upon their arrival in Australia as they were confronted with all things contrary to their pre-migration lives. At this stage, they were not prepared to meet the demands of their new environment.

3.8.1.3 Lack of English skills, education, and employment

All refugees in this study came from non-English speaking backgrounds and/or were using English as a second language. Unless they were exposed to English in their homeland, they were required to learn it from scratch in Australia. A few participants who had acquired a higher degree in their homeland found that their previous qualifications were no longer useful in terms of getting a job in Australia. Although a handful continued to follow their trade once they were familiar with English (e.g., Payam), most participants reported a loss of their previous vocation or heard of others of similar fate.

Lots of refugees now, they ran from the war, they are not educated. Most of the time, they actually work really hard, like life is really hard. Some of them are educated as well, they come here, they still don't get a good job. I know this person, X, he finished university, but when he came here, he doesn't have a good job, it's washing dishes. (Mike)

I didn't think about myself that I can lose it whatever I achieved in Poland because I completed master's of Economics in Poland. (Ania)

It was found that even newly arrived refugees who spoke English did not automatically obtain employment. Morathi, who spoke English fluently, had to complete a certain number of hours of English classes in TAFE before he could get a job.

There are also some challenges that I am having now. That is, one is like getting a job is very difficult because of the language ... I mean you have to be perfect and get certificate from TAFE before you go to work. (Morathi)

Dealing with work contract and the social security system could be a tricky matter for the new arrivals. For example, Morathi was not able to accept a job offer because social security would cut off his benefits before he got paid at the completion of his job.

They [The employer] gave me work as a focus group facilitator, and the kind of job they gave me is contract base. I can't do that job because they were going to pay me after I finish the job at the end. I have to inform Centrelink, and they are going to reduce my benefits for four weeks, and I cannot afford that. My benefits will be cut even before I get paid. (Informal interview, Morathi)

A lack of job satisfaction was also found among the refugees. Although Morathi was elated when he was first offered work at a factory, he became quite unhappy with his work environment.

The job at the factory [in preparing dog food] is really really hard, I don't want to work there any more. It is also not my kind of environment, the people. (Informal interview, Morathi)

3.8.1.4 Adjusting to a lower socioeconomic status

Refugees from wealthy backgrounds found it more difficult to accept their new status in Australia. For instance, Ho's father refused to go to the United States because his wealthy friends were there, whereas he had to adjust to a lower standard of living in Australia. Ho tried to compensate by earning more in order to send his parents on a holiday.

When I was young in Vietnam, we were very wealthy, we don't do anything heavy. So from that to come here to hard labouring. That is why I am trying to do something. Make some money here and then just send them [my parents] off for a couple of years or five years holiday. (Ho)

In contrast, Ming confessed that since his family did not come from a wealthy background, adjustment to their current lives was easier.

There are differences in terms of social security, social benefits, Australia is a nicer place to live. Because we, the first wave of refugees, we weren't all that rich to start off with. So, what we end up with, Australia is not so bad from what we left off. Because we weren't very high up, we didn't have to catch up to where we were. But I guess other people were richer than us when they were in Vietnam, they feel it much more than we do. (Ming)

3.8.1.5 Perceived lack of time

A perceived lack of time in Australia was described by two participants. Nadia believed that this was a common issue for others in Australia and gave two reasons for this. First, she described the different working hours in her homeland.

I am always short of time. I think in Australia, that's the way of life for other people also. I really feel like always under some sort of pressure, always

something that I have to do and not enough time. It [Yugoslavia] wasn't like this. Could be because we had different working hours. Like office starts at six o'clock or half past six. I was working until two o'clock. And then you have like whole afternoon for your family. (Nadia)

Second, Nadia also attributed her lack of time to the distance she had to travel to work.

In Australia, I spend all day because I live far away from here [workplace]. One hour to come here and one hour to go back home. And eight hours here or so and I really don't have much time or days for my family or for myself. And it could be reason why I felt that I had more time there. And everything was closer than here. Here, you travel so long, your work and home, and school for your children, and everything. I do waste so much time. (Nadia)

Ken explained that in his homeland his father was likely to be the bread-winner who provided financial support for the rest of the family. In Australia, Ken had a "full schedule" as he had to work to support himself and complete his studies simultaneously. He also believed that everyone else was just as "busy."

Here, it looks like nice and easy life, but we all have been struggling because everybody has to get a job. In a family, all the adults have to get a job. It's like after 18 or 19 [years old], they all got a job, I mean they don't want to stay with the parents, so they moved house, then get a job. In Burma, only the father got a job and the rest of the family, they didn't do anything. It's quite an easy life in there. Here, it's like everybody is busy, busy, busy. It's like me now, seven days, I got only one day off. Most of the time, full schedule. (Ken)

3.8.1.6 Intolerance to extreme climate

Extreme weather in Perth was found to be one of the major concerns for older refugees, especially those who also suffer from physical ailments. Discomfort with the climate in Australia, especially the high temperatures in Perth during summer, was reported by Sabrina. Such climatic differences apparently aggravated the ill health of older refugees.

Climate is sort of different because it's high temperature here ... especially for the older people, blood pressure, blood sugar. I think they need to change their habits, eating habits, according to this Australian climate and everything. Especially older people have a problem of adjusting here because of high temperature. (Sabrina)

Tuba, aged 63 years, complained about having arthritic pain in her knees. She believed her condition was worsened by the cold weather.

The weather here can get very cold, the wind. In Iran, in winter there is snow but no strong wind, it's not so cold. It's very hard for me. It makes my arthritis worse. It was so hot last week. It was very difficult. It was very hard to sleep. In Iran, it doesn't get as hot as this. I am getting weak. I can only stand for 10 minutes. I go for hydrotherapy and physiotherapy. I am getting better, but the arthritis is still bad. (Informal interview, Tuba)

3.8.2 CONDITIONS INFLUENCING SELF-ENVIRONMENT INCONGRUITY IN AUSTRALIA

Several conditions were found to influence the refugees' experience of SEI in Australia. These conditions included age of arrival in Australia and the presence of an established ethnic community in Australia.

3.8.2.1 Age of arrival in Australia

Age of arrival was found to be an important factor that affected the refugees' perception of SEI in Australia. Several participants who arrived in Australia at a young age experienced a lesser degree of SEI.

It wasn't so bad for us because we were children, we were not that aware of the differences so much. We start off, what the heck, I don't think we were that lost, so to speak. I mean I was probably nine at that time. I don't think it was that alien. It was different, but it wasn't alien. Different but wasn't scary, so to speak. (Ming)

3.8.2.2 The presence of an established ethnic community

Participants who lived among their ethnic community members experienced a much lower SEI upon arrival in Australia.

When we first came, they didn't scatter us everywhere, we were staying near Swanbourne or Graylands area. It used to be the Commonwealth Games complex. We were, all the Vietnamese were there, we were like sort of a mini community. I guess that probably made it better because we weren't scared, we thought this was our home, our community. Everything was free, we only going out to school and then coming back. So it wasn't scary from that perspective. (Ming)

The refugees also perceived a lower SEI if there was already an established ethnic community in Western Australia that had made some changes to the environment. For instance, Mariam found a mosque that she could attend in Perth.

We attend this mosque, and there are religious occasions sometimes. Each week, there is one day sometimes we attend the mosque to do something, to perform some kind of practice some kind of, you know, my religion, to practice our

religion there in mosque. And we see each other – different people in our community. Sometimes we attend the mosque for prayer. (Mariam)

As shown, not all daily encounters were unfamiliar to the refugees. As well, multicultural food was not difficult to find in Western Australia because of the presence of established ethnic communities. In the following comment, Mariam describes the ease of obtaining “halal food” in Perth.

The food is also different because we eat from halal shop. There is a halal shop for us, especially for meat because we cannot eat any meat which is cut by other people. When you want to cut the throat of an animal, should be Muslim people cutting the throat. There are many now because the community is becoming bigger now, so there are many halal shops now in different areas. (Mariam)

3.8.3 SUMMARY OF SELF-ENVIRONMENT INCONGRUITY IN AUSTRALIA

Upon arrival in Australia, the refugees resolved to stay permanently and their problem of SEI persisted through experiencing the eco-sociocultural differences between their homeland and Australia. They experienced some anxiety of not knowing how to behave and how to fit in because of their lack of understanding of the social norms in Australia. They were unprepared for their new lives in Australia and were unfamiliar with the daily practical issues. Some refugees lacked English skills, and others had to adjust to a lower socioeconomic status in Australia. Older refugees were more likely to report their intolerance to the extreme climate in Western Australia. In the following section, sense of displacement, an important aspect of SEI in Australia, is described.

3.9 SENSE OF DISPLACEMENT

In this study, at one end of the continuum of SEI, SEI was minimally perceived by the refugees. At the other end of the spectrum of SEI, a *sense of displacement* can be articulated to capture a conglomeration of emotions resulting from being forced out of one’s homeland and subsequent relocation in Australia. Specifically, sense of displacement encapsulates the feelings of homelessness and homesickness, feeling “strange,” not belonging in Australia, and feeling lonely and isolated. A sense of displacement is magnified among older refugees and among refugees who perceive a greater cultural distance between their homeland and Australia. A sense of displacement can be described as feelings of homelessness upon leaving one’s homeland as well as feelings of instability or impermanence as the refugee is being relocated to new

sociocultural environments. Throughout all phases of the refugee experience, it was common for the refugee participants to frequently move or be moved from one place to another; this heightened their sense of temporariness, which in turn exacerbated their sense of displacement. As Sabrina explained, "I think that this is not my permanent place to stay, here, probably because I was moving so constantly in the last 10 years." Sabrina provided a typical description of a sense of displacement, which she described as "instability," sensing "something is missing," and feeling "detached."

At that stage you lose your identity, and then it is very hard to see yourself anywhere, to see yourself really to stay – like you are here and you are going to stay here. I haven't found a place where I belong. I don't think this is my permanent location. I feel very attached to places, to Perth, but ... something is missing. Maybe because I was in a couple of places, moving from place to place, instability, detached. (Sabrina)

Homesickness, in this study, can be defined as an emotional condition laden with anxiety, a deep sense of longing to be home again and longing for one's previous life, "psychological chaos" or unease, and is sometimes accompanied by feelings of ambivalence with regards to leaving one's homeland. Some participants reported feeling homesick and worried about those who were still left behind in the refugee camps, as typified by Morathi. His deep sense of loss and sorrow over his Oromo people still in the refugee camps was palpable throughout three interviews. There was a deep sense of longing to be with them (loss of community), a sense of loss of culture and country (due to genocide), and grief over loss of social support (loss of friends). He described the loss of his community as "hurt" as he struggled emotionally and mentally to come to terms with the fact that his people were still suffering back home. He felt a deep sense of ambivalence about being in Perth, explaining that he should not be here when his people in the refugee camps in Kenya were still suffering terribly.

You can [have] a problem like homesickness – that you will start thinking about your home every time you get good service, you think that there are thousands of your fellow people who are still suffering and in need of the service, that you are getting here, that is something that hurts your mind now and then. Homesickness is like you really miss the people. (Morathi)

A common issue of concern that was voluntarily and repeatedly brought up by participants was their perceived social or *interpersonal distance* among people in Australia. The differences in social boundaries encountered by the refugees also meant

that many found difficulties in establishing new friendships with others in the larger society. The loss of social networks and social support (see section 3.6.1.2.2) was also the preliminary contributing factor towards a sense of displacement in the refugees. Feelings of loneliness and isolation were precipitated by loss of family members, previous friends, and community and persisted due to difficulties in making new friends in Australia. A few refugees were particularly concerned about not being able to socialise more freely with their neighbours and the larger society in Australia.

Australian people, that is my knowledge, when they live next door, they don't talk even next door, isn't it? So we Burmese people want to know about them there, they are very curious, they want to know, they want to explore. (Matt)

Feelings of loneliness and isolation were found in those who arrived recently in Australia, especially if they did not belong to an established ethnic community. They therefore perceived a real lack of social support in Australia.

I am fine, just loneliness. I want to know more Australians than just my own community. I don't have any Australian friends. I am trying to seek out Australia people ... The biggest biggest problem I have here is making friends. (Informal interview, Morathi)

Even for participants who managed to make friends with Australians, the lack of English skills and cultural differences were found to increase the social distance between the refugees and Australians, which at times culminated in communication difficulties and misunderstandings.

I found Australians who helped us go through the hard times, but sometimes, there was misunderstanding between us because I couldn't understand their culture. They tried to help us, but they couldn't understand us as well. Sometimes, there is some sort of disappointment from both sides ... Once you start talking our way, people then start to separate from us because of some sort of misunderstanding. But [if] we would be able to operate with this language easily, so that words you can communicate with people, you can explain. (Ania)

A few participants lamented that they were not acquainted with their neighbours at all. Those who lacked English skills and also perceived wide cultural differences especially expressed such sentiments. However, it gradually dawned upon these refugees: Compared to their country of origin, it appeared to be the norm in the larger Australian society that neighbours in general did not know each other very well. Hence, social or interpersonal distance emerged as a constant experience among the refugees. In the

context of this study, *interpersonal distance* refers to the perceived personal space or closeness between two people, which is reflected in terms of how often people visit one another and ask about one another's well-being, whether they are involved in one another's lives, and the ease with which people mutually disclosed personal information such as illness and emotions. The concept of interpersonal distance can be partially explained by the notion of individualism-collectivism.

Collectivism has been defined by Triandis (1995) as a social pattern which consists of closely attached persons who perceive themselves as parts of one or more collectives such as a family unit, tribe, or nation; additionally, these individuals are motivated by the norms of these collectives as well as the duties prescribed for them. They choose to forgo their personal goals in favour of those of the collective and focus on the *connectedness among members* in these collectives (Triandis, 1995). In extreme collectivism, these persons do not have any personal goals, attitudes, values, or beliefs which differentiate the self from the ingroup; rather, they only mirror those of the ingroup. Hence, the person's action is completely predictable through social roles, and the fulfilment of such roles is the accepted road to happiness (Shweder & Bourne, 1982). Individualism, as defined by Triandis (1995), refers to a social pattern made up of *loosely attached persons* who see themselves as independent of collectives; they are motivated by their own choices, needs, rights, and contracts with others. They prefer to prioritise their personal goals over those of others and focus on rationalising the advantages and disadvantages in their affairs with other people (Triandis, 1995). Most of the countries where refugees come from are collectivistic countries (where connectedness among people is important), whereas Australia is predominantly individualistic (where the social pattern is largely made up of loosely attached persons).

Participants who were aware of the wider interpersonal distance in Australia were less inclined to bring their older family members over to Australia. For instance, although Matt had thought of bringing his mother from Burma to stay with him in Australia, the idea that she would feel socially isolated prevented him from doing so. He further argued that due to her relatively old age, she would not be able to learn sufficient English to converse with others.

Because she is more than 60 years old, maybe she is able to speak in English a little bit but not much. So for example, if she came here, our neighbours, we don't even know their names, how can she know them, it would be like a prison. (Matt)

His fears were not unfounded as Tuba, an older refugee, confirmed that she felt very homesick in Australia. Her extreme sense of displacement was reflected as grief over the loss of her culture and homeland. She perceived her homesickness to be a major factor that exacerbated her physical pain, in her case, arthritis. Even though her immediate family members, including her husband and most of her children, reside in Perth, this alone was not sufficient to attenuate her sense of displacement. Upon visiting her homeland for six months in 2004, she reported a temporary remission of her arthritic pain as well as being able to look forward to her day while being with her relatives there.

Believe me, my sister-in-law, my nephew, three nephews, myself, my cousins, six families women. Everyday [in Iran], three o'clock, going for the mountain, walking for two hours and back. Now going too slow, nothing, in Australia, the moment I wake up from bed, no properly walking. Now nine o'clock, me in Australia, I can't wake up [from] the bed, not feeling [good] in my body. In my country going for everyday walk. Five o'clock, my sister said, "Are you crazy? Why are you waking up from the bed? Go to sleep." I said, "No, I don't know, can't sleep, I am happy." (Tuba)

As inferred, participants from collectivist cultures were likely to experience a sense of displacement as they moved to an individualistic country like Australia. Tuba pointed out that the social distance she perceived in Australia was something she had not experienced in her homeland.

Australia is good, but I am very sad one thing, nobody coming to our home. Nobody coming to knock at the door, "Are you okay? What do you say? What are you doing? You are not coming out." Nobody, nobody. Because I am thinking for my country back, beautiful, talking, enjoying time, being with each other ... And now, never coming to the door, knock behind the door, talk to me, me upset, my God. (Tuba)

Such sentiments were not only expressed by older refugees but were highlighted by younger refugees as well.

There is no good social communication – that people are not very close to one another. Let me start from the neighbours, you cannot get to know each other when you stay next door. They don't call you for tea; they don't invite you for discussion. From the community that I came, we really come to each other's house and play together and have good time. But it's not like this here, it's like you will be isolated a bit. (Morathi)

Most of my friends say they are isolated, no communication with anyone. Because in Africa, you find people on the way, you talk to your neighbour. Here, you cannot talk to your neighbour. So, that's what people complain about. When I sit alone, yeah I feel isolated because the way you brought up is not like this. If you are in Africa, if you are alone, even if you don't have family... your neighbour is your family, your uncles, your aunts. (Emanuel)

It is noteworthy that cultural differences and a lack of English skills did not necessitate a wider interpersonal distance, as Aziza clearly demonstrated with her ease in making new friends in the detention centre. It should also be noted that her new friends shared common experiences as detainees even though they did not speak the same language. Even though fellow detainees originated from various countries, they came from collectivist cultures and shared experiences as detainees, and this might have helped them to relate to one another with greater ease.

3.10 SUMMARY

Self-environment incongruity (SEI) was identified as the basic social psychological problem encountered by the refugee participants throughout all phases of the refugee experience. In the first phase of the refugee experience, the initial misfit between the refugees and their environment prompted them to escape. The refugees were various degrees forced out of their homeland to escape the oppression, discrimination, and often the persecution they faced, as well as the subsequent dismal and adverse living conditions in their homeland. This turbulent, unstable, and often violent political environment of the refugees' homeland was the main reason for their forced departure. After escaping their homeland, most refugees entered the second phase, which was the transitional phase where they sought temporary refuge away from their homes. Here, the problem of SEI continued as refugees waited for varying lengths of time for their refugee status and eventually their entry visas into Australia. Upon arrival in Australia, which was the third phase of the refugee experience, most refugees resolved to stay permanently, and the problem of SEI persisted through experiencing the eco-sociocultural differences between their homeland and Australia. A sense of displacement arose as an important aspect of SEI. The basic social psychological process adopted by refugees in order to overcome their problem of SEI will be addressed in Chapter Four.

CHAPTER FOUR
THE BASIC SOCIAL PSYCHOLOGICAL PROCESS: ADAPTING TO
MINIMISE SELF-ENVIRONMENT INCONGRUITY

4.1 OVERVIEW OF THE CHAPTER

After the identification of the basic social psychological problem of *self-environment incongruity* (SEI), further data collection and analysis were aimed at uncovering the basic social psychological process adopted by the refugee participants to deal with their SEI. The basic social psychological process was identified as *adapting to minimise self-environment incongruity*. In this chapter, the process of *adapting* and its stages are explored in detail.

4.2 DEFINITION AND STAGES OF ADAPTING

In the context of this study, the term *adapting* refers to the long-term practical and psychological process that the refugees used to minimise their experience of SEI. As inferred from the findings, the refugees adapted in Australia by (1) changing various aspects of the self in order to better deal with their new circumstances and to fit into their new environment in Australia, (2) making changes to the environment itself, and (3) avoiding or moving away from the environment. Specifically, the refugees' new circumstances included the experience of disintegration and multiple losses arising from their pre-migration SEI. As derived from the analysis of the data, the new environment refers to the new eco-sociocultural context in Australia. When the refugees experienced less SEI and became competent and effective in their new environment, they are said to have successfully adapted to Australia. The process of *adapting* involved five stages: (1) Coming to terms with the past, (2) Maintaining self-identity, (3) Rebuilding a new life, (4) Integrating perspectives and balancing identities, and (5) Consolidating identity towards a new life. It should be noted that these stages are not discrete sequential stages, although they will be described in a linear manner. Represented by bipolar arrows, these stages are intricately related as they take place simultaneously. For instance, refugees who had a lot of previous disintegration issues had to work harder to rebuild their lives in Australia, whether practically or psychologically. For ease of discussion, however, the five stages are presented in a linear form. All refugee participants in this study

experienced the first four stages without exception, although the degree to which they experienced each stage and the duration of each stage varied. Not all participants arrived at the fifth stage of consolidating identity towards a new life. It should be stressed that the refugees engaged in the basic social psychological process of *adapting* over varying lengths of time. In the following section, the process of *adapting* and its five stages will be explored. This process is depicted in Figure 4.1.

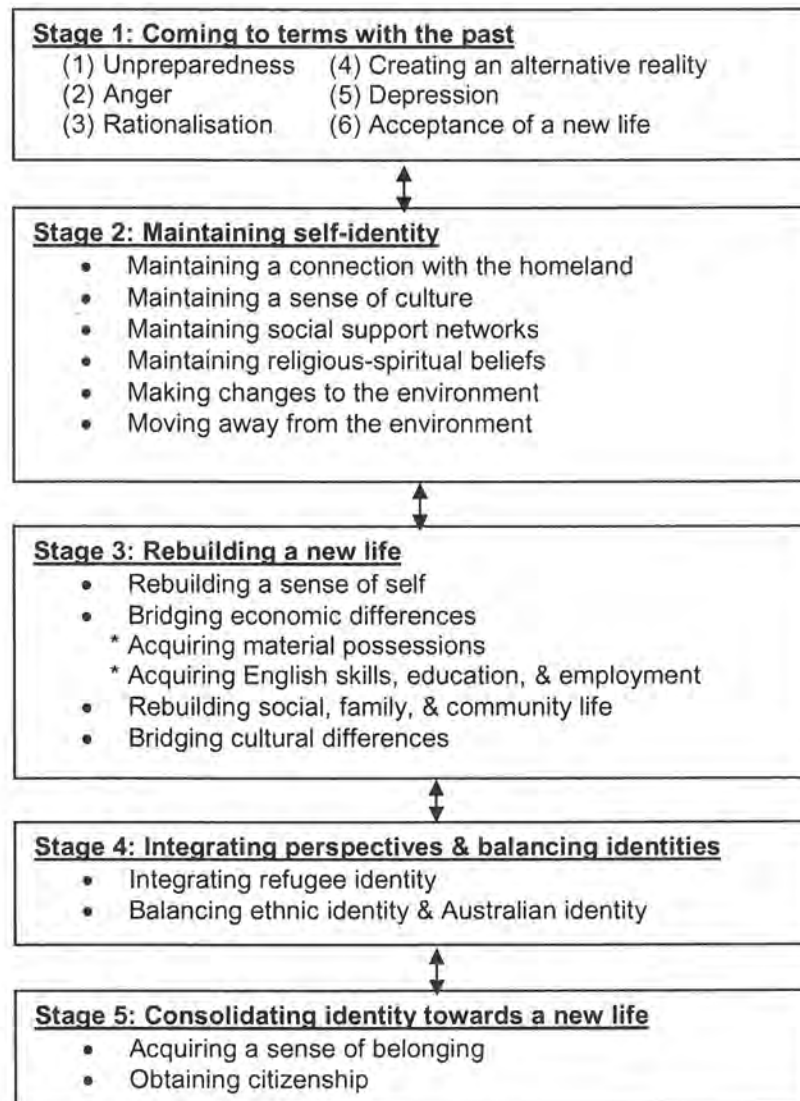


Figure 4.1. The five stages of the basic social psychological process of *adapting to minimise self-environment incongruity*

4.3 STAGE 1: COMING TO TERMS WITH THE PAST

In the context of this study, *the past* refers to issues that are brought up in the refugees' current lives because of their pre-migration experiences. The stage of *coming to terms with the past* is defined from the findings as the adaptive process of learning to understand and accept the past in order to manage the experience of multiple losses and disintegration. This stage comprised six phases: (1) Unpreparedness, (2) Anger and its underlying emotions, (3) Rationalisation, (4) Creating an alternative reality, (5) Depression, and (6) Acceptance of a new life. Each of these phases is described as follows.

4.3.1 PHASE 1: UNPREPAREDNESS – SHOCK, DENIAL, AND NUMBNESS

As the refugee participants faced an unknown future with uncertain circumstances, they experienced a state of *unpreparedness* laden with fear and anxiety. With the exception of refugees who experienced SEI from birth, many refugees experienced an initial state of shock as their minds were unable to handle the reality of their situation. This state of shock was marked by a sudden disturbance in their emotions due to unexpected environmental changes. For instance, the suddenness of civil war or being captured and facing death catapulted the refugees into a state of shock. There were questioning and gradual realisations of what had really happened. Throughout the refugee experience, the refugees persisted in questioning and checking their new life situations. The following excerpt reflects how a refugee checked his new situation in his homeland until he realised the seriousness of his circumstances.

When things were happening, it was very hard to know. Wait [for] what was coming along everyday. Just adapting ourselves with it. I didn't really know what's happening. This happening there, that happening there. Many people were basically executed. And it was so shocking to me, and I was so like a person who has just woken up and realising what was happening. Towards the end of that high school year, I realised that it is serious. (Payam)

Throughout the three phases of the refugee experience (i.e., in the homeland, in the transitional phase, and in Australia), the refugees continued to experience the emotions of *unpreparedness*. In particular, they experienced fear and anxiety about their uncertain circumstances until they adapted permanently in Australia. None of participants were in a state of total denial where they refused or failed to acknowledge their new

circumstances or environment. They realised that they had experienced multiple losses and their lives had disintegrated, but they found it difficult to believe they had lost so much and were ill-equipped to deal with such losses. Hence, denial appeared to be more symbolic than literal. *Partial denial*, a more appropriate term to reflect disbelief, occurred when the refugees were not prepared to deal with reality and what had happened to them. The stage of partial denial began from their homeland and extended to their time of resettlement in Australia. Partial denial was observed in a few participants who, although living in Australia, continued to employ *avoidance* as a strategy because they were still overwhelmed by their emotional distress, and they were not ready to face their new circumstances. As indicated in the analysis of the data, they responded by partially denying their emotional pain while continuing with their lives in Australia. A lack of emotion could be considered as *numbing* (Webster's New Encyclopedic Dictionary, 1993). The term *forgetfulness* was commonly used by the participants to depict partial denial.

Refugee means ... something makes me sad when I think about being a refugee. I try to forget about I am a refugee here ... I try to get on like Australian citizen, or I feel that this is my country because I don't like this word "refugee." (Mariam)

But it's just like the memories were very hurtful. And I stopped thinking about them, and I was very successful, and I forgot everything. I forgot a lot of my memories the first few years I was here. Maybe I denied, or it was just too hurtful to remember things. (Fariba)

The strategy of *avoidance* in one participant had become so pervasive that it not only appeared to block out her negative memories but her positive memories as well.

When I first came to Pakistan and then here [Australia], it was so painful to remember anything, I literally decided that I am not going to think about past, even my good memories. My good memories more because it was very hurtful – knowing that my brother who is still in Iran loves to have banana, knowing that they wouldn't have any banana, and then I will still eat banana here. (Fariba)

With time, most refugees seemed to deny their emotions less and less. As they became more ready to face their past experiences, a series of emotions, based on anger, emerged.

4.3.2 PHASE 2: ANGER AND ITS UNDERLYING EMOTIONS

Anger and its underlying emotions (including guilt and emotional pain) eased the path for the refugees to face past issues of multiple losses and disintegration of their lives.

During my interview sessions with the participants, anger was not the most prominent feature, probably because most participants had moved beyond anger with the passage of time and had arrived at the phase of acceptance. At times, I relied on the tone and facial expressions of the participants to detect their emotions. When anger was present, it was usually a response to the unfairness of the refugees' life circumstances.

Displaced anger, or anger directed at those who were not the cause of one's suffering, was revealed by reports of the participants. For Ken, whose ethnic minority group was victimised by an ethnic majority group in his homeland, anger was directed towards all members of the ethnic majority group whom he also encountered in Australia.

As a X [ethnic minority], I can make friends with A or B or C [ethnic minority groups] very easily; we can become friends, even though we don't know each other because we trust each other. We can communicate and discuss whatever we want, but we never get involved and make friends with Y [ethnic majority] students. They wanted to talk to us, but we don't want to talk with them. No matter what they are, we see them as Y. So for us, we don't like that. (Ken)

Anger could be targeted at the aggressors who transgressed against the refugees. For instance, Payam was angry that the authorities had lied about their unfair treatment of the Baha'is in Iran.

Every year since 1980, UN general assembly has asked this government to abandon the policy on being against the Baha'is and prosecuting Baha'is, and every year, they still said, "We haven't punished anyone for being a Baha'i ... All those have been put in jail because they have broken laws." But I was told my crime was being a Baha'i. I know that they are lying. (Payam)

Because of his distrust and anger towards these authorities, Payam was adamant about never returning to his homeland.

No matter what happens I will not go [back to Iran]. I will not trust these people. I probably won't connect with that country any more. But to go and visit my parents and my family, that's something that I will not even contemplate unless they come out and say that "yes" they did that and tell the world that they did that to me. I know that they did. I want them to be honest about it. (Payam)

Anger was also manifested as *guilt*, that is, anger turned inward towards oneself or feelings of being responsible for having done something wrong. For example, Nadia admitted to "spoiling" her daughters because she had blamed herself for not providing for them during the war.

I feel guilty because I couldn't provide normal life for my children, and I did have that feeling that something was my fault, although it actually wasn't ... When we came to Australia, when life started being normal, I did spoil them. They didn't do housework. Everything was just like give them, just to make them happy, don't expect them to contribute. We were just trying to compensate. (Nadia)

Survival guilt in the refugees was manifested as a painful emotion that they had done something wrong, that they were undeserving of the good treatment they now received in Australia, and that they had escaped a horrific situation while others had perished or were still trapped. For example, feelings of survival guilt were presented in Morathi whose emotional pain persisted through two interviews.

You will start thinking about your home every time you get good service; you think that there are thousands of your fellow people who are still suffering and in need of the service that you are getting here – that is something that hurts your mind now and then. (Morathi)

Survival guilt was also manifested as an inner conflict about staying in Australia. For instance, Morathi often wished that he was back at the refugee camp and wondered what he was doing in Australia.

Now I am here, I am thinking of my people, I want to be there to help them. What am I doing here? (Morathi)

Similar sense of guilt of having left one's homeland and deserted fellow sufferers was also apparently experienced by Tuba. It was her opinion that only those who were strong in spirit stayed behind to support one another.

I am very guilty. Why? I am coming to Australia because they need Baha'i people to stay in Iran. Every Baha'i stay in Iran, why you coming? Not going somewhere. Very strong Baha'is in Iran. I am coming [to Australia]. I'm guilty. (Tuba)

It should be noted that those who volunteered for this study did not display extreme anger. One refugee who was approached by the research assistant was very angry at the request for interviews and she held deep resentment towards interviewers in general. This refugee was not interviewed. It was likely that refugees who had not moved on from the stage of anger were generally not agreeable to being interviewed. This limitation will be further addressed in Chapter Six (see section 6.6).

4.3.3 PHASE 3: RATIONALISATION

In the process of facing emotions such as anger and emotional pain, the refugees also attempted to rationalise or understand why war and other forms of persecution had occurred. Rationalisation can be defined as the cognitive strategy the refugees adopted to understand certain events, especially their cause-effect relationships, which led to their SEI. The process of rationalisation was exemplified by Sabrina, who candidly revealed her thought processes.

I am just young. I am just skeptical. I am always trying to find something. I don't think a story is a story to be true. I am trying to think for something more – I am trying to see what they say is right when they are saying something. (Sabrina)

Sabrina expressed her initial inability to comprehend why the civil war occurred and her need to find closure through understanding the unfolding events.

I am still coming to terms about it, about what has happened. I am still not clear about why it has happened.... trying to come to some kind of closure with regards to why this war has happened in my country. (Sabrina)

In the following excerpt, Sabrina describes her attempt to understand the events that led to the civil war in her country.

They first ask you what are you and then they treat you, what are you by nationality because civil war is the worst war of all. You were celebrating both ways, you were sharing, you had barbeque with these people. They were your neighbours. Suddenly now, we are shooting each other. I don't blame people if they don't understand because we don't understand what happened. (Sabrina)

In the process of rationalisation, Sabrina arrived at the conclusion that the civil war originated from a higher authority or the politicians.

Until yesterday they were all your friends and today, you are shooting to kill each other because of some stupid ideas - to which nationality you belong, and what do they have at the end? Nothing. Politics, everything is politics. Everything is on a [sic] higher places. (Sabrina)

Refugees who tried to understand the events of war or other upheavals usually described the difficulties in distinguishing the innocent party from the guilty party.

But if you read everywhere, everything is black and white – good boys and bad boys, and it's always the same in media. But in real life, it doesn't work like that, never ever. But when you read about that, they always put blame on one ethnic group. We can bomb you because you deserve that and you are all bad. (Nadia)

It was possible that through rationalisation, the refugees gradually gained more specific knowledge and understanding. This increased understanding assisted them in coming to grips with what had happened to them and eased the way for *accepting* their own experiences. Rationalisation appeared to reduce their sense of loss of control and helplessness and facilitated some form of closure. A sense of understanding in turn allowed the refugees to learn from their experiences and move forward. For instance, Sabrina believed that the civil war came about because of the “weakness” of the people who allowed their leaders to stir up ethnic conflict among them.

We let them use and stir us, to stir our weakness between us, and then they started to kill each other, later on we killed each other because of stupidity.... It is stupid when you look at it ... hopefully we will learn something. But there is always somewhere, you know, war is going on. Probably we need some markets to sell some weapons or whatever – I don't know honestly, it's politics. (Sabrina)

Gaining more understanding about how things went wrong seemed to help the refugees to come to terms with where they were at present. For instance, Sabrina came to understand the role of the media in amplifying the ethnic conflict.

As peaceful people now, we are all sort of disturbed by the war that has happened in our country.... Suddenly you become so self-aware of your religion, of your nationality ... just through media. They [The media] were putting more oil on fire. And now after all these years, after people are finishing all over the world, they just now realised they were just things to play with, like chess figures. (Sabrina)

For some refugees, *rationalisation* did not necessarily lead to a sense of closure that helped them get on with their lives as Sabrina did. For instance, some tribal refugees still wanted to return to fight for their own land in Burma until today. One participant did not feel that peace was possible because his tribe would never fit into Burmese culture and he hoped to return to his homeland some day.

Kachin and Karen have the highest Christians in Burma. Kachin, most of them are Christians, like 99.9% ... And Burma is like 99.9% Buddhist. And plus the language completely different from the Burmese.... And culture is completely different again. You can't really tell Israel and Palestine to live together and to become a democratic country. I don't think they can live together because they have been fighting for over a thousand years. It will never happen. The same thing, Burmese and Kachin and Karen, we can't live together because we all are different no matter how they get the peace together, we still got war. (Ken)

As shown, rationalisation could be manifested as a *transient* phase (for example, one that helped the refugees to move on with their lives in Australia), or a *persistent* phase (for example, one that kept alive the refugees' hopes of having their own land).

4.3.4 PHASE 4: CREATING AN ALTERNATIVE REALITY

In the phase of *creating an alternative reality*, the refugees provided themselves with the possibility of having choices and wondered how things might otherwise eventuate. Wishful thinking was played out – in their minds, they entertained many “ifs” and wondered if they or other refugees were able to live different and better lives. For instance, Sabrina wished that her father had been alive so that he was able to share their newly built life in Australia.

I think, I can just think out for my parents, you know, my father was a very big man ... very important to me, you know, very much affected my life. I am just sorry because he didn't have a chance to be here, like now. (Sabrina)

During this phase, the refugees also attempted to negotiate a way out of their emotional pain by finding arguments in favour of their situation. Sabrina, who was glad that her father did not live to see what had happened to their homeland, found a reprieve from her grief.

During the war, I was glad that he wasn't alive, you know, because I was happy he didn't have to see all that was happening, what was happening around. But now, you know, we missed him very much. (Sabrina)

Creating an alternative reality appeared to be crucial for the survival of refugees who had escaped horrific events such as genocide of their tribal people. For instance, in the following excerpt, Mike describes his spiritual reality. It appeared that having this spiritual reality removed him from his painful emotions. His spiritual beliefs kept his faith alive and assisted him in facing the loss of lives of his fellow-countrymen.

We keep praying for our country. Even though they are suffering, even though they are dying, we pray that their soul doesn't die. Their spirit will still go to heaven. Even though they are in refugee camp, we pray that they will have happy life like spiritually happy, not physical.... emotionally dead, but we pray that like spiritually. (Mike)

The creation of alternative realities appeared to be prominent in refugees who arrived in Australia at an older age. As they had lived a significant part of their lives in their

homeland, they felt very lonely and homesick in Australia. Their difficulties in establishing new lifestyles in Australia changed their perception of the past – they could have lived in their homeland, they would have been happy. In their loneliness, there was a tendency to be nostalgic about the happy times of being connected with people in their homeland. In the following passage, Mike describes his mother's loneliness.

My mum tells me she rather lives in the jungle. Because of the war, she had to run and everything. Otherwise, she would love to live in the jungle. My mother feels kind of lonely. She rather goes back to Burma and lives with the relatives. She still keeps the old tradition. She always says, "I am not happy here." (Mike)

For these reasons, older refugees were more inclined to remember the glory of the past, even momentarily. This was especially so when they had had a good life before the war or revolution. This state is exemplified by Tuba, an older participant.

I am homesick because my country ... before revolution, I had beautiful money, beautiful house, everything's okay ... then I am coming to Australia. Thank you this government giving me Homeswest house but small house. Not the same in Iran because now little bit money. Big money I give the children presents. Now nothing ... I am becoming sick, too homesick, I am tired with my body. (Tuba)

The notion of nostalgic glorifying of the past was also noted by Viktor Frankl (1984) in his book, *Man's Search for Meaning*. Frankl (1984) stated: "This intensification of inner life helped the prisoner find a refuge from the emptiness, desolation and spiritual poverty of his existence, by letting him escape from the past. When given free rein, his imagination played with past events, often not important ones.... His nostalgic memory glorified them...." (p. 58-59). When the refugees were increasingly able to experience the emotional pain over their losses and realised they could no longer recover what they had lost, depression sank in.

4.3.5 PHASE 5: DEPRESSION

Several symptoms of depression were revealed in a few participants. It appeared that depression varied with the extent of perceived losses. The refugees spoke about their losses in terms of how difficult it was to leave their country and loved ones behind, to lose jobs, family members, and friends. The phase of depression was noted in Morathi, whose depression was expressed as psychological pain resulting from a sense of loss. He stated, "But you're just here [in Australia], you are okay, but inside you are not okay. It

really hurts psychologically; it hurts, yeah." The refugees also grieved over events that they could not change. For instance, they felt a deep sadness resulting from the deaths of other people during war and other losses.

The saddest thing of all of these is so many young people had been killed in this war, so many houses and belongings are destroyed and never be returned to the owners' hands, and we are all around the world. The friends that you grew up with, some of my really good friends have not been found ... very bad thing for these ordinary people. (Sabrina)

There was evidence that depression was reflected as hidden grief in other refugees as reported by those interviewed in this study. As mentioned earlier at the phase of denial, some refugees avoided their painful experiences and suppressed the emotions associated with them. For example, Morathi alluded that he knew of others who suppressed their emotions and were not prepared to talk about their grief.

I really find out that there is a lot of grief in every refugee that is coming to the resettlement country like Australia. They have their own grief that they haven't spoken out yet. I don't really know how to help them to speak out. (Morathi)

In this study, Tuba, aged 63 years, remained in the phase of depression and spoke mainly of her pre-migration life and the happier times during her visit to her homeland. There was the need for her to manage her homesickness and grief on a daily basis. She spoke sufficient English to be able to share with me the meaning of her losses. Upon returning from a visit to her homeland, she equated her grief to losing the zest for life as reflected in her reluctance to start her day each morning and the worsening of her arthritic pain.

Never never one time one medicine, one tablet in Iran, but after six months, I am coming to Australia again – get too sick, tablets, lots of medicine. I am now problem for my body. Now going too slow, nothing, in Australia, the moment I wake up from bed, no properly walking. Now nine o'clock, in the bed, me in Australia, I can't wake up, not feeling [good] in my body (Tuba).

Tuba's depression was also clearly compounded by her loneliness and her gradual loss of physical health.

How many times the kitchen and the door? Smart and neat ... What do you do after? Nothing ... Ten minutes reading, my eyes tired, my body tired because arthritis. Still I am looking at the door, nobody coming, everybody working. My body worse and worse. Sometimes me, get to cry by myself. I need to cry, worse

and worse and worse, arthritis very bad ... Too many times, outside, collapse on the floor, slip on the floor because no energy on my knee. (Tuba)

One refugee discovered depression in other refugees in the form of stagnation of life and described it as helplessness, being stuck, or being unable to do anything for oneself and others.

If you look backwards all the time, then you just stay in one spot and you can't do anything for yourself or for your family. Personally I know many many people like that ... if you talk to them, they know it's not good. And they know it's better if they can think in a different way or behave or act [differently], but it's something stronger in themselves, and they just can't. (Nadia)

It was found that the decision to let go and move forward ameliorated the risk of prolonged depression. The refugees were then able to accept the reality of their multiple losses and disintegration of their previous lives.

4.3.6 PHASE 6: ACCEPTANCE OF A NEW LIFE

Acceptance, in this study, can be defined as the phase where the refugees were at peace with where they were at present without obsessing over their past issues which they now had no control over. For instance, they no longer lived in regret over their past decisions nor wished that things had turned out differently. In this study, participants who had arrived at the phase of *acceptance* might not necessarily have reached a state of peace without any unfinished business; rather, their past issues no longer had a strong grip on them or overwhelmed their present functioning in Australia. Being at peace meant that they were not controlled by their strong emotions, including fear, anger, or depression. As Kubler-Ross (1997, p. 48) put it, "Acceptance is a feeling of victory, a feeling of peace, of serenity, of positive submission to things we cannot change." An example of positive submission is presented in Nadia.

I just, I put that behind, I just don't want to go all over again, and I don't think back all the time – I had that and I had that, and if I was there I could be ... It's just something that I just put aside, and that's it. It worked like that, and I don't [think] of that any more – if I lost it, lost it, and that's how it was. (Nadia)

Social interactions with fellow refugees helped Nadia realise that those who were able to release past experiences were better able to live in the present moment, rebuild their lives, and learn new skills in Australia. Thus, *acceptance* also entailed the process of

coming to terms with one's present life, which was the adaptive process of learning to understand and accept where one was at the present moment and of finding a focus that was currently meaningful to one's life in Australia, as indicated by this comment.

Some people I know, so unhappy with life, with life altogether not in Australia – just like life after the war because they just think backwards and never try to do anything. I realised you have to draw a line, and that's it, it was like that. You can't go back any more to this life or lifetime, and you have to look what is in front of you, and you try to do something with your life again. (Nadia)

In contrast to Nadia's ease at moving forward, acceptance did not always come easily for other refugees. Tuba attempted to overcome her depression through various logical reasoning in order to be at peace with her present life. She attempted to re-orientate her attitudes through affirmation of the good things she still had in life, which gradually helped her *accept* her present life.

Yes, I try. Me thinking for my four children, I have six grandchildren. Just beautiful my husband very good man. Australia, it's better, little bit little freedom better than Iran. And for money social security, thank you, Iran nothing. Like this, slow slow, my heart relax body. Me better than somebody – older women, no speaking English very well, very worse ... But me, thank you God, just little bit understand [English]. I am going to the doctor for my pain. Nobody come to translate for me. Feel like this myself, it's okay. (Tuba)

By realising that she would never to return to her homeland to live, Tuba made efforts to accept her current life in Australia by focusing on her family.

But I am homesick for my family [in Iran], but what can I do now? I am coming to Australia, I am not coming [sic] back because no job, no money, nothing, everything is gone ... after 18 years little bit settled down, little bit, little by little, little by little because I am looking for my children. My children the best for me, my husband too. (Tuba)

One of the signs that the refugees were able to close a chapter in their lives was when they decisively moved into a positive and proactive position. For example, Sabrina's conclusion that civil war in her country was "stupid" had helped her to stay remote from any ethnic conflicts in Australia.

If anyone has a problem, you know, I just say, "No, I don't care." I obviously don't care. There are a couple of people around, according to your nationality, are cruel to you ... go and see them ... Now, all these people from all different republics, all different nationalities, and they are getting along so well ... We are lucky. We are more peaceful. (Sabrina)

Another indication of having moved away from the past appeared in the process of letting go of negative emotions and embracing life in Australia. For example, Sabrina stated, "Because if I feel angry and hate, so what? I probably just develop cancer. I don't want that, I have enough bad experience. This is my time and I enjoy." Many refugees in this study had arrived at the stage of *acceptance* either through meaningful work (including voluntary work and career) or through family life. The stage of acceptance facilitated the refugees' process of *rebuilding*, which will be described in a later section. Through acceptance, the refugees' past issues became just memories that did not dominate or control their current lives in Australia. They came to accept the reality of what had happened in their lives as well as the reality of having new and different lives in Australia. The stage of *coming to terms with the past* was applicable when the refugees had experienced irreversible losses in certain aspects of their lives. However, to some extent in their lives in Australia, they were able to maintain certain dimensions of life that bore some resemblance to their previous lives and thus maintain their sense of self. Their maintenance of self-identity is discussed in the following section.

4.4 STAGE 2: MAINTAINING SELF-IDENTITY

A sense of continuity of self was apparent throughout all interviews as the refugee participants provided an account of their lives before and after their arrival in Australia. The concept of *continuity of self* was important because it was evident that most participants never forgot their past experiences. Maintaining self-identity or a sense of continuity of self by maintaining connections to numerous dimensions of one's previous life was an important stage in minimising a sense of loss and grief. This was achieved through maintaining a connection with the homeland, maintaining a sense of culture, maintaining social support networks, maintaining religious-spiritual beliefs, making changes to the environment, and moving away from the environment.

4.4.1 MAINTAINING A CONNECTION WITH THE HOMELAND

All refugee participants to varying degrees perceived that they had lost their countries because they had physically moved away from their birthplace. Maintaining an attachment to one's homeland was a strategy to defend against the sense of loss of one's country. For example, Morathi attempted to minimise his sense of helplessness that

derived from loss of his country and fellow-countrymen (through genocide) by finding ways to assist those left behind in refugee camps.

So I don't know what to do ... maybe we could find a few members who will be interested to contribute maybe every month or a way of raising funds to reach those needy refugees in exile. (Morathi)

A few participants maintained a connection with their homeland either through the radio or through the Internet. Matt stated, "I always listen to the radio because there is one, just the political news from Burma, only from Sydney... radio FreeBurma."

After 1988, the military government took over temporary. Then, they never go ... they held election, Aung Sang Suu Kyi won more than 80%, they did not want to give the authority to her ... I saw in the Internet, on Burmese new year's day, the government is going to change, something positively. (Matt)

I heard the news. There is no solution for us. All we want is freedom. We have been fighting for over 50 years. My mum tells me, every night, she listens to BBC, the news from Burma, we couldn't do anything. (Mike)

Some participants maintained a connection with their homeland by returning to visit when it became safe to do so.

I went back to Thai border, and I saw soldiers, and I feel sorry for the soldiers. The soldiers are younger than me some of them. I took a lot of photos. (Mike)

When I went back in 1999 after four years in Australia, I went to visit my family in Serbia, they are refugees there still. Before that, they were in Croatia. And they had a wedding for my cousin's daughter, and we went there. (Nadia)

4.4.2 MAINTAINING A SENSE OF CULTURE

Most participants maintained some aspects of their own culture in Australia whether or not they perceived a cultural loss. To varying degrees, their ethnic communities maintained a tapestry of customs, common language, and shared values. For instance, Nadia reported having adjusted well to her life in Australia and had maintained a strong sense of culture.

Maybe I'm very old fashion or just don't like changes personally. So I am not so good that I can say that I easily fit in or integrate, like I stick to my old everything – habits, customs, foods ... and how I did things before. And I think it's more than fair in Australia because really nobody put any pressure on you. I feel it is a very tolerant society, anything you can do whatever you want. (Nadia)

More important, successful adjustment in Australia did not imply becoming more Australian. This was demonstrated in Nadia who attributed her success to the multicultural context of Australia that accepted diversity in people.

When I came to Australia, I was accepted. The treatment how I was accepted, I think it was good altogether. Because you feel as normal like a human being, and you don't feel any difference between you as a newly arrived person and other people who have been here a longer time or who are born here. Personally, I really felt equal to all other Australians from first day when I came here. (Nadia)

The refugees were also able to maintain their sense of culture by retaining culinary preferences or religious-spiritual practices because of the presence of established ethnic communities in Australia that preceded them. Mariam explained, "Because the community is becoming bigger, so there are many halal shops now in different areas. So it's not difficult for us to get halal meat."

We attend this mosque.... Each week, there is one day sometimes we attend the mosque to do something, to perform some kind or practice some kind of you know, my religion, to practice our religion there in mosque (Mariam).

The importance of maintaining self-identity in terms of culture was further highlighted in a study by P. Guerin, Elmi, and B. Guerin (2006). The authors, through many years of ethnographic and participant observation, demonstrated the role of weddings and parties with the inclusion of cultural dance, music, and dress on the well-being of Somali women in a small city in Australia. They further suggested that community-initiated activities can be a therapeutic social approach to mental health promotion and early intervention.

There were certain tribal cultures that were lost through the years as an aftermath of genocide. These tribal refugees also had the opportunity to *rebuild* their culture as they settled in Australia (see section 4.5.1.5).

4.4.3 MAINTAINING SOCIAL SUPPORT NETWORKS

Among the participants, Nadia was the best example of a refugee who preserved her sense of continuity of self by retaining her social networks from her homeland. Her strategy of social segregation was possible because she felt no pressure to assimilate in what she perceived as a very tolerant Australian society. The following excerpt shows

that she derived social support from her ethnic community, together with friends she knew before escaping her country.

I came with my husband and my two daughters. A year after me, my parents came to Australia. And I had my first cousin, my best friend, and people that I knew from my childhood. I have four people in the closest neighbourhood, like I played with them since I was a child. Many people that I know from home – like school, or work, or neighbours, or friends. So, I know many many people that I knew from my life before the war. (Nadia)

Not only did Nadia have her family members and friends with her in Australia, they lived in close proximity to one another.

Maybe that is the reason I don't feel I changed so many things because I have so many people that I knew from before, and then it's just different country, different language [in Australia]. Yeah, many other things are the same because now I have my parents living very close to me ... and they come everyday, and other people like my distant relatives, we lived with each other. (Nadia)

Nadia acknowledged the disadvantages of maintaining her pre-existing social networks. One of these included the lack of Australian friends and the lack of motivation to acquire Australian friends.

But I didn't make any friends with Australians – that is another maybe bad side of the story because I never tried, and they probably didn't try. So I don't have any people visiting me like Australians. (Nadia)

Nadia's statements were supported by Phinney, Berry, Vedder, and Liebkind (2006) who stated that in more ethnically homogeneous neighbourhoods, immigrant youth have more ethnic language use and little contact with national peers.

4.4.4 MAINTAINING RELIGIOUS-SPIRITUAL BELIEFS

A few refugee participants spoke about their religious-spiritual lives being an important dimension of their self-identity, which they strongly maintained in Australia. They believed that their religious-spiritual lives had provided comfort and guidance. Praying can be defined as having conversation with, and supplicating assistance from, a Higher Power. Prayers also helped a few refugees in keeping their faith and hope alive. For instance, Morathi concluded the interview with a hopeful tone by saying "just pray." Here, prayer reflected both hope and an act of imploring a Higher Power for assistance.

They really need help. And at the same time, maybe there are serious cases that are not being interviewed by UNHCR laws that really need protection. Even in

the neighbouring country, there are many cases that are getting deported back, they may get killed, get tortured again ... So, just pray. (Morathi)

Prayers for those who died and the spiritual belief that one could be saved by grace helped a young refugee in easing his psychological burden arising from the genocide of his tribe.

Even though they die, their spirit won't die as well, that their spirit will go to heaven. That's what I am trying to pray. I believe that one day when I die, I will still go to heaven ... not just because I've done anything good, or I saved people, or I give donation to the poor, or anything. But I believe that we are saved by grace, not by good that we have done, we are saved by grace. (Mike)

This religious-spiritual dimension, which formed a significant part of Mike's self-identity, appeared to help him survive the past and carry on with his life in Australia.

Mike also had the opportunity to attend a church in Australia.

Outreach is like gospel, like evangelist. There is a Burmese fellowship here, Australian ABCF, Australian Burmese Christian Fellowship. As soon as I came to Australia, in '96, I start going to that church. And now, people are getting more and more people, like the church is growing, more and more people. (Mike)

4.4.5 MAKING CHANGES TO THE ENVIRONMENT

Although the term *adapting* might imply that most adaptive changes the refugees made in Australia were within themselves, they also made important changes to the environment in Australia as they maintained their self-identity. For instance, established ethnic communities in Australia often built their own places of worship (e.g., Mariam's Muslim community), opened their own restaurants (e.g., Ho's ethnic community), and organised their own ethnic clubs, thereby maintaining their cultural heritage.

You know Lucky Imports? They are very successful. A lot of the shops around the city are all, all came from the same area as I did, all around the same time. Like Golden Swan, I think it's probably very successful now. Ten years ago, all the Chinese restaurants owners all came around the same area. Yeah, and it's like a norm, let's go buy restaurants and open it. (Ho)

I think my dad is [a member of the Chung Wah Association]. It's this big circle of friends, IndoChinese, you know. If their daughters and sons get married, my mum and dad and everyone else have to go to it. So, if I get married, all of them have to go to it. It's all French Indochina. It's a big community. If there is any ounce of juicy gossip, they all know about it. (Ho)

As demonstrated in the preceding excerpts, in their process of *adapting*, the refugees had the opportunity to make certain alterations to the environment in Australia.

4.4.6 MOVING AWAY FROM THE ENVIRONMENT

If the refugees realised that they could not “fit” into the larger society and were ineffective in changing certain aspects of their environment, then it became an option for them to avoid the environment or move away from it. For example, eight months after his arrival in Perth, Morathi informed me of his decision to move to Melbourne because of the nagging sense of displacement he felt in Perth. He explained that he wanted to be with his friends who were residing in Melbourne.

Although the aforementioned dimensions of life were strongly maintained in some refugees’ lives in Australia, several refugees reported “taking baby steps” (e.g., Ania, Payam) or rebuilding their lives from scratch (e.g., Nadia) as they learnt a new language and lifestyle, developed new skills, and made new social connections. The stage of rebuilding is further explored in the following section.

4.5 STAGE 3: REBUILDING A NEW LIFE

Upon arrival in Australia, the refugees’ situation changed from statelessness and homelessness to a situation where they could rebuild their homes and lives from scratch. *Rebuilding*, as derived from the analysis of the data, refers to the process adopted by refugees to reconstruct all dimensions of their lives (including sense of self, social life, family life, career, and spiritual life) in order to effectively deal with their past issues of multiple losses and disintegration, immediate issues of resettlement, and present issues of long-term adjustment, with the view of permanently establishing a new life in Australia. The immediate issues of rebuilding were early resettlement issues of survival and safety (including finding accommodation and food), accessing interpreting services, obtaining financial support through Centrelink, and, for some refugees, seeking employment. During early resettlement, the refugees increasingly compared their lives in Australia to that of their homeland. Present issues of rebuilding involved long-term adjustment, whereby the refugees attempted to deal with their SEI in Australia by narrowing the gap between themselves and their new environment. Examples of long-

term adjustment included working towards financial security, learning English, and building a career.

As inferred from the findings, there was a distinction between the *psychological perspective* and the *practical perspective* of rebuilding. In both perspectives, a strong foundation was a necessary requirement. By analogy, this was like building a house: The foundation had to be firm before the refugees could take additional steps in rebuilding their lives from the ground up. In psychological terms, the foundation of rebuilding required refugees, to some extent, to have come to terms with their past, accepted a new permanent reality of life in Australia, and realised that they could not fully maintain their lives as before. The fears some refugees had over rebuilding their lives are highlighted in the following comment.

It's very hard to adjust to something better. People say, "It's easy to adjust for better." But it's as well heavy burden to live for quite a number of years under pressure and stress and then come to the point where your life could be better ... in the new environment. You have better prospects, you have better opportunity. It's very hard to come to that terms because you still... can't register that ... probably forgot, confused, and can cause some fear it's going to break down – that's the sort of insecurity ... fear. (Sabrina)

A few participants reported that their process of rebuilding a new life involved a steep learning curve, which they typically described as *taking baby steps*. Most refugees built on what was already known and familiar to them (e.g., maintaining aspects of their culture), but learning and change were the crux of rebuilding. For example, Ania, who experienced a huge cultural distance between her homeland and Australia, felt that she had to “start from the beginning like a baby” to establish a goodness of fit between herself and her new environment. Ania stated, “Sometimes, [I think] what am I doing here? I would never come here because I have to start from the beginning like a baby.” Additionally, there was evidence to suggest that the acquisition of English was the foundation or first step in the practical perspective of rebuilding.

And every step that you take, you start from the beginning. Once you are familiar with the language and everything ... what have you been doing so far, such a long time. I was just like a baby growing up, and I have to do this growing up twice. (Payam)

In this study, the stage of rebuilding is best described in terms of its four main aspects: (1) rebuilding a sense of self in Australia; (2) bridging economic differences; (3) rebuilding social, family, and community life; and (4) bridging cultural differences. These aspects are elaborated in the following sections.

4.5.1 REBUILDING A SENSE OF SELF IN AUSTRALIA

After their arrival in Australia, the refugees had the opportunity to rebuild their *sense of self*, that is, aspects of themselves that they perceived to be central to who they were or aspects that defined them and gave them a sense of identity, pride, self-worth, and integrity. In general, there were opportunities provided in Australia for the refugees to rebuild their sense of self in terms of rebuilding their sense of pride and achievement, having self-autonomy, being able to attenuate the negative effects of life, recovering from illness, rebuilding culture, and having an emerging sense of identity in Australia.

4.5.1.1 Sense of pride and achievement

The refugees in this study provided examples in areas where they felt great pride and a sense of achievement. For instance, Aziza's sense of self (or more specifically, her self-esteem) was derived from her pride of being a refugee and a survivor and from having learnt important life lessons.

Being a refugee is not something that I choose, but something that I accept as a fact, and some day I can help other people who are refugees. I understand very easily, emotionally, and physically what they have been going through ... that is one major thing I am really proud of, being a refugee. I learnt a lot of lessons. I learnt how to communicate with other people whom we don't share any culture, any religion. I learnt how I can build trust. I learnt how I can be a survivor.
(Aziza)

In the following excerpt, Aziza highlights the importance of knowing who she was, of having confidence, and understanding her own behaviour.

If someone asks me, "Where you are from?" I have been here for this time, I am refugee basically, I came here as a refugee. I know myself, I have the confidence. I don't know who will I be, which person will I be, but my heart tells me that I don't have to deny who I am, you know. (Aziza)

The path to rebuilding a sense of self in Australia is further described by Aziza in the following comment. She stressed the importance of doing one's best, trusting in one's abilities, taking pride in being a refugee, and accepting the circumstances of one's life.

That is what I believe – just try whatever I can, and then, if I were to get negative or positive, that is God sent. But I try and I trust myself – I did what I could. When I came out, I went to school first and English classes. Still I am learning. Then [I] decided to do some voluntary work. I am really proud of being a refugee – just learning, some path of life. Just accepting, if things happen, it happened, just accepting the way they are. (Aziza)

A sense of pride could also be attained when the refugees found their inner strength to overcome a major life challenge. In Fariba's case, despite her traumatic experiences, she persisted to complete her studies.

Fear was holding me back from learning ... I can now imagine how much I must have forced myself to get my degree. It was very hard for me ... I know that it was. I am just trying to now give myself a pat on the back for that now that I know what a difficult thing I have done. (Fariba)

4.5.1.2 Self-autonomy

A sense of self also came with having achieved what one had set out to do, even in the midst of pressure from other people to do otherwise. For example, with self-autonomy, Sabrina made a choice to further her education, which in turn increased her self-esteem.

If you have a will, there is a way. I would rather learn, develop, and improve this language better than to walk 200, whatever, miles round a year and gaining material stuff ... these people put unnecessary pressure on me. I really don't need it. I am working, and I can have anything I had before, it is just a matter of time. And this is much more [sic] better for your personal development. This is what I want. This is making me empowered. Very good for your self-esteem. (Sabrina)

Sabrina's success reinforced her view that "people are satisfied by different things," and it was self-empowering for her to choose the path that was right for her. The following passage indicates that she found faith in the process of life after she carved her own path.

We all have our point of view, and we [are] all satisfied by different things. Personally, myself, I have a motto, my favorite, that small things make life, you know. And everything will come to place in its time, you know. (Sabrina)

4.5.1.3 Attenuation of negative effects of life

It was found that having a sense of self that derived from certain positive aspects of life attenuated the negative effects of other difficult life situations, as exemplified by Tuba.

My son X and Y [daughter-in-law] speak English. Y, health nurse, and X, engineer computer, beautiful job. I am very happy ... My grandsons, six months and seven years old [when they came], now working. That's it, beautiful. I try to myself. Stronger and then help my family and teach my children to be good person to Australia. I need to help people ... because Baha'u'llah teaches me, believe all religions, teach to people, help to everyone.... I try thinking like this – sometimes I am very happy. Like my body, sometimes it's in pain ... I am happy because I am Baha'i. I try doing for the peace, and family, and unity. (Tuba)

As the preceding excerpt indicates, Tuba, whose sense of self was centered on her family and her religious values, took comfort that her family had a good value system and was doing well in Australia. This helped her cope with her failing physical health and severe homesickness.

4.5.1.4 Recovery from illness

A few participants were able to start seeking treatment in Australia for physical or mental conditions that they had previously and thus rebuild their health and give themselves a chance to recover from their illnesses. For instance, Mike suffered from malaria as a child during the war in his homeland. His initial treatment was inadequate and his full treatment only took place after he resettled in Perth. Fariba, who had depression for 10 years, reported, "I was on medication. It must just be over a year. I think I am feeling much better." Some refugees (especially older refugees), however, had to live with their ailments and manage them as best as they could.

She [My mother] came to Australia with high blood pressure. She sort of learns to live with it because you are in the war, you don't have the chance to get adequate medical assistance. So when she came here, she was already assisted by a community nurse ... They [medicines] helped her in a way... but after two years, they [kidneys] are shrinking. The specialist said to us that if they stay like this, it's sort of acceptable. So she is very careful about what she eats. (Sabrina)

4.5.1.5 Rebuilding culture

Culture constituted a major aspect of the refugees' sense of self. The rebuilding of a culture was an important step for refugees whose tribes had succumbed to genocide. The desire to rebuild one's tribal culture was demonstrated in Mike.

We have ancestors who came from somewhere around Mongolia. We live there for over 150 years. Later on, the Burmese came. They took over our tribe, they took over our land. Like genocide us, we lost our language, we lost our writing. Every time we write, they come and cut our fingers. And they burn all the Karen books. The real writing is still somewhere in China. My dad wants me to go back there and find that language, and tell the world that. (Mike)

The maintenance of one's culture warrants a topic in itself, which has been previously discussed in Stage 2 (see section 4.4.2).

4.5.1.6 Emerging sense of identity in Australia

A new sense of identity was found to emerge in the refugees as they settled in Australia and interacted with members of the larger society. For example, Aziza believed that she would struggle very hard if she were to be alienated from the rest of the Australian society. By wanting to be part of the Australian society and by interacting with people of diverse cultural backgrounds, Aziza derived a new sense of self, one that she was immensely proud of. Her positive experiences with other races in Australia further encouraged her efforts.

I went to TAFE Southwest College, and I was just doing English ... We went shopping we went together, I have got black skin and the lady is from Asia and the man is white, and everyone was looking at us. "How do these people have different skin? They joke together!" And then to cover that, we live again together! If I say I am not one of this society, I will struggle, and it will be hard, very hard for me. Unless I have to accept, and until I am one of them, that is what I believe, [be] involved, be who you are, trust them, I feel this. (Aziza)

With their emerging identities in Australia, the refugees further faced the challenge of balancing their new identity with their previous identity. This stage will be explored in section 4.6.

4.5.2 BRIDGING ECONOMIC DIFFERENCES

Most refugees in this study arrived in Australia with a low economic status. They made numerous economic adjustments in order to reduce their SEI arising from a perceived lower standard of living compared with other Australians. They engaged in the process of finding employment and obtaining an income. They also acquired material possessions, learnt a new language, furthered their education, and got new jobs or rebuilt their careers.

4.5.2.1 Acquiring material possessions

The notion of renting a place was previously described in Chapter Three. As inferred from the findings, setting up a home in Australia and the acquisition of material possessions from scratch were the very first strategies that the refugees used to overcome their loss of possessions, home, and assets.

I was under a lot of pressure all these time since I came to Australia because you have to do so many practical things to re-establish your life. You are always under additional pressure than people who already lived here from before because you [have to] put everything in place. (Nadia)

Commonly, the refugees in this study spoke of being destitute and their efforts to purchase item after item.

When I came to Australia ... I didn't have anything ... eventually you start building your life and with Centrelink money, you use that, put that in good use, try to buy yourself furniture, instead of spending it in night clubs or just wasting it. And then you just gradually start building up your life. (Fariba)

Since we came here, we were starting from scratch. You don't have anything in your house, and you have to buy thousand small and big things. And then you try – want to buy car, start from smaller things to bigger and bigger, and then you buy your house finally. And you are always trying to save some money, you always need something important. (Nadia)

As inferred, the refugees commonly sought employment to support themselves and their families, to acquire material possessions, and to purchase houses of their own. Matt, for instance, gave the reasons for seeking a full-time job: “Now I am looking for a full-time job, I want to buy house.” It was likely that establishing one’s house was perceived as establishing roots in Australia. It was consistently demonstrated in the findings that having sufficient English skills was the first step towards obtaining employment, making new social ties, and achieving the overall success in rebuilding one’s life in Australia.

4.5.2.2 Acquiring English skills, education, and employment

In recognition that refugees cannot plan for their settlement in Australia, provision has been made for them to have up to 510 hours of English language instruction at no cost. This has been regarded as important investment in their future. When refugees become proficient in English they are better able to participate in all areas of Australian life (Refugee Council of Australia, n.d.). In this study, the acquisition of English was

consistently found to be the first step in the process of rebuilding. Refugees who understood that having English skills was the foundation for rebuilding their lives in Australia tended to be more motivated to acquire them. For instance, Mariam seized the opportunity to learn as much English as possible when she realised that it would enhance her adaptation.

When I came here, it was very hard for me to be settled here, to be adjusted. I try to be active or I try to get to learn English so quick because I think the language is so important. Because if you know the language of the place you live, you'll feel more secure, more adjusted. (Mariam)

One participant who previously had a trade qualification also saw the acquisition of English skills as the first step to employment. Payam admitted that he had to rebuild his life from scratch, beginning with learning English and getting his trade license recognised.

I tried to do work, and to do this, and tried to do that, and tried to learn my language, tried to get my trade license here recognised. And it took longer and longer and longer and every piece of paperwork and everything ... I realised I had to start life all over again. (Payam)

In building careers of their choice, it became necessary that the refugees learnt sufficient English to proceed with further education. Learning English was seen as the first step for the refugees in improving their quality of life in terms of having preferred jobs and better financial returns.

I studied the first year English course at Central TAFE. After that, I studied Interpreting Course. It was good opportunity for me to get this job. I am so happy. (Mariam)

Conversely, when the refugees failed to develop their English skills, they lost the chance to further their education. They had jobs which they disliked but felt that they had little choice. For instance, Ania regretted her loss of opportunity to rebuild her life when she did not learn English in the first decade of her arrival in Australia. This loss of opportunity appeared to override the effects of her relatively young age (26 years old) when she arrived in Australia.

From the beginning, I thought I am here, I am very happy – I won't be any longer chased by police. I can establish my life with a family and create for my son a future. These were the things that were for me the most important, so I didn't think about myself. I didn't know that this country has lots of

opportunities for the immigrants. And that's why I lost lots of opportunities because time is very precious. In the first few years, I should have done with my life in a different way. (Ania)

The lack of English skills was perceived by the refugees to be linked to fewer educational opportunities and many refugees settled with different forms of manual labour. There was a difference between building a career of one's choice and obtaining a job simply to earn an income. Typically, manual jobs such as factory work or driving taxis were described as being simply for the paycheque. Without English skills, regardless of the refugees' professional qualifications, they could not work in their field of expertise in Australia.

We thought we were very highly educated people. We came here with many types of knowledge, electronic engineer, doctors, dentists, teachers, highly educated people, world of experience, wide experience. But because of totally different country, and we didn't know language, we had to start from the beginning. And everyone wants to get some money, so we started work in factories, men started to work as taxi drivers. (Ania)

In the following comment, Emanuel explains that some refugees were not able to obtain an education in Australia because of the way war had affected them. They had lived as refugees for too long and found it difficult to learn a new language.

Some people are not studying because of war impact because they leave the country, they lived the refugee life for long years, and they didn't have any practice.... When they come here, if you can't speak the language, it's very difficult, you don't learn. Because of language, they just prefer to work, do labour work and survive. (Emanuel)

When the refugees felt the pressure to quickly re-establish their lives and did not understand the cultural differences and opportunities in Australia, they failed to realise that English skills were the foundation for rebuilding their lives. Ania highlighted the reasons her community did not prioritise the acquisition of English skills.

We didn't see the opportunities that this country actually have [sic] for us, and we lost a lot ... We just push ourselves to get some money because most Polish people don't want to use unemployment benefit. They felt very bad about it because there is nothing like that in Poland ... we need to organise our lives, we need to buy a flat or house ... we are going to get money, we are going wherever they can employ us. (Ania)

Ania further described what she would do and would not do in hindsight.

Today, when I think back, I would definitely finish off three, four full-time English courses, and I would go to university. I wouldn't go to work five, six, or seven years even. I would just develop [English] language in the best way as much as possible. I think my life would be totally different. It was up to me, but I didn't actually [realise] that I could do these things. (Ania)

The desire to acquire new skills, especially English skills, largely depended on the refugees' sets of priorities, values, and capacity for self-determination. For instance, Sabrina persevered in obtaining an education, although her community members discouraged her. She even dissociated from those who were negative about her goals. It appeared that pressure from others to conform had a negative impact on refugees who had different goals.

Some people choose to run after money.... neglecting to develop English. They are aimed towards some wealth ... to be better than some fellow countrymen. I am not associating privately or socially too much with groups like that ... I am getting bad vibes from people ... "Why are you going to school? Why don't you go and deliver newspapers and letter-boxing and whatever?" (Sabrina)

A few refugees could be considered as "architects" in designing their own lives as they had the latitude to explore new opportunities, which in turn expanded their employment skills in Australia. They were determined and motivated. They also withstood the pressure from others to prioritise material possession. In the following excerpts, both Sabrina and Emanuel describe their commitment to obtaining an education. The role of motivation in facilitating the process of *adapting to minimise SEI* will be further explored in Chapter Five (section 5.3.4).

You made your choice, I made mine – I am going to study. "Oh, that's not good for you, you won't get any job" and all that kind of stuff. I have been through all that. According to them, you are wasting your time. You are not Australian. You are not from an English-speaking background. I am not, but I can learn this language. (Sabrina)

I just commit myself to do it. I did it, I did it. It can be done. But if you hear something from people, you get disappointed. "If you learn, you don't get any work here." They think [that] to get work you have to be fluent in English. English is difficult. Culture is difficult. And they just compared themselves with ... someone who is born in Australia who speaks English. "Why are you spending a lot of time there studying, you got to make money?" (Emanuel)

There was evidence that although the basic social psychological process refers primarily to how the refugees adapted themselves emotionally to the new environment, successful

economic adjustment enhanced their self-esteem and fulfilment, which in turn facilitated the adaptation process. For instance, both Sabrina and Mariam followed their hearts to acquire English skills and certificates from TAFE that later led them to find employment in their fields. They both reported a sense of fulfilment in their jobs. Sabrina equated her sense of fulfilment to feeling “like a mouse.”

And sometimes I can catch myself when I start to work, I am not working for God's sake, jumping like 10cm from the ground, you know, like a mouse thing, social worker. Mouse being me, you know [laughs]. (Sabrina)

The last two years I studied. I studied the first year English course at Central TAFE. After that, as I came here [to work], I studied Interpreting Course. It was good opportunity for me to get this job. I am so happy. I am so happy to get this job now because I used to work in my country when I was there. (Mariam)

Importantly, the doors of opportunity for learning English in Australia remained open to the refugees, even when they had missed out at their early stage of resettlement.

I thought that's my life I can't expect anything else. But once I actually made first steps, and I left the factory and wanted to do some courses, the door was open for me! I bet the door would be open much much earlier if I would know that it is open. (Ania)

The preceding example highlights the phrase used by Nonja Peters (2001) as the title of her book, *Milk and honey – but no gold*. In this study, it implies that similar to the situation of early European settlers in Australia, refugees have the opportunities to improve their lives, but they have to work for it.

4.5.3 REBUILDING FAMILY, SOCIAL, AND COMMUNITY LIFE

Part of the experience of being a refugee appeared to be the severance of many ties with one's homeland, including social connections. In Australia, once their survival issues were dealt with, the refugees had the opportunity to focus on rebuilding their family, social, and community lives. For example, Mike's family hoped to rebuild their family unit in Australia.

My relatives are all over the place because of the war. My sister, my oldest sister lives in Germany. My second oldest sister lives in Canada, and my brother lives in England. He used to live in Canada; he came to Perth last year. We applied for family reunion. We want, like live together. (Mike)

The refugees also had the opportunity to consolidate existing relationships, including their relationship with family members, and found the time to enjoy them.

I will enjoy that time [with my mother].... I think at that time the years in war, when I was sixteen. Of the years of talking to my parents, I didn't get that chance because war was happening. Now, I think I am reliving that years now, you know. This closeness thing is eleven years after. (Sabrina)

In the preceding comment, Sabrina indicates her desire to make up for lost family time and to bring back normalcy in her life. Additionally, the refugees differed in their desire and ability to make new friends in Australia. It was evident that although it was the refugees' choice if they wanted to make new social ties in Australia, various factors appeared to influence whether they were able to do so. The ease of making new social connections in Australia depended on the refugees' language skills, sociability, shared values and interests, as well as motivation or priorities in life. Refugee participants who were friendly or sociable reported the ease of acquiring new friends. Sabrina stated, "You cannot have too many friends ... I am from three different countries, I talk to everyone. I have a more friendly approach."

It was found that the refugees had preferences in the types of friends they made – they usually associated with those who shared similar values or those who were able to relate to the refugees' lives. For example, Ania was unable to relate to and befriend her co-workers because she did not share the same interests.

Every Friday, they [colleagues] go to drink in the pub. I don't drink, I don't like to smoke. I just don't like pub atmosphere. I just felt lost between them, and they talked about their own things. I just can't find myself between them. They talked about a lot of things in Australian slang. I can't follow it. I can't understand the jokes. Their conversation is just their conversation. (Ania)

Refugees who had other priorities could choose to be less sociable. Emanuel, who was studying full-time, kept to himself because his priority was to complete his education.

When they find friends, they maybe called to go out, with social interactions. Just talk and laugh, and you forget that way [about being lonely and depressed]. But I'm very busy with my school. (Emanuel)

Some refugees were able to re-establish lost relationships after they settled in Australia.

I finally found my very good friend. She tracked me down over the Internet honestly. Unbelievable. I don't know what happened that night that I went and

checked ... my name is de de de, like I am looking for X ... O my God, that's me. I finally email the address, and we spoke to each other like over 4 hours. We need to catch up since 1995. (Sabrina)

In Australia, the refugees had the opportunity to rebuild a sense of community life by joining an established ethnic or religious group or helping to build a new one.

We went to Sydney just to, I don't know, preach ... like there is a church in Sydney. It is not very strong yet. Our church is getting stronger each day, but their church is a bit weak, like there is not much people in Sydney. (Mike)

The community in Stirling is a huge community. I like the community in Stirling, huge people. Yes, I am happy, Baha'u'llah thank you, look at the Baha'i people, huge Baha'is. In Iran, very sad because very hard for Baha'i people, they don't gather together in a community. (Tuba)

As the refugees tried to rebuild their social ties, they also strived to fit into their new environment by bridging the differences they perceived between themselves and the sociocultural environment in Australia.

4.5.4 BRIDGING CULTURAL DIFFERENCES

In order to bridge the incongruity they experienced between their culture and that of the larger society, the refugees gradually learnt various aspects pertaining to the way of life in Australia. They learnt to eat foods and wear clothes other than the ones they were familiar with. For instance, Sabrina tried out different kinds of food that were available in Australia.

First, when I came here, I gained 30 kilos [laughs]. That's my first, you know, try this, try that, you know, because we came hungry, sort of hunger. So it was everything, we eat everything, like here you can try different food. (Sabrina)

The influence of the larger society in Australia was apparent in a Muslim refugee as she allowed her daughter to choose whether to cover certain parts of her body.

My daughter, no, she is still without anything because in my holy book, the Quran says that the girls should cover their bodies and their hair when she is age 10 years. So she is now under 10 years [of] age. [In future], I will try to make her, to let her know about our religion, and we should do that, and we should do this. But I will leave the choice to her. (Mariam)

Some refugees shed certain attitudes that they disliked from their own culture; instead, they acquired new modes they perceived to be more relevant to the larger society.

One thing that I learnt from the western culture or the Australian culture is being assertive. I really like that here, say what you really feel not with the intention to hurt someone but with the intention that you are not going to get hurt yourself. We have got this culture of "taroff" [prioritising politeness over honesty] in Iran, which I really come to think of it as a dishonest comment. I don't like "taroff" in my culture. (Fariba)

Increasingly, the refugees became familiar with the political system, transportation, the education system, and the tax system in Australia. They learnt about these through experience. For instance, Larissa learnt about the education system when her degree was not recognised here. She began to understand how to follow the steps in the education system in order to build her career.

I got a degree from the Philippines. I went to apply in uni, business administration. I was not accepted. Then I went to TAFE. She [The program manager] said, "You translate the transcript, the degree that you got from Philippines, like assessment." And they rated me as advanced diploma ... The program manager, she said "Okay, I accept it." So I can study there. (Larissa)

Shahrooz stated that he took six months to get used to how things were done in Australia.

At first, it was difficult not knowing the language. It took a good period of six months to get used to it, get used to how things are done. The education system is different. And getting used to the education system, how to study because we were studying in a totally different language. So we have to get adapted to that. And the government system is different, the way things are done here. (Shahrooz)

Some refugees perceived some differences between their homeland and Australia in the way they shopped, obtained food, and received financial support.

Things are different like shopping. In our country, we use cash to buy things, we don't have bankcards. We have to learn how to use the ATM. (Informal interview, Shahrooz)

There are cultural differences. I have to walk miles to get to somewhere [in Perth]. There are financial differences. I don't get food the same way in my country. For example, one day I went to the supermarket, they told me to pay like \$80. I realise that when I buy things, I need to budget. I get money from Social Security only. (Informal interview, Morathi)

At the stage of rebuilding, the refugees typically took small steps to reconstruct most aspects of their lives from the ground up in order to narrow the gap between themselves and the new sociocultural environment of Australia. They learnt various aspects of the

culture of the larger society. They acquired new skills and general information as well as learnt about other people's attitudes in order to expand their repertoire so that they could be more congruent with life in Australia. This resulted in a stronger fit between the refugees and their new environment. There were several ways by which the refugees adopted certain aspects of the culture of the larger society while rejecting others. There were also different degrees to which refugees decided to adopt the culture of the larger society or maintain their own. These issues are further examined in the following section.

4.6 STAGE 4: INTEGRATING PERSPECTIVES AND BALANCING

IDENTITIES

The processes of *integrating perspectives* and *balancing identities* are treated as one stage, as both processes appear to work in tandem. In the context of this study, *integrating perspectives* refers to the process of incorporating new aspects of life into the refugees' self-identity while acknowledging the pre-existing foundation upon which their past identities had been built. New aspects of the refugees' self-identity included: being a survivor, having a refugee identity, and having learnt the ways of Australian culture or acquiring an Australian identity. The pre-existing foundations upon which the refugees' past identities were built included the refugees' pre-migration experiences and previous sociocultural environment. Specifically, at the phase of *integrating perspectives*, the refugees took up the task of redefining themselves by incorporating what they had learnt in the stages of *coming to terms with the past* and *rebuilding*. In Australia, they now had a home and were no longer stateless. While they lost certain aspects of their identity pertaining to their pre-migration lives, they learnt to survive these losses and rebuild their identity. They started anew with opportunities to learn a new language and a new way of being, to build careers, and to make new social connections.

During the process of *integrating perspectives*, the refugees seemed to have a need to balance the paradoxical aspects of their identities arising from the tensions of opposing demands and thinking processes. To varying degrees, they experienced a chaotic unbalanced state where tensions existed among various aspects of the self. For example,

some tensions arose when the refugees had to decide whether to follow their traditional lifestyle or the lifestyle of the larger Australian society. In this study, *balancing identities* refers to the process of moving from an unbalanced state, being stretched by conflicting values and beliefs, towards a comfortable state, having reconciled the tensions. The refugees had to acknowledge that something had to change for them to become sufficiently balanced to be able to function and thrive in Australia.

Important aspects of the refugees' self-identity, including ethnic identity, national identity, and *refugee identity*, were revealed in this study. As highlighted by Frable's (1997) review, there was an indication in the literature that identities are fluid, multidimensional, personalised social constructions that reflect the person's current context and sociohistorical cohort. Thus, it should be noted that this study was situated in the multicultural context in Australia set against the backdrop of certain global and political events (see Appendix E). Although there are other identities that should be noted in refugees (such as their gender, racial, sexual, and class identities), they are not intentionally explored in this study due to its scope. It was found that the refugees needed to predominantly integrate their past and present identities as well as to find a good balance between their traditional and Australian values. This is described as the process of *balancing ethnic identity and Australian identity*, which is explored later in section 4.6.2. Additionally, the significance of *integrating perspectives* can be captured in the process of *integrating refugee identity in the Australian context*.

4.6.1 INTEGRATING REFUGEE IDENTITY AND OTHER IDENTITIES IN THE CONTEXT OF AUSTRALIAN CULTURE

As inferred from the analysis of the data, many refugees in this study thought about the way their experiences as refugees affected their current lives in Australia, their perception of themselves, and society's perception of them. It appeared that the refugees needed to take these different perspectives into consideration and *integrate their refugee identity* in such a way that it served to promote, or at least protect, their sense of self and general functioning in Australia. To serve this purpose, there were varying degrees to which the participants identified themselves as refugees. Thus, the refugee participants created, negotiated, and integrated their *refugee identity* by (1) identifying strongly with

being refugees and emphasising their refugee identity, (2) trying to forget and avoid being identified as refugees, (3) identifying strongly with being refugees but not emphasising their refugee identity, or (4) no longer identifying with being refugees. In this section, the various ways the refugee participants integrated their refugee identity are discussed.

While some refugees identified strongly with being refugees, others seemed to avoid such associations for various reasons. For instance, participants who had not experienced the stigma attached to refugees were more likely to integrate the refugee experience into their self-identity, and vice versa. This was even more so if they perceived that the refugee identity gave them a sense of pride and achievement. For example, Aziza affirmed her self-identity (in terms of ethnicity, religion, and the refugee identity) in Australia through describing her country and her religious beliefs to others.

I met lots of people, and they were interested even when they have never heard [of] my country ... I really give them a lot of [stories] about my culture, and I give them presentation about my culture, my religion, and being a refugee. And they were quite happy because for them, it is challenging, understanding new culture, accepting who I am. If someone asks me, "How did you get here?" I will tell, "I am refugee." I am really proud, I never thought about it [that I can achieve], I am really proud of what I have done and what I am going to do in my life. (Aziza)

It was apparent that refugees who had knowledge of the stigma society had shown towards refugees were more inclined to avoid the refugee identity or at least not openly declare themselves refugees. In the following excerpt, Mariam speaks of her attempts to avoid identification with being a refugee because of the stereotype that refugees were uneducated and poor.

Refugee means, something makes me sad. I try to forget I am a refugee here. I try to get on like Australian citizen. I feel that this is my country because I don't like this word "refugee" ... when I was in my country, there were many refugees from another country who came ... we have a bad image about refugees. They are poor people or they are not educated people, they don't have a place ... that is the same image here about refugees from the Australian people. (Mariam)

The concepts of the refugee identity, the refugee stigma, and the role of the media in perpetuating the refugee stigma will be explored in detail in Chapter Five. Among the refugees, Payam stood out in his ability to articulate his emotions, particularly his confusion with identifying himself as a refugee in Australia. He strongly identified

himself as a refugee but eventually would not emphasise his refugee identity unless he was asked. This changing attitude reflected the fluidity of the refugee identity.

My feelings have changed since the beginning – there is a big big shift in my thinking. At the moment, in a way I feel a lot of confusion because sometimes I am afraid of identifying myself with being a refugee. Unless there is [sic] special circumstances, unless I am asked specifically, I don't want to identify myself that way. (Payam)

Although Payam did not feel embarrassed when someone asked him how he came to Australia and where he came from, he did not want to identify too much as a refugee. He stated, “As soon as I said I am a refugee ... the whole situation will change, and people’s mentality will change towards me ... that’s just my feeling.” Payam was certain that he would always retain his refugee identity because he felt different from voluntary migrants and people who were born in Australia.

I have to accept that, you know, anything could happen, and I am still a refugee no matter how long I stay here, I will still be a refugee. I am not like the same person who was born here, who chose to live a life here. (Payam)

In contrast, Shahrooz and his family did not consider themselves as refugees because the term “refugee” had the negative connotation of a person who was impoverished and financially dependent on the government. Shahrooz alerted me that I should no longer hope to interview his mother because she would feel insulted if I requested an interview. This highlights the sensitive nature of the issues surrounding refugees.

We really don't think ourselves as refugees. First, the way people from outside perceived us – maybe you are poor, you don't have anything, you are depending on the government. My dad had worked until last year, he retired. We really don't like this term because of the life we had in Iran. My mum thinks it's an insult if you mentioned it to her. (Informal interview, Shahrooz)

Fluidity of the refugee identity was also reflected in a few refugee participants who no longer identified themselves as refugees. For instance, Nadia believed that her life story faded away and no longer felt like a refugee because she had listened to many stories of other refugees in her field of work. She strongly identified with her career in the helping profession, which also balanced any negative aspects of the refugee identity.

I have been here now nearly eight years, and I don't feel like a refugee any more because for the last six years I was working helping other refugees ... I just don't feel like a refugee any more because I hear so many new stories in the mean time

and my personal story just like fading away ... Although I do remember everything, it's not so fresh in my mind. (Nadia)

Another reason Nadia no longer felt like a refugee was because she felt accepted and perceived that she was equal to everybody else in Australia. This was in contrast to how Payam felt.

When I came to Australia, I was accepted. The treatment ... it was good altogether because you feel as normal like a human being, and you don't feel any difference between you as a newly arrived person and other people who have been here a longer time or who are born here. Personally, I really felt equal to all other Australians from first day when I came here. (Nadia)

It is apparent in the preceding excerpts that several factors affected how the participants integrated their *refugee identity* in Australia. Whether or not they still considered themselves to be refugees depended on how they defined the term "refugee," whether their definition of "refugee" served them well psychologically, and whether there was a sense of pride or a sense of rejection. Furthermore, some refugees (e.g., Nadia, Sabrina) balanced their *refugee identity* with other aspects of their self-identity (such as a career) so that the refugee identity itself was not all consuming. There was evidence to suggest that personal meanings of the refugee identity change over time. That is, the degree of identification and the content of the refugee identity alter over time and these changes are best understood in the current sociohistorical and political context of Australia. These issues will be further addressed in Chapter Five (see section 5.2.6.5.1).

Refugees who had careers also found the need for a good balance in their lives. For instance, Sabrina needed to balance her career, which involved intense emotional work with people, with her need for self-preservation.

Working with people can be energy draining, and it could drain very easily, especially if you have a tendency to taking upon yourself other people's problems, other people's trauma from war ... so you need to preserve yourself to be able to help not one person but a hundred persons ... self-preservation. Otherwise you could spend 24 hours working. (Sabrina)

Although there were several aspects of the refugees' lives and identity that required balancing (as shown in the preceding excerpt), the most prominent aspects of the refugees' identity that required some balancing were their ethnic identity and their Australian identity.

4.6.2 BALANCING ETHNIC IDENTITY AND AUSTRALIAN IDENTITY

Upon arrival in Australia, the refugees' lives were infiltrated by novel experiences, and they experienced a sense of SEI. They tried to fit into their new environment by bridging economic and sociocultural differences as well as by rebuilding their sense of self and social lives. They further integrated these new perspectives into their self-identity. In doing so, some refugees experienced the *tension of opposing demands*, arising from the demands to conform from peer groups (e.g., ethnic community, colleagues, fellow students) and the larger society as well as from the demands to yield to traditional values. There was also personal autonomy to consider so that the refugees could maintain their sense of self. An example of such tension was found in Mike, who perceived the competitive pressure to keep up with a certain lifestyle in Australia.

In the jungle, we don't worry about ten years time. We worry about six months later or three months later, like this year we will be growing rice, so when we harvest the rice, it will last till next year. It's a simple life. Here, I feel like getting a new car. When you see things are better, you want to become better, basically competing against other people. (Mike)

Mike also described the different courtship styles between his homeland and Australia. Although he had not started dating, he perceived the pressure exerted by his mother to preserve their traditional values.

Here, it's like everyone is different, the culture is different, people have their own girlfriend. In there [homeland], there are no girlfriend and boyfriend, you don't see in the village holding hands ... Here, you will see couples walking around holding hands. So from our point of view, it's alright having girlfriend at the right age, over 19, 20 but not doing anything else. (Mike)

As inferred, refugees from cultures that were vastly different from the mainstream Australian culture often found it difficult to maintain their culture and religion. For example, Aziza wanted to maintain her Somali culture and religious beliefs as a Muslim, but expressed the tension and difficulties in maintaining them in Australia.

It's very hard. I have to keep my own culture and religion and not be affected by others here. People are different, language is different, culture is different. It's hard trying to keep my own culture here. (Informal interview, Aziza)

Taking into account cultural differences and intergenerational differences, the refugees needed to achieve a state of harmony among various possible conflicting values. They had found a good balance among various aspects of their lives when they achieved a

sense of control in their new environment and functioned optimally in Australia without compromising their sense of self. Ideally, they were able to achieve an integrated, acceptable, and stable self-identity that they could live with in Australia. A good balance was achieved when none of the aspects of their lives adversely affected other aspects. Harmony was also found when the refugees could maintain certain desirable traditional values that would also benefit their current lives in Australia. Thus, after experiencing the tension of opposing demands, most refugees adopted the strategy of *finding the path of least resistance* in order to find a comfortable state of being or balance without having to exert too much effort. This also implied that they did not create an additional psychological burden by facing strong opposition from their new circumstances or environment. As an example, parents of adolescent refugees might exert pressure on their children to yield to parental expectations. Mike, an adolescent refugee, opted for the path of least resistance to avert family conflicts.

My parents told me that here, you be a soldier, they train you really well like discipline. My dad wants me to be a soldier. He doesn't like my behaviour that much and my attitude ... he wants to discipline me, like soldier, soldier is really neat. When he looks at my room, it's not clean, he is not happy. I am not trying or boast, but my friend like say my room is clean. (Mike)

There was evidence to suggest that parental attitudes could force young adult refugees to seek a balance in their lives in the midst of intergenerational differences. These young adult refugees tried to find the path of least resistance between their present daily lives in Australia and their past represented by their parents who maintained their traditional way of life. Sometimes, intergenerational differences could develop into intergenerational conflict, and the young adult refugees faced the additional burden of having to overcome this problem. For example, Mike, in his attempt to avoid serious conflict and find the path of least resistance, chose to conform to his mother's wishes, at least outwardly.

She doesn't like me to chat [on the Internet] because she worries ... "The girl will like you, and what would you do if you like that girl? You will be following that girl. You are not supposed to go out with any girl. I will find you a girl. You wait till 30, I will get you a really good one, like hasn't been touched." I have to say, "Okay, I'll wait." If I say, "No, I don't want to wait," she'll get angry straight away. "You are a bad boy, you copy the Australian culture." I can't really say anything. I just say, "I'll listen." She'll be happy. That's the end of story. (Mike)

It was possible for young adult refugees to find their path of least resistance by adopting a balanced view without resorting to extreme rebellion and by negotiation with their parents. For instance, when Mike's mother refused to grant him permission to use the Internet, Mike negotiated a way to access the Internet without resorting to serious arguments.

Now I can [use the Internet] because I said, "I don't do nothing, usually I just download songs, that's it, the video clip. And mostly Karen songs." I just said that. (Mike)

It should be noted that refugees who were unable to find their path of least resistance might resort to extreme attitudes or behaviour. Consequently, they experienced an unbalanced life in Australia. According to Shahrooz, some refugees, who were too stuck in their old traditional ways, felt a nagging inner conflict and confusion about how to be and what to do. He coined the term *confusion* and the phase *in the middle* to depict a condition where some refugees, who were unable to let go of their traditional values, found it difficult to reach a balance among the tension of opposing demands. They were therefore unable to adapt well in Australia.

Some refugees are new to the country and still very attached to their old values and have not let go. They then go through a stage – they always compare the values of their country with here and not letting go. They are still like a person in the middle, feel lost at this stage and many remain very confused. They may also do stuff that are not right – steal, crime ... they are confused. (Shahrooz)

In contrast, some refugees, according to Shahrooz, completely relinquished their traditional values. It should be noted that none of the participants demonstrated this tendency. Shahrooz provided the following example.

Some refugees have more freedom. They see that women don't have to wear veils. They also tried on make-up, clothes, and shoes like Australians. You still see a person who is Islamic.... In their culture, they are not allowed to have feelings or physical relationships outside marriage. When they come here, they think, "This is the culture I am living now, and this is Australian culture." They tried to grab a bit of this, a bit of that, and tried to define a culture of their own. (Shahrooz)

Shahrooz, who did not experience the two extreme conditions that he had just described, attributed his strong sense of right and wrong to having parents who were strong role models and to having family members who settled earlier in Australia. Thus, he was well prepared as to what to expect in terms of having conflicting values to choose from.

But in my case, my parents are very strong role models, and we are totally aware of this [situation], and we are sure that our parents were totally right in this aspect – we were able to tell from right to wrong. Also my brother and sister came here first and told us what to expect, and we were protected from that [confusion]. (Informal interview, Shahrooz)

Unlike the two extremes described by Shahrooz, a few participants found a sense of balance. They stated that although they were from a particular ethnic and national origin, they had also become more Australian in certain ways.

You don't feel you are 100% Australian. I contributed everything to Australian life – I worked all the time, I didn't use any unemployment benefit, I paid tax, I support lots of charities, and etc. And now, I don't feel I am 100% Polish. It is strange, but it is like that. (Ania)

I want to be a part of this society this field [work] makes me feel I am active, I am doing something for my [ethnic] community, even for the Australian community because I am now I feel a part of the Australia society.... My country [Iraq] is my first home, I can't deny that or ignore ... I feel I will say in my language, my culture, our "root" in Iraqi. But this doesn't mean I don't feel Australia is also my home now. (Mariam)

I am Persian, depending how you define Persian. I was born in Iran, so I can't change that. If you say Australian as a European Australian, I am not, I will never be. I will always be Persian. But if you talk about whether I need, for instance, to speak Farsi all the time, no, I don't have to. There are many [Persian] people, especially younger generations who grow up here, and when we get together, we always talk in English. (Payam)

Additionally, Payam spoke about being able to find a balance. He highlighted his flexibility and his way of finding a balance by choosing what appeared to be the more necessary and appropriate behaviour in a given situation.

I can't put a quantity value on how much I am Persian, how much I am Australian, but I can say that I can be either. I think I manage to find balance between the two, and I can be either. I just do and choose and accept whichever way, whichever behaviour is necessary at that time and more beneficial at that time, and more positive at that time when I do it. I won't think whether it's a Persian thing to do or Australian thing to do. (Payam)

Most participants integrated many new perspectives and values of the larger society into their lives and identity and thus increasingly identified with Australians. They found a balance when they could relinquish certain traditional values that no longer worked in Australia without diminishing their sense of identity. In general, it was found that

finding the path of least resistance involved shedding or maintaining certain traditional attitudes and behaviours that helped to reduce the mismatch between the refugees and their new environment and therefore served to benefit the refugees' current lives. The refugees had to find a new equilibrium or a comfortable state that was more congruent with their new circumstances in Australia. This process was best exemplified by Payam who described his thinking processes and showed what "balance" meant. He detailed how he found a balance between being a Persian and being an Australian.

Culturally, I can never be an Australian. I don't see, I mean what we call it Australian "Australian culture" – I don't see much connection yet. I am not going to change ... basically, what's that mainstream Australian culture, what people do, the type of parties and the type of other things that are there, not 100 percent how I would like to do it. (Payam)

Payam further explained what he could not accept about being Australian and what he could learn to love.

For instance, having a can of beer and that sort of thing is out of question for me. If that is going to be known as Australian culture, if I am not taking it, I won't be considered as Australian; that part I don't think will ever happen to me, I can't do it. I can bring myself to love, for instance, footy. I can't bring myself not to criticise, you know, cricket, for instance, I can't. (Payam)

In maintaining his ethnic identity, Payam distinguished the part of him that he wished to preserve and felt confident about what he could offer.

I can't bring myself into not having herbs and spices in my food. But I don't mind enjoying and being with people and then be part of the way they have the parties. But I don't want to put out the same food when I invite them over. I still want to have the way I am confident that I can offer to them, and I know it's going to work out. That way I know that is something that I am offering, rather than something I am trying to copy. (Payam)

In the following excerpt, Payam demonstrates that he still maintained certain traditional values and supported his heritage.

There are things that are brought with me that will always be with me and goes with my knowledge and understanding of Persian culture and this culture – the way we look at the world, the way we value friendship with our neighbour. (Payam)

For Payam, changing his cultural protocols had become necessary because Australians did not understand them. He also encouraged other Persians to make necessary changes

in their attitudes. It should be noted that a refugee could strongly maintain certain aspects of his or her ethnic identity that were discarded by another refugee. Thus, the process of balancing identities appeared to be largely a choice made by individual refugees.

"Oh no, we shouldn't do this and we should keep this protocol, this is our culture." I said, "Who says that we can't change it now? Just because we are in foreign land doesn't mean it is not the right time to change it. Sometimes we change our protocol because of the pressure, because of the situation, because of the necessity of that time. The reason for change is that the bigger population here doesn't understand it, doesn't make any sense to them." (Payam)

In changing his behaviour and attitudes, Payam emphasised the importance of finding a balance, where one did not resort to extreme attitudes and behaviour while maintaining an identity.

They go, "Okay, but it's so stupid." That is why I am trying to say, "I bring a balance." But at the same time, people said, "Yeah, why don't you go and colour your hair and blue your eyes?" Because they take it that way. I said, "No, no, no, no, I am not going to be anything but who I am. I am still a Persian by birth. But I am just saying these protocols can change." (Payam)

Payam, in the preceding comments, demonstrates his assertiveness and freewill amidst conflicting views from his peers. In the following excerpt, Payam discloses his attempt to instil what was beneficial from his own values in the larger society and thus make a contribution to the Australian society. This was in accordance with the concept of *acculturation*, where both the individual and the larger society influenced one another (Berry, 2007). It was not a one-way process. These excerpts show that Payam had developed a sense of autonomy in talking about what kind of Australia he wanted. He took the initiative to create the social environment to which he wanted to belong. He found a balance by maintaining the values he held in high regard and offering them to others in Australia. This was in accordance with the definition of *adapting* in this study where the refugees made some changes to their environment, including their social environment.

I am not going to be using rude language, which is very normal here, offensive language that is offensive to the rest of the population. I am not going to accept that, "Oh, because I am Australian now, I am going to use it." I want to have some barriers and boundaries in my life, and I want my family to have those and

to honour those barriers, boundaries, and virtues. And if it doesn't exist in Australian culture, I want it to change. I want to have that balance. (Payam)

In addition to finding a balance among diverse values, the refugees could also find a balance in their social lives. The best example was Ming who described his conscious decision to interact with everyone in his social environment regardless of their cultural backgrounds. He did not want to join an all-Vietnamese group. Ming also emphasised that having one's own culture as a background to enrich one's worldview should not prevent the person from taking in other cultures.

I made a conscious act in interacting with other residents. In uni, there is an Asian group, a Vietnamese group, but I never like that. Because if you sit around people of your own country, you don't actually understand the colloquim [colloquial speech], their [the Australians'] sense of humour. There is nothing wrong with having a natural Vietnamese/Chinese background [to] enrich your understanding of the world, but that shouldn't prevent you from taking in other people's culture. Other people can accept your culture and your cuisine, no reason why you can't try theirs and open your mind to that. (Ming)

Ming stated that as his family did not live among their Vietnamese local community, he felt at ease interacting with individuals of the larger society.

A lot of people didn't move out of the Asian area, a lot of people were staying at Highgate. My parents move quite far away. There were so many of us, forming a Vietnamese gang terrorising the others. When we moved out, we were different. I guess that was probably the reason why it was much more relax in University. I had friends from other countries, friends from Australia. I wasn't looking for a Vietnamese group. I join in with whoever I become friends with. (Ming)

As shown in the preceding example, Ming's sociocultural adaptation was good in terms of his interaction with members of the larger society. Ming's attitude was reflected in a study of immigrant youth described earlier in Chapter One (i.e., Berry et al., 2006b). It was found that immigrant youth in diverse neighbourhood reported higher use of their national language and more associations with national peer (Phinney, Berry, Vedder, & Liebkind, 2006). This was in contrast to Nadia who reported a lack of friendship with members of the larger society because she lived among members of her ethnic community (see section 4.4.3). Furthermore, Ming explained how his ethnic identity was balanced with his Australian identity. Ming did not believe there was such a thing called Australian values. Although he explained that he was mainly influenced by his parents' traditional beliefs such as Confucius' principles, he found Christmas, but not

Easter, to be compatible with his life. Thus, in a similar manner to Payam, he adopted certain practices while discarding others. This was the way Ming found his balance.

Australian values? There is no such thing. Because my mum and dad are mainly Buddhists, and I am brought up by Confucius principles that you don't waste this, you don't mistreat people. I mean Christmas is very compatible. You celebrate Christmas for what Christmas is, you don't celebrate Christmas for the present side of it. I guess Christmas is pretty easy. Easter doesn't make sense to us because that is much more religious. Yeah, we don't celebrate Easter. (Ming)

When the refugees achieved a good balance among various aspects of their identity, they appeared to be more prepared to move on to consolidate their identity towards a new life in Australia.

4.7 STAGE 5: CONSOLIDATING IDENTITY TOWARDS A NEW LIFE

To varying degrees, all refugees felt the initial anxiety of being unsafe, being dispossessed, being unsettled, and not belonging in Australia during their early settlement. These feelings could be summarised as a sense of being incongruous with the environment (or *self-environment incongruity*, SEI) or a sense of being “uprooted” like a plant that was transplanted in a different environment. Thus, the desirable outcome of the process of *adapting* was to overcome the emotions associated with SEI. This desirable outcome was captured in the last stage of *adapting*, termed *consolidating identity towards a new life*. This stage was commonly described by the participants as being “really at home” in Australia, where their experience of SEI became minimal as they strengthened their Australian identity and rebuilt most of the important aspects of their lives. For some refugees, being able to rebuild their lives according to what they had defined as successful helped them to consolidate their identity towards a new life in Australia. Sabrina referred to this stage as having *spread her roots*.

I really do feel this is my home now, probably because I am starting to settle in, how do I say it, to spread my roots. I feel really at home. I don't even feel any homesick. So, I really do feel this is it. I think so. I think probably because I am working now, I am building my life again, give me some personal and professional satisfaction, satisfaction at all levels. I mean we are rebuilding life, building new one. I really do feel this, this is my home. I really think so now. It took me a while. It's good, quite different from last year. (Sabrina)

In this study, calling Australia *home* is defined by Shahrooz as feeling a *sense of belonging*. He stated, “I guess the definition of a home is just like when you do, you

have a sense of belonging. You feel like you belong here.” Two main aspects of this stage, including acquiring a sense of belonging and obtaining Australian citizenship, are explored in the following sections.

4.7.1 ACQUIRING A SENSE OF BELONGING

A few participants reported that, over time, they transformed their experience of SEI into a sense of belonging in Australia. Among the refugees interviewed in this study, Payam, Shahrooz, Matt, Sabrina, and Ming described a sense belonging in Australia and felt that Australia was indeed their home. Other participants, for one reason or another, did not highlight a sense of belonging. These reasons will be examined in Chapter Five. A *sense of belonging* could be considered as the culmination of the earlier stages of *adapting* or the antithesis of a sense of displacement, where the refugees gradually lost their feelings of strangeness about their new lives in Australia. In this study, Payam and Shahrooz provided a more detailed description of this stage than other participants. For instance, Payam provided a few examples of how the passage of time along with knowing the history of various places and increased familiarity with his environment helped him to feel he belonged in Australia.

One of the things that I see helps me, one was passage of time. I came in 1988. Those tall buildings in Perth weren't there. The last 15 years I grew up with it. I feel belonged because I see part of the history of this place. From city I was coming by train, I went through Daglish station, and I was so eager to look out and see those wild fig trees because they were the very first things that I would notice. Wow, I am remembering something about this place – it's no longer a new place to me. It is a place that I have been, I have seen. (Payam)

Additionally, certain written materials also helped Payam to consolidate his sense of belonging and his Australian identity because he could relate to the stories that were told.

Reading books like “A Fortunate Life” – he talked about the Subiaco station, the army barracks, and everyday I went by these places. I can see it in my lifetime how it changed. Reading the book called “My Place” by Sally Morgan, and I almost know everybody in that book because I lived there in Port Hedland, Como, and Manning. So, passage of time, and seeing the changes in the place, and knowing the history of the place help me to be more and more Australian. (Payam)

Other refugee participants made similar comments to Payam's. For example, a sense of belonging was associated with feeling more comfortable, enjoying life, going forward, no longer feeling strange, and the feeling that one had "fallen into place."

[During war] you lose your identity. It is very hard to see yourself anywhere, to see yourself really to stay. This is the time of adjustment, this is the time you come to terms that this is it. It's peace. It's quite nice when you feel that you really belong somewhere again – this feeling inside of you, you feel much more comfortable, enjoying, going forward. (Sabrina)

Now it seems like we have always lived in this country. Whenever you go to a place, it doesn't feel like home, I always missed here. When I said "It doesn't feel like home," I didn't compare it to Iran, I compared it to Australia. It feels like home in the sense that we don't feel strange here any more, we can 100 percent understand what people are talking about like when they are watching TV or listening to the radio. It's like we have fallen into place here. (Shahrooz)

In the following passage, Shahrooz describes his home as where he felt comfortable and where he could live his life without being controlled by others.

When you go to your place, your home, you feel that there is some comfort. You can be yourself, you can let your hair down whenever you like. It feels like that for us here that we are able to live the life that we have the bounty of having, the way that we want to. Nobody is watching us, nobody is telling us that, "You have to live your life this way. You have to live your life that way. You have to eat this sort of food. You have to eat that sort of food." (Shahrooz)

A sense of belonging was further depicted as having feelings of attachment or connection to Australia to the extent of being affected by the events that occurred in it. Payam describes his attachment to Australia in the following excerpt.

I am very affected, moved by whatever happened in Australia and Australian society, Australian politics. I am forever interested to know what happen to every corner in this country, follow the news, especially the places I know of and been to. I want to know that is happening to it. I am very much concerned about things that are happening in the country. (Payam)

The connection Shahrooz and Payam felt towards Australia became so strong that they even came to a point where they described a sense of detachment from their previous homeland.

If you just try to tell me, "Get off and go back to Iran," I could never do that because I am totally unfamiliar with that culture. I don't feel any personal. I don't feel any alliance to that country. (Shahrooz)

Disasters and things like that concern me a lot. I probably say it would more concern me than what is happening in Iran. A plane falls down the sky here in Australia, I am probably more concern than if it has fallen down in Iran. Not that I don't care, but I know I can't do anything about it – it's out of my way, out of my place, doesn't relate to me and my life, or anything. But here it does, I mean I can see it, I feel it, it hurts me. (Payam)

In the following excerpt, Ming describes his transformation from thinking that he was a foreigner living in a foreign country to thinking that he was an Australian.

Around 89 or 1990, I remember the secretary was asking, "Are you an Australian or not? You have been here so long, are you Australian or not?" And that was the time I actually thought someone asked me that question, and I actually said, "Yes." And from that point on, I started thinking I am Australian. I just stopped thinking that I am a foreigner living in a foreign country. (Ming)

Around the same time, Ming also realised that he had ceased thinking in Chinese when he was reasoning but started thinking and talking to himself in English. This was a true reflection of Ming's adaptation over time in Australia.

I think at that point in time, I was still thinking in Chinese. But around that time I stopped thinking in Chinese, I think in English. Yeah, you stopped thinking [in Chinese], when you do reasoning, you talked to yourself [in English]. (Ming)

When asked about what was important in the life of a refugee, Ming gave the advice that one should think of Australia as home so that one could feel that way too. To Ming, it was a conscious decision.

I guess the thing at that time, you know, the sooner you think this is your home, the sooner you feeling like this is your home. (Ming)

As the above examples revealed, *connection* was the crux of the sense of belonging. Here, the refugees became increasingly connected and attached to their new lives, their Australian identity, and anything else pertaining to life in Australia.

4.7.2 OBTAINING AUSTRALIAN CITIZENSHIP

Although some of the refugee participants (e.g., Fariba, Matt, Ming, Mike, Shahrooz, Payam) became citizens of Australia, there was evidence to suggest that different emotions were associated with obtaining citizenship. For instance, Payam thought carefully about whether he really wanted to be an Australian citizen. He thought about

what it meant to him to be an Australian and what kind of commitment he was ready to make.

I have thought about it, not that I didn't want to [get citizenship], but I didn't want to just do it because everybody else did it. I wanted to value it. I wanted to make sure that when I go and under oath and I say I want to become an Australian citizen, I am going to obey the laws and regulations and everything. (Payam)

I want to be associated with Australia in that way, just didn't want to take it just easy like that, didn't want to be like many others who just said, "Oh, doesn't matter, you can always change it." So I wanted to really think about it, that's why a year after I became eligible for being a citizen, I spent time thinking about it. I realised now I can call this country my home. I can achieve things here. I don't mind being associated with it and be a citizen. (Payam)

Additionally, Payam's view of Australia as a "little world" helped him to decide that he would indeed like to be an Australian citizen.

I probably would have done the same thing today as well; my thoughts are still the same. But then a lot easier because I thought Australia is like a little world, everything that is in the world is in Australia as well, all the types of people here. It's kind of like becoming a world citizen by becoming Australian citizen. (Payam)

While Payam pondered his citizenship for a year, Mike described the process differently. He had become a citizen because there was a letter asking his family members if they would like to be citizens. His family members realised that there was nothing to go back to if they returned to their homeland.

We got the citizenship because there was a letter that was sent to us and [asked] if you want to become a citizen of Australia. That's how we said yes, it would be great. It's no point. If we go back one day if the country is better in Burma, but we won't go back. Right now if we go back, we may go to visit, that's it. (Mike)

Likewise, Ming stated that he became an Australian citizen by default. He explains what he meant by this in the following excerpt.

Once my parents got that, we sort of got it. It must have been pretty soon when my dad was eligible. I think it was a few years after we came. Because we were refugees, we were not planning to go anywhere, so it's good we have citizenship. (Ming)

In Shahrooz's case, obtaining his citizenship was instrumental in helping him see that he was no longer a refugee and he belonged in Australia.

We were labelled "refugees" for the first six months we were here by the Immigration Department because they were handling everything for us. But now, we are not like that, and I guess that feeling started to sink in when we got our citizenship, you know. (Shahrooz)

Shahrooz was grateful that he was given a chance to obtain an education and was able to earn a living in Australia. This chance had helped him feel that Australia was his home.

It was two years after we got here, that's when I got my citizenship. It felt like "you are accepted into this country." Many of the things that we couldn't have like higher education, work, or even be able to finish high school in my country, we got it here. This country gave us more than Iran, so that's why we said this country sort of like appreciated us and we appreciated this country, so it feels like home. We don't feel like we have been segregated. (Shahrooz)

For Matt, obtaining citizenship and having a gay lifestyle that was accepted in the Australian society were instrumental for him in making Australia his home. Matt believed that Australia was the best country in the world because his sexual orientation was respected.

I really appreciate Australian government because if I compare with my life in Burma, here you have your own life. I am gay. You cannot live as you are. It's very, very hard. In Australia, it's not only you have gay rights, especially now in WA two weeks ago, they have age of consent, it is going down to 16. If you want to have a relationship, you can sponsor from another country. (Matt)

Matt further demonstrated the depth of his gratitude as he pledged his allegiance and commitment to Australia.

For me, since I was naturalised, I feel like this, this is my country, my stepmother and father, my real mother and father is no good, that's why I came here. This is my stepmother and father, they look after me very well, so I must be very faithful to this country. I must work. I must support this country in different ways. (Matt)

The preceding excerpts demonstrate that for several refugees (e.g., Shahrooz, Matt), naturalisation became a catalyst for them to perceive a sense of belonging in Australia. It should be noted that the act of becoming an Australia citizen did not automatically imply that the refugees felt a sense of belonging in Australia. For instance, Fariba, who obtained her citizenship and had lived in Australia for seventeen years, could not fully express a sense of belonging in Australia, although she would like to feel one.

Sometimes, I really, I feel that I don't have any home. Most of the time I feel that home is everywhere, wherever that you feel at home. So I don't know, it's like you like to belong to a group or a country, like I have been singing in a choir, singing

that "I still call Australia home." That's been really good, helpful. Because other people don't think of you as Australian, it's very hard. (Fariba)

In the preceding excerpt, it is apparent that Fariba's perception that other people in Australia did not see her as an Australian made it difficult for her to perceive she belonged in Australia. Her perception was similar with El-Zein's (2002) who stated that "you belonged to a place only in so far as the place itself – its inhabitants, its culture – felt that you belonged to it" (p. 229). In a similar vein, Phinney, Berry, Vedder, and Liebkind (2006), in reporting the findings of a large scale study of immigrant youth (i.e., Berry et al., 2006b), stated that perceived discrimination was linked with immigrant youth's distancing behaviour from the larger society and a lack of a sense of belonging. The role of perceived discrimination in the refugee experience will be examined in Chapter Five.

4.8 FLUIDITY OF THE STAGES OF ADAPTING

It should be emphasised that the five stages of *adapting* are not linear as not all participants experienced all of the stages or experienced them in the prescribed order that was presented in this chapter. These stages are fluid (as depicted by the two-way arrows) in the sense that most participants experienced a few stages simultaneously and they could return to the earlier stages at any time. These stages are therefore not discrete and sequential. It is not necessary for the refugees to have completely dealt with one stage before moving on to the next stage. For instance, refugees who were rebuilding their lives by attending English classes in order to find employment might be experiencing some depression due to past losses. At the same time, they might be encouraged by the support that they received in Australia and decided that they really belonged here. As well, they might skip the stage of *balancing identities* but visit it later in life. It is also noteworthy that the process of *adapting* took time, and the refugees engaged in this process at their own pace.

4.9 SUMMARY

In order to deal with their problem of SEI, the refugee participants adopted the basic social psychological process of *adapting to minimise SEI*. The process of *adapting* involved five stages. Most refugees had experienced multiple losses. Thus, there was a

need for them to come to grips with their losses and accept their new lives in Australia. The first stage was therefore termed *coming to terms with the past*, which involved six phases of unpreparedness, anger, rationalising, creating an alternative reality, depression, and acceptance of a new life. In *maintaining self-identity*, which was the second stage of *adapting*, the refugees preserved their connection to numerous aspects of their previous lives in order to minimise their sense of loss and grief. They maintained a connection with their homeland, culture, social support networks, and religious-spiritual beliefs. The refugees also maintained their self-identity by making changes to the environment or by moving away from the environment. The third stage of *adapting* came in the form of *rebuilding*, where the refugees reconstructed their lives from the beginning in Australia. They rebuilt their sense of self. They learnt a new language, found new accommodation, made new friends, etc. They also learnt about many facets of life from the larger society in Australia. The fourth stage of *integrating perspectives and balancing identities* involved incorporating numerous aspects that refugees learnt from the stages of coming to terms with the past and rebuilding into their self-identity, while simultaneously attempting to find a balance among different cultural values and expectations. Finally, at the fifth stage of *consolidating identity towards a new life*, the refugees acquired a sense of belonging in Australia and obtained their Australian citizenship. Here, the refugees felt increasingly familiar with, and connected to, many aspects of life in Australia and their experience of SEI became minimal.

CHAPTER FIVE
CONDITIONS AND PERSONAL FACTORS INFLUENCING THE PROCESS
OF ADAPTING TO MINIMISE SELF-ENVIRONMENT INCONGRUITY

5.1 OVERVIEW OF THE CHAPTER

As inferred from the analysis of the data, the refugee participants engaged in the basic social psychological process of *adapting to minimise SEI* over varying lengths of time with varying degrees of difficulty. I compare the refugee experience of being displaced to plants being uprooted. It is important for these plants to have the optimum conditions (in terms of climate, soil, and moisture) to be transplanted. I argue that depending on various conditions, sometimes these plants thrive, and sometimes they struggle to survive in their new environment. Similarly, there is evidence to suggest that some refugees adapt to their new environment in Australia with relative ease while others take a longer time or experience many difficulties.

In this chapter, numerous external conditions and several factors intrinsic to refugees that hindered or facilitated their process of *adapting to minimise SEI*, and hence contributed to their varying experiences, are described. External conditions that influenced the process of *adapting* were (1) length of residence in Australia, (2) age of arrival in Australia, (3) the presence of an established ethnic community, (4) social and psychological support, (5) financial support, and (6) intercurrent stressors (or stressors arising from intervening major life events). Personal or intrinsic factors that influenced the refugees' process of *adapting* were (1) preparedness, (2) the presence of trauma, (3) resilience, and (4) motivation. Each of these conditions and factors is described in this chapter. These conditions and factors are also depicted in Figure 5.1. Notably, certain personal factors, including personality and intelligence, which are beyond the scope of this study are not fully explored, although it may be inferred from the participants' responses to open-ended questions that such factors are also likely to have played a role.

ADAPTING TO MINIMISE SEI

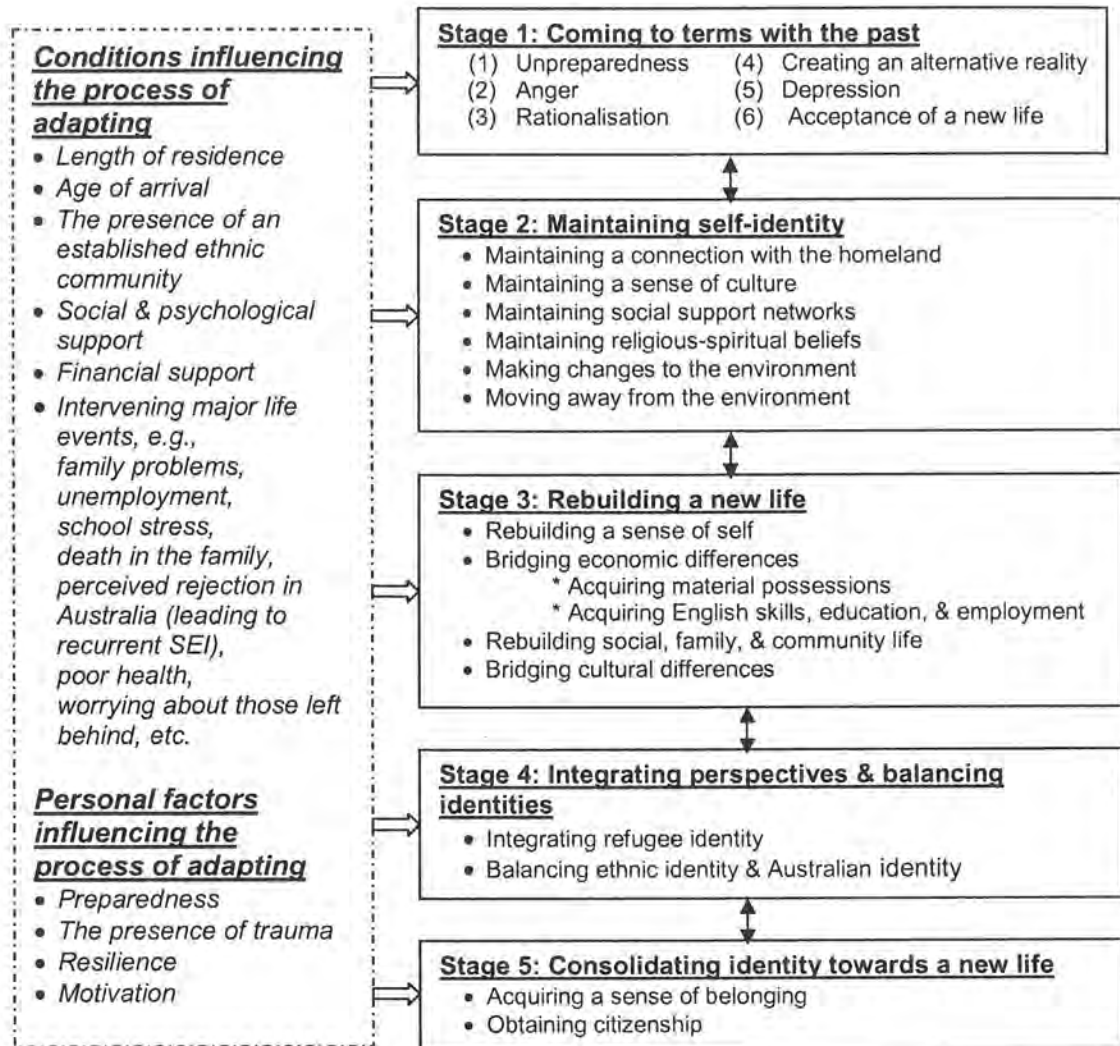


Figure 5.1. Conditions and personal factors influencing the process of *adapting to minimise self-environment incongruity*

5.2 CONDITIONS INFLUENCING THE PROCESS OF ADAPTING

Without exception, all participants described their pre-migration experiences, their current lives in Australia, and their future aspirations. The extent to which the refugees spoke about their pre-migration experiences and present lives served as a guide that indicated the degree to which they were preoccupied with the stage of *coming to terms with the past* and the stage of *rebuilding*, respectively. It was found that time was potentially a default indicator – the longer the refugees lived in Australia, the further along they were in the process of *adapting to minimise SEI*.

5.2.1 LENGTH OF RESIDENCE IN AUSTRALIA

Length of residence has been assumed to be a coarse indicator of the extent of exposure to the larger society; that is, with longer time, there is increased contact with the larger society (Georgas & Papastylianou, 1994). This assumption was re-affirmed in this study. It was found that refugees who arrived more recently were more likely to be preoccupied with their pre-migration experiences and their process of *coming to terms with the past* compared to refugees who had lived in Australia for a longer time. For instance, Morathi was preoccupied with his past issues when he was interviewed four months after his arrival in Perth. He lamented that other refugees in his community had forgotten their past and were too busy with their current lives in Australia. This was an indication of the likelihood that other refugees in his community had moved on with their lives.

Others in my community are not concerned about helping the ones in refugee camps. They have forgotten their past. They are too busy with their lives here in Australia. (Morathi)

Although Morathi sought employment, his priority was to send back his earnings for the people he had left behind. He was also ambivalent about his stay in Australia. I took the following notes following an interview.

His best friend is currently in the refugee camp and has asked for money. He doesn't have much money to send. So, Morathi is thinking of shifting from Maylands because the rent is expensive (\$180 per fortnight) so that he can save some money to be sent to his friend. (Field notes, 10 April 2002)

I want to be a useful person in this world, and I am thinking of how to help. Now I am here, I am thinking of my people, I want to be there to help them. What am I doing here? (Informal interview, Morathi, 10 April 2002)

With the passage of time, the refugees' focus could change from one that was predominantly centered on their homeland and pre-migration experiences to one that was directed at rebuilding their lives in Australia. For example, in the first interview, Mike spoke at length about becoming a soldier in order to fight for his tribe. In an interview 15 months later, he no longer spoke of his desire to be a soldier but was focusing on building a life for himself in Australia, including gaining entrance into university and buying a new car.

Here, actually I feel like getting a new car. I feel like how to get better, better. As you look at the country, when you see things are better, you want to become

better, basically competing against other people. You see a friend with a good car, I think now I better study harder. It's like competing against your friend, study hard, get a good job, and buy a good car. (Mike)

Furthermore, there was evidence to suggest that refugees who had lived in Australia for a longer duration were more familiar and passionate about the issues and events in Australia compared to refugees who had not lived in Australia for long. For example, Ho, who escaped Vietnam as a young child and had lived in Australia for 25 years, expanded his sphere of concern from personal matters to wider community issues in Australia, including politics and issues concerning refugees.

It's like you are building a tin shed in the middle of nowhere, just chuck them [detainees] there and just leave them there for the time being. We'll think about it. When it comes to it and it has been years and no one wants to talk about it ... Say the politicians want something done for themselves, it will take a week, like a pay rise. None of them have to whinge. All the nurses are crying for more money, and how long does that take? Or the teachers are crying for more money ... it will take months. There's strike everywhere. It's like a double standard. (Ho)

Ho further described the conditions in the detention centres as he perceived them. His concerns are reflected in the following passage.

It's not really a place. If they all go to prison, I think they will be looked after ten times better. I only know one place in Darwin desert. I am seeing people on TV who have computers, toilets, magazines, and probably air-conditioned prisons as compared to what people, from say third world country, who risked everything to come here and get supposed not prosecuted but, er, unwelcome. (Ho)

Ho was also very focused on his present life in Australia and on expanding his restaurant business in the future.

It's something that I wanted to do many many years because everyone says, "Always buy a restaurant or buy your own business," but I thought working for somebody is a bit better off, less stress, less problems. But now I am in it, there is stress, there is problem, but I like it because it's my own. If I work hard, I get more out of it. And if I stay late, it's for me, it's not for anybody else. (Ho)

It was found that progress towards the stage of *consolidating identity towards a new life* was a function of length of residence, as described in Chapter Four (see section 4.7.1). Here, the refugees' experience of SEI became minimal as they became increasingly familiar with the Australian culture and lifestyle. It could be said that they had fitted into the Australian environment or they had "fallen into place." For instance, Shahrooz

commented on his increased familiarity with Australian jokes as he lived longer in Australia.

There was a time that we couldn't laugh after a joke that appeared on TV or radio. But now, after living here for 16 years, you appreciate different facts of life here, that you could relate to the jokes. Before, I remember Andrew Denton show and to see people are laughing, and I thought that these people must be idiots [laughs]. But now, it's all changed because I can watch Rove Live or hear a joke on the radio, and I could laugh too because I can relate to it. (Shahrooz)

It was possible that unlike refugees who had arrived recently, refugees who had lived in Australia for a longer duration were more adapted. Their past experiences might be portrayed as a distant memory that no longer evoked an intense emotional response. In the following comment, Shahrooz appears to have let go of the past.

Even in my dreams, I speak English. That's just shows you that how I have totally forgotten about that. I don't remember. When something is bad, something is sad, we try to let go, and you look forward to the future. It's just like a distant memory now. It was a bad dream, it was a nightmare, and I have just woken up, and it just belonged to the dream. It never existed. (Shahrooz)

One of the signs that the refugees had moved forward with their lives was that they no longer talked about the past. For example, with the passage of time, Shahrooz and his family members collectively ceased talking about the past. When asked about his siblings' experiences, Shahrooz provides the following comment.

I honestly cannot tell you because we don't talk about it at all, because this country has been our country since 1988. We were also ostracised in our country [homeland], we didn't feel that we belong to that country any more. So when we came here, we just adapted to this kind of lifestyle and to this country, so this country is now our country. Now it seems like we have always lived in this country. We don't talk about the past. (Shahrooz)

Also evident in the preceding excerpt is that Shahrooz perceived a sense of belonging in Australia. As explained earlier in Chapter Four, several participants along with their desire to be part of the Australian community perceived a sense of belonging as they lived longer in Australia. It was further revealed that the process of *adapting* was influenced by the age of the refugees when they arrived in Australia.

5.2.2 AGE OF ARRIVAL IN AUSTRALIA

As inferred from the findings, the age of the refugees when they arrived in Australia was a pivotal factor that influenced all five stages of *adapting*. The stages, as previously described in Chapter Four, included (1) Coming to terms with the past, (2) Maintaining self-identity, (3) Rebuilding a new life, (4) Integrating perspectives and balancing identities, and (5) Consolidating identity towards a new life. The influence of age upon each of these stages is described in the following sections.

5.2.2.1 The influence of age of arrival on Stage 1 (Coming to terms with the past)

It was found that the age of the refugees when they arrived in Australia affected the extent to which they were preoccupied with their past experiences. Refugees who escaped their homeland at a young age or when they were only children did not appear to experience a sense of loss, possibly because they had few past experiences, and they did not have sufficiently strong ties with their past that needed to be resolved. This seemed to be true for refugee children who arrived with their family members and had not experienced serious trauma, whether direct or indirect. For example, as reported in Chapter Three, although Ho (who arrived in Australia at 10 years of age) did remember his pre-migration experiences, they did not seem to impact on him negatively. As well, he admitted to having fun and did not remember anything negative during his stay in Indonesia because he was young and had not experienced any direct threat to his life.

A few potential participants explained that they would not be of help to my study because they could hardly remember what happened to them during war. I assured them that their experiences were still important as I was not searching for a specific refugee experience. The sense of loss for these potential participants was minimal and the stage of *coming to terms with the past* did not fully apply to them. They had few memories of the past due to their relatively young age when they escaped their homeland. For example, Ming, aged 31 years, who had lived in Australia for 24 years, stated, "I don't remember much about what happened in Vietnam because I left when I was young." His current preoccupations were raising a young family and advancing his career. He informed me that he had few memories of the past, and I should perhaps find someone else to interview. At a later stage, I managed to secure an interview with Ming.

There was evidence to suggest that a sense of closure was possible for adolescent and young adult refugees who had experienced more losses than refugee children. They experienced, to varying extents, the six phases in *coming to terms with the past*. When the adolescent and young adult refugees had not experienced serious direct trauma, they were able to leave the past behind and felt it unnecessary to frequently review it. With the passage of time, they were able to start the next chapter of their lives (e.g., Aziza: section 5.2.2.3). Compared to older refugees, they were better able to come to terms with their past and no longer talked about their past issues extensively. For instance, Payam observed that younger refugees, including himself, moved on with their lives within four or five years of their arrival in Australia and no longer talked about the past.

I do a lot of sitting around and chitchatting with people. From what I gather, the younger generation doesn't want to talk about it any more, young generation who has been here for a while, especially four or five years onwards, especially having a business or studying. They don't want to talk about it any more. The attitude is sometimes as if it never happened. (Payam)

It was not completely clear why some young adult refugees no longer wanted to talk about their past. Payam believed that it was because they did not want to be reminded that they were refugees.

I remember talking to some of these Baha'is who went back to Iran especially the last couple of years, and I said, "But what about this? What about that?" And it's as if it's hurting them when I remind them of the fact that they are refugees, and they said, "But it's gone." (Payam)

Payam also found that young adult refugees from other countries behaved similarly, and they no longer spoke about what it was like to be refugees.

Many of these younger people of my age that I knew back from Pakistan [country of asylum], they went all over the world and some of them came here, every now and then I come across some of them. Even if we meet each other after a long while, we don't go back talking about being refugees. (Payam)

Payam further observed that when young adult refugees focused on rebuilding their present lives in Australia, in terms of obtaining an education or work, they were better able to let go of their past.

We talked about what we do everyday, it's no longer living the memories. I see this is a part that we just want to somehow be finished with it. It's just been that

for too long for some of us. And the sooner we get into some kind of work or education, I think, it's easier for us to let go of it. (Payam)

As inferred, refugees who arrived in Australia at an older age tended to focus predominantly on their pre-migration experiences and were more likely to discard many future prospects in rebuilding their lives. As well, they were more likely to have both negative and positive experiences. These older refugees took a longer time to come to terms with their past, probably because compared to younger refugees, they had to work through a lot more issues that they had experienced prior to migration. Those who were unable to move on from this stage could be regarded as *living in the past*. It was possible that, in general, older people tended to reminisce about their past simply because they had lived their lives. The following excerpt depicts the older refugees' (above 50 years of age when they arrived in Australia) views through the perception and observation of a younger refugee.

The older generation, they satisfy themselves by remembering them and talking about them, saying what happened to them. Often they remember when they talk about it. After a while, they start talking about the life back there, and how it was, and how they came out, and what happened to them. (Payam)

In the following passage, Payam observes that older refugees who were more dependent on others felt a greater desire to return to their homeland while forgetting their reasons to escape in the first place. As well, they tended to compare their lives in their homeland and their current lives in Australia as well as criticise their new lives.

If they are totally dependent on the others, they feel that they have to go [back to homeland]. They can't adapt, they are always criticising the new life they are in: "Look at this, food doesn't taste as good as there." They forget that it was a mental thing that they came out. Older refugees ... It's very hard for them to adjust here and adapt here. And most of the time they are reliving the memories and wanting to go back. And they compare, always compare. (Payam)

Payam's observation that older refugees were more likely to make comparisons between their homeland and Australia was partially demonstrated in Tuba, who arrived in Australia at the age of 48 years.

In Australia, winter very strong to bones; and in Iran no, cold coming to just skin, not inside, it's warm. Perth, wind very strong coming to bones, not coming to warm. But in Iran, snow coming, you going outside, you walking, walk beautiful, fresh. (Tuba)

Food beautiful, 70% in Iran fresh, no chemical, no hormone, beautiful. Taste different, make different. I make my home, never never go outside, going some restaurant to eat because I like my house making, cook. But taste not good, much different to my country. The chicken all hormone, vegetables all chemical, you believe it? Look at the people, lots of cancer to people because of the chemical, because the hormones. (Tuba)

It was not clear from the analysis of the data whether there was a particular age of arrival that acted as the cut off where the refugees were more likely to remain living in the past. However, in the following excerpt, Payam observes that this happened to refugees who were older than 50 years of age when they arrived in Australia. According to Payam, those who adapted and tried to be more independent were the exceptions.

I would say over 50 [years old]. I have seen exceptions, over 50 came here, and they learnt the language, and they said they don't want to go back. And even when they haven't learnt the language properly but [they] adapt themselves and because they are very proactive, and they ride the buses, they won't wait for someone to drive them around. Or maybe they can drive and they get the license and all that sort of thing. And those are exceptions. (Payam)

Additionally, it was found that refugees who arrived in Australia at an older age were more likely to maintain their self-identity.

5.2.2.2 The influence of age of arrival on Stage 2 (Maintaining self-identity)

As inferred, refugees who arrived in Australia at an older age were more likely to maintain their pre-migration self-identity and were less inclined to make changes in their lives. In the following comment, Payam observes that these older refugees became more isolated as they could not communicate in English; they were also more likely to have a stronger desire to return to their homeland.

And for older generation, they can't see any reason to change any more, always remember them, I lived my life, you know, too late for me to change, too late for me to learn another language. They can't express themselves, they can't talk, and they can't communicate, and everything has to be English. And they gradually feel more and more isolated, and the pressure will be more and more mentally and then to move, to go back [to Iran]. (Payam)

It was found that refugees who arrived in Australia at an older age were also more likely to maintain their culture and tradition. For instance, Mike commented that his mother had not adapted to the Australian culture.

She [My mother] likes the Karen culture. She likes Australia in a good way, the government and everything, but she hasn't adapted [to] the culture yet. She still keeps the old tradition. She always says "I am not happy here." (Mike)

Tuba, who arrived in Australia at the age of 48 years, expressed her desire to remain in her homeland during a recent visit, but she had to return to Australia. She stated, "But what can I do? Because I live in Australia, my life [is] in Australia, I doing in Australia, finish my country." In the following passage, Payam argues that older refugees tended to live in the past because they were too old to experience anything new, and they had a lot of difficulties in rebuilding their lives in Australia.

The older generation, I think, they satisfy themselves by remembering them and talking about them, saying what happened to them ... I don't know what sort of conclusion I can make out of this ... maybe because they are too old to experience anything new any more. They know that there is no other hope for them, they can't change anything, they can't learn any more new trade, they can't learn a new language, they can't go to university or anything. (Payam)

The difficulties faced by refugees who arrived in Australia at an older age are further described in the following section at the stage of rebuilding.

5.2.2.3 The influence of age of arrival on Stage 3 (Rebuilding a new life)

It was found that age of arrival was an important factor that influenced the stage of rebuilding. As discussed in Chapter Four, the acquisition of English skills was central to rebuilding a new life in Australia. It was found that participants who arrived in Australia at a younger age were able to rebuild their lives more rapidly than those who arrived at an older age. For instance, Aziza, who arrived in Australia at 19 years of age, did not think much of her pre-migration experiences and found herself learning English very rapidly. She also moved on easily to follow her dreams.

I move on [with] my study. I start following my dreams, and I really feel that I rebuild my life. And now I have been here almost three and a half years, and I feel I moved on very easily. When I visited my family [in Africa], God, really I have moved [on] very fast. I just think about them, I didn't think how life in Africa is, and I didn't even think a certain way. (Aziza)

As inferred from the findings, younger refugees were better able to rebuild their lives because they were more likely to interact with their environment and become part of it.

They learnt a trade and a new language. They rebuilt their lives, giving them “something to cling to” in Australia.

Younger people, I consider myself as the younger generation because we have an escape route basically, we learn trade and language and establish a life, then we have something to cling to here. And because we see the growth, we have the opportunity to go out and see the changes and be with the changes, read more about the history and gradually become part of this. The life that we have here is part of our life; it's not something that we want to leave one day. (Payam)

The lack of English skills was found to lead to limited vocational choices, difficulties in forging new friendships, and hence social isolation and a sense of displacement. This scenario commonly applied to refugees who were older when they arrived in Australia. As indicated in the analysis of the data, with increasing age, the rate of learning new skills declined. For instance, Tuba observed that her grandchildren were able to speak English like other Australians, whereas she quickly forgot the things she had learnt.

Because very young, [like] computer, very quick. My husband and me, in ear, tomorrow ear gone [hand signs showing ears], no computer. [Grand]Children young, X nine years old, Y seven years, beautiful school, beautiful studies, beautiful English very well, the same as Australians my grandchildren. (Tuba)

A relevant concept related to the functioning of refugee families in Australia is *culture brokering*. According to Trickett and Jones (2007), *culture brokering* refers to the ways in which children and adolescents become the mediators between their families and the domains of the new culture. In this study, for instance, it was not unusual for the younger refugees to become interpreters for their parents.

I have to help my parents to cope as well in terms of English. We got used to speaking it very fast, but they couldn't, so at the same time trying to help them. Like if they needed to go somewhere like doctor or buy something in a pharmacy or different things like that, you know. I remember when my dad got the loan for the house that we live in at the moment, so I have to basically go along to help them and translate, you know, interpret. (Shahrooz)

The age factor was also emphasised by a refugee parent with primary school age children. Mariam believed that unlike her eldest child, her youngest child adjusted well in Australia because she did not know much about their homeland and had not experienced any losses.

The eldest one, he missed his friends and everything because when he came here, he was about 12 years old. So he was big enough, he missed his friends.

Sometimes, when he attends school, he feels like a strange person in this society of Australian people. But the youngest one, she is very happy because when she came here she was very young, she was just 4 years old. So I don't feel like there is any suffering from her to be a part of this society. (Mariam)

There was evidence that refugees who arrived in Australia at a younger age rebuilt their lives more quickly than those who arrived at an older age. By rebuilding their lives, they became more congruous with the new environment. Refugees who arrived in Australia at an older age were slower in terms of meeting the current challenges of rebuilding (e.g., learning English) and acquiring an Australian identity. In the following comment, Payam concludes that reflection on one's life at an older age was common for any person.

They have to rely on their memory, to just keep them alive, like in Iran, what they used to do. That is part of any generation, any type of person – when you get old it's the time you reflect on your life rather than trying to learn new tricks and all that. It's very hard, even worst for refugees. (Payam)

5.2.2.4 The influence of age of arrival on Stage 4 (Integrating perspectives and balancing identities)

There was evidence to suggest that refugees who arrived in Australia at an older age were less likely to engage in the process of *integrating perspectives* because it was harder for them to learn the ways of the Australian culture (see section 5.2.2.3) and incorporate them into their identity. It was also more difficult for them to make new social connections with mainstream Australians due to their insufficient English skills. As well, they were less likely to engage in the process of *balancing* their ethnic identity with their Australian identity because they were more likely to maintain their ethnic identity (see section 5.2.2.2) and less likely to acquire an Australian identity.

5.2.2.5 The influence of age of arrival on Stage 5 (Consolidating identity towards a new life)

It was found that refugees who arrived in Australia at a younger age were more likely to acquire a sense of belonging. This was especially so for those who had successfully rebuilt their lives in Australia, as in the case of Sabrina who arrived at the age of 22 years. As described in section 4.7, Sabrina felt a connection to Australia after four years of her arrival because she had successfully rebuilt her life.

Conversely, refugees who arrived in Australia at an older age found it difficult to call Australia their home. For example, Nadia, who arrived in Australia at the age of 37 years, confessed that she did not feel that Australia was her home after living in Perth for eight years. Nadia had a fulfilling career, had the support of her ethnic community, had felt accepted, and had not experienced discrimination. She stated that she was very grateful for being treated like a “normal” person after experiencing discrimination in her homeland. This was the paradox she had expressed during the interview.

I still don't have [a] sense of belonging. Maybe sounds strange after what I said about Australia, just like practical side, how it was, how I went through all of that stuff. Deep inside, I don't have a feeling that I really belong here, although I appreciate everything and what I got in Australia. (Nadia)

Nadia further provided an example to illustrate the way she referred to her country of origin as her home. In conversation, she naturally referred to her country of origin as the place to which she felt a sense of belonging. Nadia perceived that she was still *over there* in her homeland, albeit psychologically.

It's very confusing when I ring my relatives over there, and if I am talking in my language and if I said my country blah blah and then I was talking about this country over there, not Australia. And they said, "Where is your country?" When I said here, I was physically here in Australia, but I was thinking there. I feel that I actually belonged there. I don't have that, and I don't think I will have because once you lose that feeling. (Nadia)

Nadia further explained what she meant by *losing the feeling of belonging* in Australia by describing the emotions associated with a sense of belonging.

The feeling of belonging to your country, like your home, and you are proud of that, and you like your flag, and you like all symbols. And if they play with other countries, soccer, you are like a fan. In Australia, I really don't have that. It's something you can't push yourself. You can say, but you know how you really feel, and if you don't have that feeling, you don't have it. (Nadia)

In Nadia's case, age of arrival in Australia appeared to be the main factor in determining whether she called Australia her home. She joked that she was “too old to fall in love” as she arrived in Australia at 37 years of age.

I was laughing, once I said something like, "I am too old to fall in love now" – it was the same like with a man, I won't be able to fall in love any more after my husband, and it is the same with a country probably. I am too old now. I think it takes time. And I am not sure, maybe, some ten years, who knows. (Nadia)

However, Nadia predicted that she might perceive a sense of belonging after living in Australia for another ten years. Notably, obtaining citizenship and purchasing a house did not override the effect of age upon acquiring a sense of belonging.

I have Australian passport and everything, but it was more formal part and paper, you know, and we bought a house here in 1996. So, we have house and home again, but altogether I wouldn't say I have any feeling of belonging really to this country. (Nadia)

The preceding excerpt suggests that refugees who arrived in Australia at an older age might not acquire a sense of belonging even if they felt accepted, were happy and comfortable, were employed, had purchased a house, and had even taken Australian citizenship simply because they had lived most of their lives in their homeland. Nadia's lack of an Australian identity can be explained in the following passage.

Clearly, the analogy between a "physical home" (an actual house) and a "homeland" (a heimat or a "place of belonging") had its limits. One of the differences was that a homeland was part of your identity in a way a physical home, for all its importance, would never be. A homeland defined you in some ways. A physical home did not. (El-Zein, 2002, p. 228-229)

Nadia's identity appeared to be tied to her homeland rather than her physical home in Australia. As inferred from the findings, there was no obvious cut-off point at an age where the refugees could no longer develop a sense of belonging. It was apparent that there was another factor that affected the acquisition of a sense of belonging in Australia (see section 5.3.4: Motivation).

5.2.2.6 Interaction between age of arrival and length of residence

As discussed earlier, both age of arrival and length of residence strongly influenced the process of *adapting to minimise SEI*. As inferred, for refugees who arrived in Australia at a younger age, successful rebuilding and the passage of time helped them to acquire a sense of belonging in Australia. Shahrooz, who arrived in Australia at the age of 15 years and had lived in Australia for 16 years, had forgotten his past. His forgetfulness should not be confused with the phase of denial in the stage of coming to terms with the past; rather, it implied that Shahrooz had let go of his past.

Gradually we forgot about our country. Totally forgot about it, yeah. It's a funny thing – when you think and when you try to express yourself, you always think in your own mother tongue, but I am not doing that. (Shahrooz)

Even with refugees who arrived at an older age, the longer they lived in Australia, the more they felt settled, although they faced more difficulties in their process of *adapting* as they grieved over their multiple losses more intensely and frequently. For instance, a sense of displacement was revealed in Tuba, but she coped with it daily by thinking positively, and she came to accept it with time.

After marriage, beautiful house, beautiful everything. I am coming to Australia, nothing, zero. After 18 years little bit settled down, little bit, little by little, little by little because I am thinking, my family in Iran, no job, no studies, now coming to study. My husband now, old man, government give my husband money, like this you know, slow, slow. Everything, one to two, three, four. Everybody good. I'm happy. That's it, we settled down after 18 years. (Tuba)

5.2.3 THE PRESENCE OF AN ESTABLISHED ETHNIC COMMUNITY

As discussed in Chapter Four (section 4.4), the refugees maintained numerous aspects of their self-identity, including a connection with their homeland, their culture, their social support networks, and their spiritual beliefs in order to minimise their experience of SEI in Australia. In general, refugees who had more opportunities to maintain their self-identity (especially their ethnic identity) were able to do so more than refugees who had fewer opportunities. Such opportunities came about usually because these refugees had strong connections with an established ethnic community that preserved its ethnic identity in Australia, and they perceived an attitude of acceptance from the wider Australian community. They were therefore more likely to maintain their ethnic identity.

Refugees who had the opportunity to maintain their self-identity did not perceive their lives in Australia to be too different from their pre-migration lives. Nadia typified this scenario. She explained that “everything was the same” in terms of the friends she had and the customs of her culture. She stated that she had a strong social support network comprising her children, husband, her parents, relatives, and friends whom she already knew from her homeland (see section 4.4.3). Furthermore, Nadia lived in close proximity to her circle of relatives and friends. For these reasons, Nadia did not appear

to experience a serious loss and was able to fit into her immediate environment quickly and easily.

It was evident that refugees who perceived that most aspects of their identity were accepted in Australia have fewer difficulties in their adaptation. Nadia's perception of acceptance from the Australian public is reflected in the following excerpt. Coupled with her success in finding work, she had few problems with her adaptation.

I don't feel that I can't do something, or somebody looks at me differently because I am not Australian. Maybe that's the reason why I felt that I have the same rights or opportunities as other people. When I finished school, I was lucky that I got a job, maybe that's another reason why I feel like that. It's more than fair in Australia because nobody put any pressure on you. Australia is really good. I feel it is a very tolerant society. You can do whatever you want to do ... support is around everywhere. You are accepted as you are. (Nadia)

While Nadia was able to maintain her culture and social life within her immediate social circle consisting of her ethnic community and family, she reported having less interaction with the larger society.

I only keep contact with people from my own community. It's not good characteristic, but I don't adjust easily. Sometimes here we are multicultural, and people make different food, but I just can't try. I feel awful, and I feel that people can think that I have something against them. I am not so good that I can say that I easily fit in or integrate, like I stick to my old everything, habits, customs, foods. I don't think I change much in Australia. (Nadia)

As shown, an established ethnic community, along with a perceived attitude of acceptance from the wider Australian society towards the maintenance of the refugees' ethnic identity, provided a supportive environment that encouraged the refugees to maintain their ethnic identity. However, support from one's ethnic community could also act as a double-edged sword because the refugees were expected to conform to the expectations of their communities. For example, both Sabrina and Emanuel perceived the pressure from their ethnic communities to find paid work instead of getting an education in Australia.

I am getting bad vibes from people [in my community]: "Why are you going to school? Why don't you go and deliver newspapers and letter-boxing and whatever?" You have your choice, I made mine. I am going to study. "That's not good for you, you won't get any job" and all that. I have been through all that.

According to them [ethnic community members], you are wasting your time. You are not Australian; you are not from an English-speaking background. (Sabrina)

They asked me what I am going to study. I told them I have to study or I am going to find out what I am going to study, but my interest is this. I am not sure if these things are marketable or not, I just commit myself to do it. I did it. It can be done. But if you hear something from people, you get disappointed, "If you learn, you don't get any work here." Because they think, to get work you have to be fluent in English. They just compared themselves with someone who is born in Australia who speaks English. They find it difficult to copy these people: "Why are you spending a lot of time there studying? You got to make money." (Emanuel)

Sabrina commented that older refugees were less able to acquire new skills (such as English skills) and were more concerned with conforming to the values of their ethnic community. She was frustrated that older refugees in her community were preoccupied with material achievement and did not want to learn English. However, she also found out recently that younger refugees were beginning to follow this trend.

I am encouraging, but unfortunately I don't have such good response from people of my community in developing or improving their English language skills. They are more obsessed with materially secure [sic] while neglecting improving their basic communication skills. I thought at the beginning that was just people between 35 to 65 [years old], but then recently I am coming across younger people which is really a shame. There is so much opportunity here. (Sabrina)

Sabrina further highlighted the pressure the community placed on its members towards material achievement.

I think it is just the problem of other people's expectation because their communities expect them in a short time to drive a fancy car, to have a house. I mean I have huge clashes about this with people from my community. The first question "Do you have a house?" and I don't. And "Oh my God, four years you are here and you don't have a house?" (Sabrina)

In Ania's case, the pressure to conform to the norms of her ethnic community appeared to override the influence of age on rebuilding. Despite having arrived in Australia at the age of 26 years, she did not acquire sufficient English skills because she conformed to the message given by her ethnic community that it was better to work than to learn English. Her feelings of regret were palpable throughout the interview.

Our Polish community, they discouraged us: "This is the country now you have to know that here is always unemployment. Australian-educated people they can't have work, so what do you expect?" They kept us in this dark corner. It was BIG, big, big mistake because after ten years, I still didn't speak English. The door

would be open much much earlier if I would know that it is open, you have to just knock at that door. There were so many opportunities, and I missed it, it's a shame. It would be easier for me, and I didn't have to suffer so much. (Ania)

In addition, the refugees widened their social networks to include those who were not in their ethnic community. The importance of their wider social networks is described as follows.

5.2.4 SOCIAL AND PSYCHOLOGICAL SUPPORT

It was evident in the findings that throughout the lives of the refugees, social and psychological support was crucial to their well-being. Social and psychological support from family, friends, and the wider Australian community was consistently found to an important factor in facilitating their process of *adapting to minimise SEI*. Specifically, having support, either in the form of counselling or simply having friends and family, greatly assisted the refugees in their process of coming to terms with their past. One of the ways the refugees coped with their past experiences was to accept professional counselling. The kind of psychological assistance that was helpful to the refugees was described by Morathi as welcoming, safe, and secure.

They [United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, UNHCR] also gave me some counselling because I was really traumatised. So, thanks to the UNHCR and also GOAL. They really really help refugees. The environment is very much welcoming refugees. It's a place where they can really feel safe, secure, and where they can tell out their grief that is on their minds and everything. It's a place where you can release your stress, I can say. (Morathi)

It was found that refugees who were depressed could find a distraction simply by enjoying the company of friends. In the following passage, Emanuel describes the importance of having friends in attenuating depression.

Many people are depressed. But they are not bad anyhow, but you can understand it. They will change from time to time. They may change after, well, they find friends because when they find friends, they maybe called to go out, with social interactions, just talk and laugh, and you forget that way. (Emanuel)

There was some indication that having an audience who listened to the refugees' life stories helped them in their recovery process. For instance, Fariba attributed the release of her hidden emotions to having shared them with a friend.

I must have hidden my feelings because it was hurting too much. But I talked to a friend of mine and expressed my fears and my worries. Next day, I could see better literally. (Fariba)

Payam also provided an account of the importance of having an audience in the stage of coming to terms with the past.

In the early stages, if I wasn't given a chance to talk, probably would make it more difficult to let go. The fact that I had enough audience at some point to talk about it, trust other people that I came across. Telling people who I am and what are my beliefs – and that also helped me overcome. (Payam)

As indicated by Payam, there was a limit to how much refugees could benefit from sharing their stories because talking too much about the past was equivalent to not letting go. In the following comment, Payam highlights the importance of focusing on the next steps in one's life and moving on.

By itself [talking about the past] in the long run could be damaging as well. Now, if it's too much, if it continues, then by itself becomes a cause of "not letting it go." Talking about it in an analytical way, consultation, like a counselling way. At the end, give a result of "Okay, what do you want to do next?" This sort of talk get to that point, then it will help. (Payam)

Payam further described the kind of social support that was useful for refugees. He emphasised the essential aspect of listening, which was valuing the experiences of the refugees, and the use of time to examine one's past and present.

Not only listening but also valuing. If the experiences that the refugee has gone through is valued because I often heard people said, "Yeah, okay, you suffered but get on with it now," and that doesn't help. Time is the greatest factor but not just time. I think time given to the person to examine everything – examine the past and examine the situation which he's in. (Payam)

Refugees in this study also spoke of being assisted by others in their process of rebuilding. For instance, Sabrina reported a substantial amount of support she received from her mother and brother, which included the times when she thought of giving up learning English.

My brother and my mum, they are really big support. With everything, like she was there. For me, it's very hard to study because it was very different, sort of new system, learning at the same time the language. I was giving up everyday. Every time, she said, "No, you came to this far. Try, try, I know you can do it. Try this, you can do that. It's just this day. It is going to go away." All sides of support, like emotional support, everything. (Sabrina)

Social support during the process of rebuilding could also derive from family members who had resettled earlier in Australia. This is indicated by Shahrooz in the following excerpt.

My brother and sister were here already when we came, and they were already established like they were going to uni and all that. So when we came here, they really took good care of us, you know, and tried to show everything, you know, and how things work here. (Shahrooz)

Conversely, a lack of support had affected a few participants who reported the difficulty in rebuilding their new lives alone. For instance, Ken lamented his lack of support in Australia because most of his Kachin tribal people had resettled elsewhere.

A lot of people from Kachin tribe live in US, Germany, and Japan. A lot of people don't know about Australia, so they don't want to come here. It's really hard when I came here alone to settle. You have to start from zero, you have to think about your future. If I go to US, I got a relative or friends, they will show you around, and you can settle there easily. But here no, I don't have any friends or any relatives. (Ken)

It was found that a lack of social support could impede the rebuilding process. For example, having to look after a baby without support, Ania found it difficult to attend English classes. She stated, "Unfortunately, I couldn't go to English class. It's very hard for me, I don't have any family, and I didn't have support from anyone." Payam further provided the evidence that a supportive social environment was crucial in encouraging refugees to learn English. In the following example, he shows his gratitude for the care he received while acquiring English skills.

I have a purpose to talk, and I had the opportunity to talk and express myself in English without being ridiculed. I have the other members helping me out. As soon as I made a mistake, they told me the correct way of saying it. And having on the spot, having someone, basically Australian Baha'is, who picked it up and they said the most correct way of saying it. And so, I think I had a very good tender care to help me through it. (Payam)

Additionally, Payam had the opportunity to learn the *cultural* part of English when he constantly spoke in English in Port Hedland.

More help came when I moved to Port Hedland. I had to constantly talk in English, day and night. People are more friendly and invite people into their houses.... it was easier for me to pick up on the cultural language – not just saying things I know with translation in my mind but saying things [that] have meaning for Australian people. It's a colloquial way of speaking. (Payam)

Sabrina and Nadia reported receiving support and encouragement from others, which motivated them to move forward in establishing their careers.

Lots of things have changed since I started to work. You feel more independent, you feel much confident, self-esteem. You are interacting with the people you can learn a lot from. They are so encouraging. They were really all the time into true work. They're just amazing. They give you so much confidence: "Good on you, you achieved quite a lot in a short time." And it's not that you are asking for acknowledgement, but it's also a good feeling. It also gives you a burst, like a burst of energy, gives you some more motivation to go forward. (Sabrina).

I went to Migrant Centre, and somebody who is working there offered me to work as a volunteer, and I did work with very very poor English. People that I was working with, they were very nice to me. They were giving me advice. They were guiding me on what to do, which course, how to find a job. (Nadia)

Some participants, especially unaccompanied refugees, expressed how important their new friendship networks were. For example, although Aziza had only lived in Australia for three years, she had established a close network of friends. She highlighted the support she received during challenging times, which included a medical crisis.

I have no family here. All my friends are Australians, and I have two Japanese friends. They helped me a lot. I had two operations at the hospital. My friend thought I was okay, but the doctor said I wasn't, and he told her that. People have been helping me so much. I really want to give back. That is why I want to help other people also. (Informal interview, Aziza)

Family members who cooperated and supported one another reported that they were better able to rebuild their lives in Australia.

We discuss all things, everything. We have one place for the money, our money - not my money, or my mum's money, or my brother's money. Okay, this is my pay, this is my mum's pay [pension], this is my brother's pay, and it is in one place. Okay, what is the first thing that we need? Food, pay the bills. We are more like a community of three, and we respect each other. We manage to save money, and we manage to create a real home for us. It gives you a feeling of "I am starting to build something again." (Sabrina)

As demonstrated in the preceding example, it may be suggested that cooperation and consultation in the family can also promote understanding between generations and minimise intergenerational differences. The unity within the family also enables its members to work towards financial security and creating a home.

5.2.5 FINANCIAL SUPPORT

In the early days of their settlement, the refugees expressed their gratitude for the financial support rendered by the government, which was necessary for them to rebuild their lives. For example, Larissa was pleasantly surprised and grateful when she qualified to receive an allowance from Centrelink.

The government from Centrelink, they gave us allowance every two weeks. I was thinking, "How is it that I am not working and they just gave me allowance?" [Laugh] Our father cannot give us, regularly, every two weeks. Now I get Newstart allowance, it's \$354 for two weeks. Even my brother and sisters, they also get allowances. And it's all very nice, very nice place to stay, and my father is also telling us, "Yeah, this is the best place in the world." (Larissa)

As there was usually no social welfare system in the refugees' homeland, the refugees welcomed the social security system in Australia that had given them a sense of financial independence.

Here [Australia] is more comfortable than there. I mean you are not dependent on anyone here. You get your own benefit from government; you live on your own. In Africa, you are dependent, you are dependent on family. If you don't have family, you have to just search others for some money you can benefit from. You have to work for them. (Emanuel)

5.2.6 STRESSORS ARISING FROM INTERVENING MAJOR LIFE EVENTS

In this study, stressors arising from intervening major life events (or intercurrent stressors) were found to compound the challenges the refugees were already facing in their process of *adapting to minimise SEI* because these events demanded their attention. Some of these intervening major life events included family problems, unemployment, school stress, death in the family, perceiving rejection, worrying about those left behind, and poor health.

5.2.6.1 Family problems

Marital discord constituted one of the problems refugee families might face in Australia. An example of marital discord was presented in Ania, who described her relationship with her ex-husband as her "private prison."

I had lots of my private problems with my ex-husband. I didn't have family, I didn't know many people because he didn't want me to be involved with other people. So I was actually coming from one prison to my private prison. We

divorced six years already. He just decided that his life was more important to just bring some money, a family, a house. (Ania)

It has been reported in the literature that refugees who arrive in their receiving countries at a younger age are likely to experience an *intergenerational gap*, which can lead to *intergenerational conflict* with their parents (e.g., Matsuoka, 1990; Rosenthal, Ranieri, & Klimidis, 1996). As found in this study, *intergenerational conflict* could be exacerbated because younger refugees adjusted to the Australian culture much more quickly than their parents. This *differential acculturation rate* came about because younger refugees had greater involvement with the social environment through their educational institutions and workplaces. These increased social encounters with Australians provided opportunities for the acquisition of a lifestyle and attitudes more similar to the larger society. Younger refugees were better able to form friendships and be influenced by the larger society, whereas older refugees were more likely to feel lonely and homesick as highlighted by the following comment.

She [My mother] would love to live in the jungle [in Burma] because like [Perth] city, culture, and tradition, everything is different. And we have no relatives here – we are the only family here. My mother feels kind of lonely. She rather go back to Burma and live with the relatives (Mike)

It was found that refugee parents tended to worry a lot, especially if their children were in their adolescence. There was an incessant fear that their children might get *polluted* because of their exposure to various lifestyles in Australia. For example, Mike spoke about the restrictions imposed on him by his mother, “She still wants me to follow the old tradition. She doesn’t want me to follow the Australians.” He provides examples of other restrictions imposed by his parents in the following excerpt.

In my country, my parents don’t worry about me – where I go, what I did, they don’t worry about me being kidnapped. Like in here, in the City, I can’t even go on the Internet. They go, “You go into the Internet, you do this, you do that, it’s bad for you. You can’t go into chat line. You can’t watch TV.” My parents hold my bankcard, they don’t give it to me. They go, eh, you spend it all, you go to the wrong way. My friends hold their bankcard. (Mike)

As shown, Mike faced the challenge of meeting his parents’ expectations. He also had to deal with their fears. Mike described the extent of his mother’s anxieties about their new

life in Australia. Initially, it was baffling to me when Mike described his experience of war as being less of a threat than the violence occurring in Australia.

In the village, it's simple life. You can do whatever, it's fine. There is no worries, no killing. The only thing, problem is the war. What happen was we live there [village], and suddenly, villagers would probably run around and saying, "Burmese are coming, we have to run." That's the only danger. When they left, we become peaceful village again. When they come, we have to run. Otherwise, they will take us hostage and carry big mortar. (Mike)

Although this revelation was enigmatic, Mike later explained the role of the media in exacerbating his mother's fears in Australia.

Our country, we didn't have any TV. Here, our friends now they bought TV. They get news like killing and gangsters. A few days ago, there was a gangster fight in Perth, she [mum] watches news, fear comes into your mind. She doesn't want me to go out at night time. When I want to go to the movie with my friends, she goes, "No." Always fears of things come to mind. (Mike)

Disagreements between refugee parents and their children were also revealed from the findings. This process, from the perspective of an older refugee (aged 63 years) and a younger refugee (aged 18 years), is highlighted in the following examples.

I talked to my daughter, "What are you doing like this?" She said, "My business. I am big girl in Australia. 16 years, 18 years old, that's enough." (Tuba, age 63 years)

Let's just say that in a family, you have an argument, you feel like you don't want to live any more, dying, crying, angry. My family, for an example, with a father and everything, you want to run, like get over something, like run away, you want to kill yourself just like that. But after I've known Christ, Jesus Christ, I don't feel like running any more. (Mike, age 18 years)

In the preceding comment, Mike speaks about the role of his religious beliefs in helping him to get through conflicts with his parents. However, a close relationship with one's parents was found to greatly diminish the tension brought on by the widening intergenerational gap. For instance, Sabrina's ability to consider her mother's point of view greatly softened any potential tension due to an intergenerational gap.

You always learn something from another person, it doesn't matter because she's my mum. She will use some examples, and I think, my God, she lives like 50 years ago. Then you think, and you come to it that she's right. Advice, understanding, be really fun with each other. If we don't talk, it is something wrong, you know. (Sabrina)

In conclusion, findings in this study paralleled the results of the existing research literature on intergenerational acculturation that often reported the differential acculturation rates between immigrant parents and their offspring (e.g., Boman & Edwards, 1984; Matsuoka, 1990; Rosenthal, 1984; Rosenthal, Ranieri, & Klimidis, 1996). For instance, Rosenthal et al. (1996) found that in migrant families, Vietnamese adolescents in Australia perceived that they had less traditional Vietnamese values than their parents. This result echoed a United States study by Nguyen and Williams (1998) who demonstrated that values of Vietnamese parents remained relatively stable with respect to their length of stay in the USA, whereas Vietnamese adolescents' endorsement of traditional values decreased as a function of their length of residence. It was demonstrated in both these studies that there were differential acculturation rates between parents and adolescents with regards to traditional family values.

5.2.6.2 Unemployment

Being unemployed and having financial difficulties could be a source of stress for refugees who were trying to rebuild their lives in Australia. This situation is exemplified by Fariba.

Now I am 37, just want to have a job, to live, maybe comfortably, not getting social security, like not being on dole. It doesn't seem that studying a course has helped me at all because I looked for a job for two years. Now I am just doing another course. The fact that I always have to think about money to pay off my bills and mortgage and all that is a bit stressful for me. (Fariba)

Being unemployed could also lead to boredom. In the first few months of his arrival, Morathi spoke of how he spent his time, "I cannot find work, I watched TV all day. I get so bored." Incidentally, this was also the time that he questioned his stay in Australia as he had not found a sense of purpose.

5.2.6.3 School stress

Examples of school stress were reported by Mike, who was studying for his TEE at the time of the interview. Mike was very worried about his lack of concentration and focus.

I read for like half an hour, I can't read any more, I'm gone. I go out like do something else, come back, I hate that. I want to concentrate and do something for 4 hours. I read for half an hour or ten minutes. Sometimes not even half an hour, ten minutes, I have to go out. When I go out, I am lost, like go outside

watch TV or play guitar, I lose concentration. Come back, doesn't go into my mind any more. That's what happened, hard time. (Mike)

Mike was also concerned about not being as “brainy” as his other friends at school. As well, he felt the pressure to achieve academically because he was the only one in the family who had the chance to study.

The thing is I am not a brainer. I have to study. You know, people, my friend, I always ask my friend that some of them are brainy. Like they listen in class, they understand it. Like when exam comes, they just study for a few days, and they pass the exam really well. (Mike)

Additionally, Mike recounted an incident where he had to be “tough” in order to survive teasing and bullying from other students.

There are three of them, they grabbed my neck, and I couldn't move. I got really angry, my face became really red. I grabbed the hand and threw some of the students away. They said they were just mucking around. They like give me the look, and they teased me. You got to show them that you are tough otherwise they won't respect you, they treat you like you are weak. They will respect you, not because they are afraid of you, but because you show them like you don't allow, that you can go against them, you are not scared. (Mike)

As demonstrated, school stress, such as having difficulty concentrating and being teased or bullied, could direct the refugee students away from focusing solely on their studies.

5.2.6.4 Death in the family

When there was a death in the family, the refugees had to deal with their grief and their process of *adapting* might be interrupted. For example, Aziza spoke with pride about what she had achieved in Australia. During this period of relative ease, the sudden death of her father within two weeks of her grandmother's passing came as a terrible shock.

My father and grandmother passed away within two weeks. It was really hard. My grandmother passed away first, then my father. My grandmother was 76 years old. [My father was] only 56 years old. It was a shock. We didn't expect him to pass away. I miss my father very much. (Informal interview, Aziza)

Death in the family could alter the grieving refugees' plans. For example, Aziza, who was very enthusiastic about her study plans, realised that she had to focus on getting a job to financially support her siblings in Kenya.

My father supported my brothers and sisters, but now they have to depend on me and my brother [in New Zealand]. I have to get a job. I have six brothers and

sisters [in Kenya]. Two of them are teenagers. Four of them are under 10.
(Informal interview, Aziza)

Aziza also spoke of her grief: "I have a lot of grief. I will carry this pain for the rest of my life." Realising that no one could assist her, Aziza stated that she had to accept the reality of her situation and move on to find the financial means to support her siblings.

I have to accept this. I need to move on. Only I can do this. Nobody can help me. It is all up to me. I have to move on, that is why I am going to Wellington [New Zealand] for two months. I will sort out with my brother, what we can both do to support our family in Kenya. (Informal interview, Aziza)

As shown, death in the family had interfered with Aziza's study plans. She had to grieve and adjust to her new circumstances.

5.2.6.5 Perceiving rejection in Australia

The perception of rejection was found to be an intervening major life event that compromised the process of *adapting* and was described at length by several participants. There were three forms of rejection that they perceived. First, the refugees perceived a stigma attached to being refugees that was perpetuated by the media in Australia. Second, the refugees had a perception of racial discrimination in Australia. Third, the refugees had the perception of discrimination towards their immigrant status. These three forms of perceived rejection will be examined in the following sections. The experience of *recurrent self-environment incongruity* (recurrent SEI), which was theorised in this study, is also discussed. The strategies applied by the refugees to deal with their perceived rejection in Australia will also be described.

5.2.6.5.1 The refugee identity, refugee stigma, and the role of the media

The notion of how participants perceived themselves as refugees and how society perceived them could be captured by the concept of *refugee identity*. This concept was previously introduced in Chapter Four (see section 4.6.1) where the refugees engaged in the process of integrating their identities. The concept of refugee identity constituted one of the crucial outcomes of having experienced life as a refugee. In this study, the negative aspects of the refugee identity refers to the negative self-identification of the refugees towards their past experiences as refugees usually in terms of being forced to escape and having to live with the stigma attached to their refugee status in Australia.

Specifically, the negative aspects of the refugee identity are associated with a conglomeration of emotions arising from the perception of being rejected in Australia, including feeling undeserving, feeling vulnerable, experiencing the fear of being wrongfully accused of being terrorists in Australia, and experiencing anxiety arising from being vigilant in having to do the “right thing” all the time. The positive aspects of the refugee identity were linked to feelings of empowerment and pride that one had struggled, survived, and thrived in Australia despite being a refugee.

In this study, some participants perceived a stigma attached to being refugees as the result of certain stereotypes. They perceived that refugees were typically stereotyped as poor, uneducated, illegal, queue-jumpers, and free-loaders. Levinson (1998) in his book, *Ethnic Relations*, argued that a major way ethnocentrism stereotypes of other people grew and was reinforced was through the media. In line with his description, in this study, a specific negative aspect of the refugee identity was revealed in the findings. The term “media refugees” was espoused in this study to depict the public perception of refugees in Australia as portrayed by the media. This means seeing refugees exclusively as those in the detention centres, desperate, destitute, and dependent on the government financially (the four Ds). According to a few refugees in this study, the media has promulgated this view and applied it to the boat people from Afghanistan and Iraq who were portrayed as “illegal” because they did not have entrance visas or correct documentation, and hence compounded the stigma attached to the term “refugees.”

Most participants did not identify themselves according to the stereotypes perpetuated by the media. For instance, stereotypes about refugees were so ingrained that Shahrooz and his family were reluctant to be called “refugees.” As his family came from a wealthy background in Iran, they did not wish to be stereotyped as being destitute in the same manner as refugees from Afghanistan. Shahrooz insisted that they arrived as religious refugees, not economic refugees. As they had lived in Australia for seventeen years, other people also saw them as part of the larger society, not the “illegal” boat people who arrived in the last decade.

I have talked to my mother about the interviews. She won't feel comfortable doing it because my mother doesn't like the term "refugee" because refugees are oppressed. People refer to refugees as being destitute, especially those from

Afghanistan, and they were in the detention centre and stories you hear from the media. Refugees are basically those who are not doing well in their country. We just came here because of religious reasons. (Informal interview, Shahrooz)

Because of the martyrs in Iran, it opened the way for other Baha'is to move out. We got people from all sorts of socioeconomic backgrounds who came out. Religious refugees are different from financial [economic] refugees. They are not necessarily poor. That kind of status or stigma is attached to you for the rest of your life. Even outside, I don't like to talk to people that I'm a refugee. (Informal interview, Shahrooz)

Similarly, Payam was hesitant about being identified as a refugee, although he would not deny it.

People don't have that detachment, don't have that free mind about it. A refugee doesn't necessary means someone poor. I had people questioning me whether I had a fridge back at home, whether I had electricity back at home. It's very stereotype. In a way, it's very hard for me. That's why my feelings come, not wanting to associated myself as refugee. I don't want to deny it, but [I] try not to use that word in my conversation as much as possible. (Payam)

It was interesting when Shahrooz suggested that other refugees might be more appropriate for my research because, unlike refugees, he had a career and was not financially dependent on the government.

I don't consider myself as refugee – refugees really depend on the government for payment, they don't work, but I have my own money and my work. You might want to interview other refugees. I know about how other refugees from Afghanistan, Somalia are like. I knew some Persians who are very poor in Iran, they don't know the language, or had no work and maybe you can talk to them. (Informal interview, Shahrooz)

The perception of other people that he was not really a refugee because he had lived in Australia for a long time also reinforced Shahrooz's assertion that he and his family were not "true" refugees.

Seventeen years ago [when I came], there wasn't any media about refugees. [Now], they think that refugees are new to the country, people who are coming on boat. So, they don't think of us as refugees. It came out as conversation with my colleagues. "How long have you been here?" I said, "Seventeen years." "You are one of us now." I asked, "What difference does it make?" "If you are one year here, you are not one of us." To them [Australians], it's important how you integrate with them, how you connect with them. (Informal interview, Shahrooz)

Shahrooz further described how he *integrated* and *connected* with others.

At work, I don't really connect with guys who like footy. But I pretend I like footy, I show myself I am interested, and I know some of the teams. They also talk about politics, I listen to them. They think you should listen first, and I play a bit of workplace politics. If I show I am not interested, then they think I am one of the people they see on TV. They never asked me if I am refugee or not. (Informal interview, Shahrooz)

Zarrin, aged 74 years, bluntly and adamantly refused to be identified as a refugee. It should be noted that Zarrin's interview was not included in the current research data as she had arrived under the Special Humanitarian Program. She saw herself as a migrant who voluntarily joined her son. However, her comment is included here to demonstrate her awareness of the negative stereotypes associated with refugees. In her opinion, refugees entered Australia "illegally," whereas migrants had visas to enter Australia.

When I said I'm a migrant, I mean that I left my country legally. I have visa. I've got government permission. But some people, they come illegally, then they suffered, then they said, "So long." Gradually they get visa. I came by plane legally from my country to here. Some people, they illegally enter borders. I think that's the only difference between us. (Zarrin)

Zarrin's statement confirmed the existence of the stigma of being "illegal" that has been perpetuated by the media. In Zarrin's opinion, legality was the sole determinant of whether a person was a migrant or a refugee. As well, Mariam, who was accustomed to the "bad image" of refugees in her country of origin, tried to forget that she was a refugee.

Makes me sad when I think about being a refugee. I try to forget I am a refugee here. I try to get on like Australian citizen, or I feel that this [Australia] is my country because I don't like this word "refugee." There were many refugees who come into my country [Iraq], so we have a bad image about refugees, they are poor people, or they are not educated, they don't have a place. I think that is the same image here about refugees from the Australian people. (Mariam)

As shown, stereotypes took away the individuality of the refugees and ignore the reality that refugees came from diverse backgrounds. The stereotype that refugees were destitute and uneducated was challenged by Payam. Payam also highlighted the pain he felt when the term "illegal" was used indiscriminately on refugees: "It really hurts me after so many years of talk about refugees, there is still misunderstanding about who is a refugee. [A] refugee doesn't choose."

Being [a] refugee does not always mean being poor – that's a stigma. Refugees could be very wealthy people, with university degrees, professors and doctors. Media can be very bias in the way they present refugees. One of the biggest thing that really hurts me is the continuous use of the word "illegal," "illegal migrant," "illegal people," "illegal asylum seekers." There is a huge reluctance from the public to express their views on media and the media editor to use the word "refugees" and "asylum seekers" without any attachment. (Payam)

In the preceding excerpt, Payam attaches the terms "illegal" and "queue-jumpers" to the refugee stigma. With regards to the term "queue-jumper," Mares (2001), in his book, *Borderline: Australia's treatment of Refugees and Asylum Seekers*, accused the government of creating the notion of a "queue-jumper." Mares blamed the Minister for Immigration, Mr Ruddock, for giving new impetus to the term by combining Australia's onshore and offshore refugee program into one category, which implied that every "boat person" who obtained refugee status denied a visa to a refugee who was processed offshore. The adverse consequence of the refugee stigma was further elaborated by Payam.

Media will throw blankets and say "illegals." Recently I have noticed only the word "illegal," no longer they said "illegal refugees," just "illegal." To me it's very hurting, it's very bias, and that is not at all informative to anyone, and it creates that stigma again, that stereotype and the problems that come with it – brings bigotry, brings unnecessary bitterness towards refugees. (Payam)

In Payam's opinion, the biased presentation of the state of the refugees was reflected by the lack of a forum to give refugees their own voice.

Another part that always hurts me is there is no forum when all of these [are] happening. It's only one side; there is no forum for those asylum seekers to say their points – why we are here, why we are doing this. I am not supporting all these at all, but I am saying there is no forum, there is no way for them to have the attention of other people through media to talk about the issues. (Payam)

From his studies, Payam understood that the White Australia Policy was still in place until a few years before he arrived.

I heard many migrants who came to Australia, who went on the radio, wrote letters to paper, and all that, yeah, we have to wait our turn, we have to do this and that, we come here and trying to queue. Oh, good on you, you know, that was a choice. But people like me, it wasn't our choice.... Probably a few years before I came, it was the very first time that refugees were accepted from the Middle East. The White Policy was put aside, and Australia can handle Middle Eastern people as well. (Payam)

In his book, Mares (2001) echoed Payam's sentiments. The author emphasised the bias and insufficient coverage from the media with regards to the plight of the detainees in Australia. He specifically pointed out an incident at Curtin detention centre in February 2000, where a group of Iraqi men sewed their lips together in protest against being detained and the appalling conditions they lived in. Any news reports of this protest were dependent upon the official version from the Department of Indigenous and Multicultural Affairs (DIMA) in Canberra. He noted that overall, detail, context, and analysis from the media were thin, and the Curtin protest did not prompt the media to investigate the issues of detainee welfare and conditions. At the end of 2000, *The Australian* newspaper gave attention to the detention issue, and the Australian Broadcasting Corporation (ABC) followed suit. Mares also lamented that the media had uncritically applied the language of the Minister of Immigration and Multicultural Affairs, that is, it was not "asylum seekers" that were the subject of reports but "illegal immigrants" or simply "illegals." He also suggested that the lack of coverage in the media reflected just how effectively the federal government had imposed a black-out on any news from the six detention centres in Australia. In a similar vein, some authors (e.g., Ang, 2003; Brawley, 2003) noted that the mentality of the White Australia policy persisted despite the demise of its legal and formal-political structures. In this study, Ho also noticed a lack of discussion on the well-being of asylum seekers in the detention centres. He contrasted this issue with September 11, an event which everyone knew and talked about.

If people are helpful towards them, you hear it, not just from myself, but everyone you talk to, they will bring it up; it's like a common subject. And like say the September 11, everybody knows about it and everybody talks about it, whereas this, everybody knows about it, but nobody talks about it. (Ho)

The refugee identity could also emerge from the consciousness of having escaped one's homeland. In Payam's case, he considered his refugee identity to be persistent even though he had resided in Australia for over fifteen years. He characterised his enduring refugee identity as involving "no rest," and he continued to struggle with the fact that he had escaped.

When you say born into a country, once you tried to escape from the system because you can no longer try to change it. It's just like when a child runs away. The child may go back to the house, the child may be accepted to somebody

else's house, but the fact that that child ran away once, the memory will always stay. I escaped – I always have to deal with my conscience. Could I have stayed and fought it? Did I do something wrong by escaping? The thought and the feeling is always there. (Payam)

Payam's consciousness of being a refugee also led him to believe that he was less deserving than other people.

Maybe I should be the one who should sacrifice more when there is hardship because after all these people allowed me in. I can't bring myself to say it's my right to come here ... if there is a ration, I probably would feel that I have to let go of my portion for the sake of the others here because these are the people who let me in. And that conscious of being a refugee will always be with me, the fact that I received something. (Payam)

Although Payam was rationally aware that the Australian government could easily afford to assist all refugees financially, he explained that the public would choose to see refugees as a problem, especially during times of economic hardship.

There is still a bit of hiccup, hardship, especially economic lifestyles, people see refugees as a problem. And I will feel no matter what I do, at the end of it, I will be confronted with that. I'll be told, "We let you in, you have to be thankful for us." I hope that day will not come. I hope that I will be proven wrong. (Payam)

Conversely, the lack of any perceived prejudice and discrimination dramatically decreased the refugees' identification with the negative aspects of the *refugee identity*. For instance, Nadia readily relinquished her refugee identity and no longer saw herself as a refugee because she perceived a positive reception in Australia and saw herself to be equal to others. As well, because she had, over the years, listened to the stories of other refugees, her own story faded (see section 4.6.1). Nadia reported feeling like a refugee and felt "labelled" in her country of origin because of the discrimination she perceived. Thus, Nadia's refugee identity was only transient and existed only as part of her pre-migration experience.

It was a huge difference comparing the time I was a refugee in former Yugoslavia because I felt more "labelled" there. When you are labelled as a refugee, you are different and you feel like that people look at you, like you have label written on your head. And here, I didn't feel that, I just feel like a normal person, not a refugee. I didn't feel that I was not welcome. (Nadia)

Due to the prevalent refugee stigma in the larger society, the refugees often encountered prejudice from others. An example of perceived prejudice is presented in the following

excerpt by Payam who explained why he would rather be a voluntary migrant or a tourist than a refugee. He perceived a change in some people's attitudes towards him when they realised he was a refugee.

I suppose the stigma, the stereotype attached to being refugee here. I feel that people start to either feel pity or not wanting to associate. I had a feeling people don't act normally after hearing you are refugee, either they feel pity, "Oh, poor you" or they might go the other way and said, "He is one of them," you know, "free loaders." It's very hard to find a middle ground most of the time. (Payam)

Payam subsequently became reluctant to be identified as a refugee because of his fear of being excluded and not being part of the Australian community.

Not feeling embarrassed but not wanting too much to identify myself as a refugee. I guess I want to be more a part of the community here, and if I identify myself as a refugee, I won't be a part of it. I will be looked at differently. (Payam)

Prejudiced attitudes could be hidden as those who held such attitudes might not verbalise them. However, certain inferences could be made from their responses towards refugees. As inferred from Payam's comments, people who held prejudiced attitudes tended to avoid the refugees, feel pity for them, or make certain stereotypical comments.

They probably won't say much. People are trying to hide their feelings. But when the conversation starts in a friendly manner, and all of a sudden after they know I am a refugee, the other side doesn't want to continue. If there is a chance, they walk away, or [say,] "Must have been devastating, must have been horrible" and continues, and nobody tries to, before applying any judgement or giving any indication, find out. The pity comes first. (Payam)

In contrast to the majority of the participants, Aziza took pride in being a refugee even though she arrived in Australia with fake documents and was detained for one year. This was because she saw her own progress in acquiring English skills and the way she built trust in her relationships with people of diverse backgrounds. It could also be due to her relatively short time in Australia (i.e., three and a half years), and thus she had yet to perceive serious rejection. Aziza saw her own struggles and accomplishments and readily embraced the positive aspects of the refugee identity.

Some friends are refugees. When they have been here for a while, they deny they were refugees. They don't have confidence [in] themselves and with other people, especially the image Australian people have about refugees. Even sometimes they said they have been here for 10 years, which they have not. I am not like that, I know what I am doing, and I am really proud. I am really proud of being a refugee, being on the refugee side to see what it is really like. Just make a

balance [between] the differences, I can live anywhere, I can fit in anywhere. I have experienced both sides, being in Australia, being in Africa, being in refugee camp, being in detention, and I feel that I can understand everyone. (Aziza)

As inferred, portrayal of refugees in the media had largely ignored the reality that refugees in Australia came from diverse backgrounds. The refugee stigma appeared to undermine the refugees' process of *adapting to minimise SEI* as they felt separated from the larger society when they were being viewed in a negative light.

5.2.6.5.2 Perceived racial discrimination

Perceived racial discrimination constituted a real problem for some refugees in this study. However, it was found that the experience of racially motivated discrimination was not purely a refugee experience. For instance, individuals from Middle Eastern backgrounds regardless of whether they were voluntary migrants, overseas students, Australian-born, or refugees could be targets for racial discrimination in Australia. A few participants made the distinction between perceiving discrimination because of their cultural/ethnic backgrounds and perceiving discrimination because of their status as refugees. For instance, Shahrooz, who adapted well in Australia and spoke English fluently, explained that the discrimination he perceived was not due to his refugee status but due to his Middle Eastern background.

The problem is racial rather than refugee. People won't take it against you if you are refugees, but they will take it against you if you are from the Middle East. They have an idea about how they think we view Westerners. Once they know I am from Iran, they change their attitude – they avoid me or don't want to associate with me. Once, a woman said to me, "You bloody Asians, you take our place in university." I said, "Excuse me. I am only in year 10." (Informal interview, Shahrooz)

Shahrooz further explained what he thought was the cause of racism.

The problems that I am facing now have nothing to do with me being a refugee or anything like that. It's just that unfortunately there are elements of racism in the society, but it's not something that people have been feeling like that all the time. It's something that they get into their minds from watching TV, or hearing horrible stories happened to, for example, America or to the Westerners. (Shahrooz)

Ming, a Vietnamese Australian, shared similar sentiments to Shahrooz.

I think there is racism; that is true. Whether because we are refugees, I don't think so, not that true. I think it's racism. Well, from what they say, yeah, things like "go home" whatever. Refugees don't have a choice. (Ming)

Ho gave the following example of racism he experienced in Australia at 22 years of age.

My friend and I, he's Malaysian, had pizza and a group of [four] guys drove past and started swearing at us, "You ching chong China man, you go back to your own country," so we just swore at them. They drove off, and so we said "Idiots." Then they came back with bat, pipes, screw driver, and they started belting us. And then my friend got really hurt, cracked skull, and then I got a bit of injury. My friend was just blood everywhere. And I got the scar from them from here [his ribs], so cannot forget it. (Ho)

When requested to give an example, Mariam describes her perceived racism in the following excerpt.

When I drive my car in the street, many times I saw many people are making many mistakes, but because they don't put on any scarf or they are wise people, nobody make [sic] any attention. But with me, without any mistakes, sometimes the people are accusing me when I am driving my car. They try to show me some bad sign or some pig sign without any reason. (Mariam)

Fariba perceived her Middle Eastern background as a barrier for her in obtaining a job.

I think people feel a bit insecure and intimidated employing people from different background, especially Middle East background. So that's now my personal attitude – hopefully one day it will change. But at the moment, I am very sure that's the reason now I don't have a job. (Fariba)

In *The Age*, Gordon (2002) cited Alloush, who reported that an Arab woman applying for a job using her Arabic name did not get an interview. However, she reapplied using a different name and was offered an interview and the job. In a similar vein, Fariba was advised by her Australian friends to change her family name to one that was less Arabic.

My Australian friends usually have been telling me and advising me that maybe I should change my family name, and they have been very honest with me. And they are the ones who made me think a bit now the way I think today because that [discrimination] was real, and they knew the situation and on what basis employers would employ people. They said that maybe you should change your family name to something which is more common or less Arabic. (Fariba)

Thus, perceived racial discrimination constituted a real problem in the refugees' process of *adapting to minimise SEI* as they encountered racist verbal and physical attacks,

perceived more difficulties in obtaining employment, and perceived that others avoid associating with them.

5.2.6.5.3 Perceived rejection towards the refugees' immigrant status

In this study, the majority of the refugee participants perceived that any discrimination against them came about either because they were refugees or they had a Middle Eastern or Asian background. In the case of Ania, she perceived that her immigrant status led others to treat her like a second class citizen.

And I just always felt that we are second class citizens, something like this which is totally wrong. Sometimes even I think, even today I think, we are still different, you know, and some people treat us as if we are second class citizen. (Ania)

Ania provided an example of her perceived discrimination at her son's school.

When I went to school about my son, once they realised that I am not born here, and they just start to ignore me, I had that feeling. For example, my surname is typical Polish. Some people, they don't even try to pronounce it, they just ignore it. Once someone ignores your name, you feel that they ignore you. (Ania)

Ania further spoke of her perceived discrimination at her workplace.

Sometimes they discriminate against me at work because of my background. They don't give you the same chance that they give other people. You have to work harder to be recognised, much much harder. For example, take it easy like some of my colleague, I wouldn't work like that, they would just sack me if I did. But for them there is always place, always excuses. For us immigrants, there is no excuse; we have to be the best to be good. (Ania)

Ania's sentiments were not shared by Nadia who perceived herself to be equal to everyone else in society. Even though Nadia was confronted with a negative remark, she construed it as a one off incident. The incident had not fazed her.

I had only one bad experience with a lady. She was screaming. I only picked up "speak English, blah blah." I didn't take that so seriously because it was obvious that she was drunk. I didn't feel that people look at me differently because still I have very strong accent, and I know that they know that I am not Australian when they see me or when I talk. I don't feel that I can't do something or somebody looks at me differently because I am not Australian. I felt that I have the same rights or opportunities as other people. (Nadia)

I have perceived another factor which could have contributed to Nadia's sense that she was equal to others. Other than her accent, there appeared to be no apparent physical feature that would vastly distinguish her from other Anglo-Australians. Her appearance

and skin tone were not particularly Middle Eastern, Asian, nor African. She could easily be considered an Anglo-Saxon Australian. As well, there was no way of knowing she was a refugee based on her physical features.

5.2.6.5.4 Recurrent self-environment incongruity

In this study, the concept of *recurrent self-environment incongruity* was espoused to refer to the SEI some refugees experienced in Australia as a consequence of re-experiencing rejection. *Recurrent SEI* should be differentiated from the initial SEI in Australia, which was derived from experiencing eco-sociocultural differences. For some participants, their previous *fear of persecution* and the emotions experienced during pre-migration SEI re-emerged when they were confronted with unwelcoming responses from certain individuals in Australia. These concerns were the reason refugees escaped their homeland in the first place. The re-emergence of the fear of persecution was further translated into *recurrent SEI*. Emotions associated with *recurrent SEI* included feeling vigilant, feeling unsafe and vulnerable, having a fear of being wrongfully accused, becoming terrorism suspects, and being unable to live a normal life.

I propose that in recent times, *recurrent SEI* primarily arose out of having perceived a resurgence of rejection from the Australian social environment that was set against the socio-political backdrop of events in the early 1990s (Gulf war), the year 2001 (in particular the issue of border protection after the *Tampa* incident, the aftermath of the September 11 terrorist attacks on the United States, the “children overboard” incident, and the federal election), and the year 2002 (i.e., the Bali bombing), as well as the year 2003 (i.e., Australia’s participation in the war against Iraq). These events are elaborated in Appendix E. It was revealed that certain individuals from the public magnified the cultural and racial differences in refugees as an aftermath of certain global events such as September 11. This often resulted in feelings of vulnerability and being unsafe in Australia. For instance, the current war in the Middle East and the way media reported these events further worsened the racial discrimination Shahrooz perceived.

I know many Australians are patriotic; they are helping out the war with Middle East. Those times are the worst times for the Middle Easterners. Maybe you introduce yourself, they know your accent is not Australian; they make a connection between you and what they see on TV. They don't care if you are

refugee or without refugee status, they first ask about where you are from. The stigma is more attached to nationality or country of birth. (Informal interview, Shahrooz)

Shahrooz experienced discrimination following the 2003 war against Iraq and decided to return to Perth.

When the war between Iraq and America broke, people thought I was from Iraq. They have a really slow way of understanding, of distinguishing between Iran and Iraq. There comes a point that this girl was sitting, and I walked into the class, and there was no other place that I could sit. So, I sat next to this girl, and suddenly she called me very rude word ... It basically made me very very upset. The lecturer couldn't continue, and he could see that I was upset. I walked out because I couldn't bear it. (Shahrooz)

Eventually, Shahrooz left another city in Australia in order to return to Perth because of the racism he faced at work.

To tell you the truth, one of the reasons I left my job and just come to Perth was the same problem [racism] emerging there. One of the teachers told me that I was just the person that they were waiting for to express their hatred because there wasn't any Middle Eastern person working in that school, so he said that, "You are just the guy that we all love to hate." (Shahrooz)

Issues of terrorism in the Western countries after September 11 had a negative impact on refugees of Middle Eastern backgrounds. They appeared to be easy targets as they had a distinct appearance and some were differentiated by their clothes.

Some people don't have any ideas about this religion [Islam] – why we put a scarf, or why we cover our body. So somebody have a bad or a wrong idea about Muslim people, especially after September 11 event. A few people look different[ly] at Muslims, especially Muslim women because we put a scarf so the people recognised us. So some individuals, I don't think from all the society, but it happens to me many times, they look down on you. (Mariam)

As well, it was demonstrated in a study that Arab and Muslim Australians experienced an increase in offensive remarks and physical violence against them following the September 11 terrorist attacks on the United States and the Bali bombings ("Muslims report," 2004). A key finding in the study (cited in "Muslims report," 2004), which involved describing the experiences of 1,400 participants in 69 focus groups held across Australia in 2003, was that 90% of female respondents reported experiencing racist abuse or violence since September 11. The study (as cited in "Muslims report," 2004) also stated that after September 11, most participants experienced an increase in the

level of discrimination and vilification. The key finding from "Muslims report" (2004) was echoed in this study. As an example, Mariam recounted an incident that took place after September 11, which upset her.

After September 11, I was shopping at Target. When we went out of the shopping centre, I used to open my bag to the security to check. A very old man, he was sitting beside the security, and when I opened my bag, the old man said, "Do you have any machine gun?" It was very impolite behaviour. I feel very sad and upset, but I couldn't say something. (Mariam)

As well, in the wake of September 11, Payam could not help feeling targeted as a terrorism suspect. The fear of being wrongfully accused was reawakened in Payam.

It's very uneasy as far as the issue about terrorism goes because everybody is now a suspect. I often wondered how many times I have been watched when I go to the shops. When I go and buy fertiliser, I am wondering whether I am going to be counted. If I discuss it with someone outside like another Australian, I wonder often what they are going to think: "Maybe he has got something to hide, that's why he is worried about." But when you are a refugee, you always worry. I didn't do anything wrong, I ended up being persecuted. I ended up in jail. (Payam)

Payam could not help worrying that others might misjudge him. As Payam perceived that others were suspicious of him, he was unable to live a normal life in Australia.

Believe me, I have the right to be worried about it, to be misjudged. People could come up because they haven't experienced it, "If you haven't got anything to hide, what are you worried about?" But it's not as easy as that. When we plant the seed of mistrust, that's the bad thing, that's something that will never be changed. It's like telling a person, "Don't think about a pink coloured elephant." If I say something about it, people think obviously there is something wrong. So [I] can no longer lead a normal life once the seed of mistrust is planted. (Payam)

As shown, the emotions associated with recurrent SEI were most apparent in Payam. Payam highlighted his recurrent SEI as feeling different from others and perceiving others to view him as different from other Australians. He highlighted his feelings of vulnerability as being an easy target if things would go wrong. Specifically, his feelings of vulnerability emerged out of the fear of being an easy target for hate crimes and other forms of discrimination. His recurrent SEI was manifested in terms of a strong refugee identity. He was acutely aware that others would not want to associate with him.

I know I am accepted as long as I do the right work, but I know I will be pointed at straight away as soon as something goes wrong. People will always see the difference in me and differences I have with the rest of the society here in Australia. [I am] a target for hate crime, a target for abuse, a target to be

discriminated against, not in a formal way. Nobody comes out and say, "I will not give you the job because of that." It will be a lot easier for public to try to avoid me. (Payam)

Payam further articulated his emotions as a refugee. In the following excerpt, he explains why he continued to feel like a refugee.

I will always be a refugee. I will be someone who jumped the line, run away, came here, and that will always be with me. I know deep down I have to accept it – I have to accept that things could go wrong here, and people could go against me even though I am Australian citizen, even though I have done so many good things, a lot of voluntary work. No matter what I do, I know that if things go wrong, I will be easy target. And things that happened last two or three years don't help me to think otherwise. (Payam)

When asked about what took place over the last two or three years, Payam explained that he knew about some people who still received hate mail, even though they had lived and worked in Australia for a long time. He further emphasised that his refugee identity would endure regardless of his length of residence in Australia. As Payam understood it, being a refugee was about having to suffer and not being accepted by other people. This was what he meant by a persistent refugee identity.

I mean knowing that there were people who lived in this country for such a long time and a country that we did a lot for, they received hate letters and this and that ... I have to accept that anything could happen, and I am still a refugee no matter how long I stay here, I am not like the same person who was born here, who chose to live a life here. (Payam)

The fear of being an easy target, which added to Payam's vigilance around other people, was reflected by his words: "I know it is going to be around the corner." He also elaborated what he meant by being an "easy target."

Australia is probably wealthier 15 years ago. Because of the hardship and the things that are happening around the world, [Australia is] going through a few periods of change. But if you look at it at the topic level, it's always said that it's because of the migration of the refugees. And in the scale of things, it's nothing. A couple of thousand [people], boats full of asylum seekers really is not going to make big changes to the budget of a country like Australia. But it's very easily seen that way by the public who doesn't know really what is happening and that is what I mean by being easy target. (Payam)

In sum, recurrent SEI in this study was presented predominantly in refugees of Middle Eastern origin due to a series of global and political events in the years 2001, 2002, and

2003. Here, the refugee stigma and racism played a major role in contributing to the refugees' experience of *recurrent SEI*.

5.2.6.5.5 Strategies applied to cope with perceived rejection in Australia

The refugee participants continued to live with and cope with their perceived rejection and *recurrent SEI*. Some of their coping strategies included assigning blame to others, avoidance, becoming indifferent, rationalisation, acceptance, and compensation. For instance, Mariam coped with racist comments by allocating the blame to those who held prejudiced attitudes towards her. She also *avoided* thinking about these episodes.

There are many things. I try to forget it. These kind of people, I think to ignore them. I think this is the best way. I think this is their problem, not my problem to look at me in this way. Because I know myself, where I am from, and what I did for my life. I try to ignore them. It's their problem. (Mariam)

Ming, a Vietnamese Australian, experienced some racist remarks at times when he walked on the streets. He dealt with it by a change of attitude. By realising that Australia was indeed his home now, he became *indifferent* to these racist remarks.

When you think this is your home, you don't care what other people say, you stop thinking about caring what people say. I mean you still get people who drive past, shouting at you. Go home, chink. Not so much recently because I stopped walking around so much. I just don't care, stopped caring. (Ming)

Based on his perception and understanding, Payam faced some facts on the vulnerability of being a refugee and his *rationalisation* helped him to work towards acceptance. In the following excerpt, Payam explains how his persistent negative refugee identity came about and highlights his understanding that suffering was part of the refugee experience.

Being refugee by itself, you surrender all your rights and everything else when you tried to escape. There is no protection for you because there is no state for you. No one owns you. You belong to no one. I came to this understanding that a refugee must suffer regardless, suffering is part of it. It's character of it. It just like red paint is red; it's anything else it's not the word "paint." So is refugee, refugee is suffering, not being accepted and having all these challenges is part of it. (Payam)

Payam explained that he had to *accept* this difficult life situation in Australia.

In a way, I have accepted it. I knew this is the case and last couple of years especially, it emphasised this viewpoint to me. There is no rest for refugees, no matter how far you go, how much you settled, until [your] children grew up – they become free, they become part of the nation. For that refugee person, once

you are [a] refugee, for the rest of your life, you are refugee. And media hasn't helped me to overcome that thought and that feeling. (Payam)

Ho, who was previously attacked by a group of racist men, decided to adopt the strategy of *avoidance* (by driving or walking away) should a similar future situation occur again.

A few of the incidences, better not to get hurt, doesn't matter if I can hurt them or they can hurt me. I rather just drive away or walk away. I mean, it's not worth the hassle, to go through a full on argument that come to bats and hammers and screw drivers and any other instruments that they can find and come and get you. (Ho)

Additionally, Shahrooz noted that some refugees tried to *compensate* by striving for material success or by changing their physical appearance in order to detach themselves from the refugee identity.

We don't feel like refugees at all. People might ask you about your accent and realise where you are from and have certain stigmas, but we are not affected by that. But other refugees might be upset if they were asked where they were from or when people have stigmas. Some refugees tried to be blonde or improve their lifestyles so that they are more successful than Australians, so that others won't classify them as refugees. (Informal interview, Shahrooz)

It should be noted that although perceived rejection appeared to negatively influence the process of *adapting*, perceived rejection itself did not preclude the development of a sense of belonging in Australia. This was exemplified in Payam who interacted with his environment and felt a deep sense of belonging (see section 5.3.4: Motivation). It appeared that his motivation had overcome the negative effects of perceived rejection.

5.2.6.6 Worrying about those left behind

In this study, two refugees spoke of their distress for those they left behind in their homeland. These worries divert their attention away from their process of *adapting*. In the following example, Morathi was extremely worried about the conditions of the refugees in Africa.

You worry about people who are still back home in Africa. They are still going through police harassment, they are still going through being detained, even they are running for safety to the neighbouring country, the neighbouring country still harassing them, detaining them, deporting them. It's a public secret now that the government is doing this, and then Amnesty International is doing what it's supposed to do. But you're just here, you are okay, but inside you are not okay. It really hurts psychologically. (Morathi)

Certain events could exacerbate the refugees' anxiety for those they left behind. For example, the war with Iraq, after the Howard government joined the "Coalition of the Willing," was declared on 21 March 2003 (Appendix E). This crisis heightened Mariam's fears for her relatives in Baghdad one week after the Coalition attacked Iraq.

I can't explain my feelings. I am so worried about them. I feel very sad and upset. I don't know what the future will bring for us about this war because war means destroy everything. And we have many many of my relatives there. Actually I contacted them, just worried that war has begun. I think they are uncontactable now, I am sitting all the time in front of the TV and watching the news. Sometimes it's driving me crazy this news because I don't know. Because they are bombing the capital city, and we don't know what is going on. I am so worried about them. I was hoping the war would be the last option. (Mariam)

5.2.6.7 Poor health

Poor health, which was found to be a common complaint among older refugees, affected the way the refugees adapted and enjoyed their lives in Australia.

I am tired with my body. Sometimes, Mr X takes me to hospital, help me little bit but not much – too many people on waiting list. But what can I do for me? Nothing, because I try this now, one day good, two days not good because arthritis not gone, just painkillers. Like this, I get too old, I get too old, day by day is worse and worse and worse. I am now problem because I understand now, I am not baby, I understand it's worse and worse. (Tuba)

Especially for the older people, blood pressure, blood sugar. They are not malnourished. They feed themselves very good, but I think they need to change their habits, eating habits. (Sabrina)

Mike received full treatment for his malaria after he resettled in Perth. At the time of being interviewed, Mike continued to suffer from frequent headaches that affected his concentration and attendance at school. He described his headache as "killing" him, he felt "weak" and "faint," and things looked a "blur."

I often get headaches. Read it, disappear, read it, disappear, I try like concentrate, still disappear. After like few weeks, four five weeks to get into my head. Then I will be able to pass the exam. That's why my mum said that, "You have been affected by malaria, it affects your brain." When I get headache, my eyes hurt as well, I didn't even read or anything. Yesterday, I went to the nurse, one session, I couldn't do. (Mike)

5.3 PERSONAL FACTORS INFLUENCING THE PROCESS OF ADAPTING

Intrinsic or personal factors influencing the process of *adapting* refer to factors that are not contextual and are more personal to refugees which affect their process of *adapting to minimise SEI*. These intrinsic factors were identified as preparedness, presence of trauma, resilience, and motivation.

5.3.1 PREPAREDNESS

As derived from the findings, preparedness refers to a sense of familiarity with the Australian environment that has been enhanced by pre-migration exposure to an environment that is similar to Australia. This familiarity helped to reduce a sense of strangeness in the refugees when they settled in Australia. Preparedness reduced the refugees' experience of SEI. For instance, Emanuel commented on the familiarity he perceived in Australia because he had lived among people of diverse backgrounds in the refugee camps. This facilitated his adaptation to Australia.

Because I was living with different people in refugee camp who have different cultural backgrounds, religious background, and personal differences too. Most of my refugee life, I live with different people, and they used to speak different languages. And I learn a lot of languages too – Swahili, Somali, Omoro, Amharic, and English. When I came here, there was nothing new to me other than roads to go somewhere. (Emanuel)

Payam reported that his ease in learning English was derived from his background in Farsi literature as well as his familiarity with reading and written materials.

One of the reason why I achieve so much in English is because of my background in my own literature, my Farsi literature because I loved it, I studied it, and I used to do my own composition and understand it, read a lot of books. So I wasn't illiterate in a way, I had a background of studying, literature and reading and experiencing with written things wasn't unknown to me. (Payam)

In addition, Payam attributed his progress to having the opportunity to practise speaking English during his transitional phase. This opportunity prepared him for his subsequent settlement in Australia.

And because of two years being in Pakistan, also, I lived with people who were there, so I picked up the language from them. So I think my mind has already shifted to this – I don't need translation. I just have to learn the language as a baby. That is probably why when I came here, I started communicating with people, pushing myself to talk to people and made it easy. (Payam)

Thus, preparedness appeared to reduce the incongruity between the self and the refugees' new environment, thereby enhancing the refugees' process of *adapting*.

5.3.2 THE PRESENCE OF TRAUMA

As inferred from the findings, the presence of trauma could impede the process of *adapting*. It should be noted that the focus of this study was not specifically on recovery from trauma per se, and thus I did not set out to explore the existence of traumatic experiences, hidden traumas, and prior traumas that were unrelated to the refugee experience. However, in previous chapters, I have alluded to these concepts when they emerged from the data. The presence of *traumatic experiences*, such as the loss of family members, and being tortured and imprisoned, amplified and delayed the process of *coming to terms with the past*. This process was amplified in the sense that refugees who had traumatic experiences engaged in the phases of denial, anger, and depression much more intensely than refugees whose experiences were not as traumatic.

Some were in prisons and tortured and spent like nine months in prison in my country. It can be that they really had some reasons [to be stuck in the past]. Some people really have very bad personal experience like losing close family members or prison. (Nadia)

Nadia further explained that because her experiences were not as traumatic, she dealt with her past issues more easily.

I lost my property, and I lost my country, and I was refugee, but I was lucky enough that I didn't lose any close family members – that could be huge difference. I don't have this thing that I hate somebody, and I don't blame like anybody and I can, maybe it was easy to, overcome that. (Nadia)

It was reported in a recent study by the University of Western Sydney that African refugees had more resettlement problems compared to refugees from Afghanistan and Iraq. This was due to the trauma they experienced and their lengthy stay in refugee camps (Community Relations Commission for a multicultural NSW, 2006). It should be noted that in this study, it was not possible to ascertain interethnic differences. However, it was clear that in general, the presence of trauma inhibited the process of *adapting*.

As a consequence of the nature of trauma and the scope of this research, I did not enquire about the existence of *hidden trauma* and *prior trauma* in the participants unless

they volunteered such information. In this study, *hidden trauma* refers to trauma that has not yet been expressed or trauma that is denied by refugees because they are not ready to deal with the emotions associated with it. For the purpose of this study, *prior trauma* refers to trauma unrelated to the refugee experience and commonly arising from other horrific experiences such as being abused or neglected in childhood either within the family or by someone else. Hidden trauma and prior trauma were only explored in one participant, namely Fariba. Her case will be illustrated later in this section. Although Morathi indicated that he was an orphan and his mother died when he was born, he declined to comment on this issue upon questioning. He did manifest symptoms arising from traumatic refugee experiences (see section 3.6.1.4.5.2).

Sabrina believed that a major challenge for most adult refugees in the stage of rebuilding was the acquisition of English skills. Issues of trauma could intertwine with issues of rebuilding. Sabrina stated, "It's very hard for them to reach out, very, very hard, they feel maybe ashamed. And maybe other feelings are also involved because they are more focused on settlement ... to provide for their families, for the children." According to Sabrina, the focus of adult refugees was on rebuilding their lives. She described their trauma as "hidden" because they would not talk about it.

The experience that they are going through, it's very much everything to do with settlement. Language is a big, big barrier. Some people have been through hell, like traumatised and tortured, there is lots and lots of hidden trauma. They are raised or brought up trying to live their lives with this – not expressing their worries, their thoughts, and their problems, sort of try to heal themselves, trying to forget about that, they don't talk about it, they don't remind themselves, they don't discuss about that. (Sabrina)

The existence of *prior trauma* and *hidden trauma* were found to compound, complicate, and prolong the challenges faced by the refugees. For instance, prior trauma and hidden trauma could prolong the phase of *unpreparedness* because the refugees were still too overwhelmed and unable to deal with their emotions. Fariba admitted that if it were not for the prior and hidden trauma of child abuse and neglect that she did not share with anyone as a child, being a refugee in itself would not have led her to suppress her painful emotions for 27 years. She further spoke of her inability to find the cause of her initial decision to suppress her emotions.

I just don't know the experience [numbing] is because of my childhood, my dysfunctional family, the [traumatic] incident that happened while I was 6, 7 years old and following which I made the decision that I am not going to talk about it to anyone. And I kept it to myself. I decided that it was hurting too much, so I decided to go numb from age, say 7 till I was 34. About forgetting things, it's really good that we can do that, otherwise we might actually go crazy. I think that if I hadn't made that decision, it was very possible that I would go crazy. (Fariba)

Fariba lingered in the phase of *denial* for a lengthy period while making an effort to rebuild her life in Australia. Her suppression of emotions compounded and complicated the challenges she faced as a university student. She spoke candidly about the underlying *extreme fear* that precluded her from effective learning.

I am sure about the experience [denial]. I read somewhere, if you have fear, extreme fear, you can't learn. Also, met with this educational psychologist, he said, "Happy brain learns better and more effective." In my case, the fear was holding me back from learning. I can now imagine how much I must have forced myself to get my degree. It was very hard for me. (Fariba)

A possible problem associated with persistent numbing was that Fariba had little access to other emotions as all her energy was invested in sustaining her state of denial.

These factors all contributed in me maybe not doing well in my academic. I know that I could have done better, but once you hold fear and all these negative feelings in yourself, then you cannot really do well because you cannot learn. You are using all the energy that you have to stay in that state – don't use it for good learning process. (Fariba)

Fariba's experience was supported in the literature by Day (2002), who stated that the traumatised person experiences exhaustion and lifelessness that are related to the effort of suppressing unacceptable emotions such as rage, fear, panic, and complete disconnection from others. The traumatised person suppresses all emotions to protect and numb oneself, and an enormous amount of energy is needed to do so (Day, 2002). Fariba further described how she cried and became aware of her painful unexpressed emotions, namely fear and displaced anger with regards to her childhood trauma.

I burst into tears. Before I came to Australia, there was a built up of fear and anger. It was all negativity about myself. I always feel a lot of guilt, fear, and anger. Mostly the fear and anger came out. The fear in my life, what people think. The anger, it didn't come out all at once. I realised I had a lot of anger with employers, relatives, everyone, with people. One day I asked myself, "Why am I so angry?" So there was a lot of questions. (Informal interview, Fariba)

It was evident in the findings that refugees' exposure to trauma could add to the burden of having to overcome the traumatic experiences and complicate the stage of *coming to terms with the past*. There was an indication that this complication came about because traumatised refugees remained in this stage for a prolonged period of time, or they skipped over this stage but had to deal with it later. As exemplified by Fariba, the presence of trauma was found to complicate, compound, and prolong the six phases of *coming to terms with the past*. First, her denial or suppression of painful emotions was maintained for 27 years. Second, she reported being very angry with many people and eventually dealt with her fears and painful emotions. Third, she had depression and took anti-depressants to manage it. Her eventual recovery was mirrored by increased visual clarity.

Maybe I just didn't have any fear to look or see because one of the feelings that I had hidden inside, one of the negative feelings that I had was fear, extreme fear. Once I shared with someone my experience, then that fear must have diminished. I could see better. I started seeing colours again, literally just seeing colours again. Dreaming about colours and all the colours of the rainbow. (Fariba)

It was possible that the presence of trauma could lead to a sense of alienation or disconnection from other people and thus excluded the social support needed for recovery. In an informal interview, Fariba confessed that she did not want many friends. "I just didn't want a lot of friends around me. Not everyone that comes to my life can be my friend." The presence of past trauma coupled with stressors arising from intervening major life events, such as unemployment and discrimination, could further impede the process of *adapting*, as in the case with Fariba, who had difficulties consolidating her new identity in Australia.

It should be stressed again that the issue of severe trauma is beyond the scope of this study, and no participant is currently severely traumatised. However, information about severe trauma was provided by shadow data. For example, the research assistant provided second hand information about his traumatised acquaintance. She was a 28 year old refugee woman from Sierra Leone who was deeply disillusioned with the usefulness and sincerity of research on refugees and was very angry that researchers were more concerned about "putting the story on the shelf in the library." She was severely traumatised and was interviewed numerous times over the years in the process

of obtaining her refugee status. Thus, it was not surprising that any form of questioning, including a research interview, was seen as an attempt to "take advantage" of her sufferings. The following comments are excerpts from the research assistant who was in contact with her. The research assistant was quick to point out that the Sierra Leone refugee had generalised her past experiences to all forms of research, including mine.

That people [researchers] are taking advantage of the people [refugees], the problem that we are going through. That they do what helps them but not really trying to reach us, putting the story on the shelf in the library and then sell it. (Comment of the refugee provided by research assistant)

She just said that, "We have gone through a lot of interviews even in Africa. We don't know where, from Germany, from America, from Norway." "They said, 'We are trying to find out the problem of refugees so that they can be helped in a better way,' but we haven't seen any progress after the interview that they give." "We even suspect that the information will be sold back to the government that we have been persecuted by." She failed to see the result of the interview that she has given before. (Research assistant)

The preceding excerpts point to the sensitive nature of research on refugees who have been severely traumatised. It should be noted that multiple losses experienced by severely traumatised refugees, including the loss of trust and the way they dealt with their trauma, have not been thoroughly explored in this study.

5.3.3 RESILIENCE

Some aspects of resilience were demonstrated in the participants and were found to facilitate their adaptation. Resilience refers to the ability to recover from or adapt to misfortune or change (Webster's New Encyclopedic Dictionary, 1993). In this study, resilience in the refugees was demonstrated when they were able to bounce back from adversities, recover from trauma, believed that they could influence change (as opposed to feeling helpless), and had learnt important life lessons from their past experiences. Resilience was further shown when the refugees were able to adjust to their new circumstances, were optimistic in their outlook, had a stable sense of self or hardiness, and were able to endure certain life difficulties that they could not change. Some of these aspects are further explicated as follows.

In this study, self-efficacy or the belief that one has the power to produce change (Webster's New Encyclopedic Dictionary, 1993) was an important aspect of resilience. For instance, Sabrina believed in her ability to learn English in Australia despite discouragement from her community. A community member told her, "You are not [an] Australian; you are not from an English-speaking background." Her response was: "I am not, but I can learn this language, you know." In discovering her ability to make positive changes in her life, Sabrina further stressed the importance of believing in oneself, taking responsibility, and being optimistic.

What I believe? I believe, I believe in myself. I think that you are responsible for your actions. Take responsibility. If I screwed up something, you know, and I go, oh my, this is happening to me. And then, I am trying to look for something good in all that, you know, because in all bad, in everything that happens to everyone, there is something good that you can get. (Sabrina)

Self-efficacy was seen in Aziza who had stayed in the Port Hedland detention centre. Initially, Aziza did not realise she had what it took to learn English: "I have been here such short time and I succeed a lot [in terms of] language that I wasn't expected [to]." Having discovered that she had what it took to make desirable progress in her life, she had a renewed sense of self, and she took pride in her achievement and in her acceptance of life's circumstances. The interview with Aziza stressed the importance of positive experiences that helped shape the sense of self in refugees. Aziza became more inspired to be herself after favourable social interactions with people of diverse backgrounds.

I made good friends, really very good friends. We don't even understand [each other], and we became really close friends, and I am really proud of what I have learnt there. When I came out, I got encouragement from what I have learnt – more confidence, be myself. I went to school first and English classes. I didn't know English at that time, still I am learning. I am really proud of being a refugee – just learning, some path of life. Just accepting, if things happen, it happened, just accepting the way they are. (Aziza)

There was an indication that religious faith was one of the ways that guided the development of resilience in the refugees. For example, Mike spoke about being able to live more peacefully after he developed his spiritual life as a Christian.

Before I have known Jesus Christ, I wasn't that happy. I was like, sometimes there is sadness and everything, fear. But now, after I have been going to that church for five years, I am like spiritual, more powerful. Not powerful, but like, I could handle myself, like not worrying about anything. (Mike)

In the following excerpt, Aziza, a Muslim, speaks of her submission to God's will after she put in her efforts.

Sometimes it's really hard. Sometimes we don't get our dreams the way we wanted. That is what I believe, just try whatever I can, and then if I were to get negative or positive, that is God sent. But I try, and I trust myself, I did what I could. That is one of my beliefs. (Aziza)

Despite feeling homesick and enduring her physical pain everyday, Tuba, who adhered to the Baha'i Faith, found her strength and resilience through focusing on peace, family, and unity.

Sometimes me little bit homesick, little bit upset, but doesn't matter, thank you God, everything is good, thank you Baha'u'llah, and God bless to everybody in Australia. Australia's people [are] beautiful, never, never seen people like this beautiful ... Try, try to myself, stronger, and then help my family and teach my children to be good person to Australia. I try thinking like this, sometimes I am very happy. I am happy because I am Baha'i. I try, I try doing for the peace, and family, and unity. (Tuba)

There was evidence that the *human spirit* rather than a particular religious adherence underpinned the ability to overcome life obstacles or to endure life difficulties. For instance, Sabrina, who admitted that she was not particularly religious, displayed many aspects of resilience, including optimism or the tendency to look on the bright side of life.

I have very high self-esteem. Of course I have my ups and downs, like everyone does, but I am a very happy person. Even if I don't feel happy, I try to see the bright side of war. My character is.... giving me something to go forward. War as in war, you say it is just war, it's not a pretty word, but I also think that probably war has made me a better person. (Sabrina)

It was found that participants who were resilient were less likely to continue to feel like victims who wallowed in self-pity; rather, they strived to make their own lives better. For example, Aziza believed that wallowing in regret could lead to mental illness. She stated, "If I regret, I become mental illness, I stress a lot. I really ended up depressed, depression." As well, Sabrina did not perceive herself to be a victim; instead, she learnt some important lessons from her bad experiences.

I see good. If something bad happened, try to look for something good from all that bad, what you can get that is good. The lowest thing that you can associate with something bad, you probably have learnt something. Or the lowest thing

that you have experienced, that you have learnt through all these. Don't say that it's the end of the world. (Sabrina)

Participants who were resilient tended to express their gratitude for having learnt important life lessons from their experiences, renounced their past losses, and moved on to "new pastures" in their present lives. They derived some positive feelings and attitudes from their refugee experience, including pride in their achievements and in having survived. Their ability to harvest positive emotions from their past experiences appeared to have contributed to the enjoyment of their new lives in Australia.

I learnt how I can be in different cultures in a society, just respect people as human beings and understand who they are no matter what their gender or whatever. I learnt a lot of lessons. I learnt how to communicate with other people whom we don't share any culture, any religion. We don't share anything, just human beings. I learnt how I can build trust. I learnt how I can be a survivor. (Aziza)

Another aspect of resilience was being able to like oneself. Despite living on her own and having to deal with discrimination at times, Aziza liked herself and had a high self-esteem.

I did really very good ... still I don't know the person who I will be, but so far I really like myself. If someone asks me, "How did you get here?" I will tell I am refugee. I am really proud, and I am really proud of what I have done and what I am going to do in my life, like what I am planning to do. (Aziza)

Having resilience also meant that the participants endured, resolved, and accepted certain life difficulties and circumstances. In the case of Payam, he realised what it meant to be a refugee – he had to start his life all over again, he had to come to terms with his past, resolve his refugee identity, and accept his new circumstances in Australia.

I had to start a life all over again, and that is to me what being a refugee means. And every step that you take, you start from the beginning. I was just like a baby growing up, and I have to do this growing up twice to get to this stage. That's to me, is realising I am a refugee, I have to accept it. Certain things are not my choice, and that's the characteristic of being a refugee. (Payam)

Also, for Payam, the experience of discrimination constituted a negative long-term life situation in Australia which was not likely to cease. Payam continued to endure the prejudice he still faced and accepted the possibility of being an easy target for discrimination in Australia.

Deep down I have to accept it, I have to accept that things could go wrong, and people could go against me even though I am Australian citizen, even though I have done so many good things, a lot of voluntary work. No matter what I do, I know that if things go wrong, I will be [an] easy target – a target for hate crime, a target for abuse, a target to be discriminated against, you know. (Payam)

Despite his negative experiences, Payam's optimism, hardiness, and resilience were reflected in his faith that people would grow, learn, and become more accepting towards refugees.

I am pretty sure deep down that this is a sort of phase that will go away, and people will spiritually grow and come to understand and accept and realise. And probably research like this when they are done and published will awaken people to the facts and issues to do with it. (Payam)

5.3.4 MOTIVATION

Motivation was found to be paramount in facilitating the process of *adapting to minimise SEI*. Motivation, which was the result of having a sense of purpose or meaning, was the driving force that moved the refugees forward in the direction of achieving certain desired life goals in Australia. In this study, *having a sense of purpose or meaning* refers to having life directions and therefore making life decisions that promote the refugees' sense of self. This gave rise to determination and motivation to achieve life goals. This sense of purpose, which could still be evolving, directed the refugees towards improving their own lives or others' lives. As inferred from the findings, refugees who were more motivated to adapt in Australia tended to center their energy on the stage of *rebuilding* where they could find their unique sense of connection to life and meaning in Australia (in the form of friends, family, community, career, education, spiritual connection, etc). They made plans for their future and work towards achieving their goals in terms of obtaining work and being successful in relationships. In seeking out their unique sense of meaning and purpose, a few refugees in this study were able to take a step further in *consolidating their identity towards a new life* in Australia. The role of motivation in the stage of rebuilding and the stage of consolidating identity is described in the following sections.

5.3.4.1 The role of motivation in the stage of rebuilding a new life

As noted earlier, participants who were resilient possessed certain attitudes, including persistence in the face of difficulties, patience (including the ability to delay gratification), and optimism. Motivation further helped them to be persistent and get through their challenging times. For instance, Sabrina, who had a sense of purpose in undertaking further education, did not find her journey to be easy. There were times when she felt depressed and doubtful about her own abilities. Her motivation helped her to be patient and persistent despite self-doubt.

I am glad that I am here. It was big step, and I wasn't sure sometimes when you come to this, sort of depressed moments. Could it be better if I stayed over there? Like: "O my God, I will never learn this language, it's so hard." But after all, to myself, all these will be rewarded after a while. Patience is a virtue. (Sabrina)

Witnessing what life might be if one did not obtain an education in Australia could become a motivating force for the refugees. For instance, Mike witnessed how hard his brother worked as a labourer because he did not continue with his education. This increased his resolve to study even harder. Further, his realisation that he was the only one in the family who had the chance to go to school kept his motivation alive.

He [My brother] rolls pipes like 12 hours a day. He is really tired when he comes back, like the job is really hard, he is really dirty. Because of the war, we have to run, not educated. When we come here, we couldn't speak English, we couldn't get a good job. So, he has to work really hard. Sometimes I want to help my family like I am the only one in the family that has been educated properly. My parents say, "You are the only one who has the chance to go to school." I just feel really – help them, I have to study harder. (Mike)

Motivation also sustained the refugees in achieving their goals despite previous failures. For instance, Mike, in a follow-up interview, continued to describe his struggle with his inability to concentrate which badly affected his studies. This setback, however, did not dampen his motivation. Despite having to repeat year 12, he was determined to graduate from high school and get into university. He stated

I am repeating it [TEE] this year. I don't remember things. My brain is not working so well. The other day, I went to buy a car mat, I tried it. I lean on the car, then later drove off and forgot all about it. In biology exam, there were 3 or 4 essays. One was on the central nervous system, I wrote something else, and the teacher said it was out of track. I think I can do better this year. I want to be a geologist. I will be doing three TEE, if I get all 60 above, I will get a chance to go to uni. That will make myself have a future. That is what I want to do. (Mike)

There was evidence that motivation was essential for learning English. For instance, Payam, being a member of an administrative body in which English was crucial, was motivated to learn English as much as possible.

The major, er, in all of these, was being part of the Baha'i administration. I became a member of the assembly about six months after I arrived. I had only a little English, maximum of six weeks of English course. Because in those meetings, things have to be said [in English], I had to continuously try to understand. Because of all the working out and trying to achieve, I had a purpose to learn English as well. (Payam)

Motivation was found to override the effects of age on the process of *adapting*. For example, older refugees who were motivated were more likely to persist in their efforts to acquire English skills. As an example, Tuba, at 63 years of age, persisted with improving her English at TAFE. I was also able to interview her in English.

Encouragement from Anglo-Saxon Australians was also perceived to be a motivating force in the effort to learn English. For example, Sabrina felt validated by the encouragement and acknowledgement she received from Anglo-Saxon Australians.

When you received a compliment from the person who is born here, I mean who is Australian, who is Anglo-Saxon, and who achieved quite a lot in her or his life, they still can see your efforts. And they still say, "Good on you" or "Congratulations to you, coming to a new country, learning a new language, going to school." And it really gives you so much motivation to go forward, so it's a big big help. (Sabrina)

5.3.4.2 The role of motivation in the stage of consolidating identity towards a new life

Motivation was found to be vital in the stage of *consolidating identity towards a new life*, even to the extent of overriding the negative effects of perceived prejudice and discrimination. For instance, perceived rejection notwithstanding, Payam was motivated to interact with his new environment in Australia and found his unique sense of connection and belonging.

After all what is a nationality? A nationality is where you think you belong, something you know about, you understand it, you can feel it, you can close your eyes and imagine it, and you can value its changes and everything. And I think that's what happened to me. (Payam)

Payam further explained that becoming Australian was a natural thing if one was willing to interact with the new environment and experience its changes.

I remember being around friends who have been here. "Do you know this place here and the history of the place?" People looked at me, "How do you know all that?" I said, "You have been here longer than me, or you have been here as long as I am, why don't you go and investigate and find out more?" It's a natural thing if you allow it to happen, if you allow yourself to experience the change in it. If they see it, and they own it in a way, the ownership will come. (Payam)

While Payam desired to integrate into the Australian community, he also explained that some refugees were unmotivated to interact with the new environment and thus did not experience a connection to the environment the way he did.

People who can't, after many years, feel like Australians because they don't go around, they don't see it, they don't experience it, they don't read about it. All they do, I am talking about Persians, as soon as they get into their houses, they read Farsi, they talk Farsi, they don't watch TV related to Australia, Australia current affairs. They prefer having a Persian video on. These things don't help for them to understand and to feel being Australian, being part of Australian community. (Payam)

Additionally, being educated about the process of adaptation could activate the refugees' desire to be a part of the Australian community. For instance, Aziza became aware of many refugee issues in her advocacy course. She had studied the stages of how refugees rebuild their lives in Australia. In order to deal with the present and adjust to her new life, she strongly believed that she should make a *conscious choice* to be one of the Australians.

I am one of them, one of the Australians. If I think that I am not, then I will have a lot of problems living in Australia. If I say I am not one of this society, I will struggle, and it will be hard, very hard for me. Unless I have to accept, and until I am one of them, yeah. So, that is what I believe, [be] involved, be who you are and just, you know, trust them, yeah, I feel this, still I do. (Aziza)

Hage (2002a), in writing about a sense of belonging in Arab-Australians, asserted that while the host societies and the state are responsible for certain crucial mechanisms of inclusion and exclusion that can promote or obstruct economic, socio-political, and cultural belonging, these mechanisms are not the only determinants of migrant belonging. The author explained that there are factors intrinsic to the migrant condition that might obstruct participation and belonging; thus, the migrants themselves should

take responsibility for reducing their effects within their own lives or subcultural environment. In this study, Payam and Aziza clearly demonstrated how they took responsibility and were motivated to participate in Australia's public life.

5.4 SUMMARY

Certain conditions and personal factors were found to influence the basic social psychological process of *adapting to minimise SEI*. The longer the refugees lived in Australia, the more adapted they became. Refugees who arrived in Australia at a younger age invariably adapted to Australia at a faster rate than those who arrived at an older age. An established ethnic community supported the refugees in their adaptation. However, an established ethnic community could also become a source of stress when conformity was expected of the individual refugee who would not comply. Social, psychological, and financial supports eased the refugees in their process of *adapting*. Stressors arising from intervening major life events such as family problems, unemployment, school stress, a death in the family, and perceived rejection were found to impede the refugees' process of *adapting*. The concept of *recurrent self-environment incongruity* was espoused and highlighted in this study to capture the emotions arising from rejection perceived by refugees in Australia. Specifically, political events in the year 2001 (in particular with regards to the issue of border protection after the *Tampa* incident, the aftermath of the September 11 terrorist attacks on the United States, the "children overboard" incident, and the federal election), the year 2002 (the Bali bombing), and the year 2003 (Australia's participation in the war against Iraq) appeared to contribute to the problem of *recurrent SEI* in the refugees.

Preparedness in the individual refugees, or their familiarity with Australia due to previous exposure to a similar environment, was found to reduce the refugees' SEI and thus enhance their adaptation in Australia. The presence of trauma appeared to complicate the refugees' process of *adapting* as they faced the extra burden of having to overcome their traumatic experiences. It was evident that resilience and motivation on the part of the refugees could facilitate their process of *adapting*.

CHAPTER SIX
DISCUSSION OF THE SUBSTANTIVE THEORY OF
“ADAPTING TO MINIMISE SELF-ENVIRONMENT INCONGRUITY”

6.1 OVERVIEW OF THE CHAPTER

The purpose of this study was to explore the phenomenon of the refugee experience in Western Australia. Specifically, I used the grounded theory method to generate a broad and comprehensive substantive theory of the refugee experience. In this chapter, an overview of the substantive theory is presented. This is followed by a discussion of the substantive theory in the context of existing literature covering both the theoretical and the research aspects of the phenomenon. Limitations of the study are then discussed. In addition, implications of the substantive theory findings for mental health counselling, education, government policy changes, and ongoing research will be addressed. A general conclusion is provided at the end of the thesis.

6.2 OVERVIEW OF THE SUBSTANTIVE THEORY OF “ADAPTING TO MINIMISE SELF-ENVIRONMENT INCONGRUITY”

The well-being of refugees in Australia has increasingly become a focal point of attention and concern among mental health care providers and researchers. Based on this concern, this grounded theory study was conducted to explore the phenomenon of the refugee experience in Western Australia through the development of a substantive theory from the perspective of the refugees. The generated substantive theory labelled “Adapting to Minimise Self-Environment Incongruity” is depicted in Figure 6.1. In the following sections, I will present an overview of the substantive theory which comprises the basic social psychological problem and the basic social psychological process adopted by refugees to deal with their problem. Contextual conditions and personal factors that influence the basic social psychological process will also be briefly described.

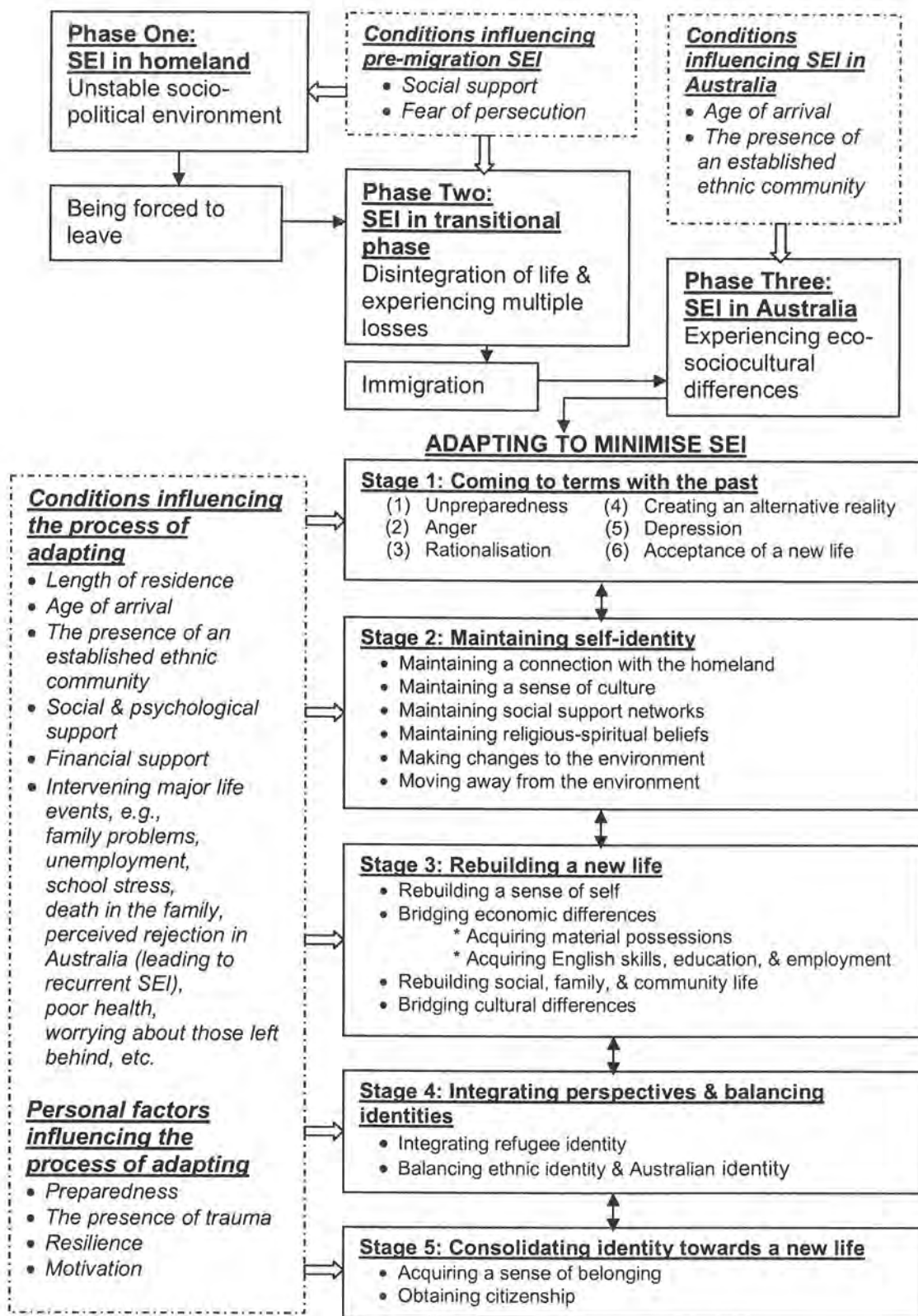


Figure 6.1. The substantive theory of "Adapting to Minimise Self-Environment Incongruity"

6.2.1 THE BASIC SOCIAL PSYCHOLOGICAL PROBLEM OF SELF-ENVIRONMENT INCONGRUITY

It was found that refugees share a basic social psychological problem of *self-environment incongruity* (SEI) throughout all three phases of the refugee experience. In the first phase of the refugee experience, the initial misfit between the self and the environment prompts refugees to escape their homes. All refugees are to varying degrees forced to leave their homeland to escape the oppression, discrimination, and often the persecution they face, as well as the subsequent dismal and adverse living conditions. This unstable political environment of the refugees' homeland is the main reason for their forced departure. After escaping from their homeland, most refugees enter the second phase, which is the transitional phase where they seek temporary refuge away from their homes and often from their homeland. Here, the problem of SEI continues as they wait for their refugee status and their entry visas into Australia. Upon arrival in Australia, which is the third phase of the refugee experience, the problem of SEI is perpetuated through experiencing the eco-sociocultural differences between the refugees' homeland and Australia.

There are several conditions that influence the experience of SEI in refugees. For instance, having social support and interaction with other people in the same situation dramatically reduce their experience of SEI throughout all phases of the refugee experience. As well, there is an indication that the experience of SEI worsens as the fear of persecution intensifies. Furthermore, the fear of persecution is affected by the interaction among factors such as age, being protected by other people (or social support), experiencing direct threats of persecution (including imprisonment, torture, and genocide), and carrying a "psychological burden" of being responsible for others. For the refugees in this study, there is evidence that fear of being persecuted was minimised when (1) the refugee was young and was not fully aware of the nature of the threat, (2) the refugee was protected by other people or accompanied by others, (3) there was no direct threat of persecution, and (4) there was no "psychological burden" of being responsible for others.

6.2.2 THE BASIC SOCIAL PSYCHOLOGICAL PROCESS OF ADAPTING TO MINIMISE SELF-ENVIRONMENT INCONGRUITY

In order to deal with their experience of SEI, refugees adopt the basic social psychological process of *adapting to minimise SEI*. The process of *adapting* involves five stages: (1) Coming to terms with the past, (2) Maintaining self-identity, (3) Rebuilding a new life, (4) Integrating perspectives and balancing identities, and (5) Consolidating identity towards a new life. Most participants reported experiencing multiple losses as they escaped from their homeland, and, to varying degrees, had to come to terms with these losses. The first stage of *adapting, coming to terms with the past*, comprises six phases: unpreparedness, anger, rationalisation, creating an alternative reality, depression, and acceptance of a new life.

There is evidence that in *maintaining self-identity*, which is the second stage of *adapting*, refugees preserve their connection to numerous aspects of their previous lives in order to minimise their sense of loss and grief. They maintain connections with their homeland, culture, social support networks, and religious-spiritual beliefs. Although the term *adapting* may imply that most adaptive changes refugees make in Australia are within themselves, they also make important changes to the sociocultural environment in Australia as they maintain their self-identity in this second stage. For instance, ethnic communities often build their own places of worship, open their own restaurants, and organise their own ethnic clubs, which further help them to maintain their cultural heritage. Additionally, if refugees realise that they do not fit into the larger society and are ineffective in changing certain aspects of their environment, then it becomes an option for them to avoid the environment or move away from it.

The third stage of the process of *adapting to minimise SEI* is *rebuilding*. This is the process refugees adopt to reconstruct most aspects of their lives. They may report that they have to start from the beginning "like a baby." Generally, refugees have to rebuild their sense of self. They also need to learn a new language, find new accommodation, make new friends, and find new jobs. They now have the opportunity to rebuild their social, family, and community lives. They can also learn about the culture and other aspects of life in the larger Australian society.

The fourth stage, *integrating perspectives and balancing identities*, involves the incorporation into the refugees' identities of numerous aspects of life that they have learnt from the stages of coming to terms with the past and rebuilding, while simultaneously striving to find a balance among different cultural values and expectations in Australia. During the process of integrating perspectives, refugees try to integrate their refugee identity into their current lives in Australia. Their refugee identity range from being strongly maintained to being relinquished altogether. Additionally, refugees make attempts to find a balance between their ethnic identity and their emerging Australian identity.

Finally, at the fifth stage, *consolidating identity towards a new life*, refugees acquire a sense of belonging in Australia and obtain their Australian citizenship. They become increasingly familiar with many aspects of life in Australia and show a minimal experience of SEI.

6.2.3 CONDITIONS AND PERSONAL FACTORS INFLUENCING THE PROCESS OF ADAPTING TO MINIMISE SELF-ENVIRONMENT INCONGRUITY

Conditions and personal factors that enhance or hinder refugees' process of *adapting* are identified in this study. Conditions that influence the process of *adapting* include length of residence, age of arrival in Australia, the presence of an established ethnic community, social and psychological support, financial support, and stressors arising from intervening major life events. In general, the longer refugees live in Australia, the more adapted they become. There is evidence that refugees who arrive in Australia at a younger age invariably adapt to living in Australia at a faster rate than those who arrive at an older age. Also, the presence of an established ethnic community supports refugees in their adaptation. However, an established ethnic community is also perceived as a source of stress when conformity is expected of the individual refugee who does not comply. Social, psychological, and financial supports play important roles in facilitating the refugees' adaptation. Stressors arising from intervening major life events (e.g., family problems, unemployment, school stress, death in the family, perceived rejection in Australia, poor health, and worrying about those left behind) tend to impede the

process of *adapting* in refugees. The concept of *recurrent self-environment incongruity* is espoused and highlighted in this study to capture the emotions arising from rejection perceived by refugees in Australia. The socio-political issues that arose in the years 2001, 2002, and 2003 (specifically issues with regards to border protection after the *Tampa* incident, the aftermath of September 11 event in the United States, the “children overboard” incident, the federal election, the Bali bombing, and Australia’s participation in the war against Iraq; see Appendix E) appeared to have contributed to the problem of *recurrent SEI* within the present sample of refugee participants.

Personal factors that influence the process of *adapting* are preparedness, the presence of trauma, resilience, and motivation. *Preparedness* refers to the refugees’ sense of familiarity with Australia arising from their previous exposure to a similar environment. Preparedness appears to reduce the refugees’ experience of SEI in Australia and thus enhances their adaptation. The *presence of trauma*, on the other hand, was found to complicate and undermine the process of *adapting* as refugees face the extra burden of having to recover from their traumatic experiences. Last, *resilience* and *motivation* play important roles in facilitating the refugees’ adaptation. While there are other conditions that might influence this process, specifically sociocultural and demographic variables that have been previously identified in the literature (see section 1.3.1.1.1), the impact of these variables on the process of *adapting* is not evident in this study.

The theory of “Adapting to Minimise Self-Environment Incongruity” is substantive, in that it applies to a certain context from which the data were derived, which was in the context of Western Australia. Specifically, the focus of this study was the exploration of the perspectives of a certain group of refugees, purposefully selected, within a specific context in keeping with the principles of the grounded theory method. The findings of this study emerged during a time when certain unfavourable attitudes towards refugees (especially those from Middle Eastern and Muslim backgrounds) were set against the backdrop of numerous socio-political events, including the *Tampa* episode and the September 11 terrorist attacks on America (see Appendix E). This context impacted on the experience and perceptions of the refugee participants in this study. The current findings have the potential to be transferable to other similar contexts with refugee

populations. In the following section, the substantive theory will be compared with relevant theories and research findings in the literature.

6.3 COMPARING THE SUBSTANTIVE THEORY OF “ADAPTING TO MINIMISE SELF-ENVIRONMENT INCONGRUITY” WITH OTHER THEORIES AND RESEARCH FINDINGS

A literature search was carried out to compare existing theories and research findings that may support the substantive theory of “Adapting to Minimise Self-Environment Incongruity.” Although there is no theory that is entirely similar to the substantive theory, there are numerous existing theories and findings that are relevant to certain segments of the theory. In this section, I will compare segments of the substantive theory of “Adapting to Minimise Self-Environment Incongruity” with research findings and related theories, which include (1) theories of grief; (2) Berry’s acculturation and adaptation framework; (3) social capital theory; (4) theories of stigma and the identity threat model of stigma; (5) theories of stress, coping, emotions, and resilience; as well as (6) theories of identity, incorporating social identity theory, acculturation theory, and the migration of human capital theory. Evidence for existing theories will also be reviewed. Finally, the substantive theory will be explored within the context of other qualitative studies.

6.3.1 COMPARING THE STAGE OF “COMING TO TERMS WITH THE PAST” WITH THEORIES OF GRIEF

It should be noted from the outset that the refugees’ experience of loss and their grieving process can be complex as they face multiple losses. These multiple losses, as described in Chapter Three, are (1) material losses, including loss of possessions, home, assets, and basic necessities; (2) sociocultural losses, including loss of country, community, family members, friends, and socioeconomic status; and (3) loss of livelihood, including loss of income, job, employability, youth, and education. Numerous psychological consequences of having experienced these losses are identified from the analysis of the data. These include unpreparedness, disintegration of identity, loss of trust, loss of control and desperation, and loss of mental health (section 3.6.1.4). Furthermore, an unresolved experience of loss and grief may hinder the process of *adapting*, as

exemplified by Fariba (see section 5.3.2). However, this view has been challenged in recent research, in particular studies relating to resilience. For instance, theorists (e.g., Bonanno, Keltner, Holen, & Horowitz, 1995) in the field of resilience have found that repressive coping may be a part of resilience (see section 6.3.5.4). I argue that the refugees' experience of multiple losses entails a process of grieving. Therefore, in the following sections, the refugees' stage of *coming to terms with the past* will be examined from numerous perspectives on grief, namely the psychoanalytical perspective (Freud, 1917/1957), the emotional perspective (Kubler-Ross and Kessler's stages of grief and grieving, 2005), the developmental perspective (Bowlby's attachment theory, 1969, 1973, 1980, 2005), and the cognitive perspective (Temes' three organisational stages of grief, 1980). Additionally, I will compare the stage of coming to terms with the past with the new paradigm of theories of grief in the 21st century (Neimeyer, 1998, 2002). This is followed by a discussion of the notion of death in the experience of loss. The earliest known theory of grief, which is Freud's (1917/1957) theory of mourning, is described in the following section.

6.3.1.1 Freud's (1917/1957) theory of mourning

Much of the literature describing the grieving process can be dated to Freud's (1917/1957) paper, *Mourning and Melancholia*, where he argued that the process of mourning involves cutting the tie that is attached to the person that no longer exists or is irretrievably lost. Freud believed that under the normal process of mourning, the process of reality testing over time eventually sets the ego free of its connection with the object that is no longer there. The phrase "work of mourning" was coined by Freud (1957, p. 166) to refer to this process. Freud further predicted that the normal process of grieving may turn into complicated or pathological mourning when there is an aggressive or intense element of ambivalence that turns inwards during the process of detachment. This occurs when the bereaved person maintains an unconscious identification with the deceased by focusing the negative emotions about the deceased or the loss towards oneself. This unconscious identification then becomes a series of depressive self-reproaches or guilt. Over the last two decades, the widely held assumption that grief work or "work of mourning" (Freud, 1957) is necessary has been challenged by some researchers (e.g., M. S. Stroebe, 1992; Wortman & Silver, 1989) for the lack of

empirical evidence to substantiate it. Freud's (1917/1957) theory of grief cannot be verified by the current grounded theory study. This is because Freud's theory was derived from the psychoanalytic perspective in which the grieving process is explained in terms of the ego and the unconscious. On the other hand, the stage of *coming to terms with the past* in this study is based on the emotional and cognitive perspectives. Among the theories of grief, the most well-known stages of grief have been initiated by Elisabeth Kubler-Ross (1969) who explored the grief process among those with terminal illnesses. The author later went on to write a book with Kessler (Kubler-Ross & Kessler, 2005) for those who are grieving for the loss of a loved one.

6.3.1.2 Kubler-Ross and Kessler's (2005) stages of grief

Kubler-Ross, having written *On Death and Dying* in 1969, stated in her later book, *On Grief and Grieving* (Kubler-Ross & Kessler, 2005), that the five stages have evolved since their inception and have been very misunderstood in the past. Specifically, these stages are not intended to "help tuck messy emotions into neat packages" (Kubler-Ross & Kessler, 2005, p. 7). Although they are emotional responses that people have, these stages should not be considered as the typical response to losses. There is no typical loss and grief is as unique as the individuals' lives (Kubler-Ross & Kessler, 2005). It should be emphasised that the phases in *coming to terms with the past* in this study are being compared with Kubler-Ross and Kessler's stages of grief and grieving (2005), rather than the stages of death and dying. Kubler-Ross and Kessler's (2005) five stages of grief are denial, anger, bargaining, depression, and acceptance. In this study, the six phases in the stage of coming to terms with the past are (1) unpreparedness: shock, denial, and numbness; (2) anger and its underlying emotions; (3) rationalisation; (4) creating an alternative reality; (5) depression; and (6) acceptance of a new life. Similar to Kubler-Ross's stages, the six phases of coming to terms with the past are not stops on a linear time frame nor does every refugee experience all these phases or experience them in the order prescribed.

Kubler-Ross and Kessler (2005) identified the first stage of grief as *denial*. According to the authors, denial in the context of grieving the loss of a loved one through death is more symbolic than literal. The bereaved may express some disbelief because the loss is

too overwhelming for his or her psyche. The initial reaction may include shock and numbness. Denial also presents itself in the questioning of reality – whether it really did happen (Kubler-Ross & Kessler, 2005). In this study, I named the first phase in the stage of coming to terms with the past as *unpreparedness*. Unpreparedness can be seen as somewhat similar to Kubler-Ross and Kessler's (2005) stage of denial, although unpreparedness is an umbrella term that also includes the refugees' ineffectiveness in dealing with their problem of SEI in their homeland, which eventually leads them to escape. The refugees are unprepared to live effectively with their circumstances, be it experiencing discrimination since birth, experiencing war, or imprisonment. Denial and partial denial are seen as part of the unpreparedness response which also includes shock and numbness. Throughout all phases of the refugee experience, refugees continue to experience the emotions of unpreparedness, particularly fear and anxiety about their uncertain circumstances, until they adapt permanently in Australia. It was revealed that none of the refugees in this study were in a state of complete denial in which they refused or failed to acknowledge their new circumstances or environment. They realised that they had experienced multiple losses and their lives had disintegrated, but they did not believe they had lost so much and were ill equipped to deal with such losses. Hence, similar to Kubler-Ross and Kessler's (2005) belief, denial is more symbolic than literal in this study.

In this study, the second phase in the stage of coming to terms with the past is *anger* which has several underlying emotions, including emotional pain, displaced anger, and survival guilt. Similarly, Kubler-Ross and Kessler (2005) stated that anger can be manifested as guilt and pain. In this study, the underlying emotions of anger appear to be more prominent than the direct expression of anger. As explained in Chapter Four (section 4.3.2), this is probably because most refugees interviewed in this study had moved beyond anger with the passage of time and had arrived at the phase of acceptance. It is also likely that refugees who had not moved on from the stage of anger and had displayed extreme anger were generally not amenable to being interviewed in the first place. Alternatively, some participants were possibly not comfortable with expressing their direct anger and thus were more likely to express the underlying emotions related to anger.

The third phase of coming to terms with the past is termed *rationalisation*. This cognitive phase does not coincide with any of Kubler-Ross and Kessler's (2005) stages of grief and grieving. However, rationalisation is an important phase because refugees try to work out the way different events unfold and attempt to rationalise or understand them. Rationalisation is applied to clarify certain cause-effect relationships that lead to the refugees' initial and subsequent experience of SEI. Through rationalising, it is possible that they find some sense of control over their grief.

The fourth phase of coming to terms with the past is identified as *creating an alternative reality*, which is the phase where refugees mentally provide themselves with the possibility of having choices and wonder how things will otherwise turn out. Unpalatable painful emotions are temporarily put aside so that they can dream of a better world and a better life. This phase vaguely corresponds with Kubler-Ross and Kessler's (2005) third stage of *bargaining*, where the grieving person finds a reprieve from the pain of loss albeit momentarily. According to the authors, in bargaining, the person's mind attempts to change past events as he or she explores the maze of "if only ..." and "what if" In this study, the phase of *creating an alternative reality* was found to be important in older refugees, as is the case with Tuba. Here, Tuba became nostalgic, homesick, and lived in her past. She yearned for the life she once had. When refugees are increasingly able to experience the emotional pain due to their losses, depression takes over.

Depression constitutes the fourth phase of coming to terms with the past. This phase resembles Kubler-Ross and Kessler's (2005) stage of depression. According to Kubler-Ross and Kessler (2005), depression "slows us down and allows us to take real stock of the loss" (p. 24). Additionally, depression "makes us rebuild ourselves from the ground up" (p. 24). The phase of depression in this study is well exemplified by Morathi, who mourned deeply over the loss of his Oromo community and his homeland.

In this study, the last phase of coming to terms with the past is termed *acceptance of a new life*. Through acceptance, the refugees' past issues become mere memories that do not control their current lives in Australia. This phase is somewhat similar to Kubler-

Ross and Kessler's (2005) stage of acceptance. Here, refugees accept the reality of their previous losses and realise that their stay in Australia is permanent and this will be their new country and their new life.

There are several limitations to Kubler-Ross and Kessler's (2005) formulation of the stages of grief. In his general evaluation of the conceptualisation of the stages of grief, Neimeyer (2002) argued that a distinguishable sequence of the emotional stages of loss is not found in any studies and there is no endpoint that can be labelled recovery. The lack of a distinguishable sequence to the stages of grief is also confirmed by my search through the literature on grief. There are also no quantitative or qualitative studies that involve direct exploration of the stages of grief as formulated by Kubler-Ross and Kessler. Additionally, adherence to the stages of grief, Neimeyer (2002) argued, can discourage those who are grieving by suggesting that they should follow particular stages of grief. This concern is also highlighted by Kubler-Ross and Kessler (2005, p. 203), who emphasised that "each grief has its own imprint, as distinctive and as unique as the person we lost," and "grief is not just a series of events, stages, or timelines." According to Neimeyer (2002), there is also an implication in the conceptualisation of stages of grief that these emotional stages are central to the extent that meanings and behaviours are ignored. This concern will be further addressed in section 6.3.1.5.

In conclusion, the trajectory of Kubler-Ross and Kessler's (2005) stages of grief is comparable to the one in this study. However, I argue that unlike the grief over the irretrievable loss of a loved one, the refugees in this study to varying extents had accepted certain losses and simultaneously found ways to recover these losses. Thus, not all their losses were irretrievable. For instance, they could rebuild their ethnic communities, their careers, and their family life. Additionally, Kubler-Ross and Kessler (2005) focused predominantly on the emotional reactions of the grieving process, and, to a lesser degree, on the cognitive responses of grieving. This is also similar to the orientation of the stage of coming to terms with the past in this study. Bowlby (1969), the founder of *attachment theory*, undertook a developmental perspective in understanding grief, which can be used as an alternative frame of reference for the grief responses of refugees.

6.3.1.3 John Bowlby's (1969, 1973, 1980, 2005) attachment theory and four phases of grief

Bowlby presented his theory of attachment in three volumes in his seminal trilogy, entitled *Attachment and Loss*. In his first volume, *Attachment*, Bowlby (1969) asserted that knowledge about personality development can be enhanced by observation of the way a young child responds to his or her mother in her presence and particularly in her absence. In his second volume, *Separation*, Bowlby (1973) examined separation and its accompanied anxiety and anger. In his third volume, *Loss*, Bowlby (1980) explored the way young children respond to the temporary or permanent loss of a mother-figure and the emotions of anxiety, grief, and mourning arising from such a loss.

In the first volume, through observation of infants behaving in a specific way ("separation response syndrome") when they were separated from their mothers, Bowlby (1969) described three phases of the separation response – protest, despair, and detachment. These three phases are seen as reactions to the threat of loss that aim at bringing the mother back. Bowlby (1980, 2005) was struck by the similarities between the reactions of separated infants and reactions of adults towards the death of a loved one, and he devised four phases of normal mourning. In the first phase, a short period of *numbness* is followed by a longer second phase of *yearning and searching* for the loved one. At the third phase, the grieving person is overtaken by *disorganisation and despair* as the loss is finally acknowledged as final. The fourth and last phase of *reorganisation* takes place when the bereaved person adapts to life without the deceased one. Thus, according to Bowlby (1980, 2005), grief in adulthood in response to loss can be considered as a variant of the separation anxiety of infants and young children when they react to the threat of loss of their attachment figure.

Bowlby's conceptualisation of the four phases of grief can be compared with the six phases of coming to terms with the past in this study. Bowlby's (2005) first phase of *numbing*, which lasts from a few hours to a week, may be intercepted by outbursts of extremely intense distress with or without anger. This phase seems to vaguely correspond to the refugees' initial experience of SEI, in particular their phase of *unpreparedness* which includes shock, denial, and numbness. The refugees in this study

were unable to deal with their unstable environment and eventually left their homeland. Refugee participants who waited for a lengthy period for their visa to enter Australia reported having experienced intense distress. In general, the waiting period is one of the most stressful times for refugees. The longer refugees wait, the more they report having the following emotions: distress, vulnerability, desperation, and a sense of having lost control over their destiny. Additionally, the waiting period amplifies feelings of temporariness of the refugees' stay and the anxiety concerning an unknown future without a destiny. This emotion is well exemplified by Payam and Mariam (see section 3.5.1.2.1). Bowlby's (2005) second phase of *yearning*, which lasts for some months or for years, involves the search for the lost figure. Bowlby's phase of yearning is vaguely related to the phase of *creating an alternative reality* in the stage of coming to terms with the past. Specifically, refugees who arrive in Australia at an older age are more likely to yearn for their homeland. They are also more likely to relive their past through nostalgic remembering. Bowlby's (2005) third phase of grief, *disorganisation and despair* (which also includes the emotion of anger), seems to correspond to Kubler-Ross's stages of anger and depression. This phase also resembles the phases of anger and depression at the stage of coming to terms with the past in this study. Bowlby's (2005) fourth phase, *reorganisation*, is somewhat similar to both the phase of *acceptance of a new life* and the stage of *rebuilding* in this study. Here, refugees rebuild their sense of self by rebuilding their sense of pride and achievement, finding their purpose through self-autonomy, and having an emerging sense of identity in Australia.

Notably, Bowlby (2005) related his work on separated infants and young children to those who are grieving the loss of a loved one. In contrast, refugees are able to maintain and rebuild numerous aspects of their lives that have previously contributed to their identity. Thus, some of the refugees' losses are not perceived as final or permanent. However, intense grief was revealed from the findings particularly in Morathi and Tuba. Tuba, for instance, who arrived in Australia at an older age, reported having experienced an intense grief arising from the loss of a certain way of life and her homeland. This is probably because she had lived a significant part of her life in her homeland.

Bowlby's (1969, 1973, 1980, 2005) *attachment theory* has been applied in studies of grief and loss, including the bereavement of children (e.g., Howard, 2000), bereavement therapy (e.g., Reeves, 2001), and studies of coping and mental health (e.g., Leonard, 2001). It has been argued that familiarity with attachment research tools and socio-psychoanalytic assessment can facilitate the development of the clinicians' observational skills, insight, and research practices (de Millan & Millan, 2004). To date, there is little empirical research that involves exploration of Bowlby's (1980, 2005) four phases of mourning, and direct evidence for these phases is yet to be found. Although there are questions regarding Bowlby's use of his findings in separated children as a yardstick by which to compare the responses of the bereaved (Shackleton, 1984), Bowlby's work remains very influential today. A less well-known description of the stages of grief was postulated by Roberta Temes (1980).

6.3.1.4 Roberta Temes' (1980) three organisational stages of grief

Roberta Temes (1980), in *Living with an empty chair: A guide through grief*, described what she regarded as three distinct stages associated with grief. They are (1) numbness or mechanical function and social insulation, (2) disorganisation or intense painful emotions of loss, and (3) reorganisation or resuming a more "normal" social life. It should be noted that Temes' stages predominantly focus on the loss of a loved one. Once again, as with Kubler-Ross' and Kessler's (2005) stages, Temes' stages are seen as predictable stages of the bereavement process. According to Temes (1980), not everyone experiences the same emotions at similar points in time, but grief commonly involves three distinct stages of numbness, disorganisation, and reorganisation.

According to Temes (1980), at the stage of *numbness*, the bereaved person is not ready to deal with intense emotions but functions in an automatic, mechanical, and robotic manner. This stage resembles the phase of *unpreparedness* in the stage of coming to terms with the past in this study, where refugees are not prepared to deal with their problem of SEI in their homeland. In this study, the term *unpreparedness* is an umbrella term that also includes numbness. Additionally, Temes' stage of numbness also involves occasional genuine sorrow and anger towards the deceased. However, guilt surfaces

immediately and neutralises the anger that appears at the next stage of disorganisation (Temes, 1980).

Temes' (1980) second stage, *disorganisation*, commences once numbness wears off. The stage of disorganisation comprises feelings of acute loneliness, emptiness, yearning, depression, aimlessness, apathy, loss of appetite, loss of sleep, and constant weeping. Other symptoms of grief are tightness in the throat, shortness of breath, sighing frequently, and fatigue (Temes, 1980). The yearning aspect corresponds to the phase of *creating an alternative reality* in this study, where refugees yearn for and miss their homeland, even more so for those who arrive in Australia at an older age. In this study, Tuba and Morathi reported feelings of loneliness. The stage of disorganisation in Temes' model is further characterised by anger, shame, fear, guilt, hopelessness, and helplessness. Thus, it appears that the phases of *anger*, *creating an alternative reality*, and *depression* in the stage of coming to terms with the past in this study can be subsumed under Temes' (1980) stage of *disorganisation*. I argue that while the emphasis and terms used differ slightly in describing the grieving process in both Temes' and Kubler-Ross' stages, the conglomeration of emotions related to grief are similar in both – they are not fundamentally different. This is because the stage of disorganisation, including its intense painful emotions of loss described by Temes (1980), appears to be very similar to Kubler-Ross and Kessler's (2005) stages of anger, bargaining, and depression.

The third and last stage in Temes' (1980) model, *reorganisation*, is in many ways similar to the phase where refugees work towards *acceptance of a new life*. Here, there is a commitment to the future in terms of refocusing one's energy towards the future and an acknowledgement that life must continue. The stage of *rebuilding* in this study appears to correspond to the stage of reorganisation in both Bowlby's model and Temes' model. At this stage, refugees are committed to their new lives and their future through (1) rebuilding a sense of self in Australia; (2) bridging economic differences; (3) rebuilding social, family, and community life; and (4) bridging cultural differences. To date, there have been no studies conducted with the aim of exploring Temes' model. The shortcomings of Temes' model appear to be similar to other stage models of grief (such

as Kubler-Ross and Kessler's model, see section 6.3.1.2). For instance, a distinguishable sequence to the emotional stages of loss is not found in any studies and there is no endpoint that can be seen as recovery (Neimeyer, 2002).

In summary, the grief process described by Kubler-Ross and Kessler (2005), Bowlby (1969, 1973, 1980, 2005), and Temes (1980) focus primarily on the trajectories or stages of grief. In this study, it was found that although refugees face multiple losses, they also find ways to maintain some aspects of their self-identity and rebuild their lives. For instance, refugees form their ethnic communities in Australia, establish their places of worship, and open their own ethnic restaurants. Importantly, they rebuild their sense of self and attempt to find their unique sense of purpose and meaning in Australia. For instance, Sabrina realised that she could facilitate, within her capacity, the peace process among refugees from the different nationalities of the former Yugoslavia currently residing in Australia. I argue that refugees' bonds with their past identities are not irreversibly lost. As inferred, there are varying extents to which refugees grieve over their losses. Although the stage of coming to terms with the past is an important part of the process of *adapting*, it does not imply that all aspects that are central to the refugees' identity are irretrievably lost. Therefore, the new 21st century grief theories, which are described as follows, may be more congruent with refugees' experience of loss.

6.3.1.5 The 21st century grief theories – continuity in grieving

For most of the 20th century, grief was seen as a process of "letting go" of the attachment to the deceased person, of moving on with life, and of a gradual recovery from the depression that has arisen from the loss in order to revert back to one's "normal" behaviour (M. Stroebe, M. Gergen, K. Gergen, & W. Stroebe, 1992). As the literature on loss grew, the concept of grief was modified to include symptomatic features of complicated and uncomplicated grief and delayed grief reactions (e.g., Bonanno & Kaltman, 2001) as well as the stages by which grief could be resolved. This conceptualisation of the stages of grief appears to have some authority, and it gains acceptance by generations of people dealing with grief. However, increasingly, the limitation of the notion that grief is all about relinquishing emotional connection and the need to progress towards recovery is being acknowledged (Neimeyer, 1998). Neimeyer

(2002) argued that the distinguishable sequence of the emotional phases of loss is not found in any studies nor is there an endpoint that can be identified as recovery. It is also unclear that a normative pattern of grieving exists, and thus one cannot be certain of the diagnosis of a “pathological” or “disordered” form of grief. Furthermore, the previous models of grief can discourage those who are dealing with grief by suggesting that they must follow certain phases of grief. The assumption that such emotional phases should be central to theories of grief, to the extent of discarding meanings and behaviour, is also challenged by Neimeyer (2002).

Following the aforementioned criticisms, a new paradigm of grief models emerged. Several key figures were instrumental in the conceptualisation of this new paradigm. For example, Neimeyer (1998, 2002) highlighted the central theme in the newer models of grief, which is, *symptoms have significance*. This means that the expressions of distress related to grieving can be comprehended through the struggles of the grieving person to accommodate an altered interpersonal reality due to the loss. The new paradigm for grief theories was developed based on the premise that *meaning reconstruction in response to a loss is the central process in grieving*. This premise has been construed in several ways. Bowlby (1961, 1980) asserted that the expressions of grief are not just private reactions but also the attempts to reconnect with the lost object and to seek comfort from other survivors. Gaines (1997) stated that the emphasis on detaching oneself from the lost object obstructs the task of repairing the disruption to the self-other relationship that is a result of the actual loss. The author referred to this task as “creating continuity” (p. 549). For example, in this study, Sabrina derived meaning from her refugee experience, including having learnt important life lessons and “becoming a better person.” Importantly, meaning reconstruction facilitates refugees to move on with their lives in Australia. Meaning reconstruction and creating continuity are also linked with resilience, motivation, and self-determination (see sections 6.3.5.3 and 6.3.5.4). A few theorists (e.g., Hagman, 1995; Kaplan, 1995; Shapiro, 1996) further argued that the stress on relinquishment is so great in the psychoanalytic view that normal phases of preservation and continuity are ignored, if not pathologised. Kaplan (1995) stressed the importance of continuing dialogue with the deceased. Hagman (1995) highlighted the importance of transformation and internal restructuring of the attachment to the deceased. As Morrie

(cited by Albom, 1998, p. 174) put it so poignantly in *Tuesdays with Morrie*, "Death ends a life, not the relationship."

As long as we can love each other, and remember the feeling of love we had, we can die without ever really going away. All the love you created is still there. All the memories are still there. You live on – in the hearts of everyone you have touched and nurtured while you were here (Morrie in Tuesdays with Morrie, p. 174).

These views from the 21st century of models of grief can be compared with the experiences of the refugees in this study. There is evidence to suggest that, in general, refugees do not have to relinquish everything pertaining to their past. While there are some losses that they have to come to terms with, the stage of maintaining self-identity is central to their process of *adapting to minimise SEI*. As inferred, all refugees have to varying degrees maintained certain aspects of their self-identity (including their ethnic identity) and rebuilt or reconstructed other aspects of their lives.

6.3.1.6 The notion of "death" in the experience of loss

Although some authors did not equate loss with "death," they stated that people who experience loss of any kind go through a grieving process (e.g., Gard, 2000). I argue that the experience of loss in its varied forms for some refugees can be equated to a form of "death" and thus entails a process of grieving. There is evidence in the findings to argue that while some aspects of the refugees' pre-migration lives can be maintained and rebuilt in Australia, aspects that are perceived by refugees as irretrievably lost can be regarded as a form of "death." Specifically, the loss of the homeland, whether through voluntary or forced departure, has been equated with a form of death. For example, El-Zein (2002), a voluntary migrant from Lebanon, alluded to the notion of "symbolic death" (p. 232) as he left behind the place where he grew up and everything that mattered to him – his dreams, his sense of right and wrong, his loved ones, and people who valued his successes and accepted his failures. The author asserted that "everything loses its meaning, withers away and dies if we turn our back on that place" (p. 232). Also, El-Zein equated his disappearance from his country of origin with a form of demise. In this study, Tuba's grief over the loss of her homeland was intense and can well fit into El-Zein's concept of "symbolic death."

The stage of *coming to terms with the past* resonates with *cultural bereavement* or the grief of losing one's cultural heritage and community as described by Maurice Eisenbruch (1990, 1991, & 1992). In studying the acculturation of Cambodian and other Southeast Asian refugees residing in the state of Victoria in Australia, Eisenbruch (1990, 1991, & 1992) stated that *cultural bereavement* can be resolved by validating the refugees' traditional values and cultural rituals. He defined *cultural bereavement* as a constellation of refugee experiences featured by having previous events intrude into daily living, guilt about leaving behind their homeland, and facing past "supernatural forces" while awake and sleeping. This is due to a loss of social structures, cultural values, and self-identity (Eisenbruch, 1990, 1991, & 1992). Notably, Eisenbruch (1990) regarded cultural bereavement as normal recovery from trauma, whereas the Western notion is that these experiences are actually symptoms of PTSD. I argue that cultural bereavement as defined by Eisenbruch can also be seen as a form of "death" as refugees grieve over the loss of their culture and community. In this study, both Tuba and Morathi appear to be very affected by cultural bereavement as they deeply mourned over the loss of their cultures. Both refugees described their guilt over leaving their homeland and experienced the loss of their well-established social networks in their homeland, traditional values, and other aspects of their previous identities. Morathi, in addition, also wondered what he was doing here in Australia.

The loss of mental health, especially in traumatised individuals, has also been viewed as a form of death. In their review of posttraumatic stress syndrome, Ebert and Murray (2004) conceptualised the notion of "mental death" for those who have been traumatised in their lives. Mental death also constitutes the main characteristic of a distinct posttrauma syndrome termed as complex posttraumatic stress disorder (complex PTSD; see section 1.3.1.3). Exposure to extreme interpersonal stress, such as the experience of torture, signifies a threat to the psychological integrity of the victim. The authors further contended that such an experience is likely to result in mental death or the loss of the victim's pretrauma identity. Mental death is therefore associated with symptoms that arise from psychological threat from a loss of the victim's pre-trauma identity, including guilt and shame, distrust and alienation from others, ineffectiveness and loss of autonomy, loss of core beliefs and values, as well as a sense of being permanently

damaged (Ebert & Dyck, 2004). Morathi, in this study, reported certain features of *mental death* as he lost his pre-trauma identity. However, although Morathi and Fariba experienced some form of trauma, the symptoms of “mental death” are not overtly evident in this study.

6.3.2 COMPARING THE SUBSTANTIVE THEORY OF “ADAPTING TO MINIMISE SELF-ENVIRONMENT INCONGRUITY” WITH BERRY’S ACCULTURATION AND ADAPTATION FRAMEWORKS

Berry’s acculturation and adaptation frameworks (as described in section 1.3.1.1) can provide a frame of reference for the substantive theory of “Adapting to Minimise Self-Environment Incongruity”. In the following section, the basic social psychological process of *adapting* and its five stages are compared with Berry’s frameworks.

6.3.2.1 Acculturative stress

There are three main perspectives on the outcomes of *psychological acculturation* in the research literature. First, it has been suggested that psychological changes are easy to achieve, and the alterations to a person’s behavioural repertoire occur easily and are usually non-problematic – this perspective has been referred to as “behavioural shifts” by Berry (1980b, 2006), “cultural learning” by Brislin, Landis, and Brandt (1983), and “social skills acquisition” by Furnham and Bochner (1986). There are three sub-processes in the process of behavioural shifts: culture shedding, culture learning, and culture conflict (Berry, 1992). *Culture shedding* is a process involving the gradual loss of certain characteristics of one’s culture (including attitudes, beliefs, and values), and certain behavioural competencies (including knowledge and use of language). *Culture learning* involves the learning of certain aspects of the new culture, at times substituting the attitudes and behaviours that are lost, although more often in addition to them (Berry, 2007). Both culture shedding and culture learning involve the selective, accidental, or deliberate loss of behaviours which are substituted by behaviours that facilitate a better fit between the person and the larger society. This process has also been referred to as adjustment (Ward & Kennedy, 1993) because almost all adaptive alterations occur in the acculturating person and fewer changes take place among individuals of the larger society (Berry, 2006). Berry (2006) stated that adjustments are

usually made with little difficulty as acculturation is non-problematic. In this study, the phase of *bridging cultural differences* in the stage of rebuilding a new life (see section 4.5.4) can be viewed as being similar to the process of *culture learning*, or the learning of many aspects of life of the larger Australian society. As well, *culture shedding* was found in this study, at the stage of *integrating perspectives and balancing identities*, specifically at the phase of *balancing ethnic identity and Australian identity* (see section 4.6.2). This occurs when refugees realise that some aspects of their traditional values are no longer compatible with certain aspects of life in Australia and thus should be discarded, as also explained in section 4.6.2.

The second perspective of psychological acculturation is relevant when conflict occurs. If there are difficulties experienced in changing one's repertoire, the individual may undergo "culture shock" (Oberg, 1958, 1960) or "acculturative stress" (Berry, 1970, 2006). The concept of *culture shock*, as postulated by Oberg (1958, 1960), refers to a form of anxiety arising from losing a sense of when and how to do the right thing. According to Pedersen (2006), culture shock is "a profoundly personal encounter with persons or situations from a different culture resulting in stress and requiring a high level of coping facility" (p. 580). Berry and Sam (1997) preferred the term *acculturative stress* to culture shock. They argued that the concept of acculturative stress is closely tied to psychological models of stress as a response to external stressors. Usually, only moderate difficulties are encountered and experienced, such as psychosomatic complaints, since other psychological strategies, such as assessment of problems and coping processes, are usually accessible to the person (Berry & Sam, 1997). The experience of conflict is assessed to be "problematic but controllable and surmountable" (Berry, 2006, p. 292). The refugees in this study experienced a sense of strangeness or foreignness as they were unfamiliar with their new surroundings in Australia. Furthermore, they became anxious about not knowing how to behave and how to fit in due to their lack of knowledge with regards to the social norms in Australia. The stress involved in minimising the experience of post-migration SEI resembles the concept of acculturative stress as espoused by Berry and Sam (1997). Additionally, the personal factor of *preparedness*, as derived from the findings in this study, refers to a sense of familiarity with the Australian environment that has been enhanced by pre-migration

exposure to an environment that is similar to Australia. This familiarity helps to reduce a sense of strangeness and perhaps acculturative stress when refugees settle in Australia. Preparedness attenuates the refugees' experience of incongruity between the self and the Australian environment.

The third perspective in psychological acculturation is relevant when major difficulties, such as psychopathology, are experienced by the acculturating person. Here, cultural changes surpass the person's coping capacity, giving rise to serious psychological problems such as clinical depression or incapacitating anxiety (Berry, 1997). This perspective has been applied in the fields of clinical psychology and psychiatry. Acculturation as viewed from this perspective is almost always regarded as problematic and assistance is needed to cope with "virtually insurmountable stressors" (Berry, 2006, p. 294). This perspective appears to be similar in some ways to the persistent form of experiencing SEI and *sense of displacement*, where attempts at adaptation are not sufficient to minimise the refugees' SEI. The concept of *sense of displacement* encapsulates feelings of homelessness and homesickness, strangeness, not belonging in Australia, and loneliness and isolation. However, it should be noted that a sense of displacement may constitute a small part of the third perspective of acculturation. Notably, psychopathology, such as clinical depression and incapacitating anxiety, experienced by the acculturating individual is not overtly evident in the current sample of refugee participants. For example, although Fariba had depression, she reported having recovered from it.

6.3.2.2 Adaptation

Berry (1997) stated that long-term *adaptation* is the final feature of psychological acculturation. He further defined long-term *adaptation* as the relatively stable changes that occur in a person or a group in response to environmental demands. This general definition resembles the concept of *adapting* in this study, which is the basic social psychological process undertaken by refugees to minimise their experience of SEI. The process of *adapting* in this study encompasses five stages: (1) Coming to terms with the past, (2) Maintaining self-identity, (3) Rebuilding a new life in Australia, (4) Integrating perspectives and balancing identities, and (5) Consolidating identity towards a new life.

The focus of the process of *adapting* in this study therefore differs slightly from Berry's conceptualisation of adaptation (e.g., Berry, 1994, 2005, 2006b). For instance, Berry's framework does not include the stage of *coming to terms with the past*. This stage was found to be very important in this study. The emotions involved at this stage are not present in Berry's framework. Additionally, the stages of integrating perspectives and balancing identities as well as consolidating identity towards a new life are not mentioned in Berry's framework.

In order to minimise their experience of SEI, refugees through their process of *adapting*, either (1) make certain changes within themselves in order to better fit into the environment, or (2) resist making changes within themselves and make certain changes to the environment by introducing numerous aspects of their culture into Australia, or (3) choose to move away from the environment and thus adopt the strategy of avoidance to minimise their experience of SEI. For instance, Morathi, who could not find employment and make friends in Perth, chose to move to Melbourne in the hope of finding better job prospects and to reunite with his larger ethnic community. Similarly, Berry (1997, 2006) stressed that adaptation may or may not improve the "fit" between individuals and their environment. That is, it does not necessarily mean that individuals or groups change their ways to fit better with their environment (i.e., adjustment through assimilation). Rather, long-term adaptation also encompasses resistance and attempts to alter or move away from the environment (through separation) (Berry, 1997, 2006). According to Berry (2006), long-term adaptation is very variable, ranging from where individuals can cope with their new lives very well (well-adapted), to where individuals cannot manage in their new lives (poorly-adapted). Thus, from this perspective, the findings of this study concur with Berry's views.

6.3.2.3 Ethnic identity and Australian identity

It can be inferred from the findings that as refugees attempt to minimise their experience of SEI, they acquire the way of life and culture of the larger society while maintaining their ethnic identity to varying degrees. This occurs at the phase of *bridging cultural differences* at the stage of *rebuilding a new life*. When refugees acquire many aspects of the Australian identity while maintaining most aspects of their ethnic identity, this is

akin to the strategy of *integration* as described by Berry (2006). The strategy of *assimilation* is applied when refugees incorporate many aspects of the Australian identity while discarding most aspects of their ethnic identity. It can be inferred that both the strategies of integration and assimilation were adopted by the refugees in this study. However, as none of the refugees were assessed using an acculturation scale in keeping with the grounded theory method, no conclusions can be made with regards to whether they preferred one acculturation strategy to another.

The ethnic identity and the Australian identity of refugees have been discussed earlier in the fourth stage of the process of *adapting*, termed *integrating perspectives and balancing identities* (see section 4.6). At this stage, refugees attempt to seek a good balance among various aspects of their lives so that they can achieve a sense of control in their new environment and function optimally in Australia without compromising their sense of self. I argue that, ideally, refugees can obtain an integrated, acceptable, and stable self-identity that they are comfortable with in Australia. A good balance occurs when none of the aspects of their lives adversely affect other aspects, and refugees can maintain certain desirable traditional values that also benefit their current lives in Australia. In this study, the concept of *balancing* is the focal point in examining the refugees' ethnic identity and their Australian identity, instead of the four strategies of acculturation devised by Berry and his associates (Berry, 1980a, 1990, 1994, 1997, 2001, 2006, 2007; Berry & Sam, 1997). In Berry's acculturation studies, the strategy that was adopted at one point in time by each participant was assessed. In this study, the cognitive process involved in *finding a balance* is the primary focus as the refugee participants described how they found their balance among different cultural values and behaviours (see section 4.6.2). One way of *finding a balance* is to weigh between who one is and what should be modified after migrating to Australia. Specifically, a few participants in this study illustrated clearly how they acquired new attitudes or behaviour. For instance, they chose to preserve aspects of their ethnic identity that still served them well in Australia and discarded specific attitudes and behaviours that no longer made sense. The process of *balancing* can be depicted as the coming together of different learning phases of the refugees' lives. Here, refugees can move towards building a sense of wholeness in their self-identity, instead of experiencing the tension

of opposing demands. Balancing is the main process used to cope with various, often-conflicting values and opinions they encounter in the new environment. After experiencing the tension of opposing demands, most refugee participants adopted the strategy of *finding the path of least resistance* in order to find a comfortable state of being or balance without having to exert too much effort or having to create an additional psychological burden by having to face strong opposition from their new circumstances or environment. Relating this to Berry's model, this implies that refugees should ideally adopt the strategy of *integration* or *assimilation* so that they will not face strong opposition from the larger Australian society.

There is an indication that the quest for a balanced perspective is facilitated when refugees can be flexible under varying contexts. For example, two participants in this study, Ho and Ming, spoke their own language when they were among family members or among people who speak only their native language. They converted to speaking English outside their family environment and in the larger society. In a similar vein, Phinney, Berry, Sam, and Vedder (2006) stated that in the public domain, including school and the general community, a strategy of integration that approximates assimilation facilitates a better fit with the larger society, even more so if the larger society cannot accept the retention of the immigrants' heritage cultural practices in public. However, in the private arena, including the family and ethnocultural community, the strategy of integration that approaches separation promotes a better fit with ethnic members in everyday social life (Phinney, Berry, Sam, & Vedder, 2006). These strategies are in keeping with the strategy of *finding the path of least resistance* espoused in this study.

Berry (1997) pointed out that the process of adaptation can take place immediately or over a longer duration. Berry (1997) explained that at times there is an increase in the "fit" between the person and new environment, for instance, when the person adopts the assimilation or integration strategies. However, at other times, there is an absence of a "fit" when the strategies of separation/segregation and marginalisation are used. This becomes a pattern of conflict. Consequently, the person experiences acculturative stress or psychopathology (Berry, 1997). According to Shahrooz in this study, some refugees

who are too stuck in their old traditional ways feel a nagging inner conflict about how to be and what to do. He coined the term “confusion” and the phrase “in the middle” to depict a condition where some refugees, unable to let go of their traditional values, find it difficult to reach a balance among the tension of opposing demands. They are, therefore, unable to adapt well to the Australian environment. These extreme attitudes and behaviours are also found to be in line with Berry’s definition of the strategy of separation.

6.3.3 COMPARING THE SUBSTANTIVE THEORY OF “ADAPTING TO MINIMISE SELF-ENVIRONMENT INCONGRUITY” WITH SOCIAL CAPITAL THEORY

In his review, Portes (1998) highlighted the consensus in the literature in defining *social capital* as “the ability of actors to secure benefits by virtue of their membership in social networks or other social structures” (p. 6) and emphasised that “whereas economic capital is in people’s bank accounts and human capital is inside their heads, social capital inheres in the structure of their relationships” (p. 7). Therefore, social capital is not about a personality trait or the characteristic of a person but a resource that is derived from groups and networks the individuals belong to (Mouw, 2006). Portes (1998) further distinguished three basic roles of social capital: (1) as a source of social control, (2) as a source of family support, and (3) as a source of advantages through extrafamilial networks. In the first role as a source of social control, social capital established by tight community networks is applicable to parents, teachers, and police in the rule enforcement, specifically in upholding discipline and enhancing compliance among those under their authority (Portes, 1998).

The second role of social capital is as a source of family support (Portes, 1998). The importance of family as a source of comfort and support was highlighted in Chapter Five (section 5.2.4). Specifically, family support was found to facilitate the refugees’ process of *adapting to minimise SEI*. This finding is consistent with the current literature on refugees. For instance, Reiboldt and Goldstein (2000), in their longitudinal ethnographic study, used a family strengths perspective to explore positive coping strategies adopted by Cambodian refugee families living in poverty in urban areas in the United States. They found that these families relied on close family members and their Cambodian

community for assistance and support rather than on formalized service systems. These families focused on the future, were dedicated in their pursuit of education for their children, and were determined that their children should avoid risky gang activity. One of the strategies they adopted to fulfill these objectives was to “insulate their family from outsiders” (p. 510). The authors concluded that these adaptive strategies of the families were evidence of their success.

In the context of this study, in its role as a source of family support, social capital is invoked as an explanation of academic success. For instance, Sabrina attributed her academic success to having full support from her mother. Furthermore, the importance of rebuilding a family life in refugee families is highlighted in this study and a study by Weine et al. (2004). Weine et al. (2004) were concerned about the gap between posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD) approaches and the lived experience of refugee families. The authors cautioned that investigation into changes in refugee families should not be restricted to the clinical population, suffering, and deficits. Rather, family strength and resilience approaches within nonclinical families should also be studied. Although it has been found that many refugees, including Bosnians, have symptoms of PTSD (Weine et al., 1995), Weine et al. (2004) found little evidence that most Bosnian refugees were framing their experiences in the terms outlined by PTSD or a clinical mental health model of trauma and recovery. Instead, the authors stressed the importance of the strategies families used in rebuilding their lives. Similarly, refugees in this study did not frame their experiences in terms of PTSD or other psychopathologies. For example, both Shahrooz and Sabrina highlighted the importance of family support in facilitating their adaptation in Australia.

Using a multiple case study approach in a Canadian study, Merali (2005) explored the family transition process in Central American refugees by interviewing six first generation parent-adolescent dyads who perceived their transition process as successful. The parents stated that their harmonious relationships with their adolescents created positive emotions. The adolescents asserted that their relationships with their parents remained intact after migration. Merali suggested that the comfort the adolescents perceived with their parents might have facilitated the development of a consolidated

cultural identity at home and in schools. The adolescents reported that they continued to see their parents as role models irrespective of their exposure to different values in Canada. In this study, Shahrooz stated similar sentiments. While Shahrooz noticed that other refugees appeared “lost” amidst Australian values, he attributed his strong sense of right and wrong to having his parents as strong role models. Participants in Merali’s study reported that their family cultural transition experiences involved positive affect, high cohesion, and collaborative problem-solving processes that included open communication and mutual respect. This type of family support (in the form of open communication, mutual respect, and positive emotions) was also reported by Sabrina in this study (see section 5.2.4).

In the third role as a source of network-mediated benefits beyond the immediate family, social capital is used as an explanation for gaining access to employment, mobility through occupational ladders, and successful enterprise (Portes, 1998). A community with high social capital is a community with high levels of civic engagement, social participation or interaction, high degrees of trust, political equality, and social structures that promote cooperation among its members (Putnam, 1993). The loss of social capital in terms of community was described by several refugees in this study. They reported feeling isolated because they were brought up differently back home. Even if they did not live with family members in their homeland, they described their neighbours as their family (e.g., Morathi, Emanuel). They specifically commented on the lack of communication with their neighbours in Australia (e.g., Matt). This lack of communication is amplified for refugees who speak little or no English. There is evidence to suggest that compared to older refugees, younger refugees have greater involvement with the social environment through their educational institutions and workplaces. These increased social encounters with Australians provide opportunities in the acquisition of lifestyle and attitudes more similar to the larger society, which in turn facilitate the younger refugees’ integration or assimilation into the larger society. In this study, both Sabrina and Nadia reported having received encouragement at their work place, which is also the third source of social capital.

The importance of the third form of social capital, which consists of extrafamilial networks, has been emphasised in qualitative studies of immigrants and refugees (e.g., Barnes & Aguilar, 2007; Schweitzer, Melville, Steel, & Lacherez, 2006; Simich, Beiser, & Mawani, 2003; Simich, Beiser, Stewart, & Mwakarimba, 2005). In particular, Simich et al. (2003) found that seeking support from people of a similar background or country of origin who have been through similar experiences is particularly helpful because they have the same reference points and are facing similar challenges in the new country. This type of validation is essential for the psychological well-being of refugees (Simich et al., 2003). This form of social capital where similar experiences are shared was also reported by Aziza and Emanuel in this study.

In his review, Portes (1998) highlighted the negative consequences of social capital. One of these negative consequences is relevant in this study – there are restrictions on individual freedom because the community places certain demands for conformity (Portes, 1998). This aspect is especially relevant in the cases of Sabrina and Emanuel, who had to leave their communities behind to pursue their personal goals of obtaining an education. According to deVries (1996), culture is important in providing the context in which social support can be experienced. Individuals who identify strongly with their cultures benefit from the increased social support. Hence, culture appears to cushion the consequences of trauma. Although culture cannot prevent trauma, it may be helpful in establishing resilience in terms of validation, restitution, and rehabilitation (deVries, 1996). However, as deVries (1996) put it, culture can be a double-edged sword; strong bonding to persons and lifestyles results in a greater loss when culture disintegrates. In this study, this concept is relevant to refugees (e.g., Morathi, Tuba) who deeply grieve the loss of their culture and other individuals in it. While the process of *adapting to minimise SEI* can be facilitated when refugees secure some benefits for being members of certain social networks, the reverse can be true. That is, their process of *adapting* can be hindered by their perception of rejection in Australia.

6.3.4 COMPARING THE SUBSTANTIVE THEORY OF “ADAPTING TO MINIMISE SELF-ENVIRONMENT INCONGRUITY” WITH THEORIES OF PERCEIVED REJECTION

Social support, including acceptance from the larger Australian society, was found in this study to be an important factor that facilitates the process of *adapting* or the fit between refugees and their environment. Conversely, there is evidence that perceived rejection, in the form of prejudice and discrimination, impairs the process of *adapting* in refugees. Existing literature was found that supported these findings concerning refugees' perceptions of acceptance or rejection. Specifically, according to Berry and Sam (1997), when assimilation or integration strategies are chosen and when the larger society accepts the acculturating person and the group, there is a strengthening of the fit between the person and the new surroundings. Both these strategies are associated with less conflict as they involve acceptance of and by the larger society (Berry, 1994). Conversely, conflict, acculturative stress, or psychopathology often result when separation (or segregation) and marginalisation take place (Berry & Sam, 1997) because both strategies imply a resistance to or rejection by the larger society (Berry, 1994). These strategies can be further viewed in light of how the refugees in this study perceived rejection from the larger Australian society (section 5.2.6.5). Further, their perceived rejection can be viewed in light of existing theories on stigma and prejudice.

6.3.4.1 Theories of stigma

Erving Goffman (1963) has been widely credited for conceptualising and pioneering a framework for the study of stigma. The author created a context for continuous research on stigma. In his landmark book, *Stigma: Notes on the Management of Spoiled Identity*, Goffman (1963) conceptualised *stigma* as “an attribute that is deeply discrediting within a particular social interaction” (p. 3). His main focus of stigma is on the public's attitude towards an individual who has an attribute that fails to meet society's expectations. The person with the attribute is diminished in our minds from a wholesome individual to a “tainted, discounted one” (Goffman, 1963, p. 3). In this study, it is evident that some refugee participants attempted to control the reactions of others by manipulating what they revealed about themselves. They concealed their refugee identity by denying that they were refugees. A few participants stated that they were no longer refugees or

avoided being linked with refugees. The secrecy of several participants pertaining to their refugee identity is also reflective of Goffman's (1963) belief that people suffering from a discrediting stigma have to limit other people's access to any information regarding the stigma or else submit to the features of a stigmatised and discredited person. According to Goffman (1963), the demand of idealised behaviour is most apparent in marginalised individuals, whose deviance turns them into "discredited" or "discreditable" groups, depending on the nature of their stigma (p. 42). The importance of impression management is most obvious in discredited individuals, as they have to reduce the tension caused by their stigma so that they can associate with other people successfully. The emphasis on idealised, normative identity and behaviour reduces the ability of the discredited person to obtain total acceptance by the larger society that the person has to assimilate or integrate into. For the discreditable person who tries to "pass" and apply "disidentifiers" to portray himself or herself as "normal," ambivalence and alienation evolve as an outcome of diminished social interaction. Eventually, the existence of a stigma of any type as part of the existence of the larger society alters the nature of impression management as well as interaction (Goffman, 1963, p. 44). This type of information control is clearly evident in the current sample of refugee participants. Further description of stigma is presented in the following section.

6.3.4.1.1 Conceptualisation of stigma

The concept of *stigma* itself has been criticised for its vagueness and its focus on individuals. In their review, Link and Phelan (2001) attended to these criticisms and to the application of stigma by investigators from Goffman (1963) to the present. The authors constructed a revised conceptualisation of the term *stigma* and posited that stigma occurs when five components co-occur or converge. According to the first component of Link and Phelan's (2001) conceptualisation of stigma, human differences are distinguished and labelled by people. The authors chose to apply the term "label" and not "attribute," "condition," or "mark" because the latter terms focus on the feature that is being referred to in the stigmatised individual and thus forgetting that its identification and selection for social significance is actually the result of social processes. In the context of this study, the present terminology used in the media, and, to some extent the larger Australian society, to describe refugees clearly conveys

stigmatising attitudes. For example, refugees have been distinguished as “boat people” and labelled “illegals,” “free loaders,” and “queue jumpers.”

The second aspect of the stigma process takes place when the beliefs of the larger society associate the labelled individuals with undesirable features or negative stereotypes. This aspect of stigma has been crucial to the conceptualisation of stigma since Goffman’s (1963) work. Link and Phelan (2001) considered this aspect to be highly salient in psychological literature on stigma because of the focus on how cognitive processes facilitate the association between labels and stereotypes. When the individual is associated with a label containing a set of undesirable features, stereotypes are formed. In this study, the media’s portrayal of refugees as “uneducated,” “poor,” and “desperate” (according to Payam, Shahrooz, and Mariam; see section 5.2.6.5.1) can perpetuate the development of stereotypes of refugees.

Link and Phelan (2001), citing evidence from Morone (1997) and Devine, Plant, and Harrison (1999), explained that the third component of stigma is present when labelled individuals are categorised in such a way that there is some degree of a distinction or separation of “us” from “them.” In this study, according to Payam, some people describe refugees as “illegals” or “queue jumpers” rather than simply describing them as asylum seekers who are forced to leave their countries and have arrived in Australia without a legal permit. The association of social labels with undesirable features becomes the rationale for assuming that these negatively labelled refugees are fundamentally different from people who do not share the label. For instance, in this study, the labelling of refugees as “illegals” and “queue jumpers” has served to increase the public’s desire for social distance as well as to separate “us” from “them.” (Note that throughout this thesis, I place terms like “illegals” in inverted commas to indicate reservations about the usage of this term.) According to Link and Phelan (2001), in an extreme situation, the stigmatised individual is assumed to be so distinct from “us” that he or she is not really human; therefore, all forms of ill-treatment of “them” are possible. As an example, the horrific treatment of the asylum seekers in Australia’s detention centres (Dudley, 2003; Jupp, 2003; Lawrence, 2004) has become “justifiable” because these asylum seekers are so different from “us” that they are no longer human.

In the fourth component of the stigma process, according to Link and Phelan (2001), the labelled individual experiences status loss and *discrimination* that result in unequal outcomes. Although most definitions of stigma do not contain this aspect, Link and Phelan (2001) reasoned that when individuals are negatively labelled, distinguished from others, and associated with undesirable features, a rationale is established to devalue, reject, and exclude these individuals, thereby leading to their experience of status loss and discrimination. According to Hage (2002b), the year 2001 was dominated by intensive attempts of the Coalition government to discourage a "quasi-invasion" of Muslim asylum seekers who came by boat via Indonesia from Iraq, Palestine, Iran, and Afghanistan. The Coalition government was accused of legitimising de-humanising strategies, including leaving asylum seekers at sea or locking them in detention centres. The government was also accused of propagating the pettiest de-humanising claims that "these people" did things which decent humans would not do, including using their children inhumanely such as keeping them hungry, allowing them to be sick, and, to the extent of, throwing them in the water. Many notable Australians, including a few ex-Prime Ministers, stated that this was one of the vilest endeavours at propagating petty prejudice that an Australian government had done to achieve its political objectives (Hage, 2002b, p. 241).

In the fifth aspect of the stigma process, stigmatisation is completely dependent upon access to the social, economic, and political power that facilitates the identification of distinctness, the making of stereotypes, the separation of labelled individuals into different categories, and the full operation of disapproval, rejection, exclusion, and discrimination (Link & Phelan, 2001). Consider, for instance, while some refugees engage in certain stigma-related cognitive processes about those not in their stigmatised refugee group, they do not have the social, cultural, economic, and political power to imbue their thoughts with any real discriminatory outcomes. These refugees simply do not control access to important areas of life, including educational institutions, employment, housing, and health care. This scenario reflects the views of Link and Phelan (2002) that stigma is contingent on social, economic, and political power. This situation can be further exemplified by a scenario in which the Australian government

has full political power over the decision of which type of asylum seekers they allow into Australia. As well, the larger society has the social power to decide whether they like to befriend refugees or avoid refugees. In conclusion, according to Link and Phelan's (2001) definition, *stigma* occurs when "elements of labelling, stereotyping, separating, status loss, and discrimination co-occur in a power situation that allows these processes to unfold" (p. 382). Furthermore, there is evidence in the findings of this study that the stigmatisation of refugees has led refugees to deny and hide the fact that they are refugees.

6.3.4.1.2 Secrecy and denial

In this study, a few refugee participants who were aware of the refugee stigma attempted to hide their refugee status in order to maintain their secrecy. One participant observed that some refugees denied that they were refugees when questioned. Others believed that they were no longer refugees because they have lived in Australia for a long time. Additionally, a few participants avoided any association between themselves and the "boat people" in detention centres who arrived "illegally" in recent times. These participants are said to have experienced stigma by association because they are linked with "illegal" asylum seekers. It is possible that such secrecy and denial will lead to increased stigma in the larger society because fewer refugees will be willing to talk openly about their experiences. As well, when there is no forum for refugees to voice their own defence, the less the public learn about the refugee experience and the more likely they are to believe what has been written in newspapers and conveyed in the media. Consequently, this can lead to increased marginalisation of the refugee population in Australia, and refugees may be precluded from participating fully in social activities of the larger community. Thus, the refugee stigma is of great concern because it is both the origin and outcome of secrecy and denial. Such perceived rejection can compromise the refugees' process of *adapting to minimise SEI*, especially at the phase of *acquiring a sense of belonging* in Australia. As an example, El-Zein (2002, p. 230), who pondered what a sense of belonging meant to him, emphasised the importance of acceptance by the larger society.

What was a "home" made of? A list of attributes might have included familiarity, a sense of ownership, a sense of not being a guest and a sense of belonging.

Familiarity with a place was a matter of time, a matter of being there ... Belonging was equally ambiguous. After all, you belonged to a place only in so far as the place itself – its inhabitants, its culture – felt that you belonged to it.

As well, the impact of stigma on refugees is apparent at the stage of *integrating perspectives and balancing identities*. Due to their perception of the refugee stigma in the larger society, a few refugees in this study became less likely to integrate their refugee identity into their self-identity. Instead, they employed the strategy of denial and avoidance to maintain their secrecy about being refugees. However, there is an indication in the findings that not all refugees respond to the refugee stigma the same way. This variability can be further explained by the identity threat model of stigma in the following section.

6.3.4.1.3 Identity threat model of stigma

According to Major and O'Brien (2005), in the past, individuals from stigmatised groups were seen as victims of other people's negative stereotypes, prejudicial attitudes, and discriminatory actions. Although the stigma itself does have direct negative and insidious consequences on the stigmatised, the authors in their review found that the individual's construals are crucial in mediating the responses to stigma. Major and O'Brien (2005) further asserted that the high variability across people, groups, and situations in responses to stigma can be explained by the *identity threat model* of stigma. According to this model, reactions to stigma-relevant situations and circumstances are a function of cues in the immediate situation, collective representations of the person's stigma status, and the person's characteristics. Together, these factors influence the assessment of how significant the situation is for the person's well-being. When the person perceives the demands exerted by a stigma-relevant stressor to be potentially harmful to his or her social identity and these demands have surpassed his or her coping capacity, *identity threat* results. Consequences of this identity threat are involuntary stress reactions such as anxiety, vigilance to the threat, and a declined working memory capacity. The person's coping strategies aimed at reducing the threat include (1) blaming negative occurrences on discrimination, (2) increasing identification with the threatened group, and (3) removing self-esteem from threatening domains (Major & O'Brien, 2005). In this study, it is assumed that *identity threat* can emerge from the refugees'

stigmatised status and their perception of other forms of rejection, including perceived prejudicial attitudes from others, perceived discrimination, and perceived racism. There is evidence to suggest that coping strategies utilised by refugees who have experienced prejudice or discrimination include assigning blame on discrimination, avoidance, becoming indifferent, rationalisation, acceptance, and compensation (see section 5.2.6.5.5). In light of the review by Major and O'Brien (2005), these coping strategies can be further examined as follows.

6.3.4.1.3.1 Blaming negative occurrences on discrimination rather than self

It was found that blaming a negative event on discrimination by moving the blame from the stable and unique features of the self to the prejudice of other people can preserve a person's self-esteem (B. Major, Kaiser, & McCoy, 2003). This is especially true when prejudice is blatant (B. N. Major, Quinton, & Schmader, 2003). However, attributing an incident to discrimination is still threatening to a person's social identity. This attribution is more harmful to the person's self-esteem, than is entirely blaming the incident on an external source (Schmitt & Branscombe, 2002). When prejudice is hidden or disguised, attributing an incident to discrimination leads to a decrease in self-esteem (B. N. Major et al., 2003). Hidden or disguised prejudice has been alluded to in this study. For instance, Fariba questioned whether her unemployment arose from the prejudice of others as the prejudice she perceived was not obvious. Eventually, her Australian friends suggested that she change her name so that it sounded less Arabic. They attributed her lack of success in her job interviews to the interviewer's prejudice.

It was found in a study (Stangor, Swim, Van Allen, & Sechrist, 2002) that members of a stigmatised group are more inclined to blame negative outcomes on discrimination in a private setting or when they are among members of the ingroup. They are less likely to blame unfavourable consequences on discrimination when they are in a public setting among members of the higher-status groups (Stangor et al., 2002). In this study, a similar situation is reflected in Payam as he would not talk with his family members via marriage (who were Australian-born Caucasians) about the discrimination that he faced because he believed that it would lead to disunity in the family. However, he appears to have no qualms in revealing this information to me (I am not a Caucasian).

6.3.4.1.3.2 Removing self-esteem from identity-threatening domains

The stigmatised can also choose to disengage themselves from domains in which they are being negatively stereotyped or fear becoming a target of discrimination (J. Keller & Dauenheimer, 2003; B. Major & Schmader, 1998; B. Major, Spencer, Schmader, Wolfe, & Crocker, 1998; Schmader, Major, Eccleston, & McCoy, 2001; Steele, 1997; Stone, 2002). In this study, this coping strategy applies to refugees who have disengaged themselves from the domain of higher education and having career aspirations. For example, both Sabrina and Ania reported that members of their ethnic communities attempted to discourage them in their endeavour to learn English and in their aspiration to have better jobs. Many members in their ethnic communities focused on earning an income through menial jobs and buying a house at the expense of learning English and obtaining higher education. They did not believe that they could compete with others because they were “not Australians” and they were “not from an English-speaking background” (see section 4.5.2.2).

Another way of coping with an identity threat in a certain socially valued domain is to compensate or strive hard to overcome certain obstacles (Allport, 1954; C. T. Miller & Myers, 1988). In this study, Shahrooz noticed that some refugees try to *compensate* by striving for material success or by changing their physical appearance in order to detach themselves from the refugee identity. For example, they might change their hair colour to blonde.

6.3.4.1.3.3 Increasing identification with one's stigmatised group

According to Allport (1954), members of the stigmatised groups can deal with their identity threat by increasing their identification with their group. In particular, Ellemers, Spears, and Doosje (2002), in their review, concluded that members who identify strongly with their group may manage the threats to their group by enhancing identification with the group. However, those who identify little with their group respond to threats by further reducing their group identification (Ellemers et al., 2002). This may partially explain why a participant (i.e., Payam) had an increased level of

identification as a refugee while another participant (i.e., Shahrooz) had a lowered level of identification as a refugee when their refugee identity was under threat.

6.3.4.2 Perceived prejudice

According to Totten and Kleg (1989), prejudice can be regarded as an unfavourable or negative feeling or belief about a group or an individual just because the individual is a member of the group. These prejudiced beliefs are rigid, are not true for all members in the group, and are associated with mental pictures or stereotypes that people have of the group. A stereotype is a fixed mental picture that is generalised to all members of a group, and it creates the rigid belief of a prejudiced attitude (Totten & Kleg, 1989). As an example, the prejudice that Payam perceived from others arose from sensing that people felt “pity” for him or that they distanced themselves from him (see section 5.2.6.5.1). He also stated that it was “very hard not to have that feeling” when two or three people actually “created” this feeling in him. Payam explained that his perception of prejudice was worsened by the things he heard in the media and what he read in the newspaper.

When I talk to people, especially if they are Australians, known as European Australian basically, as soon as I said refugee, I had a feeling that “okay, he is one of them,” that sort of thing. I tried to not let this thought to come to me, but in a way, it's just a feeling that come because of the things I hear in the media, things that I read in the paper, people's comments about refugees, migrants, and asylum seekers. (Payam)

In a review of racial prejudice, Quillian (2006) stated that in most cases, prejudice is the primary motivating factor for discrimination to occur. It can be difficult to differentiate among the terms *prejudice*, *discrimination*, and *racism*. Among these three terms, *racism* implies a stronger moral condemnation and the speaker's obvious condemnation of the specific belief or practice (Quillian, 2006). In the following section, evidence of the resurgence of the refugees' perceived rejection in Australia will be presented.

6.3.4.2.1 Resurgence of perceived prejudice, discrimination, and racism

Archbishop Barry Hickey stated in *The Sunday Times* (Lampathakis & Spagnolo, 2006) that “when Vietnamese people came here in the 1970s, soon after that Vietnam War, Australians accepted them with little screening and were very sympathetic.” Hickey was surprised that “Australia's attitude towards refugees had hardened so much in the past 30

years.” The increasingly negative attitudes towards refugees were observed and reported by three refugees in this study. Both Payam and Ho stated that they did not perceive much discrimination when the first wave of refugees arrived in Australia.

Early years when I came here, fifteen years ago, fourteen years ago, and there was talk about refugees, it was [in a] more compassionate way from the media. I know ever since different things happened that, you know ... didn't help refugee's cause basically in a way. (Payam)

It was very good because I suppose in 1980, there wasn't [sic] many boat people. And we were more or less treated like red carpet all the way ... we were treated like kings and queens. But now, I mean these other people come, they get locked up. I mean, there must be a bit of sympathy towards these people, you know ... these guys probably get fed when the time is to be fed, sleep when the time they have to sleep ... like a chook cage. (Ho)

Willmoth (2005), in *Sunday Age*, cited one of the Vietnamese refugees who said that they were very lucky to be so welcomed compared to asylum seekers today who were detained in Australia. The author also claimed that the warm reception the Vietnamese received from the Fraser government – the first wave in the late 1970s and the second wave in mid-1980s – stood in contrast to the refugee policies of the Howard government. An increasingly unfavourable attitude toward refugees was also noted by Fariba.

And then I came here [1986], people were really good. I didn't know any English at the beginning, but still people are ... somehow because of the media, like they knew that refugee people were coming, the reasons why they were coming. I could feel that they were much more sensitive and they would be friendly ... But I don't know – these days are very difficult. (Fariba)

Fariba believed that having a Middle Eastern background compounded the prejudice associated with being a refugee, especially after the September 11 terrorist attacks on the United States in the year 2001.

For refugees like myself coming from Middle East background, I think it's because people not knowing exactly the history, the background of things, and they just judged you by being a Middle East person, and that's it. They want to put you in a box with every other Middle East person from Osama bin Laden to like [sic]. They just want to put you in a box and close the door and that's it, like they don't want to get to know you as a person or as an individual. (Fariba)

In response to the resurgence of racism towards Arabs and Muslims in Australia, Hage (2002b, p. 242) stated

The attack on the asylum seekers was similar in function to the ideologies of slavery: when treating someone in ways you know are inhuman it is best to convince yourself that they are inhuman. And, of course, the facile associative logic of racism being what it is, the de-humanising and demeaning claim about the asylum seekers ended up attaching themselves to Muslims and Arab-Australians in general. (Hage, 2002b, p. 242)

It was further found in a study (cited in "Muslim report," 2004) that Arab and Muslim Australians reported an increase in offensive remarks and physical violence against them following the September 11 terrorist attacks on America and the Bali bombings. Australia's Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission (HREOC) acting race discrimination commissioner William Jonas stated that the findings supported anecdotal evidence about an increase in violence against Muslims and Arabs. Although most participants in the study cited in "Muslims report," (2004) perceived an increase in the level of discrimination and vilification following the event of September 11, Jones claimed that this finding was not reflected in an increase in the number of complaints to police possibly due to a fear of victimisation. He further stated that this was not surprising as some individuals express their religion in a different way and because they are visibly different ("Muslims report," 2004). Public fears were further fuelled by reports of the possibility that members of the al-Qaida terrorist network, who were responsible for the September 11 terrorist attacks on America, arrived in Australia pretending to be refugees (Mills, 2002). The federal government was accused of portraying refugees as "illegal queue jumpers" and "potential terrorists," which compounded a xenophobic environment in Australia which in turn gave rise to vilification as well as racial and religious hatred ("Refugees policy," 2003).

In this study, the refugee stigma and discrimination directed towards refugee participants of Middle Eastern origin were found to be an important contextual condition that led to their experience of *recurrent SEI* (see section 5.2.6.5.4). Furthermore, in a large scale study of immigrant youth (as described in Chapter One, i.e., Berry et al., 2006b), discrimination was found to be the most substantial predictor of poor psychological and sociocultural adaptation (Phinney, Berry, Sam, & Vedder, 2006). The refugees' experience of recurrent SEI can be considered a form of stress. The stress experienced

by refugees, including their experience of SEI and recurrent SEI, can be further explored in light of current theories of stress and coping.

6.3.5 COMPARING THE SUBSTANTIVE THEORY OF “ADAPTING TO MINIMISE SELF-ENVIRONMENT INCONGRUITY” WITH THEORIES ON STRESS, COPING, EMOTIONS, MEANING AND FREEWILL, AND RESILIENCE

For more than fifty years, Richard Lazarus conducted research into stress, emotions, and coping strategies, and is considered a pioneer in this field. His theory is described in this section within the context of the findings of this study. This is followed by comparisons of segments of the substantive theory with theories of emotion, meaning and freewill, and resilience.

6.3.5.1 Lazarus’ theory of stress and coping

Lazarus (1966) proposed the first theory of stress and coping, which he later refined (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984; Lazarus, 1999). Relevant to this study is the Lazarus’ *relational approach* to stress which takes into account the environmental demands and the person’s psychological resources to cope with these demands. A stressful situation occurs when environmental demands exceed the person’s resources to meet these demands. Anxiety, a stress emotion, can take place and is stronger when the individual has little regard for his or her capacity to cope. Trauma occurs when the demands vastly exceed the individual resources to cope. In this situation, a sense of helplessness to deal with the demands can lead to panic, hopelessness, and depression (Lazarus, 1999). The concept of stress and coping corresponds to the general aims and focus of this study. The main source of stress or the overarching problem encountered by refugees and the process they adopt to cope with this stress have been addressed in Chapter Three (The basic social psychological problem) and Chapter Four (The basic social psychological process), respectively. The basic social psychological problem or the main source of stress faced by refugees is identified as *self-environment incongruity* (SEI). It is evident that refugees cope with their problem by attempting to minimise their experience of SEI through the basic social psychological process of *adapting*. Refugees adapt in Australia by (1) changing various aspects of the self with the aim of dealing with their new circumstances and their new environment in Australia, (2) making changes to the

environment itself, or (3) moving away from the environment. Additionally, another form of stress that refugees face in Australia is conceptualised in this study as *recurrent SEI* (see section 5.2.6.5.4), which emerges when refugees perceive different forms of rejection from the larger Australian society. The coping strategies they adopt to deal with their recurrent SEI have been described earlier in section 5.2.6.5.5.

In the acculturation field, Berry (1994) conceptualised *stress* as the generalised physiological and psychological state arising from experiencing environmental stressors, which necessitates a coping process to resume normal functioning until adaptation to the new condition. *Acculturative stress*, according to Berry (1994), is defined as a type of stress that originates from the process of acculturation, often with reduced mental health (especially anxiety and depression), perception of marginality and alienation, and increased psychosomatic and psychological symptoms. Berry (1994) further stated that acculturative stress is a phenomenon underlying poor adaptation entailing a decrease in health status, identity confusion, and daily life problems in the domains of family, work, and school. Lazarus (1999) admitted that he was heavily influenced by Berry's (1997) work on *psychological acculturation* with regards to the issues of immigration, acculturation, and adaptation. The author, however, voiced two main concerns that he has with Berry's (1997) framework. First, Berry's analysis subordinates many structures and processes, including the ones dealing with stress and coping, to the process of acculturation. This suggests that the main struggle of an individual who immigrates to another society is the struggle of acculturation. Lazarus (1999) emphasised that while some stress in immigration involves acculturation, there are other forms of stress. This is also evident in the findings of this study. In support of Lazarus' (1999) argument, it is apparent that besides acculturative stress, the refugees in this study encountered other forms of stress. For instance, throughout the process of *coming to terms with their past*, the refugees had to deal with the stress provoked by their pre-migration and migration experiences. This includes having to come to terms with losing their homes, possessions, livelihood, and education. They also yearned for their homeland and communities. Additionally, another form of stress included having to face discrimination in Australia and live with the stigma of being refugees.

Lazarus' (1999) second concern is that Berry's system of variables is too complicated to explore and too abstract. According to Lazarus (1999), this system of variables is too distant from the daily struggles of the living experiences of immigrants. Although Berry (1997) included the basics of stress, emotion, and coping theory in his framework, Lazarus (1999) highlighted the absence of a microanalytic, narrative approach to the adaptation struggle that is experienced in people's daily lives and commented that Berry's framework is not sufficiently transactional. According to Lazarus (1999), transaction adds to the personal connotation of what is occurring to the perceived incident. This issue was addressed in this study through in-depth interviews with refugees. Specifically, using the grounded theory method, daily social realities of the refugees were explored and documented through their own words and perceptions.

Incidentally, Lazarus (1999) suggested substituting a systems theory research approach with a narrative approach. While the most common objection to a narrative approach to the study of emotions includes its heavy dependence on self-report, the author argued that a limited subjectivism can facilitate a closer approach to the truth than the simplistic presumption that humans react only to the objective circumstances in their lives. Furthermore, Lazarus (1999) asserted that other methods can be adopted to supplement these self-reports, including the use of the best observational and inferential strategies of clinical method to identify conscious and unconscious motives as well as ego-defences. In this study, although the bulk of the data was not obtained by these methods but was derived from in-depth interviews with participants, phone interviews, and field notes, the path of generating a grounded theory according to the Straussian approach was followed closely. This ensured that the generated theory was indeed grounded in the data.

Some researchers (French, Caplan, & Van Harrison, 1982; Lazarus, 1999; Lazarus & Folkman, 1984) adopted the definition of *effective coping* in terms of the quality of fit between environmental demands and the person. They also viewed this fit as being dependent on the criteria adopted for effectiveness such as subjective well-being, social functioning, and physical health, and the relational meanings different people constructed from it at any given time or as a whole. Effective coping, which corresponds

to having success in the process of *adapting* in this study, can also be viewed in terms of the quality of fit between refugees and the environment. I favour the approach of Lazarus (1999) who highlighted the fit between the individual and the environment as this corresponds to the concept of SEI in this study.

Two types of coping responses that facilitate the management of stressful circumstances were identified by Lazarus and Folkman (1984): (1) the problem-focused responses aimed at actively alleviating, changing, or solving the problem and (2) the emotion-focused responses, including efforts to regulate the emotional responses to stressful and potentially stressful conditions. A third coping mechanism was identified by Endler and Parker (1990) as avoidance-oriented coping. Berry (2006) commented that it is unclear how the problem-focused responses and emotion-focused responses relate to the acculturation strategies because both these coping responses are involved in assimilation and integration. The avoidance-oriented coping is similar to the separation and marginalisation strategies (Berry, 2006). In this study, the problem- or behaviour-focused responses can be found at the stage of *rebuilding a new life* in the process of *adapting* where refugees try to minimise their problem of SEI. For instance, they learn a new language, rebuild their career and form new social networks. Their emotion-focused coping responses are elaborated in the following section.

6.3.5.2 Emotion-focused coping responses

The emotion-focused responses of refugees can be found at the stage of *coming to terms with the past* in the process of *adapting*. Here, refugees submit themselves to the phases of unpreparedness (including shock, denial, and numbness), anger and its related emotions (such as guilt and emotional pain), rationalisation, creating an alternative reality, depression, and acceptance of a new life. Most of these emotion-focused coping responses help refugees to regulate their emotional reactions to stressful situations, especially with regards to their experience of multiple losses and disintegration of their previous lives.

It was Lazarus' (2000) opinion that everyone uses *denial* from time to time and this defence is not necessarily pathogenic or pathological. Lazarus (1983) emphasised that

denial, which is traditionally seen as immature in adults and pathological, is sometimes adaptive and sometimes maladaptive. In this study, *denial* as part of *unpreparedness* is viewed as the first phase of the stage of *coming to terms with the past*. Denial was found to be a transient phase, although refugees linger in this phase to varying degrees.

Traditionally, theories of coping highlight the value of tuning into and expressing negative emotions during recovery from traumatic events. However, contemporary evidence (e.g., Bonanno, Keltner, Holen, & Horowitz, 1995; Bonanno, Moskowitz, Papa, & Folkman, 2005; Skinner, Edge, Altman, & Sherwood, 2003) suggests that repressive coping (or directing attention away from negative emotions) can help to build resilience after aversive experiences. For instance, Bonanno et al. (1995) showed that the avoidance of unpleasant emotions during conjugal bereavement may not be a bad thing, as it was previously assumed. As well, resilience to loss was demonstrated in a recent study by Coifman, Bonanno, Ray, and Gross (2007). The authors found that both bereaved and non-bereaved people who display repressive coping behaviour have fewer symptoms of psychopathology, fewer health problems and somatic complaints, and are assessed by close friends to be better adjusted than those who do not display repressive coping. However, the authors also cautioned that repressive responses may not be adaptive in all stressful conditions. In this study, Fariba clearly exhibited repressive or avoidant coping behaviour, which she appreciated retrospectively. She believed that she would “go crazy” if she had not avoided her negative emotions. However, as she lingered in the phase of denial for a lengthy period, she admitted that this had negatively affected her academic achievement. In a different vein, emotions that are positive have been seen as predominantly adaptive.

6.3.5.2.1 Positive emotions

The importance of positive affect in coping with stress was highlighted by Folkman and Moskowitz (2000). They argued that (1) positive emotions can simultaneously take place with distress at a given time, (2) positive emotions during stress have an important adaptive function, and (3) coping processes that give rise to and sustain positive emotions during chronic stress involve meaning. In this study, a few refugees stated that they had derived some positive outcomes that arose from experiencing stressful events

even when the events themselves did not have desirable resolutions. Their perceived positive outcomes include having benefited from the stressful situation (e.g., Aziza, Sabrina), having successfully learnt important life lessons (e.g., Aziza), having grown from the experience (e.g., Sabrina), and having spiritual-religious growth resulting from the stressful experience (e.g., Mike). For instance, Sabrina reported that war made her a better person and that she had benefited and learnt something from it (see section 5.3.3). As well, Aziza expressed her gratitude for having learnt important life lessons from her undesirable experiences. She derived some positive emotions and attitudes from her refugee experience, including pride over her achievement in having learnt English, having established friendships with people from diverse backgrounds, and having survived her ordeal in the detention centre. These positive emotions further contributed to her process of *adapting* and enjoyment of her new life in Australia.

As shown, the findings of this study substantiate Folkman and Moskowitz's (2000) premises that positive affect can co-occur with distress, and "positive affect in the context of stress has important adaptational significance of its own" (p. 648). There is evidence in the findings that success in *rebuilding a new life* can facilitate the stage of *coming to terms with the past*. A few refugees in this study reported experiencing positive emotions through successful rebuilding, which in turn eased the psychological burden of their past experiences. For instance, Nadia rebuilt her career successfully and reported having moved on with her life with ease. Aziza also stated that she had successfully learnt English and had moved on with her life very quickly. As well, Payam stated that refugees who focused on establishing their careers did not dwell on their past experiences. These findings can be further viewed in light of Fredrickson's (1998, 2001) broaden-and-build theory of positive emotions.

The *broaden-and-build theory* was posited by Fredrickson (1998, 2001) and later supported in a study by Fredrickson and Joiner (2002). The broaden-and-build theory of positive emotions states that "experiences of positive emotions broaden people's momentary thought-action repertoires, which in turn serves to build their enduring personal resources, ranging from physical and intellectual resources to social and psychological resources" (Fredrickson, 2001, p. 218). As well, it was demonstrated that

the psychological broadening initiated by one positive emotion enhances the odds that the person will obtain positive meaning in later incidences and will perceive even more positive emotions. Furthermore, positive emotions via their outcome in broadening thinking can predict future increases in positive emotions as well as initiate upward spirals towards improved emotional well-being and build psychological coping resources for coping with future crises (Fredrickson & Joiner, 2002).

In another study (Fredrickson, Tugade, Waugh, & Larkin, 2003), it was revealed that resilient individuals are buffered against depression by positive emotions in the aftermath of crises. These individuals also thrived through positive emotions and thus rendering support to the broaden-and-build theory. Fredrickson et al. (2003) found that the experiences of resilient people were not entirely positive. Similar to the less resilient individuals, they encountered problems and stresses arising out of the September 11 events and experienced anger, fear, disgust, contempt, and sympathy. However, compared with less resilient individuals, resilient people perceived their negative emotions and sympathy as intertwined to a greater extent with positive emotions. It was shown that resilient individuals offset their negative experiences with positive emotions – although they were affected by the tragedy, they were not overwhelmed by it (Fredrickson et al., 2003). Sabrina, in this study, provided a good example for the broaden-and-build theory of positive emotions. Although she was saddened by the occurrence of war in her country of origin, she perceived that war made her a better person. Although she grieved over the death of her father, she perceived that this had made her grow up very fast. In Australia, having successfully acquired English skills, Sabrina went on to obtain a higher education. This led to her success in building a career that she was passionate about. She spoke about being happy at work, like “a little mouse” (section 4.5.2.2.).

Folkman and Moskowitz's (2000) premise that coping processes that give rise to and sustain positive emotions during chronic stress involve meaning is echoed in Viktor Frankl's (1984) book, *Man in Search of Meaning*. Frankl (1984) who survived the holocaust founded a revolutionary approach to psychotherapy, logotherapy, based on his core belief that the main motivation in humans is their search for meaning. His belief

also resonates with the central theme in the new paradigm of grief models (see section 6.3.1.5). The basis of the new grief models is that the central process in grieving is *meaning reconstruction* in response to a loss (Neimeyer, 1998, 2002). The importance of meaning and freewill is further highlighted in the following section.

6.3.5.3 Meaning and freewill

In this study, the personal factor of *motivation* (see section 5.3.4) can be examined in the context of the literature on meaning and freewill. The author-psychiatrist, Viktor Frankl (1984, p. 154) believed that (1) human beings can choose to give in to limiting conditions or overcome them and (2) humans are ultimately self-determining as they have the freewill to decide what they will become in the next moment.

Every human being has the freedom to change at any instant. Therefore, we can predict his future only within the large framework of a statistical survey referring to a whole group; the individual personality, however, remains essentially unpredictable. The basis for any predictions would be represented by biological, psychological or sociological conditions. Yet one of the main features of human existence is the capacity to rise above such conditions, to grow beyond them. Man is capable of changing the world for the better if possible, and of changing himself for the better if necessary. (Frankl, 1984, p. 154)

As Frankl (1984) pointed out, one of the primary characteristics of human beings is their ability to transcend their biological, psychological, or sociological conditions. While the concept of *self-determination* was not fully explored in this study, the concept of *motivation* appears to approximate the concept of self-determination. In this study, motivation, coupled with a sense of meaning and purpose, was found in several refugee participants. Motivation, as inferred from the findings, is a personal factor that can partially overcome the negative effects of discrimination. For instance, despite facing prejudice and discrimination in Australia, Payam perceived a sense of belonging in Australia possibly due to his motivation to become a part of the Australian society, his eagerness to find out as much as possible about Australia, and his readiness to interact with his new surroundings. Payam also discovered a sense of connection and meaning as he empathised with the plight of the Aborigines in Australia. Similarly, Shahrooz had always considered Australia to be his home despite having experienced discrimination at his workplace. Additionally, there is evidence in the findings that motivation can

overcome the effects of age on the process of *adapting to minimise SEI*. For instance, Tuba was motivated and determined to continue to study English at the age of 63 years. Tuba also derived some positive emotions in the form of gratitude for her children's success in their careers in Australia. Sabrina found a sense of meaning and purpose, which motivated her to assist her ethnic community (in Western Australia) towards obtaining peace among the different nationalities of the former Yugoslavia. Another concept that is related to motivation, which is commonly termed *resilience*, is further examined in the following section.

6.3.5.4 Resilience

To date, there have been two conceptualisations of resilience, one by Bonanno (2004) and the other by Roisman (2005). Bonanno (2004) emphasised the distinction between resilience and recovery. He viewed *recovery* in terms of a trajectory whereby normal functioning is temporarily substituted by threshold or sub-threshold psychopathology (such as depression and PTSD) for at least a few months and then slowly reverts to the pre-event levels. Complete recovery may be immediate or may take up to two years. On the other hand, he stated that *resilience*, which demonstrates the ability to maintain equilibrium, is usually described in developmental research in terms of protective factors that promote the development of positive consequences and healthy personality features among children who have experienced adverse life situations. Bonanno (2004) further asserted that (1) resilience of loss or potential trauma signifies a trajectory different from the trajectory of recovery, (2) resilience is common, and (3) there are multiple and sometimes unexpected routes to resilience. Kelley (2005) agreed with Bonanno (2004) that the human capacity to thrive after extremely aversive experiences has been grossly underestimated and resilience is natural and normal, part of the innate health of all individuals. In conceptualising adult resilience, Bonanno (2004) further stated that *resilience* to loss and trauma is the person's ability to maintain stable healthy levels of psychological and physical functioning despite having experienced an isolated, potentially disruptive incident (including the death of a close relation or a violent or life-threatening circumstance). During the time of the interviews, the refugees in this study did not report having any serious psychological problems. They had all dealt with their

losses to varying degrees and thus giving some support to Bonanno's (2004) belief that resilience is common.

Bonanno (2004) postulated several distinct dimensions of resilience to loss and trauma. These dimensions are hardiness, self-enhancement (i.e., the overly positive biases in favour of the self), repressive coping, as well as positive emotion and laughter. Some of these dimensions were found in a few refugee participants. It has been demonstrated in the literature (Florian, Mikulincer, & Taubman, 1995; Kobasa, Maddi, & Kahn, 1982) that hardiness involves three basic elements of commitment, control, and challenge. First, the person is committed to finding a meaningful purpose in life. Second, the person believes that he or she can influence the environment and the results of events. Third, the person believes that he or she can learn and grow from positive and negative life experiences. In this study, Sabrina demonstrated the personality trait of hardiness as she believed that she had grown to be a better person for having her negative life experiences. Hardiness was also demonstrated in Aziza who believed that she could influence her environment when she realised that she had successfully learnt English. Aziza also believed that she had grown from her life experiences.

Roisman (2005) argued that Bonanno (2004) provided only one plausible conceptualisation and definition of resilience. Alternatively, according to Roisman (2005), resilience is best seen as "a family of loosely connected phenomena involving adequate or better adaptation in the context of adversity" (p. 264). The focus is on both environmental sources (good relationships) and individual sources (including "hardiness" and its personality traits) of protection. In this broader definition, Roisman (2005) contended that *recovery* can be viewed as a special case of resilience because the emphasis is on obtaining successful adaptation after maladaptation or developmental difficulty. Roisman's (2005) broad conceptualisation of resilience closely resembles the refugees' ability to adapt or to minimise their experience of SEI in Australia. This is because resilience can be simply regarded as the ability of the refugees to adapt to new circumstances and a new environment. In short, resilience is very much akin to *adaptability*. In this study, all refugee participants experienced multiple losses to varying extents. They engaged in the process of *adapting to minimise SEI* to different degrees

and were preoccupied with different stages in adaptation. From this perspective, resilience is also seen as a *process* rather than just an attribute or personality characteristic that some people seem to have. I argue that resilience in the process of *adapting* involves learning that one can influence change, that one learn and grow from difficult life situations, and that one can find a sense of meaning and purpose in Australia. Thus, resilience in the process of *adapting* can be seen as the refugees' ability to adapt to changing life situations over time in Australia.

6.3.6 COMPARING THE SUBSTANTIVE THEORY OF "ADAPTING TO MINIMISE SELF-ENVIRONMENT INCONGRUITY" WITH THEORIES OF IDENTITY

Social identity for the current sample of refugee participants includes ethnic identity (or identification with one's ethnic community or culture of origin), national identity (or identification with the larger Australian society), and refugee identity. Colic-Peisker and Walker (2003) proposed an interdisciplinary approach of examining the identities of refugees in Australia by incorporating *social identity theory* in social psychology, *acculturation theory* in cross-cultural psychology, and *migration of human capital theory* in sociology. In the following section, the identities of the participants are described in light of these theories.

6.3.6.1 Social identity theory

Social identity theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1979) can be applied to explain the attitudes of several refugees in this study. According to social identity theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1979), the main motivation for identifying with a certain group is to enhance one's self-esteem. In this study, Fariba did not want to be identified as an Iranian. Seemingly, for Fariba, her identification as someone with a Middle Eastern background was not a source of self-esteem for her. Other refugee participants of Middle Eastern background in this study (e.g., Mariam, Payam) also made similar comments, especially after the events of September 11. In contrast, Ho did not deny that he was born in Vietnam. In fact, he was proud of his heritage. He did, however, describe the behaviour of some members in his ethnic group.

I have got no shame in what happened to me in the past – I mean I was born in Vietnam. I am happy I was born in Vietnam, but a lot of people that I meet,

who are Vietnamese or Chinese Vietnamese, they don't like to say, "I was born in Vietnam or I am Vietnamese." They like to say, "I am Chinese." (Ho)

As reflected in the preceding excerpt, some Vietnamese refugees do not want to be identified with their perceived relatively low status Vietnamese ethnic group. Consistent with social identity theory, it is possible that for these Vietnamese refugees, their self-esteem is enhanced through identification with the Chinese ethnic group.

Another important aspect of social identity of refugees is the refugee identity (see section 4.6.1). In this study, although Mariam and Payam did not deny that they were refugees, they were reluctant to be identified as refugees. As well, Aziza spoke of the refugee friends she had who totally denied that they were refugees. Her friends had also lied that they had lived in Australia for 10 years. According to Aziza, these friends also stated that they were Australians. Altogether, these findings render support for one of the principles of the social identity theory. That is, individuals will try to either leave their existing group or join a more favourable group when a particular social identity is unsatisfactory (Tajfel & Turner, 1979).

Colic-Peisker and Walker (2003) found that professionals spoke more often than other refugees of being uncomfortable about being categorised as refugees. These professionals perceived this as a "void" position laden with public disgrace as well as being a "socially disadvantaged and culturally distant social category" (p. 343). The authors reported a situation with a participant who claimed that she was not a refugee as she "came to Australia with a valid passport of her home country" (p. 343). They argued that it was clear that the war entitled her to a humanitarian visa. However, Colic-Peisker and Walker (2003) did not make a clear distinction between (1) refugees who arrived under the Refugee Program and (2) those who arrived under the Special Humanitarian Program (SHP) and did not strictly fall under the "refugee" category, according to the definition of "refugees" by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR; Crock & Saul, 2002). Strictly speaking, the Refugee Program caters for individuals who are subjected to persecution in their home country and are in need of resettlement. Most applicants for resettlement referred by the UNHCR come under this category. The SHP caters for individuals who are outside their home country and are

subjected to substantial persecution or discrimination, or both, in their home country leading to a gross violation of their rights. Applicants for the SHP visa must have a supporter who is an Australian citizen, permanent resident, or a community group based in Australia (The Refugee Council of Australia, n.d.). In this study, Zarrin was excluded from data analysis because she insisted that she did not arrive in Australia as a refugee but as a migrant who was sponsored by her son. Similar to the participant in Colic-Peisker and Walker's (2003) study, Zarrin was adamant that she was not a refugee. However, it was also unambiguous that she arrived in Australia through a humanitarian visa, most likely under the SHP. Her comment was included in this thesis (section 5.2.6.5.1) to demonstrate the "disgrace" of being associated with refugees.

The Queensland Health Department (2008) alluded to the refugee stigma and pointed out that identifying oneself as a refugee removes the sense that one is part of the general community. In this study, Payam voiced a similar concern (see section 5.2.6.5.1). He was afraid of being seen as different and not being a part of the general community if he identified himself as a refugee. According to Colic-Peisker and Walker (2003), to shed the refugee identity, refugees need to rebuild and reshape components of their social identity in the new environment. In this study, there is evidence to suggest that refugees integrate their refugee identity in a number of ways and not all refugees shed their refugee identity. Specifically, it was found that refugees integrate their refugee identity by (1) identifying strongly with being refugees and emphasising their refugee identity, (2) trying to forget being, and avoid being identified as, refugees; (3) identifying strongly with being refugees but not emphasising their refugee identity; or (4) no longer identifying themselves as refugees. For instance, refugees who have knowledge of the stigma society has shown towards refugees appear to be more inclined to avoid the refugee identity, or at least not openly declare themselves as refugees. Conversely, refugees who have not experienced the stigma attached to refugees are more likely to integrate the refugee identity into their self-identity. This is even more so if refugees perceive that the refugee identity gives them a sense of pride and achievement (as in the case of Aziza), thus supporting the principle of social identity theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1979). That is, the main motivation for identifying with a certain group is to enhance

one's self-esteem. The identities of refugees can be further explored in light of acculturation theory.

6.3.6.2 Acculturation theory

According to Colic-Peisker and Walker (2003), through acculturation refugees re-acquired social roles that they had lost during forced migration. They re-acquired their social roles by obtaining citizenship, obtaining employment, furthering their education, building formal and informal social networks, establishing a feeling of "territorial belonging," as well as finding a favourite television channel and a sports team (Colic-Peisker & Walker, 2003, p. 355). All these strategies were also used by the refugees in this study. The concept of requisition of social roles in Colic-Peisker and Walker's (2003) study corresponds to several phases subsumed under the stage of *rebuilding* and the stage of *consolidating identity towards a new life* in this study. For instance, Nadia built a house in Australia, which helped her establish a feeling of "territorial belonging." Some refugees in this study (e.g., Mike, Ming, Payam, Fariba, Matt, Shahrooz) also became citizens of Australia.

Colic-Peisker and Walker (2003) analysed the process of "reconstruction" and "renegotiation" of social identity following migration of Bosnian refugees to Australia. They observed that refugees who resettled in the West usually came from different cultures and thus were often drastically "stripped" of their identity (p. 355). This process is partly congruent with the concept of *disintegration of life* in this study. As derived from the analysis of the data, *disintegration of life* refers to the process whereby the refugee's life falls apart, turns turbulent and chaotic, and eventually becomes hard or impossible to manage. A sense of impermanence, turbulence, and anxiety is often experienced. There are many aspects of disintegration related to various types of losses, including material losses, sociocultural losses, and loss of livelihood. These multiple losses also correspond to aspects that contribute to the identities of the refugees. Thus, intrinsically related to the concept of *disintegration of life* is the concept of *disintegration of identity*, which refers to the weakening or loosening of various aspects that previously contributed to the refugees' sense of identity.

In this study, *maintaining self-identity* is an important stage in the process of *adapting to minimise SEI*, especially among refugees who arrived in Australia at an older age. The stage of maintaining self-identity is enhanced when the following conditions are in place: an established ethnic community, having a place of worship, the ease of obtaining certain foods, presence of ethnic restaurants, and close proximity between one's home and ethnic community. Additionally, in this study, the refugees also made changes to the environment (section 4.4.5) as an important phase of maintaining their self-identity. Thus, unlike Colic-Peisker and Walker's (2003) participants, the refugees in this study were not drastically "stripped" of their previous identities; rather, they also exerted their influence and contributed to the diversity of cultures in Australia.

While Colic-Peisker and Walker (2003) argued that their participants *re-negotiated* their social identity after forced migration, the phase of *balancing identities* (especially between ethnic identity and Australian identity) was conceptualised in this study. I argue that the process of re-negotiating identity is one of the strategies adopted by refugees to balance their identities. By re-negotiation, refugees are able to find a balance and a more harmonious sense of identity. Additionally, the concept of *reconstructing social identity* in Colic-Peisker and Walker's (2003) study can be subsumed under the phase of *rebuilding social, family, and community life* in this study. In following section, the identities of refugees are further examined in light of migration of human capital theory.

6.3.6.3 Migration of human capital theory

According to Colic-Peisker (2002), the identities of urban professionals are largely entrenched in the world of paid employment; thus, the loss of their professional status or remaining unemployed signifies a real identity crisis and a real threat to their self concept. Similar to a study by Colic-Peisker and Tilbury (2006), the loss of professional status among refugees who were professionals was also found in this study. For instance, Ania, who completed a master's degree in Economics, was underemployed and had to work in a factory for ten years in Australia. Although she had not described this loss as an identity crisis, she admitted to having suffered a lot. Colic-Peisker and Walker (2003) stated that their participants (consisting of Bosnian refugees) had lower employment aspirations as they learnt from the experiences of those in their community, either

consisting of recent refugees or earlier migrants who were largely working-class people. The authors stated that there appear to be community pressure on men to return to their breadwinning position quickly, instead of attempting to gain back their occupational status. This type of community pressure was also experienced by a few refugees in this study. For instance, Sabrina had to ignore the “bad vibes” from other members in her community who advised and pressured her not to pursue a higher education. On the other hand, Ania, who followed the trend in her community not to learn English or pursue an education, deeply regretted her decision. Additionally, regaining previous occupational status was found to be the best way to substitute the refugee identity with a more positive social identity (Robinson & Coleman, 2000). In this study, this situation was found in Nadia who no longer felt like a refugee after regaining her occupational status. In the following section, the generated substantive theory is further explored in light of other qualitative studies of refugees.

6.4 EXPLORING THE SUBSTANTIVE THEORY OF “ADAPTING TO MINIMISE SELF-ENVIRONMENT INCONGRUITY” IN THE CONTEXT OF QUALITATIVE STUDIES OF REFUGEES

A brief review of qualitative studies of refugees was presented earlier in Chapter One (see section 1.3.2). To date, there are no reported qualitative studies of refugees that have generated a broad and comprehensive substantive theory to explain the phenomenon of the refugee experience. Numerous aspects and segments related to this theory, however, have been explored in some qualitative studies of refugees. Findings from some of these studies have been described earlier in relevant sections of this thesis. In this section, additional findings and theories from existing qualitative studies related to the substantive theory of “Adapting to Minimise SEI” are presented.

In a study that used hermeneutic phenomenology, Rungruangkonkit (2007) explored the lives of Mien refugees with depression who have been residing in the United States for ten years or more. The author found that the roots of depression, as perceived by these Mien refugees, originated from their multiple, ongoing, and unresolved losses, both physical and psychological. This is consistent with the findings of this study – the consequences of the refugees’ pre-migration SEI were the disintegration of their lives

and the multiple losses that they had incurred (including material losses, sociocultural losses, and loss of livelihood). Furthermore, in this study, the psychological consequences of experiencing these multiple losses include fear and unpreparedness, disintegration of identity, loss of trust, loss of control, depression, posttraumatic stress, and disintegration of the self. Thus, in line with the findings of Rungruangkonkit (2007), depression in this study was found to originate from experiencing multiple losses. Depression, as experienced by Rungruangkonkit's (2007) participants, was expressed across three dimensions – behaviours (crying, isolation), emotions (feeling hopeless, unloved and unwanted, and lacking self-worth), and cognition (worries). In this study, depression constitutes one of the psychological consequences of experiencing multiple losses as well as being an important phase in the stage of coming to terms with the past. As with Rungruangkonkit's study, depression is also expressed across three dimensions: behaviours (mainly through crying, isolation, and sleeplessness), emotions (including hopelessness and helplessness), and cognition (worries). While the participants in Rungruangkonkit's (2007) study also expressed their depression in terms of feeling unloved and unwanted as well as a lack of self-worth, these emotions are not evident in the participants of this study. It is probably because the participants were not selected on the basis of their depression. Thus, the full range of emotions related to depression was not revealed.

Issues relevant to the refugee experience in this study can be compared with findings of a study by Whittaker et al. (2005). The authors used interpretative phenomenological analysis to examine the psychological well-being of young Somali (Black African Muslim) refugee and asylum seeker women in northern England. One of the themes the authors stated to have emerged from their data was "Resilience and Protection." Within this theme, the authors stated that central to their participants' understanding of psychological well-being was the appearance of "moving on" and coping. This meant that the participants had to deal with their feelings rapidly, be strong, not complain or ruminate on problems, and to get on with life (Whittaker et al., 2005). In this study, however, the "get on with it" approach is not evident. Although several refugees reported having moved on with their lives (e.g., Aziza, Nadia), they did not report experiencing the pressure to do so rapidly. Whittaker et al. (2005) highlighted the

importance of a protective environment, including having family and community supports, having a religion (personal and family-based), and having access to services (including doctors, counsellors, “shrinks,” psychologists, bereavement groups, etc.). The authors concluded that mental health teams can work on the promotion of well-being and resilience, instead of focusing solely on distress. This conclusion is also echoed in this study. The importance of social support, having certain spiritual-religious beliefs, and psychological support is documented in this study (see Chapter Five). These conditions are also found to be important in facilitating the process of *adapting to minimise SEI* in refugees.

Keyes and Kane (2004) used the phenomenological method to describe the experience of Bosnian refugees living in the United States. Two main interconnected themes emerged as processes central to the experience of being a refugee, that is, “Belonging and Adapting.” The authors found that for the refugees, belonging in the old home before war provided a sense of safety, normalcy, and community. During war, the problems of not belonging led the refugees to adapt by deciding to change their environments. Although not articulated as such, Keyes and Kane (2004) alluded to the concept of SEI, the basic social psychological problem faced by the refugee participants in this study. Consistent with Keyes and Kane’s (2004) findings, participants in this study changed their environment by leaving their old homes as the unstable political environment precipitated their initial experience of SEI. Keyes and Kane (2004) further reported that due to the refugees’ varying responses to their multiple losses and culture shock, belonging in their new home was also problematic. These refugees adapted by making changes within themselves in their new home in the United States. Adaptation involved coping with transitions, coping with memories of past and attendant losses, coping with accepting a new culture while trying to fit into it, and learning the new language perfectly (Keyes & Kane, 2004). In this study, the refugees also reported having made similar changes within themselves in Australia. Keyes and Kane’s (2004) themes are consistent with a few of the stages in the process of *adapting to minimise SEI* in this study, including the stage of rebuilding as well as the stage of consolidating identity (which also involves acquiring a sense of belonging in Australia). However, the concept of *adapting* in this study is used more broadly to include how refugees come to

terms with their past, how they maintain their self-identity, and how they integrate different perspectives and balance their identities. These stages are not described by Keyes and Kane (2004). The participants in Keyes and Kane's (2004) study reported feelings of loneliness, shock, psychic numbness, dejection, and feeling that they belonged nowhere. The authors suggested that these emotions might actually be symptoms of depression and posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD). Although it was not known if their participants suffered from depression or PTSD, the authors stated that their participants reported these negative mental health states related to their refugee experience of having survived war trauma and having to resettle. Keyes and Kane's study provides support for this study with regards to refugees' mental health status. For instance, the refugees in this study perceived a *sense of displacement* (which encapsulates feelings of homelessness and homesickness, strangeness, not belonging in Australia, loneliness, and isolation) as well as other emotions specifically at the phase of coming to terms with the past (which includes shock, numbness, and depression). Overall, Keyes and Kane's (2004) findings support segments of the substantive theory in this study.

In a phenomenological study on Southeast Asian refugee women, Davis (2000a) argued that while it has been indicated in the literature that pre- and post-war experiences of refugees could herald the development of PTSD, she found no evidence for this. The author suggested that the meaning of the experiences of her refugee women participants were better defined from a cultural perspective, where the meaning of their experiences was captured by the loss of culture and their previous country of origin. Becoming a refugee signifies a "deep-seated loss of an accustomed cultural environment" and does not always lead to the development of severe mental illness as portrayed in the literature (Davis, 2000a, p. 158). Davis' (2000a) interpretation is in line with findings of this study – the participants in this study did not frame their experiences in terms of psychopathology or their mental health states. Instead, SEI is conceptualised to provide an overall picture of the basic challenge that refugees face, while the multiple losses refugees incurred (including the loss of culture and country) are subsumed under their problem of SEI.

Using grounded theory method enhanced by the feminism perspective, Buckland (1997) studied the everyday concerns of Somali immigrant and refugee women that were related to setting up suitable, adequate, and accessible health care services in Canada. The central process identified by the author was "Rebuilding." The process of "Rebuilding" involved two categories: (1) adjusting to the refugee reality and (2) finding a new safety in Canada. Buckland (1997) stated that it was not easy for the refugees to come to terms with their reality, although they were safe in Canada. Once the shock of the reality of being refugees was gone, the Somali women would then think of their plethora of losses. The author stated that in the process of rebuilding, it was important to take the time to grieve over these losses. Although Buckland (1997) did not aim to generate a broad substantive theory of the refugee experience, her findings provide support for stage one (Coming to terms with the past) and stage three (Rebuilding a new life) of the process of *adapting to minimise SEI* in this study.

In a study on the experience of Southeast Asian refugee adolescents in Canada, Phillion (2001) used the grounded theory method to analyse interview data and uncovered the core category as "Experiencing Acceptance." The author found that acceptance was perceived in four main areas of families, school, friends, and in the process of establishing the refugees' own identities. This finding is consistent with the findings of this study. Social support, including acceptance from the larger Australian society, was found in this study to be an important factor that facilitates the process of *adapting*. Conversely, there is evidence in this study to demonstrate that perceived rejection, in the form of prejudice and discrimination, impairs the process of *adapting* in refugees. The importance of acceptance is also alluded to by Berry and Sam (1997). According to Berry and Sam (1997), when assimilation or integration strategies are chosen and when the dominant culture accepts the acculturating person and the group, there is a strengthening of the fit between the person and the new surroundings. Both these strategies are associated with less conflict as they involve acceptance of and by the larger society (Berry, 1994). Phillion (2001) further pointed out that the true meaning of acceptance and of being accepted is reflected by the refugees' negotiation of a multicultural identity. This multicultural identity can be viewed as "a living synthesis of knowledge, values, and ways of being, integrated from the wealth of diverse cultural

influences in their lives” (Phillion, 2001, p. 6761). The author’s conceptualisation of “negotiating intercultural identities” can be subsumed under the stage of *integrating perspectives and balancing identities* in the process of *adapting* in this study.

A grounded theory study by Prendes-Lintel (1996) was found to resemble this study with some qualifiers. The author explored the process of adaptation of three refugee families from the former Soviet Union. Having developed a grounded theory of refugee family adaptation, the author defined *adaptation* as self-perception of having needs met in the environment, which in turn was stated by the participants as the level of satisfaction with their environment. The participants in Prendes-Lintel’s (1996) study perceived that they fitted in with the new culture when they reached an adequate level of satisfaction. The author, however, did not explain whether the data had reached saturation (Strauss & Corbin, 1990) where no new categories were forthcoming. While Prendes-Lintel (1996) emphasised the refugee families’ self-perception of having their needs fulfilled and having achieved some level of satisfaction, the focus of this study was the conceptualisation of the overall challenge or basic social psychological problem that refugees faced. In this study, refugees are said to have successfully *adapted* to Australia when they have successfully minimised their problem of SEI. Prendes-Lintel (1996) further categorised her participants’ needs into “Basic Human Needs” and “Personal Worth Needs.” The author stated that when the “Basic Human Needs” were fulfilled, “Personal Worth Needs” would appear. As already noted, the perspective taken by Prendes-Lintel (1996) to conceptualise adaptation differed from the perspective taken to explore adaptation in this study. That is, the author’s primary focus was on the family unit, rather than individual refugees. Furthermore, Prendes-Lintel did not reveal the stages in the process of *adapting* such as the ones that emerged in this study (i.e., coming to terms with the past, maintaining self-identity, rebuilding a new life, integrating perspectives and balancing identities, and consolidating identity towards a new life). The process of *adapting to minimise SEI*, as conceptualised in this study, is a process that has been described at length in Chapter Four.

Certain aspects of the substantive theory of “Adapting to Minimise Self-Environment Incongruity” in this study are found in a grounded theory study conducted by Catolico

(2005), who explored perceptions of health in Cambodian women resettling in the United States. The author described the core perspective of her study as "Seeking Life Balance," which involved achieving spiritual fulfillment, re-establishing kinship, and engaging in meaningful work. The journey to achieve spiritual fulfillment encompassed the practice of Buddhism, seeking spiritual refuge, and exploring other spiritual perspectives. To re-establish kinship, the Cambodian women sought out other survivors in their desire for togetherness. These themes mirrored certain categories in the current grounded theory study. For instance, similar to Catolico's (2005) participants, the refugees in this study maintained their religious-spiritual beliefs. As well, they sought to rebuild their family, social, and community life. The refugees in this study also engaged in activities that had some meaning for them (e.g., obtaining an education, rebuilding their culture, and achieving material success). Thus, segments of the substantive theory of "Adapting to Minimise Self-Environment Incongruity" support Catolico's (2005) study. Catolico (2005) further uncovered thematic categories that supported "Seeking Life Balance," which included emerging from chaos (the context for seeking life balance), patterns of knowing (the conditions for seeking life balance), caring for oneself and care seeking from others (the process of seeking life balance), and reaching a turning point (the consequences of seeking life balance). As Catolico's study involved the specific exploration of Cambodian women's perception of health in the United States, these thematic categories are not echoed in this study.

6.5 SUMMARY

It was found in a literature search that no theory is entirely identical to the substantive theory of "Adapting to Minimise Self-Environment Incongruity." However, there are several existing theories that describe certain key aspects of this substantive theory. The stage of *coming to terms with the past* can be examined from numerous perspectives, including psychoanalytic, emotional, developmental, and cognitive perspectives. Most of these perspectives have predominantly focused on the trajectories or stages of grief. As well, there is the central belief that grief is all about relinquishing emotional ties with the deceased and there is a need to progress towards recovery. This central belief only holds true for refugees who perceive that certain aspects of their lives are somewhat irretrievably lost. Thus, to varying extents, refugees accept certain losses and

simultaneously find ways to recover these losses. For example, they maintain and rebuild many aspects of their lives that are meaningful and important to their identity, including their ethnic communities, careers, and family life. Thus, while the stage of coming to terms with the past can be applied to situations that involve more permanent losses, not all losses are permanent. More recently, a new 21st century paradigm of grief theories has emerged. Rather than focusing on the trajectories of grief, the central process in the new paradigm is *meaning reconstruction* in response to a loss. This approach is also representative of refugees' process of *adapting to minimise SEI*.

While the findings of this study support existing literature on acculturation and adaptation, the substantive theory also presents new insights into the refugee experience from the perspective of the refugees. For example, Berry and Sam's (1997) concept of *acculturative stress* can be subsumed under the basic social psychological problem of SEI. As well, Berry's theory of acculturation and adaptation was limited when applied to refugees as Berry did not explore their acculturation and adaptation from the emic perspective. Instead of attending to the four strategies of acculturation in Berry's model, the concept of *balancing* is the focal point in exploring refugees' ethnic identity and their Australian identity in this study.

Social support, which enhances the process of *adapting* in refugees, can be viewed from the perspective of social capital theory. In this study, social capital is invoked as an explanation for academic success through family support. It is also used as an explanation for access to employment opportunities.

Theories of stigma, prejudice, and discrimination are useful in providing a backdrop for understanding the refugees' perceived rejection in Australia. The secrecy and denial about being refugees are highlighted in this study. The perception of the refugee stigma and discrimination was found to impede the refugees' process of *adapting* in Australia. The resurgence of prejudice, discrimination, and racism towards immigrants of Middle Eastern and Muslim backgrounds is confirmed by reports in newspapers.

The theory of stress and coping corresponds to the two main objectives of this grounded theory study. The first objective was to identify the "stress" component of the refugee

experience. This “stress” corresponds to the basic social psychological problem of SEI. The second objective involved identifying the “coping” component of the refugee experience. The “coping” component relates to the basic social psychological process, which is identified as “adapting”.

Support for the developed substantive theory can be found in a recent study of social identity in refugees. Colic-Peisker and Walker (2003) stated that their participants *re-negotiated* their social identity after forced migration. In this study, the phase of *balancing identities* is conceptualised to refer to the requisition of an optimal state of being where refugees can find a harmonious sense of identity. Colic-Peisker and Walker stated that refugees are completely “stripped” of their previous identities. In this study, however, there is evidence that refugees are able to maintain numerous aspects of their self-identity, to exert their influence in Australia, and to contribute to its diversity of cultures. As with Colic-Peisker and Walker’s study, it was found in this study that the loss of professional status or being unemployed signifies a threat to the self-concept of refugees who are previously urban professionals. Conversely, refugees who have regained their occupational status have a more positive social identity.

Finally, segments of the substantive theory in this study are supported by numerous qualitative studies. These qualitative studies covered important themes that are echoed in this study; they include resilience and protection, belonging and adapting, rebuilding, experiencing acceptance, negotiating intercultural identities, and seeking life balance.

6.6 LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

As with qualitative designs, I was the tool and thus the analysis and the emerging categories were the results of my interpretation of the findings in my own words and language. The human component of this analysis process underscored a limitation of this study. To minimise this limitation, I used the dictionary to derive the definitions of certain terms; transcripts were also carefully analysed in order to highlight the meanings of certain terms and their derivations. Specific terms that I have used (such as ethnic identity, national identity, and integration) have been borrowed from the literature in the field of psychology.

All refugee participants were either (1) approached by me personally, (2) recruited through a research assistant, or (3) recruited through a request for interviews via advertisements placed on Curtin Radio or on notice boards at various locations (such as TAFE English classes). Recruitment of participants was limited to those who were able and willing to contribute to this study. Thus, it is possible that refugees who did not want to be interviewed or were unable to be interviewed may have a different refugee experience. Therefore, a specific sample of refugee participants may be represented in this study. For instance, the research assistant, who was employed for four months to assist me to get in touch with the African community, approached a refugee from Sierra Leone for an interview and an unexpected scenario emerged (see section 2.4.5). The research assistant stated that this refugee became quite angry. Her grievances are reflected in this sentence: "It is only for those who research; the benefit is only for those who are doing the research." Her level of distrust and disappointment with regards to a lack of "real" assistance given to the African refugees was previously described in section 5.3.2. The following excerpt also reflects her trauma.

Her experience is she has gone through a lot. I mean her sister, her leg is amputated. There are many relatives that she has lost, been killed in the war in Sierra Leone, and her experience with other refugees in Guinea. It's horrible the way she explained. (Research assistant, 11 June 2002)

Additionally, due to this refugee's suspicion with the outcome of her previous interviews, further contact to secure an interview was not plausible. It appears that there is a certain amount of difficulty in securing interviews with refugees who are in the "anger" phase and still have a lot of negative experiences (including trauma) to deal with – they are thus unwilling and unable to participate in this study.

It should be noted that variables that have been shown in previous studies to influence the process of acculturation, including socioeconomic status, personality, and education (see section 1.2.1.1.1) were not actively sought. This is because, in keeping with qualitative research, the aim of this study was to seek social realities from the perspective of the participants. Furthermore, in keeping with qualitative research, the *personality* of each of the participants was not assessed. In the personality domain, a number of traits have been revealed to be both risk and protective factors that affect the

course of acculturation, including traits related to locus of control and introversion/extraversion (Ward & Kennedy, 1992) and self-efficacy (Schwarzer, Hahn, & Schroder, 1994). However, Berry (1997) noted that consistent findings are rare, probably because it is not the trait by itself but the "fit" with the environment that is important.

Due to the nature of self-selection in this study and its voluntary participation, all the participants were found to have arrived in Australia before they turned fifty years of age. It is likely that refugees who are older when they arrive in Australia will not volunteer for studies of this sort. Older refugees appeared to be more reluctant to participate when I approached them. Although the perspectives of refugees who arrived in Australia at the age of fifty years and above were alluded to by several participants, no direct data were acquired from this group. The oldest participant, Tuba, was 63 years old at the time of the interview. She arrived in Australia at the age of 48 years. I made several attempts to secure an interview through five phone calls and two visits to Tuba's residence. The purpose of the research was carefully explained. I further attempted to recruit another two older refugees; however, their children alerted me to the likelihood that their parents would find such interviews intrusive. Thus, securing interviews with older refugees may require a longer time to establish rapport. It appears that older refugees are more likely to be unfamiliar with the research culture in Australia.

6.7 IMPLICATIONS

Findings from this study can contribute to the body of knowledge on the refugee experience primarily through the information about the refugee experience from refugees themselves. The primary distinction between this grounded theory study and other qualitative studies of refugees is its emphasis on the development of a broad and comprehensive substantive theory. Through the developed substantive theory labelled "Adapting to Minimise Self-Environment Incongruity," an in-depth understanding of the refugee experience in Western Australia can be described in its entirety. The findings of this study, together with the review of existing literature, have several implications for mental health counselling, education, government policy changes, and ongoing research.

6.7.1 MENTAL HEALTH COUNSELLING

The findings of this study can add to the body of knowledge with regards to the social realities and functioning of refugees in Australia. They challenge mental health providers to actively seek out strategies that minimise the refugees' experience of SEI and to set the stage for purposeful and meaningful involvement in life for refugees in Australia. This meaningful involvement in Australian life, as demonstrated in the findings, can eventuate in a sense of belonging in Australia. Mental health care providers can screen for and help alleviate a sense of displacement and other psychological consequences of experiencing losses by addressing the refugees' multiple losses and tailoring treatment to their needs within the Australian health care system. The substantive theory of "Adapting to Minimise Self-Environment Incongruity" also contributes to the exploration of explanatory models of the refugee experience. Counsellors can therefore take into consideration the explanatory model of refugees with regards to their experience. As an example, explanatory models are linked with the refugee stigma that hinders the refugees' process of *adapting to minimise SEI*. If issues of secrecy and hidden emotions with regards to refugee stigma emerge, they can be addressed during counselling sessions. Refugees can reflect on the way the refugee stigma impacts on them negatively and better rationalise its existence. They can also devise ways to actively fight this stigma. Furthermore, counsellors may consider encouraging their refugee clients to maintain their self-identity (especially their cultural identity) as it was found that maintenance of self-identity is an important stage in reducing the experience of SEI.

Based on more recent studies of resilience and the findings of this study, the refugee experience should not be solely framed by refugees' negative pre-migration experiences, including their experience of trauma. The substantive theory of "Adapting to Minimise Self-Environment Incongruity" provides an overall picture of the lives of refugees. Therefore, it is also important for refugees to realise that they are not defined purely in terms of their past experiences and they can take pride in being refugees. Through the analysis of the data, it was found that there are many domains in the lives of refugees, and meaningful achievement in any of these domains can move them forward in their new lives. For instance, refugees can be guided to derive positive emotions from their

negative experiences. This does not imply that they should suppress their negative experiences. However, when positive emotions emerge during counselling sessions, the counsellor needs to be aware of their value in helping refugees build resilience. Additionally, positive emotions can surface from having learnt important skills, including the acquisition of English skills. Thus, constant encouragement given to refugees to learn English cannot be overemphasised. In a similar vein to the broaden-and-build theory (Fredrickson, 1998, 2001), much of the mental health focus should be directed towards generating positive emotions (such as pride in one's achievements) that can facilitate refugees' resilience building and adaptation.

While it is generally acknowledged that there is a need for refugees to come to terms with their negative experiences, the strategy of repressive coping should not be seen as maladaptive for all refugees. The need to be sensitive to the refugees' chosen coping strategies is underscored in this study. Additionally, the notion of meaning reconstruction as a response to loss can serve as a motivational force in refugees' process of adapting. The meaning of their losses can be framed in a way that can also promote resilience building and augment their process of adaptation.

6.7.2 EDUCATION

Another implication of the substantive theory includes the need for awareness and education in the general community with regards to the refugee experience. Stereotypes of being "illegal" are central to the refugee stigma, and the discrimination that surrounds refugees can undermine their process of *adapting to minimise SEI*, integration into the Australian society, and their full participation in the larger society. As well, the labelling of refugees as "queue jumpers" and "free loaders" can lead to the promotion of generalisation and negative attitudes towards refugees. Some refugees perceive that society only notices their refugee labels such as "poor" and "uneducated." Thus, the stigma surrounding refugees in Australia should be addressed at a societal level. There is a need for provision of education and guidance for the media in terms of prevention of stigmatisation of our refugee population. It is also important for members of the larger Australian society to recognise the development of stigma through fear and ignorance, biased presentation of the media, a lack of empathy, and a lack of education or

understanding of the refugee experience. In addition to disseminating information about the refugee experience, extra emphasis can be given towards achieving a more favourable media portrayal of refugees, including how they overcome their adversities, their achievement in all domains of life, and their contribution to the Australian society. Public forums, information programs, and education targeted at selected groups of people can increase public awareness of the refugee experience in Australia. School curricula need to address issues relating to stigma, racism, and discrimination. This can in turn promote social interaction between refugees and the larger society, instead of social distancing and exclusion which can marginalise our refugee population. The provision of education in the general community and guidance for the media will hopefully lead to better acceptance of refugees in Australia.

6.7.3 GOVERNMENT POLICY CHANGES

In this study, concepts that are useful in familiarising policymakers in the arena of mental health and education are identified. These concepts include (1) the refugees' experience of SEI, especially their experience of recurrent SEI and (2) their attempts to minimise their experience of SEI through adaptation. There is a strong indication in the findings that reaction from the larger society towards refugees exerts a powerful influence in refugees' lives. A few participants experienced a recurrent SEI due to the rejection that they perceived in Australia. One of the reported findings is that the demonisation of asylum seekers (e.g., Jupp, 2003; "Overboard affair," 2002; Wall, 2002) impacted negatively on refugees currently living in Australia. These refugees perceived that the larger society also rejected them. I suggest that policymakers should strongly and publicly discourage the use of derogatory labels for refugees, such as "illegals" and "queue-jumpers," as these labels have been demonstrated in this study to "hurt" our refugee population. A public policy of inclusion and equality, and not rejection, will create an accepting attitude in the long term that facilitates refugees in their process of *adapting to minimise SEI*, whether in schools, tertiary institutions, or the workplace.

I have highlighted the importance of maintaining self-identity (including ethnic identity) in refugees' attempts to minimise their experience of SEI in Australia. Not only should refugees be allowed to maintain their ethnic identity, they need to be encouraged to do

so through government policies and programs. For example, the government needs to support the establishment of ethnic organisations or clubs so that cultural loss is minimised. Furthermore, the emphasis on the stage of *maintaining self-identity* in this study, especially the maintenance of culture, supports Eisenbruch's (1990, 1991, & 1992) belief that validation of refugees' traditional values and cultural rituals can be a strategy to cope with cultural bereavement. As well, validation of immigrants' (including refugees') cultural heritage is highlighted in the guidelines in the Western Australia Charter of Multiculturalism (Office of Multicultural Interest, 2004) where the government of Western Australia affirms that pride in one's distinctive heritage and having an ethnic identity and a culture are not barriers to having a common national identity and a commitment to being Australian. The retention of refugees' ethnic identity and other aspects of their self-identity should not be interpreted as a lack of integration on their part. Rather, these are the fertile ground from which refugees can explore and adopt various aspects of life of the larger Australian society. This is in line with Berry et al.'s (2006a) findings. Berry et al. (2006a) further recommended that governments in societies that receive immigrants should support and encourage immigrants to align themselves with the integration strategy because psychological and sociocultural adaptation are more favourable for immigrants who choose the integration strategy.

English proficiency was found in this study to be fundamental to the stage of rebuilding in refugees' attempts to minimise their experience of SEI. The current provision of English language instructions at no cost to refugees is up to 510 hours (Refugee Council of Australia, n.d.). However, this "one size fits all" approach is not suitable for all refugees as it does not take into account individual differences in their rates of learning English. Given that English skills were found to be the foundation for the process of *adapting to minimise SEI* in this study, there is a need to look into provision for extension of these hours for refugees who are still struggling with learning English and have not reached a certain level of proficiency. Here, individualised or tailor-made programs are appropriate. The Refugee Council of Australia (n.d.) has also recognised that refugees are better equipped to deal with all aspects of life in Australia if they become competent in English. It is therefore incumbent upon policymakers to find every possible way to facilitate, encourage, and motivate refugees in their acquisition of

English skills. As an example, in this study, Ania had to look after a young child in her early days of resettlement and had to forgo her English classes. Thus, I suggest that certain facilities can be put in place, such as the provision of crèches, so that mothers can attend English classes. As well, home visits from an English tutor can be arranged for some refugees when required. It should also be impressed upon newly arrived refugees that learning English should be considered the first and foremost priority in their lives in Australia. There is evidence to suggest that refugees who have learnt English are more employable and are able to move on with rebuilding their new lives in Australia more easily (e.g., Nadia, Mariam, Sabrina).

One of the major hurdles faced by refugees who are professionals in their country of origin is a lack of recognition of their qualifications in Australia. They are therefore underemployed and often have to work on menial jobs. At present, Specialist Migrant Placement Officers provide guidance to refugees by offering specialist orientation to the Australian workplace (Refugee Council of Australia, n.d.). I recommend that incentives be given to employers and special assistance be provided for refugees towards finding suitable employment among the larger society. This will facilitate and encourage refugees' participation in everyday life in the larger Australian society. In fact, the Refugee Council of Australia (n.d.) continues to promote the provision of additional assistance for humanitarian entrants during their early settlement in Australia.

It has also been demonstrated that if they [refugees] receive appropriate assistance at this time, they are more likely to become productive members of the Australian community who, through their labours and their commitment to Australia will repay the investment many times over. (Refugee Council of Australia, n.d.)

During the transitional phase of the refugee experience, in particular the lengthy waiting period for refugees' claims to be assessed, some of the participants reported feeling a sense of having lost control over their lives, feeling stressed, and depressed (e.g., Payam, Mariam). I emphasise the need for rapid processing of claims for refugee status. Although the experiences of asylum seekers in Australia's detention centres are not thoroughly examined in this study (Aziza was the only participant who had stayed in the detention centre), much of the media coverage and literature have reported negative outcomes for these asylum seekers (Dudley, 2003; A. S. Keller et al., 2003; Lawrence,

2004; Steel, Mares, Newman, Blick, & Dudley, 2004; Steel et al., 2006). I therefore stand in strong support of authors (e.g., Calvert, 2004; Cemlyn & Briskman, 2003) who rally for better living conditions for the detained asylum seekers and their children in Australia. While the refugee status of asylum seekers needs to be verified, there should not be any unnecessary delays in the processing of their claims. More important, the process of detention itself should be questioned. It is crucial that asylum seekers who reach out to Australia for safety can regain a sense of humanity and acceptance. Additionally, asylum seekers and refugees should have immediate access to supportive services in the form of social, psychological, and financial support.

6.7.4 ONGOING RESEARCH

The substantive theory of “Adapting to Minimise Self-Environment Incongruity” can stimulate research aimed at improving the standard of mental health service delivery by developing programs and services that relate closely to refugees’ life experiences. For example, in their review, Hogan, Linden, and Najaran (2002) found some support for the overall usefulness of social support intervention. However, there is insufficient evidence for the authors to make the conclusion on what types of interventions will be effective for which type of problems. Given the consistent findings in this study that social support is very important in facilitating refugees’ adaptation, it may be worthwhile to investigate how to match certain social support interventions to certain refugee subgroups. I propose that social support interventions can be targeted at older refugees, those who cannot speak English, and new arrivals because there is an indication that these subgroups of refugees are more likely to perceive a lack of social support, loneliness, and a sense of displacement. Additionally, the substantive theory of “Adapting to Minimise Self-Environment Incongruity” can be further expanded – future studies can involve the exploration of the refugee experience in (1) refugees who arrive in Australia at fifty years of age and above; (2) refugees who cannot speak English; (3) refugees who are illiterate; (4) refugees who exhibit certain psychopathologies, such as depression; (5) refugees who have traumatic experiences and are traumatized; and (6) refugees who have arrived in Australia more recently. As well, the concept of “refugee identity,” which is identified from the findings, can be further explored in future qualitative studies. This concept can be further expanded and refined.

6.8 GENERAL CONCLUSIONS

This study is the first grounded theory study which was conducted with the aim of developing a substantive theory to explain the phenomenon of the refugee experience in its entirety. The basic social psychological problem of refugees is identified as *self-environment incongruity* (SEI). The basic social psychological process adopted by refugees to deal with this problem is identified as *adapting to minimise SEI*. The developed substantive theory, labelled "Adapting to Minimise Self-Environment Incongruity," is unique as it represents a comprehensive view of the social realities of refugees from the emic perspective. The conclusions made in this study are informed directly by the refugees' own words and perceptions, presenting us with a rich tapestry for understanding their social realities. The generated theory therefore provides evidence for the explanatory model of the refugee experience. Counsellors can also benefit from having knowledge of the refugees' explanatory model and assist refugees in minimising their experience of SEI. A heightened understanding of the refugee experience that is derived from the substantive theory of "Adapting to Minimise Self-Environment Incongruity" can help to frame the issues of refugee adaptation for intervention, potentially reducing the cost of mental and physical health treatment. For instance, the central issues of cultural maintenance and social support are highlighted in this study as they provide fertile ground for the refugees' involvement and integration in the larger Australian society. This knowledge can also facilitate more efficient planning and better policies by contributing to refugee-specific programs and to the development of the current conceptual framework (such as Berry's [2006a; 2007] model of acculturation) for health care providers. Findings of this study also provide the scaffolding for future ongoing research. Numerous recommendations have emerged from the findings; in order for these recommendations to be translated into action for the refugee communities, participatory action research needs to be conducted in future. Further suggested is the need for provision of education for the larger society and the Australian media regarding the importance of not stigmatising refugee media coverage.

Findings of this study provide considerable evidence that some refugees have to deal with additional challenges as they encounter unfavourable attitudes that have emerged

and evolved from the social and political environment in Australia. Although the refugee participants in this study have now resettled in Australia, some of them experienced a recurrent SEI through their perception of rejection from the larger Australian society. From my point of view, a reduction of prejudice and discrimination against our diverse refugee population is timely, and the refugees' life stories need to be documented. The following opinion from a refugee participant reflects this.

It's always a reason for someone to come here. I think a lot of people don't realise that each person that comes here got a history, got a story to tell. How did they get on that boat? How did they come here? I think people don't think about that. They don't realise that each person or each family has a history before even they decided to journey here. It's not an easy thing. (Ho)

It is my hope that through this study, the stigma and prejudice held against our refugee population in Australia can be reduced and the social realities of refugees be heard.

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INFORMATION SHEET FOR INTERVIEW

Thesis title: The phenomenon of the refugee experience in Western Australia

My name is Jocelyn Lee-Luyke, and I am a postgraduate student at Curtin University of Technology. The purpose of my study is to describe the experience of war and other socio-political upheavals in adult refugees living in the Perth community. The knowledge obtained from this study will guide practices of counsellors and facilitate better management of future refugees who will be resettling in Australia.

The study will involve adult refugees aged from 18 to 70 years. An interpreter will be provided if you prefer the interview to be conducted in your own language. Information will be collected through a tape-recorded interview lasting approximately 60-90 minutes. The interview will be conducted at a mutually agreed place and time. Follow-up interviews may be necessary at a later date in order to clarify or expand on issues from the earlier interview. I would appreciate it if you would be available for the follow-up interviews. During the interview(s), you may decline to answer any question and request for the tape recorder to be turned off. At no time will you be identifiable by the information you have provided me. Extracts of the interview may be used in research reports or articles, but your name will not be used. Participation is voluntary and you may withdraw at any time without penalty.

If you have any questions or concerns regarding this study, please don't hesitate to contact me on 93880189. You may also contact my supervisors, Dr Rosie Rooney on 92663050 or Dr Saras Henderson on 92662070.

.....
Curtin University of Technology

INFORMED CONSENT FORM FOR INTERVIEW

Thesis title: The phenomenon of the refugee experience in Western Australia

I, _____ (print full name), have read the information sheet on the study relating to the experience of war. I understand the nature and purpose of the study and have the opportunity to ask questions. I know where to direct future questions which I may have. I have been given a copy of the consent form. I understand that my participation in the study is voluntary and that I may withdraw at any time without penalty.

Signed _____ Participant

Signed _____ Researcher

Date _____

Appendix B

SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEW GUIDE

I will meet with the participant approximately 15 minutes before the interview starts in order to establish rapport and to explain the aims of the study. I will then start by stating, "I would like to ask you a few questions to explore your experience of being a refugee living in Australia. Do you have any questions for me?"

Subsequent questions will mainly follow the line of inquiry made by the participant. Although no exact structured questionnaire format will be used, I will elicit responses from the participants by deriving questions related to the following general areas.

- What was it like when you first arrived at Australia?
- How is your life at the moment?
- How is your health?
- How are your family members?
- Is there anything else relevant to what we are talking about?

A sample of prompts used include:

1. Tell me more about it.
2. What happened next?
3. Go on.

Appendix C

Considerations for any potential harm in recruiting refugees as participants

Frequently, research on sensitive topics such as the current one is important for generating theory simply because their related issues represent the hidden sectors of society. These sensitive issues raise a wide range of technical and methodological problems. Refugee topics are laden with feelings of loss, grief, traumatisation, and issues related to threats and death. As with other refugee studies, the proposed study may make demands on the participants, which may be quite substantial and thorough consideration must be made with regards to any potential harm to their psychological well-being that may arise as a direct result of the study. The interview itself may evoke unpleasant memories and charged emotions. If this situation occurs, the interview will be terminated and steps will be taken. The participants will be given the contact details of a trauma counsellor from ASeTTS (Association for Services of Torture and Trauma Survivors) and a practising counsellor. I will also have close contact with an available counsellor should I experience an interview which may be distressing.

Appendix D DEMOGRAPHIC INFORMATION

Interview code number: _____

Please tick (✓) the answers that apply to you

Gender: 1) Male _____ 2) Female _____

How old were you at your last birthday? _____ years

Country of origin: _____

In which country was your father born? _____

In which country was your mother born? _____

How old were you when you experienced war? _____ years old

Country of asylum: _____

Length of time spent in asylum: years _____ months _____

Year of arrival in Australia: _____

Length of residence in Western Australia: _____

Religion: _____

Do you speak other languages other than English? No _____
Yes, I also speak _____

How well do you speak English? Very well _____
Well _____
Not well _____
Not at all _____

What is your marital status? Never married _____
Widowed _____
Divorced _____
Separated but not divorced _____
Married or living together _____

Do you have any dependent children of your own? Yes _____
No _____

Are you currently attending a school or other educational institution?
No _____
Yes (full-time student) _____
Yes (part-time student) _____

Please tick (✓) the level of education you have completed or are currently in

	Your country of origin	Australia
Primary	_____	_____
Secondary	_____	_____
Tertiary	_____	_____

What type of educational institution are you attending in Australia?

- High School _____
- TAFE _____
- University _____
- Other institution, please specify _____

What is the highest educational qualification you have completed in Australia?

- Left school without a qualification _____
- Lower Secondary Education Certificate _____
- High School Graduation _____
- Trade Certificate _____
- Associate Diploma _____
- Bachelor Degree _____
- Masters Degree _____
- Doctorate _____
- Other qualification not listed above _____

How old were you when you left school? _____ years

Which of the following best describes your household? (Please circle)

- Sole-parent plus dependent children (and no one else) -----1
- Couple plus dependent children (and no one else) -----2
- Other household with dependent children -----3
- Person living alone -----4
- Couple living alone -----5
- Non-related adults sharing house or flat-----6
- Parent (s) with non-dependent children-----7
- Other households not listed above-----8

If your answer is 8, please describe the household you are living in

Current Employment Status (please circle)

- Working full-time for pay-----1
- Working part-time for pay-----2
- Studying (full-time) at school, TAFE or in training program-----3
- Studying (part-time) at school, TAFE or in training program-----4
- Unemployed or laid off and looking for work-----5
- Mainly doing home duties-----6
- None of the above-----7

If your answer is 7, please describe your current employment status

Appendix E: The socio-political environment of the study

The phenomenon of the refugee experience and the socio-political environment of refugees in Australia can be viewed in light of a series of global and national political events that took place in the years 2001, 2002, and 2003 when this study was conducted. The year 2001 was marked by the *Tampa* crisis, the event of September 11 terrorist attacks on America, and allegations that asylum seekers on a Suspected Illegal Entry Vessel (SIEV-4) off the north-west coast threw their children overboard. These events have significantly reflected and shaped the attitudes of the larger society towards asylum seekers and refugees. Also, these events have placed asylum seekers and refugees in a negative light, particularly those of Arab and Muslim backgrounds. Following these events, there was a resurgence of racist attitudes and violence against refugees of Arab and Muslim backgrounds in Australia. It was therefore highly probable that the process of *adapting* of refugees from these backgrounds had been influenced by these events. In this appendix, each of the following events is described: (1) the *Tampa* crisis and the Pacific Solution, (2) the September 11 terrorist attacks on America, (3) the “children overboard” incident, (4) the federal election, (5) the Bali bombing, and (6) the war on Iraq.

E.1 The *Tampa* crisis (August 2001) and the Pacific Solution

According to Manne (2003), on 26 August 2001, 433 Afghans mostly of the persecuted Hazara minority were onboard an Indonesian un-seaworthy boat on its way to Christmas Island, an Australian territory. After a shipping alert issued by the Australian search and rescue authority, the *MV Tampa*, a Norwegian cargo vessel, went to its rescue. All asylum seekers were safely on board the *Tampa* at the end of the day. The captain of the *Tampa*, who was sympathetic towards the asylum seekers’ plight, consented to take them to Christmas Island, although the Australian government ordered him to go to Indonesia. Ignoring the advice, *Tampa* was anchored off Christmas Island, just outside Australian territorial waters. As the captain became concerned over the health of the asylum seekers, he continued to defy the order and sailed towards the Christmas Island port. SAS troops were deployed and ordered to board the *Tampa*, and the asylum seekers were then transferred to a naval frigate, HMAS *Manoora* (Manne, 2003).

The refusal of the Howard government to let the *Tampa* unload the asylum seekers on Australian soil signified a turning point in Australia’s history. After a frenzy of diplomatic exchanges, New Zealand and the bankrupt island state of Nauru consented to take the refugees and process their claims. Other Pacific island nations were offered financial incentives to provide camps for all asylum seekers attempting to reach Australia. Papua New Guinea agreed to offer Manus Island. This gave rise to “the Pacific solution” (Manne, 2003). The “Pacific solution” was announced on September 1, 2001 by Prime Minister John Howard with the aim of discouraging future boat people. He also stated on *60 minutes* that he was very offended by a United States report comparing the *Tampa* to a ship named *Voyage of the Damned* that carried Jews escaping the Nazis in 1939 (“Pacific Confusion,” 2002). The *Border Protection Act* that was rushed through the federal parliament in early September 2001 gave the Australian government the legal authority to turn away all future boats. Other legislation that was passed to excise specific Indian Ocean island territories from the Australian migration zone permitted the asylum seekers to land on Australian territory without the right to

apply for asylum (Manne, 2003). Asylum seekers arriving by sea from Indonesia without authorisation were moved to camps in Papua New Guinea and Nauru while their asylum claims were being processed. Canberra pledged to process their applications "swiftly and fairly," although no set time was made for the duration of detention. Canberra later claimed that the policy had been a success, and the number of illegal arrivals greatly reduced since 2001 ("UN urges," 2005). On 26 September 2001, the Senate passed six Bills that determined the legislative framework for the "Pacific Solution": Certain territories were excised from Australia's migration zone; unauthorised arrivals to these territories were unable to apply for a visa and could be detained and moved to other countries. As well, unlawful arrivals were prevented from taking legal action in an Australian court (York, 2003).

A few writers (e.g., Brawley, 2003; Clark, 2001) believed that they "saw dead people" after the *Tampa* episode. Brawley (2003) stated that the "ghosts" of the White Australia policy had been resurrected by the *MV Tampa*, which led him to consider the persistence of the White Australia policy after its enactment one century ago (p. 100). The author further highlighted a major concern – legislation was now dealing with people who in other times were simply labelled as "refugees" but who were now being labelled as "asylum seekers" or "illegal immigrants" (p. 102). The author believed that while the formal part of the White Australia policy ended in the 1970s, its spirit lived on in the legislative practices of the Howard government and the federal government's response to asylum seekers. As well, Clark (2001) "saw dead people" as she wrote for the *Sydney Morning Herald* in the wake of the *Tampa* incident. Both Clark (2001) and Curthoys (2003) perceived that the *Tampa* incident echoed the Jewish refugee crisis in the late 1930s when the Jews escaping Germany in the ill-fated SS *St Louis* were unable to find asylum in the United States or Canada. In addition, Curthoys (2003) drew attention to the striking similarities between the *Tampa* and the *Afghan* that carried Chinese immigrants who were refused entry to Melbourne and Sydney in 1888. These parallels included the exclusionism in Australia's reaction to immigration, the refusal to allow the ship to land, the rushing through of the new legislation to determine that the unwanted immigrants were actually illegal, the court intervention, the perception of siege, and importantly, the huge popularity and support for the government's responses (Curthoys, 2003; "Tough time," 2001).

In early September 2001, the *Sydney Morning Herald* stated that polls revealed 77% of Australians supported the Howard government's refusal to let the asylum seekers to land on Australian soil ("Howard's Tampa-led," 2001). As well, the *Herald Sun*, a Melbourne tabloid newspaper, asked its readers, "Should Australia turn away the disputed boatload of illegal immigrants?" Some 13,500 responded "yes" out of 14,000 readers ("Voteline," 2001). Similarly, it has been revealed in another opinion poll that about three-quarters of the Australian people supported the way John Howard had dealt with the *Tampa* crisis (O'Connor, 2001). As well, a large number of letters arguing the pros and cons of the government's policy were presented in newspapers. Talkback radio aired the expressions of hatred towards the refugees and their supporters (Curthoys, 2003). Such overwhelming public support for the Howard government's campaign against asylum seekers also led some writers (e.g., Jayasuriya, Walker, & Gothard, 2003) to question the values of our society. Curthoys (2003) believed that such

exchanges reflected the desire to protect our borders and were closely related to issues of race, culture, immigration, policies on refugees, and human rights.

In April 2006, the Australian government reported that the 2001 “Pacific solution” was to be extended after a rift with Indonesia for granting temporary protection visas to 42 Papuans. This policy has been viewed as a direct response to Indonesia’s anger over Australia’s granting of asylum to the Papuans. The extension of this policy meant that people who entered Australia illegally by boat, regardless of whether they reached the mainland or not, were taken to one of the three offshore Immigration detention centres for processing (Sheridan & Maiden, 2006; “UN warns Australia,” 2006). As well, the government even sent genuine refugees to a third country. The United Nations refugee agency was concerned about the implications of this new hardline asylum policy. The United Nations further warned Australia not to penalise those who escaped persecution or set a precedent by deflecting its international responsibilities to refugees (“UN warns Australia,” 2006).

E.2 The September 11 terrorist attacks on America (2001)

Two weeks after the *Tampa* crisis, terrorist attacks on New York and Washington on 11 September 2001 gave rise to serious concerns about Australia’s national security. Public opinion with regards to refugees hardened even further. The event of September 11 affected Australia in several ways. An increased sense of insecurity generated renewed anxieties related to Australia’s northern border (Jayasuriya et al., 2003). Also, connections were drawn by Australian politicians between the arrival of boat people and the likelihood of a terrorist attack (Crock & Saul, 2002). Some authors (e.g., Jayasuriya et al., 2003) believed that this situation revisited the “yellow peril” anxieties that had created the White Australia Policy a century ago.

A year after the September 11 attacks, the NSW Anti-Discrimination Board reported in the *Adelaide Advertiser* that all levels of government had failed to address the racism that had erupted in Australia since September 11. Board president Chris Puplick said the increase in racial vilification and violence needed to be dealt with (“Racism ‘not dealt with,’” 2002). It was found in a study that Arab and Muslim Australians reported an increase in offensive remarks and physical violence against them following the September 11 attacks on America and the Bali bombings (“Muslims report,” 2004). The focus of the study was on the experiences of 1,400 participants in 69 focus groups held across Australia in 2003 and was released by Australia’s Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission (HREOC) acting race discrimination commissioner William Jonas. A key finding was that 90% of female participants reported experiencing racist abuse or violence since September 11. The government was advised by the HREOC to implement a national anti-discrimination and vilification law (“Muslims report,” 2004).

In addition, the September 11 terrorist attacks had a negative impact on asylum seekers who were detained in Australia. For example, Wall (2002) of the *Agence France-Presse* newspaper reported in January 2002 that riots and hunger strikes occurred in Woomera detention centre as the detainees endured long delays in getting their claims processed. Amidst reports of hunger strikes and detainees burying themselves up to the neck, the Minister for Immigration and Indigenous Affairs, Philip Ruddock, defended the time

taken to process the Iraqi asylum seekers. He argued that Australia had to check whether the asylum seekers represented a security risk. Amnesty International spokeswoman, Irene Khan, stated that there was a tendency to lump together terrorists, money launderers, and traffickers. She further claimed that those arrested and who were associated with al-Qaeda had arrived legally in various countries. Khan also warned that seeing refugees as threats only led to fear and xenophobia and further dismissed Ruddock's argument that illegal immigrants were "queue jumpers" taking the place of "genuine" refugees. "There is no queue. Many of the people coming (illegally) to Australia do not have access to the UNHCR, they are fleeing desperate conditions," she explained. Khan also believed that most Australians, who according to polls supported the government's tough stance on immigration, were being misled by politicians. She argued that there was a deliberate vilification and demonisation of those arriving in Australia (Wall, 2002).

Lawson (2003) of *Canberra Times* wrote that the United States-based organisation Human Rights Watch, in its 2002 report, had accused Australia of joining a copycat phenomenon of rogue states that have used September 11 as an excuse for repression. In its 2002 report on human rights abuses around the world, this international group claimed that nowhere was the lack of sympathy for refugees more apparent than in Australia. Australia, in claiming that asylum-seekers might be "a pipeline for terrorists" to enter the country, imposed some of the tightest restrictions on asylum in the industrialised world. In the wake of the September 11 attacks, governments such as Britain and the US applied punitive strategies against asylum seekers. As well, Australia persisted in applying its "draconian" approach towards refugees and asylum-seekers, including intercepting boats at sea, sending asylum seekers to the Pacific or detaining them under very punishing conditions of an "arbitrary and brutal detention regime," and denying them permanent visas (Lawson, 2003).

E.3 The "children overboard" incident (6 October 2001)

Manne (2003) believed that a type of "respectable xenophobia" (p. 171) was emerging as he drew attention to an incident that took place at the start of the 2001 election campaign, in which a boat of Iraqi asylum seekers was intercepted by HMAS *Adelaide*. Philip Ruddock, the immigration minister, claimed that he knew parents had thrown their children overboard despite a lack of evidence to substantiate his claim (Manne, 2003). He told a media conference, "A number of children have been thrown overboard, again with the intention of putting us under duress (to take them in)." The Prime Minister, spoke out in a leading talk back program, "We don't want people who seek to come to this country illegally to be able to do so. I express my anger at the behaviour of those people. I can't comprehend how genuine refugees would throw their children overboard" (Burton, 2002). However, *Herald-Sun's* Jill Singer (2002) questioned the Prime Minister's readiness to believe that the asylum seekers had thrown their babies overboard to blackmail Australia into accepting them as refugees. She asked if Howard's vehemence originated from his so desperately wanting to believe this claim.

The Australian newspaper ("Overboard affair," 2002) stated that the "pawns" of this "nasty political game" were the demonised Iraqi refugees, the so-called "terrorists" and baby-throwers who escaped the Iraqi regime. The Howard government was criticised for

not explaining that it had the facts wrong ("Overboard affair," 2002). Senior naval officials reported in March 2002 that claims by the Howard government about the refugees throwing their own children overboard were perpetuated long after they were known to be false. Furthermore, the Refugee Council of Australia reported that such claims led to increased harassment of refugees and migrant Australian citizens. Together with supposed photos of the throwing of children overboard, these claims led to increased public hostility toward asylum seekers during the federal election campaign (Burton, 2002).

E.4 The federal election (10 November 2001)

As reported in *The Australian*, in the wake of the *Tampa* crisis, the September 11 event, and the "children overboard" episode, Australian Prime Minister John Howard gave his famous statement, "We will decide who comes to this country, and the circumstances under which they come." He was further criticised for linking terrorists with refugees, who mostly arrived from Iraq and Afghanistan, in order to win the votes of One Nation supporters ("Wrong on refugees," 2006). The issues of border protection and the new threat from the north became the dominant issues of his campaign (Jayasuriya et al., 2003). His statement was said to have crystallised public opinion on illegal immigration and was credited with winning the Liberals vital electoral support (Sheridan & Maiden, 2006). Thus, the basis of victory of John Howard's Coalition Party in November 2001 was due primarily to his refugee repulsion re-election strategy (Manne, 2003; Sheridan & Maiden, 2006) with regards to his rigid stance against asylum seekers, which reached a climax during the *Tampa* crisis in August 2001 (Ang, 2003). Ang (2003) stated that overwhelming public support for Howard's inflexible and "aggressively antipathetic" (p. 52) position against asylum seekers reflected the persistent appeal of a worldview consistent with the White Australia policy that was drafted a century ago. Ang (2003) strongly believes that while the legal and formal-political sides of the White Australia policy have ended, its mentality is still an entrenched part of Australian culture.

E.5 The Bali bombing (12 October 2002) – Australia's own September 11

The bombing in Bali, Indonesia, has been termed by New Zealand Prime Minister Helen Clark Australia's own September 11 because of the significant numbers of Australian victims and because Westerners were the primary target. The Australian Labor opposition leader, Simon Crean, stated that the bombings in Bali signified the blackest day in Australia since the Second World War ("NZ leader," 2002; "Spotlight falls," 2002). Several commentators saw the bombings as an outcome of the Howard government's enthusiastic support for America's campaign against international terrorism with the possibility of a pre-emptive strike against Iraq. The Howard government, however, rapidly ruled out such suggestions while stressing the global nature of terrorism ("Spotlight falls," 2002). Amidst the calls for retribution after the Bali bombing, there were also people who advised the public against blaming Australian Muslims, who have experienced discrimination and harassment since the September 11 attacks on America (Christie, 2002).

E.6 The war in Iraq – the second Gulf War (21 March 2003)

There were protests against this highly controversial US-led war on Iraq (e.g., McGrath, 2003; Pilger, 2003; “Pro-democracy youth,” 2003; “Roundup”, 2003; Stead, 2003) as well as deep concerns that this war would inevitably cause grave harm to Iraqi civilians (Minear, 2003; Salahuddin Mahmud, 2003). Despite such concerns and the lack of proof of any weapons of mass destruction in Iraq (Salahuddin Mahmud, 2003) as well as the lack of any connection between Saddam and the al-Qaida terrorist network that led to the September 11 attacks (“Bush leads,” 2003), the assault on Iraq began on March 21, 2003. The *Portland Press Herald* called the US-led 2003 war on Iraq as “an act of self-defense to disarm” the Iraqi president Saddam Hussein because Saddam’s attempt to build chemical, biological, and nuclear weapons was an obvious and immediate terror threat to the United States (“Bush leads,” 2003). However, a columnist in *The Independent* newspaper, called it an “unjust war” (Zubaer Abdullah, 2003), and others questioned the legitimacy of this war in terms of international law (“Now that it’s war,” 2003). Other columnists (e.g., Knox, 2003) wrote about the high cost involved in ensuring America’s security in this pre-emptive strike against Iraq.

Whereas the ground invasion of Iraq in 1991 included forces from 28 nations that supported the American and British troops, the invasion of Iraq in March 2003 by the United States was only supported by troops from Britain and the Australian special forces (Spiegel, 2003). By 23 March 2003, the “Coalition of the Willing” had expanded to 46 countries, including countries such as Palau, Mongolia, and Costa Rica (Weiser, 2003), as well as Spain, Poland, Nicaragua, and Singapore (Dine & Sawyer, 2003). The White House Website stated that “Every major race, religion, ethnicity in the world is represented,” together with “nations from every continent of the world” (Dine & Sawyer, 2003). When the war began, the *Sunday Times* (Perth) called for all Australians to support the troops who risked their lives in Iraq and requested all who were opposed to the war to put their own views aside (“War critics,” 2003).