‘Band-aids in a battlefield’: The anthropology of refugee and asylum seeker support in Australia

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Contents

Abstract

This thesis examines the experiences of individuals in South Australia who have worked and volunteered with people seeking refuge over years and decades. There is considerable literature on asylum seekers, refugees, and the fraught circumstances they often endure as they navigate asylum processes. However, there has been little anthropological attention paid towards understanding associated experiences of those who provide support to people seeking refuge, throughout asylum-seeking processes and beyond. This research is approached from the perspective of activist anthropology, providing insight into the motivations and experiences of volunteers and workers who often provide crucial support to people who have fled circumstances of war, conflict, violence, torture, and trauma. The research is guided by three central questions that seek to understand the roles and experiences of supporters who undertake their work through various modes of organisation. Firstly, what motivates people to participate in refugee and asylum seeker support work? Secondly, what is the nature of their experiences resulting from differing modes of participation and organisation in this work? Finally, how can an understanding of these motivations and experiences aid support organisations (both formal and informal) to attract, retain, and care for volunteers and workers to promote sustainability in this sector?

Fieldwork was undertaken with 44 asylum seeker and refugee supporters aged between 23 and 90 years in Adelaide, South Australia, from July 2019 to October 2020. Ethnographic data was obtained through surveys, participant observation, semi-structured interviews, and textual analysis. I worked with a theoretical frame encompassing the anthropologies of self, identity, morality, organisations, and resilience that crosscut the thesis. My analysis demonstrates that supporters are motivated to participate in voluntary or work activities that align with morals and values, linked strongly to their senses of 'self' and 'identity.' When supporters can provide valuable assistance to people seeking refuge, in alignment with their morals and values, their sense of self is boosted, contributing to their resilience. However, varying modes of organisation and participation in the support sector determine or affect the extent to which supporters can achieve this combination of valuable support provision, moral alignment, and self-realisation. Supporters struggle when their work is not understood or recognised by others as valuable. They also struggle in settings characterised by significant bureaucracy and control. This affects their personal and professional

relationships, emotions, resilience, and longevity. However, alternative modes of participation and organisation go some way to favourably affecting these things, for example those that offer democratic and egalitarian working environments characterised by high levels of trust. This thesis argues that people's experiences of support and being a supporter are framed and affected by the modes of organisation and participation through which they engage. The interplay between individual beliefs and values and democratic and flexible modes of participation and organisation simultaneously ignite passion and cultivate resilience. In turn, this serves to enhance the broader sustainability of the refugee and asylum seeker support sector. My findings have implications for the sector in terms of how it organises, attracts, retains, and cares for volunteers and workers.

Keywords: Anthropology, organisations, volunteers, resilience, identity, asylum-seeking

Thesis declaration

I certify that this work contains no material which has been accepted for the award of any other degree or diploma in my name, in any university or other tertiary institution and, to the best of my knowledge and belief, contains no material previously published or written by another person, except where due reference has been made in the text. In addition, I certify that no part of this work will, in the future, be used in a submission in my name, for any other degree or diploma in any university or other tertiary institution without the prior approval of the University of Adelaide and where applicable, any partner institution responsible for the joint award of this degree.

I give permission for the digital version of my thesis to be made available on the web, via the University's digital research repository, the Library Search and also through web search engines, unless permission has been granted by the University to restrict access for a period of time.

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This thesis is for the **forty-four lion-hearted individuals** who entrusted me with their stories. I am in awe of your courage, strength, passion, resilience, dogged determination, and humility. And yet, I long for the day when we are all redundant in this space: the day when justice and rights are truly for all, including those who dare to ask for refuge; the day when refuge is not simply an obligation but an honour to provide.

Completing a PhD is a lot like raising a child in one respect— it takes a village. It could not have been done without support from so many people along the way who deserve my sincere gratitude:

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To my **friends** who have generously taken the back seat, whilst I have been largely absent for a very long time, your unconditional love and support means more than you know. Time passes, but our bonds remain strong.

Finally, this thesis is also for **people who seek refuge** – may we serve you better and strive for the day where we are no longer needed, because you are safe, happy, and well. Let's dare to dream.

List of images and figures

Image 1: Van parked at Tarntanyangga, Adelaide, during one of the many Safe Harbour Australia art installations shown in 2019 in support of people seeking refuge. Safe Harbour Australia was “an artistic endeavour by Adelaide artists and community activists aiming to reclaim the "boat" as an icon of sanctuary for all those seeking refuge.” (see https://www.facebook.com/safeharbouraus/)

CHAPTER ONE

People seeking refuge: conceptualising the landscape of supporter engagement

Towards the end of September 2019, I visited a small, inner-city home in the southern corner of the Adelaide central business district. I went to meet Mim, who has been involved in refugee and asylum seeker support since the late 1970s. Mim and I have encountered each other on several occasions over the years prior to my fieldwork, at various events in support of people seeking refuge. Mim's involvement in support has taken many forms: working in informal and formal settings; encompassing the private, public, and political realms; and undertaking mostly considered, but sometimes outlandish actions in pursuit of change. If I could sum up what I know of Mim, I would describe her as a creative, fierce, determined, and active supporter of people seeking refuge in South Australia. She is also someone who has been close to burnout many times. Over the course of my research, I had many lengthy conversations with Mim, and her experiences appear throughout this thesis. However, what she told me in the first five minutes of our first meeting articulates and echoes similar experiences and sentiments of so many of my research participants, so it is fitting that it should introduce this thesis:

> *I guess back in the mid to late 1970s and in to the 80s I was working quite intensively with Vietnamese refugees. I was married to a Vietnamese man at the time. I'd meet his extended family, friends… help them set up bank accounts, help them find rental accommodation, sometimes help them find jobs and… yeah, I thought well, I will do this because I am in a position to be able to do it. I started talking to friends of mine, some of whom had money, who could throw in a bit of financial support for people. I thought it is a very specific support, it is time limited, and when the Vietnamese people stop coming as refugees, they won't need that help anymore and I won't ever have to do it again. I think like that in retrospect. At the time I just thought, what can I do? And I did it. I didn't realise it would become something that I would be revisiting and revisiting for the rest of my life.*

Introduction

This thesis offers an anthropological account of everyday South Australians who work and volunteer their time to support people seeking refuge, often over years and decades. It was largely inspired by my own experiences of volunteering in this sector since 2012. I often wondered how my experiences compared with others. From an academic perspective, much is known about experiences of people navigating asylum processes in Australia, but very little is known about those who seek to support them. As one participant said to me during our first meeting, "No one has ever asked me about my story before. No one has asked any of us really." The refugee and asylum seeker support sector (hereafter generally referred to as 'support' or 'the sector') in South Australia encompasses a diverse range of concerned individuals, community groups, non-governmental organisations (NGOs), and other organisations who seek to improve the physical, material, and emotional circumstances of people seeking refuge. This study represents an exercise in activist anthropology, whereby I critically engage with the support sector, applying anthropological knowledge and theory, to produce useful and meaningful knowledge for participants and the sector more widely. It seeks to highlight key experiences and challenges that supporters face as they work to make a difference for people seeking refuge. It is the first research of its kind in South Australia with this community of people. With the increasing global flows of people seeking refuge, and the decreasing willingness of nations and governments to adequately assist and support them, it is critical that the experiences of volunteers and workers on the frontline are examined. My work draws on, and contributes to, literature in the field of refugee studies, and the anthropologies of self and identity, organisations, and resilience. It contributes to the ethnographic canon of activist anthropology specifically. In-depth ethnographic insights offered by this research may assist the sector, comprised of informal and formal modes of participation and organisation, to attract, retain, and care for volunteers and workers in pursuit of increased sustainability. Furthermore, it provides contributes to knowledge surrounding the nature of advocacy, volunteering, and social justice challenges more broadly.

This research is guided by three central questions that seek to understand the roles and experiences of supporters who are undertaking their work through various modes of organisation. Firstly, what motivates people to participate in refugee and asylum seeker support work? Secondly, what is the nature of their experiences resulting from differing modes of participation and organisation in this work? Finally, how can an understanding of these motivations and experiences aid support organisations (both formal and informal) to attract, retain, and care for volunteers and workers to promote sustainability in this sector?

From July 2019 to October 2020, fieldwork was conducted with 44 asylum seeker and refugee supporters aged between 23 and 90 years in Adelaide. Participants comprised a diverse range of concerned individuals who volunteer and work within community groups, non-governmental organisations (NGOs), and other organisations who seek to improve the physical, material, and emotional circumstances of people seeking refuge. Though specific groupings of participants were not sought in the recruitment process, three loosely defined practice groups emerged amongst my participant cohort, so I focused my analysis on these:

1) Individuals who are wholly or mostly unaffiliated with any particular formal organisations;

2) Persons working or volunteering within structured and reasonably formalised organisations such as NGOs or other formal settings; and

3) Those who claim membership to a particular support grouping in South Australia, the Circles of Friends.

My analysis demonstrates that supporters are motivated to participate in support activities that align with morals and values they believe are essential for constructing and realising their senses of 'self' and 'identity.' When supporters can provide valuable assistance to people seeking refuge in alignment with their morals and values, their sense of self is boosted, contributing to their resilience. But varying modes of organisation and participation in the sector determine and/ or affect the extent to which supporters can achieve this combination of valuable support provision, moral alignment, and self-realisation. Supporters struggle when faced with social invisibility or in settings characterised by significant bureaucracy and control. This, in turn, affects their personal and professional relationships, emotions, resilience, and longevity. However, alternative modes of organisation go some way to favourably affecting these things, for example those that offer democratic and egalitarian modes of organisation and engagement, characterised by high levels of trust.

This thesis argues that individual experiences of support and being a supporter are framed and affected by the modes of organisation and participation through which they engage.

The remainder of this chapter is divided in to four parts. I first offer a contextual rationale for my research, before providing insight into asylum seeking and support in Australia. The asylum-seeking process determines the circumstances faced by people seeking refuge that supporters respond to, and navigate, daily. The task of answering my research questions led me to engage with an array of literature from anthropology, as well as other disciplines. Identifying broad themes enabled me to collate and organise interrelated subsets of literature in ways that reflected the most salient data and research focus; these are laid out below. These include the broad literatures of self, identity, morality, organisations, and resilience that crosscut the thesis and inform my attempt to answer the research questions. This literature is explored in more detail in the chapters themselves. I finish with an overview of each chapter in the thesis.

Refugee studies

In anthropology and related interdisciplinary fields, much seminal research focuses on the lived experience of refugees as 'subject', for example in the broadly titled 'Refugee Studies' (noteworthy examples are Agamben 1998; Fassin 2011; Arendt 1996; Khosravi 2010; Malkki 1995; Said 2000; Stein 1981). There is a significant, cross disciplinary body of literature that focuses on the lived experiences of people seeking refuge in the Australian context (noteworthy examples include: Hartley & Fleay 2017; Fleay & Briskman 2013; Briskman 2013; Mares 2001; Corlett 2002; Boochani & Tazreiter 2019; Tazreiter 2017; Mares 2001; Briskman 2008; Ziersch, Walsh & Due 2023; Silove, Austin & Steel 2007). Niche literature about supporters and/ or advocacy and support organisations that *assist* people seeking refuge largely focuses on experiences in overseas contexts (c.f. McAllum 2018; Maestri & Monforte 2020; Fleischmann & Steinhilper 2017; Lahusen & Grasso 2018; Sandberg & Andersen 2020; Boersma et al. 2019; Brown & Horrocks 2009). In academic research and literature where refugee supporters are the focus, particularly in the Australian context, support work has mainly been explored through themes such as discourse, memory, identity, and politics –but almost always outside of the direct anthropological purview (Cabot 2016; Every et al. 2013; Tilbury 2007; Olaf Kleist 2013; Mares & Newman 2007; Surawski, Pedersen & Briskman 2008; Briskman & Doe 2016; O'Neill 2008).

There is a limited but growing body of oral testimony and biographical literature that provides deeply personal and highly descriptive insights about the experiences of refugee supporters, the work they do, and emotions they experience during their work (c.f. Mares & Newman 2007; Isaacs 2014; Mann 2003; Mares 2001). However, there has been very limited research undertaken using anthropological methods that examine supporter experiences in Australia in depth (Gosden 2012; Koelsch 2017; Peterie 2017). In recent times, Australian academic, Peterie (2018, 2019a, 2019b, 2022a) has offered a critical body of work that shifts the focus squarely towards understanding experiences of supporters participating in friendship programs and visiting immigration detention centres, using anthropological methods. The limited amount of anthropological attention towards experiences of supporters suggests a clear gap in the literature that sparked my attention.

Seeking asylum and support in Australia

Unanticipated arrivals of people seeking refuge in Australia are often the catalyst for highly emotional, hotly contested interactions between those who support asylum seekers and refugees, and those who stridently oppose their presence in the country. Asylum seekers are people who have fled their countries and applied for protection as refugees (AHRC 2015). A refugee is a person who is outside their own country and is unable or unwilling to return, due to a well-founded fear of persecution because of their race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group, or political opinion (UNHCR 2011). Though the two groups have clearly different legal definitions, for the purposes of this thesis, and to acknowledge the people behind the labels, I refer to asylum seekers and refugees as 'people seeking refuge' as much as possible.

Before 1973, people seeking refuge predominantly arrived in Australia through official immigration channels (RCOA 2020a). However, when boats began to unexpectedly arrive in Australia from Vietnam and other Asian countries in the 1970s, a moral panic about 'boat people', 'invasions', and 'hordes' of unanticipated arrivals ensued, changing the way people seeking refuge were discussed and treated in this country (McKay, Thomas & Warwick Blood 2011; Reid & Skuse 2018). The Australian government has deployed a variety of propaganda and institutional, structural, legal, and policy measures since then - designed to both create and appease public anxiety about unanticipated arrivals (Fleay & Briskman 2013; Hage 2003; Reid & Skuse 2018).

These measures contribute to widespread beliefs amongst the Australian public that people seeking refuge are 'illegal', immoral 'queue jumpers', may be associated with threats such as terrorism, and pose an inherent danger to national security and Australian values (Clark, Haw & Mackenzie 2023; McKay, Thomas & Warwick Blood 2011; Pickering 2001; Neumann 2015; Isaacs 2014). This growing trend towards 'crimmigration' means those who engage in advocacy work directly challenge the majority national public opinion (Gosden 2012; Isaacs 2014; Welch 2012). This has led to a social situation, where choosing to provide support or assistance to refugees is to engage in a political, anti-social, and sometimes personally risky act (Gosden 2006; Hage 2003; Robinson 2013). Supporters, therefore, undertake their work within politically and socially fraught circumstances, and in the face of considerable social and emotional pressure.

It is a fundamental human right for all human beings to be able to seek asylum (United Nations 1948). In 2020 ,when I was undertaking fieldwork, there were roughly 26 million refugees globally and around 4.2 million asylum seekers (RCOA 2020b). During that time, almost 71,000 persons lodged an application for an offshore humanitarian visa to Australia, though only total of 13,171 Australian resettlement visas were granted (Department of Home Affairs 2020a). There were 1,520 people being held in Australian-run immigration detention facilities, the bulk of which were in centres on the mainland (Department of Home Affairs 2020b). At 30 June 2020, the average period of time for people held in detention facilities was 551 days with more than a quarter of that population held for longer than 2 years (Department of Home Affairs 2020b). Also, at that time, around 30,000 people[1] were living in the community, awaiting refugee status determinations (Department of Home Affairs 2020c). Though, in 2020, no refugees or asylum seekers were 'officially' detained by Australia in regional processing centres on Nauru or in Papua New Guinea, supporters were still in contact with more than 200 people who were left to live in the community in those places with few rights or prospects (RCOA 2020c).

[1] Known as the 'IMA Legacy Caseload', these are predominantly people who arrived in Australia on or after 13 August 2012 and before 1 January 2014 who did not first arrive in Australia on the Australian mainland; and who have not previously been to a regional processing country (either Nauru or PNG). There are also several additional categories that have been added to these two main provisions since the inception of 'fast-tracking'. https://www.racs.org.au/fact-sheets (https://www.refugeecouncil.org.au/fast-tracking-statistics/). Fast-tracking allows asylum seekers to apply for protection to the (now) Department of Home Affairs through a process characterised by very short timeframes for the provision and assessment of claims. These accelerated assessments have been introduced in the interests of efficiency but are thought to pose a greater risk of unfair assessments https://www.refugeecouncil.org.au/asylum-policies/7/. https://www.racs.org.au/fact-sheets

The process of seeking refuge in Australia is long, complicated and, in large part, determined by the mode of arrival of an asylum seeker. According to the Kaldor Centre for International Refugee Law (2020), “Those arriving with a valid visa access a standard refugee status determination process…Those arriving without a valid visa subject to a ‘fast-track’ process with diminished rights.” Australian asylum-seeking processes are complex, but the ‘general’ refugee status determination process is detailed in Figure 1 (overleaf).

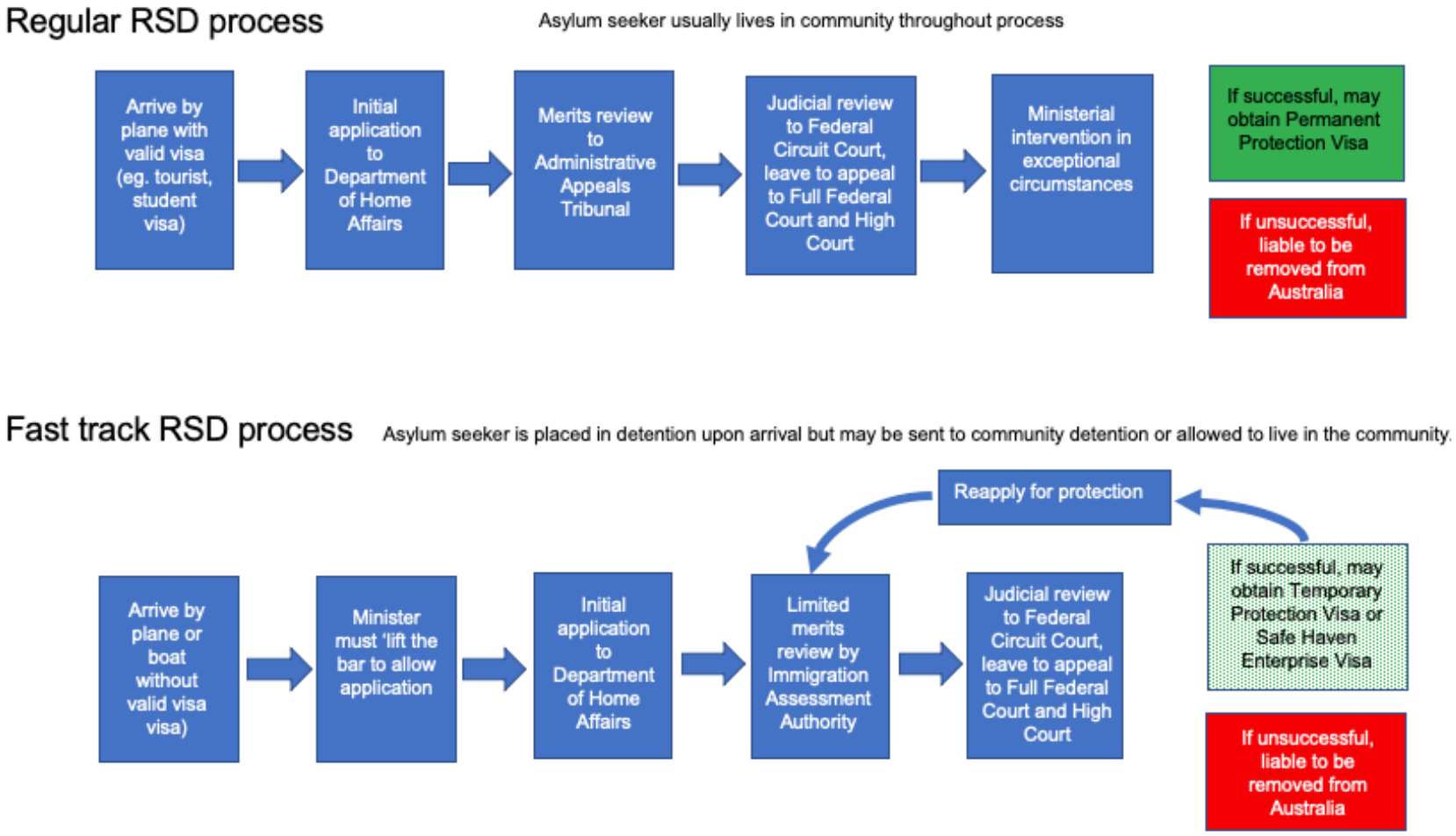


Figure 1: The refugee status determination process in Australia (Kaldor Centre for International Refugee Law 2020)

NOTE: a more detailed explanation of these processes can be found in the appendix.

In addition to processes shown in Figure 1, people seeking refuge may be subject to alternative processes depending on several factors. These include: when they arrived; which government they arrived under; how they arrived; what the rules were at the time; what rules have changed since their arrival that are now deemed to apply to them; which visa they may be on; and so on (Asylum Seeker Resource Centre 2021). For this reason, it is very difficult to describe the 'typical' experience of people seeking refuge for the purposes of this thesis. Perhaps the only generalisation I can make is to say that the processes are long, complicated, and incredibly stressful for all involved.

Depending on the visa status, government policies, and circumstances of people seeking refuge, they may or may not have access (or only have limited access) to freedom of movement, or opportunities and social safety-nets like the right to work, access to Medicare[2], education, legal advice, family reunion, or social welfare payments (Asylum Seeker Resource Centre 2021; Hartley & Fleay 2017). In these circumstances, it is supporters— volunteers, paid workers, and organisations that work to ameliorate the resulting physical, material, and emotional challenges that arise, including helping people to navigate the process(es). I use the term 'supporters' here and throughout this thesis as the most unifying term to identify a diverse participant cohort. Other commonly used terms such as 'advocate' and 'activist' were contested by research participants with wide ranging views about to whom and how the terms should apply. However, all participants agreed that their efforts were undertaken in support of people seeking refuge, hence the adoption of 'supporters'.

At the macro level, it is difficult to determine exactly how many people seeking refuge are supported by volunteers and workers in South Australia. This is because supporters may provide varying types of assistance to new arrivals, as well as to: people in detention settings; in offshore locations and circumstances; who have moved interstate; who hold different visas and are at different stages in the process of seeking protection, or who may have been in South Australia for some time and periodically need help (Gosden 2006; Mares & Newman 2007; Fleay & Briskman 2013; Isaacs 2014; Gleeson 2016). Based on what I have gleaned from fieldwork, I believe I can say the numbers extend into the thousands at any given time.

[2] Medicare is the publicly funded universal health care insurance scheme in Australia.

At the micro level, supporters work to provide various kinds of assistance, be it "…social, emotional, practical, lobbying and medical and legal support" (Gosden 2006, p. 8). The work they do is almost always undertaken with no formal training and depends on the supporter being able to provide or procure all necessary resources. These include goods and money, but also resources and skills such as time, knowledge, emotional intelligence, cultural awareness, and many other intangible necessities to get the job done (Mares & Newman 2007; Mann 2003; Puvimanasinghe et al. 2015; Peterie 2019a, 2018). Because the work requires such a diversity of resources and skills, this work is often (but not always) undertaken by retirees who appear to be more able to meet these needs. They provide friendship and social connections to people they support meaning their work is often of a personal, rather than a solely transactional nature (Gosden 2006; Tilbury 2007; Mares & Newman 2007; Peterie 2018). I offer a few examples for context. There is the new arrival who only has one set of clothes and who hasn't contacted relatives in Quetta, Pakistan for months; the Hazara family who have fallen behind on rent and need to secure new housing; the man whose Temporary Protection Visa is about to expire, needing to reapply for protection; the young single mother who requires a pram for her child and to urgently see a dentist for a broken tooth, but she can't access either; the young man offshore who needs his mobile phone credit to be topped up so he can speak with his family or lawyer; the person whose Centrelink[3] assistance has been stopped for weeks because of a basic error in the spelling of their name that apparently cannot be easily resolved. Additionally, supporters are frequently involved in political activities such as resisting government law and policy. These few examples barely scratch the surface of possible circumstances in which supporters assist. The resultant dependent relationships formed between supporters and people seeking refuge exist from short to very long periods (sometimes over years) and are often intensely personal, demanding, and highly emotional, in both rewarding and/ or potentially emotionally injurious ways.

In 2020, participants of my research were battle-weary. There were less resources to work with, less funding, and less chances of significantly changing the political terrain that leads to all they face 'on the ground': the scourge of temporary protection visas; a resolute and hostile government; a lack of funding and resources; and a fearful and often ill-informed public. Though the actual numbers of people seeking refuge by boat have dwindled in response to hard-line approaches of both Labor and Liberal governments over many years

[3] Centrelink deliver social security payments and services to Australians.

(RCOA 2022), there remains considerable need for supporters to 'journey alongside' people through all they must navigate in pursuit of a safe life, whether that ends up being in Australia or elsewhere, such as the USA (Kaldor Centre for International Refugee Law 2021).

At the time of my fieldwork, supporters were yet to face Covid-19. They were yet to face withdrawal of US troops from Afghanistan and the Russian invasion of Ukraine. These events will present a range of new challenges, in terms of how supporters work, whom they can assist, and what support is required. I have no doubt they will draw breath, sharpen their skills, revive networks, innovate, keep calm, and carry on as they always have in order to undertake this 'living work' that is inherent to their senses of self, identity, and a life that is 'truthfully lived'.

The anthropology of self, identity and morality

In this section, I consider support work as it relates to notions of self, identity, and morality. In the Australian support sector, there is no clear, universally accepted definition of exactly who or what a supporter is or does. As it stands, the formal definition may vary between individuals and organisations, but support is generally described in terms of activities undertaken, such as political lobbying on behalf of individuals, as well as the provision of material support to refugees, as previously outlined (Millwood Consulting Pty Ltd 2015). However, Malkki (2015) explored experiences of people involved in humanitarian aid activities and found that the activities had a strong relationship to their senses of self, including self-transformation and self-humanisation. She found that people involved in aid work found it to be transformative in both creative and troublesome ways, suggesting that participation in such work may have meaning for people that extends far beyond actions. Such variations in perspectives exemplify why my research actively questions what support is and how supporters understand it. Whilst participants of this research discussed their actions as connected to other subject areas such as humanitarianism, politics, and aid, they emphasised that key drivers for their involvement (that precede their actions) in support relate deeply to their sense of self and identity, who they are seeking to be in the world. For this reason, a focus on self, identity and morality is appropriate.

Across several academic disciplines, and particularly in the social sciences, various terms are used to describe people, who they are, how they came to be whom they are, and how they understand themselves in a myriad of cultural and social settings. Harris (1989) identifies key differences between the 'individual', 'self', and 'person', arguing a person is a human being who enjoys a level of power and agency in society. Notions such as 'self' and 'selfhood' (Cohen 1994; Fogelson 1982; Shweder & LeVine 1984), various forms of 'selves' (Edwardes 2019; Skinner, Pach & Holland 1998; Hoffman 1998; Sökefeld 1999), the 'individual' (as opposed to 'dividuals') (Strathern & Stewart 1998; Miller 2020; Morris 2015), and 'identity' (Cohen 1994; Holland 2001; Jacobson-Widding 1983) have been generally understood as sub-sets of broader notions of 'person' and 'personhood' (Shweder & Bourne 1982; Smith 2011; Carrithers, Collins & Lukes 1985; Geertz 1966). These have been discussed (sometimes interchangeably), interrogated and theorised *ad infinitum* - particularly as anthropologists and other social scientists have endeavoured to understand and interpret interactions with their participants to an ever-increasing level of nuance, reflexivity, and depth. Indeed, Appell-Warren (2007) conducted an extensive examination of 'personhood' and associated terms of 'self' and 'identity' in anthropological literature. She concluded that 'personhood', 'self' and 'identity' are enmeshed and cannot be understood as distinct, independent concepts. In this thesis, I engage with these, and associated literature (explored further within the Chapters), in a conscientious effort to understand and describe my informants.

Anthropological research has explored ethics and morality extensively and part of this has included a focus of the relationship between morals, personhood, and matters of the self (c.f. Lutz 1988; Rosaldo 1980; Scheper-Hughes 1992; Vickers & Lambek 1993). Mattingly & Throop (2018) point out that throughout Western history, ideas of morality have been linked to personal moral development, self-cultivation, and representation as the basis for moral action in everyday life. The extent to which a person cultivates their moral self or identity and acts on that basis is strongly linked to beliefs about whether or not they live 'the good life'—a quality of life that includes aspiration, opportunity, dignity, and purpose (Fischer 2014). By behaving according to personally held moral beliefs, individuals simultaneously position themselves, defining who they are (or perhaps who they seek to be) and what they stand for, vis-à-vis the world (Mattingly & Throop 2018). This, in turn, informs their moral and social intersubjective experiences (Jackson 1998). Fassin (2014) questions whether human beings act morally out of obeyance, learned behaviours or fear, or whether they act morally because they determine it is the right or best course of action, for themselves and

for others. These links between morality, self, identity, and motivations were fundamental to my research, which critically examines how supporters see themselves and interprets what they do and why.

Hinde (2005, p. 3) argues 'moral' values or behaviour are values that are seen as 'good', that inform how someone 'ought' to behave. He states that the 'moral precepts' (prescriptive and proscriptive values) of an individual or group are referred to as the 'moral code' of that individual or group and these are constructed, maintained, altered, and passed on through human interaction (Hinde 2005, p. 13). Importantly, he also argues that a person's moral code is deeply ingrained in their sense of self and identity, and people will act on moral precepts within their code both consciously and unconsciously as they go about their lives (Hinde 2005, p. 35-36). Rusche (2012) studied a group of women social justice activists with one aim being to understand how women adopted activist identities and what it meant to them. One of her findings was that women in her study claimed moral intuition to demonstrate that their involvement in activism was an expression of themselves and their identities. Through their autobiographical disclosures, they explained how they came to identify as activists, responding to their own feelings and experiences about what they believed was 'right' or 'wrong'. Rusche (2012, p. 37) came to differentiate between true moral intuition (that is, 'innate' or 'feelings' based beliefs of 'right' or 'wrong') and learned moral intuition (whereby women referred to childhood experiences that sensitised them to injustice) to convey their claims. Though the history of research into biological determinism and moral relativism may question the validity of the claim to *true* moral intuition (Shweder & Menon 2014; Hinde 2005), others have argued that to be a human being, is to be a moral being (Smith 2011; Nader & Sursock 1986). That is, they argue humans possess a moral orientation that locates them in moral space and are both subjects and agents in moral lives (Smith 2011). In this research, I argue that supporters are motivated to participate based on their privately held values, beliefs, and moral codes, which are strongly linked to their senses of self and identity.

Additionally, it is often not enough to hold a moral position, or act in moral ways, but it is also important to be seen and recognised, to be perceptible and visible as a supporter, according to a morally defined identity. This is usually not for self-aggrandising reasons but in the hope of inspiring others. I explore visibility and perceptibility through the work of Honneth (2001), Smith et al (2018), and Herzog (2019). In this thesis, I explore the moral orientation and beliefs of supporters. I examine how their beliefs around cosmopolitanism

and shared humanity are pervasive throughout their work as they seek to affirm their identities (Cheah 2009; Hannerz 1990; Werbner 2009). I show that the ability of supporters to uphold their senses of self, identity, and moral codes varies according to their modes of organisation and engagement in the sector, affecting their resilience and longevity.

Anthropology and modes of organisation

After exploring supporter motivations for becoming involved and remaining involved in support, I was keen to understand the various modes of organisation through which they undertake their activities. Supporters in Australia are a demographically diverse, heterogeneous mix of people that form organisations, connected through their interest in working to assist people seeking refuge.

Anthropological theory on organisations provides guidance to consider what forms organisations may take, whether formal, informal or semi-formal (Gellner & Hirsch 2001; Lister 2003; Wright 1994). Descriptions of organisations in the literature vary. Jones, Moore and Snyder (1988) describe organisations as not only formal structures characterised by chains of command or certain channels of communication and roles, but as social units, such as special interest groups or small-scale groups organising activities. In this sense, organisations work towards achieving clearly defined common goals, pursue agreed objectives, and provide participants with a sense of identification with the group and its endeavours (Jones, Moore & Snyder 1988, pp. 15-16). Caulkins and Jordan (2012) also highlight that organisational cultures exist within communities of practice (Wenger 1998; Lave 1991) in both online and offline forms, as communities are informally bound together by sharing expertise, resources, experiences, and passion for a joint enterprise. Finally, Schultz (1995, p. 8) argues that organisations do not actually exist beyond the organisation's members, meanings, and interpretations they accord to their actions and experience. He asserts that meanings prescribe behaviours that actually create organisations, therefore, to study organisations is to study linkages between meaning and behaviour (Schultz 1995). These definitions are useful as they assisted me to think about how formal, informal, or semi-formal support groupings (made up of hybrid volunteer/ paid workforces, and who may be spread across geographical and even virtual/ digital spaces) constitute organisations that can be explored, despite their very different forms.

I soon realised that many attempts to define organisations appear to assume a certain homogeneity of behaviour amongst organisational members and did not adequately engage with the possibility that behavioural requirements within organisations may be determined and reinforced according to organisational hierarchies, structures, and power. That is, required behaviour within organisations did not always neatly reflect meanings and interpretations of all organisational members or explain their behaviour equally (Hochschild 1979). Schein (1983) argues that much of an organisation's culture actually reflects how people have learned to cope with anxiety. For this reason, I also explore various modes of organisation in the sector with a keen eye to the influences of power, structure, and agency in the advocacy context. To do this, I draw on related bodies of literature around governmentality and social movements, in terms of how they influence modes of organisation and participation.

Governmentality, in the traditional sense, relates to how individuals and groups are organised and governed by the state, or within contexts characterised by asymmetrical power relations, such as in organisational or institutional settings (Foucault 1995; Foucault & Rabinow 1991; Inda 2008). The term 'governmentality' emerged in the 1970s and was coined by Foucault as he sought to understand and explain power (including political power) and human behaviour (Foucault & Rabinow 1991; Rose, O'Malley & Valverde 2006). Foucault explained how the practices of institutions, organisations, and authorities shape and normalise actions within populations (Foucault & Rabinow 1991). He argued that biopower, a form of governmental power, can be used to shape, control, and regulate populations by directing their choices and behaviour towards, or away from, certain outcomes, impacting health, sanitation, birth rates, race, etc. (Foucault 1997). State governmentality may take many forms including the imposition of laws, or social policies and programs designed to coercively direct and influence people away from, or towards certain desired behaviours and choices (Ferguson & Gupta 2002). We experience state power through various state imposed rules, processes, laws, and regulation and these are most burdensome when the state seeks to control or block something (Ferguson & Gupta 2002). In terms of the asylum process, the weight of regulation is extreme, so state power is experienced in an extreme way. Logics of governmentality may be used to organise people in to social categories to exercise particular efforts of social control (Cohen 1994). Persons or groups may then be controlled through technologies of governmentality such as fear (Green 1999), censorship (Post 1998b; Carter 2006) or silencing (Thiesmeyer 2003) and it is at this point that efforts to

govern may even constitute acts of structural violence (Galtung 1969). Governmentality ultimately aims to secure the willing participation and consent of people to be governed in such ways. I explore governmentality in this thesis and argue that the Australian government and its agencies use it to attempt to control, censor, and silence supporters and this can be seen across different modes of organisation, affecting supporters' private and working lives. I explore how many supporters resist these attempts. I also argue that governmentality poses serious challenges for support organisations, such as NGOs, through processes of accountability.

Further, I explore the experiences of workers in the sector and find they are significantly shaped and characterised by technologies of governmentality, particularly in terms of bureaucratic processes that hold people accountable or responsible for a multitude of actions, behaviours, and outcomes (Rose, O'Malley & Valverde 2006). This has significant negative implications for the resilience of supporters. Terms such as 'governance' and 'accountability' are used to encapsulate day-to-day risk management processes, performance reviews, audits, reporting, and 'tick box culture' (Munro & Mouritsen 1996; Strathern 2003; King 2017; Scott 2008). Organisational norms assist employees and adjunct volunteers to determine what is required of them; they must govern themselves according to acceptable and unacceptable behaviours in the workplace, who they cannot or should not disclose information to, how they should best represent their organisation, what they can change, and what they must not change (Scott 2008; Munro 1999; Hochschild 1983). Comparatively, I turn to literature on social movements to understand experiences of supporters who engage in more democratic and egalitarian modes of organisation.

Social movements are examined extensively across the academic canon, particularly in political science, sociology, and anthropology. Because social movements span the political spectrum and various disciplinary areas of interest, definitions of what they are vary and are contested (Mayo 2004). Goodwin & Jasper (2009, p. 3) state, "Social movements are conscious, concerted, and sustained efforts by ordinary people to change some aspect of their society by using extra-institutional means." They additionally further describe social movements as collective and organised challenges to authorities, those with power, or cultural beliefs and practices (Goodwin & Jasper 2009, p. 4). Della Porta & Diani (2006) suggest social movements are informal interaction networks based on shared beliefs and feelings of solidarity. They focus on conflicts, engaging in collective action and protest, and they do not include single, formal organisations, but are based on informal networks of

organisations and groups. Nash (2005) suggests social movements are mobilisations of likeminded, morally committed (often pacifist or leftist) citizens who share personal values around justice, autonomy, and human rights. These attempts at definition are sufficiently broad that they could be applied to everything from small, local community groups mobilising to prevent something like the felling of some trees in a single location, to large scale, national or even trans-national efforts to raise awareness and secure fundamental rights, such as in the example of the #BlackLivesMatter movement.

Additionally, there is a growing tendency for the term 'social movement' to be applied far more often to large scale protest actions in pursuit of social change, furthering attempts to find new definitions or descriptions for smaller scale efforts that may or may not be focused on protest. For example, Johnston (2014, p. 12) argues, "Social movements are characterised by big change oriented ideas that guide them and impart to them an overall unity." He suggests that social movements are "…big-idea trends, such as environmentalism, feminism, radical equality, gender equality—the sweeping ideas of contemporary history…", giving the sense that scale contributes to what makes a movement (Johnston 2014, p. 12)— though this is somewhat challenged by those who are interested in efforts undertaken at the grassroots (Escobar 1992; Goodwin & Jasper 2009; Cnaan & Milofsky 2006). In this thesis, I draw on this literature predominantly to understand a particular grouping within my participant cohort— the Circles of Friends. I find modes of organisation that resemble or contain characteristics of grassroots and small-scale community and affinity groups present many advantages both for support provision and supporters themselves, including their resilience.

The anthropology of wellbeing and resilience

Supporting people seeking refuge can be physically and emotionally demanding, so this research invited a focus on the wellbeing and resilience of supporters. The topics of wellbeing and resilience have become increasingly popular foci of study in recent times. How best to define these terms and all they encompass is likely to be an ongoing multi-disciplinary effort, but I think it is reasonable to say wellbeing and resilience are interlinked and often used interchangeably to describe the physical, mental, and emotional states of people or groups and the means by which a person may 'be' resilient or 'achieve' wellbeing; this varies across cultures and societies (Jimeňez 2008; White 2016; Blackmore & White

2016; Southwick et al. 2014). Wellbeing has been described as “an optimal state for an individual, community, society, and the world as a whole. It is conceived of, expressed, and experienced in different ways by different individuals and within the cultural contexts of different societies” (Mathews 2009, p. 5). The capability of people to pursue and achieve such an optimal state has been famously theorised by the likes of Sen (1985) and Nussbaum (2011). They focus on wellbeing not only in terms of what people have, but also in terms of what they are able to achieve (Sen 1985; Nussbaum 2011). Additionally, Jackson (2011, p. 195) writes about the Kuranko people of Sierra Leone who understand wellbeing as “dependent on an adjustment or balance between our sense of what we owe others and what we owe ourselves.” Wellbeing is thus, far more than simply ‘being well’ (Mathews 2009).

The work of Fischer (2014) was particularly instrumental for analysis of my participants’ experiences, allowing me to distinguish between their understandings and usages of the terms ‘wellbeing’ and ‘resilience’ in relation to support work. Fischer’s work relates to two concepts that find their origins in classical Hellenic philosophy and many have worked with these terms (c.f. Waterman 1993; Deci & Ryan 2008; Mckay 2016). Fischer (2014, p.2) describes two types of happiness that may link to wellbeing: ‘hedonic’ happiness which is linked to feeling generally content, and ‘eudaimonia’ which is a feeling of life satisfaction that comes from actively striving to live a life that is personally valued. For some, wellbeing may be more about hedonic happiness (everyday contentment) and for others, eudaimonia (a constructed life of value) may be the goal (Fischer 2014, p. 2). Wellbeing is thought to encompass internal states of mind, aspirations, desires, pursuit of happiness, agency, and freedom, but also willingness to forgo hedonic pleasure in pursuit of something greater (Fischer 2014; Mathews 2009). The idea that wellbeing can eventuate from “the arduous work of becoming” or “living a life one deems worthy” suggests wellbeing may arise from adversity, struggle and personal sacrifice motivated by meaning and beliefs (Fischer 2014, p. 2). In this way, wellbeing also appears to have a strong relationship to resilience, or “…the capacity to carry on, improvise, and survive despite overwhelming challenges” (Barrios 2016, p. 31). I argue that supporters associate wellbeing more with ‘hedonic’ pleasure or happiness, but they appear to associate resilience more with their support work activities and a sense of ‘eudaimonia’ (living a life of value).

Resilience is described as "…the ability to bend but not break, bounce back, and perhaps even grow in the face of adverse life experiences" (Southwick et al. 2014, p.2). Theron, Liebenberg & Ungar (2015) consider resilience as a process of adaptation in response to a threat; so, a threat might be stress or adversity, and adaptation might include a person's assets, resources or personal characteristics that help them to respond accordingly. These understandings of resilience echo elements of the aforementioned capabilities approach to achieving wellbeing (Sen 1985; Nussbaum 2011). Panter-Brick (2014) suggests the agency and resourcefulness of people are as fundamental to resilience as actual resources, particularly when dealing with challenging circumstances. However, Southwick et al. (2014) also suggest that resilience is not just about functioning and doing well but links with moral, emotional, and spiritual aspects of life. As such, the two concepts of resilience and wellbeing are often interrelated and may share some similarities, but they are not synonyms for one another. In this thesis, I demonstrate that supporter resilience is inextricably linked to their senses of holding and exercising a particular form of agency, centred on 'living truthfully', which aligns with their motivations, beliefs, and senses of self.

Supporters often find themselves attempting to provide support in circumstances where they may be constrained or unable to exercise agency, giving rise to an array of emotions that can affect their resilience. It was, therefore, pertinent to engage with literature surrounding emotions as they relate to resilience. Feelings and emotions are frequently conflated and spoken about interchangeably making it difficult to clearly separate the two (Solomon 1978). Solomon describes emotions as "…a complex system of judgments, about the world, about other people, and about ourselves and our place in our world" (Solomon 1978, p.7). This echoes Levy's (1982) description of emotions as involving the whole person and implying something about a person's relationship to others or to their environment. Rebhun (1994) describes emotions as moral reactions to individual views of events. Beatty (2019, p.5) explains that a range of definitions have been offered over time including emotions as "…feelings, judgments, biological reactions, brain states, social roles, functional orientations, action tendencies, evolved responses to opportunity and danger, performances, transactions, cognitions, strategies, and words." He argues that most definitions end up being circular and not particularly useful, so he goes so far as to "swear off" offering any sort of definition at all (Beatty 2019, p.13).

Anthropological understandings of emotions have become increasingly complex over time as generally accepted biological, psychiatric, and psychoanalytic theories have given way to alternative explorations of emotions. Emotions have been considered in terms of how they are culturally and socially constructed (Kleinman 2004; Abu-Lughod 1999; Scheper-Hughes 1992; Lutz 1988; Rosaldo 1989) and embodied (Ahmed 2014) experiences that can delineate, straddle or transcend inner and outer worlds, the public and the private, the individual and the collective (Lutz & White 1986; Hochschild 1979). Emotions are no longer understood as passive, irrational or uncontrolled responses that people have to external experiences or stimuli; rather emotions affect our beliefs, our behaviour, our culture, and determine our actions (Ahmed 2014; Lutz & White 1986). Furthermore, our experience and understanding of emotions is influenced by context, which informs our emotional expression (Beatty 2019a). At this point I felt inclined to follow Beatty's (2019) lead and avoid attempts at definition. Instead, in this thesis I seek to explore how participants suggest they experience and understand emotions in relation to their work. I am also concerned with understanding how the emotions of supporters shape their experiences. I argue, that for many supporters, anger is a motivational force. One key response to strong emotions felt by supporters investigated in this thesis is resistance. The possibility for resistance significantly affects supporter resilience, hence it is explored here.

Through various forms and acts of resistance, supporters respond to circumstances and associated emotions they face. This means resistance is also key as I consider the resilience of supporters. In the case of supporters, resistance relates to activities they undertake in opposition of Australia's immigration regime, at all levels, and in all milieux to which its power extends and operates. This resistance often originates from moral outrage and the need to act (Kim 2013). Foucault (1978, p. 95), echoing Gramsci (Gramsci, Buttigieg & Callari 2011), famously said "Where there is power, there is resistance…" and this statement certainly describes the experiences of the participants for whom resistance has been necessary as they routinely confront significant asymmetrical power (Reid & Skuse 2018; Scott 1985). This study demonstrates how supporters regularly face stonewalling and silencing, often preventing them from speaking out or being heard in their attempts to advocate for change (Post 1998b; Jaworski 1993). When supporters resist, they often confront monolithic hegemonic power that poses considerable risk to themselves and those they support (Reid & Skuse 2018). Considering this, I found in many cases, the capacity for supporters to resist in meaningful ways was significantly curtailed. Despite these challenges,

I demonstrate that supporters continue to engage in everyday resistance, finding ways to negotiate asymmetrical power (Scott 1985). This contributes to their ongoing resilience.

Finally, in my exploration of supporter resilience, I found it important to explore burnout as a challenge to resilience. Burnout is a concept that has gained widespread traction and acceptance in predominantly western cultures over time. It formally originated from a psychological study in 1974 that looked at the decline in service and care provided by volunteer health and social workers and found that after one to three years they lost their motivation, enthusiasm, and extreme dedication for the work (Freudenberger 1974). Malasch (1976) described burnout as the chronic stress, exhaustion, and emotional distancing experienced by professionals as a result of contact with their clients. Due to its roots, 'burnout' is historically a medicalised term used in relation to work and occupations (Neckel 2017). Indeed, the World Health Organisation (WHO) describe burnout as an 'occupational phenomenon' (World Health Organisation 2019). However, over time, it has also been recognised that people do not only burnout at work and burnout can mean vastly different things to different people. For some people burnout can even become a 'badge of honour' – a sign of a hard worker or a valiant effort, rather than a failing (Neckel 2017). As a result, the term burnout has been appropriated and adopted across a multitude of settings and contexts. It has become a kind of 'catch all' descriptor for the process towards, and the experience of, overwhelming chronic stress, physical, and emotional fatigue and exhaustion that can come from an imbalanced lifestyle where too much energy is expended outwardly (c.f. Neckel 2017; Corrigan 1994; Moreno-Jiménez & Villodres 2010; Friberg 2009).

The popular notion of burnout is so overwhelmingly accepted that much of the recent research in to this phenomenon in the anthropological sphere draws on this notion for both its starting point and structure (c.f. Savicki 2002; Olding et al. 2021; Tantchou 2014). In the limited anthropological literature on this topic, the term "emotional exhaustion" is used more commonly than burnout to describe similar phenomena where individuals may feel stressed, emotionally wrung out, and disengaged (Hill & Bradley 2010; Quimby 2021). But this term is not well defined and leaves little room for recognition of things like physical exhaustion or fatigue, spiritual depletion, general mental weariness or other experiences (Neckel 2017; Schaufeli 2017). Overall, it appears that burnout is largely under-explored in anthropology, which is surprising given the breadth of its progression into mainstream popular culture and everyday life. In this thesis, I argue that supporters' experiences of burnout tend to be less of a burning *out* and more of a burning *down*.

Hence, I critique the notion of burnout and suggest the term *burn down* to describe supporters' experiences in this thesis. I also argue supporters appear to experience *passion fatigue*—tiredness resulting from their inability to *stop* caring or to fully disengage from the world of support. I develop the term *passion fatigue* to explain how and why supporters remain thoroughly devoted to support even when they feel considerably burned down. For supporters, the process of burning down involves a personal recognition of the signs of impending burnout, upon which time steps are taken to prevent total burnout, allowing people to recover and reengage for the long term. In my analysis I demonstrate what this means for supporters' senses of resilience, self, and identity.

Thesis overview

The thesis is structured as follows:

Chapter Two details the methodology I used to conduct ethnographic fieldwork in South Australia with supporters of people seeking refuge. In this chapter, I provide a reflexive examination of my own position both as a researcher and participant in the sector and this thesis as an exercise based in activist anthropology. I describe my entry into the field and challenges I faced. I then detail the research methods used. I consider the impact of Covid-19 on my fieldwork. Finally, I explain how I analysed the data and reflect on limitations of this study.

Chapter Three begins the ethnographic component of the thesis by examining motivations of the individuals who have participated in support of people seeking refuge over years and decades in South Australia. In this chapter, I challenge slurs and labels often levelled at supporters, characterising us as reckless saviours and 'bleeding hearts.' I draw on literature surrounding self and identity to demonstrate that supporters construct their selves and identities through the work they do. I highlight that supporters understand and manage themselves in alignment with a moral belief system that focuses on cosmopolitanism and the notion of a shared humanity, and their reflexive, rational and risk-averse tendencies. These deeply held beliefs inspire and sustain their ongoing participation in support work. I show that popular characterisations of supporters are erroneous and indelicate.

Chapter Four explores the notions of 'wellbeing' and 'resilience' as they relate to supporters. I draw on the work of Fischer (2014) and the concepts of hedonic and eudaimonic happiness to explore supporter understandings of wellbeing and resilience in relation to their support activities. I demonstrate that supporters tend to associate eudaimonic happiness and resilience to their work. Their resilience is quite contingent on the extent to which they are able to exercise a particular form of agency: 'living truthfully', which links with moral beliefs discussed in Chapter Three. I propose there are three key themes that significantly affect supporters' senses of resilience: making a difference, achieving outcomes, and forging personal connections with others.

Chapter Five delves in to experiences of supporters working outside of large NGOs or organisations, in terms of how their involvement in support work affects their social (in)visibility and (im)perceptibility (Honneth 2001; Smith et al. 2018; Herzog 2019). I look at this in relation to their experiences with people that matter to them, such as close family and friends, and in their interactions with government and government agencies. I explore how social invisibility and imperceptibility affects supporters' senses of self, identity, and resilience.

Chapter Six investigates experiences of supporters working within NGOs and formal organisations. Drawing on literature surrounding governmentality, accountability, and audit culture, this chapter explores the effects of government funding on organisations, their paid workers, and volunteers (Foucault & Rabinow 1991; Inda 2008; Munro & Mouritsen 1996; Strathern 2003; Shore & Wright 2015a). I examine challenges presented by funding and the chilling effect it has on free speech and dissent in the sector (Post 1998b). I consider the relationship between power and identity in funded workplaces.

Chapter Seven turns attention towards emotions and resistance. In this chapter, I consider the emotional experiences of supporters, with a close analysis of anger. I demonstrate that anger is a political emotion contributing to a 'state of being' for many supporters (Nussbaum 2016; Johansen, Sandrup & Weiss 2018). I explore how anger and moral outrage serve as motivating forces towards action (Kim 2013). This leads to an exploration of supporter acts of resistance. I convey how supporters attempt to resist aspects of Australia's immigration regime, but illustrate that their capacity to engage in meaningful acts of resistance has been weakened over time (Scott 1985). This has a dulling effect on their resilience.

Chapter Eight looks at the critical issue of burnout as it relates to support work across the sector. I present supporter understandings of burnout and examine strategies they adopt in response to feelings of burnout. In this chapter, I demonstrate how supporters manage 'the burn' and preserve resilience. I explore the popular idea of compassion-fatigue and propose the concept of *passion-fatigue* to explain that supporters are fatigued by their inability to stop caring about people seeking refuge, rather than becoming indifferent to their plight (Berlant 2014; Sontag 2004). I then draw on the concept of retreat as a constructive response to burnout and show how supporters use this to recover their motivation, realign with their moral code, and boost their resilience to carry on (Csordas 2005; Strathern & Stewart 1998). I further highlight that supporters believe opportunities for debriefing to be beneficial to mitigate against burnout but show that these opportunities, based in solidarity, are unavailable or inappropriate in most support settings (Binford 2008). Throughout this chapter I propose that, overall, supporters *burn down*, but not out. However, to finish, I look at the experiences of a small segment of outliers who describe themselves as disengaged and examine what this means for them in terms of their senses of self and identity (Nias 1993; Stein 2009).

Chapter Nine focuses on a unique grouping within my participant cohort, the Circles of Friends. I draw on literature relating to organisations and social movements to explore this social phenomenon that appears to offer many benefits for supporters and recipients of support including accessibility, efficacy, attractiveness, and sustainability (Gellner & Hirsch 2001; Escobar 1992; Nash 2005; Della Porta & Diani 2006). I consider the Circles' democratic and egalitarian mode of organisation and characteristics as they affect the early engagement and ongoing participation; trust; flexibility and efficacy; and focus of supporters (Appadurai 2002; Mindell 2000; Goodwin & Jasper 2009). I demonstrate that the Circles of Friends occupy a space in the sector that falls somewhere between social movements, NGOs, and formal organisations, presenting an intriguing and potentially more efficacious alternative mode of organisation and participation that is attractive to a sizeable proportion of my participant cohort.

Chapter Ten concludes the thesis and identifies implications that my findings have for the sector in terms of how they attract, retain, and care for volunteers and workers to promote sustainability. I explore the implications of my findings for practice and notably for the identification of optimal modes of organisation that may offer the best opportunities to support people seeking refuge.

Image 2: A meal shared between people seeking refuge and supporters

CHAPTER TWO

The pursuit of 'pracademia': context and methods

Today I conducted my first fieldwork interview. I arrived at a small inner-city cottage in the eastern corner of Adelaide at 11.30am. This is the first time I have met Anne. I feel unsure about what to expect as she has not yet completed the survey and I have no idea of her age, circumstances, etc. I feel a little bit nervous, but mostly excited. I mostly feel like I can't wait to start this process and see what I will discover.

Anne greets me as an old friend, gives me a ticket for my parking to give us more time, and once we sort that out, she takes me through to her kitchen and suggests we have some coffee. We immediately start talking about her involvement with the Circles of Friends, but I don't want to get it in to it too much until we start the interview.

Once we organise the coffee, I explain the research again, the purpose of the interview, and ask her if she has any questions. She doesn't. So, I switch on the recorder, and we start the interview. She seems very relaxed, comfortable, and ready to talk. Throughout the interview at times, she seems emotional - not in a distressed way - but she clearly cares very deeply about her role as she sees it as a humanitarian responsibility to care for people seeking refuge and engage in what she determines as support. She really thinks about her answers and when I draw on my own experience to check my understanding and see if she sees things the same way we connect more and more. By the time we are done, it feels as though we are old friends.

After the interview is 'finished' we talk for another 40 minutes or more - this time about my experiences overseas, she wants to know about that. She tells me repeatedly that I can contact her as much as I need, for as long as I need to ask any questions and keeps saying how important the research is. When I leave, she seems as though she wants to give me a hug, but she squeezes my arm and says thank you. She seems very moved at the possibility that someone cares and is interested in the wellbeing of supporters. I feel very strongly that she will likely become a key informant for me.

(Excerpt from my field notes, 7 August 2019)

Introduction

This chapter details my involvement in refugee and asylum seeker support and how the research was conducted. I begin by situating the research effort as an exercise in activist anthropology. I explore what this entails and explain my personal involvement in the sector since 2012. I then reflexively explore my dual position as researcher and supporter, 'insider' and 'outsider' to the field and effects this might have on my research. I detail my entry to the field, how it came about, and some challenges I faced during this time. I then explore some fundamental aspects of conducting the research: recruitment; informed consent; and data collection methods of surveys, semi-structured interviews, participant observation, and textual analysis. I detail the impact of Covid-19 on the research, as the first restrictions occurred during fieldwork. I finish by explaining how the data was analysed and limitations of this work.

Undertaking this research was not just a journey for me, but also an incredible opportunity to take a deep dive in to a social world I have been part of for many years. As I am sure is the case with many researchers, I wondered how it would all play out; would I make connections? How would I be received? What would I need to overcome? Would I achieve something meaningful? What would I discover? Aside from these pre-fieldwork nerves, I was mostly excited by the prospect of who I would meet, how much I would learn, and connections I would make. I knew it was likely I would end up connecting with some of the longest serving and most skilled supporters of people seeking refuge in South Australia and I could not wait to hear their stories. I hoped I would find and connect with people in the sector who are undertaking work I never knew was happening. The prospect of immersing myself in a year or so of interaction with a cohort of people who were involved in similar activities to me was enticing. Finding out about those with very different experiences was equally intriguing. So, despite some nerves, I (figuratively) ran at, and hurled myself into the field - headfirst, with little hesitation. I wanted to achieve something meaningful, tangible, and useful for participants, though I did not yet know what that might be. I was open, eager, and inspired.

Activist anthropology

As a student of social anthropology, there has never been any sense in my mind that my eventual anthropological practice would be anything other than a form of applied anthropology: that the anthropological knowledge and skills I have acquired, and continue to acquire, should and would be 'put to work' to both increase knowledge in the academic realm, but also to produce meaningful, practical results for participants and allies in the wider world (Field & Fox 2007; Lewis 2005). It has been argued that anthropology, and particularly its methods and application, has evolved from the 'pure' (academic) to the 'impure' (applied) forms (Pink 2006; Wright 2006), causing some division amongst scholars. That is, some argue that a great deal of anthropological enquiry has shifted from a purely academic exercise to praxes that not only has, but is intended to have, real world impacts and outcomes (Pink 2006). Whether the anthropological endeavour has ever been purely academic is debateable. Nonetheless, this shift has brought a plethora of new interpretations and forms of anthropological and ethnographic approaches (Roberts 2006). Anthropological research nowadays often involves participants in collaborative research activities where they not only supply data, but are involved in research design, analysis, and the production of a wide range of outputs from community development projects to ethnographies (Lassiter 2005; Field & Fox 2007; Hale 2007). From its inception, this research was intended as an exercise in applied anthropology based on mutuality and reciprocity, where the research is beneficial to both researcher and informants (Sanjek 2015; Seymour-Smith 1986). I also approached the research from the perspective of activist anthropology.

Activist anthropology involves the deliberate alignment of the researcher with an organised group who are involved in some kind of struggle for rights, redress, and empowerment (Hale 2007). This form of anthropological enquiry brings with it the commitment to produce useful and meaningful knowledge for the group, in collaboration and dialogue with group members (Hale 2007). The role of the 'researcher' from this perspective is to draw on and apply their theoretical knowledge in pursuit of critical engagement with social issues for specific social outcomes and change. The aim is to accurately engage with and represent research participants to the wider world, delivering practical results for them in the process (Hale 2007; Wright 2006). Davis (2006, p. 232) describes the intellectual work of bridging theory and practice at the intersection of research, service, and activism as 'pracademics'. Thus, I consider this thesis a wholly 'pracademic' effort. On the one hand, my task is to produce an

academic, anthropological thesis that contributes to the academic canon. On the other hand, I approached this research as an exercise in activist anthropology, to deliver practical findings to participants and the wider support sector who seek to improve the circumstances of people seeking refuge and ensure their own longevity and sustainability in relation to their efforts.

I feel it important from the outset to not only disclose, but also emphasise that I am not an unbiased observer in this research context and process. I have been actively involved in support, activism, and advocacy on behalf of people seeking refuge since 2012. In Australia, this has seen me engage in a wide variety of activities including: visiting people in immigration detention facilities and in community detention settings; organising and providing physical, emotional and material support to people in those settings; acting as an advocate for people seeking refuge in terms of their legal, health, education and other needs; participating in (and on occasion organising) community support organisation activities; engaging in political protest and lobbying actions; hosting people seeking refuge in my home; public speaking at various events to disseminate information about the plight of people seeking refuge in Australia, and much more. These activities were often undertaken in both online and offline spaces, at all hours of the day and night, on weekdays and weekends, and very much became integral to my life and identity. Internationally, I delivered aid in refugee camps in Europe (specifically in Calais and at the Greek/Macedonian border) during the Syria/ Iraq exodus from 2015 to 2017, coordinated and ran English conversation classes for people seeking refuge in Dagenham, East London, UK, and advocated for people across international borders and time-zones. My involvement both locally, nationally, and internationally was deep until 2018. Since then, my involvement has reduced while I turned my attention to this research. I am not only a part of the sector I write about but am also an acquaintance or friend of many participants involved in this research.

Reflexivity

I have been conscious from the outset that it is the desire of my participants for their stories to be used as instruments for tangible improvement and change of the sector. As a supporter myself, I share this sentiment. Therefore, I entered the field focused on conducting research that draws on individual and collective experiences to provide practical insight that may contribute to the ongoing sustainability and resilience of participants and

the wider support network. However, entry to the field required much reflexive consideration.

Throughout the research process I maintained a constant awareness of my position as not only a researcher in this 'field', but also as a fellow refugee supporter, political activist, friend, and observer. I approached this research aware of my position both an insider (as a long term refugee advocate) and an outsider (to certain organisational settings and individual experiences), so it was critical that I paid careful attention to reflexivity both during the fieldwork phase and in my resulting analysis (Narayan 1993; Davies 2008). On many occasions, I was engaging with people I had known for some time, both in the support space and privately as a friend. This afforded me very easy access to the field, researching 'at home' in a cultural space I am very comfortable in (Mariza G. S. Peirano 1998). For this reason, entering the field was a transition of excitement and anticipation for me, rather than a time of trepidation. Despite this, entry to the field also came with challenges and important considerations.

I decided quite early on that I wanted to present myself as authentically as I could to my participants, so I was up front about my background and experience in the field. On the one hand, I was interviewing participants who had often undertaken similar activities and had similar experiences to my own over the years. On the other hand, I was engaging with participants I had not met before, who had been involved in refugee support at completely different times, in completely different contexts, or who were engaging in ways I have never experienced. A whole set of assumptions arose from this hybridity of experience. People who knew me were quick to share their experiences, but often assumed I knew what they were talking about, so I had to delve to get the level of detailed information from them that I was seeking. I also continuously challenged my own assumptions about their answers – taking care not to project my own experiences, understandings, and assumptions on to their personal testimonies. I engaged in a lot of paraphrasing, rephrasing, and double checking to ensure I was questioning and interpreting their disclosures correctly (Davies 2008). People who I had not met before varied in their level of immediate disclosure and depth of detail depending on how they had come to the study and whether they knew of me prior to participation. On occasion, they also assumed I had knowledge I did not have, or alternatively, did not realise I was familiar with the field. I noticed some participants visibly relaxed in my company when they asked me a bit about my background and realised, we may have shared interests and values. Only on one or two occasions did I feel that my

knowledge and commitment to support was being tested and this soon passed as we got to know each other (Berreman 2007). Overall, I was constantly managing my position to try to balance these shifting assumptions, and reflecting on my interview questions, data, and interpretations in an attempt to make 'the familiar strange' and 'the strange familiar.'

I thought reflexively about to my connection to the field and the various effects I might have on it. Before I entered the field I considered characteristics such as my age, class, race, gender, politics, ability, socioeconomic status, marital status, parental status, and education (Davies 2008; Walter 2019; Robben & Sluka 2007). I tried to objectively consider how each aspect might influence the research and what I might do to overcome any potential concerns, whilst remaining true to my applied endeavour (Davies 2008). I was open with my participants regarding my personal characteristics. I found that as a white, middle-class Australian woman I was perceived as non-threatening and was well accepted by my informants (who come from a variety of cultural and migrant backgrounds). Most expressed effusive gratitude and excitement that someone was interested in their experiences. The fact that I am also a working mother in my early forties surprised some, but overall, I was met with admiration and empathy from both men and women. My informants describe themselves as predominantly 'left-wing' in their politics and hold strong beliefs about equality for all (irrespective of age, gender, and other factors), valuing opportunity and education – so my social position and politics brought me closer to my informants. Sharma (2022) notes that being a woman and a 'native' in the field often presents more challenges than advantages. However, my gender did not hinder my ability to connect with informants, rather I feel it may have helped them to open up to me. Though I recognise that stereotypes are often unhelpful and are there to be challenged, I found being a woman (and mother) may have assisted participants to talk openly about their emotions relating to their support activities (Robben & Sluka 2007).

Though some informants were much younger than I was, and many were quite a bit older, I had no sense that my age prevented participants from relating to me. They appeared to assume a certain level of knowledge commensurate with my level of education as a PhD candidate, so I took responsibility for clarifying information when I did not know about or understand something or admitting when I was unsure. The major factor I believe influenced my access to the field and the willingness of my participants to share their experiences with me was trust. I believe they placed their trust in me as a fellow supporter and ethical researcher who would treat their stories with care and respect and would protect them and

most importantly those they seek to help. They were also keen for me to document their stories in the hope they would contribute to the ongoing sustainability of the sector. Hence, my tandem positions as researcher and fellow supporter were valued more highly than my gender, age, nationality, or role as friend (Robben & Sluka 2007).

Entering the field

My fieldwork was conducted with 44 asylum seeker and refugee supporters aged between 23 and 90 years in Adelaide from July 2019 to October 2020. Adelaide is a reasonably small coastal city and is the capital of South Australia which has a total population of approximately 1.7 million people (Australian Bureau of Statistics 2016). Most of my participants live in the metropolitan area, many within 25 minutes' drive from the central business district. A small minority live in regional areas more than one hour's drive from the central business district. To conduct my research, I used the methods of surveys, participant observation, semi-structured interviews, and textual analysis. Of the 44 participants, 31 were female and 13 were male. Collectively they are a mix of currently or formerly paid workers and unpaid volunteers engaging in refugee and asylum seeker support activities, roughly two thirds of which consider themselves *active* supporters. One third of the cohort were taking a temporary break from support activities. A small proportion of these have disengaged indefinitely or describe themselves as no longer participating in the field. Approximately half of the participants were acquainted with me through the refugee support network prior to the research but only four of them could be considered close friends.

Entry into the field was a relatively easy process for me. As detailed earlier, I have been actively involved as a volunteer in this space myself since 2012 when I met a supporter at an Australian Refugee Association Oration. She facilitated my first visits to the Inverbrackie Immigration Detention Centre in the Adelaide hills. Since then, I have made many local connections as well as connections nationally and internationally as I first 'dipped in a toe' in support and then 'ended up going in up to my neck'. Despite this, entry into the field was not all smooth- sailing.

My original intention was to study the emotional experiences of volunteers and workers in clearly defined organisational settings in both South Australia and interstate. I planned to conduct fieldwork within organisations boasting formalised organisational structures and workforces, such as some of the larger NGOs and support providers. A key aim was to explore what can be understood about resilience and what contributes to resilience and wellbeing in the sector at this larger and more formalised organisational level, by speaking with, and observing, the workers in clearly bounded contexts. Between the acceptance of my research proposal and when I entered the field (a timeframe of some eight months due to the birth of my son), the field had changed. Firstly, as a new parent, I was no longer able to consider interstate fieldwork, so I focused solely on researching South Australian refugee support. Secondly, many sites I had identified as strong possibilities for fieldwork in South Australia were defunded by the (then) new Morrison Liberal government[4], and became mostly unviable as neat, formal groupings, ripe for study. For example, support organisations that previously consisted of around five or more paid staff and 20 or more volunteers had shrunk to 0.5 to 1.0 full-time equivalent position and no volunteers. Therefore, conducting participant observation in the traditional Malinowskian sense in group settings became almost redundant (Malinowski & Fraser 1984). It became clear that some people who had worked or volunteered within those organisations were still willing to speak to me on personal, individual terms and so, I proceeded as such, conducting initial surveys to gather some basic information, followed by semi-structured interviews. I was also welcomed by one community support organisation that was still operating, and I attended their premises on 23 occasions over 31 weeks, conducting participant observation and semi-structured interviews. I also turned my attention to speaking to many supporters at the grassroots level, some of whom were not involved in any formal organisations at all.

I was fortunate to experience minimal gatekeeping in the field generally, because Adelaide is a small place and I am either known by individuals within the support community itself, or I generally know someone who knows someone else. This assisted me to connect to participants widely and to earn acceptance and trust relatively quickly. I had the most difficulty gaining access to individuals in the legal community – I suspect due to demands on their time and their natural risk aversion resulting from the high-stakes, sensitive nature of their work. Despite this, once connection was made through a key contact in the field, further connections flowed freely. Overall, I became inundated with more offers of

[4] The Prime-Minister of Australia at the time, Scott Morrison.

involvement than I was able to manage due to the limitations of my project. Sadly, this meant I had to turn participants away. I felt not only welcomed by this diverse network of people, but I felt their enthusiasm and their desperation for genuine research into this area. In their words: “No one has ever asked us about our story before” (field notes), “I'm very grateful for the opportunity to tell my story and for the work you are doing, telling our collective stories of the work and its effect on us” (email).

Participant recruitment

Participants were initially recruited in three ways. As mentioned, in 2018 I had made preliminary contact with a key refugee and asylum seeker support organisation in Adelaide who indicated they would be interested to host me as a researcher at their location. When I entered the field in 2019, I re-established contact with them, attended their site and provided them with a copy of my recruitment poster, participant information sheet, and relevant consent forms. They then emailed this to their employees and volunteers who were invited to contact me if they were interested in participating. I made it clear that I was not studying their organisation in particular, but rather the organisation was providing a locale and context through which I could connect with supporters and understand something of their experiences either in relation to the organisation, outside of the organisation, or both. Once people had read the information, they emailed me privately to express their interest in participating.

The second way I recruited participants was via Facebook. Though I am not looking at how support is facilitated and/ or conducted online in this research, I know from my personal advocacy experience that Facebook is a place where supporters regularly congregate for all kinds of purposes in relation to their work. Thus, this was a logical place for me to find participants. A closed group was set up on Facebook that contained the recruitment poster, participant information sheet, and consent form that people could access. Initially supporters who were known to me and who had already expressed an interested in participating in my research were invited to join. Though it was not the intention, many of them then invited other supporters to join or sent the link to them, which resulted in additional participants. I posted a link to the closed group on several open refugee support pages on Facebook, which resulted in further participants joining. As the research had necessarily become limited to the South Australian experience, there were a number of

interested people from interstate or overseas that I excluded from the research. Additionally, I was contacted by two individuals who were previously refugees. I was unable to include them due to restrictions in my ethics approval (Approval H-2018-209) that prohibited me from speaking to asylum seekers or refugees. Once people in the Facebook group had received and read the provided information, they emailed me privately to express their interest in participating.

The third way participants were recruited was via a direct invitation from me. I attended key events, meetings, and forums related to refugee and asylum seeker support and sought permission to provide information about the project to attendees who could then approach me if they wished to receive further information. Those who approached me were provided with the recruitment poster, participant information sheet, and consent form. Again, they emailed me privately to express their interest in participating if they wished. Many of these participants also independently forwarded these documents to other supporters and I found that additional interested people contacted me.

Informed consent

Informed consent was sought from all participants in line with requirements of the Human Research Ethics Committee, approval H-2018-209, and in line with the Code of Ethics according to the Australian Anthropological Society ('Code of Ethics' n.d.) and the National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research (NHMRC 2018). Informed consent (in brief) seeks to ensure participating parties are informed and agree upon the terms of work and attempts are made to ensure truthful and respectful exchanges between social researchers and research participants ('Code of Ethics' n.d.). Consent throughout my research was an ongoing process. I regularly requested, checked, and re-checked that all participants were participating with informed consent.

Methods

Participants were admitted to the research based on inclusion and exclusion criteria. People included were individuals working or volunteering for refugee advocacy organisations in Australia, aged 18 or above or people who self-identify as refugee advocates/ activists in Australia, aged 18 or above. Those excluded were people under 18 years of age, people who did not provide informed consent (of which there was no one), and people who are themselves refugees or asylum seekers. Much of this information was obtained through an initial survey. Once I had determined I had enough participants to conduct research with, and that to accept more participants would over-burden the project, I also turned potential participants away simply based on numbers.

The survey provided details about the project and consent information again and it was made clear to participants that completion of the survey implied consent to participate. The survey was also used to gather some limited, preliminary information, providing me with a base of information I could refer to during semi-structured interviews (Walter 2019). A private survey generated through Google docs was emailed to participants asking a range of questions focusing on their motivations and experiences. Some questions were able to be answered by way of free text entries and others according to a Likert scale (Walter 2019). This approach was chosen to ensure the survey was quick and easy for participants to answer but allowed them to elaborate on their answers if they chose. The survey was not compulsory and 35 of 44 participants opted to complete it.

Semi-structured interviews also became the preferred and main data collection method. Semi-structured interviews were chosen for the flexibility they offered in terms of information collection and because of the long-standing historical use of qualitative interviews within anthropology and the social sciences (Walter 2019). Whilst they provided some structure for conversation, they also gave me the opportunity to build rapport with my participants about their activities and emotional experiences. These interviews provided flexibility for me to focus on 'feeling questions' and sensory prompts to understand emotional responses, probe particular areas, and ask follow up questions (Harris & Guillemin 2012; Walter 2019). Once participants had completed the survey (or if they chose not to), I contacted them to arrange a semi-structured interview place and time.

Semi-structured interviews were necessitated by the nature of 'the field' itself. In addition to the lack of opportunities available for participant observation, supporters are also notoriously time poor and/ or undertaking their work in settings where privacy concerns mean that having a researcher following them around would create undue pressure and stress for them and, potentially, the people they support. Having clearly defined interview times alleviated these concerns for all. Participants were provided freedom to determine when, where, and how we would meet, as I wanted them to feel comfortable, safe, and able to contribute to the process freely. I briefed them on the kinds of things I would be asking so they could consider their meeting options. Most of my interviews were conducted in participants' homes at their invitation, though a small number of interviews were conducted in other locations: at my home, at the university, libraries, cafes, in workplaces, and the like. I felt that conducting interviews predominantly in participants' private spaces made for a safe environment where people felt comfortable to open up about their experiences, and it also gave me a strong sense of the participants themselves – seeing how they decorate and furnish the places that they privately retreat to and providing context to some of their stories. At interview, participants were given opportunities to choose pseudonyms, though some left that task to me. Some chosen pseudonyms were necessarily changed due to duplication or because the pseudonym chosen by the participant resembled their real name too closely. Place names were also changed to further prevent participants from being identified.

Over 13 months, I conducted semi-structured interviews averaging 1.5 hours each with 44 participants. Key questions focused on obtaining information about their background, motivations for participating in support work, experiences of being involved (with a focus on personal, emotional experiences), how their experiences affect them, and their wellbeing and resilience. I conducted a second round of semi-structured interviews of 45 minutes to 1.5 hours with 15 key participants, selected from the first round, to fill gaps and probe emerging themes further. Not all questions were asked at every interview, depending on their relevance to participants' personal contexts. Additionally, as interviews were semi-structured in nature, this allowed me to pursue certain lines of questioning and adapt questions throughout the process to pursue information about developing themes. As mentioned, I also attended a community support organisation on 23 occasions over 31 weeks, for between four to six hours on each occasion, to engage in semi-structured

interviews and participant observation. Additionally, I attended public forums with interest groups in this space and other events such as refugee support rallies and fundraisers.

Interviews were recorded using a small recording device that could be placed on a table or surface between us without being intrusive. No participants seemed bothered by this and all knew I was recording them and actively consented to this. Interviews were conducted individually, except for on three occasions where two participants wanted to be interviewed together. Though I often had my notebook open, I rarely wrote notes during interviews, but rather allowed conversation to flow. I made notes as soon as possible after each interview about anything noteworthy, including the setting, participant's demeanour, their emotional state, and so on. On occasion I made a few notes of possible further themes or lines of questioning to pursue or wrote down details I could not capture on the recording such as correct spelling of particular names or titles of books they referred to, for example. At the end of each research day, I wrote my field notes in Evernote, predominantly noting the salience of what I had observed (Wolfinger 2002). An outsourced transcriber operating under a confidentiality agreement, and I, transcribed all interviews. Transcriptions were provided to participants for their review and feedback. Whilst not everyone opted to provide feedback, when it was provided, I accommodated their requests to amend or omit certain information. I also spoke with participants throughout the writing process, either in person, via phone or email to check or gain additional information. Draft chapters were also sent to participants for review and feedback where appropriate.

A wide range of paraphernalia was acquired in addition to the surveys, interview data, and my field notes. Several participants emailed me documents and photographs throughout the research process. Some participants also brought items with them to interviews to either show or give me. These consisted of photographs, artworks, keepsake items, brochures, pamphlets, personal diary entries, books they had written, and folders of documentation they had accumulated throughout their activities advocating on behalf of refugees and asylum seekers. Beyond photographing items, I did not take many photographs whilst in the field, though some images do appear in this thesis. The nature of fieldwork (predominantly based around interviews conducted with identifiable individuals, sometimes in private homes, or in an open plan community drop-in centre frequented by refugees and asylum seekers) did not lend itself to this activity. However, I did invite participants to provide photographs to me that captured their experiences of volunteering or working in refugee support, if they wished. Where possible and appropriate, I have included these items in the

research process, engaging in textual analysis and using this information to corroborate and inform my research findings.

Finally, I gathered further information via email and the internet. I have a longstanding digital news-alert set up that sends me a daily compilation of all articles from Australia mentioning 'asylum seekers and refugees' that I read to stay across developments related to my field. I am also an active member of several social media-based groups that share news and information affecting my participants. However, as many of these are closed groups, I have chosen not to name them here to protect the privacy of their members and those they support. The support space is ever-changing and often fast moving, so having knowledge of current events was critical to contextualising their experiences.

Negotiating Covid- 19

My research was interrupted and impacted by the Covid-19 pandemic and subsequent South Australian restrictions. I lost approximately 2 months of research time between March and July of 2020 due to formal restrictions and related impacts. Though it may have been possible to maintain contact with participants through platforms such as Zoom during this time, several participants indicated they did not feel emotionally 'up to' continued involvement and I also felt it would be inappropriate and unhelpful to continue research on people's emotional experiences and responses during a pandemic. I felt very strongly that people's perceptions of what was important and meaningful to them might be skewed in such unprecedented circumstances. For example, what seemed important in January of 2020 for a participant might not have seemed as critical with all they may have been facing in April or May of 2020. On this basis, I halted my research until restrictions eased (11 June) and until participants indicated they felt ready to contribute once again. Unfortunately, Covid-19 also brought forward the already impending cessation of private funding that was keeping the community organisation, which I was visiting weekly, afloat. I had planned to continue my research with them throughout their closure, staying with them until the very end. As a result of Covid-19, one week I was there conducting research, and the next I was never to return. They have since ceased their operations. However, I do feel I had taken all I needed from that field site for the focus of this thesis and retained contact with several participants from that grouping, despite the upheaval.

Data analysis

Data obtained during the research was analysed in several ways. Field notes entered into Evernote were coded as I went along using 'tags' – keywords that would help me to locate information based on key ideas and themes later on. All interviews were transcribed and then coded using NVivo software according to key themes and observations. I coded as I progressed through the research, so as some themes began to emerge later, I needed to revisit some of my early data and re-code as required (Walter 2019). NVivo was not used in a specialised way due to my own limitations regarding its capabilities. Nevertheless, it was extremely useful to help me collate themed information and to produce basic diagrams and charts that helped to confirm key focus areas. Other material was coded manually by hand, so assembling selected data for this thesis was quite a process of drawing together data from a variety of sources in a sometimes rudimentary, but methodical way.

Conclusion

This chapter has explored my involvement in efforts to support people seeking refuge, emphasising my personal connection to the refugee and asylum seeker support sector in Adelaide, including participants of this research. It has also outlined the consequent methodological approach of activist anthropology, which has informed this thesis from the outset, and details the associated research methods from entry to the field through to thesis production. Despite considerable challenges occurred within the field due to a change in government as well as the impact of Covid-19, I was able to engage with the sector, deepening existing relationships I had in the support space, and making new connections that gave me a broader and deeper knowledge of the sector in South Australia. The following chapters offer a unique and multifaceted analysis of support, providing insight into the discrete settings and associated experiences of volunteers and workers. Chapter Three focuses on the motivations and beliefs of individuals who have participated in this sector over years and decades in South Australia.

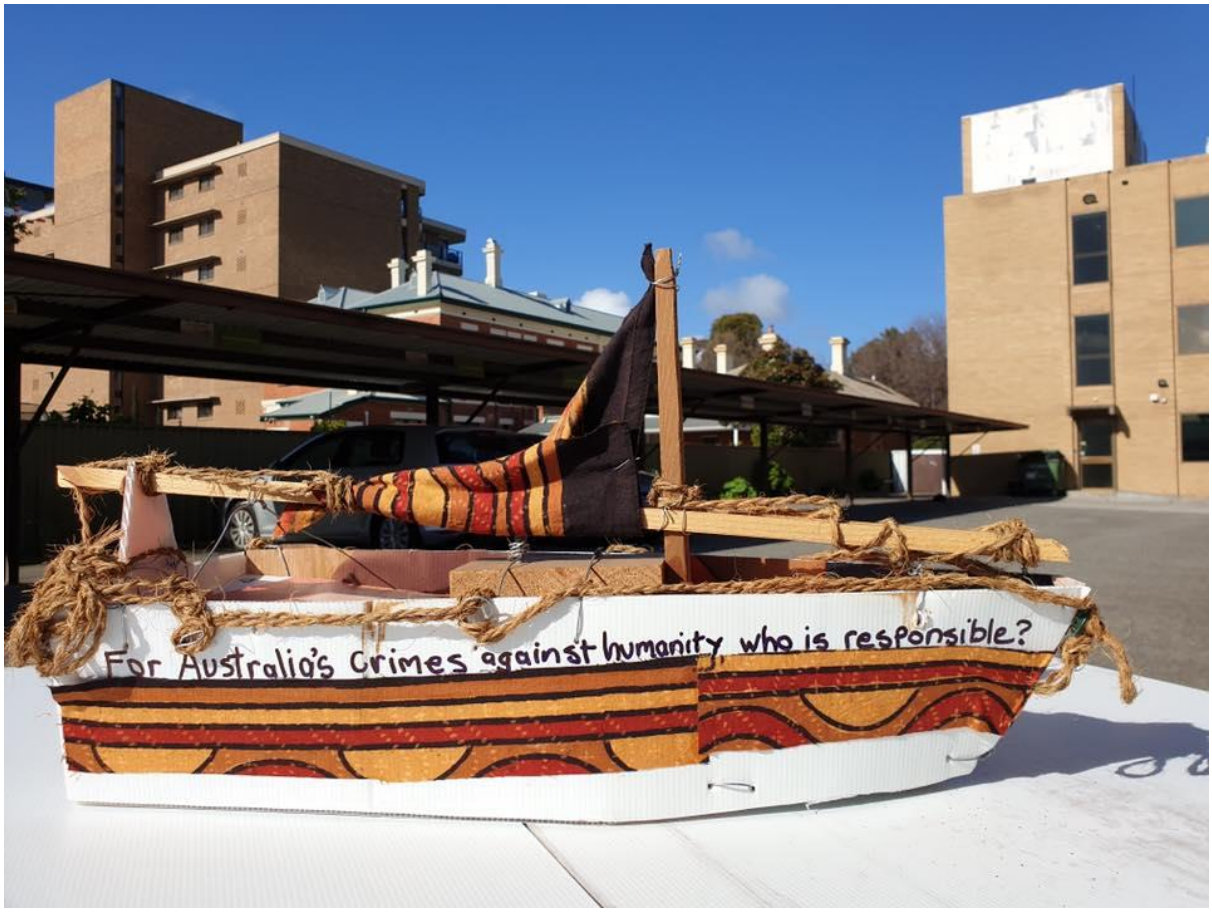


Image 3: Wooden balsa boat, painted by a supporter for inclusion in a Safe Harbour Australia art installation, questioning Australia's crimes against humanity.

CHAPTER THREE

Refugee supporters and self-governance: the 'bleeding heart' lefties with a moral responsibility for 'the right'

I am not a liberal snowflake.

My feelings aren't fragile, my heart isn't bleeding.

I'm a badass believer in human rights.

My toughness is in tenderness. My strength is in the service of others.

There is nothing more fierce than formidable, unconditional love.

There is not a thing more courageous than compassion.

But if my belief in equity, empathy, goodness, and love indeed makes people like me snowflakes, then you should know – WINTER IS COMING.

(A meme that was shared by refugee supporters on Facebook, Author Unknown, n.d.)

Introduction

Over the years Australian supporters have had a great many slurs and accusations levelled at them publicly from politicians and political commentators and members of the public who strongly oppose the work they do. Supporters have been labelled "Compassionistas" (Kenny 2015), "Bleeding Hearts" (Sheridan 2013), "Lefty-meddlers and self-styled saviours of refugees" (Devine 2011), a "Rabid Rabble" (Akerman 2006), and accused of reckless behaviour, inciting and coaching refugees and asylum seekers to undertake self-harm, engage in dangerous and disruptive detention centre incidents or to make attempts to 'game' Australia's immigration system (Lloyd 2016; *AAP General News Wire* 2004; McKinnell 2016; Taylor & Christmas Island 2019). Supporters are subject-positioned as occupying the over-zealous extreme left of politics and society, their actions and beliefs threatening to undermine 'Fortress Australia' as they stand in opposition to paranoid nationalists, the politicking of government, and an often apathetic public (Hage 2003; Welch 2012).

This chapter seeks to shed light on refugee and asylum seeker supporters in South Australia, in terms of how they understand themselves, the belief system that underpins their support activities, and what motivates them to participate in support— often over years and decades. I begin by exploring how supporters understand their own 'selves' and 'identities'. I argue that supporter 'selves' exist on a continuum and can be (and are) crafted into identities which are malleable and subject to change over a person's life. I also argue that supporters engage in 'self' and 'identity' construction throughout their outward participation in support work and processes of self-management. That is, supporters' work is inherently biographical in nature. Supporters understand and manage themselves, their choices, behaviours, and interactions with others in accordance with their moral belief system, cosmopolitan outlook, and their reflexive, rational, and risk-averse tendencies. Through an exploration of these aspects of supporter selves and identities, I show that whilst there may be elements of truth to caricatures that are created of them, like any good caricature there also exists much distortion.

Supporter understanding of self and identity

Despite the contested nature of terms such as 'self' and 'identity', I have chosen to work in this chapter with these terms in specific ways to illuminate how supporters understand and describe themselves, and what motivates them to engage in support work. Harris (1989, p.601) argues the self can be conceptualised as "…the human being as a *locus* of experience, including the experience of that human's own *someoneness*" (my emphasis). The term 'locus' suggests a centrality to the notion of self: that there is a kind of core or essential quality to the notion of self. 'Someoneness' also suggests a certain singularity or boundedness to the notion of self. To clarify, even though a person may consist of several different selves (Edwardes 2019), only one self will be recognisable and distinguishable as the 'real self' to that person because some feelings and actions associated with that self are more salient than other feelings and actions (hence the notion that selves exist on a continuum) (Turner 1976, p.1011). Participants talked to me about experiences that shaped 'who they are', referred to their 'sense of self', their 'persona' (which was clarified as 'my self' (not myself)) and 'inner self', resonating with the idea of a locus of self. They consistently spoke of themselves in the singular: that is, as a single self, made up of various characteristics, beliefs, roles, and experiences over time. For example, a person might

describe themselves as a mother, musician, case manager, part-time artist, refugee and asylum seeker supporter and humanitarian, but speak about themselves in terms of 'who they are' in a singular fashion. Their understanding of self is consistent with the likes of Sokefeld (1999) and Jackson (1998) who suggest the self is a frame upon which a plurality of identities are inscribed.

Identity appears to be a malleable concept, strongly linked to self. Epstein (1978, p.101) contends, "Identity…is essentially a concept of synthesis. It represents the process by which the person seeks to integrate his various statuses and roles, as well as his diverse experiences, into a coherent *image* of self" (my emphasis). That a person can create an 'image' of the self suggests that firstly, identity is separate but related to the self. Secondly, that a person can *create* an image suggests they may have some agency over what kind of identity that will be. That is, people may be able to construct 'selves' and identities they desire, creating biographical selves (Roth 2016). This also indicates that identities can shift and change. The locus of identity can change over time depending on social and cultural roles people are required to play (Turner 1976). Additionally, particular aspects of self (for example nationality, race, class, status, profession, etc.) that might be more or less salient to a person can give rise to feelings of a 'real' or 'true' self, amongst other possibilities (Turner 1976). Identities can also be 'in crisis' (Erikson 1971). That an identity can be 'in crisis' also indicates they may be susceptible to change. These understandings of identity resonate as participants indicated they hold very strong and salient senses of 'who they are' but said they 'cemented and solidified' their sense of self even more strongly by engaging in support work and identifying themselves as supporters.

The notion that a person's sense of self (or selves) and identity (or identities) are formed, crafted, performed, and maintained over time dominates in anthropological and social theories, and most of these theories have arrived at the conclusion that these processes are inherently social (Durkheim 2004; Goffman 1971; Mead 1950; Foucault et al. 1988). That is, construction of self and identity happens by and through interaction with others and our past experiences (Bourdieu, Champagne & Collier 2020). Foucault (2005; Foucault et al. 1988) also talks about 'care for the self' *(souci de soi*), which involves processes of self-examination whereby an individual engages in deliberate efforts to construct the particular self that they want or need to be. He suggests part of this also involves turning outwards towards society to undertake self-care work and self-construction. Workplaces, and similar

settings, are recognised as being key sites of identity construction and maintenance (Caulkins & Jordan 2012; Wenger 2015). For example, Malkki (2015) explored experiences of international aid workers and found that in addition to their desire to help others, aid workers also experienced considerable transformation of their selves through their work. I found that supporters engage self and identity construction throughout their outward engagement in refugee and asylum seeker support work. Through participation, they maintain and reinforce their senses of 'real self' and they engage in efforts to become a certain kind of self and identity. Thus, their work is biographical in nature (Roth 2016). To appreciate how supporters understand and construct themselves and their identities, it is helpful to explore this against the backdrop of the above theoretical assertions, and in relation to their moral codes, philosophical beliefs, and relationships with others.

The primacy of the 'moral code'

Participation in support is not a linear process. It is *not* typically the case that supporters look for a cause to become involved with, make the decision to participate, seek out an entry point, and get on with the work until they decide to call time on their involvement and move on to something else. I have found that 'becoming' a supporter can be deliberate or almost accidental, straightforward, or circuitous, disorganised or organised. However, what appears to draw my participants to support is their self-identified moral belief system that I have termed their 'moral code.' They each described deeply held values, moral intuition, and moral precepts, comprising a moral code they strive to live by. They indicated that they actively attempt to align their outward actions with their senses of self as moral beings. Though each participant disclosed their values and beliefs independently of each other, the shared synergy and consistency across their personal accounts is remarkable to the degree that, in this cohort at least, I contend they broadly share a 'moral code' that provides motivation to participate in this form of work. Their moral code also provides a self-framework and template for self-management upon which to undertake the task of identity construction, management and maintenance— striving to achieve the 'good life' (Mattingly & Throop 2018; Fischer 2014).

Supporters sometimes draw on notions of 'authenticity'[5] to convey their senses of true or real selves; they convey that to be their 'true selves' they must act in alignment with their moral code to care for those less fortunate. For example, Helen, who has been involved in refugee and asylum seeker support since 2002 explains her motivations for participating in support work:

> *Ohhh, it's about injustice. The injustice of people who can live side by side, one with plenty and one in poverty. When I was growing up, my parents were Catholic, and we went to Catholic schools. There was lots of talk about the missions and the poor kids. I used to collect money for the missions, and we had school fetes and all of that to raise money for the school and church. Then when I was in high school there was the YCS (Young Christian Students), and it taught me social justice…There was a little girl, she lived in the same street but over the other side. I was middle class girl; she was over the other side of the road that divided the working-class area from the middle-class area. So, it was visceral. I could feel it in my body. I walked along the street to her place to pick her up; the cement between the bricks was falling out of her house. Her house smelt of urine, there was many little kids there. This was the same street we lived in. It was so different to my house.*

Helen's testimony describes her sense of injustice as a 'visceral' feeling in her body, but she also states her involvement in the Catholic Church and her schooling also 'taught' her about social justice. As a child, she 'felt' a sense of injustice but as an adult she is able to reflect and describe it in reference to learned concepts such as class. Daniel, who works for a faith-based organisation, also explains:

> *It has always been in my blood to stand up against injustice. I was born into a Christian community and grew up in a Christian community, but there were no particular influences as a kid growing up. My parents weren't into advocacy or anything like that. I think there is just a gnawing away in terms of my own personal faith journey - you know, if we were really to stand up for the least of these, we wouldn't put up with stuff like this: of kids being detained for long periods of time, or adults for that matter. There is satisfaction that I am contributing to something beyond myself, doing something that is a useful contribution to the community.*

[5] I recognise that 'authenticity' is a contested notion in Anthropology (Handler 2015; Taylor 1992), however I engage with this notion and use it here as my participants use it.

> *But there is also a spiritual level there for me. The way in which I respond to people in need in the world has consequences for me personally about whether I feel like I am being the person that I am called to be. If I am not doing that, then I am sitting on my laurels and I am not satisfied with how I am living my life. It is about authenticity, character, and integrity. All of that. It is more than just doing a nice thing. There is something much deeper than that.*

Daniel's testimony highlights his belief in an intrinsic moral code, which includes standing up against injustice. This code appears to incorporate the moral precepts of standing up against indefinite detention of children and adults and responding to people in need. He indicates it is not enough to simply have a sense of justice. He talks about needing to 'contribute' and 'respond' to feel like he is 'being the person he is called to be.' This suggests he is firstly, working to maintain what he feels is 'in his blood', and secondly, actively engaging in self-care and taking action to meet a 'calling.' He suggests if he is not doing that, he is not satisfied with how he is living his life. This indicates he evaluates his efforts against his moral code. Presumably, the greater his sense of satisfaction with how he is living his life, the greater he feels he has been able to live in alignment with his moral code and become a person who actively stands up against injustice.

Mabel and Verity are two retired long-time friends who participate in support work together and I asked them if they felt their senses of self or identity had changed as a result of participating in support work. Verity responded,

> *It has gone down more the social justice sort of area. That is really important… that is really part of* ***who I am****. I think it has become* ***clearer*** *to me. Certainly, I think most people want to find something meaningful in their life, whether it is their garden or playing bridge or whatever it is, something that they feel really resonates with them. We were involved in meaningful things beforehand, but this just took us to other levels.* (Her emphasis.)

Her friend Mabel similarly said,

> *I think, looking back, it is why I became a social worker. The sense of social justice. I never put it into those words but it sort has been a part of my persona I think for a long time. This great step, this journey we went on… it certainly solidified it and magnified it.*
>
> *Ali: So, it has kind of cemented you knowing who you are?*
>
> *Mabel: Yes. You can't ever go back.*

Verity and Mabel both spoke about having a sense of self that was discovered and/ or clarified and solidified over time. Though their testimony suggests a belief in a true or real self, they disclose selves that have become more social justice orientated and magnified throughout their lives. They suggest this not only gives them a sense of meaning in the work that they do, but also contributes to a stronger sense of self. This indicates that Verity and Mabel, like Daniel, to some extent, also engaged in self-care to align their actions and their self or identity with their moral code. By talking about different levels of 'meaningful' activities, they also indicate they evaluate themselves and manage their actions according to how well they mesh with their moral code.

Supporters' moral codes provide means for them to not only evaluate themselves and their own actions, but also to socially situate themselves in terms of 'who they are' (and thus, who they belong with) vis-a vis 'who they are not' (and thus, who they definitely do *not* belong with). The idea that humans often understand themselves in opposition to an 'Other', or by determining what they are *not,* is not new (Boyce & Chunnu 2020; Sumner 1959). The classic reference point for this is Said's 'Orientalism' where he argues that the Western world in large part has come to define and understand itself in opposition to the Orient in terms of its "…contrasting image, idea, personality, [and] experience" (1979, p. 10). Though supporters place significance on moral values such as inclusion, compassion, and kindness (as I explore more closely shortly), they also often eschew those who do not appear to share their moral code. For example, early on, I asked participants if support work had particular meaning for them. Almost all expressed a deep commitment to social justice; standing up for what is 'right'; the Australian notion of the 'fair go' and referencing elements of the 'Golden Rule',

treating others as they would like to be treated or caring for their neighbour. They not only cited related ideas about human equality, fairness, and the like, but stressed the importance of acting on these ideas. Katrina, a manager of a community-based support service explained:

> *Umm, it's feeling like you need to be **doing** —if you're in this world— you need to be taking responsibility for what's happening to other people. Without sounding too self-righteous* [laughs], *if we're going to have a decent community, we need to care about what's happening to other people and to try and help them if they need help: to contribute to creating some sort of halfway reasonable, fair and just society*. (Her emphasis.*)*

Katrina's reference to sounding 'self-righteous' indicates she understands she is asserting a morally superior position by suggesting that community decency and care are linked. The inference here is that people who do not care about those in need of help are indecent, or at the very least, something other than decent (c.f. Hage 2003 regarding 'paranoid nationalism' and the impetus for a great commitment to 'caring'). Because I was asking her specifically about her involvement in refugee and asylum seeker support work, I further posit she was referring specifically to people who do not support people seeking asylum or refugee as indecent.

The moral high ground is not a stigmatised or taboo place to inhabit in the world of refugee and asylum seeker support as they respond to xenophobia, far-right politics and the unsympathetic or public. Indeed, supporters tend to not only claim that ground as an existential location they necessarily inhabit, but also claim the resulting labels (and slurs) that are often directed towards them as badges of honour: indicators that *we* are not *them over there* - and we are proud of it. Maliha, who first began support work in the late 1970s, is matter of fact when she tells me:

They have power.[6] *We have righteousness. That is really about all I can say. There is nothing appealing in what we do. We are easily written off as colluding with terrorists, you know it is really easy to demonise us because there is this kind of cruel culture that is, I think at heart, the Australian way for a lot of Australians. I mean, I would like to get the blood of all the refugee advocates, transfuse it into the society, and see what that would do because everyone could do with that optimism, resilience, caring, and passion. But it is not the society we live in.*

Of course, Maliha was not speaking literally, when she suggested a blood transfusion for society. However, metaphorically speaking, she was drawing attention to particular moral qualities she believes supporters inherently have: optimism, resilience, caring, and compassion. She was highlighting her belief that those qualities are lacking in the wider population. Mabel told me of the reactions of some of her friends when she began to participate in support work:

It made some of my friends say, "hmmmm." (Looks sideways warily, then laughs)

Ali: How do you feel in yourself?

Mabel: Good! Good. Glad I did it. Absolutely. I can't think what I would have done if I hadn't. Their reaction is a badge of honour! (Laughs)

Mabel's account indicates she has a sense of humour as she acknowledges that her participation in support work has set her apart from her friends. However, the fact that this separation made her feel good indicates that Mabel clearly understands herself and the work she does in comparison to what her friends are not doing, akin to Said's (1979) ideas around Orientalism and Othering.

Levi, a parent working in the sector, explains that more often than not, supporters only seriously position themselves as morally superior to groups that directly and deliberately work against refugee and asylum seeker rights, such as ultra-conservative politicians or paranoid nationalists, akin to those described by Hage (2003).

[6] Referring to non-supporters of people seeking asylum and refuge.

Levi indicates the morally superior position taken by many supporters often simply boils down to knowledge and experiences corresponding with their participation that they feel sets them apart from others. Levi says,

> *I totally connect with white Australia, because I am, and I have been on the journey. Do I want to hang out with them? Nuh* (laughs). *I don't fit with them. I am now a round peg in a square hole. But do I identify with them? Hell yeah, I do! Because I am them, they are my people. I am who I am 24/7, that is undoubted. But supporting refugees and asylum seekers doesn't need to be a part of every conversation I have. It was at one point because that new knowledge was all consuming. I just wanted to splash cold water on everybody who was 'asleep'.*

Levi's testimony suggests a growing distance between her sense of self and 'white Australia', even though she acknowledges 'they are my people'. She indicates that through the acquisition of new knowledge relating to the circumstances of refugees and asylum seekers, she no longer 'fits' and actually, she no longer desires close connection with 'her people' because they are 'asleep.' Levi's observation here apportions no judgement or blame on those with their eyes closed. By referring to them as 'my people', she suggests she has some affection for them, but simply explains she is on a journey that has taken her on a different pathway: one informed by new knowledge.

In sum, supporter testimonies show they hold moral beliefs and act in accordance with a moral code as they participate in support work. This code is reinforced through engagement with others. They draw on this code to understand and explain their motivations, to evaluate their own actions and to understand themselves and their identities, often in comparison to who they are not. If non-refugee supporters could be categorised simply as the extreme-right of politics and society (as suggested in the opening context of this chapter), then it is easy to see how supporters could be accused of occupying the extreme-left. However, binary categories are not useful for understanding deep complexities that no doubt exist amongst and between these groups. Though supporters often stand in opposition to what they determine as indecent or immoral actions and behaviour, overall, their actions are less about reacting to these and more about responding to their own moral code and senses of self and identity in relation to that code. In this way, they are constructing a biographical self. They are also very driven by their belief in a 'shared humanity.'

Belief in a 'shared humanity': cosmopolitanism and 'crossing boundaries'

South Australian supporters of people seeking refuge emphasise their strong belief in what they refer to as 'shared humanity' and this belief is central to their moral code and participation in support work, contributing to their senses of self and self-care activities. Their belief in shared humanity (whether learned or otherwise) ascribes them moral responsibilities for other human beings. These responsibilities motivate and inform their behaviour in the world. Participants of this research are not alone; other Australian supporters also express such beliefs (Corlett 2002; Gosden 2006; Every 2006). Belief in a shared humanity is thus central to supporter phenomenology. When supporters speak about 'shared humanity', they reference their interest in, and support for other cultures—including their beliefs and practices. Supporters speak of all people deserving the same rights and freedoms as each other and the importance of everyone having the same right to a 'fair go.', Elder (2007) notes that the 'fair go' is a key marker of 'Australianness', but also of Australia as a welcoming country. Though they don't often speak in legal terms, their notion of 'shared humanity' echoes universal human rights instruments such as the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and other international conventions and treaties, including the 1951 Refugee Convention and associated 1967 Protocol (UNHCR 2011). The outward expression of their belief involves seeking out opportunities to learn about and engage with other cultural groups, advocating for the equal rights of cultural Others, and seeing the world as a 'global village' that expands beyond the literal and figurative borders of Australia and Australian citizenship and culture.

The beliefs and values of South Australian supporters that preference 'shared humanity', justice, and fairness, are analogous to aspects of cosmopolitanism. The word 'cosmopolitan' and its 'ism' often invoke ideas of world travellers: connoisseurs of far-flung cultures and consumers of associated cultural offerings (Hannerz 1990). Philosophically, cosmopolitanism according to Cheah (2009, p. 21) imagines "a universal circle of belonging that embraces the whole of humanity, as a result of the transcendence of the particularistic and blindly given ties of kinship and country." Hannerz (1990, p. 239) describes 'genuine cosmopolitanism' as an orientation and willingness to engage with the Other and different cultures through practices of "listening, looking, intuiting and reflecting." Werbner (2009, p. 2) offers several

definitions of cosmopolitanism, but says its basis is in "…reaching out across cultural differences through dialogue, aesthetic enjoyment, and respect; of living together with difference." Rovisco and Nowicka (2009) also focus on actions people take, arguing cosmopolitanism is apparent in what people do and say as they engage with Others and the 'oneness' of the world. They also argue that cosmopolitanism is a "moral ideal that emphasises both tolerance towards difference and the possibility of a more just world order" (Rovisco, Nowicka & Holton 2009, p. 2). Jane, a retired social worker, explained to me how her belief in shared humanity influences her actions throughout her life – not just in support of people seeking refuge. She says,

> *It is about being human. I think, if people hear a story and they have the capacity to help, they will help. That is who we are as people. That is my experience in my family. We help people out. That is what we do. Here, with my neighbours, I have been here for 30 something years. The lady next door was being beaten up, I rang the police, she came around here: "Can you help me?", "Sure, ok, let's get you somewhere safe." And the man out the back always comes around for some milk, "Can I have some baked beans, can I have some bread?" He learnt not to say, "Can I have some money?", because I won't give money, but I will give him food, I'll do whatever else I can for him. I will make phone calls for him, but I won't give him money. He is an alcoholic, but we have to help each other, that is just the way it goes. I think that refugee advocates are like advocates for anyone who is in need. They don't have to be refugees, they can be homeless, they can be Indigenous, women in domestic violence and that is just the situation. It is caring for other human beings.*

Jane's testimony highlights a philosophy emphasized by many of the participants in this research – the responsibility they believe they have to their fellow human beings. Most participants are relatively well-travelled and share considerable international experiences and cross-cultural knowledge. These factors may also explain why most supporters I interviewed appeared to be involved in many other social justice issues and activities in addition to their support for people seeking refuge.

Supporters embody aspects of each of the definitions of cosmopolitanism; however, they do not simply tolerate difference: they actively welcome and make space for it, whilst finding aspects of similarity through which to connect. They incorporate the cosmopolitan belief in a 'shared humanity' into their moral code and then behave accordingly and somewhat altruistically (Post et al. 2002, p. 3). Florence, a retired grandmother who has supported one family very closely over many years, emphasised this when she said,

> *My involvement is not for personal gratification. I regard them as human beings who have something to offer. We laugh and we have fun together and we watch the kids grow. I'm just there, supporting the mother as a woman to a woman of any nationality. She regards me as a grandmother, so I do the grandmotherly things.*

Florence highlights several points of 'shared humanity' that both motivate and enable her ongoing relationship with the family she supports. Her use of the descriptor "human beings with something to offer" ignores categories of race, religion, nationality, and the like, but emphasises her view of family members as people with agency. She draws similarities and connection between herself and the mother of the family by referring to their mutual womanhood and shared experience of mothers "watching their kids grow." By qualifying her involvement as "not for personal gratification", Florence appears to signal that her support is morally acceptable and altruistic as she 'intends and acts for the other's sake as an end in itself' (Post et al. 2002, p. 2). Her statement suggests she evaluates her involvement against an altruistic moral precept or moral code informed by a cosmopolitan outlook.

A similar view was also expressed by Daniel, who said,

> *The one thing that has been my primary motivator is to make sure that these people don't feel like they are alone, or they are coming to a strange country, and no one cares. At the most basic level, here is a* ***person*** *who doesn't know anyone in this country that needs a friend. (His emphasis.)*

Here, Daniel deliberately stressed 'person' as opposed to saying 'a man' or 'an Iranian person' or by assigning particular characteristics to this person in any way. He used the term as a *leveller*, to downplay difference as he argued that we all need friends. He made it clear he feels he has responsibility to care for a *person* in a vulnerable situation who does not have friends. This indicates his belief in 'shared humanity' informs his moral code and subsequent actions.

Werbner (2009) points out that cosmopolitanism stands in direct opposition to xenophobia and intolerance of difference through cultural universalisation. Such opposition is central and critical to supporter beliefs and actions. Supporters conveyed their ideas about shared humanity to me in ways that suggest they do not consider it a blindness to, or erasure of cultural or racial difference. If anything, most supporters expressed delight in the learning that came from connecting with, noticing, and sharing these differences, whilst placing value on simplicity of human-to-human connection. Finding meaning in cross-cultural connection was regularly conveyed to me as a key motivation for participation in support work. Helen shared,

> *I've encountered immense generosity and hospitality and welcome from refugees. It makes me think that I want every Australian family to be connected with a refugee family or a new migrant family to say welcome and to get to know each other, instead of all these Australians going and travelling the world. You know, stay here, and meet the people here. You can travel the world here! I call it 'crossing the boundaries.' For me it is a cultural thing...another way of being without the same assumptions and respecting the other people, even though you might look at some things and think you don't like it.*

Helen sounded excited as she described to me just one of many positive experiences, she has had over many years of involvement in support work. For her, cultural difference provides opportunities for cross-cultural learning and new experiences as people get to know each other.

Anne, who founded a key refugee and asylum seeker support group, also supports this position:

> *I went to a wedding of refugee man marrying Australian girl in regional Australia. Her family are conservative, his family are Muslim Iranians, and it was joyous…I wouldn't change it*[7] *for anything. It was such an incredibly intense, alive kind of time in my life. I felt vibrant with passion, with purpose, with connection, with love during that time. We were two complete strangers who connected. How amazing is that?*

[7] Her involvement in support work

Anne highlights connection between strangers as amazing and joyous despite differences in political beliefs, religion, and nationalities. In doing so, she challenges normative stereotypes and assumptions – that these differences might typically result in conflict or incompatibility – and highlights what a wonderful experience she felt it had been for her to be a part of this cross-cultural, cosmopolitan type of union.

Several supporters disclosed they preferred to connect with people from other cultures because of unease and lack of cultural belonging they felt as Australians. These supporters described their preference for cross-cultural connections in direct opposition to what they see as an enduring 'white Australia'— despite popular discourses of multiculturalism. They expressed their unease at Australia's colonial past and their belief that in Australia, we continue to experience a hangover from this history that permeates our public and private social relations. Wendy, a former case manager for a national NGO providing refugee settlement services said,

> *This work has made me who I am today. As much as I have helped people, they have helped me a hell of a lot more. Every time a client thanks me for helping them, I feel like* ***no****, thank* ***you*** *for coming into my life.*
>
> *Ali: What do you feel you get from them?*
>
> *Wendy: A connection I suppose that I don't have in my family or society. As much as I look as I do – white, blue-eyed... I have never felt white. I don't feel connected to Australian culture. I don't feel like I belong in this culture. I don't feel like I belong in Australia.*
>
> *Ali: What do you get from supporting refugees?*
>
> *Wendy: It is that feeling of connectedness to people that I don't feel anywhere else as much. I feel annoyed by Australian culture. The outrage of the whole myth and fear of the Islam invasion…I just feel weird about... maybe it is the* ***lack*** *of culture. The flag waving... all that makes me feel sick.* (Her emphasis.)

Wendy expresses gratitude to refugees she has connected with for helping her to become 'who she is.' She indicates she feels alienated from White Australian culture and links this to nationalist sentiment and mythology (Hage 2003, 2000). Though she doesn't explicitly say so, it appeared that through her employment in a position that actively connected her with other cultures, Wendy was able to define herself in opposition to her perceptions of a xenophobic, nationalistic, flag-waving 'White Australia', an Australia that she firmly feels is lacking in terms of human connection across cultures, and instead find alternative spaces and modes of belonging that meshed more harmoniously with her cosmopolitan inclinations.

In sum, supporters' cosmopolitan beliefs focusing on 'shared humanity' with others motivate and attract them to participate in support work. Supporters recognise people seeking asylum and refuge as *people,* first and foremost. They are comfortable connecting with people from different cultural backgrounds, learning from differences and finding joy in similarities. Through connecting with people seeking refuge, some supporters are able to understand and define themselves in opposition to aspects of their own culture they struggle with. Through welcoming and embracing people from different cultural backgrounds, supporters may well be viewed as "Compassionistas" and "Bleeding Hearts" who pose a threat to a predominantly white Australian culture. However, in general, they are people who simply enjoy 'crossing boundaries' without fear or intolerance of difference.

Supporters: reckless white-saviours or reflexive and rational nationals?

Though supporters have been accused in the media as 'self-styled saviours of refugees' (Devine 2011), engaging in reckless behaviours and indulging irrational beliefs and emotions (Lloyd 2016; McKinnell 2016) , overall, they appear to be highly reflexive – acting very cautiously in the interests of those they support, constantly reflecting on their roles and responsibilities in the sector. Though Devine (2011) stops short of attaching 'white' to her criticism, the use of the term 'saviour' in relation to any humanitarian effort could plausibly be understood as a 'dog-whistle' to mean 'white-saviour' on account of its wide-spread currency (Bex & Craps 2016; Milazzo 2019; Cooney-Petro 2019). White-saviourism is a term used to describe circumstances or actions in which (often privileged) white people help a person or group of colour in an attempt to emancipate them from their circumstances

(Milazzo 2019). Additionally, any positive change in the circumstances of the person or group of colour is attributed to actions of their 'white-saviours', as though people of colour are only recipients of help; unable to help themselves (Milazzo 2019). Fassin (2012) explores how morals and moral direction motivate politics and vice versa. Though supporters' senses of self, beliefs, and behaviours are strongly informed by their moral code and cosmopolitan outlook, supporters are often very risk-averse, concerned with how their words and actions may affect those they support. They are hyper-aware of public sentiment and the extremely challenging legal and political landscape they inhabit (c.f. Hage 2000).

People who enjoy privilege often find it easier to engage in activities associated with charity, activism, and aid provision (Roth 2016). Strand (2010) pointed out that persons who are privileged with the luxury of entertaining a cosmopolitan lifestyle (and thus, belief system), stand in stark contrast to many millions of people worldwide who have been forcibly displaced from their own taken for granted lives and social worlds. Participants of this research expressed to me their acute awareness of this privilege and explained that they align themselves specifically with refugees and asylum seekers, in part, precisely because of the magnitude of this contrast. However, they appear to do so with considerable awareness and reflexivity. I was surprised at just how many supporters discussed their social position, privilege, and power in great depth with me as they reflected on their experiences and practise. My findings here very much accord with those of Peterie (2019) who explored the activities of volunteers participating in friendship programmes with refugees and asylum seekers who arrived in Australia by boat and found volunteers were acutely aware of pitfalls associated with volunteer work such as motivations, power imbalances, and privilege. Supporters were keen to clarify that their feelings and awareness did not indicate feelings of guilt for their own privilege in comparison to people who seek asylum and that their actions were instrumental and goal oriented, not signifiers of white-saviourism. I specifically asked participants about feelings of guilt or responsibility in relation to their work and they emphatically expressed that they feel a high degree of responsibility to do something useful and good with their privilege, but they absolutely do not do so out of a sense of guilt or the need to 'rescue' people. Despite their acute awareness of difference, supporters indicated to me they deploy their belief in the possibility of a world of shared humanity that transcends notions of race, borders, cultural difference and so on, to support those who they recognise as currently unable to enjoy these same privileges.

I spoke with one volunteer support worker, Katherine, at her home in quite an affluent suburb in Adelaide. She told me about how and why she became involved in support work:

> *I am lucky in that I am a woman, but that I am a white woman. I am an educated, middle-class woman. I am healthy, professional, so I don't feel excluded from many things. My background was English speaking, not a migrant from another culture that was completely different. I feel that I am in a comfortable position. That doesn't necessarily mean that I am comfortable with everything going on around me. It is definitely not guilt. I am not doing it because I am guilty because I live in a nice house. I don't feel guilty about that. It is not a rescue. These are human beings who are in this position for political, economic, or whatever reasons, so it is giving them support within that structure. I am not trying to make them better people. I don't feel that I* ***must*** *do it... It is a real inner thing that I* ***want*** *to do this: that I know this is needed. We are all connected, the whole community is connected. So, I live here in Netherby, but I don't feel disconnected from people in Salisbury…Through an accident at birth I was born here at this time, in this situation, but that doesn't mean that I am not connected to everybody else. So, at the end of my days, what do I want to think? I want to think that I have been fair and just and have done as much as I can do in a reasonable way.* (Her emphasis.)

Katherine went to some lengths during her interview with me to try to clearly articulate why she had chosen to undertake support work. Her response conveyed a significant level of reflexivity and rational thought about her social position and personal circumstances when compared to others. Whilst she acknowledges her privilege, she also downplays difference when it comes to her desire to help others. She indicates she is not motivated by a sense of guilt (that might invite accusations of white-saviourism), but that she wants to provide support because she believes we are all connected people who deserve justice and fairness. Here, the aforementioned moral code, belief in shared humanity, and a reflexive and rational thought process coalesce, resulting in Katherine's participation in support work.

Diana, a young millennial employee of a refugee and asylum seeker support service explained her motivation for undertaking work in this space. She stated,

> *It's having compassion for other people, essentially. I can't live in a world where I know people are suffering as much as they are and not be doing something about it…I'm doing it because I can't live the privileged life that I lead without acknowledging that other people don't have it as good as I do.*

Diana also shows a high degree of reflexivity as she admits that at least, in part, she engages in support work because she does feel the need to redress the balance between her own perceived privilege and those who enjoy less privilege than she does. In our second meeting, I asked her for some clarification around her above testimony, which seemed to indicate guilt. She emphasised to me that she participates with a sense of responsibility to use her privilege in instrumental ways, rather than from any sense of guilt. She and other participants draw a clear distinction between guilt and responsibility; guilt is in many ways tied to pity, whereas responsibility is tied to what is fair and just. The fact that Diana feels some responsibility for redress, based on having compassion for others, highlights that her involvement in support work is also informed by her own moral code or moral precepts. She also talks simply about concern for 'people' (and not specifically about people seeking refuge or asylum) which points to concern for humanity in general. Again, the beliefs discussed earlier intersect and explain Diana's choice to undertake support work.

Supporters also spoke to me about the high degree of caution and risk management they exercise during their work. Many talked about their thought processes as they rationalised engaging in some activities and actively avoided, limited, or declined involvement in other activities, reflecting on their own skills and capacity to help people seeking refuge and asylum. Helen emphasised,

> *You are going to visit people who have a **really** different culture. You are trying to help them do things. There is this **big** bureaucracy that is oppressing them, and you have to fight that bureaucracy and be warm and sensible with this group of people. You have access to language, to information, to money, to knowing how the system works. But there is this really, really dangerous bureaucracy that can get them at any time and if you make a mistake, you can put them in danger. The threat from the government is **so** enormous, it is so heavy. People get deported all the time. Who wants to be responsible for somebody being deported?* (Her emphasis.)

Helen draws attention to the heavy responsibility that supporters are often acutely aware of as they attempt to help people during various stages of their asylum-seeking process. She highlights the need for cultural awareness and the need to be warm and sensible with people we support whilst at the same time keeping a keen eye on potential consequences of any action taken that could have significant life or death consequences for them. As one participant said to me on several occasions, "we have to be as wise as serpents and as gentle as doves." Whilst I found perceptions of risk varied across the cohort, particularly between volunteers, professionals, and workers with varying levels of accountability, all participants in this research who discussed these matters with me expressed deep concern for those they seek to help, and a highly reflexive approach to their responsibilities.

Conclusion

This chapter has explored how South Australian refugee supporters understand and manage themselves in relation to work they undertake. To explore this, I worked with anthropological and philosophical notions of 'self' and 'identity' as they relate to participants in this research. I argued that participants understand and describe their involvement in support work as strongly intertwined with their senses of self and identity, comprised of their beliefs and behaviours. To maintain and enhance their senses of self, supporters engage activities and experiences that may confer on them certain statuses or roles, which form their 'supporter identities.' Though supporters are motivated to participate for a variety of reasons, I found that predominantly, South Australian supporters believe in, and try to live and act in accordance with a 'moral code' that confers a moral responsibility to care for other human beings – in this case, people seeking refuge. Supporters' senses of self and identity rest strongly on the degree to which they feel they have been able to act in accordance with their beliefs to do 'what is right'. Supporters actively evaluate and engage in self-care and self-management to monitor and achieve a particular construct: selves who stand against injustice. I found supporters also generally share a strong belief in a 'shared humanity', akin to beliefs explored in literature on cosmopolitanism, and they apply this belief particularly to 'downtrodden' persons in society. Their desire to draw upon similarities, welcome, and embrace differences as they engage with people from other cultures smooths the metaphorical path of support work and its considerable challenges. By relating to others in ways that align with their cosmopolitan outlook in addition to their moral code, supporters are able to understand themselves in opposition to those who do

not share this same outlook. They reaffirm and strengthen their identities in contrast to what they perceive to be a xenophobic and increasingly nationalistic white Australia. Many supporters also demonstrated a keen awareness of their own social position relative to those they support, openly speaking about their privilege and power. They appear to draw on this awareness as they undertake support work. They showed a high degree of reflexive and rational thought and risk averse attitudes in contrast to allegations they are reckless, rabid individuals who would incite self-harm or violence amongst refugees and asylum seeker populations or see themselves as 'saviours.' I argued that their deeply held beliefs, centred on humanity and morality lead to, and sustain, their involvement in support work—even as they encounter challenges from others along the way. In Chapter Four, I discuss how the concepts of 'wellbeing' and 'resilience' relate to supporters and their work.

Image 4: A collection of small gifts, given by a family seeking refuge to a supporter who they call "Grandma"

CHAPTER FOUR

Pathways to resilience: living lives of value and truth

It is a cool, damp October day in 2019 in the Adelaide Hills. Sitting across from me at my kitchen table is a woman who I have known for almost a decade, a woman who I have often turned to for advice and admired for her ability to endure in the face of overwhelming adversity. She has been a supporter for around 15 years, each month supporting (on average) about 35 people and contributing more than 350[8] hours of her time. Despite our long connection, as I prepare to commence our 'interview', I realise I have often wondered how she maintains her strength, focus and determination against all odds, but I have never actually asked her. I lean in, excited for what I am about to hear and learn. Gwen begins,

> *Support, for me, is walking alongside people who have little or no power and trying to do better for them if at all possible. It is part of my being.*

She details how some 30 years earlier she became an advocate for adults with intellectual disabilities and says this equipped her with skills to move in to support work:

> *I started visiting detention centres, in South Australia and interstate, and kept visiting across the years… Dealing with agencies like Life Without Barriers, Centrelink, Immigration, dealing with medical issues, electricity bills, lawyers, courts.*

As we speak, Gwen helps me to understand some of her underlying beliefs and attitudes that help her to endure:

> *All our friends are retired and going on cruises, and I go "Well, what's the point of going on a cruise!?" You are only perhaps spoiling yourself for 5 minutes. There are more important things in this world. I'm the kind of person, as long as there is something I can do to improve the situation or comfort people then I am okay. Up until recently, I haven't felt like it's affected me greatly. But with longevity, I think more lately, I have felt depressed.*

This surprises me, as Gwen rarely outwardly shows signs of struggle or strain. If anything, she is the safe, steady pair of hands that reassures so many in the support community. She

[8] Note, though this figure seems extreme, it is correct.

explains this recent depression has come about because over time it has become almost impossible to effect any real change for refugees and asylum seekers because of the increasingly harsh government policies and restrictions. Before I have the chance to ask, she addresses the question that sits on my lips:

> *People say to me how do you keep going? Well, I don't know. Stamina, glass half-full kind of attitude. Can do! What to do? Think outside the square, make a move, call, or email somebody, get advice, whatever; that is resilience…resilience is the factor that helps you stay strong enough to keep going.*
>
> *…Wellbeing for me is balance. I don't think I have that much balance. My focus is on supporting people. The balance against that is a focus on singing. There's a recognition that I need to have some time out for myself that I haven't ever bothered about before. I will be on the laptop doing emails, reports, and stuff until three or four am quite often. Of course, that is not healthy lifestyle. I managed not to do it for a while, but I am now back doing it. So, I don't know…*

For the first time, I realise she is just as susceptible to the mental, physical, and emotional challenges that many supporters describe. I feel rather foolish to have previously attributed some kind of super-human capacity to her as she confides that she worries and second-guesses her actions just like the rest of us. She continues,

> *With age, you know, you can feel yourself slowing down. I think about the outcomes… have we done everything that is possible? I had to face that with a man who went back to his country. Did we do* ***everything*** *possible? Should I have phoned that lawyer in Sydney who has found another way? Why didn't I do that? So, yeah. But I have been doing it for so long, the network is strong, and the knowledge is there. Given this government, I don't think we could have done anything differently. I would do it all again. You just have to find the ways of doing it that enable you to survive and keep going.* (Her emphasis.)

Introduction

This chapter examines how support volunteers and workers in South Australia understand the concepts of wellbeing and resilience in relation to their work and identifies aspects of support that have significant effects on their experiences of wellbeing and resilience. Wellbeing and resilience are popular topics of interest in research about both volunteering and work. They are buzzwords and concepts that are frequently the focus for organisations and groups, as it is recognised that 'being well' and 'becoming resilient' has positive effects on productivity, finances, and risk reduction in these settings (Southwick et al. 2014; Panter-Brick 2014; Jimeňez 2008). The recent (and very welcome) popular focus on improving mental health has also seen wellbeing and resilience as goals, incorporated in to workplace planning and policy, social outreach initiatives, and our individual, private lives (Jimeňez 2008). We can access applications on our mobile phones that purport to help us boost our wellbeing and build our resilience and we are told these efforts will improve our lives. But one may question, what exactly is meant by wellbeing or resilience? No doubt, they will mean different things to different people and in different contexts or settings. Studies of persons involved in refugee support have found that whilst workers describe decreased feelings of wellbeing and resilience in relation to their work, they also report experiences within their work that increase resilience and wellbeing (Guhan & Liebling-Kalifani 2011; Barrington & Shakespeare-Finch 2014; Century, Leavey & Payne 2007; Puvimanasinghe et al. 2015). What often matters in these circumstances is the extent to which workers feel equipped and able to act in ways that allow them to manage their work themselves (Guhan & Liebling-Kalifani 2011).

In Australia, persons supporting people seeking refuge (either as volunteers or paid workers) have historically reported significant impacts of the work on their mental, emotional, and even physical health (Puvimanasinghe et al. 2015; Gosden 2006; Peterie 2018). Though they report many positive benefits they experience from the work, most often, negative impacts tend to outweigh the positive (Puvimanasinghe et al. 2015). Despite this, many supporters remain actively involved in the work for many years and decades. These observations can be seen in Gwen's story at the commencement of this chapter. A focus on wellbeing and/ or resilience, therefore, seems obligatory if the goal is to understand the nature of supporter experiences. Notwithstanding supporters' social and emotional circumstances prior to their

involvement in support work, all participants in this research indicated their involvement in the work had considerable effects, particularly for their sense of resilience.

I begin by exploring supporter understandings of wellbeing and resilience. I argue that even though supporters sometimes talk about wellbeing and resilience interchangeably, their testimonies suggest they think about them in qualitatively different ways in relation to their own lives, experiences, and work. Though there will invariably be some fluidity between individual experiences of the two concepts, there also exist some clear distinctions between them. Supporters tend to link their ideas about wellbeing more closely to their private lives and associate wellbeing more with 'hedonic' pleasure or happiness (Fischer 2014). It is important to note here, 'hedonic' should not be mistaken for, or misunderstood as, pure hedonism: the pursuit of, and devotion to total self-indulgence. Fischer (2014) describes 'hedonic' happiness as feeling generally content. In contrast, they appear to associate resilience with their work and a sense of 'eudaimonia': living a life of value (Fischer 2014). My observation during fieldwork is that supporters prioritise living a life of value (with all the associated challenges) over feeling generally content. Additionally, supporters recognise what resilience and wellbeing mean for themselves and they actively work to secure contexts and experiences of wellbeing and resilience for those they support. Whilst I recognise that the concepts of wellbeing and resilience are not neatly organised into binary categories for supporters' real-life experiences, I argue that resilience is the more useful concept for understanding how well supporters feel they may be faring during support work, in terms of their physical, mental, and emotional states. I then look at the role of agency as it relates to supporter resilience. I posit that agency exercised by supporters as they go about their work is best understood according to a particular definition of agency centred on 'living truthfully' (Williams 1992). I argue the extent to which they can exercise this type of agency has implications for their resilience. The remainder of the chapter explores three key themes that supporters identified as central to their voluntary and work experiences that affect their resilience. These are making a difference, achieving outcomes, and forging personal connections with others. These themes both delineate and group specific activities and experiences, common amongst the supporter cohort. They are particularly meaningful to their sense of achievement and resilience to carry on with the work.

Locating wellbeing and resilience

Though on occasion support workers also speak about wellbeing and resilience interchangeably, often they indicated to me they think about them in discrete ways in relation to their own lives and experiences. When I asked my participants what wellbeing means for them, they commonly identified activities that bring general contentment such as spending time with family and friends; reading for escape; writing and playing music; doing arts and crafts; gardening; participating in sports or taking holidays. This can be seen in Gwen's story as she mentions her passion for singing. They also identified actively making lifestyle choices such as getting enough sleep; practicing mindfulness or meditation; ensuring time alone and work/ life balance; and maintaining healthy personal and emotional boundaries. Again, Gwen's story highlights this as she talked about her lack of balance and personal boundaries. Wellbeing in this sense appears to align more with Fischer's (2014) notion of hedonic pleasure, or feeling generally content.

In contrast, when supporters disclosed what resilience means for them, answers they gave indicated an outward, social focus as they deal with circumstances they are experiencing now and will experience in the imminent future, predominantly in relation to their volunteering or work. When I asked participants what resilience means for them, they commonly identified activities such as: spending time with like-minded people and the support community; taking opportunities to debrief; managing setbacks, frustrations and rising to challenges; reading for learning; and engaging in self-care. They also identified the importance of cultivating and developing personal traits linked to their values such as the ability to be inventive and resourceful; the capacity to complete tasks, meet goals, and deliver outcomes; building motivation and inner strength; and living according to their moral code. These can be seen in Gwen's story as she talks about feeling the need to act and adopt a 'can do' attitude. Though Fischer (2014) links eudaimonia with wellbeing, supporters' notions of resilience appear to align more closely with the willingness to forgo hedonic pleasure in pursuit of a life that is personally valued. When compared, elements that supporters consider essential for wellbeing, by and large, are personal and proactive hedonic activities that they have a high degree of control over (Fischer 2014). Comparatively, elements essential for resilience appear to be eudaimonic, reactive or responsive activities that hinge on other people and/ or circumstances (Fischer 2014).

Though wellbeing is often discussed as a desirable destination, a state people arrive at after considerable effort to manage their spiritual, mental and/ or physical health (as observed by White 2016), supporters tend to describe wellbeing as a private, every-day state of being that seems to exist in a parallel world to that of their work. That is not to say their work and wellbeing are disconnected, but more that activities and circumstances they link with wellbeing often do not overlap with or intersect with their work. They indicate their characterisation of wellbeing may ebb and flow as they are able to engage in hedonic wellbeing activities and practices as above. Their understanding of wellbeing suggests this ebb and flow may be influenced by choices they make (or fail to make, as indicated by Gwen who suggests she needs to prioritise more time for herself). However, they do not suggest that if they make particular choices, they will suddenly have achieved wellbeing, or alternatively that they may have lost their wellbeing. To provide further evidence and clarity around this, I refer to testimony from Maliha, who has been involved in support work for around thirty years. She says,

> *Wellbeing is a continuous state of riding the waves of each day in the way that you would like to...I think that is really important. The ground of your being is secure somewhere that you choose and that your foundation is set.*

Resilience, on the other hand, is often described as something that can be acquired, accumulated, or learned as people respond to adversity and challenges. Like a muscle that grows stronger as it is worked harder, so too are people thought to 'become' more resilient as they respond to a challenging circumstance or catalyst, resulting in some form of personal change (Southwick et al. 2014). Supporters understand resilience in terms of their capacity to endure or persevere and they describe it as something they work towards or aspire to so they can carry on. Maliha echoes this sentiment saying,

> *I always try to be in the resilient form of rising to challenges and overcoming challenges and planning, anticipating and all the things that you need to do to stay on top. It doesn't always happen and sometimes you get forced more in to coping and into depression and stuff like that. But I think I don't aspire to cope* (laughs). *I aspire to resilience.*

Maliha points out key differences between wellbeing and resilience, which are present across the participant cohort and reflected by Gwen's story. Maliha's testimony also confirms the views of many supporters: that resilience is a desirable capacity, beyond that of simply coping, which is often described by supporters as barely 'keeping one's head above water', or 'treading water.' Supporters indicate that as demands of support work increase, they will tend to forgo more hedonic activities and circumstances that increase their sense of wellbeing and will instead tend to focus on trying to increase their resilience as they engage in activities that have particular meaning or value for them, akin to Fischer (2014). Forgoing activities related to wellbeing appears to increase their risk of burnout (discussed in Chapter Eight) but by engaging in resilience building activities, they appear to temper this risk. Thus, it appears resilience is the more useful concept for understanding how supporters feel they may be faring during support work, in terms of their physical, mental, and emotional states. For this reason, I have chosen to leave my analysis of supporter wellbeing at this point and draw on resilience for the remainder of the chapter and thesis. The distinction made by supporters about the qualitative nature of their experience of resilience, as well as the role of agency (as specifically understood below), are important to keep in mind for the following chapters as I explore supporters' experiences and their effects on resilience, and senses of self and identity.

Agency as 'living truthfully'

Agency is a slippery notion that is often wrapped up in discussions of action, intention, choice, power, resistance , freedom, free will, and accountability (though this list is not exhaustive) (Ahearn 2001; Kockelman 2007). Agency is described as "…people having a degree of control over their actions and effects in the public world" (Weissman 2020, p.32), or in terms of people's ability to act, either individually, on behalf of another or collectively (Hewson in Mills, Durepos & Wiebe 2021). There are many other proposed definitions. I do not intend to discuss the multitude of definitions of agency here, but rather to present an understanding of agency that is useful for my analysis.

Williams (1992) argues against common definitions of agency such as free will or the freedom to choose between a set of alternatives. He argues outside forces always mediate free will, and choices we make must be made on some grounds, which means they are not truly free. He convincingly explains in some detail how the commonly proposed link between

agency and freedom is unsatisfactory for understanding agency. He instead suggests agency should be understood as a moral and social phenomenon centred on 'living truthfully.' Williams (1992, p.759) is careful to define this 'truth' as a 'moral truth' that

> *…stretches far beyond…any person who feels him or herself faced with a choice. It stretches to our very being... The question of human agency is the question not only of what we will do, but of what we will be.*

Williams takes care to point out philosophical challenges that accompany the notion of 'truth', but he gives an example of self-deception and self-betrayal to point out that when undertaking such acts, an individual will know they are acting in an untruthful way. Through this example, he appears to propose 'truth' as referring to a person's inner, privately held truth(s) that are grounded in moral beliefs. This dovetails with the relationship between self, identity and personhood and morality outlined in the work of Fischer (2014), Fassin (2012), and Mattingly & Throop (2018). It is this 'truth' that gives individuals the power and impetus to act.

Agency in the support world is contextual and links strongly to resilience. It may be exercised in relation to for pragmatic purposes, high-risk moral dilemmas or in relation to very simple choices. In relation to my participants and data, I propose that agency, understood as 'living truthfully' means living in accordance with a person's 'moral code' (as explained in Chapter Three). By drawing on Williams (1992), and as suggested by Panter-Brick (2014), I posit the degree to which supporters are able to exercise agency in varying circumstances, interactions, and activities has significant implications for their resilience. Generally speaking, the higher the moral stakes are in any given circumstance, the greater potential there is for agency to affect resilience both in positive and negative ways. That is, if the stakes are high and a supporter can act to achieve a positive result in that circumstance then their sense of resilience will likely increase. However, if the stakes are high and a supporter is unable to act to achieve a positive result, their resilience may be eroded. However, this observation is offered with an important caveat: though supporters may have the capability and freedom to act, if agency is not exercised in accordance with their moral code ('truth'), their actions and choices are less likely to contribute to their sense of resilience. This echoes Southwick's argument about the importance of moral aspects of life to resilience (Southwick et al. 2014). Agency is particularly important to supporters' resilience as they work at making a difference, achieving outcomes, and forging personal connections with others.

Making a difference

The theme of 'making a difference' was pervasive throughout the research process and strongly links to supporter resilience. 'Making a difference' is often stated by volunteers and workers involved in the provision of humanitarian type support as a key motivator and reward for their efforts (Roth 2015). 'Making a difference', according to my participants, refers to actions that may not drastically change the world, but might change the recipients' material, physical or emotional circumstances in the short-to-medium term. Supporters frequently equate 'making a difference' with 'feeling useful', 'helping', 'assisting', and 'witnessing' the circumstances of people as they progress through their asylum journey. Examples of 'making a difference' include things like: procuring and providing food or household items for newly arrived refugees; paying for mobile phone credit for people seeking refuge; regularly chatting online with, or visiting, people in immigration detention to provide social, emotional or psychological support; participating in English language teaching or practice sessions for those living in the community; or joining in welcome activities such as community-based picnics or dinners. Thus, 'making a difference' appears to also describe achievable efforts undertaken alongside the more challenging efforts towards wider systemic change, or when such change feels not just elusive, but near impossible. Similar achievable efforts are undertaken by others in the support sector to express solidarity and maintain a sense of purpose in the face of increasingly challenging circumstances (Nelson, Price & Zubrzycki 2017; Briskman & Cemlyn 2005; Field, Chung & Fleay 2021). These efforts are eudaimonic in nature as supporters prioritise their time and resources towards activities that have value and meaning for them, over hedonic pleasure or leisure and enable them to carry on when much needed systemic change feels out of reach (Fischer 2014).

Participants of this research described the overwhelming need to respond to the inhumane treatment of refugees and asylum seekers both in Australia and offshore by 'making a difference'. This need to adapt and act to alleviate hardship is wed to supporters' moral codes, affirming Southwick et al.'s (2014) suggestion of a link between moral aspects of life and resilience. In some cases, they may draw on their skills and life experiences to offer this support. Though, in many cases, they may have had no experience or training whatsoever to undertake the work and they must adapt and learn new skills as they go, building their resilience.

‘Making a difference’ seems to evoke a sense of accomplishment on a small scale, often at the grassroots level, on an individual or small group basis; it is this sense of accomplishment that builds supporter resilience. Supporters link their success in ‘making a difference’ closely to the extent to which they contribute to alleviating the material, physical, emotional, or mental hardships faced by people seeking refuge. They evaluate their success based not only on what they have been able to provide, but also on reactions they receive from recipients of their support and/or based on their own emotional responses. In this sense, successfully ‘making a difference’ is heavily contingent on the agency and resourcefulness of supporters to secure meaningful small wins or incremental steps towards better circumstances for people. Such incremental approaches are highlighted in the work of Panter-Brick (2014) and Williams (1992) as critical to feelings of resilience. If a supporter has successfully ‘made a difference’ it means they have been able to act in ‘truthful’ ways that align with their moral code and able to harness necessary resources so both recipient and supporter may feel happy, energised, less helpless, and more able to face another day.

In helping me to understand the notion of ‘making a difference’, supporters also described circumstances that would erode their feelings of success. These could be large or small-scale circumstances inviting feelings of helplessness, sadness, or exhaustion. Anne says,

> *I think of advocacy as the interaction with the political and the community, raising awareness and advocating for change. Whereas support work with refugees is a humanitarian response to a situation where I want the political situation to change but my reason for doing it is to make a difference for those individuals, rather than to change the big picture. I always have done both. Trying to change policy has been so heartbreakingly* ***not*** *effective; I felt that I could not make a difference. I still feel like I’m not making a jot of difference to changing the public discourse on refugees! Look! We’ve got another Liberal government who’s quite happy to lock people up on Manus Island*[9] *and obviously, the Australian people think that is okay. So, that side of me is totally despairing and despondent. Whereas I felt that the support work that I was doing visiting people, sourcing things for new mums, setting up houses was making a real difference to the lives of people.* (Her emphasis.)

[9] An Australian-run detention centre based on Manus Island, Papua New Guinea that was intermittently used between 2001 and 2017.

Anne's comments here highlight her awareness and acknowledgement that systemic change is needed, but show how her efforts in 'making a difference' sustained her when that change was not forthcoming, echoing other experiences in the support landscape (Briskman & Cemlyn 2005; Nelson, Price & Zubrzycki 2017; Field, Chung & Fleay 2021). All participants of this research remarked on the need for widespread systemic change and efforts towards it but were regretful (and in many cases resigned) to the fact that such change has become incredibly difficult to achieve over the years and successive governments. Many felt that 'making a difference' was often all they could do. At the same time, they also recognised that efforts towards 'making a difference' can be significantly important for people seeking refuge. As such, 'making a difference' was seen by many participants as a highly important and much needed part of the practice of support overall, to improve the lives of people seeking refuge.

Supporters also often describe 'making a difference' or 'feeling useful' as efforts that they undertake to help refugees and asylum seekers live 'normal lives'. The normal lives they describe are the most basic of lives: being able to afford food, clothing, and shelter; having freedom of movement; not living in fear; being able to connect with family and friends. Agamben (1998) explores the circumstances of refugees in concentration camps and Biehl (2013) explores 'zones of social abandonment' in Brazil to exemplify how socially marginalised people live 'bare lives': devoid of basic rights, pleasures, and freedoms. In many ways, supporters are seeking to tangibly change the lives of refugees or asylum seekers which may have been or continue to be 'bare' away from bareness, to resemble what they consider to be normal, everyday lives. Participants indicated to me the 'normal' lives they envisioned included the reasonable expectation and experience of pleasure, leisure and meaning, or (in the terms of this research) hedonic wellbeing and eudaimonic resilience. The lengths supporters are prepared to go to, to ensure that newly arrived refugees and asylum seekers can experience these, is an attempt to recognise and promote their shared humanity. Thus, when supporters can 'make a difference' in this way, they act in alignment with their beliefs and moral code, increasing their sense of resilience. Another volunteer, John, who is involved in rural and regional support, says,

> *It is heart-warming to see the response to the care that we've been able to give to two or three families. We gave a young girl a laptop, and we also gave her a second-hand guitar that we had re-strung because she is 16 and wants to learn the guitar...*

> *So gorgeous just to see her response and to see the parents say "Ahhh!" For them... they were not allowed to work, not allowed to travel interstate… To see them responding and settling into the community and looking for things to do so they can become normal in the community,* ***this is just so good, just so good****! We are making a difference. It is a trickle, but it is a difference. It is being useful, feeling like we are achieving something.* (His emphasis.)

When they are able to successfully 'make a difference', supporters experience a sense of eudaimonic achievement. This provides them with motivation to carry on, the moral satisfaction that they are living truthfully in alignment with their sense of self, in turn contributing to their sense of resilience. Though 'making a difference' is often relatively easy, 'achieving outcomes' raises the moral stakes and has greater potential to affect resilience.

Achieving outcomes

'Achieving outcomes' sounds like it may be synonymous with 'making a difference', however, I observed a clear qualitative difference between these two concepts. Whereas 'making a difference' refers to actions that may change recipients' material, physical or emotional circumstances in the short-to-medium term, 'achieving outcomes' relates to the securing of medium to large-scale, often life-changing outcomes for individuals, families, or groups. Outcomes in the support world may of course be understood differently by different people, but 'achieving an outcome' for someone usually relates to things like: organising pro-bono legal support, securing someone a visa or approval to travel, securing a person's release from detention, preventing a deportation, gaining access for individuals or groups to participate in particular funded support programs, setting a family up with appropriate housing, securing medical support, and the list goes on. Outcomes, in this sense, are often (but not always) associated with the paid for, and/ or professional work of migration agents, lawyers, case managers, NGOs, medical and allied health professionals, or persons who have acquired these skills. These outcomes may come with a considerable cost, in terms of time, money, resources, physical, mental, and emotional strain for all involved, in large part due to the political and bureaucratic nature of refugee and asylum seeker support in general (as detailed in Chapter One). Even though outcomes are often achieved in more formalised work environments, those working to achieve them also do so by drawing on their agency in

those contexts to do as much as they can for individuals and groups in accordance with their moral codes. Luke, a founder of a community-based not-for-profit organisation in Adelaide told me,

> *I really love people and want outcomes for humans, not ideology for activists… Refugees can't stick around waiting for us to create Utopia. They need their life improved* ***now****…I just want to create better outcomes for people that need that the most. In a practical sense, it is very day-to-day, it is very relational, but it is also attempting to make decisions at any given time about how to leverage whatever power and privilege I have to make change... At the moment, my business to outcomes ratio is way out of whack. I flew 70 times in the last 6 months of last year. I don't mind doing that, but I want some pretty good outcomes. When I feel like I am forced into working on things that are not my best skill set or natural abilities then that drains me. Resilience is when I feel like I am able to do all the things that I am best at in a way that makes a difference to people. (His emphasis.)*

Luke explains he is aware of his own privilege and power and actively uses this to create change for people. His testimony exemplifies observations I made in Chapter Three that supporters' moral codes and awareness of their own privilege are fundamental reasons for their involvement in support work. What is less clear from Luke's testimony is what he may be doing to mitigate his power and privilege by supporting the agency and self-determination of people seeking refuge (Peterie 2022a; Lenette et al. 2020). Luke's testimony appears to how his focus on achieving *human* outcomes drives his practical, day-to-day efforts in the workplace and the high level of importance that he places on this. Luke says he feels resilient when he can do things that he is best at, which links more to a hedonic understanding of his experience. However, he also indicates that his somewhat hedonic pleasure, felt through undertaking his work in a particular way, must also result in tangible difference to the lives of others. This suggests his sense of resilience is also strongly linked to eudaimonia: living a life of value (Fischer 2014). When Luke says he feels 'drained' when he is forced to act in particular ways, he indicates very clearly his sense of resilience at work is also connected to his sense of self as it relates agency: his capacity to act in ways that align with his moral code (Williams 1992). Willow, a senior manager of a settlement services organisation also said,

I see what people go through and the hoops they have to jump through and the quality of life that they don't have and the desperation of the people that come in. Mine is always an open door. I have clients coming into my office to sit down and talk about an Afghan man that escaped the Taliban even though his back had been broken and other people were murdered in front of him. He managed to get out here and his wife and children were still back there. With individual cases [like this], the end result is the most important. I personally got that man in contact with some Migration Agents that are just absolutely brilliant and did some pro bono work. We bumped into him recently and his wife and kids are here. You know what? I might have had to work until 10pm at night for a whole bunch of weeks to get his paperwork together, but now he has his family.

Despite the potentially traumatic nature of Willow's daily work, she spoke with some pride as she explained that what makes it worthwhile for her is the end result. Though she doesn't explicitly say so, the lengths she went to, to help the Afghan man to have 'quality of life', demonstrates her willingness to act on behalf of another person. This presumably came with personal cost to her own life, but it was meaningful to her in terms of her moral code, her sense of agency as living truthfully, and her job satisfaction: all contributing to her ongoing resilience.

'Achieving outcomes' is very important to supporters' senses of resilience. In more formal working environments, supporters may be limited to working according to particular policies or procedures and may have different levels of power and privilege that they are able to utilise to achieve their desired results (Nelson, Price & Zubrzycki 2017; Briskman & Cemlyn 2005; Field, Chung & Fleay 2021). Even in the workplace, supporters are motivated predominantly by their personal moral code and beliefs, trying to act in accordance with these as much as possible. Their senses of wellbeing and resilience depend, in large part, on how much agency they have in these circumstances to act in meaningful ways to achieve outcomes. Whether they are volunteers or paid workers, the sense of resilience derived from support work is also strongly linked to relationships that are formed, not only between one another, but also importantly between themselves and those they support.

Forging personal connections with others

'Forging personal connections with others' is the final theme relating to supporter resilience explored in this Chapter. Popularly accepted understandings and definitions of resilience focus on individual personal abilities and characteristics, placing less emphasis on the role of others (Barrios 2016). However, supporters place significant importance on their ability to connect with others as they engage in support work for their sense of resilience. Supporters may connect with others in person in private settings, in person in formal settings (such as through organisations and programs), or through online avenues such as Facebook, WhatsApp or other messaging applications, as well as through more traditional methods such as phone or email. Often connections are forged online when people seeking refuge actively seek out supporters via shared interest pages and groups. In other circumstances, supporters will come across an individual or family who needs assistance (often through word of mouth via the wider national network) and put a call out for help. For example, they might know of a family who has been released from detention in Melbourne, who is moving to Adelaide, and needs some help to procure household goods.

Like many people who choose to participate in the volunteer world, supporters often seek a personal connection with those they aim to support. Many close, long term friendships arise between people seeking refuge and their supporters and some even consider each other as 'family' (Tilbury 2007). Despite this, it is important to note that provision of support is not necessarily dependent on the existence of close relationships; many supporters who engage in activities of 'making a difference' and 'achieving outcomes' do so in the service of complete strangers[10]. Supporters frequently told me that whilst some of the day-to-day aspects of support work have the potential to wear them down, their connections with others are often what most sustains them. This is especially true in volunteering or workplace settings where personal connections between supporters and refugees or asylum seekers may be completely prohibited and/ or actively discouraged. Research conducted by Stukas et al. (2016) on Australian volunteers found people who participated for 'other-

[10] It is for this reason that I have opted to discuss personal connections at this point and not at the outset, so as not to suggest a causal link between relationships and the kinds of support offered. Though some support activities may arise from personal connections being formed (such as in the case where a supporter may advocate for a family or individual throughout lengthy legal battles) it is not the case that supporters establish friendships or relationships with asylum seekers and refugees before they are prepared to offer their support. Overall, support activities are undertaken to assist total strangers and any subsequent ongoing friendship or relationship evolves during the provision of support, sometimes lasting years after their needs have well and truly discontinued.

oriented reasons' (for the benefit of others) were more likely to report high levels of wellbeing and social connectedness. They found that social connectedness was the strongest predictor of satisfaction in volunteers. This finding is reflected amongst my participant cohort. One former, regular volunteer visitor to Inverbrackie detention centre in the Adelaide hills, Jenny, said,

> *We felt so much joy when we were fed by these beautiful people on a rug at Inverbrackie. They would cook all day, the day before our visit,* ***for us****! They would put out these gorgeous prawn and rice dishes and every type of dish and all I could think of was why would they do this for us? They were happy, we were happy and that was very joyous to me.* (Her emphasis.)

Jenny's main involvement in support has been to provide friendship and 'every day' experiences to refugees and asylum seekers. She has conducted art classes in detention and provided beach visits, dinners, and barbeques to refugees living in the community. She continued,

> *I do what I do so they will have something in their lives that they might remember - what we have done for them on a quiet level - whether it be at the beach or sitting in a circle at Inverbrackie eating food with them or having a laugh with them here at home. I just hope that some of these little children or adolescents, middle aged or older people might remember what we've done. It might be a bright spot and spur them on to get the good result they want. Our lives, mine especially, is enriched by meeting all of these people from all over the world which we never would have if we didn't care about refugees. It is a two-way thing.*

While Jenny's actions may seem very basic, the circumstances in which she was volunteering provide important context as to why they were anything but. Detention centre settings, and even community detention settings, are actively designed to inhibit and prevent people from making personal connections with one another (Peterie 2019a; Fleay & Briskman 2013). However, recent work by Peterie (2022) highlights how seemingly trivial actions are politically and socially important, providing psychological nourishment to people enmeshed in harsh and harmful circumstances. Gaining access to detention centres in the first instance

can be a fraught process[11] and interactions between visitors and detainees are frequently monitored and surveilled (Peterie 2019a; Fleay & Briskman 2013). Additionally, taking released persons out for their first visits to places like the beach, or dinner with new friends are highly emotional events, laden with meaning and expectations around enormously important ideals of freedom, hope, and the 'good life'. Jenny's testimony highlights that support comes in many forms and simple acts like sharing food are very important to supporters' senses of personal connection to those they support. Such acts may both cement and illuminate the strength of bonds between persons partaking in them (Klein & Watson 2015; Watson & Caldwell 2005; Peterie 2022b). Similarly, Jenny emphasises the role of reciprocity as she outlines what she hopes to give ('a bright spot') and what she receives from connection (an enriched life). Reciprocal acts, such as the giving and receiving of gifts (even food gifts) may serve to establish, affirm, and reinforce connections between people and groups (Mauss 1990). However, what is important here is Jenny's focus on what these forged personal connections mean for lives; both the lives of those she supports and her own. Jenny indicates her actions are motivated by a desire to contribute something bright to the lives of people seeking refuge which aligns with her cosmopolitan outlook and provide Jenny with feelings of happiness and hope about her actions. In this sense, her actions are both eudaimonic and hedonic in nature. She focuses on the ripple effect that she hopes her actions may have, providing moments of happiness that she hopes may impart a kind of hope and resilience to others. Personal connections, therefore, come to represent somewhat of a victory over powers and structures that would otherwise seek to keep people apart (Peterie 2022b). In this sense, these connections are strongly intertwined with "…the ability to bend but not break, bounce back, and perhaps even grow in the face of adverse life experiences" (Southwick et al. 2014, p.2) and as such are critical for creating a sense of resilience.

In the workplace, personal connections also serve to provide workers with a sense of achievement and the feeling that their efforts are worthwhile. Belinda, a migration lawyer, comments on professional boundaries that are often enforced in workplaces to prevent personal connections between workers and clients saying,

[11] This is explored further in Chapter Five.

I don't think it is inevitable that no lawyer/ client relationship has a humane element to it. Every lawyer is different, and some people do choose to put up probably more boundaries than I do. I always form connections and I don't shy away from it. I think that it helps to keep things fresh, and you don't become a robot. People need to be given compassion because you're meeting their legal needs but maybe you can also meet other needs that they have as well. When people feel so disconnected from our society because they are being treated so badly, I think it makes a huge difference for them to actually feel like they are being helped by somebody who cares about them, not just treating them as a legal case. I would say I always show care and compassion to my clients. I think it is part of what makes me a good lawyer.

Belinda is fortunate she is in a position where she can determine how she interacts with clients she represents legally. Her testimony highlights active choices she makes about how she conducts herself in her legal practise. By choosing to connect with people, Belinda indicates she uses her agency to work against 'becoming a robot', lacking care, compassion or failing to see the person in front of her as worthy of care, rather than just a discrete legal 'case'. Belinda's recognition of how her actions may offset the way people are often treated by society highlights her decision to act truthfully in accordance with beliefs previously outlined, such as shared humanity. The fact that she feels like she is a good lawyer because of her ongoing actions suggests that forming personal connections contribute to Belinda's sense of achievement and resilience in the workplace.

Personal connections in the support world are not just limited to connections between supporters and people seeking refuge. Supporter resilience is often heavily contingent on the strength of their connections to like-minded people and/ or people that matter to them, such as loved ones. These connections provide safe contexts in which supporters may be able to debrief, rest, ask for help, and vent their frustrations, happiness, or sadness. John explains,

My resilience is in knowing what is right, what is important. Knowing what is fair and just and sticking with it, even though it might be hard. I manage better when I am surrounded by like-minded people who support and pick up part of the load. This happens in my family. Like when I am most stressed, and I'm alone, I just bring the image of my family into my mind. That is my core.

John indicates his family support him and help him to carry the load as he goes about his support work and that this sustains him. In many ways, these personal connections become resources he can draw on to ensure he is able to continue his work (Theron, Liebenberg & Ungar 2015; Panter-Brick 2014). In this sense, they are very important enablers for his sense of agency. His testimony echoes those of many supporters who told me about how connections with other supporters and people that matter made them feel less alone and (importantly) accepted for the person they are, who has chosen to undertake the work that they do, as well as providing them with meaningful, material assistance. As John indicates, simply knowing they are there can be enough to boost resilience when the work becomes difficult or stressful.

The presence of other supporters and people that matter can emotionally and materially sustain a supporter, as much as their absence can be a source of frustration, sadness, disappointment, and hurt. Mim has been involved in refugee support from Australia welcomed Vietnamese refugees in the late 1970s and her testimony highlights aspects of this:

> *I have been very fortunate. My partner, we are besties. Right at the beginning I said, this is going to be full on. You have a choice, I am going to do it, but you have a choice. She has been incredibly supportive. But in terms of my kids; I could strangle them. I can't push them. I love my kids. I cannot push them in to corners and tell them they must be activists. They are not activists. It doesn't affect my relationship with them because I won't let it - but it could. You can't expect people to be or do what is beyond them. People are what they are. You can't let it eat at you. Things that* ***do*** *help are [like when I] send an email asking for financial help or other help and getting an email back saying "****yes****." That sustains me. My friends saying "****Yes****, we will come and help. We will do this." What* ***would*** *sustain me is if my kids got on board; that would be* ***awesome****. I would be …aahhhh… overjoyed and proud. They have helped in small ways for me. But I want them to do it because they really care, not just for me. (Her emphasis.)*

With help from personal connections, supporters are able to draw on resources to more effectively meet the needs of refugees and asylum seekers and to meet their own emotional needs (Surawski, Pedersen & Briskman 2008). As Mim's testimony indicates, personal connections who seem to genuinely care about and share in supporters' efforts not only sustain them, but also give them a substantial boost to carry on their work. They play a key role in creating the conditions in which supporters can not only survive but also thrive in their work – often in the face of tremendous opposition and over the long term. These individuals can contribute towards supporters' efforts to live and acts in alignment with their moral code as authentically as possible (Williams 1992). Where personal connections such as these are absent, or where supporters undertake their work in the face of direct opposition from the people who matter to them, life can become substantially more difficult. Their sense of agency may be diminished, and their resilience eroded.

Conclusion

This chapter has explored understandings and experiences of wellbeing and resilience amongst refugee and asylum seeker support volunteers and workers in South Australia. Through examining key theoretical understandings of the concepts of wellbeing and support and considering testimonies of participants in this research, I found that supporters understand these concepts in discrete ways in relation to their lives, experiences, and work. By drawing on the testimony of supporters, I argued that resilience is the more useful concept for understanding how they withstand various challenges of their work in terms of their physical, mental, and emotional states on an ongoing basis. I identified that agency plays a critical role in supporter resilience as the extent to which they can exercise their agency has implications particularly for resilience. I argued that a particular definition of agency, centred on 'living truthfully' corresponds to supporter choices and actions and fits with supporter motivations and beliefs as detailed in Chapter Three. Finally, I explored three themes that supporters indicated significantly affected their senses of resilience: making a difference, achieving outcomes, and forging personal connections with others. The third of these themes began to indicate that resilience may suffer when people do not feel supported by those around them. The next chapter develops this theme by examining the experiences of supporters working outside of large NGOs or organisations, often largely on their own.

Image 5: Some flowers (since pressed) given to a supporter by a person previously held in immigration detention.

CHAPTER FIVE

The need to be seen: visibility and perceptibility in support work

In early March 2019, I arrived at an op-shop in Adelaide that provides people seeking refuge with goods and practical support. I went to meet Brian, the volunteer Coordinator of the shop. He signalled some instructions to another volunteer before ushering me through to a private meeting room where we could chat. He was gently spoken, pausing regularly to give genuine thought and consideration to each of my questions as we chatted for over an hour.

> *We have 20-30 volunteers. Support is a part of what we do for individuals. We provide goods, but we might also help somebody by going to Centrelink with them to find out why their payments have stopped. We might go with them to one of the migration agents to see what visas they can get, putting their case together for some sort of protection visa. We liaise with settlement organisations and migration agents, that sort of thing. But we are fairly independent here and we have our own small network. We know there's the organisations like Welcome to Australia, we know there's ARA; but we don't really have regular contact with them. Some of the people we support come and volunteer at the shop. We keep in touch with a number of families.*

I asked Brian about his experiences, both as a volunteer at the shop and in his own time over the years. I was deliberately vague, keen to see what he decided to tell me. He sucked in a breath and smiled, saying,

> *People getting visas, that's a source of real joy, that's the sort of thing you remember for a long time. You can see I'm getting quite emotional about it… It's big stuff… It is just quite overwhelming, makes you feel good, on a high for about three or four days. It's exhilarating. An Iranian family got their SHEV[12] after 4 years. We'd organised the material for that. I didn't think they would have a strong enough case to get it, but they got it! You just almost collapse in a heap, and you feel great for about a week after that… I have had that sort of thing maybe 2 or 3 times over the years. On the flipside, there is a lot of frustration and tiredness from the sheer amount of effort*

[12] Safe Haven Enterprise Visa for people who arrived in Australia without a visa and want to seek asylum. It lets them stay in Australia temporarily if they engage Australia's protection obligations and meet all other requirements for the grant of the visa.

involved in helping people get visas…There is a lot of work involved, there is not much encouragement along the way. The families are absolutely stressed out, there is not much you can do about it, and this goes on for years. It is absolutely exhausting and frustrating. Sometimes you get a bit lost with patience. You are never sure if they are going to get their visa or not.

Brian then proceeded to explain to me some social consequences he has experienced as a result of supporting people through such challenging circumstances over long periods of time. He said,

It costs a lot of time, money. A lot of effort. I don't have all that large a social network. I have some social support there definitely; that's very important, knowing that people are happy with what we do. But there are people in my family that I wouldn't keep in touch with now. I think one of my uncles is quite a right-wing person. I look at his posts on Facebook and think "hmm, he might not be on the visit list anymore", right? I've got friends that I'm not as engaged with as I once was. Once you start talking about the real problems, other people find them too hard to hear and they'll change the subject. Probably because they just don't want to hear about that stuff, it's too distressing to hear about. So, we can't talk about it too much. We talk about something else.

The other social cost is a real mistrust in the government, the processes of government. You probably hear quite a lot that maybe 10 – 15 years ago if there was something wrong you would write to the government about it and complain and you'd have some feeling that in some way that would have been noticed. But having seen all the stonewalling stuff that's gone on with immigration detention…I'm sure the government wanted us to see that we were getting nowhere. I've ended up quite disengaged with that side of things. Quite disillusioned. I think four or five years ago, I just realised that we weren't going to get anywhere with politics: writing letters and that. We have been fairly constrained in what we can say. How can I put it? There's a fear of the Federal government and their very repressive policies.

Introduction

This chapter explores the experiences of supporters, particularly those volunteering or working outside of large NGOs or organisations to support people seeking refuge, in terms of how their involvement in support work affects their social (in)visibility. Social (in)visibility appears to be a relatively recently defined concept that explains a social phenomenon observable across cultures and throughout history – that is, whether people may be actively or deliberately seen or unseen by other members of society (Herzog 2019; Honneth 2001). Supporters occupy a challenging but rewarding space in the support landscape where the work they do is vitally important, but they are often misunderstood by friends and loved ones, becoming imperceptible in relation to their work. Additionally, supporters experience social invisibility through processes of silencing and stonewalling by the government. I acknowledge that what supporters experience pales in comparison to what people seeking refuge routinely must ensure. I also acknowledge that supporters working within NGOs and charitable groups may also relate to experiences described in this chapter. However, for the purposes of this thesis I give additional and particular consideration to experiences of people working within NGOs and formalised charities in upcoming chapters.

As Brian's story above exemplifies, supporters often undertake their work with limited outside encouragement or assistance from others and may have only tenuous affiliations to any formal organisations or none at all. As exemplified in the introduction, the work can be complex, demanding, and deeply personal. Supporters may have many connections to other supporters through online avenues like Facebook, Twitter, or email, or none at all. Where such connections do exist, they may be to supporters in other states and territories in Australia with very few in South Australia or Adelaide. Even with connections, they still may undertake the bulk of their day-to-day support work mostly alone. They receive little to no support from government representatives or departments at any level, be it local, state, or federal. Despite support activities accounting for so much of their time, energy, and meaning in their lives, supporters' testimonies indicated to me this 'aloneness' means they often feel unseen and unrecognised as they go about their work.

In this chapter, I first seek to understand the desire of supporters to be seen and recognised as they undertake their work. I argue social recognition is important for supporters as it affirms and validates their moral worth and the worth of their activities (and the beneficiaries of those activities). I then draw on literature surrounding notions of (in)visibility and (im)perceptibility to explore the experiences of supporters as they navigate and negotiate the private and political spheres of their lives. (In)visibility relates to the extent to which people are actively seen and recognised by others in society (Herzog 2019). (Im)perceptibility relates to the extent to which people are not only seen but understood (Smith et al. 2018). Drawing on supporters' testimonies, I first illuminate how social (in)visibility and (im)perceptibility affect their personal relationships. I then detail how processes of stonewalling and silencing constitute tools of social invisibility. I explore how these tools are utilised by the government to render supporters somewhat socially invisible in the political spheres of their lives, in turn hindering their efforts to provide support for people seeking refuge. I argue the combined experiences of social invisibility and imperceptibility can erode supporters' personal relationships, senses of self, identity, and resilience.

The importance of being seen and recognised

Arendt (1998, p. 179) argues that,

> In acting and speaking, men show who they are, reveal actively their unique personal identities and thus make their appearance in the human world…This disclosure of 'who,' in contradistinction to 'what' somebody is—his qualities, gifts, talents, and short-comings, which he may display or hide—is implicit in everything somebody says and does.

But it could be argued that neither acting nor speaking count for much if actions and words are not seen or recognised by others in a social world. Müller (2017) argues that 'being seen' (being visible) makes us identifiable entities that are: subject to social and moral orders; necessarily concerned with others; and thus, public beings. He also says, "Seeing also means deciding whom we want to see…" (Müller 2017, p. 373), alluding to the subtle difference between simply seeing a person or *recognising* them (or not) according to particular characteristics and for various reasons. These ideas echo Jackson's (1998, p.6) notion of intersubjectivity, "the interplay between subject and object", whereby the way an individual understands their own world and circumstances is influenced by how they experience and

interact with other objects in society. This includes exploring how we exist and how our identities are formed in relation to our interactions with others (Jackson 1998). Through speaking and acting in particular ways, individuals in the support community in South Australia construct, affirm, and reveal themselves as supporters to the world. Being seen and recognised as supporters by friends, loved ones, and in the wider social and political milieux is of significant importance.

Participants of this research have a strong desire to be seen and recognised as supporters, but their testimony suggests this generally does not come from a place of vanity or narcissism. Their desire to be seen and recognised does not appear to be about receiving accolades for work done (though many are deserving of such), nor about boosting the ego. From what I observed, supporters understand being seen and recognised as important for two main reasons: first, to validate the worth of what they stand for – namely, the rights of people seeking refuge; and second, to strengthen their senses of self and identity as moral beings striving to live 'truthfully' (as discussed in Chapter Three). From a purely pragmatic perspective, being seen can mean the difference between dealing with challenges alone or sharing the load (as exemplified by Brian's story). As Mabel shared over coffee, she would much rather that her friends "Give me a hand. Don't heap praise on me. Just **do something.**" (Her emphasis). Supporters in this cohort desperately want their actions, messages, and efforts to be visible and recognised by others as important, worthy, and meaningful in the hope they might make a difference or achieve an outcome (or steps towards an outcome) for people seeking refuge. Elizabeth, age 74 and an outspoken and highly politically active supporter of people seeking refuge, captures the importance of visibility well. Initially, she had told me she is too old to care what people think of her. However, her further testimony strongly indicated this should not be interpreted that she is okay with being unseen or unrecognised. Quite on the contrary, Elizabeth said:

I am ok… but at the same time, I am not ok because I live in the world, and I want a world that is fair and decent. That is the bottom line. I'm tired. But if I just quit, it is like I have let the bastards win. I have just turned my back. Instead of saying, 'no I am in a position, I am going to be a voice and say, this isn't right'. I have to draw a line in the sand and say 'no, this is not the Australia I would like to be in'. I am a citizen still, no matter how old I am. Am I really going to say, 'I am just going to shut my eyes and pretend, no it doesn't matter, I am 70 now and I am all right, I won't say anything' or, 'hang on a minute, I don't want that done in my name'. I might not get a lot of people speaking out but sooner or later… people are now starting to have a conscience about it, I think. That might hopefully bring change.

Elizabeth's testimony highlights that she very much cares about standing up for what she believes is right, in line with who she believes herself to be in her 70^{s}, rather than closing off to the world. This comes from a need to 'be herself', to reveal herself as an active citizen (with all the rights and responsibilities that confers upon her) – confirming her intention to continue being socially and politically active. According to Arendt (1998), to live a socially and politically 'active life' is fundamental to our identity and humanity. Elizabeth talks about 'not letting the bastards win', referring to the Australian government that we had been discussing earlier. Furthermore, she also talks about 'getting people speaking out' which indicates a hope that her moral stand, words, and actions might motivate others towards change.

Elizabeth's testimony exemplifies the importance of visibility, being seen and recognised, that is echoed by many supporters. They have a strong desire to be both socially and politically visible: seen and heard by the government, but also by their friends, loved ones and wider society: not to receive praise, but in the hope they might influence and inspire change. For supporters like Brian, to be unseen or unrecognised constitutes not only the denial of their moral worth but importantly, the moral worth of who and what they stand for (Müller 2017). At best, this may translate to a weakening of their social ties and relations. At worst, supporters are deliberately and actively silenced and prevented from fully participating in political and social settings, resulting in a kind of social invisibility.

Social (in)visibility and (im)perceptibility

As mentioned in the introduction, social (in)visibility relates to whether people may be actively or deliberately seen or unseen by other members of society. Herzog (2019, p.76) states that "to be invisibilized socially, one must first be physically identified, that is, visibilized." While this statement seems reductive, this basic observation is important because it alludes to the fact that in(visibility) is linked to a deliberate act of (non)recognition between parties. One party must first recognise another in order to ignore them and thus, deliberately fail to recognise them (Herzog 2019). Such invisibilised persons might traditionally include socially stigmatised and minority groups (such as those identified by Goffman (1968)) or women, who at times have been rendered physically invisible through segregation, or socially invisible through denial of their social worth (Herzog 2019). In his theory of recognition, Honneth (1996) suggests a person is *rendered socially invisible* when one party does not consider the other party as having the same social and moral worth as they do. As a result they 'look through' that person as though they do not exist, denying them recognition and esteem that is so important to their sense of self and identity (Herzog 2019; Honneth 1996).

Processes of social invisibilisation can extend beyond deliberate attempts to ignore or 'look through' certain individuals or groups. Invisibilisation can refer not only to the physical absence of the other, but also to the invisibilisation of their lived experiences, or characteristics that make them worthy of love, respect, and social esteem (Herzog 2019, p.77). Invisibility also links to structural marginalisation of people and/ or groups, silencing or oppression of people's experiences and voices, and denial of their moral worth (Herzog 2019). Examples include Apartheid, where black African people were prevented from being present in physical spaces designated only for white people, or historical expectations in many western countries that people with severe disabilities should be removed from society and housed in institutional spaces, or that a woman's place was in the home, not in the workplace. Actions like censorship, stonewalling or secrecy may constitute acts of, or attempts at, social invisibilisation and structural violence, as they are wielded effectively to also silence and marginalise (Post 1998b; Horn 2011; Carter 2006; Galtung 1969). This can in turn affect social cohesion, which may explain antisocial outcomes such as violence, crime, and other social unrest.

It is important to note that, in real-world circumstances, (in)visibility is likely experienced on a spectrum. People and groups are never totally visible or invisible to all in wider society. For this reason, Smith et al. (2018) prefer the term 'imperceptibility' to 'invisibility' because this term recognises that viewer(s) may see other person(s) or group(s) but find them "…difficult to see, or difficult to understand" (Smith et al. 2018, p. 56). In such circumstances, people are seen but not necessarily understood. This poses challenges for recognition as viewers may not know how to consider the other party as having the same social and moral worth as they do (Herzog 2019; Honneth 1996). Additionally, Smith et al. (2018) acknowledge that whilst (im)perceptibility may be put upon us, the process of becoming imperceptible can be used a tool of resistance; a deliberate strategic choice, a principled action, that one may make in order to 'fly under the radar' or avoid an 'identity trap' (Smith et al. 2018). In doing so, Smith et al (2018) enable more nuanced ways of considering what it means to 'be seen' and recognised in a social world. Their ideas suggest that individual (in)visibility or (im)perceptibility not always determined by others but can be self-determined and used to navigate or negotiate our social circumstances. I draw on both notions of social (in)visibility and (im)perceptibility throughout this chapter to illuminate the experiences of supporters as they navigate and negotiate the political and private spheres of their lives.

Becoming imperceptible

As observed in Chapter Four, personal connections with others are often what sustains supporters, so when they are rendered socially invisible by friends, family, and loved ones for engaging in activities that are highly meaningful to them, the effect on their resilience is noteworthy. Roth (2016) notes that activism (and presumably associated beliefs and motivations for activism) can be embedded in the everyday lives of participants, having biographical consequences on their social relations with others, such as friends, family, or co-workers. This is apparent amongst participants of this research. Supporters sometimes experience a degree of social invisibilisation or imperceptibility when and if they engage in public advocacy, such as protesting on the steps of parliament or trying to get people to sign petitions. In these circumstances, members of the public often purposefully look away, or avoid eye contact in an active effort to avoid recognising supporters. However, where social invisibilisation and imperceptibility most affects supporters' senses of identity and resilience is when it occurs amongst people that matter to them such as amongst friends, family, and

loved ones. In these circumstances, imperceptibility is more common as it occurs at the individual level and affects individual relationships where people are known to each other but may not understand each other. This is qualitatively different to a person experiencing social invisibilisation or stigma on a widespread social scale on account of something like their race or gender (Goffman 1968; Herzog 2019). However, complications arising from degrees of imperceptibility or social invisibility may result in partial or complete loss of important relationships. For some supporters the loss of these personal relationships is deeply painful and life changing, but for others the loss is like the shedding of skin, providing the freedom and opportunity to become more authentic in their work and to establish new relationships with likeminded people. I asked each participant if they undertook their work with the support of people that matter to them. Their answers confirmed a range of experiences as suggested above.

One couple, Malcom and Jenny, have been involved in many social justice activities, including support, over some years. They described experiencing a degree of imperceptibility from friends as a result of their friendships and support activities with refugees and asylum seekers:

> Jenny: *…Not everybody agrees with what we are doing out there. So, when you talk about the Sudanese wedding or what you have been doing on the weekend at Inverbrackie, or any things to do with social justice, some people sort of look at you sideways. They think "Oh yeah, you just protest against anything and everything." We are sort of branded – 'The Protesters.'*

I asked them how they managed those difficult interactions or if they just avoid speaking about the topic. They replied:

> Malcolm*: We avoid it.*

> Jenny*: Yeah, we do, we avoid it. But that's not the* ***real*** *us. But what can [we] do? We love [our friends] in so many ways, but we're not really on the same page. I think I am doing what is right. I wouldn't do it any other way. We have even got a good friend in Sydney who says "now you are going off to Cabramatta aren't you? - To see those refugees." I'm offended by that. [There's a] slur in that: "Why would you bother to go and see those people from another country?"*

> *I will never change my views and that is why I suppose I stick with some of those people who have a go at me - because there are so many other parts of them that I like, and it is very hard to just drop everybody who says anything about what we are doing. But there are a few of those who put in little snide comments, and we have let them go, because we are staying firm.* (Her emphasis.)

Social imperceptibility has had considerable effects on some of Malcolm and Jenny's friendships. Malcolm and Jenny appear to accept that aspects of themselves remain necessarily imperceptible and misunderstood in order to negotiate tension in their friendships (Smith et al. 2018). Jenny indicated that, to preserve friendships, she tries to focus on what she likes about her friends, acknowledging it would be difficult to end friendships with everyone who disagreed with their actions. This suggests she lets contentious moments slide, though she may feel like fighting back. Malcolm and Jenny indicated they believe pursuing perceptibility would involve direct confrontation with their friends, which could damage or end friendships. Therefore, by remaining imperceptible, Jenny and Malcolm retain their 'real' senses of selves whilst avoiding confrontation. However, Jenny's comment, "That's not the **real** us", indicates her personal discomfort that they must conceal parts of their 'real' identities to preserve friendships. Her comment about friends 'not being on the same page' also signals the lack of understanding between parties contributing to imperceptibility. Additionally, Jenny indicates that she and Malcolm have felt the need to end friendships to maintain their ongoing commitment to people seeking refuge and to their own beliefs and values that sustain their involvement. Lisa, a supporter who has been involved in support internationally since 1991 and in South Australia since 2013 says,

> *I often feel exhausted. I think that comes from the lack of support, the criticism, and I know that shouldn't affect me, but it is exhausting. Because my life has always involved people from other countries or refugees, if people ask me how my week has been, it usually includes discussion of them and my involvement with them. I did notice in some circles, they thought I was always sharing some of that to make a point, when I wasn't. It was just part of my weekly life. So, there are some groups, I withdrew from because it wasn't helpful for my mental health. I changed what groups I interacted with because some environments are not as supportive. How do you maintain a steady voice without burning out?*

Lisa's testimony highlights how her resilience is challenged because of criticism she receives as she tries to live a cosmopolitan life, interacting in cross-cultural exchanges that are normal for her. As a result of feeling imperceptible, Lisa reveals she chose to change the groups she was mixing with, presumably to seek out connection with people who might understand her (and therefore 'see' her) more clearly (Smith et al. 2018). As I explained in Chapter Three, cosmopolitan beliefs are extremely important to supporters and acting in alignment with them is imperative. Additionally, being heard is key to expressions of self and identity (Weidman 2014). Lisa indicates that becoming imperceptible through being misunderstood wears her down, and she shares concerns about how to maintain her voice in the face of exhaustion. Reactions Lisa received from people in her social circles became increasingly challenging to her sense of resilience, leaving her with little alternative but to change her social interactions and connections.

Long-term supporter and faith leader, Daniel, recounted the social ramifications of his choice to support people seeking refuge. He described processes of social invisibilisation as his friends actively avoided him, disappeared from his life, or ended their friendships with him, indicating their unwillingness to support him in his choices. Other friends and members of his church community actively went on the attack, making considerable attempts to vilify him in shared social circles. Daniel shared,

> *I sought support from within my tribe, but there wasn't a whole lot around… There were relationships ended because of this…They* ***were*** *friends but…* (He trails off). *It wasn't because I cut it off. It was because* ***they*** *cut it off because they could not approve of me either being involved in advocating for asylum seekers. And so, they would either disappear or they would just give me a wide berth and just cut me adrift in relationship. But some people had taken to social media or other platforms to put my name through the mud and bring other agendas into that. So, I have been quite happy to see the end of those people because I just block them, or I don't talk to them anymore.* (His emphasis.)

Honneth (1996) argues recognition is critical to the development of our identities. He argues that people struggle for recognition in life in relation to love, rights, and solidarity, and a lack of recognition has serious impacts on their personal and social esteem (Honneth 1996). Though Daniel indicated in some instances he made the decision to block certain people on social media or cease communication with them, as he recounted his story, I observed sadness and disappointment from him that his friends had not stood in solidarity with him regarding refugee rights and welfare. Daniel told me that having support from people that matter played a big part in enabling and encouraging him to carry on. It was very important to him that friends and loved ones recognised his support activities as worthwhile and morally right. Herzog (2019) links such recognition with resilience. It is therefore understandable that the lack of support from Daniel's friends and loved ones might negatively affect his resilience.

One participant, Jane, told me she has been fortunate to experience a lot of encouragement and support from her family in relation to her efforts on behalf of people seeking refuge, but her friendships have suffered. She said:

> *I've lost friends. People would just say, "Stop it." But it was my life, [though they] talk about it like it was nothing… And, really surprisingly, my church didn't support me. I'd been going to that church for decades; I've left now...because the minister told me never to speak of refugees in the church again...there were lots of tears.*

After three decades of involvement in her local church, Jane was devastated by how quickly the church and its associated community sought to silence her when she spoke up in support of people seeking refuge. She was also disappointed to find that some friends could not abide her beliefs and actions. In saying, "it was my life [though they] talk about it like it was nothing" she indicates the extent to which she associates her sense of self and identity with her work and describes the invisibilisation of her lived experiences and denial of her moral worth as described by Herzog (2019). Jane indicated to me that disregard for her work (which she equates with her life), as well as rejection and silencing by the church and her friends, was a double rejection— of herself and her refugee and asylum seeker friends for whom she has great care. This experience had a significant effect on Jane's resilience. Her church-based social connections broke down; she was left questioning her faith and re-evaluating her level of involvement.

For some supporters, processes of imperceptibility and invisibilisation cause supporters to re-evaluate and adjust their social circumstances, leading to more sustainable relationships. Levi, a long-term supporter in both voluntary and paid work also indicated to me that some of her friends were unwilling to accept her as her priorities changed in light of her volunteering experiences. She says,

> *My circle around me changed. The two people I would have considered my best friends are gone. Totally. [We are] not even friends on Facebook anymore because I changed too much…. I want to say to my best friend, "you didn't even need to be part of the asylum seeker or refugee stuff. You didn't need to be a part of it. We can just hang out and go to a movie. You didn't have to hate me." But I could no longer go shopping for a $200 pair of jeans with my friends. I just couldn't. The superficial conversations drained me. I have gone back to who I really am, and they don't like that. I had to undo my unconscious xenophobic bias. It was built in.*

In Levi's case, though she expressed disappointment that her friends were unable to understand the change in her beliefs and choices, she appeared to accept that this was the way things needed to be for her to be 'who she really is.' She seemed relieved that she is now able to do that; indeed, she has since been heavily involved in support work. This suggests that in Levi's case, becoming imperceptible and then socially invisible to her best friends became the catalyst for an adjustment in her own priorities with some unexpected or unintended consequences. Levi's decision to 'be herself' contributed to her resilience and longevity in support. Levi gave me the impression that, in the scheme of things, her old friendships had ceased to matter as much to her as her newfound connections with likeminded people and the people she supports. In this sense, I suggest that Honneth's (1996) notion of social invisibilisation may only negatively impact on the personal esteem of the recipient if executed by people 'who matter.'

My analysis reveals that degrees of social invisibility and imperceptibility are endemic within the social relations of supporters and those that matter to them. Failure (whether deliberate or otherwise) of friends and loved ones to see, understand, and recognise supporters has biographical consequences, including the potential to significantly affect the personal

esteem and resilience of supporters. However, the extent to which this affects them appears to depend upon the depth of the relationships and the degree to which people are prepared to accept the prospect of at least some social invisibility on account of their choices to participate in support work. For most supporters, loss, or curtailment of relationships with friends and loved ones is a sad but inevitable consequence of engaging in support. Despite this, most carry on doing the work, but the lack of encouragement or care makes it that much harder, especially as they also face social invisibilisation by the government through processes of stonewalling and silencing.

Becoming socially invisible

Most supporters, at some point during their support journey, have experienced degrees of social invisibility through processes of stonewalling and silencing. Typically, if a supporter has been involved in making a difference for a person or people seeking refuge for some time, they will find themselves taking responsibility for, or involved in activities and processes connected with achieving outcomes. As previously stated in Chapter Four, achieving outcomes relates to the securing of medium to large-scale, often life-changing outcomes for individuals, families, or groups (such as securing visas, freedom from detention settings, employment and/ or education opportunities). It is at this point not only do the stakes become much higher for all involved, but it is also the point at which supporters may have cause to become quite politically and legally active (if they are not already) in pursuit of these outcomes. This is also the point at which they are likely to experience considerable silencing and stonewalling by governments and government agencies.

Stonewalling, according to Welch (2012, p. 331) is a tactical barrier, a *wall of governance*, that the government erects to reduce transparency and accountability during the asylum process. Stonewalling can be understood as a tool that is utilised (in this case by the Australian government) to establish a discursive field, acknowledging some speech, but marginalising others; thereby effectively giving voice to some and silencing others (Post 1998b). Supporters seeking to engage with the government are met with a 'stonewall' systematically and regularly, that often conceals information and offers nothing but silence. Stonewalling also silences supporters as they attempt to advocate for people seeking refuge. Letters to ministers of local, state, and federal governments receive automated replies or sometimes no replies at all (despite clear requests for responses), layers of bureaucracy send

people in circles without answers to important questions, and legal and governmental processes can take years without updates. This stonewalling has also been documented by other researchers and authors in the broader Australian support context (c.f. Mares & Newman 2007; Briskman 2008; Gosden 2006; McPhail, Nyamori & Taylor 2016). Whether intended or not, these stonewalls serve to socially invisibilise; if individuals are not seen and not heard then they cannot effectively demand recognition and can thus, be easily ignored (Welch 2012; Herzog 2019; Post 1998b). All the while, well-meaning people, and those they support, are left without answers, certainty, or avenues through which to be acknowledged and heard. Grievances are nuisances that are ignored, unless a person or group can mobilise large sums of money and leverage powerful legal connections required to make progress. Even then, there is no guarantee of achieving a good outcome.

The stonewalling and silencing supporters experience as they work to achieve outcomes is one of the biggest threats to their resilience, as this is where the biggest power imbalances in the asylum-seeking process and the refugee experience are found. Push too hard and there is a perceived risk of jeopardising critical outcomes for people seeking refuge; fail to push hard enough and there is a sense of simply giving in and giving up, which begs the question of most supporters, why do it at all? Considering the moral code that drives supporters to do what they do; the latter is hardly an option. Therefore, supporters must navigate and negotiate this tricky terrain.

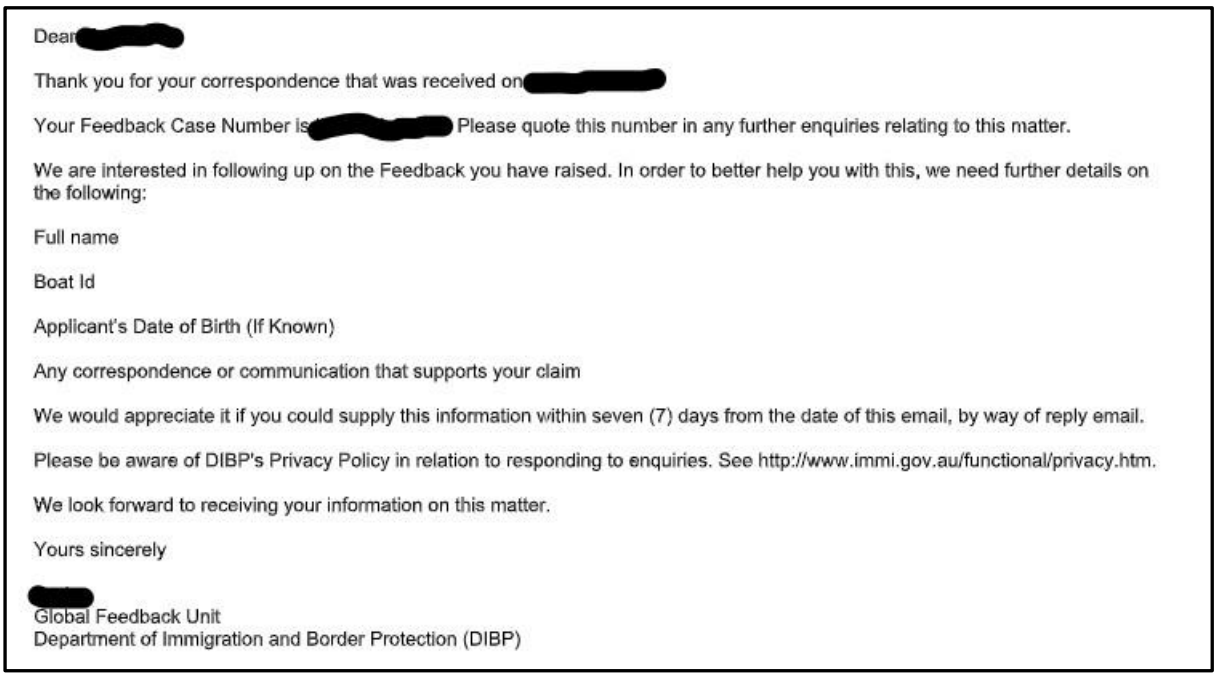
Invisibilising tools such as stonewalling and silencing are easily wielded through processes, interaction, and engagement that can be impersonal by nature. Letter writing is one such example, particularly in relation to written communication between politicians and constituents where they are not necessarily personally known to one another. Supporters of people seeking refuge often engage in letter writing to politicians and government officials as a key means to express and register their grievances and concerns relating to immigration matters. Dierks (2011, p. 282) argues through letter writing, people articulate "…their own standards for communication and expression, social order and change, and personal identity and agency…[these form] the practice and privilege of defining the terms of one's position and agency in life." Ralph (2020, p. 199) also notes, letters incorporate "a felt sense of who the author is and what the author wants." Thus, I posit letters are material artefacts that give form and expression to thoughts, feelings, and wishes of supporters, but also to their senses of self and social visibility. Supporters place these on the public record, making them tangible, and thus, recognisable. Letter writing also constitutes processes of exchange and

reciprocity where the writer often sends a letter in anticipation of the reply (Mauss 1990). But the letter may or may not be read by its intended recipient. It may or may not receive a response. It may be read, but not afforded any degree of importance. It may be actively ignored or rejected outright (*ABC News* 2015). Thus, letters can create or prevent recognition between individuals and groups depending on whether the sender is afforded recognition by the recipient. Omar, a professional working to provide mental health support for refugees and asylum seekers, said:

> *I have written some sort of generic letters… "This is not good enough, you need to do something about this" … but more often, my letters are related to a particular episode and sent to somebody. You know some prime minister is never going to see it and some public servant is going to respond to you. Even if I don't get a response, I am hopeful that it is going to cause a bit of anxiety and distress to the person I am sending it to. But yeah, a family member works in the public service in Canberra and so I have got a fair idea about what happens to our petitions and letters and stuff…. So, I am not overly optimistic about them making a difference.*

Even though Omar openly admits he does not anticipate that his letters will receive responses or make a difference, he still takes the time to write. However, he sounded downcast as he confessed, he does not know if he has made much of a difference and that he often wonders if he could have done more. He then reflected on the restricted circumstances he has had to work in and conceded he has probably done all he can. This was common across the participant cohort. On the one hand, supporters were quite cynical about the efficacy of their letter writing efforts. They indicated that nine times out of ten they anticipated no reply, effectively facing a stonewall and silence (Welch 2012; Post 1998b). On the other hand, those that continued to write letters indicated they did so for three main reasons. They felt it was important to continue to try and make themselves and those they support visible (Honneth 2001; Herzog 2019); they felt it was important to have their questions, concerns, and grievances placed on the public record (Weidman 2014; Müller 2017); and often they felt there was little else they could do.

Stonewalling not only occurs in relation to general correspondence between supporters and the government, but also in relation to specific, urgent, and sometimes life-threatening circumstances. Gwen, a long-term supporter who is well versed and highly skilled in letter writing, political, and legal advocacy, wrote to the Department of Immigration and Border Protection responding to urgent concerns raised by a supporter about a terminally ill asylum seeker in mandatory immigration detention. She provided all relevant details relating to the case, including the individual's name, boat ID and date of birth. She received back a suspected automated reply (see Figure 2). The reply asked for information that had been supplied in the initial correspondence from Gwen, through this was not acknowledged or recognised, suggesting her original email had not been read. Many supporters within my participant cohort and in the wider Australian support sector indicate that such experiences characteristic of stonewalling are common and even routine (c.f. Millwood Consulting 2015; *ABC News* 2018).



Dear [redacted]

Thank you for your correspondence that was received on [redacted]

Your Feedback Case Number is [redacted] Please quote this number in any further enquiries relating to this matter.

We are interested in following up on the Feedback you have raised. In order to better help you with this, we need further details on the following:

Full name

Boat Id

Applicant's Date of Birth (If Known)

Any correspondence or communication that supports your claim

We would appreciate it if you could supply this information within seven (7) days from the date of this email, by way of reply email.

Please be aware of DIBP's Privacy Policy in relation to responding to enquiries. See http://www.immi.gov.au/functional/privacy.htm.

We look forward to receiving your information on this matter.

Yours sincerely

[redacted]
Global Feedback Unit
Department of Immigration and Border Protection (DIBP)

Figure 2: Automated reply received from Department of Immigration and Border Protection responding to urgent concerns raised by a supporter about a terminally ill asylum seeker in mandatory immigration detention.

One could be forgiven for thinking the extent of supporter grievances in relation to the government relate to unanswered letters. However, it is important to understand that the experiences of supporters via this mode of communication are emblematic of a wider trend.

The majority of my participant cohort are around or over retirement age. As exemplified by Brian's story, throughout their lives, grievances with government could be expressed through informal avenues (such as through protests) or through formal avenues (predominantly letter writing to, or meetings with, politicians). If they contacted the offices of politicians or government departments, they were asked to detail their grievances, concerns, or comments in writing. They told me that, long ago, if they wrote letters to their local or state politicians (and sometimes even to the federal politicians) they would receive a reply to their specific concerns and potentially even an audience with them at a meeting. In short, they were seen, heard, and recognised as citizens with the right to ask questions and receive meaningful replies via the preferred and dominant avenue of letter writing. Such transparency and interaction are attributes often associated with a healthy democracy (Horn 2011; Birchall 2011). Steph is one of many supporters told me this recognition has eroded overtime. She said:

> *It has definitely changed to the point that I don't even write letters anymore. My advocacy has virtually gone down to nil. I got sick of the word-processed autoreplies, the brick wall that you hit when you wrote. You never got a proper response; you just got word processor 1 or word processor 3: whichever template they felt like hitting the button on. It was just generic; nobody ever actually responds to what you have written… I feel an absolute sense of powerlessness that I have never had with former governments, even if I didn't like them. In the past, we could always access them, even the Minister. Now we can't even access a lower Case Officer, let alone someone higher up - the boss, the guy at the top. It's an absolute stonewall. You know the Labor government had put in the slogan 'People are Our Business.' Scomo*[13] *quietly removed that when he became Minister for Immigration, and nobody noticed it. Nothing was said about it, and I happened to notice it one day. Oh! What's happened to 'People are Our Business'? They've removed that, but obviously they have moved more than just the logo because now people that you were friendly with and talked with have suddenly stonewalled you. It is just unbelievable.*

[13] The publicly accepted nickname for the incumbent Prime Minister of Australia at the time of interview, Scott Morrison.

Steph describes a *wall of governance,* as defined by Welch (2012), that has increased over time. Her references to receiving replies from word processors one or three and the removal of 'People are Our Business' highlights the overwhelming sense, conveyed by supporters, that they are feel socially invisible. They feel unable to connect, to be seen, heard, or recognised on a human level when exercising their democratic rights as citizens and political constituents advocating for people seeking refuge.

Jane told me about her failed efforts to advocate for people in offshore detention with government representatives regarding medical evacuations. She suggested that even when a supporter can meet with a government representative face-to-face, the outcome is typically less favourable:

> *My frustration is with the system…with this brick wall. How many letters we have written, how many phone calls we have made, how many petitions we have signed, but not being able to make a dent in that wall!? [My relationship with the government] is a non-existent relationship. I have written letters, tried to meet with them in some cases and they just wouldn't do it… [made] phone calls, and all the time, "nuh, nuh." I finally met with one guy, a Labor senator who said, 'if you spoke to everyone off the record in Canberra, they will go, "this is a really bad policy"* [14] *and they will want to do something about it, but politically, they won't do it.' I looked later and he voted against us [on a matter], even after speaking with us!*

Jane's testimony reveals the extent to which she feels she was stonewalled and denied any avenue through which to make her voice and grievances heard by those with power to effect change. She describes a 'non-existent relationship' that actively and systematically ignores and fails to recognise the efforts of supporters. On the one occasion where she was able to gain access to someone in government with power to advocate for a change in the circumstances of offshore refugees in relation to medical evacuations, it became clear to her that supporters' voices would not be heard, as their views and demands were not politically expedient. Considering this and her experiences in support more generally, Jane describes herself now as burned out.

[14] He was referring to the repeal of the Medevac Bill in 2019.

Daniel told me about his experiences over years, supporting both on and offshore asylum seekers, but unable to access or elicit any information from the government. He said,

> *[I feel] absolute frustration [at the] bureaucracy, the government's poor excuses for their policies and justification of doing what they're doing. The long, long,* ***long*** *wait times. I can't remember exactly how long we waited for the first people we started journeying with to get permanent residency. I think it was about six years back, in the early 2000's when things were good, when these avenues were available for people. Then you start working with people who've been detained offshore, and the years drag on, and there seems to be no change at all. I remember I was communicating with a guy on Manus Island through WhatsApp*[15] *and he was sending me images of people who had been self-harming. There were nooses around their necks and cuts... things like that. I just went into my room and cried. It wasn't necessarily because of what I saw - that wasn't what upset me. It was the helplessness. There was* ***nothing*** *I could do about it. Absolutely* ***nothing****. My primary role was just to help. In the end, all I could do was to keep paying for credit for his phone.* (His emphasis.)

Daniel's testimony reveals that even in the 'good times' it took six years to achieve outcomes for people. The fact he feels there is 'nothing' that he could do to achieve outcomes for people speaks to the extent to which people are denied access to appropriate and meaningful avenues to be heard and afforded rights and status, whether as citizens or recognised refugees. Daniel had written letters, organised, and attended political protests, followed required processes and procedures, joined in large lobby groups, and undertaken many, many more activities as a supporter. Despite this, Daniel clearly attributes his frustration, distress, and helplessness to the absence of avenues through which he was able to be sufficiently visible to eventually make a difference (Honneth 1996; Herzog 2019). Far from being able to secure freedom for people in offshore detention, the sum of his efforts was to keep making a difference and keep avenues of communication going by paying for a person's mobile phone. He told me attempts to communicate with the government were met with silence. As he admitted this to me, I studied his demeanour. Daniel appeared downcast, defeated, at a loss. It was clear to me his resilience and sense of self as an efficacious and recognised supporter were significantly affected by such constraints.

[15] A popular encrypted social media messaging platform.

In summary, efforts to achieve outcomes for people seeking refuge are regularly and systematically hindered as a result of silencing and stonewalling by the government and government agencies. Stonewalling (through both silence and silencing in turn) renders supporters socially invisible as they are denied access to viable and meaningful processes, pathways, and human connections through which they can achieve outcomes for people seeking refuge. This is largely due to the significant power imbalance that exists between supporters and Australian governments at local, state, and federal levels. Supporters who experience long-term and sustained stonewalling and social invisibility appear to be at much higher risk of burnout, despite their deeply held moral beliefs, convictions, and identities as supporters.

Conclusion

This chapter has explored the experiences of people working and volunteering in refugee and asylum seeker support in South Australia predominantly outside of large NGOs or organisations. Throughout this exploration, I have highlighted that these supporters experience a significant degree of social invisibility and imperceptibility as they undertake their work. Persons who participate in this kind of work are often, but not always, retirees. The support work they undertake is of a personal nature in close relationships with those they support, and they do this with limited resources and/ or training. They face significant challenges as they seek to provide physical, material, and emotional support to refugees and asylum seekers both on and offshore within Australia's immigration regime. Despite this, they find they often undertake this work in relative isolation from other aspects of their lives. I argued that supporters experience degrees of social invisibility and imperceptibility from people that matter to them such as loved ones, family, and friends as their efforts are either not recognised or are misunderstood. I also detailed how supporters experience silencing and stonewalling by the government and government agencies as they seek to gain and provide information about their concerns and grievances. Silencing and stonewalling are tools of social invisibilisation that prevent supporters from achieving full participation and much needed human connection in the political spheres of their lives. Throughout, I explained how these combined experiences of social invisibility and imperceptibility erode supporters' senses of self, identity, and resilience. In Chapter Six, I delve into the experiences of supporters working within NGOs and formal organisations.

Image 6: A collection of documents relating to support activities - in the home of a supporter in early 2021.

CHAPTER SIX

The governmentality of support: cultures of compliance and silence

In the latter part of 2019, I headed to a north–eastern suburb of Adelaide to meet Levi, a supporter who has worked in refugee and asylum seeker support as both a volunteer and an employee over several years. During numerous conversations between 2019 and 2021, Levi told me about her experiences transitioning from a volunteer into a formal role she held in the sector and the cultural shift she experienced as her organisation (and other organisations in the sector around them) grew from grassroots efforts to fully fledged charities or NGOs. Levi first told me about her experience as a volunteer within a community support organisation:

> *At the beginning [we were] a group of people doing good things in the world. We were all connected for a common cause, and it was an absolute home for everybody who was a part of that…. [Over time I noticed that] as soon as I scratched the surface and said something like, "this person needs a pram", the door would shut. As in, the [offer of support] would shut down. I was like, "there's something going on here…I'm a volunteer in the sector, why can't you tell me why this person can't get a pram for their baby?"*

Levi described to me that it was questions like this, and resulting frustration, that ultimately led her to seek employment within the sector in pursuit of answers. Formal organisations in the sector receive funding to support refugees and new arrivals. During our conversations, Levi opened my eyes to the ways in which matters of funding and associated notions of governmentality and accountability ravage the sector and, in turn, the resilience of supporters. She told me about her transition into employment in support:

> *…So, I joined the sector. I am really glad I did. Because it gave me insight in to how this funding works. …**It is toxic.** You are too busy battling each other than working together to help people. It filters from the top. It comes from government. It comes from how it is funded. People are positioned to fight against each other. I don't think the resources that are allocated are used efficiently.*

> *I have seen the silence that happens around tables by organisations that are apparently meant to be advocating for the people but are dependent on funding.* (Her emphasis.)

Levi described to me some cultural changes that occurred in the sector over time as they became more reliant on funding (particularly government funding) and more corporatized. She said,

> *Everybody is competing for the same money. You have to find ways to diversify and stand out from the crowd. This is why people won't collaborate; it works against sharing resources and ideas. If you accept government funding, you cannot bite the hand that feeds you, so you will never hear people say anything bad about the funding or the government* ***ever, not any government.*** *It is just business; everything comes with ties. I have had my hands smacked a lot by people internally and externally because I am prepared to call out nepotism. My hands are almost sawn off now. This is not just my experience. It is less than Band-Aids in a battlefield now. At one stage it felt like Band-Aids in a battlefield and now I don't even know what it is.* (Her emphasis.)

Introduction

This chapter examines the effects of workplace governmentality on workers within formal organisations in the support community in South Australia. By drawing on theory related to governmentality, accountability and audit-culture, this chapter explores the experiences of workers within funded organisations, particularly those who are dependent on government funding. I first examine anthropological theory about governmentality (Foucault & Rabinow 1991; Foucault 1995; Rose, O'Malley & Valverde 2006; Inda 2008; Ferguson & Gupta 2002), self-governance (Danaher, Schirato & Webb 2000; Foucault & Rabinow 1991; Dean 2010; Taylor 2014), and audit-culture (Munro & Mouritsen 1996; Strathern 2003; King 2017; Scott 2008; Shore & Wright 2015a, 2015b, 2003; Merry 2011), then outline the terrain of the funding environment in the sector. I explore the centrality of audit-culture in the funding environment before engaging in an in-depth discussion of the effects of funding on organisations. I detail how funding and the requirement to be accountable affects

competition, collaboration, and the identities of organisations and workers. I then delve into the cumbersome nature of funding agreements in terms of the performance of audit and reporting processes, examining how these impact on organisations and workers. I explore how and why funding agreements present challenges for recipients of support and employees of organisations to access support and employment. I then examine how funding has a significant chilling effect on free speech and dissent in the sector and look at how the need to protect funding leads to the censorship and silencing of supporters. Finally, I touch on the relationship between power and identity in the funded workplace. I argue that organisations and workers experience considerable challenges brought about by their dependency on funding, particularly government provided funding.

In South Australia, the support sector is mostly made up of NGOs. There are many support services and groups, both formal and informal, within the overall sector, which form a kind of unruly hierarchy. Examples of more formal and structured organisations providing various forms of refugee support in SA include the Australian Refugee Association (ARA), Welcoming Australia, Life Without Barriers (LWB), Survivors of Torture and Trauma Assistance and Rehabilitation Service (STTARS), Australian Migrant Resource Centre (MRC) and AMES Australia. Medium sized and smaller organisations include: local community groups such as Circles of Friends (CoF) and Rural Australians for Refugees (RAR); groups related to churches such as Mercy House of Welcome (MHW), Sophia Ecumenical Feminist Spirituality Inc. (Sophia), and Hope's Café (Uniting Church); legal and medical support groups (comprised of professional representatives from various law firms and medical practices or associations), such as The Refugee Advocacy Service of South Australia (RASSA), Justice for Refugees SA (JRSA), and Doctors for Refugees. Some of these organisations may operate in a more (or less) formal or structured manner depending on the nature of the support needed, services offered, and funding challenges. For some, undertaking support work within the sector may offer many benefits, not least the possibility of payment for services rendered, the chance to work closely with other like-minded people on larger scale programs, and service provision that may provide a sense of contributing to meaningful support. But others (like Levi) have found that working in formal settings presents a series of new challenges to overcome, stemming predominantly from financial precarity and the entailments of funding.

Formal and informal support services across the sector undertake their work in the face of significant resource scarcity, predominantly driven by a lack of finances. Over time, financial and program support to refugees and asylum seekers has been significantly reduced by the Australian government. In the 2017-2018 budget, financial assistance for people seeking asylum who are assisted financially under the Status Resolution Support Service (SRSS) program was $139.8 million. This has decreased in the following years with the 2020-2021 budget allocating just $19.6 million to this financial assistance. The Refugee Council of Australia reported that "These savings have been achieved by refusing support services to the majority of people seeking asylum regardless of need" (RCOA 2020b n.p.). A report was also undertaken by the Social Policy Research Centre of The University of New South Wales which evaluated the Settlement Grants Program (RCOA 2017). This program provides funding to organisations to assist new arrivals to settle in Australia. They found that many service providers indicated there was not enough funding. This contributed to a range of issues including problems with access to services, funding gaps, and a lack of ongoing support for people who need it (RCOA 2017). Therefore, as is common in the charitable sector overall, support organisations and volunteers work to fill gaps that government policies and programs create and/ or fail to fill (Briskman & Doe 2016; Briskman 2008; McNevin & Correa-Velez 2006; Robinson 2014; Surawski, Pedersen & Briskman 2008).

The financial dearth has a detrimental trickle-down effect on how many employees and volunteers can be mobilised to deliver services, what can be delivered, who it can be delivered to, how many clients[16] can receive support, and so on. Alongside financial scarcity there often also exists scarcity of less discernible resources such as time, skills or areas of specialisation, or political and civic support. Funding is therefore a primary concern of most organisations supporting people seeking refuge. Though these issues are significant in effective day-to-day service delivery on the ground, this chapter delves into the abstruse and somewhat cabalistic circumstances brought about by funding and its entailments. Phillips (2007) argues Australian NGOs are both 'tamed' and 'trained' by government and government funding to ensure their compliance with certain ways of behaving. This chapter does not present a value-judgement about the efforts of organisations or their workers, but rather constitutes a recognition of the significant challenges they face as they navigate resource scarcity in a highly manipulative funding environment.

[16] It is important to note that though recipients of support are often referred to as 'clients' by the Government in funding agreements, support workers and volunteers are generally uncomfortable with this terminology.

I recognise that a significant portion of important work would not be possible without funding. Indeed, funding forms the backbone of substantial, large-scale programs that can help whole populations of people seeking refuge. However, ultimately, in this chapter, I argue that difficulties brought about by funding and its entailments in the support sector present critical challenges for organisational and worker identity, and resilience. Technologies of governmentality and cultures of audit endemic to government funding increase unproductive organisational competition, reduce collaboration, crumble support networks, drain resources, exclude, and silence, reshaping organisational and worker identities. This often results in negative impacts on worker resilience, increasing the propensity of workers to leave the sector, experience significant personal moral discomfort, or burn out. Support organisations must be attuned to this and factor this knowledge into their choices about funding and resources.

Supporters, self-governance, and audit culture

In Chapter One I explored governmentality, particularly as Foucault conceptualised it in relation to the use of organisational, institutional and political power to coerce, influence, or control people (Foucault & Rabinow 1991; Foucault 1995). Over time, Foucault further determined that 'governmentality' (or, 'the art of governing') refers to the ways in which people conduct themselves in all aspects of their lives from the formally political to private activities and choices that we make and undertake (Danaher, Schirato & Webb 2000; Foucault & Rabinow 1991). Danaher et al. argue that Foucault's theorising of governmentality has informed development and analysis for many other contexts that are used in the social sciences and, echoing what is particularly useful to this research, they state that governmentality is "…as much about what we do to ourselves as what is done to us…" (Danaher, Schirato & Webb 2000, p. 83). Dean (2010, p. 43) asks "…What forms of person, self and identity are presupposed by different practices of government and what sorts of transformation do these practices seek?" In doing so, he highlights the inextricable link between self, identity formation and government, including self-governance. Self-governance refers to the idea that we can make ourselves, unmake ourselves or make ourselves differently by acting on our personally held beliefs, not only about who we are but who we want to be (Taylor 2014). Conversely, governmentality works to create new norms of desired conduct in pursuit of outcomes determined *for* people (Foucault 1997).

In Chapter Three, I explored how refugee and asylum seeker supporters engage in continual processes of self-management to create, maintain, and reinforce their senses of self and their identities as supporters. I discussed how supporter's self-care and self-manage by drawing on moral intuition and their personal moral code(s) and their cosmopolitan beliefs. I also discussed how they choose to behave moral and social ways, engaging in reflexive and rational behaviours, defining, and positioning oneself in opposition to others. In doing so they engage in governance of the self. For many, there is often an uncomfortable incompatibility or incongruence between their desires and efforts to self-govern in accordance with their personally held beliefs and identities and the logics and technologies of governmentality (such as audit culture) they encounter and must navigate as part of their work in the sector.

Audit culture imposes high transaction costs on NGOs, both literally and figuratively. Audit culture, according to Strathern (2003, pp. 1 - 4) refers to the performance of 'accountability', where, through processes of reckoning, evaluating and measuring, activities and practices of individuals and/ or groups are rendered accountable to each other, and to third parties. Munro (1996, p. 3) describes accountability as the explicit text of government and business agendas. He argues that accountability sits at the centre of power struggles in these contexts and further suggests because "we have to be *seen* to be doing the right thing", we need to change, augment or adjust our identity in kind (Munro 1996, pp. 13 - 14). Shore & Wright (2003) argue audit technologies are designed to create new norms of conduct, refashioning personal identities. They further say, "audit culture is both an experiential phenomenon and an analytical model that helps identify and theorize key processes and trends that are reshaping everyday social relations and cultural practices" (Shore & Wright 2015, p. 424). Though Rose (1999) examined a corporate movement of the 1970s to understand how 'corporate culture' could become a genuine path towards self-actualisation and fulfilment, 'corporate culture', processes of 'professionalisation' or becoming 'business-like' can also demand individuals adopt certain dispositions and attitudes, participate in activities or undertake actions that do not fit well with their own sense of identity and self-perception (King 2017; Maier, Meyer & Steinbereithner 2016; Sanders & McClellan 2014). These descriptions of accountability suggest performative processes that require individuals to somehow modify their identities to varying extents.

Thus, where audit culture exists in organisations, so too will exist contested spaces as people strive to find their fit between who they are and what is required of them. Funding is a key mediator of these contested spaces in support organisations.

Funding in the support sector

Support organisations generally operate with varying levels of financial and material funding and support, provided by government, commercial, private, or a combination of donors, with mixed consequences. Different funding sources bring with them different conditions in funding agreements. For example, some organisations may be funded by religious groups; others by financial bequeaths or deceased estate trust funds and the like that may or may not impose strict boundaries on support offered. Some money is given with no conditions, or limited conditions, but this is usually in the case of private donors. Government funding is typically provided with extensive, arbitrary, and often cumbersome conditions. In specialist areas, such as in legal support for asylum seekers or refugees where there is no access to legal aid, or in the absence of any meaningful government provisions or funding, work is undertaken on a pro bono basis or on a 'no win, no fee' basis. This means the cost of this work is mostly not recoverable.

In medium to larger sized organisations who provide settlement services, government funding often makes up a considerable amount of total available funds. Government funding may be made up of local, state, or federal funding. State and local governments may offer small-scale grants for community programs and initiatives but often the federal government will also initiate programs, and shift the cost of those to local governments at a later stage (RCOA 2014). Where settlement services funding is available, it is predominantly used for providing programs and services in several areas such as: case management, community engagement, housing, health services, employment, education, sports, and cultural integration[17] through the Humanitarian Settlement Program (HSP) and Settlement Engagement and Transition Support (SETS) Program (RCOA 2016a). It is important to note at this point that, in the support community, organisational size or structure does not necessarily translate to outcomes of a similar size, either in material scope or tangible (and intangible) impacts.

[17] This list is not exhaustive.

Support provisions often depend on funding and related allocation and can be distributed quite unevenly as there is no single system or process connecting those needing help to services. In refugee and asylum seeker support, needs are complex, often urgent, and the population is quite vulnerable. So, funding presents an ongoing and significant challenge for the support community. Securing a diverse mix of funding sources is, therefore, important for organisations as reliance on a single source can be precarious. Securing funding is also critical for the ongoing sustainability and survival of many organisations. However, processes inherent to securing funding and the subsequent reporting requirements wreak considerable havoc on the sector.

The prevalence of audit culture

Much funding in the sector is only available for services as determined according to funding agreements with donors and narrowly defined programs with measurable criteria and strict reporting requirements. Government supplied funding locks recipients into contracts or funding agreements that detail terms upon which the funding is provided –who and what the funding is for, the duration, what key deliverables and outcomes are required, and so on. In other words, funding agreements determine what is required of NGOs and their workers (Scott 2008; Munro 1999). Corporate donations and some philanthropic private donations may also have similar agreements. Governmentality, audit cultures and related processes, measurements and indicators are commonly implemented and often anticipated generally in government and business-like environments these days: all the more when tax-payer money is involved (Munro & Mouritsen 1996; Merry 2011). It is therefore no surprise that organisations who receive funding are required to meet key performance indicators to prove the success (or otherwise) of their programs and thus, their deservedness to receive continuing funding. Similarly, organisations who may not be recipients of government funds, but who may be donor funded, are also now required to account for and prove their worth and success according to donor led or donor approved measures. Hilhorst (2003) argues that the union of people and their associated knowledge, capabilities, and agency with these structural and processual constraints illuminates how 'NGO-ing' is done and how NGOs are legitimised. Lister (2003), on the other hand, argues the institutional and technical focus that often interprets legitimacy as adherence to strict processes, procedures, and discourses in organisations ignores the multi-faceted nature of legitimacy as determined by stakeholders

with different values, approaches, interests, and perceptions. Nonetheless, many NGOs and organisations (not only) in this sector are now governed by the need to be accountable: to participate in and comply with tick-box bureaucracy and 'red-tape' that justifies their legitimacy, leading to the prevalence of 'audit culture' in the sector (Lister 2003; Lashaw et al. 2017). Wendy, a former case manager said,

> *When the Liberal government came in it changed organisations a lot. We were preached to – "we are moving to* a ***business model.***" *So, that meant getting rid of people and cuts and things like that. People were put in positions of management who aren't burnt out social workers with experience of the frontline. They are people who have just managed people and numbers and spreadsheets.* (Her emphasis.)

Wendy's comment suggests that to secure funding from the Liberal government, non-governmental organisations and not for profit organisations needed to run things like a business, with a focus on cost savings and numbers rather than experience on-the-ground. Her mention of people being brought in to managed numbers and spreadsheets speaks to the prevalence of audit culture and accountability that often accompanies funding.

I was keen to understand what audit culture and accountability looked like in practice, so Levi helpfully explained typical government funding application and reporting requirements to me. She said,

> *Grant applications can take days and weeks depending on level required. In settlement services you can spend a month on the application if the application is in the millions of dollars. Sometimes organisations employ people to write those grants. You need political savvy, must understand government strategy, engage with all stakeholders for very long time, etc. At the smaller scale, I could apply for $2,000 from the local government council. The application might take four hours. They require information about deliverables, timing, etc. - all up front these days. Funding comes with a contract or agreement that tells you what the parameters are. Then what will happen is that the application can be modified, or funding can be reduced… that turns in to your project plan. That will determine what you can and can't do. Then you report how you've gone according to the terms of the agreement through the funding term.*

Cultures and processes of accountability and audit are common across government where taxpayer money needs to be carefully allocated, so in many ways Levi's experience is common. However, some participants wondered whether the level of accountability and audit is excessive in the sector because the funding is for people seeking refuge: people who appear to attract some of the heaviest regulation in the country.

According to my participants, accountability in the sector is a two-edged sword. On the one hand it can be used to ensure that services adhere to certain standards, presumably to achieve better outcomes for service recipients within the bounds of available resources, and to ensure that promised and expected outcomes are indeed delivered by service providers. Key performance indicators, policy and procedural compliance, risk assessments, checklists, and other auditing instruments can all be implemented in the interests of providing value for money, improving services, and managing risks, providing incentives and protections to workers, volunteers, and service recipients. From this perspective, organisational legitimacy (and thus, measures of success) depend on the institutional and technical understanding of legitimacy mentioned earlier (Lister 2003). On the other hand, stringent adherence to such measures can also slow down service provision, restrict access to services, limit the capacity of workers or volunteers to act in ways that feel right to them and sometimes overshadow key activities of the organisations themselves, resulting in the frustration and disillusionment of service providers and service recipients alike. As Strathern (2003, p. 1) observed, processes of audit and accountability create circumstances where 'the financial and the moral meet'. Critically, governmentality, processes of accountability, and audit cultures in organisations negatively affect both workers and recipients of support.

Funding and accountability: their effects on competition, collaboration, and identity

Scarcity of resources, the significant need to secure funding, and limited amounts of available funding leads to increased competition and decreased collaboration between service providers and support organisations in the sector, with damaging effects. Significant problems stem from the idea that 'funding begets funding.' The more grants an organisation receives, the more notoriety and legitimacy it can claim in the funding marketplace, thus the more likely it is that it will be granted further funding in the future (Shore & Wright 2015).

Owczarzak, Broaddus & Pinkerton (2016) observe that audit culture increases competition between community based organisations and creates a reluctance for them to work together across regions or groups. Participants conveyed to me that as funding for refugee and asylum seeker support has been shrinking over time, organisations will often find themselves either competing over funding opportunities or, alternatively, trying to differentiate their services from others to qualify for different funding allocations. Significant competition in the relatively small support sector in South Australia leads to unhealthy and uneasy relations between organisations.

There is a growing reluctance for South Australian support organisations to collaborate with each other in a tight funding environment. Consider an organisation that might be 50% or more government funded whilst the other 50% is funded by a mix of other donors. The 50% of government funding may be only for a specific project, program, or group of people - ring-fenced by certain criteria, but it is critical to the survival of the organisation. The other 50% may provide the organisation with enough flexibility to then help those who do not fit within the ring-fenced funding scope. When the time comes to apply for more government funding, several service providers may find themselves competing for grants and their very survival depends on it. Levi told me,

> *Because everybody is competing for the same money, organisations need to find new ways to stand out from the crowd. This is why people in the sector won't collaborate. The processes actively work against us working together, sharing resources or ideas.*

Steph gave me some background context to help me understand this more deeply:

> *When settlement started it was mainly handled by Red Cross and then all these other groups started. I think it was just before the second wave of boats came in the early 2000s. There were so many groups set up for settlement services and funding was split amongst groups. This is where the competition started. Our organisation used to refer people across to other services. Once funding was involved, if we had an issue and we would call Immigration about it, they would tell us it was not our issue, because we weren't funded for it, and they wouldn't tell us where to refer people to. They put everything in silos. If something was 'nothing to do with you' then you didn't get invited to things, you didn't find out.*

Also, when organisations lost funding, they would lose staff. It takes more than 3 years to build that experience and it would be lost because funding would go to someone else. The collaboration between groups just crumbled. You lost touch with information and the network fell apart. This pattern went on and on.

Shore & Wright (2003, p. 61) characterise audit and competitive practices that pit institutions and individuals against each other as 'dividing practices' that are 'individualising and totalising.' This division can be seen clearly through Steph's description of silos and the crumbling wider support network.

Diana, a young support worker, was eager to discuss the effects of competition and non-collaboration and how affects her and the sector more broadly. She told me that, in some instances, competition is so fierce that organisations lose sight of their core mission in pursuit of securing funding. She said,

It makes me so angry…you have two organisations trying to do the same thing but because they want to put their name on it, they refuse to work collaboratively with each other. It makes me ***so angry****. It is not about them; it is about the people seeking asylum! You might have someone who has a really good relationship with the local council who is doing great work and then another organisation comes in and tries to sabotage that because they want to have their name on it… It is so deeply ingrained. I don't know how it started and I hate it. I think it is so selfish.* (Her emphasis.)

Merry (2011) observes that corporations can be understood as social beings that actively construct and manage their identities and reputations, much the same as individuals do, as I explored in Chapter Three. In the field, I noticed workers often understand (or want to understand) their own identities as an extension of organisational identities and their reputations for delivering meaningful support to refugees and asylum seekers. That is, their sense of self and identity is relational to, and interdependent with, the organisations they work for (Roberts 1996). Organisations appear to provide an avenue through which supporters feel they might realise and enact their 'true' selves. However, when individual senses of self and identity are wedded to those of organisations, the effect on workers themselves can be profound when (in their view) things go wrong. Shore & Wright (2015b) suggest individuals working within competitive organisations that are subject to audit and accountability monitoring can experience stress, disengagement, cynicism, and burnout.

Participants who discussed competition and funding with me appeared outraged, angry, and frustrated. They appeared disillusioned that so many apparently well-meaning and committed organisations and workers in the sector could be so unintentionally 'thrown off-course' by financial precarity and funding entailments. They also said they felt somewhat powerless or helpless to change it. One participant referred to the lack of collaboration between organisations as 'prostitution of our values.' Another said when you rely on government funding, you have to 'sell your soul to some extent.' Luke echoed what many participants told me:

> *For me personally the hardest bits have been working in the sector, not working with the refugees. The self-interest [wears me down]. The number of organisations, in particular, and some individuals that make decisions for the brand over outcomes for refugees… you are not going to change anything. That is the stuff that gets me down.*

The effect funding has on competition and non-collaboration in the sector is palpable. Scarcity of resources and financial precarity have made it necessary for organisations to seek out funding sources to sustain the work they do. But funding (particularly government funding) has redefined organisational legitimacy such that successful organisations are recognised as those with significant funding grants first and foremost, since they are understood to have been rewarded by government (Phillips 2007). The quest for legitimacy (through initially securing funding) and recognition of legitimacy (through securing ongoing funding) creates new, competitive measures of success, quantified in dollar terms, documented through funding grants and agreements (Lister 2003). Funding, as a technology of governmentality, rearranges work practices, redefines success, redetermines individual actions in the workplace, and ultimately disturbs and reshuffles important organisational relationships in support (Owczarzak, Broaddus & Pinkerton 2016; Shore & Wright 2015a; Lister 2003). Supporter frustration only increases as they work daily according to the terms of funding agreements and subsequent reporting and compliance requirements.

Rituals of verification

In Chapter Five I explored the need of supporters to 'be seen' undertaking their work as the outward expression of their morals, beliefs, and identities. In the sector, 'being seen' requires organisations and their workers to engage with, and perform, certain tasks regularly and systematically to comply with funding agreements. Funding agreements lock organisations in the sector into reporting requirements which require organisations to draw data and information from project updates, quality control reporting, and various other audit and tracking mechanisms. These technologies of audit and performance and a seemingly endless and insistent demand for numbers, indicators and accountability are pervasive in the world of civil society organisations and NGOs (Merry 2005; Munro & Mouritsen 1996; Lashaw et al. 2017). Power (1997, p.123) refers to such processes of scrutiny, monitoring, and examination as 'rituals of verification', which suggests a performative element to reporting and audit activities. In NGOs focused on settlement services, databases are populated with extensive personal details of people seeking refuge and case managers are required to complete case management plans for each person. They have five days in which they are required to organise for their clients: housing, a mobile phone, bank account, food, school enrolments for any children, uniforms, school bags, etc. They are also required to familiarise their clients with their local mosque or alternative place of worship as required, connect them with a local medical general practitioner, set up accounts for their prescriptions, show them local shops and transport options, organise a metro bus/ train pass for them, and any other support provided for within the funding agreement. Details are recorded and kept about their: identity, education, travel history, medical history, and legal history, including details about court dates and immigration outcomes with the Department of Home Affairs. Reports are provided back to the government quarterly, bi-annually, and annually about each client and each funded program, as determined by the funding agreements. The huge amounts of documentation and the associated time taken to produce it comes at considerable cost to organisations.

Throughout service delivery, it is necessary to set aside valuable time for generating the necessary paper-trail of documents that will feed upcoming reports. This is important for the performance of compliance. Producing reports is time and labour intensive, taking valuable resources away from service delivery and improvement towards administrative outputs.

Administrative demands are compounded by additional layers of bureaucracy that workers encounter as they support asylum seekers and refugees in their dealings with Centrelink, Department of Home Affairs, Housing SA, and the like. This causes considerable frustration for supporters who value making a difference and achieving outcomes for refugees and asylum seekers quickly but instead find themselves overwhelmed by paperwork. As one migration agent said to me, 'We are overwhelmed with paperwork… At times, I hear myself say: "In your country you had to dodge bombs and bullets. Here, it is paper."' Another participant stated, 'It's ridiculous, the amount of 'pretend' work you have to go through to do work 'properly.''

Willow gave me a sense of how much administrative labour goes into funding application and reporting processes; time she says would be better spent delivering services on the ground:

> *Process of applying [for funding] were really robust. Three months was standard for funding application of about $2 to 3 million, over three years. We provided quarterly reports back to the government. Roughly 4 to 5 pages for each program. We might have up to ten programs, for example, community engagement, employment, housing, education, youth, homework, sports, etc. Our ability to be able to report depended on our database and record keeping. It took a lot of time.*

Steph was also keen to talk to me about her experiences working as a migration agent. She detailed how bureaucracy and compliance relating to funding drain resources, affect quality of service delivery, and take up valuable time. Additionally, she highlighted how she feels resources are wasted engaging in practices and processes that are more about 'being seen' to be meeting terms of funding agreements than they are about providing quality services:

> *The reporting is very time consuming. Settlement reporting has a checklist that goes with it. There was so much need, but you had to stay within the confines of the checklist and that's what frustrates me to no end. I have also learnt with funding tenders, there is nothing about quality; they are not interested in the quality. They are interested in whether you can do the work the cheapest. If you can tick off that you have done everything, nobody checks it. Two government officials from immigration visited us. They walked in, look around the office, meet a couple of staff. [They] asked us how we kept client data, had a glance at an excel spreadsheet and then they were off.*

> *Two people from Canberra, two nights' accommodation, all the time it took us to prepare - for 15 minutes… the years I wasted… I was so pedantic about 'we have to do this and this and this.' No, I don't! Tick the list, hand it in. Nobody is going to check me. That's why you have got such crappy work from some of the providers, but nobody ever does anything about it.*

The testimonies of Willow and Steph suggest while the funding application process appears to demand a focus on quality and rigour, there is less focus on these in the actual implementation of funded activities. Steph's testimony highlights the importance placed on completion of checklists, rather than on the on-the-ground work that has taken place, suggesting that 'being seen' to be doing the work matters more than what is actually done (Munro & Mouritsen 1996; Lashaw et al. 2017).

Steph told me about the effects that audit-culture and the requirements to complete checklists and reports had on workers. She said,

> *Our staff started to get narky about the amount of work, resentful of the workload because of the way it needed to be done. I personally was thinking about how others were doing things - cut and paste jobs on every client's report and getting the same funding as us – thinking what should we do here? Are they getting the same outcomes for people? That worried me. But I had no way of finding out.*

Shore & Wright (2003) note the requirement for workers to produce auditable records results in workers devoting their time to activities that are superfluous to what they perceive as their real, and perhaps more meaningful work. They state, "…the whole audit procedure takes on the feel of an artificial and staged performance" (Shore & Wright 2003, p.72) as employees are instructed and coached on what they should disclose for the benefit of the institutions they work for. Several participants indicated that the focus on form-filling, record-keeping, and compliance is a daily burden, distracting from work that aligns with their values. Those who spent a large proportion of their time managing reporting and compliance indicated it significantly affected their enjoyment and feelings of resilience in the workplace, echoing the findings of Power (2003) and Shore & Wright (2015b).

Levi explained to me that often the information requested or provided in reports appears to be less about funding accountability and is perhaps used for alternate purposes. She said,

> *Federal government will often want a report from you every 6 months, but a meeting every quarter. But they are often looking for what is happening on the ground, rather than how the project is going…What is happening in Sudanese or Islamic community for example. You hope it is a chance to advocate but often it is just about making it sound glossy. In settlement services, audit and reporting requirements take* ***a lot*** *of time. For an hour appointment, you will spend 2 to 3 hours doing paperwork. You don't talk about what you did that was good because then they will want you to write a case study for the minister to make him look good. You spend a considerable amount of time on political management.* (Her emphasis.)

Levi's testimony shows that suspicion about how reported information may be used increased the workload. It appears that, in some circumstances, workers have to tailor and edit information to not only satisfy reporting requirements, but to manage unintended consequences and entailments arising from the disclosure of certain information.

Willow is a former senior employee of a large settlement services provider in Adelaide. She also explained that producing reports was not as simple as arbitrarily punching numbers in to documents as information provided could have unintended consequences, so every piece of data and every indicator had to be carefully reported:

> *…You don't want to spend all your money because you need it to provide services. But if you don't report that you have spent the money then the government will want it back – and we can use that money! It is like walking a tightrope.*

Power (1997, p.1) suggests that "trust releases us from the need to check", ergo, the need to check, to audit, indicates a lack of trust. In support, there exists a mutual distrust between government and organisations. The government controls the measures or indicators through which they will both check to see that work has been done and limit the work according to parameters they determine. Conversely, organisations not only work to meet reporting requirements of funding agreements, but they simultaneously balance this with their distrust about how information will be utilised. One participant told me that case managers were required to provide reports on their clients, but if clients' criticised government funded services, their testimony was removed so the organisation wouldn't lose funding.

As Merry (2011, p.S90) points out, the governed may respond in ways "…not desired by the producer of the indicator." In the sector, reporting, compliance, and accountability are cumbersome because they require a double management process: one to manage the terms of the agreement with a view to securing future funding and another to manage reported information to protect the organisation and those who utilise their services in the context of funding entailments.

In sum, when organisations in the sector are governed by funding agreements, considerable resources are commandeered towards the performance of compliance and accountability. The organisational need to be seen to be complying with funding agreements leads to a considerable amount of time and effort being invested in completing checklists and reports that may or may not be valued or used for their purported ends. Additionally, information that is required and provided requires time-consuming political management and negatively impacts on workers' resilience in the workplace. The unease of workers is further exacerbated by funding agreements and their impacts on service access in the sector.

The capture of workers and commodification of clients

Funding agreements affect access to support services, creating personal discomfort for those responsible for adhering to terms of agreements. According to Owczarzak, Broaddus & Pinkerton (2016), audit culture inherent in NGO programs often results in individuals being denied access to programs because they will not help the organisation to meet their program deliverables. For example, a program might be funded for persons who fit a particular age demographic, or who have arrived in Australia within a specific time period. Anyone outside of those parameters who needs support would not count in the reporting related to funding. Funding agreements also determine who is to deliver services, who is eligible to receive services, and the criteria. For some workers in support organisations, limitations enforced according to these criteria conflict with their values and beliefs around fairness, their sense of job satisfaction, and their resilience at work. Routley (2012, p. 128) refers to this as a 'comprehension gap' between funders and their evaluative focus, and NGO staff providing services on the ground. This can be seen through Willow's testimony. She explained to me how people in need of support come to access services:

Refugees are assigned case managers. Their case manager from DSS (Department of Social Services) or MRC (Migrant Resource Centre) will refer them to us. Sometimes the communities themselves will refer people also… Somali, Burundi and so on. Sometimes volunteers from the community might refer them. What support a refugee or asylum seeker receives is highly dependent on who they connect with. You don't get a database of who is coming in. I would get the [statistics] from the Department of Immigration and I think, 'Where the heck are they?'… After they make contact, they have an appointment with an intake officer to assess their needs. For example, there might be a mum who cannot afford to pay her bills because she has 6 children. The intake officer will triage support according to their needs. The kids might be linked with sports or homework clubs. They will be linked with a cultural worker who speaks their language and shares their cultural background. They will be visited in their home to determine exactly what is required.

She further explains, however, that there are limits to who they can help, because of funding agreements they have with government:

To be eligible for support with us, they needed to be from a refugee background and in Australia for less than five years. If they fall outside of the parameters, we aren't supposed to help them…We were running a program and this woman had been here for longer than five years, but she stayed home to look after the children, and they weren't going to let her go into the program. I had an argument with a staff member over it… Our organisation was like a racehorse with blinkers. We couldn't step over the line because of government restrictions. We need more fluidity.

Anthony echoed Willow's sentiments, drawing my attention to issues of access caused by strict funding parameters. Anthony explains how people must meet specific criteria to access support, but these specific criteria are incompatible with wide ranging and diverse demographics and circumstances of refugee and asylum seeker populations:

Organisations are trying to get everyone to have the same story; it's more and more about fitting a mould... not so much about diversity. Our clients don't fit moulds. People do things they would never do in their own lives when they set up services.

Here Anthony is referring to the denial of services to some but not others based on arbitrary criteria. The notion that people can become 'calculable' subjects, determining their access to support services based on arbitrary timeframes and standardized criteria did not sit comfortably with Anthony and Willow's personal beliefs about humanity, fairness, and equality (Shore & Wright 2015b; Merry 2005). Willow and Anthony's frustration with limitations brought by funding was palpable.

In a conversation we had in 2021, Levi also explained to me that competition for funding leads to guarding of information and the potential commodification of people. She said to me, "everybody wants a refugee story or a refugee program because with stories and programs comes funding." She explained that, for each person an organisation supports (and this is proven through regular reporting and audit processes), they receive money, turning recipients of support into valuable commodities. This means 'capture' of participants is common. Participants told me some organisations have been known to restrict support recipients from accessing funded programs and services offered by other providers in the sector to prove their success on paper in a bid to secure future funding. This was confirmed by Willow who said:

We have had people who want to come to us to access particular services or programs, but they have been told that if they come to us, they cannot go back to the other organisation that they are registered with. They have been told they have to make a choice. This comes down to the competitive nature of funding and the way it is structured. As I said before, with every person registered with a service, on the books, comes funding money. It is just insane because we would be offering different services to some of the other agencies, but their clients are told they can't access us. It is bullshit, complete bullshit. A couple of the larger organisations [are] very, very protective of their patch, their clients, because that is their numbers. That is their 'tick and flick.' That is what goes to the government to show how well they have used the funding.

Participants also suggested that both employees and clients of some support organisations were affected by arbitrary organisational 'rules' that prevented them from working for or accessing support from other organisations in the sector: these demands for loyalty driven by the organisational thirst to retain resources, human, material or financial. As I was told by one participant,

> *We had a staff member who worked for us two days a week and had a role at another organisation two days a week. That other organisation wouldn't let him continue his employment because he worked for us. I have also seen very highly skilled and long-term workers replaced with younger inexperienced people so they can pay them less. This is because of the aggressiveness of the funding bidding process.*

I argue that issues of access driven by funding agreements had serious effects on workers and volunteers of organisations in the sector. As Hilhorst (2003, p.125) notes, in practice, there are concerns NGOs are "…either accountable or not accountable **only** to their funding agencies" (my emphasis). According to participants of this research, in reality, there is very little focus on organisational accountability to those they support, as retaining and gaining funding was paramount. Participants indicated their fear that commodification of clients, coupled with the limitations of funding agreements and associated accountability, is leading to displacement of organisational moral identity and legitimacy in favour of corporate business models focused on capitalist-style gains. Power (1997, p. 95) states when organisational values are dominated by the demands of audit-culture, they are effectively 'colonised' by those who influence and determine the audit parameters. The work of Phillips (2007) suggests this may actually be the preference of the government. Given that, as already argued, a supporter's sense of self and identity is relational to, and interdependent with, the organisations they work for, this displacement of organisational identity presents a serious challenge to workers' senses of self and identity, insofar as they link with their moral codes as discussed in Chapter Three. Supporters are further challenged by cultures of silence, censorship, opacity, and compliance that proliferate in funding-dependent workplaces.

The chilling effect of funding and the censorial power of compliance

Government funding has a significant chilling and censorial effect on free speech and dissent as funding recipients are fearful of losing their funding if they are critical of the government, its policies, or actions. Müller (2004, p. 11) defines censorship as "authoritarian intervention by a third party into an act of communication between the sender of a message… and its receiver…, a message intended for the public but prevented from ever reaching it." This differs somewhat from circumstances where identifiable and direct authoritarian intervention may be absent, but people choose to remain silent as a result of fear or in an effort to avoid danger or other undesirable outcomes (Green 1999; Simmel 1906). Be it through censorship or silence, in the sector, participants told me the outcome is much the same; survival depends on 'putting up and shutting up.'

In recent years, Australian NGOs have been operating in an increasingly restricted space, structured in ways that appear to be designed to silence. In 2017, Carson & Maddison (2017) surveyed 1,462 people from Australian NGOs (30% were CEOs) and revealed that a significant proportion of Australian NGOs engage in self-silencing for fear of funding cuts and political retribution. In 2022 it was reported that the Australian Charities and Not-for-profits Commission (ACNC), under the then Morrison (Liberal) government issued letters that threatened charities engaging in advocacy with deregistration (Ziwica 2022). Furthermore, Phillips (2007) observed that, in Australia, socially conservative NGOs that accepted the status quo and who were passive or conformist were favoured for funding rewards and other government support. Much of this passivity and conformity depends upon either the instructed or assumed need for workers to remain silent about grievances they may have in relation to the government and their work (Phillips 2007). Through no fault of their own, the financial survival and capacity of NGOs to adequately undertake their work often requires organisations and their volunteers and workers to 'turn a blind eye' to government actions and 'keep a lid on' their responses to these actions for the greater good of supporting people seeking refuge through organisations and funding.

Testimonies from participants made it clear that organisations they worked or volunteered for were not instructed by government to refrain from criticism (as far as they were aware), lest they lose or miss out on funding. However, they noted it was a kind of 'public secret' (Taussig 1999): everyone knew they had to watch what they said, everyone knew there were significant risks if they did speak, and no one really talked about it, at least not at work.

Participants were hesitant to tell me whether they had been directly instructed by organisations not to speak, though a few admitted these matters were linked to organisational policies around the use of social media, confidentiality, and the like. Despite this, many participants of this research were keen to tell me about the risks involved with criticising the government if you work in the sector and are government funded. They indicated this has become worse over time, necessitating their silence and self-censorship at work. Steph, a migration agent who has been involved in refugee and asylum seeker support for many years reflected on the silencing effects of funding in the sector. She spoke about her earlier work for a large settlement services organisation, compared to the similar work of organisations today:

> *When I was at* [organisation] *around 15 years ago… we got huge support…we were allowed to advocate, we were allowed to speak out. Whereas now, the way this government does the funding, we couldn't speak out. We don't want to lose our funding. Nearly everybody that has got government funding is shut up.*

I asked Willow, who had worked at that same organisation more recently about her experiences. She said,

> *There were certain things I couldn't say when I was working [there]. You have to tow the party line. If you come out bagging Peter Dutton*[18] *and you lose funding, you lose your job.*

Phillips (2007) notes that government-determined frames of reference are understood by workers of NGOs as divisive strategies that seek to centralise power and control the public agenda. She also notes government frames of reference tend to conflict with ideals of social justice, equity, and fairness that so often characterise the identity of NGOs and those who work within them (Phillips 2007). Shore and Wright (2003) argue such audit technologies are coercive in nature, keen to refashion and reorient the identities and conduct of people towards business or political goals.

To protect the organisations that provide services for people seeking refuge, workers and participants of my research have had to refrain from speaking out about government legislation, policies, agencies, and ideology, though these are often significantly in conflict with their moral codes, beliefs, and senses of self and identity.

[18] The Australian Minister for Immigration at the time of my fieldwork.

This poses difficulties for supporters who often enter organisations, keen to make a difference, only to find themselves facing considerable moral conflict: should they speak out in the face of perceived injustices – holding firm to their moral codes and identities but possibly risking the resources that make critical programs and outreach possible? Or should they compromise their beliefs and senses of self to protect the limited and hard-won resources and service offerings that are available? Levi, whose experiences I referred to at the outset of the chapter explains how this often plays out in support organisations, saying,

> *Accepting government funding, especially in settlement services means they*[19] *cannot bite the hand that feeds them. You will never hear certain people say anything bad about the funding or any government* ***ever.*** *They are playing the game. It is just business. Everything comes with ties. Somewhere along the line, organisations who are not getting funding have pissed off the government. Loud advocates get cut off. Honesty and authenticity don't get you very far. Funding is shrinking at a rapid rate and once you get the funding, you are very controlled.* (Her emphasis.)

Levi clearly conveys workers are expected to refrain from criticising the government, lest they lose their funding. Her reference to 'playing the game' suggests workers understand rules inherent to the workplaces and spaces they engage in, even if they are unwritten or unspoken (Bourdieu 1986; Hilgers & Mangez 2015). Self-censorship and silence, therefore, become daily work practices requiring continual renegotiation of the balance between morals, identity, and pragmatism. Additionally, silence tends to have a contagion effect. As argued by Sheriff (2000, p.114), "silence demands collaboration and the tacit communal understandings that such collaboration presupposes." As workers and organisations adopt daily practices of censorship and silence to ensure survival, they risk entrenching cultures of censorship and silence in the workplace. This poses further challenges, particularly for organisational and individual resilience.

[19] The organisation and its volunteers and workers.

The degree of control exercised over organisations by way of funding prevents advocacy, potentially affecting the lives of refugees and asylum seekers who rely on services. Steph told me about her first experiences of applying for funding. She said,

> *I became aware of the different groups and funding issues in settlement services and elsewhere. Settlement was where I really saw that people would not speak out at all. We were made to be apolitical in a political situation. This affected people's lives. We were silenced and important issues didn't get raised. Staff aren't allowed to speak to media or speak full stop. People kept everything very close to their chests. Nobody talked about funding or what they had got. I was writing to politicians and people with power, and I was told by someone to be quiet or I would lose my funding if I speak the truth. I was aware within legal circles that people didn't rock the boat. I was told I should be careful. With this came secrecy. I was told we have to careful about what goes in to reports [for immigration]. If clients criticised detention their testimony was removed so that they wouldn't lose funding. That was the saddest thing for me. Shocking. This sort of censorship is through* ***every*** *organisation with government funding. When you are working with refugees and asylum seekers you can't advocate.* ***All*** *advocacy is stopped when government funding is involved.* (Her emphasis.)

The fear of funding loss not only silences potential critics and whistle-blowers within the sector but it also redefines and determines new social parameters of speakable discourse in the workplace (Butler 1998). Power (1997, p.126) suggests audit reports and processes are often about producing comfort for institutions; that is, they should not be too successful in finding problems or providing criticism. What is officially recorded in organisational records and program reports typically represents perspectives and measures of those with power: the funders (Merry 2005). Critically, they also render experience of refugees, asylum seekers and those who support them opaque, on a sector-wide basis. Workers may share their anger, frustration or misgivings with friends or loved ones in private, but in the workplace and in public online spaces, they engage in daily self-censorship and silencing to protect funding - which is ultimately about protecting ongoing support for refugees and asylum seekers. The degree of coercive control exerted by funding could even be understood as structural violence or political brutal silence (Post 1998; Thiesmeyer 2003; Galtung 1969; Shore & Wright 2003; Yard 1993).

One worker described feeling as though she had been wrapped in a straight-jacket and placed in a considerably smaller box than she was used to. Wendy, a case manager, told me:

> *I think in the early days I would come home, and I was very resilient. I would go on social media and post a story with attachments of facts. So, I saw it as online activism. But because I worked in a very professional, funded setting, I had to be very careful of what I said publicly… I would have a pseudonym name on Facebook and things like that, I never had anything connected to my professional work with Facebook and things. So, that was my way of having a come-back and a voice.*

For workers who specifically choose to engage in support work on account of their personal sense of self and identity, and their beliefs and moral codes, the extreme loss of agency in terms of being unable to advocate goes far beyond the very real and important frustrations of working in a bureaucracy-driven, non-collaborative and competitive sector. It actively prevents them from acting 'truthfully' in their workplaces in ways that build and affirm their sense of identity and self, leaving some to question whether they should continue their work there at all.

Increasing dependence on government funding has resulted in a chilling effect on free speech and dissent in support organisations. Volunteers and workers feel censored and silenced, refraining from criticising the government or its agencies in efforts to protect organisations from losing funding. Reported information serves to provide comfort to the government, rather than reflecting service provision as it is on the ground. As a result, workers may experience distress at their inability to act. As I discovered, the ability to act plays a critical part in workers' resilience within support organisations.

Power and identity in the funded workplace

Though technologies of governmentality and audit-culture may provide comfort for those who determine 'what matters', they can cause considerable discomfort for workers who daily navigate these cultures, systems, and processes, especially those who lack power to act (Power 1997). The effects funding has on experiences of workers within support organisations are varied with some faring better than others in terms of resilience as it relates to their senses of self and identity. Those with more power and agency (such as managers or senior employees) were often able to find ways to navigate cultures of audit

and compliance in their workplaces; even though they were not necessarily completely satisfied with the circumstances, they were able to feel satisfied with what they achieved despite these. Anthony, a manager of a medium-sized support organisation, compared what he can achieve in his role with people who may be trying to provide support and services in much more difficult settings such as immigration detention. He said,

> *It depends where you are in the system. My position here is much more, on the whole, about resolving an accommodation problem, finding someone a migration agent, setting up a community support network. I have lots of wins. Emotionally I am in a really good position, but structurally it is dismal. We all must to some degree fight the structural battle where we can. But if that's all you are doing, it has been a pretty miserable 20 or so years. I have the advantage here of being able to draw together my own personal resources and networks and I have the freedom to use all of those very creatively.*

Anthony acknowledges his position affords him workplace experiences that are more favourable than they otherwise might be if he had less agency and power. He refers to working creatively in a fight against workplace structures that may otherwise stymie his efforts.

Despite having earlier indicating that government funding limits who can be helped, Willow, a senior manager, was also able to exercise her agency and power in circumstances where funding agreements and program rules threatened a person's access to services. Reflecting on the aforementioned argument that she had with an employee over arbitrary program rules, she told me,

> *I was like, "I don't frickin' care that she is no longer a refugee, she is going into the program!" I would always try to help those who did not meet the criteria and let them attend. I just wouldn't record them. For reporting purposes, they became invisible.*

Willow refused to internalise the 'coercive norms of service delivery' demanded by funding agreements (Shore & Wright 2003). She instead found ways to both simultaneously comply with and resist workplace norms to satisfy the demands of her role in service provision and still maintain her sense of self in alignment with her personal beliefs. Both Willow and Anthony managed to bridge the 'comprehension gap' between their own values and funding-driven organisational rules by working creatively and covertly where possible (Routley 2012).

For workers with less power there is a risk that, over time, the shift in organisational culture and identity may concomitantly contribute to a shift in personal identity and sense of self (Munro & Mouritsen 1996). According to my participants, where workers lack agency to push back against ever-increasing governmentality and audit culture in government funded organisations, they either tend to leave the workplace, begin to burnout, or experience a personal shift in values to some degree as new norms of service provision are established (Shore & Wright 2015a; Lashaw et al. 2017). Anthony discussed this with me at length. He observed,

> *That is the thing about government money, issues about how culture changes... you get big lumps of government money which means you grow, upgrade everything, get new corporate staff.... the culture starts to change. It is not all bad, but some of it leads to loss of fundamental core values…everything changes. NGOs focus on how everything will comply and less on the mission. Some aspects are good and necessary, but a whole machine starts to operate about writing rules, identifying risks, on and on until ridiculous levels. I am a bit too adventurous at times, but you end up with a culture that is more about not making a mistake than doing something good. You end up with a vested interest in making yourself look good. It is very easy for people to make it part of their identity to make decisions for refugees or asylum seekers based on corporate mentality. You want to do good work, but you shouldn't allow yourself to think you are better than anyone else. Professionalisation is a self-importance machine.*

Though none of my participants admitted to shifting their core values towards organisational or government determined ideas about 'what matters', several indicated to me they had seen it happen and told me about their discomfort at witnessing people 'selling out' to corporate and/ or political interests for the sake of their careers or in pursuit of power. However, they did describe to me feeling angry, frustrated, helpless, and hopeless, or on the pathway to burnout.

Conclusion

This chapter explored the experiences of South Australian refugee and asylum seeker supporters as they undertake their work within organisations that are heavily dependent on funding. By drawing on anthropological literature related to governmentality, accountability, and audit culture I highlighted substantial impacts that government funding and associated funding agreements have on organisations and workers in this sector. Demands and restrictions inherent to funding agreements, such as arbitrary program limits and laborious reporting requirements affects competition and collaboration between organisations, access to services, and employment in the sector. The need to secure and protect funding also leads to silencing and secrecy within organisations and amongst workers. Associated transactional and moral burdens that appear to accompany funding poses significant challenges to the identities of organisations and workers. Chapter Seven explores supporters' emotional responses to their work, particularly focusing on their experiences of anger. It draws the link between anger and resistance in support and illustrates how supporters' acts of resistance are challenged in this sector.

Image 7: A collection of postcards written by supporters to people seeking refuge, photographed in 2014.

CHAPTER SEVEN

Get mad and get moving: supporters' anger and resistance

It was a hot day in February 2020 as I headed to Adelaide's western suburbs to meet a supporter who has been involved in refugee and asylum seeker support for just three years – the shortest length of involvement amongst the participant cohort. What Sophie lacked in longevity, she made up for in passion; throughout our discussion she was effusive, candid, outspoken but also vulnerable – appearing to hold nothing back as she told me about her experiences supporting people seeking refuge. She said,

> *Before this job, I didn't do any direct work with refugees, but I have always had a passion for social justice. I have seen what has gone on and I have been appalled by it. You know, the way the government have treated people, punishing them. So really, I have probably been a bit of an online activist and I have gone to rallies and things like that: mainly that kind of thing before I worked here. [It] took me a long time to understand how it all worked, a really long time. It took me nearly a year to understand the difference between a refugee and a person seeking asylum. No one really explained that to me and I had to work it out for myself. It has been a massive learning curve and I have gotten angrier and angrier.*

Sophie told me of some of her experiences in the short time she had been working for an NGO in the sector. She said,

> *One guy arrived from Nauru. He just looked like he, he, he'd been… he looked like a locked-up animal. He just was… his face was tight and strained, you know, he looked like he was carrying the world on his shoulders, and I just felt it. I felt his pain and I burst into tears and this beautiful man who bought him who was his dear friend, he said, 'he was the one who rescued me'* (voice goes up)*, and he goes 'Sophie, it is ok, 'look at me, I am happy now and in a few months' time, he is going to be happy, just like me'. We just had a group hug and I just said to him, 'I am so sorry'. I apologised to him, I said, 'I am so sorry, this is not what we wanted, we don't believe in this, and you need to understand that…and I just want to tell you that I am sorry'.*

I asked her if working in support holds any particular meaning for her and I was curious about her anger. She continued:

> *I think the anger motivates me, to be honest. I feel like I have just gotten angrier and angrier, and I have gone to my therapist. She said, 'are you suicidal?' and I said, 'no, am homicidal' (laughs). Of course, I am only joking. But I have talked to colleagues and some of my colleagues have said to me they are also very angry. You don't know what to do with it, you don't know where to put that anger. You are powerless in a way. We don't have much power in this space. My therapist said to me, 'the mere fact that you are working where you are working and you are doing that work, you are getting right up the government's nose, so just think about it like that', you know. That really helped me to go, 'ok, yes, I don't have to just get lost in this fuming anger'* (chuckles). *Umm, I can actually channel that now.*

As I wondered what else Sophie does to channel her anger, she answered my unspoken question:

> *I think, one of the things that has really, really helped me is kindness. That's where the meaning comes in. Actually, it's the practice of kindness and then seeing the response to kindness. Everybody responds to kindness. Everybody. That also inspires me and that drives me quite a bit. You know, you make that connection with other human beings, and you see that they respond to that kindness, and you become special to them and they become special to you. That's how I deal with it. Because what else can we do? Very little. I am an advocate for getting this government out, more than ever now. My anger is spreading out, it isn't just about refugees anymore. It has become wider.*

Introduction

This chapter explores supporters' emotional responses to the work they do, particularly focusing on anger. It also explores how anger links with activities of resistance in the support context. As Sophie's testimony above exemplifies, engaging in work supporting people seeking refuge is a highly emotional undertaking. In all my encounters with supporters, both within and outside of this research, I am yet to come across any individual who will claim they did not experience emotional challenges or rewards as a result of their participation in support. Even those who seek to actively suppress emotions that come up during their work admit that supporters routinely encounter emotional experiences associated with their work. Additionally, support work is often (but not always) characterised by episodes of particularly intense emotional experiences relative to 'routine' support life: experiences of emotional 'highs' and 'lows' that stand out from an otherwise reasonably normative emotional state in this milieu. Refugee supporters both in Australia and overseas report emotions relating to their work that fluctuate between both 'highs' and 'lows'; but the 'low' experience is more commonly reported (Briskman & Doe 2016; Century, Leavey & Payne 2007; Guhan & Liebling-Kalifani 2011; Larruina & Ghorashi 2016; Lusk & Terrazas 2015; Robinson 2014; Surawski, Pedersen & Briskman 2008). Such emotional 'highs' and 'lows' result from the high-stakes circumstances and processes of asylum seeking in Australia and the depth of the often longstanding friendships and relationships that develop between supporters and people seeking refuge (Peterie 2018; Puvimanasinghe et al. 2015; Robinson 2014).

Supporters involved in this research describe feeling everything from joy, elation, happiness, and exhilaration to fear, sadness and grief, worry, helplessness and hopelessness, frustration, and anger, to name a few. Some of their emotions (such as fear) are intensely private; they may not disclose or discuss such feelings with others, whilst others (such as anger) can become quite public and politically entwined, having considerable effects on their lives and experiences. In this chapter, I argue that supporters identify their most experienced emotion as anger. I first explore anthropological understandings of anger before delving into supporter descriptions and understandings. Supporters describe anger as an intense but often concealed emotion that is quite complex, challenging traditional understandings of anger. I then consider the effects of anger on supporter identities, discussing how anger constitutes a political emotion and contributes to a 'state of being' for supporters. I further

explore anger as 'moral outrage' and examine how moral outrage galvanises and motivates supporters towards productive and principled action. I then turn my attention to supporter acts of resistance. I contextualise supporter acts of resistance and explore resistance in the anthropological literature, focusing on the notions of 'everyday resistance' and 'weapons of the weak' (Scott 1985). I draw on Scott (1985), in conjunction with supporter experiences, to show that not only has their political power and personal resilience been weakened by the monolithic and hegemonic power of the Australian immigration regime but their modes of resistance have also been considerably weakened over the years.

Defining anger

While participants of this research described a range of emotions and feelings, one emotion stood out as dominant across the cohort: anger. Anger has been considered as one of a group of 'universal emotions' (Ekman 1972), but investigations of socio-cultural experiences and expressions of anger indicate that it is experienced and expressed in vastly different ways, and on a spectrum ranging from mild irritation to all-encompassing rage (Abu-Lughod & Lutz 1990). Wierzbicka (2013) also points out that there, depending on the cultural circumstances, are potential problems with understanding emotions from an Anglo-centric perspective and through the English language. Nonetheless, as with emotions, anger has also been defined in several ways in the English academic literature. Nussbaum (2016, p.17) offers an Aristotelian, highly prescriptive description of anger, arguing anger involves the slighting or down- ranking of the self or people close to the self that is wrongfully or inappropriately done, is accompanied by pain and involves a desire for retribution. Ekman & Cordaro's definition echoes this, stating anger is:

> The response to interference with our pursuit of a goal we care about. Anger can also be triggered by someone attempting to harm us (physically or psychologically) or someone we care about. In addition to removing the obstacle or stopping the harm, anger often involves the wish to hurt the target.
>
> (2011, p.365)

Ekman (1992) also argues that basic emotions, like anger, constitutes an 'emotion family', a group of emotional states that share characteristics. For example, the emotion family of anger may also include frustration, outrage, rage, and so on.

Similarly, other definitions suggest anger is a layered, multifaceted, and impure emotion, including related feelings such as frustration or moral outrage, but it does not always involve any desire for retribution (Beatty 2019b; Kim 2013). Anger can be viewed through many lenses (such as through historical, political, cognitive, ideological, affective, and materialist lenses) to give a less prescriptive and more nuanced understanding as it manifests within particular milieux (Kim 2013). It is towards this understanding of anger that I now turn.

Supporter interpretations of anger

In many ways, supporters describe their feelings of anger using expressions and terms that are taken for granted indicators of anger in American English – language that has strong resonance with, and influence on, many Australians (Lakoff & Kovecses 1987). Often, they speak of very intense emotions, describing their 'blood boiling', 'boiling up', feeling like they could 'explode', feeling 'fury', 'rage', and 'carrying anger around' with them as they navigate and negotiate Australia's immigration regime: layers of bureaucracy and red tape, and social attitudes towards refugees and asylum seekers in the course of their work. Their anger can be so intense that supporters often describe their anger as 'embodied' (Ahmed 2014). Katherine, a volunteer who teaches English to people seeking refuge describes it like this:

> *My level of anger is very high…about the dishonesty of politicians and all the stuff that happens. You know, when I see Peter Dutton's face on TV, I have a visceral, emotional response which is very different to simply disagreeing with politics. So, yes, the intensity of the reaction is in response to the cruelty and all of that hard-line stuff.*

Though supporters' feelings of anger can be very intense, it does not follow that their outward expression is necessarily intense. As shown by Sophie's story at the outset, she used extreme descriptions to convey the intensity of her feelings but indicated her outward expression was to involve herself more in her work and the practice of kindness.
I have no doubt there absolutely are circumstances in which some supporters may experience anger, akin to that described by Nussbaum (2016) where they feel a desire for retribution on others for the unfair and often cruel treatment of people seeking refuge.

But for the most part and based on their testimonies, I suspect supporters would willingly forgo any desire for retribution if they were able to be heard, make a difference, and achieve real outcomes for those they support (c.f. Chapter Four). Moreover, any real desire for retribution does not sit comfortably with supporters' moral codes, as discussed in Chapter Three, and thus, Nussbaum's conceptual notion of anger is incompatible with this cohort of participants. Several supporters indicated to me they do not wish any ill towards those with control of Australia's immigration regime, but they seek fairness and justice in the system. Retired friends, Verity and Mabel reflect on their feelings of anger:

> *Verity: I sometimes wonder if there is a sort of an anger at the world in me.* (She says very gently)

At this point we all laugh, because both Verity and Mabel seem like the least angry of people and participants. Nevertheless, Verity continues,

> *You feel as if you want to help make things right a bit, or something or other. I sometimes wonder, is this because you don't feel you have been treated properly or fairly…?*

> *Mabel: I think like Verity, I have had a sort of latent anger about unfairness and how could [immigration] do what they do to people, people who came here thinking they were doing an okay thing [by claiming asylum].*

Verity and Mabel demonstrate that the experience of anger in this cohort may not be easily observed or detected. Mabel describes their anger as 'latent', suggesting a somewhat hidden and unapparent anger, perhaps bubbling away beneath the surface of their outward expression. Anger here is not about retribution, and more about making things fair and right. Thus, though supporters may use taken for granted terms to describe their anger, the outward expression and model of their anger may not correspond to some common or popular definitions, models, actions or behaviours (c.f. Lakoff & Kovecses 1987; Beatty 2019; Kim 2013; Nussbaum 2016).

Supporters used the term ‘anger’ frequently throughout their discussions with me to convey the strength and depth of feeling about the challenges of their daily work, but anger is not necessarily a ‘pure’ emotion for them. On closer examination, supporters’ anger can stem not just from the wrongful or inappropriate slighting of the self or people close to the self that is wrongfully or inappropriately done (Nussbaum 2016), but also from other feelings that arise from, and are related to, the policies, processes, and procedures inherent to the asylum seeking experience in Australia. In short, ‘anger’ is often the term used to describe a cocktail of emotions amongst my participants, akin to Ekman’s description of emotion families (Ekman 1992). Long-term supporter, Mim tells me with a shaking and defiant voice that she feels anger at all that she has experienced and witnessed in her many years supporting people seeking refuge. She says,

> *I feel anger. It’s frustration. Helplessness. Powerlessness. Grief…* (She is overcome). *The grief is for all the wasted lives. I mean I’ve gone in to half a dozen meetings over the last year and just sat and wept at the wasted lives, the injustice, the cruelty, the shame. As someone said the other day, I’m proud of being an Australian, but totally ashamed of our government.*

Though Mim’s testimony here lists many feelings and emotions, she does not speak of these as ‘pure’ emotions: each separate and clearly bounded (Abu-Lughod & Lutz 1990). Mim combines emotions as a one would combine a series of ingredients to make a particular dish, which in this case is her experience of anger. This dish combines each ingredient but also constitutes something in its own right. Mim’s characterisation of anger as multifaceted and complex accords with testimonies of many participants and with the conceptual ideas offered by Beatty (2019) Kim (2013) and Ekman (1992).

Anger: a political emotion and a 'state of being'

Johansen, Sandrup & Weiss (2018) suggest political emotions, such as anger, can become 'states of being.' The ongoing experience of anger can become an enduring process that contributes to 'ways of being' and I posit that for many supporters this has become the case (Johansen, Sandrup & Weiss 2018). It is not that supporters are perpetually angry people but rather, ongoing threats to their beliefs (as discussed in Chapter Three) result in the continual need to reaffirm and re-enact their beliefs through action as a means to assuage anger. In simple terms, the experience of anger, both as an emotion and an affective force, becomes a regular, familiar, and somewhat normal part of everyday life for many supporters – it becomes part of 'being a supporter'. Furthermore, supporters' testimonies suggest anger amongst this participant cohort is a political emotion with significant implications for the meaning they derive from their lives and their sense of self and identity. Hage (2009, p. 69) states that "political emotions are those emotions related to our sense of power over ourselves and our environment as we pursue those goals, ideals and activities that give our life a meaning." He further clarifies that political emotions combine various elements: "the attachments that give our lives meaningfulness, the power over our environment and the power over ourselves" (Hage 2009, p.70). Thus, political emotions are experienced by people in relation to their circumstances; what they are (and are not) able to do, and how that in turn affects what they feel they can meaningfully achieve. In the supporter experience, anger is almost always provoked through their engagement with the immigration laws, policies, and procedures of the state and its numerous agencies and departments. Supporters so regularly and frequently encounter circumstances that give rise to anger that it becomes a kind of 'mode of operating' or a motivator for ongoing involvement and a driver of action they frequently draw on, contributing to a 'state of being' as 'supporter' (Harris, Hemer & Chur-Hansen 2021; Johansen, Sandrup & Weiss 2018).

By acting on their feelings of anger, supporters simultaneously challenge threats to their beliefs, reaffirm and re-enact their beliefs, and bolster their senses of identity. As discussed in Chapter Three, supporters' senses of self and identity are deeply enmeshed in their moral codes, including beliefs about fairness, cosmopolitanism, and shared humanity. For supporters who have volunteered and worked in support settings for years and decades, there are ongoing, frequent, and fluctuating threats to these beliefs.

As laws, policies, procedures, structures, and decisions of those with power surrounding people seeking refuge in Australia have become more authoritarian over time, supporters indicate that experiences of anger have also increased, signalling deep and intense dissatisfaction. Cindy is a lawyer and migration agent, having deliberately chosen a study and career path that she says aligns with her personal values and sense of identity. Cindy described to me how she frequently experienced angry feelings in her support work and how it became commonplace in her life:

> *Reflecting on my jobs for the last 6 months, what I really got a thrill out of, was being able to achieve getting the case across the line and someone getting a visa. I would often get angry, riled up, when immigration started to say things that were stupid; if they started to pick holes in a case or said things that were not reasonable and not required to be said. There was part of me that would get all 'angsty' and ready for a fight. There is a part of me that likes that, and I think it is why I did law. I really enjoy representing the underdog and the win… I wouldn't have had the patience if it was a different social justice issue. The sense of people having a safe place and being able to belong is important and being given that opportunity is important.*

For Cindy, undertaking a job that regularly invokes angry feelings brought emotional challenges, but also satisfaction. She talks of getting angry, ready for a fight, but indicates standing up for what she sees as important contributes to her ongoing motivation to continue and to be involved in the first place. Each time Cindy successfully assists someone to gain a visa, this constitutes a win – not only for the person seeking refuge, but for social justice, principled action, and her beliefs. The acknowledgement by others of supporters' angry feelings and associated principled actions are linked with the significance of 'being seen', discussed in Chapter Five. Anger, outrage, action, beliefs, and identity combine regularly and repeatedly, suggesting that anger, in many ways, contributes to a state of being for Cindy as both supporter and lawyer.

Alternatively, Maliha describes discomfort that often accompanies experiencing long-term angry feelings, telling me about her years visiting asylum seekers and refugees previously held in the Baxter Immigration Detention Centre. She says,

> *Our government was demonising these people and was detaining them. No picture of them could be shown to the public, no story could be told. But you are meeting them and learning their life, their story, and their humanity. Seeing how they were being used as sacrificial lambs (which was what they called themselves) was so* ***rage inducing!*** *I think that is one of the main factors for refugee supporters. You have this split-level consciousness: the government is acting in a certain way, and you know that is so untrue, but you are caught in this no man's land of a truth that can't be told.* (Her emphasis.)

Maliha's testimony conveys her strong emotional response to both witnessing and experiencing injustices of the Australian immigration regime. She indicates supporters face ongoing challenges reconciling "the attachments that give our lives meaningfulness, the power over our environment and the power over ourselves" (Hage 2009, p.70). This suggests supporters also grapple with and experience anger on an ongoing basis. Upon feeling anger or outrage at the treatment of people seeking refuge, Maliha's testimony suggests she wants to tell the public their story, make them visible and humanise them. This fits in with her beliefs and moral code surrounding fairness, shared humanity, and sense of self as a moral being. Cindy and Maliha are by no means 'angry people', but involvement in support brings anger to the forefront of experience for all but the most unusually optimistic or self-assured individuals. Additionally, when supporters are actively prevented from acting, such as through processes of stonewalling and silencing (discussed in Chapters Five and Six), they are left with their feelings of anger and with no real means for resolution. In this way, supporters can be enmeshed in a web of angry feelings, a 'state of being', that can be difficult to endure. However, anger often acts as a galvanising force, inspiring ongoing activities in pursuit of change.

Anger as a verb: the generative power of moral outrage

Anger is often considered an irrational emotion that results in relatively unproductive responses and actions, such as revenge or retribution (Nussbaum 2016; Bailey 1983). However, the most noteworthy observation of supporters' outward expressions of anger is that their anger appears to be less about expressing fury at the perpetrator of the wrong, and more about acting in productive ways in accordance with feelings of moral outrage. Moral outrage is the principled and public expression of anger (Kim 2013). Kim (2013) explains that moral outrage differs from other anger-related feelings such as frustration or seething. The latter feelings may involve either no individual focus (you might be frustrated at a process, or an overall situation rather than a person), or a highly individual process (you may be seething at the person with whom you have just had an altercation). As Kim (2013, p. 176-177) describes, moral outrage combines the goals of individuals with those of the collective, focusing on notions of justice, ethics, and rights. Furthermore, Kim (2013) states that because moral outrage is a principled expression of anger, it also constitutes a call to action. That is, morally outraged individuals or groups generally act based on their principles, morals, or beliefs, rather than seeking retribution or revenge. Moral outrage is justifiable anger, arising as meaningful response to deeply held convictions about what is right or wrong (Lutz 1988). It is not surprising then that Frijda (2013) indicates moral outrage is often observed in people involved in social justice activities.

Amongst participants of this research, anger is a verb. It is important to understand that emotions are not simply intangible or invisible things that one feels, but they are affective, having power to motivate us towards advocacy and action (Harris, Hemer & Chur-Hansen 2021; White 2017; Rosaldo 1980). Helen told me the story of a man seeking refuge that she and a group of friends were supporting. The anger they felt upon hearing of his circumstances compelled their immediate action. He had waited for a very long period on a temporary protection visa, hoping to be granted permanent protection so he could be reunited with his wife and children. Such was the level of distress this caused that he ended up in mental health detention on suicide watch. Finally, permanent protection was granted. However, the man was told that before he could bring his family to Australia, he had to pay the Australian government $10,000 for his detention. Helen was visibly angry as she told me the story:

> ***Outrageous bastards!*** (Her emphasis.) *So, I asked his lawyer, what is the smallest amount of money we can pay per month, and it was $100. It was going to take us 17 years to pay it. So, we started paying it. He got his family here and then 20 months later, the Labor government got in and he got all of that money refunded to him with a cheque. That's a win. It was just fantastic.*

Helen's story illustrates how supporters typically do not simply express 'anger' or talk about 'feeling angry' without engaging in some sort of corresponding action, but action they take is typically non-retributive and constructive. Hage (2009, p. 74) says "Our emotions are not the same when we experience ourselves capable of acting on what affects us rather than feel condemned to have to just passively endure it." Thus, choosing to act may serve as a coping mechanism in response to the entailments of perceived injustices and wrongs of the Australian immigration regime. But focus on action also effectively provides an alternative 'way to be angry' – a way that moves from retributive anger to a type of anger (moral outrage) that is hopefully more proactive and productive in pursuit of a perceived greater good. As supporter, Anthony, says:

> *'When I get angry or upset, I do stuff…Bursts of activity, they indicate when I am most upset. The more angry or upset I am, the more I do.'*

This is echoed by Wendy who also says:

> *I have always attempted to divert emotion into an action. Sitting around being angry or sad isn't going to help myself or them, so I need to transfer that energy into an action of how I can solve the problem. Of course, there is anger. But I divert whatever energy that creates into an action – what am I going to do now?*

Many supporters describe that, for them, acting is the natural, immediate, and obvious response to feeling angry. As I spoke with participants it became clear to me that any separation between the experience of emotion and the subsequent or corresponding action has become blurred. Though it may not have always been this way, years, and decades of work in support has fused angry feelings and action to the point that acting upon feeling angry becomes like a reflex for supporters.

This also upholds the notion of anger as a 'state of being' for many supporters. Nussbaum (2016) refers to this sort of immediate or seamless fusion of anger and action as 'transition anger', a type of anger that focuses on social welfare as the end goal – which appears to be very similar to moral outrage. There are multiple examples within testimonies of this cohort illustrating that angry feelings, expressed in the form of moral outrage, result in supporters taking not just action, but principled action, rather than seeking retribution. Supporters often attempt to find constructive ways to respond to feeling angry through participating in acts of resistance.

The shifting terrain of resistance

Supporters have been involved in resistance activities in support of, and on behalf of people seeking refuge at least since the establishment of the Good Neighbour Council after the Second World War and certainly since the Vietnam War (RCOA 2016b). However, supporters indicate that over the last thirty or so years, and especially since the mid to late 2000s, resistance has become an increasingly exhausting and fruitless endeavour. Over this time, Australia's immigration regime has become ever more hard-line and resolute about to whom they will extend or deny protection and on what basis. Despite these challenges, supporters continue to engage in acts of resistance.

Resistance in the anthropological literature is discussed as manifesting in many forms. Hollander & Einwohner (2004) highlight the challenges of conceptualising and defining resistance, but note that it involves activity undertaken in opposition to something or someone. Ethnographies and discussion illuminate the experiences of overt, large scale, and public forms of resistance (Graeber 2009; Gluckman 1953; Gramsci, Buttigieg & Callari 2011) to more covert, individual, personal or private forms (Abu-Lughod 1999; Comaroff 1997; De Certeau, Jameson & Lovitt 1980; Scott 1985). Seminal in this body of literature is the work of Scott (1985) and his ethnography 'Weapons of the weak : everyday forms of peasant resistance.' Scott explores the struggle of relatively powerless peasant workers in Malaysia, coining the term 'weapons of the weak' to describe the 'everyday' forms of resistance they employ against those with power over them. He explores how 'everyday resistance' consists of often covert, informal, and non-confrontational acts, drawing on implicit understandings and informal networks and is undertaken in this form due to the lack of any other viable options (Scott 1985).

Scott's (1985) notion of 'weapons of the weak' is instrumental for understanding the nature of resistance efforts in the South Australian support context, but with a couple of important clarifications. Some would argue supporters are, in many ways, far from weak. Participants of this research, by and large, participate in support from their privileged positionality – as I highlighted in Chapter Three. They can advocate on behalf of people seeking refuge and publicly agitate for political change with the protection afforded them by their citizenship and the laws of this country without fear of torture, imprisonment, or other harsh penalties. However, 'weakness' amongst this cohort arises from the extent to which they face difficulties in making a real difference and achieving real outcomes for people. As exemplified in Chapters Five and Six, supporters face stonewalling, silencing, and technologies of governmentality that often prevent them from speaking out, being heard, or making change. Moreover, supporters are often unable or unwilling to resist for fear of attracting unintended and unwanted attention and consequences for people they support. In the face of overwhelming hegemonic power, their acts of resistance often do little to change the prevailing power of the immigration regime, but rather they mitigate its effects, akin to weapons of the weak (Scott 1985; Sivaramakrishnan 2005).

Much supporter resistance in South Australia has moved from organised and collective actions, such as protests and demonstrations, to individual and informal modes of everyday resistance (Johansson & Vinthagen 2016). This reflects the highly asymmetrical power imbalances that force people to engage in covert everyday resistance actions rather than in such types of overt and collective resistance. Scott (1985) indicates most everyday resistance undertaken by individuals stops short of outright collective defiance of authority, because to overtly resist is simply too risky. In the context of support, overt resistance is not particularly risky, but there is a growing belief amongst this cohort that it is perhaps not effective, particularly in relation to collective actions such as protesting. Within this participant cohort, overt and collective resistance was mostly spoken about in terms of things like attending public demonstrations, protests, and rallies, though I acknowledge that collective action can take many other forms (c.f. Fleay et al. 2022; RCOA 2021; Hayes 2019).

Supporters do engage in outright collective defiance of authority by protesting on occasion; however, any resistance of this nature seldom achieves any meaningful shift in the structure or functioning of Australia's hegemonic immigration regime. Through no fault of their own, outright collective defiance through actions like public demonstrations have been reduced to little more than virtue signalling, to the degree that many supporters see little benefit in engaging in such activities. Thus, there is a shift away from these kinds of collective resistance, towards acts of everyday resistance. This can be seen in the marked decline in both the number of protest actions and attendees in this area in recent years in Adelaide.

Everyday supporter resistance and immigration detention

Supporters work and volunteer in contexts characterised by extreme imbalances of power, so they engage in acts of 'everyday resistance' as a means to redress the balance in some way (Scott 1985). They also engage in everyday resistance in response to emotions they experience as they go about their work, including anger. Supporter acts of resistance include dissimulation and false compliance and finding clever and innovative ways to circumvent restrictions and exploit loopholes in policies and procedures of the immigration regime that they find morally unjust. Some supporters undertake action they feel is morally opposed or superior to the treatment that refugees and asylum seekers experience in Australia, as exemplified by Sophie's focus on kindness at the outset. These resistance activities have been undertaken to both 'beat the system' and achieve (usually small scale) incremental but meaningful 'wins' for people with little to no power.

One key location for activities of supporter resistance over the years has been in the context of visiting people in immigration detention. This is a context that is prison-like in nature, characterised by secrecy, inaccessibility, arbitrary and capricious rules, dehumanising practices, and hegemonic power (Peterie 2019a; Briskman 2013; Fleay 2015; Hartley & Fleay 2017; Peterie 2022b). It is also a setting that provokes strong feelings of anger amongst supporters on account of its punitive nature that is apparent not only within centres, but also towards persons seeking access, and workers (Peterie 2019a; Reid & Skuse 2018; Briskman & Doe 2016; Fleay & Briskman 2013; Gleeson 2016; Peterie 2022b). Supporter, Maliha, described her experience of visiting an immigration detention centre in rural South Australia. She said:

> *They designed it to be like a prison. No windows. There was this big rectangle of sky, which is all they could see. They never got any halal food. They were all Muslim people. They had the same food day after day. Tasteless. There was a lot of corruption in the staff. A lot of contraband. One rule for the staff and one for the prisoners. They were never, ever called by their names, only by their boat arrival number. There was no contact allowed with their families for three or four years. It was soul destroying in every sense of the word. Even for us coming to visit them, they[20] made it almost impossible to get in. They had triplicate forms we had to fill out and sometimes they would just say no, even though we were approved to come on this day, this date, for no reason. Just a whim. Then you had to go through all the forms again when you got there, that took another hour. Then you had to go through like airport security, a metal detector check and I mean, we were just visiting people.*

Any resistance undertaken in this context, be it by supporters, workers, or those detained, is highly risky (Essex 2020; Peterie 2022b). Resistance in this milieu by supporters can result in a total ban from being able to gain access to centres in future. Additionally, supporters worry about whether there might be repercussions for those they support. Despite this, many supporters have taken action to resist what they see as unfair and unreasonably harsh rules and regulations inherent to the daily running of centres.

Some acts of resistance in the context of immigration detention involve covert activities that directly defy the rules. When supporters visit immigration detention centres, the lists of prohibited items that cannot be taken in to centres are expansive (Peterie 2019a, 2022b). Mim told me about some of her responses to what she described as the arbitrary, intransigent, and seemingly puerile rules of immigration detention in relation to her experiences some years ago visiting the Baxter Detention Centre. She said:

> *We were shocked by the prison like nature of things…I can remember* [name] *wanted to do some sewing and she didn't have any needles and that was the time when you couldn't take anything. I took a wheel of needles hidden in my knickers. I had a metal zip in my jeans so I thought they could detect the metal zip… I can remember that at one stage we took a map in. That was confiscated; someone could plot their way out.*

[20] The immigration detention centre operators.

> *We had to take things like moisturiser with 0% alcohol… Everything was 'Sorry, you can't take that in.'*

Another supporter and visitor to immigration detention centres, Helen, told me of her feelings of fear as she paid for mobile phone credit for the contraband phones that people had in immigration detention to stay in contact with family, lawyers, and supporters. She said:

> *I couldn't get them out of there. And I couldn't visit them as often as would be good for them. It made me feel inadequate and powerless. I bought them phone credit... though I was really scared about buying phone credit because the phones were illegal, and they were hidden and all that sort of stuff. There were random room searches in the early hours of the morning and all of that. I was scared then about what the repercussions might be for me if they traced where this phone credit had come from... But we are so fuckin' protected! They[21] are not after us! They will just punish them!*

These small acts of resistance echo Scott's (1985) notion of everyday resistance. They involve dissimulation, false compliance, are covert, informal and non-confrontational acts, resulting from the lack of any other viable options in the face of considerable power (Scott 1985). The level of risk, relative to the success of the action is significant; in the above examples, supporters were essentially taking contraband in to a 'prison-like' environment so that a detained person could sew up their socks or moisturise their dry skin (Peterie 2019a, 2022b). Supporters I asked were unsure of exactly what their punishment might be for these actions, beyond a ban from visiting detention settings, but some were fearful for their detained friends, given their actions challenged the power of the immigration regime. Despite this, their acts are not isolated. Many participants report having undertaken similar rule-breaking actions. One took in small vials of a person's favourite perfume because they hadn't been able to smell it in years (it contained alcohol and thus, was prohibited). Another participant even told me of how she was able to gift a 'pet' spiny leaf insect to a person in long-term immigration detention to lift his spirits and provide him with a sense of responsibility: something to care for each day to provide the impetus to carry on.

[21] Immigration detention guards and immigration officials.

But generally, supporters are quite risk averse (as highlighted in Chapter Three) and so rather than breaking rules they will often attempt to bend them in clever ways before resorting to the highly risky undertaking of breaking them. Nikki, a frequent visitor of people detained in immigration detention settings told me about the introduction of a rule preventing supporters from taking freshly cut flowers into detention centres. She told me of the effort she undertook to find a way around the rule. She said:

> *There was one person in there who was so down. I wanted to do something for her, so I thought okay, I will take an artificial flower in. I know you are not allowed to take wire in. So, I went in to Cheap as Chips[22]… and bent every one of the artificial flowers to see if it had metal in it. I found one that didn't…And I took this beautiful big artificial silk rose into this person. I got it in there... I said okay, I have brought this is as a gift. Oh, says the SERCO[23] officer. And he gets out his metal detector wand and he rubs it over the flower and it didn't ping, so he didn't believe it. So, he rubbed it against his metal belt where it pinged, he did this 5 times. He rubbed it, rubbed it. (Laughs.) I just stood and watched, I had a smile on my face and in the end, he had to agree there was no metal and so they let it in.*

Mim also demonstrated this kind of rule-bending as she described assisting a refugee woman who was held in immigration detention to gain access to education she had previously been denied. The woman was not allowed to attend school on account of her status as a detainee, but there appeared to be no obvious restrictions to online learning, so Mim and sympathetic teachers from outside of the detention centre setting found a way to assist her through a clever interpretation of the rules. She said:

> *So, I used to sit on the front porch at our house in the Adelaide Hills on the phone and look out across the paddocks and the cows and have these long conversations with* [name] *about trying to get her some education. She wasn't eligible to go to school inside or outside of Baxter. She was desperate. Teachers were very willing to help, but immigration were being bastards as they are.*

[22] A retail store.
[23] SERCO were contracted to staff the immigration detention centre.

> *We finally found a chink in the whole system. We tracked down a remote learning package that seemed to fly under the radar with immigration. We set it up and she liaised with the teachers, and they made it happen. I think it was over the internet so she could do something with her days.*

Whilst I cannot speculate as to what effect these actions may have had on the mental health of the recipients of gifts and goods, certainly supporters tell me they feel that each successful small action such as this may just bring hope to a person for another day: affirmation that someone knows they are there and cares. In this way, the action and affect could be judged priceless. As Gottfried (1994, p. 118) states, "resistance is not simply a reaction to control, it also constrains and alters its frontier" and it with this kind of understanding and aim that supporters take action in the hope they can incrementally challenge and erode power. In many ways these acts demonstrate the strength of supporters; their determined, intrepid spirits, strategic alertness, and cunning (Sivaramakrishnan 2005; Peterie 2022b). But though these acts may be overt, they are not necessarily noticed or deemed particularly meaningful by those with power (Hollander & Einwohner 2004).

The activities and actions described in this section highlight just how curtailed supporters are in terms of their capacity to meaningfully resist in various social milieux created by Australia's immigration regime. Very inconspicuous activities such as giving personal accounts of supporters' experiences, gifting flowers or providing other unremarkable items or services to people seeking refuge become highly risky and prohibited undertakings (Peterie 2022b). These undertakings also come to represent the limits of what can be achieved yet demonstrate ongoing defiance and determination. Nonetheless, resistance is reduced to quite small, incremental and individual acts (Peterie 2022b), a sort of nibbling away at the edges of overwhelming power and control (De Certeau, Jameson & Lovitt 1980; Scott 1985). The enormous challenge of resistance for supporters whose power is already so diminished is that quite often they are also drawing on very weak modes of resistance.

Weak weapons, exhaustion, and the immigration regime

There are very few 'weapons' of resistance strong enough to mount serious challenges or threats to Australia's immigration regime and its effects on individuals and families seeking refuge. The 'repertoire' of resistance traditionally relied upon by supporters includes: protests and political action; lobbying and letter writing; provision of financial and material resources to people seeking refuge; and fundraising (Mares & Newman 2007; Coombs 2004; Mann 2003; Johansson & Vinthagen 2016). In recent times only the latter activities relating to the provision of resources and financial support are regularly undertaken and, in most instances, do not so much constitute acts of resistance, but more the procurement and provision of aid. In the South Australian context, there have been supporters who have occasionally been financially able to mount successful legal challenges in the courts to achieve protection for people, investing tens of thousands of dollars of their own money in the process. But these cases represent the exception rather than the rule. Overall, supporters find themselves left with very little power to resist as avenues for resistance have been all but extinguished through silencing, stonewalling and other technologies of governmentality. Their agency is continually weakened against an increasingly resolute government. Sadly, most of the time their efforts do little to contribute to wide-scale social transformation of the asylum process in Australia (Pasieka 2016).

Supporters are acutely aware of challenges they face in what feels like a never-ending battle for change towards a kinder or more humane immigration regime (Sawtell, Dickson-Swift & Verrinder 2010). Many spoke to me about how disillusioned they have become about the efficacy of traditional methods of resistance such as protest, letter writing and financial assistance, telling me they appear to become less and less effective over time. Couple, Tjamu and Kami, who have been involved for just under twenty years, told me:

> *Tjamu: Well, there are no outcomes from protesting. There is always a tiny group of people. They are all older. It would be amazing if we had rallies like the last climate change rally that the young people organised that we went to. Wouldn't it be amazing if young people got out and organised a refugee rally like that and all those people came? So, nothing politically, no change.*

Kami: In terms of outcomes, politically, yeah, we've got nothing, virtually no impact at all.

Tjamu: Yeah, the outcomes have gotten worse every year.

I was curious to see if the perception might be different among some 'younger' participants in the cohort. I asked Diana what outcomes she felt might have been achieved through the efforts of supporters. She said:

We're not getting results in the end. We're not getting people out of detention. And we're not giving them education. And we're not giving them housing. We're not giving them back SRSS[24] payments. It's so disheartening.

These testimonies illustrate that supporters are acutely aware of how little power they have and how ineffective their efforts have become. For some, associated angry feelings galvanise them to double-down and push even harder for change, drawing them in to an often-cyclical process of moral outrage, followed by resistance, followed by more moral outrage. This cycle can be exhausting, particularly when the 'wins' are very few. Some supporters have recognised this and have adjusted their approach accordingly. For many supporters now the aim now is "not directly to overthrow or transform a system of domination but rather to survive within it" (Scott 1985, p.30). Brian pointed out how many activities of supporters have been reduced to only making a difference on a small scale for groups or individuals. Gone are the days of hoping for large-scale change, he says, now it is:

Giving someone a laptop so he can do schoolwork. Paying for the internet for a family so they have got internet like everyone else in the street. Getting an old piece of furniture so they can gradually get their house furnished. Sending $200 a year down to the school so they can go on the excursions. They are fairly small things we are doing... But it is just exhausting having to do it in the current political environment.

[24] Status Resolution Support Services payment (SRSS)https://www.servicesaustralia.gov.au ›
A regular payment to help with basic living costs while waiting to hear about your immigration status

Resistance can act as a "diagnostic of power" (Abu-Lughod & Lutz 1990). If this idea is used to assess the resistance of supporters (including their modes of resistance), it stands to reason that supporters and their strategies have been significantly weakened in the face of the monolithic and hegemonic power of the Australian immigration regime. It is not that supporters have failed to resist or failed to use the right modes to resist Australia's immigration regime; indeed, over the years they have achieved considerable wins on behalf of people seeking refuge, for example, by securing visas for people and preventing deportations. However, in recent years, their power, and the power of their 'weapons' have been significantly eroded by changes to policy and legislation.

Conclusion

This chapter examined the emotional responses of supporters to circumstances of their work and focused on the nexus between anger and resistance in this context. Anger is a commonly felt emotion in relation to support work, contributing to a 'state of being' for many supporters. Feeling angry often manifests as 'moral outrage' as supporters experience and respond to perceived injustices within the immigration regime. Feeling angry fuels the impetus for supporters to take principled and productive action, including engaging in acts of resistance as they seek to redress power imbalances between themselves and those they support in relation to the hegemony of the immigration regime. In settings such as immigration detention, supporters engage in small and covert, but highly risky acts of 'everyday resistance'. Their small acts incrementally chip away at the edges of the ever-increasing power they seek to challenge. Supporters' 'repertoire' of resistance has been substantially weakened over time, meaning there are very few activities or modes of resistance that can seriously challenge the immigration regime in Australia. Chapter Eight delves into supporter understandings and experiences of burnout.

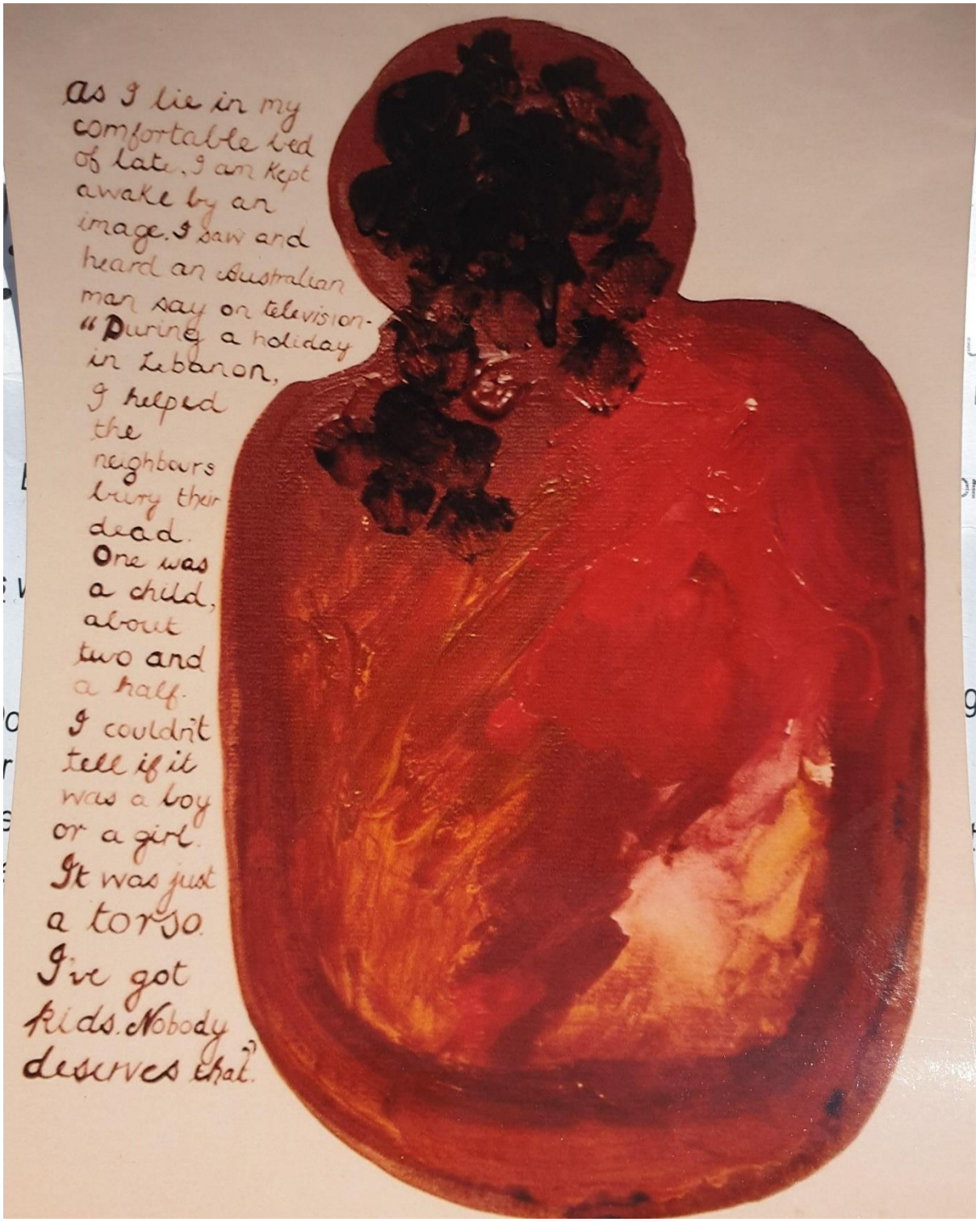


Image 8: An artwork painted by a supporter to convey her distress at the plight of people who need to seek refuge.

CHAPTER EIGHT

The flickering flame of support: burned down, not out

The woman sitting in front of me, at the kitchen table of a small cottage in inner-city Adelaide, was once a t*our de force* of the support community in South Australia. She was a leader of sorts throughout the early 2000s, though sadly new supporters becoming involved today would be unlikely to know her name. She was a regular visitor at the Woomera and Baxter detention centres. She helped people seeking refuge to find housing, furnish and set up homes, and enrol their children in schools. She was tirelessly involved in political lobbying, spending hours in the offices of members of parliament advocating for change. She gave years of her life, every ounce of her energy, to support until the establishment of a new detention centre in the Adelaide hills. Anne has almost completely disengaged from support work these days, so I felt very lucky to be speaking with her. As we cupped our coffee mugs in our hands, she shared:

> *I wouldn't change it for anything. It was such an incredibly intense, alive kind of time in my life. I felt vibrant with passion, with purpose, with connection, with love during that time. It is about feeling useful and helpful. Making a profound difference. Being a beacon of hope in a hopeless situation. A pretty amazing feeling. But I can pinpoint [the end]. It was when Inverbrackie was opened in the Hills. I had so many people ring me up and say, 'what are we going to do, when are we going to visit.' I just had to say at that point, 'I am really sorry.' I got to a point where I didn't want to read the paper, read the email, scroll past the news. This is an issue that is part of my DNA, and issue I really care about, but I can be pushed to a place of complete disengagement. I did it so intensely for 10 years, I had a holiday for 4 weeks after 10 years and felt guilty. I couldn't do it anymore. I couldn't be available, see no change, experience heartbreak, all that…* (Trails off.)

Despite describing reaching a place of 'complete disengagement', Anne explained she could not face completely walking away from support. She said:

> *So, I started something… my own little project that I could just do in my own little sphere. I didn't have to face the guards at the detention centre, I didn't have to interact with any refugees. I didn't even have to see people; I could just do my little thing in my own little space. I was still doing something.*

I recall that as I listened to her, I may have had a wry smile on my face. This is a story I have heard, in other iterations, from other participants. The details may change, but the crux of the matter remains the same; most supporters, in this cohort at least, never completely walk away. They might disengage for a while, even a long while, but they never totally disconnect. They burn down, not out. Despite this, when supporters reach the point where they choose to scale back their involvement and disengage, it often invites deeply personal existential questions around their sense of self, responsibility, and role in the world. It also brings a mix of emotions. I asked Anne what effect scaling down involvement had on her. She answered,

> *When I was really involved, I did feel that I had such an important role and a purpose in life; it was clear to me, and it was clear to everybody else. That was a really good feeling. It felt really good, even though it was an uphill battle. I was driven, there was a goal: 'this is what we are going to do.' When you let go of that…I still have times when I feel like, 'what is my purpose now?'*
>
> *I definitely feel relief from the pressure and the heartache and the constancy of it. It is lovely not to have to deal with that. But I always feel incredibly sad because it feels like we are where we were 20 years ago. I feel incredibly sad about the world, and I worry. What is the world going to be like in 20 years' time? Not all the time, but if it is something that I feel is an incredible injustice, I will actually write. I will get up the next morning and write and email the politicians again.*

I ask Anne where she is at now in her support journey. She says:

> *I still get really angry. I am still a supporter, but it is dormant. I think I can do it in a safe space now…I am still a supporter. I might not be a roaring fire but more a flickering flame. I am still here; I might just need a bit of puff.*

Introduction

This chapter explores supporter experiences as they relate to commonly accepted and taken for granted understandings of 'burnout.' As explored in the introductory chapter, the term burnout is often used to describe chronic stress, exhaustion, and emotional distancing experienced by help professionals as a result of contact with their clients (Malasch 1976). However, with chronic stress and exhaustion (and to a lesser extent, emotional distancing) becoming so commonplace in today's world, I find this definition falls somewhat short in terms of its current usefulness (Neckel & Wagner 2017). Neckel & Wagner (2017, p. 296) recognise this and describe burnout as something beyond exhaustion or stagnation; they says "Burnout victims are paralysed, passive, and emotionless; they no longer have any resources to contribute, let alone to put to effective use, because the competitive society forced them to use up their entire potential." It is this level of burnout I am concerned with in this chapter as it threatens the overall sustainability of support in South Australia. The sector simply cannot afford to lose passionate and committed supporters in this way. But this extreme burnout is also an ever-present, looming possibility for most people working in under-funded and under-supported charitable and voluntary work settings, ultimately because the needs almost certainly outstrip the capacity to meet them. As Anne's story above illustrates, support work can be incredibly demanding and intense, overwhelming in physical, emotional, and psychological scope and investment. As discussed in Chapter Five, support work can be socially and emotionally isolating. Encouragement and understanding from friends and loved ones can be lacking. Additionally, the political terrain proves treacherous and hostile, bureaucracy and governmentality make it very difficult to achieve meaningful outcomes and making a difference can feel like applying Band-Aids in a battlefield. Even during 'good times' when incremental small wins and moments of joy intersperse experiences, supporters are hyper-aware that the next piece of bad news, the next challenge, the next battle is just around the corner. Thus, most supporters who have been involved for any reasonable length of time describe themselves as on a pathway to burnout.

In this chapter I illuminate how supporters understand burnout and explore how they tend to take time out from support work before completely burning out. I examine the notion of compassion fatigue and suggest that supporters actually suffer from *passion fatigue*— the tiredness resulting from their inability to *stop* caring or to fully disengage from the world of support. I argue managing passion fatigue is a key challenge for supporters who intend to engage in support over the long-term. I suggest there are two important ways for supporters to rekindle their passion and manage 'the burn': through periods of retreat and opportunities for debriefing. I highlight how supporters' sense when they need to retreat, which involves temporary, partial or complete disengagement from the work. I explain how this allows them to manage burn-down, potential burnout and passion fatigue. I then reveal the strong desire that exists amongst supporters for appropriate avenues of debriefing that unfortunately are not currently available to them. I convey that supporters desire debriefing opportunities with other like-minded and like-experienced individuals and groups in a spirit of solidarity and this is of vital importance to supporter sustainability and longevity. I finally explore the impact that extreme burn-down and disengagement has on supporter senses of self and identity. In sum, I argue supporters are more likely to 'burn-down' than to 'burnout'; that is, in general, they self-manage so as not to arrive at a place of total burnout akin to that described by Neckel & Wagner (2017).

Defining supporter perceptions of burnout

Supporters' understandings of burnout are heavily influenced by the medicalised conceptualisation of burnout and its entailments. Supporters display a high degree of health literacy, describing their experiences through clinical terms they have come in to contact with throughout their working and volunteering lives, some of which have been popularised beyond clinical settings. Through various sources supporters have learned about risks posed to them by 'vicarious trauma' or 'secondary trauma', signs of 'burnout', methods of 'self-care' and so on (Puvimanasinghe et al. 2015; Robinson 2014). This knowledge is vitally important for people working in support settings. Most are versed in terms like vicarious trauma, burnout, and compassion fatigue and know what accepted signs, symptoms, and risks are for these. These terms have been adopted by lay-people, so they come to use those terms in their language when speaking about support.

However, in practice, supporters' descriptions of their experiences often do not align with true trauma or burnout out according to the prescriptive, medicalised and often taken-for-granted understandings such as those of Malasch (1976). This is not to discount the possibility that some supporters may experience trauma as a consequence of their work, but more to suggest that though participants of this research may use taken-for-granted terminology, their reported experiences suggest that their burnout is less of a burning *out*, but more a burning *down*.

At first glance, supporter's descriptions of their experiences clearly show elements of commonly accepted signifiers or characteristics of burnout. They report feeling exhausted, depressed, overwhelmed, hopeless or helpless with low motivation to engage, which resonates with the work of Freudenberger (1974) and Malasch (1976). Brian told me he can readily recognise when he is feeling burned out, saying:

> *Sometimes you will get a demanding day and if you are burned out, the jobs that you normally could do just seem overwhelming or you don't want to start them. Or you want to faff around and do unrelated stuff. Or you are just exhausted, and you can't start stuff, you just procrastinate. That's when you kind of recognise that you are burned out. Some of this is tied up with depression…. There are always a number of everyday issues and longer-term issues that you need to make slow progress with... burnout is sort of not being able to face the longer-term ones. That happens. Sometimes it's a feeling: 'Stuff this! Let's give it all up! I was a fool to take this on in the first place. Stuff it. I'm not going to come in today.' [It feels like] self-doubt, resignation and actively thinking that you are really in the wrong place; you need to get out of it, it's not working out. That it is just too much. You won't be able to beat the federal government or things are never going to improve for these people. And if that lasts more than a day or two, that's burnout. I feel quite burned out mainly with an almost physical feeling of exhaustion that you are so tired that you just can't do anything more. For the time being.*

Brian's descriptions share similarities with testimonies of other supporters. Mim explained to me that she knows she is on the road to burnout when:

> *Physically I start to [verbally] stutter. I get very short tempered. I think I was really close to it last time my sister came around and she brought her dog, this gorgeous cattle dog, and the dog knocked over a glass of wine with her waggy tail and I just lost it. I would lose my temper. I cry. I want to run away and jump in a hole and pull it in over me. Disengage. Turn it off. Turn it off. I like watching programs like Q&A and The Drum, but sometimes I just think, I don't want to hear another person say another word because it all crashes in on you. I know then that I need to take time out*.

On a close read, supporter testimonies offer an interesting insight that I witnessed time and again throughout the research that I believe has significant implications for understandings of burnout as it relates to support work. That is, though these supporters describe many characteristics of medicalised conceptions of burnout, as emphasised by the testimonies above, supporters almost always qualified their experiences of burnout or near-burnout with a suggestion that for them, it is a temporary state. In the literature, it is suggested that "no one expects a spent match to catch fire again" (Neckel 2017, p.22), however supporters appear to defy expectation, often burning down to the point that they actually say they are spent, only to reignite the next time they come across compelling need. For example, Brian said he feels he cannot do anymore "for the time being", whilst Mim states she tends to take time out, rather than walking away from support completely. I was tempted to chalk this up to 'resilience', which, as I have explored in earlier Chapters, absolutely enables supporters to carry on in the case of immense challenges. However, I noticed throughout my fieldwork that even when supporters had perhaps actively decided they wanted to disconnect completely, they often appeared unable to.

Compassion fatigue or passion fatigue?

The tendency to burn-down, disengage, then reignite, appears to be less about resilience and more about the inability of supporters to let go if they are passionate about issues of social justice, fairness, and the like. The kind of dogged determination supporters experience that sustains their involvement over periods of many years and sometimes even decades can result in what some may be tempted to characterise as 'compassion fatigue', though I argue it is actually 'passion fatigue'.

The root, Latin meaning of 'compassion' is literally 'suffering with'[25], suggesting the person who feels compassion for another sympathises with that person and their circumstances (Berlant 2014). Sontag (2004, pp. 90-91) argues compassion is an emotion that needs to be translated in to action, and failure to 'do' something to support the subject or object of compassion leads to boredom, cynicism or apathy. Compassion fatigue, that describes these undesirable outcomes, has been explored extensively as a social phenomenon (see for example, Sontag 2004; Berlant 2014; Wuthnow 2012; Moeller 1999). It is a term often used to describe disengagement from moral and humanitarian challenges on account of a weariness, or growing callousness as a result of over-saturation of information or requests for action (Berlant 2014). Whilst supporters describe strong distress at the experiences of asylum seekers and refugees, most in this study stop short of equating their emotions to a literal sympathy with those they support. Some supporters indeed described themselves to me as suffering from compassion fatigue, aligning their experiences with this now popularised notion. But compassion fatigue suggests a callous disengagement from the activities and emotions of caring (Berlant 2014). Though supporters are often weary with the actions of the government or the public opposition and apathy to the plight of people seeking refuge, they are far from disengaged from the cause at its core.

I posit supporters often suffer from *passion fatigue,* rather than compassion fatigue; that is, supporters often remain devoted to support, despite feeling burned down and depleted. I deploy this term, *passion fatigue*, to describe tiredness resulting from an inability to *stop* caring or to fully disengage from the world of support, and all its entailments. Boredom, apathy, or the callous lack of care have no place in passion fatigue, though cynicism at the prospect of real change is present among supporters. Supporters experiencing passion fatigue report that whilst their involvement may evolve over time in response to exhaustion or burning down, they feel a fundamental compulsion to carry on. This type of passion that compels people to engage has also been documented elsewhere in the support world (c.f. Coombs 2004; Gosden 2006; Puvimanasinghe 2015). Dorothy, the co-coordinator of a community support organisation highlights this, saying:

[25] Com – "with", Passion – "suffering"

> *The work synthesises you down. It burns off other stuff. You kind of self-generate. It is exhausting but you have to transform yourself and keep going. I keep going back to core: it's meaningful, interesting, stimulating, and helping. Worthwhile. I would want someone to do it for me. You keep going through it in your mind. I'm seeking a meaningful life and work. People rely on us, and we do a good job. The only thing that matters is doing the best we can for them. We have to keep going.*

Another supporter, Steph, told me she had experienced burnout over her almost three decades of involvement. Despite this, she indicates that it is her passion that keeps her going. She said:

> *When I did face burnout, I did pull back. Perhaps I was lucky because I still had my resilience. I hadn't lost my sense of purpose; I was just exhausted. It was that sort of thing. I took a break, and I got over it… if you completely lose that sense of justice and never can come back to it, that's a huge tragedy. If I really feel passionate about something, I will fight to the end of it.*

The testimonies of Dorothy and Steph reflect those of many of my participants. Participation can wax and wane as supporters navigate the needs of people they support and their own capacity to give. Many supporters describe being some way down a path towards burnout or having come through 'burnout' and out the other side, as though they burned down but not completely out. It is both their passion that burns them down, but also that prevents them from becoming paralysed, passive, and emotionless, akin to burnout as per Neckel and Wagner (2017) or fatigued as described by Sontag (2004) and Berlant (2014). South Australian supporters may be weary, but overall, they most certainly are not apathetic, bored, or simply able to walk away.

Passion fatigue also should not be misunderstood as only tiredness that results from the constant fight against governmentality, bureaucracy, policy, and the like; tiredness can also arise from highly rewarding and emotionally exhilarating relationships with people seeking refuge. Though I detailed in earlier chapters the many personal and professional challenges supporters endure through the course of their work, it is incorrect to assume that experiences in the support world only have their basis in compassion ('suffering with').

Supporters also regularly told me of amazing and uplifting experiences they have had with refugees, asylum seekers, and each other. They describe attending births, weddings, sharing important 'firsts', like children's' first days at Australian schools, families' first days at the beach, sharing in and experiencing new foods, dance, and songs from other cultures, seeing people overcome immense struggle to begin to not only survive but thrive in new homes, jobs, and lives. These experiences could not be characterised as suffering. Both are reported by supporters as examples of common side effects of their visits with people seeking refuge. I return to Anne, whose story opened the chapter, as she reflected on her experiences prior to burning 'down'. She said,

> *Refugee support is at the extreme end of making a difference. Something intoxicating, being at the coalface is magnetic. I think it is because there are extremes. Despair is deep, but joy is also magnified. I went to a wedding of a refugee man marrying an Australian girl. Her family is conservative, his family are Muslim Iranians, and it was joyous. The extreme emotions are intoxicating; comparable to birth of a grandchild because it is so extraordinary. Meeting people off the bus after release from detention was more emotional than anything I can think of in my everyday life.*

Anne paused for a moment and then said,

> *Actually, we wouldn't want to have these experiences every day anyway.*

It is often assumed positive experiences must only have positive effects, however, as Anne infers in her reflection, even highly rewarding experiences in support can result in fatigue. Positive experiences have been described as conducive to 'vicarious resilience' (as opposed to 'vicarious trauma'), suggesting they buoy supporters' resilience and continuing involvement (Puvimanasinghe et al. 2015). Testimonies from my participants certainly support this, telling me that having the occasional 'win' is vitally important for their sense of achievement (as detailed in Chapter Four). But in the longer-term, demands for social interaction from refugees and asylum seekers, keeping up with cultural expectations[26], dealing with very intense emotions, and the bittersweet reflection upon even very joyous moments can all contribute to passion fatigue.

[26] Such as those surrounding notions of 'hospitality' or gender which fall beyond the scope of this thesis.

Passion and the associated fatigue are fundamentally linked to the moral beliefs and desire for meaning described in Chapter Three, and links in with moral outrage and the need to act explained in Chapter Seven. In support, passion is an enabler and passion fatigue is a hazard. Passion can drive supporters to do great things, but they must regulate their passion. Bailey (1983, p. 24) argues, "The passions rule. There can be no purposive activity without emotion, for purpose implies goal, and goal, in the end, entails passion…without passion, one remains inert, unable to move oneself and unable to move others." What he is essentially saying is a person undertaking an action or activity with determination *must* draw on passion, for it is passion that ultimately moves us. Managing passion fatigue is, thus, the biggest challenge for supporters.

Processes of rekindling passion

For many, engaging in support, particularly over the medium to longer term, is a process of burning down followed by a rekindling rejuvenation of the passion that contributed to their involvement in the first place. Supporters report all sorts of personal activities and practices they engage in to revive their passion and prevent total burnout. Some supporters actively plan for activities that we are told are good for our wellbeing and mental health, such as exercise, mindfulness practice and so on (Corrigan 1994), but admit they often do not follow through on their plans. Most try to make time to do things they love, such as gardening, creative ventures like art, craft or music, reading and spending time with loved ones, but these activities are also often sidelined by more pressing support demands. A few report perhaps less rejuvenating or potentially maladaptive activities such as turning to alcohol to wind down. Nonetheless, some supporters do find ways to actively manage and slow 'the burn' so they can keep going because they really want to. Outside of personal activities and practices supporters engage in that vary across the cohort, two strategies emerged strongly as significant for managing potential burnout: retreat and debriefing.

Retreat and its role in self-preservation

The notion of retreat as a positive and constructive response to stress, exhaustion or burnout has been well-established. Indeed, a whole industry exists to refresh and rejuvenate people by way of wellness retreats, day-spas, meditation classes and the like. Glossy brochures and therapists suggest that by retreating for a period from what stresses us, we will emerge renewed: once again ready to face the world and its challenges. However, retreat is not simply a clever marketing tool designed to relieve us of money. Retreat is a strategy utilised by mental health professionals and some employers to actively try to prevent burnout (Salyers et al. 2011; Dahlgren et al. 2020). In some cultural spaces, planned and structured periods of retreat are particularly prevalent and considered necessary for healthy work practice, such as in intense medical settings and within religious pastoral care settings (Chandler 2009; Altounji et al. 2013). Here, retreat should not be confused with distancing or disengagement which would be described as *depersonalisation* according to the Malasch Burnout Inventory (Malasch & Jackson 1981). Retreat is not a symptom of stress, burnout or trauma. Retreat is a response to or a preventer of those things.

Retreat is generally a temporary and deliberate action undertaken by supporters to preserve themselves in the face of physical, spiritual, and emotional fatigue. Though supporters rarely engage in organisationally planned, structured or formalised 'wellness type' retreats in relation to their work, they do occasionally engage in mostly self-imposed periods of retreat that allow them to manage burn-down, potential burnout, and passion fatigue. When supporters do actively engage in retreat, it provides space for them to recover their motivation, realign with their moral code, and find the energy to remain engaged in support, even if in a more limited way. Csordas (2005) argues that our 'selves' are constituted by what our bodies feel and not simply what they do. Here he is not simply referring to physical feelings but also to spiritual feelings and emotions. He suggests by manipulating our embodied experiences we can transform our 'selves' intentionally in meaningful ways. Supporters recognise and often describe that they experience and sense symptoms of burnout and fatigue in embodied ways. They then manage embodied symptoms of burnout and fatigue by engaging in periods of retreat to preserve the self and their longevity in support. For example, Monica says:

> *I stop doing too much visiting. There is a family who want me to visit and have given me an invitation quite a while ago. I used to visit that family quite often, but I haven't. I pull back. I feel like I cannot go unless I have got good energy to give. I feel like I need to look after myself.*

Monica indicates how her feelings affect her choices about how she engages in support work, situating her spirituality, emotions, and mind in practice (Strathern & Stewart 2011). She responds to her perceived lack of 'good energy' by temporarily retreating from support work. She indicated to me that when she is feeling physically, emotionally, and spiritually ready, she will once again visit the refugee family to which she refers. For her, visiting is an activity that burns her down more so than other activities she engages in like organising community supporter meetings and fundraising activities, so this is the activity she temporarily retreats from.

Another supporter, Luke, indicated that for him, burnout is experienced through his body, both physically and mentally, and this is how he senses he needs to retreat for a period. He said:

> *There have been a few times where I have said to my wife, 'if I don't go away for a few days, it is not going to be pretty'. And yeah, that is when I sense I am on the way to burnout. I'd get physical signs of anxiety, like almost mini panic attacks or that kind of thing. Other times, I think it is more like…I can't actually work out a path forward from here and…an exhaustion that goes along with that, more like, if I don't shut myself away from everything for a few days, I am not going to be able to come to any sensible decisions out of that. I need to get distance to work through things because I have an action bias. Like, if I am scrolling twitter and there are 10 things I think I have to act on now* (laughs). *So, there are definitely times when I just have to try and limit my engagement.*

This 'shrinking back' or retreat for a period in response to symptoms of burnout is partially in response to discomfort, but also represents a proactive choice to arrest and prevent the discomfort from proliferating, as discussed by Scarry (1985) and Csordas (2005). Luke retreats as a means to gain perspective on important decisions or as a preventative measure against his tendency to tackle too many things at once.

Retreat is an important tool that assists Luke to make sensible decisions, particularly when determining how much work to take on.

Nate, a lawyer who has been involved in refugee and asylum seeker support for almost a decade, told me that in the early days he felt helpless, depressed, and paralysed as he tried to assist people who were navigating particularly challenging legal processes. But he was passionate about supporting them as much as he could, so he has built strategies of retreat into his practice to ensure his own longevity as a supporter. He said:

> *I don't do that work[27] on Fridays as much as I can and I try not to do it at the end of the day, so I don't take it home, so it isn't on my mind. I also try to balance it with nicer cases. So, if I have done a refugee case, now, I need to do a partner visa case, just to get my mind off it. If I did it on a Friday, it would follow me into the weekends.*

After battling some serious mental health challenges related to his work, Nate now actively quarantines his weekends from his work with people seeking refuge to ensure a regular 'mini retreat.' He told me it took him some time to arrive at this point.

Unfortunately retreat, though very effective, is often a strategy of last resort, utilised only when a supporter is so burned down, they recognise that their overall involvement in support is threatened by their continuation. However, the tendency for supporters to burn-down and retreat, rather than to abandon the cause, in conjunction with the strong desire to live truthfully and express a particular identity (as discussed in Chapter Three), goes a long way to settling my curiosity surrounding the continual and often long-term involvement of supporters in work that appears to be ripe for burnout (as discussed across the thesis). Though it often occurs at the eleventh hour, when there is a risk they may burn out to the extent described by Neckel and Wagner (2017), supporters tend to sense when they must retreat in order to slow the 'burn' and temporarily temper their passion for support so they can carry on in the longer term. This is not to suggest that complete burnout amongst supporters does not happen.

[27] Humanitarian Visa applications

However, among this participant cohort, even when supporters describe themselves as burned out, they often indicate they still have ongoing, low-level engagement with the support world. Their recognition of embodied experiences of 'burn' and 'fatigue' assist supporters to manage effects of support on their senses of self, identities and capacity to endure (Csordas 2005; Strathern & Stewart 2011).

During periods of retreat, supporters typically find new or alternative ways to connect with a social issue that allows for continuation of passion and identity expression in a way commensurate with their emotional, mental, or material capacity at that time. This allows for escalation and de-escalation of involvement, without completely abandoning the cause or their sense of self and identity as it relates to that cause. It is also critically important supporters find avenues to share their experiences with others in the sector.

Supporting the supporters: the thirst for solidarity and avenues for debriefing

Supporters impressed upon me there is not just the desire, but a thirst for opportunities and avenues for 'debriefing' about their experiences in support. Not unlike 'burnout', the notion of 'debriefing' has its roots in psychology and formally refers to "a structured intervention designed to promote emotional processing of traumatic events through the ventilation and normalisation of reactions and preparation for future experiences" (Kenardy 1998, p.4). However, over time, workplaces, particularly those involved in social work or settings with a high-risk of trauma such as in medical, law enforcement, and military settings, have adopted and adapted debriefing techniques, practices or services as part of employee wellness programs and the like (Plaggemars 2000). This has led to a variety of understandings and experiences about what 'debriefing' is. Though some supporter understandings of debriefing reflect more formalised debriefing methods or practices, others use the term debriefing to describe 'talking with like-minded and like-experienced others.' They seek to discuss their experiences with people who really understand the work they do – those who stand alongside them in 'solidarity'.

Solidarity is a concept that has been commonly understood in the last century or so in terms of class struggle against economic hegemony and authoritarianism (Cingolani 2015). In anthropology, and in other disciplines, the concept is understood in a variety of ways.

Solidarity has been described as: 'standing up beside' someone (Jennings & Dawson 2015); a bridge of interdependence between people in times of crisis (Rakopoulos 2016); a reciprocal process of gift giving that builds social cohesion (Paragi 2017); and persistent, conscious, and collective efforts to achieve change in challenging circumstances (Bhimji 2020). Binford (2008, p.181) prefers the term *acompañamiento:* "I am with you in this journey, I accompany you on this road", and it is debriefing involving this kind of solidarity that supporters suggest they seek.

Supporters indicate when they have had access to either appropriate formal debriefing avenues, or safe individual or group of individuals to discuss their experiences with, it is incredibly beneficial to mitigate against burnout. Appropriate and safe here means spending time and sharing with other *compañeros* (companions) who are on the same journey to assist and support each other (Binford 2008). For some this means connecting with others in face-to-face settings, but others also connect online or via messaging applications. I asked supporters what would most help them to carry on doing their support work. Supporter, Mim, indicated she has been fortunate enough to have some opportunities to debrief with others and this helped her to mitigate feelings of burnout. She said:

> *For me, what works is human contact. I don't like meetings, although I call them often. I do go to meetings because they are important… What works for me is friendships with people with similar passions and goals. It is so good to socialise with people, not necessarily to plan or to be doing, but just being together. That is really important to be with likeminded people just to be together.*

Another supporter, Freya, says being able to debrief with others assists her to manage her anger at Australia's immigration regime, policies, and actions. She says:

> *I talk with my friends because politically we are very engaged, and we follow everything, and we try to find good news sources and so on. We just outrage together…I think it helps to get it out. So, I swing between engaged and disengaged.*

Research by Puvimanasinghe et al. (2015) suggests that the commitment and work satisfaction of supporters is strengthened when they are able to share their experiences with each other. However, Mim, Freya, and other supporters indicate opportunities for debriefing like these are infrequent. It is often difficult to organise amongst people's hectic schedules and in the context of competing needs.

Though almost all participants of this research identified that opportunities for debriefing (whether formally or informally) would assist them greatly to protect against and mitigate burnout, many indicated they either did not have opportunities for debriefing, or opportunities available to them were not appropriate. There can be many reasons for this, some of which are highlighted in the following testimonies. Helen told me some of the most traumatic parts of her support work were when she really needed to talk to someone about, but she felt that she had no one appropriate to debrief with. She told me about one occasion where she tried to talk to a friend who was not mentally or emotionally equipped to hear what she had to say:

> *Recently I was having a bit of a down day, and I was visiting a friend who doesn't go anywhere near doing support work because she had been a social worker, was burnt out and is a very sensitive soul, so doesn't go anywhere near that. But I was having a down day, I was having lunch with her, and I just kept talking… you know, it was this dismal story. None of it was the horrific things, but it was things that I was really worried about and scared about… and angry with the government about. But I cannot do that to people. It is not alright…she doesn't need all that terribleness. I feel like I need to apologise to her for doing it. But it means that I can't tell that much. It is isolating.*

Supporter, Daniel echoed Helen's sense of isolation. He described how he felt like he was an annoyance to those around him or they were not interested or didn't really understand when he tried to talk to them:

> *I'm really wracking my brain to think of someone who was either a person of influence or superior who has actually asked about how I'm going in this kind of work. I don't think people see this as important work. It is just these annoying people over here doing this* (laughs)*. Some fellow supporters would sometimes ask "how are you going?" because they get it. But no one in those other areas of my life except for my wife would ask. My supervisor didn't really ask me, my friends... my core friendship base, this just wasn't their thing. I think it would have been good to have someone to debrief with... [The work] felt very ad-hoc, a lot of the time. Reactive. It was reactive. When I think about it, there was no stability because things changed all the time. But to have a core group of people that you would always be meeting with, not to plan stuff but just "hey, how are you going?" ... That would be great, to constantly come back together and support one another.*

Daniel's and Helen's testimony indicates that during their support journeys, opportunities for debriefing with others were largely absent, but they felt this would have assisted along the way. These testimonies echo those of many participants. The perceived absence of solidarity or *acompañamiento* here is particularly problematic when combined with the social invisibility and imperceptibility discussed in Chapter Five (Binford 2008; Honneth 2001; Smith et al. 2018). Supporters can very easily find themselves dealing with extremely challenging circumstances with little to nowhere to turn, increasing the risks of burnout.

Furthermore, supporters working for organisations either reported there were no opportunities for them to debrief at work, or available avenues for them through formal services such as Employee Assistance Programs (EAPs) were also not appropriate for their needs to assist with potential burnout. Cindy told me:

> *My role right now, is pretty isolating. I am the only person working on a particular project, working with the cohort[28] at the end of the line. I am typically the only one doing this kind of work. It is very hard to have hope for somebody when you know there is no hope. That element of the work is incredibly difficult compared to other types of work that I have done. I am not in a team of people.*

[28] A cohort of people seeking refuge.

> *I often have communication with people at STTARs[29] and they hear really difficult stories and are dealing with people who have significant mental health issues. I have heard them say multiple times, "we have a team, and we go back, and we each debrief with each other and you come away feeling a lot better." I think, 'Gee I don't have that'. In my previous workplaces that was something I always had.*

Cindy also told me she used the EAP program in her previous workplace and did not find it useful. She elaborated:

> *I think what I wanted more out if it was the opportunity to have on going conversation where it seemed that it was giving you resources: 'Away you go and do your homework.' That was just another pressure. They don't have any idea about what I do. And I don't want to explain it.*

Being able to debrief with people who really understand the challenges and pressures of support work was a common line of discussion throughout the fieldwork interviews. Often, supporters indicated formalised debriefing and support services such as EAP providers or other counselling-type services failed to meet their needs because they did not have sufficient understanding of the realities of support work. This is not to say EAP services are not useful, but it highlights the desire and need for avenues of peer-based debriefing that are grounded in solidarity – in the style of *acompañamiento* – based on shared experience (Binford 2008; Loudoun et al. 2020). Supporters reported when they accessed formalised services, it often exacerbated their feelings of burnout or fatigue and they felt services did not really assist them in meaningful ways. Luke said:

> *To debrief with people properly would actually require them to have so much background information about all these strange relational dynamics that unless you are in the support world, there is no possible way you could understand why it matters that this person said this, and that person did that. How do you even debrief with someone because no-one gets it?*

[29] Survivors of Torture and Trauma Assistance and Rehabilitation Service.

> *I have had a couple of attempts at seeing a therapist and having conversations with people who are therapists and I just get 15 minutes into explaining all the different things and they are like, 'of course you're fucked up'* (laughs).

Several supporters suggested there is a need for debriefing services and spaces that are staffed and run by fellow supporters. Dorothy explained,

> *The only people who really know how hard it is and what we are doing is us. It is almost impossible to explain, but we know the load and the never ending bottomless, exhausting pit that it can be. We are the only ones that know, so we are the only ones we can debrief with. I mean, you can go home from work and tell your partner you had a tough day, but they don't know why it is that tough and the cumulative build-up of exhaustion in this kind of work - only someone else who is at the coalface can understand that completely*.

It is clear from this testimony there is a thirst for appropriate avenues of debriefing amongst the supporter cohort, but there is a substantial void in this space. Supporters seek peer-to-peer debriefing opportunities with other like-minded and like-experienced individuals and groups, in the spirit of *acompañamiento*, rather than from third-party professional providers or persons who do not understand the intricacies of what they do (Binford 2008; Loudoun et al. 2020). However, there are significant obstacles to be overcome: supporters are often incredibly time-poor due to the nature and demands of the work; spending time with each other can take away from time to do the work, which will always take precedence in terms of importance. Additionally, there are issues of confidentiality to consider around discussing circumstances of people seeking refuge; and finally, supporters debriefing with other supporters could risk of adding to the physical, mental and/ or emotional load of one another, potentially exacerbating feelings of burnout if not undertaken carefully. Nonetheless, desire for solidarity within this cohort is strong and they believe it to be key for slowing the 'burn'.

When the fire is all but out: experiences of disengagement

Though most supporters remain engaged in support work, burning down rather than out, a small few within my participant cohort have disengaged. Of the 44 participants in this research, three have chosen to disengage from support work. Just one of the three describes herself as completely disengaged to the point that her flame is extinguished. These participants have given many years to support, such that their sense of self and identity is thoroughly expressed through undertaking the work. To curtail or cease involvement, therefore, leaves these supporters feeling very conflicted regarding their sense of self, even if they have actively chosen to disengage.

Disengagement from support work can leave supporters feeling any number of emotions ranging from deep sadness and grief, or to a lesser extent, guilt or relief. Perhaps the most fertile area for exploration of grief, loss, and change in anthropology surrounds death and dying (c.f. Hemer 2010; Kaufman & Morgan 2005; Rosaldo 1984; Scheper-Hughes 1992). As such, much exploration of grief, loss, and change relates to the responses of individuals and groups to personal circumstances often beyond their control. However, grief has also been examined as it relates to work and individuals' senses of self and identity where individuals may or may not have control over some or part of their circumstances (Stein 2009; Marris 2012, 1974; Nias 1993). Marris (1974) argues our moral codes serve to ground us and inform how we then act. This accords with the experiences of supporters as I explored in Chapter Three. He further argues any loss which significantly disrupts our ability to be able to act in alignment with our moral codes will generally result in deep, long-term grief, and the potential loss of self (Marris 2012, 1974). Stein (2009) explored the experiences of people who strongly defined themselves through their work. He found when a person was separated from what he terms their 'social skin' they experience processes of grief and mourning, as well as challenges to their sense of self-worth or value (Stein 2009, p.22). Similarly, Nias (1993) explored experiences of primary school teachers whose sense of morality and self were strongly embedded in their daily work such that their personal and professional identities were fused. She found that significant changes in their workplaces led to feelings of bereavement, disorientation, and threats to the self, requiring the (re)negotiation of identity and meaning (Nias 1993).

After a decade of commitment to support, Jane explained to me of her decision to disengage. She said:

> *I just had to withdraw. I feel like I am not banging my head against that wall anymore. I am not ringing up politicians, I am not writing letters. I am not expecting anything. I feel bad for them[30], but I can't do anything. I'm spent. I can't invest. I feel inadequate, I feel useless…ashamed that I'm useless, that I should be more effective... Emotionally, I have to stay away, I am full up to here and I can't read the news stories. It is heartbreaking and frustrating, and I just don't know what to do with my anger and with my sadness. My frustration is with the system, my frustration is with this brick wall. How many letters we have written, how many phone calls we have made, how many petitions we have signed? I'm not supporting them because I can't. I have nothing to support them with.*

Jane's decision to disengage brought considerable personal upheaval. Over the occasions that I spoke to her she at times appeared to be at peace with her decision and at other times appeared to feel deeply conflicted. It was clear to me throughout our interaction that Jane feels an acute sense of loss and deep sadness at having arrived at this point. Jane's testimony resembles grief. Though Marris explores grief in relation to death, he states that,

> Grief…is the expression of a profound conflict between contradictory impulses-to consolidate all that is still valuable and important in the past and preserve it from loss; and at the same time, to re-establish a meaningful pattern of relationships, in which the loss is accepted.
>
> (Marris 1974, p.31)

Jane's testimony echoes this sense of conflict; disengaging for her is, on the one hand, an act of self-preservation in response to experiencing frequent anger and frustration as a state of being, but on the other hand her decision sends her sense of self into turmoil as she is no longer engaging in activities that align with her moral code.

[30] People seeking refuge in Australia

Jane is clearly still passionate about the cause but lacks capacity to act accordingly. She states she now does not know what to do with emotions that arise from both the passion and the overwhelming fatigue.

As Nias (1993) found with teachers, the feelings Jane is experiencing render her life temporarily unmanageable, requiring mourning, reorganising, and (re)negotiation of the self, which may involve Jane finding new ways to live in alignment with her moral code such that she can make peace with her decision. Not long after our discussion above, I bumped into Jane at a community meeting focusing on optimising political lobbying and advocacy on behalf of people in offshore detention. It was clear to me at that time that Jane is still finding her way through her intention to disengage. Though she told me she is 'done', she still attended the event, hopeful for change. Perhaps she is about as 'burned down' as one can get, but it appeared to me that she is not yet out.

Anne, whose story opened this chapter, also describes herself as almost completely disengaged. She says her choice to pull back from support work has left her feeling sad and guilty, but she is still holding on to her sense of self. She says:

> *I think I am always who I am, but I have run out of that really compulsive dynamism that I had. I do feel guilty about that because things haven't changed and if anything, they have got worse. I haven't given up; I still have faith in humankind, and I hope that other people will carry on the banner… I still pick up a pen and write an email but that is about the extent of it. I think I feel sadder, and I feel less optimistic. People say, why don't you go and volunteer, and I am just like, 'I can't, I can't do it anymore'. But I still believe in power of compassion. When I stop, I don't want to be here anymore.*

Anne continues to hold on to the hope and her personal beliefs that motivated and sustained her deep involvement for many years, but she acknowledges she now lives with a sense of sadness as a result of disengaging. She mitigates sadness by reengaging in a much more reserved and sporadic way that is protective of her self. She is renegotiating her sense of self, finding new joy in becoming involved in local community issues closer to home and spending time with her grandchildren.

Nias (1993) also found this kind of renegotiation was important for teachers in working through and managing their sadness and grief around their changing roles also. Anne appears to have worked through much of the discomfort she experienced when she initially pulled away from support.

Maliha describes herself as completely disengaged and burned out. Years on from taking this decision, she confides in me that she continues to feel pain and grief surrounding her decision and the plight of people seeking refuge, but she feels she cannot reengage. She says:

> *I honestly, really admire, everybody who stays in [support]. But when I even see something on the news about refugees, I feel this pain inside and I know I can't go there anymore. I am sad that I can't go there but I can't. I am grieving who I used to be and what I used to be able to do and yet I know, to keep safe, I can't do that.*
> *I shield myself now. I have given everything I can give with political action, direct action, letters to everybody, forms... there is no more to give and so, I've withdrawn from that space. I can't do anymore. I have given more than I could give… there's nothing left in the tank. We need new young people who will commit to it. But some of us older people who have been in it a long time are finished. I still believe that as citizens we can have a voice, I believe in democracy and that thought remains intact in me. I haven't lost faith in democracy through this experience. I am pretty darn mad at this Liberal government and think that what they are doing, is completely unjust but I maintain my rage.*

Maliha told me several times that her journey in support is definitely over, yet her passion and core beliefs that inspired and sustained her long-term involvement carry on. She told me she has grieved long and hard for the experience, what it meant for her, and what it means to leave it behind. Though she still feels a range of emotions, she has fashioned a new sense of self that engages with her beliefs in alternative ways (Nias 1993; Stein 2009). Akin to Marris (1974), she is consolidating her past, and working to accept her new way of being. She now finds meaning through creative outlets and spending time with family and grandchildren, though this has taken some adjustment. Both Anne and Maliha have experienced a shift in their moral codes. They continue to hold moral beliefs and values that led to their participation in support, but now they have chosen to prioritise self-care.

In summary, it is inevitable supporters' journeys will arrive at an end for many and varied reasons. For some, burn-down will cause them to participate less and less, for others, particularly amongst this cohort, advancing age and declining health will eventually necessitate a slowing down and disengagement from support. Based on testimonies of this cohort, it is critical they find alternative ways of living in alignment and acting on their moral codes and passions to temper some of the challenges arising from stepping back.

Conclusion

This chapter examined the notion and experiences of burnout in support. Burnout that renders supporters "…paralysed, passive, and emotionless" poses a significant risk to the sustainability of the sector (Neckel & Wagner 2017, p. 296). I found whilst supporters draw on popular and medicalised uses of the term 'burnout' to talk about their various experiences, they describe these in ways that suggest, generally, they tend to burn 'down' rather than 'out'. Supporters grow weary more often from *passion fatigue* than from compassion fatigue. They find it difficult to stop caring and disengage from the work as opposed to becoming callous, cynical, apathetic, or bored. Managing passion fatigue is therefore incredibly important for supporter participation in the long-term. Generally, supporters are highly attuned to their emotional, psychological, and physical capacities to provide support, recognising signs of potential burnout and self-managing through periods of retreat in order to reignite their capabilities and carry on doing the work. However, supporters indicate peer-to-peer debriefing opportunities, which would significantly mitigate against the risks of burnout are largely absent from their experiences, affecting their sustainability and longevity. The small handful of supporters amongst the participant cohort that have disengaged from support experience considerable emotional and personal upheaval, including feelings of grief, sadness, and loss. Disengagement brings with it the need for supporters to renegotiate their identities and shift their moral priorities in pursuit of self-preservation and personal peace. Chapter Nine explores the Circles of Friends, unique providers of support within my participant cohort and in the South Australian sector.

Image 9: A supporter's car boot loaded with goods to assist asylum seekers and Safe Haven Enterprise Visa/ Temporary Protection visa holders affected by Covid-19.

CHAPTER NINE

The Circles of Friends

In June 2020, I returned to an inner Eastern suburbs home in Adelaide for a morning tea with long-term friends Verity and Mabel, who welcomed me with much warmth and enthusiasm. I have already had extensive conversations with them about their support experiences over time, but I wished to ask them more about their involvement in one group that is part of a wider community of groups, the 'Circles of Friends'. A 'Circle of Friends' consists of a group of likeminded people or friends who come together semi-regularly - generally monthly or bi-monthly - for the express purpose of planning and providing support for refugees or asylum seekers both in the community and in various detention settings. They usually form to meet a particular need and disband once that need is met. I have been an active member of a Circle of Friends based in the Adelaide Hills, so during this catch up with Verity and Mabel I was keen to see how their experience accords with, or challenges my own, and to learn more about how they understand and experienced their own Circle when it was active. I asked how their Circle came about in 2004. They told me:

> *Verity: The Circles are sort of... I am not sure if organic is the word? Nobody says they have to start.*
>
> *Mabel: I think I was talking to someone at ARA*[31] *one day and I said, "I could never do anything like [starting a Circle]." And he said, "Yes you could. I'll help you." And he did. I mean, it was fairly simple because it is such a simple, organic thing as you say. I asked friends to come along… I asked people who I thought would be interested.*
>
> *Verity: You sort of ask like-minded people. You are not even sure if they know anything about refugees…*

Mabel and Verity told me their Circle of Friends met about once a month when it was most active. Their activities encompass many of the broad range of activities undertaken by supporters outlined in Chapter One.

[31] Australian Refugee Association, based in Adelaide, South Australia

They also shared with me that Circle meetings were often used to provide information and promote knowledge sharing between members as many were keen to provide support but did not necessarily have the knowledge or skills to do so.

> *Verity: Our Circle was initially started for Alaa and Marzieh. It was a coming together to support refugees and each other. It was a very harmonious Circle. We worked so much for particular needs. 'So and so needs a lawyer' or whatever.*
>
> *Mabel: Circles were a support by and large. If we were bothered about something or couldn't think how to do something, there will be somebody in that group who we could ring. So, it was a great thing. We would organise, we would work out a bit of a structure, sharing the load.*
>
> *Verity: They gave us a safe place to be able to talk about it. I think for me that was a really big thing because I couldn't even talk about it with my husband.*

I asked them if they felt they could have undertaken their support work without the Circle. Verity said:

> *It would have been very hard to continue on your own indefinitely. You needed others to contribute. In the early days, post release*[32]*, the network was vitally important amongst Circles. I remember somewhere up in Eden Hills there was someone who had this huge shed that was full of all sorts of household goods. Oh, you would just go up and load the trailer! It was amazing! I think they were probably part of the Hills Circle of Friends.*

I asked Verity and Mabel to reflect on why they think the Circles worked so well to provide support to people seeking refuge and to Circle Members. Verity said:

> *There was always, as far as we could pick up, never any sense of imposing restrictions or anything on the people that we were helping or each other.*

The particular Circle that Verity and Mabel were members of disbanded in 2010, but in the years it was active, it provided critical support to people seeking refuge and a supportive, accessible, and novel way for like-minded people and friends to participate outside of formal structures such as NGOs. The wider community of Circles continue to be active, providing much needed support for people seeking refuge.

[32] When people were released from detention settings.

Introduction

This chapter explores the South Australian 'Circles of Friends' and argues that they appear to provide a unique avenue and model for participation in support in terms of many factors including accessibility, efficacy, and sustainability. To understand something of the nature of the Circles of Friends as a discrete group of supporters, in terms of how they organise and conceptually what they are, I turned to literature on social movements. Social movements have been examined extensively across the academic canon, particularly in political science, sociology, and anthropology. Because social movements span the political spectrum and various disciplinary areas of interest, definitions of what they are vary and are contested (Mayo 2004). Mayo (2004, p. 54) states social movements include "collective mobilisations with socioeconomic, political and/ or cultural dimensions, mobilising around issues of identity and rights." In this case, all those who support the rights of people seeking refuge could be considered a movement.

I consider the Circles especially as they relate to grassroots organizations and civil society activism (c.f. Goodwin & Jasper 2009; Nash 2005; Escobar 1992; Cnaan & Milofsky 2006). This literature offers insights into the structure, organisation, efficacy, informality, and flexibility of social movements, in contrast to other forms of organisation (c.f. Gellner & Hirsch 2001; Phillips 2007). On their website, The Circles of Friends Australia refer to themselves simultaneously as a form of 'grassroots action', 'community groups', 'individual volunteers', and an 'organisation', making it difficult to determine exactly where they fit in the support world (Circle of Friends Australia Inc n.d.). It appears they occupy a space that exists between social movements (in their various forms), formal organisations, and NGOs. However, in this Chapter, I argue their enigmatic mode of organisation and character provides them with some clear advantages and benefits, both for supporters and those they support.

I first explore literature surrounding social movements, to consider various understandings of what they are and what characteristics they share. I then begin to apply these understandings and characteristics to the Circles of Friends as I provide a brief overview of their history. I undertake in-depth analysis of the mode of organisation of the Circles, drawing on the literature to hone in on their deeply democratic, egalitarian, and relaxed structure, but also to point out where they demonstrate aspects of formal organisations and

NGOs (Phillips 2007; Gellner & Hirsch 2001; Appadurai 2002; Mindell 2000). For the remainder of the chapter I refer back to the literature and the Circles' mode of organisation to exemplify how it affects the early engagement and ongoing participation of supporters, particularly in terms of learning through communities of practice (Wenger 1998; Lave 1991; Ollis 2011); the creation of safe spaces that increase *visibility* of supporters as they undertake their work (Honneth 2001; Smith et al. 2018; Herzog 2019); collective levels of trust which in turn influences organisational processes, decision-making, flexibility and efficacy and cohesiveness (Jasper 1998; Goodwin, Jasper & Polletta 2004); and the deliberate strategy of refusal to overtly confront proponents of Australia's immigration regime (McGranahan 2016; Prasse-Freeman 2020; Weiss 2016). Throughout, I seek to highlight how the Circles' mode of organisation attracts, retains, and supports its members, contributing to their resilience and sustainability.

Defining social movements

As outlined in the introductory chapter, the term 'social movement' often conjures visions of large-scale protest that align with big-idea trends (Johnston 2014; Goodwin, Jasper & Polletta 2004). However, Escobar & Alvarez (1992, p. 7) state, "the whole idea of a "social movement" as a description of collective action should be abandoned because it traps our language in conceptual traditions that have to be discarded." Subsequently, smaller scale efforts in pursuit of some sort of social change have been further described as: 'social movement organisations' – formal organisations which identify their goals with those of a wider social movement (Goodwin & Jasper 2009); 'affinity groups' – small, semi-independent groups of people who act in solidarity with other similar groups and provide safe spaces for likeminded people to connect (Goodwin & Jasper 2009); 'grassroots movements' – local groups focused on day-to-day experiences of people (Escobar 1992); and 'community organisations' – groups of people connected by their location and cultural values that respond to community concerns (Cnaan & Milofsky 2006), to name just a few. In terms of scale and description, the Circles of Friends resemble these smaller scale efforts towards social change.

No matter the scale, types of organisations that reflect 'social movement' characteristics are usually differentiated from corporate organisations or NGOs. Gerlach (1971) describes social movements as segmented, polycephalous, and reticulate, whilst Goodwin and Jasper (2009) point out they are typically democratic, embracing egalitarianism, and avoiding bureaucracy and hierarchy. Social movements are also often spaces of informal, situated learning, where people can develop their skills and knowledge through social action. These characteristics set them apart from corporate organisations which typically have centralised management structures, structured training, funding and accounting systems, business, communications, human resources strategies, and who operate in a competitive market (Gellner & Hirsch 2001; Della Porta & Diani 2006). They are also typically differentiated from NGOs who may also share some of these characteristics, as explored in Chapter Six. Despite this, some NGOs often like to describe themselves as movements, further complicating matters (Lashaw et al. 2017).

The term 'social movement', thus, appears to apply to supporters of people seeking refuge as a name for, or descriptor of, collective action taken by likeminded people in response to particular social circumstances. However, it is a malleable and scaleable concept with blurred boundaries. As such, different organisations and groups in the support world may identify themselves on a spectrum from complete alignment with and participation in a wider refugee rights social movement, to partial alignment and sympathy for the concerns of the movement or as a different type of organisation altogether. In some instances, such as in the example of the Circles of Friends, a collective of likeminded individuals may incorporate a variety of social movement (and other) characteristics as I will soon explore.

Locating the Circles of Friends

Circles of Friends are an alliance of refugee and asylum seeker supporters who make up a significant proportion of the wider support landscape in South Australia. They were,

> …started by a handful of people round a kitchen table in June 2002... Founding members sought to gain the release of refugees and asylum seekers being held in detention... When the initial focus on advocacy was not successful, [they] turned [their] attention to supporting individuals and families.

> Each local Circle took responsibility for deciding who and how many asylum seekers and refugees it supported and raised its own funds to do this.
>
> (Circle of Friends Australia Inc. n.d.)

Originally, the Circles of Friends were very much a small, grassroots movement, closely affiliated with the Australian Refugee Association (ARA) who provided some early and basic administrative and infrastructure support (such as banking facilities) to the Circles (Escobar 1992; Archdall 2002). However, over time and as the number of Circles grew, a core group of early Circle members determined it was necessary to set up first the 'combined Circles' and then 'Circle of Friends Australia' (COFA). The combined Circles brought together representatives from different Circles to meet throughout the year to resolve problems together, to share the support load, and to try and reduce duplication of support throughout the Circles. Circle of Friends Australia (officially formed in 2013) eventually enabled the Circles to operate independently of ARA with their own basic administration and infrastructure (Circle of Friends Australia Inc n.d.). By this point they encompassed characteristics of various modes of organisation, including community organisations, social movements, and NGOs (Cnaan & Milofsky 2006; Della Porta & Diani 2006; Nash 2005). Though at the time of writing Circles operate with some degree of formality, overall, they continue to operate exactly as their name suggests, and as they first began; where groups of 'friends' or like-minded people come together to meet a need or series of needs of people seeking refuge, as highlighted by the story of Verity and Mabel at the outset. In this way they resemble affinity groups (Goodwin & Jasper 2009).

The Circle of Friends Australia website states:

> Members of each Circle are volunteers who come from a wide range of backgrounds but share a common commitment to welcoming and assisting new arrivals with the difficult process of establishing themselves in a new country, or with the challenges of detention. Irrespective of varying political views, we believe Australians are welcoming, generous, and compassionate people, and we try to demonstrate these Australian values towards our newest arrivals.
>
> (Circle of Friends Australia Inc n.d.)

Additionally, they present their objectives:

- To support asylum seekers and refugees in the community and in detention.
- To assist people and communities suffering in situations of conflict, displacement, disaster, discrimination, and poverty.
- To organise educational activities to inform members and the public about issues relating to asylum seekers and refugees.
- To encourage the formation and growth of regional groups to support refugees and asylum seekers in their community.

(Circle of Friends Australia Inc n.d.)

Circle activities often involve fundraising as well as providing material and emotional support for individuals, families or small communities of people (McGuire 2020; Haren 2004). The Circles are not so much 'underground', as they are 'little known' amongst the general public. Outside of fundraising events they do not particularly advertise themselves. COFA has a website, and some Circles may have a Facebook page or other modest social media presence, but you will not find information about them at your local community centre or library. My participants describe both connecting with and promoting their own Circles through word-of-mouth. Reliance on connecting with Circles via word-of-mouth has meant Circles have grown organically over time as members invited their friends and acquaintances who were potentially sympathetic to participate in fundraising, support activities or Circle meetings. In this aspect they resemble a grassroots friendship network – a type of community organisation where friendship facilitates participation and mutual solving of community problems (Adams & Ueno 2006; Escobar 1992). Other efforts grounded in friendship and community have been noted elsewhere in the support world in Australia (Peterie 2019).

In the South Australian context, and within my research field, Circles of Friends are notable as a key pillar of the support community in terms of scope, outcomes, and longevity. Their activities and scope have been particularly suited for providing support in the political and social circumstances since their inception, where support and advocacy efforts have been considerably curtailed by the legal and policy settings of hard-line governments.

As of July 2020, some 125 Circles had formed over 18 years to service various needs, with 25 that were 'active', meaning they were semi-regularly meeting and undertaking activities involved with support. They estimate they have helped thousands of people during this time. Of all my participants, Circle members comprise the longest serving supporters, often having been involved in support for at least ten years or longer. I argue the way Circles are organised, incorporating characteristics of social movements, community organisations, and more formal organisations has a significant impact on the resilience of supporters.

Mode of organisation

Individuals involved in Circles of Friends do not see themselves as working *for* the Circles, but rather they *are* the Circles. In many ways, the operations of the Circles of Friends reflect the true nature of a literal circle of people. In a circle of people standing together, no one is the leader, no one is the follower, no one is in front, and no one is behind. Replicating the egalitarianism and lack of hierarchy found in social movements, Circles of Friends embrace elements of deep democracy, and this is part of their attractiveness for members (Nash 2005; Goodwin & Jasper 2009).

Deep democracy is the idea that by being aware of, and focusing on the voices, realities, and experiences of all people (as opposed to just the majority or most powerful), unexpected solutions can be found to challenges we face (Mindell 2000). Appadurai (2002, p. 36) applies the descriptor deep democracy to describe a kind of governmentality from below, or as he suggests, "…governmentality turned against itself." He explores the notion of deep democracy through an analysis of an urban activist alliance who focus on the challenge of adequate housing in Mumbai. Appadurai (2002) explains that deep democracy is a kind of democracy that does away with boundaries of the nation state and functions at the grassroots, in intimate, local settings. Deep democracy is found within groups and communities where individuals self-organise to share their resources, knowledge, skills, and funds. They work together to self-survey and evaluate their efforts as an alternative to becoming enmeshed in opaque, hierarchical, bureaucratic, and technocratic relations with donors, state institutions and regulators (Appadurai 2002).

Deep democracy and egalitarianism are promoted in the Circles of Friends through the bringing together likeminded people and friends (c.f. Nash 2005; Goodwin & Jasper 2009; Adams & Ueno 2006; Appadurai 2002). By likeminded, I mean that Circle members appear to share similar beliefs, politics, and a sense of moral responsibility to fellow human beings, including people seeking refuge. It is not surprising Circle members often share values, beliefs, and political ideology as they tend to recruit from their own social Circles, as exemplified in Verity and Mabel's story. Membership based on friendship has meant the demography of Circles has also tended to coalesce around certain characteristics over time. For example, most (but not all) Circle participants are retired women. The majority are well educated having completed secondary and tertiary education. Many describe themselves as financially sound and all describe themselves as privileged: that is, they have access to time, resources, education and life experience and they state all these factors enable them to participate in support work. It should be noted, though several disclosed a family history involving migration, most are not themselves from an asylum-seeking background. They appear to recognise this to some degree, drawing on their collective experiences and knowledge to provide support in culturally competent and sensitive ways. However, there is considerable scope for Circles to work more closely *with*, rather than *for* people seeking refuge, to promote participation, self-representation, and leadership amongst those they seek to support (Global Refugee Led Network 2019; Fiske 2016; Lenette et al. 2020; Rae, Holman & Nethery 2018). Due to the nature of the work (which is often urgent, reactive, and crisis-driven) and the typical circumstances of refugees and asylum seekers (which are frequently precarious and vulnerable) people seeking refuge are often recipients of support, rather than active participants in support. In this way, there is considerable room for improvement. Nevertheless, in numerous ways, Circles reflect characteristics of grassroots forms of social movements, particularly affinity groups (Goodwin & Jasper 2009; Nash 2005; Mayo 2004). Coming from a wide variety of backgrounds, but sharing key commonalities appears to 'grease the wheels' of their support efforts, in terms of how they work with each other. Alliances formed by friends also make for a highly democratic structure in the Circles.

Circles of Friends exemplify deep democracy in their very loose, flat structure, and relative freedom to make key decisions about what or who to support. They are an acephalous, rather than a polycephalous, cohort (MacGill 2016; Gerlach 1971). No one definitively says that a Circle must start, how they should operate or when they should cease their work, though COFA (Circle of Friends Australia) offers guidelines.

Within Circles, members, drawing on their resources, knowledge, and skills, make decisions through consensus. Thomas explains how this plays out in practice:

> *One family needed their rent paid because they had no income. They were seeking asylum, had no work rights, no income, no Medicare. So, a Circle was started to pay their rent. Then when Vinnies*[33] *had to shut down their refugee centre out near Port Adelaide, some other people said, 'we need to do this through Circle of Friends because we can't leave these people… We have to start a Circle'. They gathered whoever, gathered their friends, to make donations and provided for them. It is individual people or a few people together, saying, 'we have to do something here, we know of this specific need, lets fix it, let's do it. We know these people; we will work with them'.*

Thomas' example illustrates how each Circle identifies a support need or needs in the community, collectively works out how they would like to offer support, perhaps agree on the breadth, depth, or type of support they can offer, and then they simply get on with it. In these aspects, Circles of Friends demonstrate characteristics of grassroots movements and community organisations (Escobar 1992; Cnaan & Milofsky 2006). Though they may have an awareness of, and limited contact with, more formalised support organisations, and they necessarily must engage with government agencies as they support people seeking refuge, overall, they avoid becoming enmeshed in these settings. These characteristics also reflect those linked by Appadurai (2002) to deep democracy.

Despite being highly democratic and reflecting characteristics of grassroots movements in many aspects, the Circles of Friends do demonstrate some characteristics of more formal organisations (Gellner & Hirsch 2001). Circle of Friends Australia is registered with the Australian Taxation Office as a Public and Benevolent Body, and with the Australian Charities and Not-for-Profits Commission as a Charity with tax deductible receipting status for donations (Circle of Friends Australia Inc n.d.). All Circles report to the board of Circle of Friends Australia Inc. (Circle of Friends Australia Inc. n.d.). Their organisational accountability is through a management committee and compliance with their Constitution, including an audited financial statement (Circle of Friends Australia Inc. n.d.).

[33] St Vincent De Paul Society shop for affordable and pre-loved items.

Each Circle usually appoints people to positions such as chairperson, treasurer, secretary, and the like – however this is to provide some structure and focus for meetings, rather than to bestow any power or hierarchy on individual members or the Circle. At meetings, minutes are taken, and business is raised according to an agenda, but this forms the bulk of any bureaucratic or administrative load. Newsletters are sometimes produced to inform interested parties (such as allies within wider society) of how their donations have been used.

Circles also somewhat resemble smaller NGOs in that they receive financial support from private donors that may or may not come with conditions for how funds should be used. However, they typically do not receive government funding which can demand quite onerous forms of compliance (Phillips 2007). Additionally, there are checks and balances associated with legal aspects of the work. Circle members dealing with vulnerable people are now also required to provide evidence that they have a relevant police check and working with children clearances to undertake their voluntary work – one of the few areas of formal accountability that exist in Circles of Friends Australia (Circle of Friends Australia Inc n.d.). Their nebulous organisational structure enables Circles to function in ways that make them quite efficacious and attractive, especially for newcomers who, usually motivated by their personal morals and values, are seeking their 'in' to the support world and its various activities, and for members wishing to continuously increase their knowledge and skills.

Initial engagement and ongoing participation

A key challenge for would-be supporters is how to access opportunities in support that allow them to participate in ways that are meaningful to them. Some positions in organisations and NGOs require volunteers and workers to have specific skills or qualifications to become actively involved in support. However, the democratic and egalitarian nature of the Circles of Friends provide invaluable 'training grounds' via which passionate and morally motivated individuals not only find their 'in' to the support community, but also learn how to support, alongside others. Ollis (2011) explored informal and social learning dimensions of activists in Australia as they participated in a range of social issues locally and internationally. She argues activists' knowledge and skills are learned from one another through socialisation as they engage in 'communities of practice.'

‘Communities of practice’ describes groups of individuals who are drawn together in continual and ongoing efforts, striving towards a mutual initiative or goal (Wenger 1998). In communities of practice, learning is a social process, rather than a transactional transfer of knowledge between teacher and student (Ollis 2011; Lave 1991). Moreover, communities of practice are groupings that facilitate shared learning, by incorporating: *meaning* – ways of talking about experiences together that negotiate and generate meaning; *practices* – ways of discussing shared resources and knowledge that sustain engagement and action; *community* – shared ways of doing things, creating a sense of belonging; and *identity* – defining who we are both within and through other members of the community of practice (Wenger 1998). In the case of Circles of Friends, each Circle forms its own small community of practice that sits within a broader landscape of practice – a complex system of communities that include other Circles and the wider sector (Wenger 2015).

Though they may share many strengths and commonalities, a large proportion of new Circle members lack knowledge and skills required to immediately participate in support effectively. This could potentially exclude them from participation in more formalised settings, such as through NGO programs and the like. Helen explained how she came to the Circles and how participation in a Circle facilitated her learning, as Circle members collaborated, shared information, and discussed practices:

> *I had always been a social activist, had been a feminist… I worked in women’s shelters, childcare work, and then was coordinator of a women’s community centre and had done lots of political work around women’s fight for equality and liberation. Also, I have been on the edges of doing lots of support for Aboriginal people, but I hadn’t found my way of knowing how to do that really. I did various things, but I couldn’t find a place where... my ‘in’. Then with refugees, I felt the same feeling I had about women and Aboriginal people - about social justice. But this time, there was an ‘in’ [via the Circles].*

> *I learnt you can do harm from when I was young, and I had been gung-ho* (voice goes quieter). *And these people*[34] *are so vulnerable, we cannot allow ourselves to do harm. We have to be educated and so, there was a sharing of resources, a sharing of information. In just* ***listening*** *to each other, there was a sharing of ways of how to think about what we can do and what we can't do.* (Her emphasis.)

Helen's testimony highlights how the Circles' collaborative and informal sharing of knowledge through situated learning enabled her to become involved and positively changed her approach to support— an outcome of situated learning also noted by Wenger (1998) and Lave (1991). It also highlights the democratic and egalitarian exchange between members, typical of social movements and community organisations as they engage in listening and sharing to improve their support practices (Goodwin & Jasper 2009; Cnaan & Milofsky 2006).

Circles provide a learning environment for development of skills and knowledge in more complicated or sensitive aspects of support for people seeking refuge. Verity told me about how she learned some key advocacy skills through her early participation in a Circle. She said,

> *We had different people talking about how you influence MPs and how you apply for visas, grants, Centrelink for people, and whatever.*

At certain points throughout the Circles' history, conferences, workshops, news, and strategies for advocacy have been regularly shared across the Circles and with outside groups and organisations. Learning of this nature depends strongly on *shared histories of learning* that are present in communities of practice (Wenger 1998). In the Circles, members often find a shared body of knowledge they can draw on, 'learning as they go.' More experienced Circle members contribute their knowledge and experience to upskill new or inexperienced Circle members.

Democratic and open transfer of knowledge between members is critical to the efficacious functioning of the Circles of Friends. Circle members share information and strategies related to things like legal steps and processes that people might undergo to achieve refugee status and visas, people's rights in detention settings (both supporters and those detained),

[34] Referring to people seeking refuge.

and details of programs and services that might be available for people in the community. Knowledge transfer of this kind has been used across many social movements (Tilly, Castañeda & Wood 2020). Ollis (2011) found mentoring of new activists by more experienced activists was a very important part of learning and sustainability in activism and this is also seen in the Circles of Friends. Over time the inexperienced become experienced, ready to welcome and pass on knowledge to a new generation of members. In this way, through shared histories of learning the Circles truly are circular in their capacity to welcome new and sometimes unskilled members in to a safe learning environment where they can develop and/ or solidify their support identities (Wenger 1998).

Learning also occasionally occurs between Circles and members of different Circles, but there is potential for this to increase. Gwen shared with me how different Circles and their members develop different strengths and knowledge depending on their focus and how sharing this can be important and beneficial. She said:

> *The Blackwood circle is great at fundraising. Energetic, committed. They wanted to hear our stories. They had some stories of their own because they were reaching out to families. My reaching out in different settings was a broader experience for them… [Nikki] and I bounce off each other. We will often glean stuff from each other and her knowledge in criminal and courts and stuff is invaluable because I haven't done any of that. I don't know about it. If I need to know something, I will usually think of someone to call.*

Gwen's testimony explains how discrete Circles work according to their own strengths, but also highlights potential that exists for increased knowledge and skills sharing between and across Circles who fit within a broader landscape of practice (Wenger 2015). The acephalous and democratic nature of the Circles means there is scope for Circles to share with each other based on each Circle's (and Circle members) self-determined needs and areas of interest or expertise. There is also scope to collaborate with and learn from other likeminded supporters who may be working in case management, migration, legal firms, educational settings and so much more (c.f. MacGill 2016; Nash 2005; Goodwin & Jasper 2009). This variety is highly attractive to Circle members.

Circles as safe spaces

By creating highly democratic, welcoming, and collaborative opportunities for participation, the Circles of Friends also cultivate safe spaces for likeminded people to connect. Safe spaces within social movements are most often discussed in relation to affinity groups (Goodwin & Jasper 2009). The term 'affinity groups' arises from small circles of (anarchist) friends who would meet during the Spanish Civil War to discuss their strategies to fight back against fascism (Polletta 2013). Nowadays, affinity groups are mostly linked with safe spaces created for people who are often disempowered to meet, share, and strategise (Abdullah, Karpowitz & Raphael 2016). Circles of Friends resemble affinity groups in that they bring together likeminded people, who often feel otherwise socially invisible or imperceptible on account of their highly politicised choices to support people seeking refuge and offer safe spaces for them to connect. This connection is not only about planning and organising, but also about supporting each other.

At Circle meetings and gatherings, it is typical for members to share their experiences. This sharing serves the pragmatic need to provide updates, troubleshoot difficult circumstances, seek advice from other members, or share new information. Additionally, it provides the social conditions for members to connect with each other around shared experiences and concerns. For example, a member might provide an update about a refugee family they are in contact with who needs some material goods, but who also needs medical treatment but cannot access it because of their visa conditions; the Circle will work out how to handle this together. Circle members indicate having a sense of purpose that is shared by a small group of individuals is a particularly salient characteristic of the Circles that serves to counter feelings of invisibility and imperceptibility that are often prevalent amongst supporters (Herzog 2019; Honneth 2001; Smith et al. 2018). Anne explains in her Circle she felt like she was not alone:

> *I feel like, when you start up a group, the most important thing is that you feel as though you are not alone in your concerns and your actions. I think that is an incredibly powerful motivator to keep doing the work that you know, "Hey, there are all these other people who actually care about the same things as I do". I don't think it should be underestimated, how important that is. We had that in the Circles.*

Here, Circles not only serve as safe spaces for individuals to be heard, seen and understood *as supporters*, but they establish a shared or collective identity that further strengthens and validates their beliefs, motivations, and efforts (Holland, Fox & Daro 2008; Nardini et al. 2021). Nardini et al. (2021) argue when people reinforce their senses of identity in these ways they are more likely to become more committed to a cause. They also emphasise how close relationships, strong senses of belonging and identity, and mutual trust boost wellbeing and resilience as group members listen to each other and share their concerns.

The visibility between Circle members creates social conditions that enable valuable opportunities for debriefing. Debriefing here occurs mostly informally. Circle members collectively monitor and evaluate their success and outcomes in relatively informal ways, mostly through storytelling with each other at Circle meetings. However, they also engage in exchange with each other that they suggest is somewhat therapeutic. Maliha says:

> *…Through Circle of Friends, you can find out from each person in the Circle what has happened in that month for their family or the person they support and that just feels like things are getting better. It is really easy to feel hopeless when you feel that society is crunching down on these people but small victories, you know, 'they got their car license this week', or new things that are happening for people is encouraging for us all to hear the story. It is a live, connected story sharing about progress, or the lack of it, and what can we do. Strategic problem solving, group efforts. People were all very kind with each other and understood that it is difficult a lot of times when things are not going well and so, there is a sense of understanding.*

Often supporters reported they do not feel understood in relation to the work they do, especially in relation to people that matter to them such as close friends and family, as discussed in Chapter Five. However, they indicated that in the Circles they felt understood, seen, and heard. Circle members said they value(d) the confidential and secure spaces they found within Circles because they felt they had nobody else they could talk to who really understood what they did. Verity and Mabel confirm this, saying:

Verity: We would probably ring each other at least once a week or so but, it was incredibly good to have the circle. It was a safe place where we could, if we wanted to, talk about it or share particular concerns or whatever. Because we couldn't do it with others. Friends weren't interested.

Mabel: I suppose I didn't have anyone to share it with. Which was probably perhaps helpful in a way? Because we did have each other and that's what made some of us in the Circle very close. We knew we could ring each other about any sort of worry. So, our concerns were parked from other people, largely because they weren't interested.

Verity and Mabel's testimony highlights how the unique mode of organisation of the Circles of Friends often provides an unintended, yet inbuilt benefit: the chance for members to discuss their experiences, feelings, and concerns with not only like-minded, but like-experienced others. This is encouraged by their democratic culture, starting with the sharing of ideas and everyone having a voice and resulting in the building of connection, trust and social visibility (Appadurai 2002; Mindell 2000; Honneth 2001; Smith et al. 2018). The Circles provide physical, social, and emotional spaces that supporters often fail to find in other settings or circumstances, where they (at least periodically) become more visible and perceptible in the very important work they do (Honneth 2001; Smith et al. 2018). Circle members impressed upon me that trust was also critically important to getting things done, which in turn contributes to their overall sense of achievement, satisfaction, and longevity.

A shared trust

Trust is thought to be essential for the success of social movements, affecting their organisational processes, decision-making, efficacy, and cohesiveness and this is also the case for the Circles of Friends (Goodwin, Jasper & Polletta 2004; Della Porta & Diani 2006). Throughout the research participants indicated that, when volunteering or working in some support settings outside of the Circles, they had found the lack of trust and common sense afforded to them by NGOs and other community groups very frustrating. They revealed they were often constrained by unnecessary or incongruous processes, procedures, and rules they were unable to circumvent or overcome.

Some participants had previous experience of working in positions characterised by the governmentality of more formalised support roles and said this had put them off participating in those workplace cultures. Anne had experienced this and told me about how important trust is for motivation and ongoing engagement in support:

> *You have to trust people! …They*[35] *are just stifling that kind of joy, spontaneity and creativity. If you are going to make any difference in the world, you need to have all those things, as well as the passion and the knowledge! I hope that there is a swing back to trust [in organisations], because I think it is the only way forwards.*

Anne's desire to trust and be trusted to undertake support work in spontaneous and creative ways was key to her attraction to, and ongoing involvement in, the Circles of Friends. Trust arising from their democratic and relaxed mode of organisation often affords Circle members far more freedom to arrive at creative solutions to problems together and to implement them with less difficulty than they faced in alternative settings. This freedom, creativity and trust is often seen in deeply democratic settings and affinity groups (Appadurai 2002; Mindell 2000; Goodwin & Jasper 2009). In the Circles, high levels of trust also improve supporter efficacy.

Trust has been credited by many Circle members as important for reducing stress and boosting their feelings of motivation and resilience. Circle members say they feel they can achieve something meaningful through their efforts, rather than being obstructed by bureaucracy, procedures, and rules. Often this comes down to how trust intersects with decision-making. Mutual trust should not be misinterpreted as carte blanche approval for members to do whatever they want. What it means is there exists a sort of implicit yet important understanding between members that they act in accordance with their shared personal beliefs and motivations, which places supporting people who are seeking refuge at the forefront of all they do. It also means checking with each other and looking to each other for guidance as they make decisions. Helen provided a clear example of what this looks like in practice:

[35] Referring to larger and more formalised NGOs and organisations.

> *We give each other something, we back each other up; people saying, 'yes', so it is not just my decision alone. I might get requests from various people to pay for migration costs…I have a think about them and send them onto the rest of the committee. But it is not my decision alone, I do not bear that alone. This money that we have raised or been given or whatever, it belongs to The Circle, it is not mine…It then becomes a group decision and that is much easier to bear and to care than a decision on your own. Like, 'this bequest that we got, $3,300 to pay this bill for this person, shall we do it?' - It is not my decision alone and that is really, really important.*

Helen's example shows how trust encourages collective decision-making, both of which are said to be critical to the success of social movements, but are less emphasized in formal organisations (Goodwin, Jasper & Polletta 2004; Jasper 1998; Owczarzak, Broaddus & Pinkerton 2016). Rather than constraining support decisions and activities with rules and processes, which often suggests a need for control to manage or mitigate risks or to prove legitimacy (Shore & Wright 2003; Lister 2003), Circle members draw on their trust in each other to work out how they can deal with various needs they uncover in the community – all of which are unique, complex, and often present unexpected dilemmas.

Trust between Circle members also helps to maintain group cohesion during difficult periods. As with any circumstance where you bring many people together, even when there is strong shared consensus about the goal being pursued, there are times when people will disagree. Participants' experiences varied across Circles, but most remarked how harmonious their dealings with each other were or are. In difficult situations, they described trusting that even though they might not agree, they all share the right motivations and have the best interests of refugees and asylum seekers at heart. This means they tend to respond to each other in ways that build inclusivity and work to people's strengths, maximising their potential for success. Again, Anne detailed:

> *They were all really good people, but of course in any group of people there are people who think differently. Sometimes people are just a bit odd, but we kind of just managed. We were kind to each other, and we managed to find niches and outlets for people to do stuff…In other facets of my life I have been in committees where I am just tearing my hair out and don't know how to deal with x, y and z. I never remember that with the Circle. We managed as a group to function pretty well really.*

Testimonies like these, gathered from many Circle members, suggest the non-hierarchical nature of the Circles that prioritises shared values (such as kindness), and inclusivity of all members with their various skills, backgrounds, and ideas makes for a deeply democratic structure and culture (Appadurai 2002; Nash 2005; Della Porta & Diani 2006). Trust provides a strong foundation on which members can provide support in ways that align with their senses of self and identity alongside other likeminded people (Appadurai 2002; Mindell 2000; Goodwin, Jasper & Polletta 2004). Trust is critical to the smooth functioning of the Circles, the provision of support and strong sense of motivation and resilience to carry on the work. It also contributes the acceptance by Circle members of highly flexible ways of working.

Flexibility and efficacy

Malkki (2015) explored the experiences of international aid workers and found that, in part, they were attracted to working abroad because it offered an escape from the mundane, constraining, and emotionally cold work they found in the welfare society 'at home.' That is, they were actively seeking something different, some variety, to fill their need for freedom and sensorial fulfilment. Participants describe that in the Circles they have the flexibility to work in creative ways to accommodate various skillsets, personalities, strengths, and weaknesses of Circle members. The relaxed and democratic nature of the Circles of Friends, strongly characterised by the minimal governmentality and bureaucracy that often constrains NGOs and other organisations appears to contribute to a social environment where individuals can find or carve out roles that suit their particular identities, strengths, and interests (Gerlach 1971; Goodwin & Jasper 2009; Della Porta & Diani 2006). Helen explains what this means for herself and other Circle members:

> *My home is in the Circle of Friends. I am a member of other organisations; I write the odd letter; I go to marches and things. But where my heart is and my energies are, is in my Circle of Friends because that's the guts of responding to people and need at the community level. I can be loud, but being out front, out loud, organising rebellions or whatever isn't really where my heart is. It has been a discovery of myself and finding myself here. There is an assumption that people who come to the Circles are good people. So, there is nothing to be gained from rules or telling others what to do. There is no power system to corrupt.*

Verity echoes Helen, saying:

> *That was part of [the Circle's] beauty I think-that it was so loose and unformalised. People did what they felt comfortable with and what worked best for them.*

These testimonies illustrate members' opportunities for participation in Circles are flexible; they are not restricted by management-approved position descriptions, workplace inductions, performance reviews or other layers of bureaucracy or hierarchy that might be concomitant with formalised voluntary positions in organisations or paid employment (Shore & Wright 2015; Power 1997). In the Circles, people can participate according to their abilities, interests, and importantly, in ways that make them feel safe and supported. These factors also enable them to respond to needs quickly.

Circles members also have considerable freedom to act when urgent needs demand flexible and fast provision of support to people seeking refuge. Support provided by the Circles is generally able to side-step common organisational and bureaucratic roadblocks experienced by other support providers like NGOs who must negotiate eligibility criteria, application processes, waiting times, checklist driven processes, and the like (Shore & Wright 2015; Power 1997; Gellner & Hirsch 2001). According to Circle members, the lack of bureaucracy allowed them to move swiftly to help people when other organisations were unable to. Outside of infrequent Circle meetings where collective decisions are made about what and who to support, supporters draw on each other and Circle funds to quickly meet urgent needs. For example, if there is an urgent request to pay for medical treatment of a person

seeking refuge, this request will usually be emailed to Circle members seeking their endorsement to release funds. In this regard, some accountability processes are followed, but these are insignificant compared to those that are likely to be found in more corporate organisations (Gellner & Hirsch 2001; Owczarzak, Broaddus & Pinkerton 2016). In other circumstances, and as highlighted in the opening vignette, support might mean members turn to each other to source material goods to assist a newly arrived refugee family to meet their basic needs whilst settlement services support is delayed. These actions are much more akin to those that might be taken by community and grassroots organisations (Cnaan & Milofsky 2006; Adams & Ueno 2006; Escobar 1992).

Supporters indicated that, on occasion when supporting refugees and asylum seekers, the urgency and desperation of the situation required more flexibility and speed in the response than organisations were able to offer, given the constraints of bureaucracy on their services. For example, Mabel reminisces about the Circle being able to assist when ARA was unable to when refugees were suddenly released from Baxter detention centre, saying:

> *I remember meeting the ARA person at the bus stop and them saying 'we really can't help anybody with accommodation tonight.' …We stepped in. ARA did good work as it could but in those early years, the Circles were absolutely vital.*

The flexibility and speed of the Circles continues to enable them to respond to circumstances, particularly emergency circumstances, particularly well to this day. For example, during the Covid-19 pandemic, restrictions on government provided refugee support have become more problematic than ever, but the Circles have been able to act as a safety net for people left in precarious and vulnerable circumstances. Helen explains,

> *New Circles [of Friends] have started up because they needed to. The people that were in them, said, 'we cannot leave this happening like this without supporting people, it is not alright'. These people are on temporary visas and so they receive no government benefits, no JobSeeker*[36]*… they were completely without income.*

[3636] JobSeeker is a payment from the Australian Government that provides financial assistance to persons aged between 22 and Age Pension age and looking for work. It is additionally available when qualifying persons are

The ability to respond quickly and efficiently to the needs of people seeking refuge means members feel motivated and resilient to continue participating in support via Circles. It is of vital importance to them that they feel they have acted according to their values and have made a tangible difference for people they seek to support on a semi-regular or regular basis. This aspect of resilience is noted by O'Dwyer & Boomsma (2015) and Conner (2000). Moral, democratic, and egalitarian forms of participation are particularly important to individual and group feelings of improved resilience for individuals participating in collective efforts focused on issues such as justice and rights (Nash 2005; Hinde 2005; Rusche 2012).

There are also several additional challenges that exist within the wider support community that Circles of Friends have been able to overcome through flexibility afforded by the relaxed structure of the Circles. NGOs may find themselves competing for funding, resulting either in duplication of services and/ or planning projects that do not align well to integrate with other available service offerings. Matters of funding can also cause accessibility problems for users of the service, or funding may not be available for a wide variety of needs which means smaller community groups may try to fill the gap or advocate for solutions. Anne highlights how her Circle filled a gap as she recounts the experience of a refugee family that needed some support to get on their feet:

> *I think we did go and visit Alexander Downer (Member of Parliament) as a Circle [of Friends] … Our major focus was getting this family on its feet and continuing to support them. She [the mother] needed nursing registration, which was really, really expensive. So, we managed to find someone who was in the Nursing Registration Department and contacted them and we raised $1500 or however much it was so she could sit the exam.*

This kind of personalised, targeted political advocacy and financial support would typically fall well outside of the scope of most funded NGO offerings or provisions for people seeking refuge. This highlights the flexibility of the Circles as they are able to act based on who they feel needs support, rather than being limited by strict criteria and rules that are often found in formal organisations (Conner 2000; O'Dwyer & Boomsma 2015).

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sick or injured and cannot undertake their usual work or study for a short period. https://www.servicesaustralia.gov.au/jobseeker-payment

Circle members told me being able to deliver support in these ways left them with the strong sense they are making a difference and achieving outcomes for people they support, increasing their feelings of resilience. Another key characteristic resulting from the mode of organisation of the Circles is focus, through refusal.

Focus through refusal

In addition to being highly democratic and egalitarian, the Circles of Friends maintain a critical focus on the day-to-day experiences of those they support, responding to community needs and concerns, demonstrating aspects of grassroots movements and community organisations (Escobar 1992; Cnaan & Milofsky 2006). A key part of this involves affirming themselves as strictly apolitical and largely avoiding expenditure of communal energy on confrontational protest. When I asked what they mean by 'apolitical', they told me they do not align themselves with any particular political party. Over time, large numbers of supporters have increasingly found traditional methods of resistance to be ineffective against a resolute government and its agencies, but also to be physically, mentally, and emotionally draining as they experience silencing and stonewalling. However, the Circles mode of operation appears to have sidestepped much of the angst that can accompany resistance by deliberately maintaining their focus on providing localised support to people seeking refuge and encouraging others to join their efforts. The Circles of Friends are acutely aware that support they provide to people seeking refuge subverts the *modus operandi* of Australia's immigration regime, but in a more sustainable way (Haren 2004; Winderlich 2004). By focusing strongly on support provision to people seeking refuge and collectively refusing to expend time, energy, and other resources in actively confronting proponents of Australia's immigration regime, the Circles strategically contribute to their ongoing sustainability.

Refusal is a strategic and deliberate strategy, adopted by the Circles of Friends, in part, to increase their overall collective sustainability. Refusal, as abstention from, or avoidance of *direct resistance* (as much as possible) towards the government, is a deliberate choice that enables Circle members to 'get on with the work' whilst minimising detrimental effects that ineffective or failed attempts at confrontational resistance can bring (McGranahan 2016; Weiss 2016). According to Prasse-Freeman (2020, p. 3), "Where resistance describes opposition to direct domination… refusal describes the disavowals, rejections and manoeuvrings with and away from diffuse and mediated forms of power (governmentality)."

In the case of the Circles, engaging in refusal is literally a refusal to be drawn in to overt and direct opposition to the State. Social movements and associated modes of organisation are regularly conflated with large scale, overt protest (Johnston 2016; Tilly, Castañeda & Wood 2020). However, the Circles of Friends, who demonstrate many characteristics of social movements, "…[look] beyond 'overt power contests'…" to focus on ongoing solidarity and achieving the task at hand (Prasse-Freeman 2020, p. 16). As such, they resemble a growing cohort of civil society movements and organisations that seek to create change through less traditionally confrontational means of resistance by (as much as possible) working around and outside of states and their institutions (McGranahan 2016).

When I first became involved in a Circle, I struggled to see how or why the group would choose to remain apolitical when involved in supporting highly politicised people: refugees and asylum seekers. I felt they needed to take more of a collective oppositional stand against the government. I felt that engaging in support immediately signalled a political position. But during fieldwork I came to appreciate the strategic choice of refusal that the Circles of Friends have made. Through refusal, the Circles reject the subordination and domination of people seeking refuge by the government. Rather than collectively engaging in overt and confrontational protest of the Australian immigration regime, the Circles of Friends instead provide support for people that the government fails to provide - helping them to navigate and overcome complicated asylum and settlement processes and assisting them physically, materially, and emotionally. This is an attempt to diminish the effects of what they feel is an unfair and harsh regime (Winderlich 2004; Haren 2004). It is also an attempt to subvert and disrupt the impact of laws and policies they feel are deliberately designed to deter and punish people for daring to seek refuge here (Hegarty 2013). Instead of directing their limited resources towards overt resistance, the Circles focus on educating the community to counter government and media slurs that position refugees and asylum seekers as 'illegal', 'queue-jumpers', and the like (Winderlich 2004). In doing so, they seek to attract more like-minded people to join them, which helps to prevent burnout as more people are involved to respond to needs. This is how they work like an affinity group in and around gaps in the political and social circumstances that oppress those they support (Goodwin & Jasper 2009).

In the publicly accessible declaration of their objectives presented earlier in the chapter, Circles of Friends explicitly and deliberately downplay politics, highlighting the importance of shared values and unequivocally focusing on people seeking refuge. There is no focus placed on confrontational resistance, such as protest, signalling a clear refusal as a community to engage in direct opposition to authority (Prasse-Freeman 2020; Weiss 2016; McGranahan 2016). This is not to say Circles or Circle members do not ever engage with government during their work for the express purpose of active resistance, or that all Circle members believe that refusal is the right way to go. For example, Circles have been known to make submissions to government inquiries about the circumstances of people in immigration detention and the like, but this kind of activity is infrequent in comparison to the bulk of their work and is usually undertaken grudgingly when there is no other significant way to effect change. Circle members have also individually written letters, signed petitions, and attended protest marches as they are personally moved to do so. But participants informed me that increasingly they are also privately abandoning these efforts – in clear acts of refusal and self-preservation (McGranahan 2016) – in favour of devoting their declining capacity and energy[37] to the people they care about . Helen, who has been a key member of the Circles since the early 2000s explained:

> *I only learnt recently to write postcards [to politicians]. I used to start writing political letters. This is very old stuff. I would start writing letters and I would get into a rant, and it would be 5 pages of a rant. It was **un-sendable**! So, there was no point me writing a letter. So, I've learned the strategic sort of stuff: Two questions, that's all you have to write. I have got small notepaper; I can write those two questions and that is alright. I can do that. But I don't do it very much. I don't go there. There is no way I would be in a political party, both lots are bastards. I don't want to be dealing with their politicking. I would rather put the energy on the ground with people, or with organisations that support the advocates to do the work. I am not a political activist; I am a social activist. For me, it is about social justice. That's the sort of work I have always wanted to do. I have never done the legal work of helping people navigate the legal minefield, nor have I done lots of the heavy-duty political work. I haven't done either of them. The **living** work I have always wanted to do is in the community.* (Her emphasis.)

[37] Mainly due to aging and increasing health concerns

Helen's sentiments reflect those of many participants and go quite a way to explaining not only their attraction to the Circles and their modes of organisation and engagement, but also their longevity. Supporters are very aware that by supporting refugees and asylum seekers, they frustrate the efforts of the government to marginalise and punish them. By deliberately and strategically directing their focus as much as possible towards supporting people seeking refuge and away from direct confrontation with Australia's immigration regime, Circle members work in ways they feel align with their beliefs and identities and are also constructive both for service provision and resilience.

Conclusion

This chapter focused on a distinctive group of supporters within this research and the wider sector, the Circles of Friends. I referred to literature on social movements to analyse the Circles' modes of organisation and how this affected the experiences of members. I highlighted how the relaxed, deeply democratic, and highly egalitarian structure of the Circles of Friends positively affected the early engagement and ongoing participation of supporters and their feelings of *visibility* and trust as they go about their work. I also explored how they maintain a high degree of focus on those they support and the task at hand, rather than becoming distracted by confrontational exchanges with the government by adopting the strategy of *refusal.* I demonstrated that their mode of organisation increases their flexibility, efficacy, and cohesiveness. Whilst the Circles of Friends have some characteristics of NGOs and formal organisations, they also exemplify many characteristics of social movements – particularly at the grassroots level. Their enigmatic structure is beneficial for Circle members and those they support, making them highly attractive to current and potential members. Though I do not suggest that Circles of Friends constitute a perfect model for support, they do present an intriguing, attractive, and potentially more effective alternative mode of organisation and participation to some traditional avenues for involvement.

Image 10: Bumper stickers often displayed on supporters' cars

CHAPTER TEN

CONCLUSION

Sustaining support: implications for resilience and practice

> *We see it with rose coloured glasses, but what happens on the ground is very different.*
>
> (Willow, during a phone call in May 2021)

This thesis originated from a personal desire to understand more about the refugee and asylum seeker support sector in South Australia, of which I am a part; from an academic desire to investigate, understand, and record everyday experiences of supporters using an anthropological lens; and from an activist's desire to tell the stories of supporters with the hope that my findings might contribute to the ongoing sustainability and resilience of the sector. These desires led me, through ethnographic fieldwork, qualitative data collection, and analysis, to examine and explore experiences of volunteers and workers in formal and informal support settings who engage through varying modes of participation and organisation. This thesis has argued that people's experiences of refugee and asylum seeker support and being a supporter are framed and affected by the modes of organisation and participation through which they engage. It has made key ethnographic contributions to refugee studies, activist anthropology, and conceptual contributions to anthropology more broadly, particularly through my critique of burnout and my development of the concepts of *burn down* and *passion fatigue.* At the outset, I posed three central questions that guided my research. The first was, what motivates people to participate in refugee and asylum seeker support work? The second was, what is the nature of their experiences resulting from differing modes of participation and organisation in this work? In the first section of this conclusion, I answer these questions through a summary of the salient points revealed in the thesis. In later sections of this conclusion, I apply insight gained from this thesis to answer my final question: How can an understanding of these motivations and experiences aid support organisations (both formal and informal) to attract, retain, and care for volunteers and workers to promote sustainability in this sector?

Participating in support, motivations, and experiences: a contribution

Despite coming from diverse backgrounds and life experiences, individuals involved in this research, who participate in efforts to support people seeking refuge, are significantly motivated by beliefs and values that are central to their senses of self and identity. As discussed in Chapter Three, their beliefs about what is right or wrong, fair, or unfair, just, or unjust, not only guide, but compel supporters towards participation. Supporters work to ameliorate the effects of Australia's immigration regime: a regime that offends supporters' moral codes, beliefs, and values relating to justice and fairness in the extreme. Supporters strongly link their senses of self and identity to their ability to live and act in alignment with their moral codes. The more they feel they can live and act 'truthfully' in this way, the higher the degree of satisfaction and resilience they feel in relation to their work. I found there was clear convergence amongst supporters in terms of their motivations and underpinning beliefs leading to participation. I also found supporters evaluate their success in similar ways that coalesce around three key areas.

Supporters tend to evaluate their sense of personal success and achievement in support in terms of the degree to which they have been able to: make a difference, achieve outcomes, and forge personal connections with others, as discussed in Chapter Four. To be clear, a supporter will become aware of a need that triggers their moral sense of justice or fairness, compelling them to respond. They then act on that basis and evaluate their success (or otherwise) in terms of how well they have been able connect with other supporters and people seeking refuge to meet the need. The need may be small or great, but the evaluation of success contributes to resilience, no matter the scale. Supporters' resilience is strongly linked to what they perceive as successful provision of meaningful support and connection. However, I also found that resilience and strong sense of self, cultivated through participation in support, can also be significantly challenged through varying modes of participation.

Supporters, particularly those participating in informal settings where they may often be working relatively alone, experience a high degree of social invisibility or imperceptibility in relation to their work. As discussed in Chapter Five, supporters often find they become imperceptible to people that matter to them, such as friends and loved ones, who either do not understand, do not value, or do not support what they do. This can be socially isolating.

Supporters also often find they are rendered socially invisible by the government and its agencies as their attempts to advocate, protest, and generally interact on behalf of people seeking refuge are stonewalled and silenced. Commonly experienced social invisibility and/ or imperceptibility negatively affects supporter senses of self, identity, and resilience as they derive a great deal of comfort and strength from 'being seen.' For supporters, 'being seen' means their actions, messages, and efforts are visible and recognised by others as important, worthy, and meaningful. 'Being seen' means being understood and valued. It also presents more hope for change, as 'being seen' often also translates to being heard. When supporters are seen and heard by friends, loved ones, and the government, they feel this increases the likelihood they may achieve meaningful outcomes (as discussed in Chapter Four), thus their resilience is boosted.

As explored in Chapter Six, the resilience of supporters is significantly tested in formal work settings and organisational contexts where they may be required to work within parameters not of their own choosing. This is particularly evident in organisations that are reliant on government funding, which generates technologies of governmentality and the requirements of audit and accountability. Funding agreements necessarily stipulate for what purpose and how public money is spent on programs and services. Additionally, they require monitoring of, and reporting on, funded programs and services, but this reliance of the sector on funding and its demands presents several challenges. Strong reliance on government funding in the sector means organisations must compete to ensure their sustainability. Increasing competition negatively affects collaboration between organisations as they must diversify their service offerings to attract different packages of funding and they must guard their programs to protect ongoing funding. Robust reporting requirements at various intervals throughout the year require significant resources to be allocated towards record keeping and management. Completion of various 'tick-box' forms and processes consume considerable resources that supporters would prefer to allocate towards on-the-ground service delivery to people seeking refuge. Additionally, both workers and clients may face capture and commodification as organisations seek to retain their human resources and funding dollars; for every person an organisation supports, they receive money. Additionally, government funding results in the censorship and silencing of workers and clients. Individuals are prevented from publicly speaking critically about the government, lest organisations' ongoing or future opportunities to secure government funding become damaged.

These various effects that arise from government funding challenge supporters' resilience and senses of identity. In the funded environment, supporters often find they are less able to act in alignment with their beliefs or provide support in ways they feel are meaningful. Those that are unable to find ways around these challenges are at greater risk of leaving the workplace or burning out.

Perhaps unsurprisingly, considering some revelations made in this thesis, supporters experience an array of emotions in relation to their support activities. A frequently experienced emotion is anger. As explored in Chapter Seven, supporters experience anger in intense and complex ways so regularly that anger forms part of a 'state of being' for supporters. Anger often manifests as moral outrage for supporters. For them, being angry or morally outraged provokes what feels for them an innate response: to take productive and principled action. Action taken may constitute many forms including resistance. In recent years, overt and directly confrontational modes of resistance have, for the most part, failed to shift the increasingly resolute and immoveable Australian immigration regime. Supporters have found the power of their efforts so curtailed that small acts of everyday resistance are now favoured in the support landscape, but sadly do little to achieve meaningful and long-term change. Everyday modes of supporter resistance, through no fault of their own, have been weakened over time by the monolithic power of the government. This has concomitantly weakened supporters' resilience and increased their chances of heading towards burnout.

Though supporters discuss and think about burnout using popularised yet clinical descriptors and ideas, I critiqued the popular notion of burnout, suggesting that supporters in this cohort tend *to burn down*, but they rarely completely burn out. Through this research, I found supporters appear to experience *passion fatigue*— and I developed this term to describe the tiredness resulting from their inability to *stop* caring or to fully disengage from the world of support. Their exhaustion does not lead to apathy, cynicism, boredom, or callousness (commonly associated with compassion fatigue). Rather, they remain thoroughly devoted to support even when they feel considerably burned down. In Chapter Eight, I showed that, when feeling fatigued, supporters feel compelled to find ways to carry on in the long-term. One way they do this is by actively retreating from the work for a period in the short-term. This is noteworthy. These periods of retreat are generally not imposed or advised by medical professionals, rather supporters self-identify when they are feeling considerably burned down and manage their physical, psychological, and emotional

resilience so they can keep doing the work they are so devoted to. A second way through which supporters seek to manage impending burnout is through debriefing opportunities with like-minded and like-experienced people, such as other supporters. However, this thesis revealed that, overall, appropriate opportunities for this kind of debriefing do not appear to be readily available or accessible to most supporters. Disengagement from the sector was also revealed as a particularly fraught process. The few supporters who have opted to disengage from support report considerable emotional and psychological upheaval as they process the resulting feelings of emotional pain, sadness, loss, and even grief. These supporters struggle with their senses of self and identity as they re-evaluate who they are and how they can reconcile their moral codes with new ways of being and engaging. Over time, their moral codes appear to shift to prioritise self-care, but they report the shift takes considerable personal adjustment.

Chapter Nine engaged in a close analysis of The Circles of Friends, exemplifying how their mode of organisation and unique characteristics offer many benefits to supporters and support recipients. The Circles of Friends occupy a niche space in the sector; they are not quite a social movement, NGO, or formal organisation, enabling them and their members to participate with considerable freedom and minimal bureaucracy to deliver 'in community support' to people seeking refuge. The Circles' relaxed mode of organisation and membership comprising likeminded individuals and friends precipitates a non-hierarchical structure based on egalitarian and highly democratic participation. Within the Circles, individuals participate according to their unique capacities and skill sets, learning from more experienced members over time. This means they offer a highly accessible and inclusive mode of participation for interested individuals. A critical contributor to, and by-product of, this deeply democratic mode of organisation is trust between members; they share personal beliefs and values and are there to work together to meet specific needs. Members pool and share their resources, supporting each other as they maintain a strong focus on delivering support for others. To maintain this focus, they deliberately and actively avoid involvement in bureaucracy and confrontation as much as possible. Thus, The Circle of Friends offer a different approach and opportunities to those offered by many other organisations in the sector.

Limitations and possibilities for future research

There were a few limitations related to this research. Firstly, the participant cohort of this research is relatively small due to limitations of what I could manage alone in the field, so findings may not be able to be generalised across the wider refugee support community in South Australia or beyond. Despite this, it is my hope that where supporters recognise elements of their own experience in this volume, they may draw on it as required to inform their own work in this area. Secondly, three loosely defined practice groups emerged amongst my participant cohort: individuals who are wholly or mostly unaffiliated with any particular formal organisations; persons working or volunteering within structured and reasonably formalised organisations such as NGOs or other formal settings; and those who claim membership to the Circles of Friends. Thus, they became key areas of analysis for the research. There are certainly more than three practice groups participating in support in South Australia, so there is scope for the experiences of other groups to be explored, for example those participating in online spaces or within groups not represented here. Additionally, participants in this research are retirees and women. I believe this is a true reflection of the demographic participating in the sector in South Australia, which is an interesting observation in and of itself, leaving plenty of opportunity for further research to be conducted amongst other refugee and asylum seeker supporters from different demographics. Thirdly, the voices and testimony of refugees, former refugees and asylum seekers who may also participate in support work are excluded, due to the limitations of my ethics clearance. These individuals often make up an important part of the support 'workforce' whether in paid or unpaid contexts and their experiences would offer an important view from a different perspective than that of my participants. Finally, I strongly believe there is still a valuable research opportunity for the experiences of supporters to be explored within the context of organisations as was my original intention and hope. Though I was able to spend time in one organisation, it was clear to me that understanding a network of organisations and how they operate in relation to one another would provide much needed insight in to the 'business' of support provision.

Implications for practice

This ethnographic research highlighted some of the experiences faced by workers and volunteers in the support sector and showed that different modes of participation and organisation present different advantages, disadvantages, and challenges for supporters. I recognise that there are individuals and groups participating in the support sector that were not explored in this research, such as those who advocate online or people with lived experiences of seeking asylum; there are certainly many more. I focused on individuals and groups engaged in face-to-face support efforts. Specifically, I focused on the experiences of three loosely defined practice groups that emerged amongst my participant cohort. I found that working or volunteering relatively alone and outside of formal organisations can result in a supporter finding themselves quickly overwhelmed by the needs of people seeking refuge, lacking in resources, and socially isolated – increasing their risk of passion fatigue and significant burn down. Furthermore, working or volunteering in highly formalised settings characterised by technologies of governmentality may require supporters to participate in ways that do not align with their personal values and vision of what they hope to achieve. They may find their capacity to openly advocate or dissent significantly curtailed, with more time spent dealing with bureaucracy than doing the work that has meaning for them and their clients. These realities can also reduce resilience and increase the risk of burnout. These are just two broad groups of supporters identified through this research that face challenges to their future sustainability. Experiences of the third group, the Circles of Friends, appear qualitatively different to those of the former two and may offer potential insights for how to increase the sustainability of volunteers and workers. This research has highlighted a number of opportunities for improving practices in support. Some opportunities crosscut the groups examined in this thesis so, I deal with these first. I then look at opportunities specific to particular groups – mostly organisations. I make further observations about the Circles of Friends and what they may offer support practices. I finish by suggesting that by combining aspects of different modes of participation and organisation, support efforts can be strengthened for the future.

This research highlighted that experiences of social invisibility, imperceptibility, and lack of opportunities for debriefing across the support landscape compound to significantly negatively affect supporters and those they seek to support (Herzog 2019; Honneth 2001; Smith et al. 2018).

Supporter resilience is challenged when they feel unseen, unheard, or lack appropriate avenues for debriefing and connection with people sharing likeminded values and experiences. They often find it difficult to undertake the tangible work, in terms of resources, knowledge, or skills. They also often experience poor mental, emotional, and social health outcomes. Newcomers to support and those who do not have strong understanding and backing from people that matter to them should consider actively building connections with likeminded others, who may be involved in support or in similar activities. Individuals obviously need to assess their own needs regarding whether they need access to professional debriefing services, or whether regular camaraderie with others is sufficient. Nevertheless, taking steps towards a form of networked or group participation appears likely to mitigate this common support pitfall.

Furthermore, this research emphasised that professional debriefing services (such as employee assistance programs) are often perceived by supporters as failing to meet their needs because service providers do not understand the unique circumstances and experiences of volunteering and working in the context of Australia's immigration regime. It can be stressful for supporters to have to explain nuances about the context before their particular concerns can be understood and addressed. With this in mind, it is strongly recommended that organisations and individuals seek out and access services who may bridge this gap as much as possible. Organisations could consider working with their EAP provider to give them a detailed understanding of the challenges of support so that their workers do not contact them for help and instead end up having to educate their counsellor. Individuals might inquire about the background of their counsellor and consider working with someone who understands the sector or perhaps has experience working with people in humanitarian aid delivery. It would be highly beneficial if there was a service that could provide professional debriefing services with qualified counsellors who had direct experience in the support sector, however at this point, such an organisation does not appear to exist in South Australia.

As highlighted in this thesis, individuals participating in support derive a significant amount of personal and professional satisfaction, encouragement, and motivation from the extent to which they can make a difference for, achieve outcomes for, and make connections with people seeking refuge. Supporters may not necessarily need to fulfil all three of these categories, but it appears that success in one or more of these categories boosts resilience. Individual supporters sometimes unwillingly or unwittingly become involved in circumstances where they quickly find themselves out of their depth trying to help someone. This can equally quickly find them experiencing feelings of failure in their efforts, again highlighting the importance of belonging to a wider network or group of people to draw on for help and guidance. It is recommended that supporters working outside of organisational contexts (where roles are less likely to be clearly defined) give serious consideration to their capabilities, capacities, and limitations before becoming enmeshed in support efforts. This means considering the level of commitment they are prepared to make and assessing the resources they are prepared to commit. This includes considering their time, finances, emotional and physical capacity, knowledge, skills and so on before becoming involved. Additionally, these capabilities, capacities, and limitations must be communicated to support recipients and other relevant parties so that appropriate expectations and boundaries can be set and managed. This would also improve supporter levels of accountability to people seeking refuge.

From an organisational perspective, enabling volunteers and workers to feel they have made a difference for, achieved outcomes for, and made connections with people seeking refuge may involve a relaxing of arbitrary rules and boundaries that tend to make natural human interaction and efficacious support delivery difficult. This may be as simple as allowing more space for the communication of empathy, sympathy or compassion, normalising and trusting the expression of emotions, rather than prioritising 'business-like', impersonal approaches that are often the default approaches of organisations for managing risk. I caution that carte blanche freedom for volunteers and workers to do whatever they please within the support sector and community is an unrealistic ambition and would be a folly, given the vulnerable people they support and the risks they face. However, this research highlighted some of the benefits identified by supporters of incorporating trust and recognition of shared values into the delivery processes and methods of support. Supporters understand the need for professional boundaries, particularly in formal workplace settings and to protect the best

interests of all involved. Nonetheless, this research has shown that they feel very strongly the need to be trusted to interact in caring, warm, and personal ways with people they support. They also feel very strongly that, when unusual circumstances demand unusual responses, support should not be delayed, denied, or hamstrung by procedures. Supporters want to be trusted to make decisions and act in those circumstances. Democratic and egalitarian discussions and modes of organisation have proven to be key to success in social movements (Escobar & Alvarez 1992; Escobar 1992; Appadurai 2002), so prioritising these between organisations and their volunteers and workers could provide confidence for all involved surrounding the unique challenges of providing support. Through a deeply democratic and egalitarian approach, reasonable actions that could be taken in varying circumstances could be identified and discussed without the need to write another procedure or require another form to be filled. It is important that organisations and their volunteers and workers do not lose sight of the fact that we are all people with a shared humanity, first and foremost; organisational operations must reflect this reality to ensure a sustainable future.

These findings lead me to focus on the practice improvements that could be made in organisations, in accordance with my 'pracademic' and activist approach. I recognise that funding from government and other donors are unlikely to be offered without demands for accountability. Organisations, particularly those in environments influenced by funding, are increasingly developing audit, accountability or 'tick-box' cultures (Shore & Wright 2015b; Power 2003; O'Dwyer & Boomsma 2015). Supporters have strongly indicated their frustration with the limitations and requirements that accompany funding agreements and 'business' processes in general. They view these processes as a necessary evil but perceive these limitations and requirements as taking away from, and preventing, more important work from being done for people seeking refuge. To ease this frustration, organisations could periodically review their processes and procedures to mitigate against audit-culture creep. Organisations could search for ways to reduce the level of bureaucracy and the high transaction costs they impose on organisations through dialogue- without losing accountability. Dialogue with funders over reporting reforms and reduced levels of auditing may also be an option.

At a whole-of-organisation level, the benefits and drawbacks of funding, particularly government funding, must be weighed. Periodic organisational self-reflection must be undertaken to ensure that organisations do not experience mission-drift if they adjust their programs to fit available funding packages, rather than the needs of their clients. To mitigate against the non-collaboration and increased competition between likeminded organisations identified in this thesis, joint-programming and joint grant applications could be considered or increased to reduce silo mentality and promote better working across the sector. At the very least, inter-agency discussions acknowledging the shared difficulties could result in solutions that bring the sector together. Furthermore, where possible, organisations might consider operating without government funding, or with less government funding to reduce the challenges of censorship and silencing, highlighted by this thesis. This does have implications for sustainability, however— independence from government funding means not only more freedom to advocate without risking censorship, silencing or punishment (through funding loss), but it also frees up considerable resources to do the on-the-ground work, rather than being tied up in substantial accountability and audit requirements. There will be some in the sector that immediately rule this possibility out, arguing that it is not possible to function as an organisation without government funding. However, it is possible. The Melbourne based Asylum Seeker Resource Centre has been operating this way since 2001[38] and is Australia's largest human rights organisation providing support to people seeking refuge. On the other hand, raising funds from alternative sources can also require the input of considerable resources and the deployment of aggressive fundraising strategies. There also remain genuine considerations and concerns about the role of the government and its duty of care and responsibility to people seeking refuge. These issues fall beyond the scope of this thesis but should be regularly revisited by support organisations.

At this point it is pertinent to highlight the qualitatively different practices and experiences of the Circles of Friends and associated takeaway points. Community groups and organisations (including NGOs) who may have concerns about how to achieve sustainability of their human resources and services into the future could consider observations made about the Circles and how they might apply to their operations. The modes of organisation and participation exemplified by the Circles of Friends, though not perfect, appear to

[38] Though I note they aggressively fundraise and devote considerable resources towards fundraising efforts to make independence from Government funding possible.

overcome a number of the challenges highlighted in this thesis that arise within other modes of participation, negatively impacting the resilience of volunteers and workers. From a participant perspective, The Circles of Friends model appears to enable individuals with varying skills and capacities to participate in ways that align with the beliefs and motivations that drive them. The democratic and relaxed mode of organisation and participation that minimises bureaucracy, maximises trust and flexibility, enables support to be provided quickly and with more ease. This, in turn, affords a greater sense of achievement for participants. Participants can see an alignment with their own identities and the broader organisational identity and actions leading to deeper commitment to the work. The sense of community or camaraderie built between individuals in this environment serves to temper the social invisibility and imperceptibility that can arise from other forms of participation. Outright adoption of the Circle of Friends model is not what I am arguing for here. What I am suggesting is that organisations and community groups could consider incorporating some of the learnings from the Circle experiences to enhance their own operations. For example, organisations and community groups could ensure that multiple entry points are available for people to engage in support activities based on their varying skills and experience. Additionally, where possible, non-hierarchical, democratic, and egalitarian cultures and modes of organising and operating may be cultivated in workplaces and community groups. There will always be a need for some fundamental processes and procedures to be agreed and followed to provide continuity in support provision. However, opportunities for flexible, creative, and innovative modes of participation could be identified and promoted, so people can achieve greater synergy and alignment between their values and their work.

In light of the above, organisations that have experienced considerable expansion and corporatisation over time may consider how their business models align with the values and desires of the volunteers and workers they seek to attract, retain, and care for. This research has shown that grassroots modes of organisation and participation are perceived by participants as attractive, for reasons already detailed. It is noteworthy that some eminent organisations in the NGO sector began operating using modes of grassroots organisation and participation similar to that seen in the Circles of Friends. One such organisation is Oxfam Australia. Oxfam Australia, stems from the small Food for Peace campaign (1953) that was renamed as Community Aid Abroad (CAA) (1962), emerging as an organisation based in local community groups supporting small overseas development projects on a case-by-case basis

(Black 1992; Blackburn 1993). In these early years, CAA is said to have been resourced by paid staff and unpaid volunteers who were strongly motivated by their beliefs and values (Blackburn 1993). It is reported it had a collegiate culture, lack of hierarchy, and considerable devolution of power which allowed individuals to work according to the skills and talents they had to offer (Blackburn 1993). The similarities to the Circles of Friends, and grassroots modes of organisation and participation cannot be denied. However, there is a potential lesson in the historical trajectory of CAA/ Oxfam. A change in CAA scope and focus had a considerable impact on many who worked and volunteered with them who valued their local focus and ways of working. As CAA expanded and became Oxfam Australia, considerable unease arose between those pushing towards globalisation and those who felt it compromised on the local, targeted and coordinated efforts and direction for which they joined. Many supporters left the organisation due to the shift in focus (Blackburn 1993). A similar trajectory has occurred across many organisations that have globalised (Lindenberg 2001). This highlights that the evolution of organisations towards more 'business-like' modes of organisation and participation may result in some attrition of valuable human resources (King 2017). Volunteers and workers who have hearts for social justice efforts may not have stomachs for the modes of organisation and participation on offer if they do not closely align with their values, beliefs and preferred ways of working. This has implications for sustainability. My participant cohort strongly indicated that though they support any efforts that help people seeking refuge, they prefer opportunities that offer them freedom and room for creativity, enabling them to engage in highly personalised ways. It has also demonstrated the strong appetite that exists for opportunities in support that depart from highly bureaucratised, corporatised, hierarchical offerings in favour of more loose, egalitarian modes of operating based on personal values and trust. Thus, the challenge is how to bridge the gap that appears to exist between the desires of the support community and the various modes of participation on offer to best service people seeking refuge.

This brings me to my final point about practice. This research has explored some key advantages and disadvantages associated with varying modes of organisation and participation, as highlighted by the participants. What has become clear is that all who are participating in support work are doing their absolute best in whatever circumstances they find themselves in and all are contributing to the broader 'refugee rights movement.' Different modes of participation and organisation are ultimately complementary, but

perhaps by addressing some of the challenges raised in this thesis, all can be strengthened for the future. There are opportunities to combine the strengths of organisations and community groups for the benefit of the support sector. Moves towards creating hybrid ways of working would combine community values and democratic and flexible ways of working with organisational goals and activities to produce workplaces that increase personal satisfaction and resilience. The interplay between individual beliefs and values and democratic and flexible modes of participation and organisation simultaneously ignite passion and cultivate resilience. In turn, this serves to enhance the broader sustainability of the refugee and asylum seeker support sector. These changes may increase engagement and diversity in the sector and attract more empathetic and sympathetic individuals to join the ranks. Across this battle-weary community more sustainable ways forward are desperately needed. Band-Aids are simply not enough.

Appendices

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Andrew & Renata Kaldor Centre for International Refugee Law

Factsheet

REFUGEE STATUS DETERMINATION IN AUSTRALIA

Last updated: November 2020

The process for deciding refugee claims in Australia varies depending on how a person seeking asylum arrives in the country. Those arriving with a valid visa access a standard refugee status determination process, as explained below. Those arriving without a valid visa are subject to a 'fast-track' process with diminished rights.

What is 'refugee status determination'?

Refugee status determination (**RSD**) in Australia is the process by which a person (asylum seeker) may be recognised by the government as a refugee and receive protection. Asylum seekers have the opportunity to put forward the reasons why they fear that they will be persecuted or subjected to other significant harm if they are returned to their country of origin.

Strictly speaking, RSD does not 'make' someone a refugee but simply recognises or 'declares' that the person is a refugee. This is because under international law, a person is a refugee as soon as they meet the definition set out in the Refugee Convention. This may be the time when they leave their country or after their arrival in Australia ('sur place'). In reality, a person needs to be officially recognised as a refugee in order to receive the rights and entitlements that attach to refugee status.

The Refugee Convention does not set out procedures that must be followed in an RSD system, but there are many non-binding international standards. For Australia to comply with its obligations under the Refugee Convention, it must have a procedure in place that enables the government to accurately identify the people to whom it owes protection.

The RSD process is also used to determine whether a person is entitled to complementary protection, based on serious human rights violations under the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and the Convention against Torture (see our factsheet on Complementary Protection). All applications made for protection in Australia are considered against Australia's domestic legislation on refugee status and complementary protection, concurrently.

Kaldor Centre for International Refugee Law

RSD in Australia - how it applies

Currently, different RSD processes apply for people who arrive in Australia with a valid visa and those who arrive without a valid visa.

In summary:

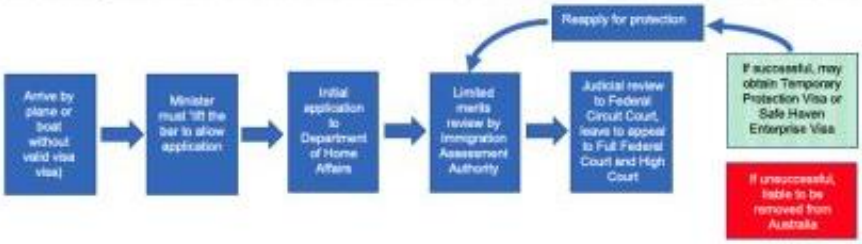
- Only people who arrive with a valid visa may access the 'regular' RSD process. These are mostly individuals who enter Australia by plane with a valid visa (such as a visitor, business or student visa), pass through immigration clearance, and apply for refugee status after arrival. Some arrive intending to claim refugee status; some learn of the possibility of applying for refugee status after they are here; others apply because circumstances change in their home country while they are in Australia that make it unsafe for them to return. If a person arrived in Australia with a valid visa, they can make a claim for protection to the Department of Home Affairs. This process is described in further detail below.
- Asylum seekers who arrive by boat, or who do not pass through immigration clearance at the airport, are no longer entitled to access the regular RSD process. Instead, they are barred from applying for a protection visa, unless the Minister exercises a personal, non-compellable discretion to allow them to do so (known as 'lifting the bar'). This has resulted in asylum seekers waiting up to four years to submit their initial application. Once the Minister lifts the bar, these asylum seekers are subject to a 'fast track' RSD process, with more limited appeal rights. This process is described in further detail below.

Regular RSD process

Asylum seeker usually lives in community throughout process

Fast track RSD process

Asylum seeker is placed in detention upon arrival but may be sent to community detention or allowed to live in the community



Kaldor Centre for International Refugee Law

'Regular' RSD process in Australia - an overview

The key steps in the 'regular' RSD process in Australia, as set out in the flowchart above, are:

- An asylum seeker lodges an application for a protection visa with the Department of Home Affairs;
- After an application is lodged the asylum seeker will be interviewed by a Department of Home Affairs officer. The officer will ask questions to check the asylum seeker's identity, credibility (whether they are telling the truth) and their refugee claims. An officer of the Department makes a decision as to whether the asylum seeker is entitled to protection (as a refugee or as a beneficiary of complementary protection). This decision is known as the 'primary decision'.
- If refused, an asylum seeker may apply for a review of the decision by the Migration and Refugee Division of the Administrative Appeals Tribunal (MRD-AAT). This is known as the merits review stage. The MRD-AAT decision maker must make the decision afresh and 'step into the shoes' of the Department of Home Affairs to decide whether an asylum seeker is entitled to protection.
- If an asylum seeker is unsuccessful at the merits review stage, they may appeal to the Federal Circuit Court of Australia for judicial review based on a legal error in the decision-making process. The court does not review the substantive merits of the asylum seeker's application, but only considers if there has been an error of law by the decision-makers. If an asylum seeker is unsuccessful at the Federal Circuit Court they may seek leave to appeal to the Federal Court of Australia, or in exceptional cases, the High Court of Australia. If an asylum seeker's application for judicial review is successful, their application is sent back to the MRD-AAT and the decision must be made afresh by the MRD-AAT.
- If all the application and appeal avenues described above fail, as a last resort, an asylum seeker may request that the Minister personally intervene to grant them a visa. A visa grant at this stage is very rare.

If an asylum seeker is found to be owed protection at the primary or merits review stage, they will (subject to identity and security checks) be granted a protection visa (visa subclass 866), meaning they will be recognised as a refugee by Australia and will receive permanent protection.

'Fast track' RSD process in Australia - an overview

A 'fast track process' now applies to asylum seekers who arrive without a valid visa, including those asylum seekers in the 'legacy caseload'. The fast track process curtails appeal rights and, in some instances, removes the opportunity of an independent review altogether.

The fast track process applies to people who arrived in Australia without a valid visa between 13 August 2012 and 1 January 2014. It also applies to people who are reapplying for a Temporary Protection Visa (**TPV**) or Safe Haven Enterprise Visa (**SHEV**), and other people designated as 'fast track applicants' by legislative instrument.

The key steps in the 'fast track' RSD process, as set out in the flowchart above, are:

- Asylum seekers subject to the fast track process are not automatically entitled to apply for protection but must wait for the Minister of Immigration to exercise a personal, non-compellable discretion to allow them to apply (known as 'lifting the bar').
- If the Minister 'lifts the bar', the asylum seeker can lodge an application for protection. They will then be interviewed by a Department of Home Affairs officer. The officer will ask questions to check the asylum seeker's identity, credibility (whether they are telling the truth) and their refugee claims. The time periods specified in the legislation for asylum seekers to provide information and attend interviews are much shorter for those in the fast track process compared to those in the regular RSD process.
- Fast track applicants do not have access to the MRD-AAT. Instead, applicants who receive a negative decision are referred to a newly established body, the Immigration Assessment Authority (**IAA**). Review through the IAA is a more limited form of review, generally without an interview and generally with no new information allowed (other than in exceptional circumstances).
- If a fast track applicant is unsuccessful at the IAA, they may appeal to the Federal Circuit Court of Australia for judicial review based on a legal error in the decision-making process. If unsuccessful at the Federal Circuit Court, they may seek leave to appeal to the Federal Court of Australia, or in exceptional cases, the High Court of Australia.
- There is also a category of asylum seekers deemed by the Act to be 'excluded fast track review applicants' who have no access to any form of merits review. Excluded fast track review applicants' can seek judicial review of the Department's decision to refuse them a visa, and of the decision to exclude them from the fast track review process.

If an asylum seeker is found to be owed protection at the primary or IAA review stage, he or she will (subject to identity and security checks) be granted a Temporary Protection Visa (TPV) or a Safe Haven Enterprise Visa (SHEV). After expiry of their temporary visa (either a TPV or SHEV), they must reapply for protection (or another visa, if eligible). Learn more about in our factsheet on TPVs and SHEVs.

For a more detailed analysis of the 'fast track' RSD process (including significant legal developments since the process was first introduced) see our research brief on 'fast track' refugee status determination.

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