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Amplifying the Third Space: Exploring the Knowledge and Artistic Production of Southwest Asia and North African Refugee Women Living in Australia

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Statement of Originality

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This thesis meets the University of Sydney's Human Research Ethics Committee (HREC) requirements for the conduct of research. The University of Sydney HREC approved this study on 13 January 2022 (Project number: 2021/924).

Izabella Antoniou

Authorship Attribution Statement

Sections of Chapters 4 and 5 of this thesis have been published in Izabella Antoniou and Safar Ahmed, "Fragmenting Australian Art - the problem of labelling," in *Variations: A more diverse picture of contemporary art*, edited by Tristen Harwood, Grace McQuilten & Anthony White. Melbourne: Monash University Press, 2023.

Izabella Antoniou designed the study, analysed the data that appear in this chapter, and wrote the analysis of the interviews found in the chapter. Safdar Ahmed provided contextual and background paragraphs as well as additional analysis of the subject's artistic production.

As supervisor for the candidature upon which this thesis is based, I can confirm that the authorship attribution statements above are correct.

Supervisor's Name: Lucia Sorbera

Abstract

Australia has been internationally criticised for its controversial policies and treatment of refugees and asylum seekers. However, an underexamined aspect of Australia's relationship to refugeehood is how the state's approach to resettlement is informed by the coloniality of power shaping Australian institutions and bodies of governance. This has led to a blind spot in understanding how refugee women are crafted as a colonially managed population as they interface with Australian policy, systems of migration, governance, and settlement services that shape their relationships and ways of living.

This study examines the assumptions, experiences and opinions on settlement, artistic production, and lived realities of being categorised as a refugee woman as told by displaced women from Southwest Asia and North Africa (SWANA) who are resettling in Australia. The study focuses on women who are actively contributing to knowledge and artistic production in Australia.

Using SWANA feminist scholarship and Indigenous epistemologies to frame SWANA women's experience of coloniality in Australia, this work begins to build an archive of narratives and memories that illuminate the diverse experiences of refugee women living in Sydney, with a focus on women who arrived in Australia between 2001 and 2019.

Through their voices, this study critically analyses themes of identity, individual subjectivities, and their relationship to the state institutions, to deconstruct mainstream binary narratives about refugee women that tend to portray them as either victims or politically active rebels. This research counters these reductive depictions by exploring "The Third Space", which this work conceptualises as a site of existence and relationality that intertwines politics and domesticity, where the personal and public spheres become blurred. These

testimonies and insights create an avenue through which to critically analyse core aspects of Australian cultural history to provide an appraisal of how the colonial history of the Australian modern state affects its ways of interacting with people who are marginalised due to a combination of class, race, and gender factors. Through the analysis of refugee women's knowledge production, the final thesis offers an alternative history of Australia, its state institutions, and multicultural ambitions.

Acknowledgements

I wish to start off by thanking the participants who took part in this study. As artists and individuals, I am grateful to them for sharing their lived experiences and letting me into their lives. Every single person I had the pleasure of interviewing is undertaking such interesting and exciting artistic work and I am thankful to have witnessed their ideas, processes, and work. I am excited to see more of their art showcased on a broader stage.

I also wish to thank my supervisors Dr. Lucia Sorbera and Dr. Vek Lewis who provided vital guidance, support, and feedback that challenged and helped me grow as a researcher and academic. Their commitment to the development of this work is testament to the ways universities and tertiary institutions should be supporting new research.

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Contents

Chapter 1 – Introduction

Australia's identity as a 'country of migrants' is problematised by a long and complex relationship with refugees. International critique and condemnation of Australia's treatment of forcibly displaced people have had little effect on the State's refugee policy, with successive governments across the political spectrum maintaining commitments to current systems of management which include offshore processing. Against this political backdrop, overtly divisive narratives of displaced people are circulated through the country's news media.[1] This polarised landscape produces an overall wary and hostile context in which refugees are expected to resettle. Australia's approach to resettlement is complicated by the global need to address continual displacement and forced migration events as evident in the 2021 Taliban takeover of Afghanistan, and the 2022 Russian invasion of Ukraine. Through these events, Australian policy reactions were a key point of interest for the Australian public and news media, with outlets paying close attention to campaigns around refugee intakes. This interest and the effects this social landscape has on refugees within Australia will only increase as Australia finds itself a key migration site for climate refugees.[2] It is within this context that our modern conception of refugees and resettlement are called into question. In examining how Hannah Arendt's theoretical examination of refugeehood[3] may not be emblematic of the ways settler-colonial host nations engage with refugees, Megan Bradely, of the Refugee Studies Centre in Oxford, underlines that, due to initiatives such as voluntary repatriation, and to refugees being created by racialised conflicts, there is a need for the theoretical understanding of refugees to detangle itself from the sole idea of 'statelessness'.[4]

[1] Ashleigh L. Haw, "'Hapless Victims' or 'Making Trouble': Audience Responses to Stereotypical Representations of Asylum Seekers in Australian News Discourse," *Journalism Practice* (2021): 1.
[2] Cam Walker, "Climate Refugees in Australia?" Other Journal Article, Chain Reaction, no. 108 (2010): 12.
[3] Hannah Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (New York: Harcourt, 2001).
[4] Megan Bradley. "Rethinking Refugeehood: Statelessness, Repatriation, and Refugee Agency," *Review of International Studies* 40, no. 1 (2014):103.

Thus, the conceptual framework must broaden to understand refugees as political actors bearing claims for the renegotiation of their relationship with their state.'[5] I posit the need to broaden the conceptual base further, beyond a politicised relationship between refugees' and their homeland. Instead, our understanding of refugeehood should encompass the relationship with transitional and host states and see them as equally important into an understanding of modern refugeehood. This is particularly true when taking into consideration that the settler-colonial histories of many host states are built upon the exile of First Nations groups, enshrine histories of institutional racialised conflict, break kinship and relations as well as lead to dispossession of land. To build upon Bradely's theorisation of violence instigating refugeehood,[6] all these facts should be explicitly encompassed under the concept of violence.

In the context of these issues, this study examines the narratives of resettlement and existence in Australia as perceived and narrated by refugee women from Southwest Asia and North Africa (SWANA). The study focuses on women who are actively contributing to knowledge and artistic production. This research aims to articulate the ways refugee women from the SWANA region navigate their daily lives as a colonially managed population to disrupt and counter simplistic narratives about them. This work explores the space where a complex entanglement of relationships, rights, and means of self-governance exists and shapes the lived experience of refugee women from the SWANA region resettling in Australia. I refer to this web of public and domestic interactions that have been mediated through their status as refugees as The Third Space.

[5] Bradley, 103.
[6] Bradley, 104.

1.1 Background and Literature Review

The Third Space

The Third space is a term borrowed from Homi Bhabha, and his work within postcolonial sociolinguistic theory that points to the unique, and inherently multiple nature of individual identity and associated communities.[7] The concept of a third space has been expanded upon in other fields to denote physical spaces of dissent, where the self exists as a hybrid encompassing civil society, domestic and professional life.[8] This expanded concept is inclusive of spaces, associations and relationships that sit outside of economic or familial spheres. The Third Space is not a separate form of existence; instead, it is a highly relational site where both, empowered and disempowered groups, have effects on one another.[9] Although uneven, these relationships are multidirectional and dismantle binary understandings of identity.

The importance of enunciating the Third Space, particularly in reference to marginalised communities, is that it destroys the traditional logics and assumptions about authorities of cultural knowledge.[10] It also disrupts the erasure and homogenising power of colonial narratives by highlighting the fluidity of and complexity of cultural symbols.[11] In this case, that includes the ideations and narratives around refugee women's relational identity, supposed vulnerabilities and status as knowledge holders. The Third Space denotes social inclusion and exclusion particularly across identity lines where groups, such as refugees and colonised peoples, are actively excluded from spheres of power, but simultaneously denied their own space of existence and understanding. Instead, these groups are forced into

[7] Homi K, Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (London: Routledge, 2004), 134.
[8] Rob Hulme, David Cracknell, and Allan Owens, "Learning in Third Spaces: Developing Trans-Professional Understanding through Practitioner Enquiry," *Educational Action Research* 17, no. 4 (2009): 539.
[9] Tapiwa Winston Seremani, and Stewart Clegg, "Postcolonialism, Organization, and Management Theory: The Role of 'Epistemological Third Spaces," *Journal of Management Inquiry* 25, no. 2 (2016): 172.
[10] Bhabha, 53.
[11] Bhabha, 54.

relationships with those on the 'inside'. These relationships give women refugees certain concessions that make their lack of belonging or exclusion hyper-visible.

In this work, The Third Space is my conceptualisation of the area of existence between and beyond a binary understanding of refugee women; it is a particular response to the victim/activist binary. Similar to the blurred liminal realms of existence decolonial and postcolonial thinkers and scholars have named previously — such as Gloria Anzaldúa's 'borderlands' and Bhabha's 'the third' — the idea of The Third Space is an unknown, changing zone of state and interpersonal violence, housing points of navigation shaped by colonial power structures. La Bestia is another named and associated phenomenon. La Bestia refers to the indistinct force brought about by historical colonialism and contemporary neoliberalism and which is traditionally used to speak about Central American migration to the United States.[12] Transcending space, it has been used to describe the Indigenous experience in Australia. Initially, La Bestia defined the emotional, physical, and gendered violence that comes about due to the journey of Indigenous migration, but it has been expanded by Grieves-Williams to encapsulate the plight of Indigenous and colonised people in their journeys and their necessary interactions with the world as embodying an opposition to coloniality. Following this line of subjectivities created through the colonial interface, The Third Space is also inspired by Achille Mbembe's third zone, in which the author presents colonised peoples as placed between subjecthood and objecthood.[13] However, where these depictions focus on how coloniality impacts marginalised individuals, The Third Space puts women at the centre and looks at how they interact with and navigate out from the site of marginalisation.

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[12] Victoria Grieves-Williams. "La Bestia as Transpacific Phenomenon: Indigenous Peoples' Camps, Violence, Biopolitics, and Agamben's State of Exception," in *Mapping South-South Connections: Australia and Latin America*, ed. Fernanda Peñaloza et al. (Cham: Springer International Publishing, 2019), 73.
[13] Achille Mbembe, "Necropolitics," *Public Culture* 15, no. 1 (2003): 23.

Key points of similarity between my reference to the Third Space and La Bestia include the inability to identify their edges, their liminality, and the control they hold over Indigenous lives.[14] In both, the blurred and frayed edges of relationships are shifting, unravelling, and reforming. This thesis shows how refugee women must continually work at deciphering these relationships as they are not overtly revealed.

Using frameworks that explicitly centre First Nations' conceptualisations of the experience of coloniality in examining refugee women's stories is useful in this context. As queer migration scholar, Lee-Oliver argues, settler colonialism and Indigenous co-racialisation is the root of violence against those viewed as marginalised, or dependent.[15] This can be applied to refugee women who are relying on the state to be resettled since their resettlement occurs within a racialised migration history produced by institutions, policy and government. This history, through the coloniality of power, a concept first introduced by Anibal Quijano with reference to Latin America,[16] confers societal power to a preferred population which is non-inclusive of SWANA women.

The importance of naming the phenomenon The Third Space resides in that it makes visible the opaque governance structures refugee women are being managed under, and helps to disentangle the experiences, and sites of power in a structure that seeks to be purposely unlearnable and unnavigable.[17] In making the sites of existence and tension of colonially

[14] Grieves-Williams, 60.

[15] Lee-Oliver Leece et al., "Imperialism, Settler Colonialism, and Indigeneity: A Queer Migration Roundtable," *in Queer and Trans Migrations: Dynamics of Illegalization, Detention, and Deportation*, ed. Eithne Luibhéid et al. (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2020), 232.

[16] Aníbal Quijano, "Coloniality of Power and Eurocentrism in Latin America." International Sociology 15, no. 2 (2000), 216.

[17] Nick Estes et al. *Red Nation Rising: From Bordertown Violence to Native Liberation*. (Oakland: PM Press, 2021), 8.

managed and marginalised women known, this work takes on a perspective of feminism in decolonising praxis.[18]

When examining The Third Space through the self-narrated experiences of refugee women and the conditions under which they produce creative knowledge, the questions I seek to answer include how subjectivity may be used to better understand how the gendered position of refugee is constructed and maintained. Another question this thesis addresses is how the participants see Australia's coloniality manifesting and affecting their navigations of both their public and private relationships. Throughout this work, the term 'subjectivity' is used with two meanings. Firstly, to refer to the participants' individual experience as unique and separate to that of others. In the second instance to refer to the experiences and the existence that the participants construct through their position, class, visa status, racialisation, and the spaces they inhabit. These experiences and existence also include psychological, social and gendered dimensions that shape their life, and in turn are shaped by it.[19] To separate these, I refer predominantly to the latter as The Third Space.

Given the decolonising impulse behind this project, I expand upon my use of SWANA as a term referring to the geographical and cultural region of Southwest Asia and North Africa. Use of the term has been increasing in both activist and academic decolonial circles as it is seen as more appropriate in diaspora than the terms Middle Eastern and Middle East and North Africa (MENA), which maintains the geographic site as relational to Europe and ideological opposition to the misnomer of the 'West'. Additionally, SWANA does not carry the same connotations that see Middle Eastern identities conflated with Arab, instead

[18]Sarah C. Motta, "Decolonizing Australia's Body Politics: Contesting the Coloniality of Violence of Child Removal." *Journal of Resistance Studies* 2, no. 2 (2017): 108.

[19] Vek Lewis, *Crossing Sex and Gender in Latin America*, 1st ed. (New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), 39.

embracing the multi-cultural, multi-ethnic, and complex community relationships in the region.

SWANA Refugee Women and Settlement Scholarship - Literature Review

In understanding refugeehood as a complex category shaped by colonial power structures, I go on to review how this relationship is presented particularly in Australian-focussed academic literature, the potential gaps resulting from institutional and hierarchical blind spots, and the subsequent problems that arise from them.

Klause Neumann, Sandra Gifford, Annika Lems, and Stefanie Scherr in an examination of knowledge produced around refugee settlement in Australia, note that limited research is available on the concept and position of refugeehood. The authors note that the increased scholarly inquiry regarding refugees over the last two decades has been centred on policy creation with studies siloed by ethnic group or period. Currently, few studies look at the refugee experience as operating within a continuum of international histories.[20] Sampson builds on this analysis and focuses on how multiple studies on settlement program development fail to question the well-established narratives that inform NGO settlement services.[21] Research around refugees and settlement is further problematised by Squire as lacking consistency around the meaning of terms such as 'integration' and 'settlement'. Squire points out that Australian studies employ different material and social criteria for these terms, and that the concepts of 'belonging' and 'settlement' are connected to ideas of assimilation.[22]

[20] Klaus Neumann et al., "Refugee Settlement in Australia: Policy, Scholarship and the Production of Knowledge, 1952−2013," *Journal of Intercultural Studies* 35, no. 1 (2014): 13.
[21] Robyn C. Sampson, "Caring, Contributing, Capacity Building: Navigating Contradictory Narratives of Refugee Settlement in Australia," *Journal of Refugee Studies* 29, no. 1 (2016): 111.
[22] Peter Squires, "A Scoping Review of Australian Studies of Refugee Integration: Popular Definitions of Integration in the Australian Literature," *Migration Studies* 8, no. 1 (2020): 91.

Much of the research around refugees, particularly refugee women who are categorised as Middle Eastern, focuses on psychological health and clinical care within the resettlement process. This highlights a keen awareness of the trauma associated with forced migration and settlement in Australia. Additionally, there is an interest in the intersection of general barriers to settlement such as access to healthcare, services, language skills, and cultural responsibilities. These barriers and resulting social isolation are noted by Casimiro, Hancock, and Northcote in their work with Muslim women in Western Australia and are presented as the result of a sustained emphasis by the government on assimilation through the guise of a multiculturalism that fails to incorporate cultural pluralism.[23] Few works tie refugee policy and processes, and the resulting lack of belonging felt by refugee women to structural issues. One exception is Ramsay's work on refugees from Central Africa in which the concept of belonging through the eyes of her participants is mediated by a racialised position that renders them as separate from and inferior to the Australian population.[24] Ramsay points to the inequity of services, structures of care, and processes within the settlement space as rooted in colonial assumptions about non-white migrants. Therefore, true belonging is not attainable by racialised, non-white refugee communities in the context of Australia's coloniality.

There also seems to be a lack of interrogation on overarching power dynamics of perceived citizenship that cultural analysts Perera and Pugliese note is predicated on an infrastructural white racial identity, which has manifested in the NGOs that deliver settlement support.[25] There appears to be a gap in Australian-based research to better understand SWANA refugee

[23] Suzy Casimiro, Peter Hancock, and Jeremy Northcote, "Isolation and Insecurity: Resettlement Issues among Muslim Refugee Women in Perth, Western Australia," *The Australian Journal of Social Issues* 42, no. 1 (2007): 57.

[24] Georgina Ramsay, "Central African Refugee Women Resettled in Australia: Colonial Legacies and the Civilising Process," *Journal of Intercultural Studies* 38, no. 2 (2017): 172.

[25] Suvendrini Perera and Joseph Pugliese, "In an Impaired State: Settler Racial Logic and Prosthetic Citizenship in Australia," *International Journal of Politics, Culture, and Society* 33, no. 4 (2020): 478.

women as a colonially managed group, and how this affects not just their settlement but their ongoing lived realities within Australia.

In addressing this gap, I have chosen to focus on how the international phenomenon of coloniality, due to its bureaucratic enshrinement within Australia's migration and settlement policies, informs settlement narratives but also upholds and shapes refugeehood within the Australian context. Through centering refugee women's own understanding of their position and how it affects their knowledge production, decoloniality is an appropriate lens to interrogate the international colonial narratives that inform the construction of SWANA women in Australia and may be extrapolated to other host nations.

Key studies that inform this approach of refugees as a colonially managed group include the works of Indigenous feminist academic and Goenpul woman Aileen Moreton-Robinson in particular, *Writing off Indigenous Sovereignty: The Discourse of Security and Patriarchal White Sovereignty.* In examining the Howard government's shift towards security-based refugee rhetoric in the 1990s and 2000s, Moreton-Robinson posits the management of migrants and refugees as an extension of Australia's border stress, which stems from the dispossession of unrelinquished Indigenous land.[26] Moreton-Robinson's earlier work, *The White Possessive,*[27] also notes the underlying coloniality within policies such as the detention and mistreatment of asylum seekers from Iraq, Iran, and Afghanistan as being assertions of white sovereignty.[28] These notions of border stress and colonial management of refugees are crucial to my research as they provide a framework for understanding the aforementioned service gaps of settlement.

[26] Aileen Moreton-Robinson, "Writing off Indigenous Sovereignty: The Discourse of Security and Patriarchal White Sovereignty," in *Sovereign Subjects*, ed. Aileen Moreton-Robinson (London: Routledge, 2020), 89.
[27]Aileen Moreton-Robinson, The White Possessive: Property, Power, and Indigenous Sovereignty, Indigenous Americas (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2015), 8.
[28] Aileen Moreton-Robinson, *The White Possessive,* 8.

In dialogue with Neumann et al.'s critique of a lack of a transnational approach to refugees, I draw upon the Feminist Refugee Epistemology (FRE) to further inform the framework underpinning my research. FRE sits between migration studies and postcolonial epistemology with significant contributions being made by refugee scholars Le Espiritu and Duong who sought to fill a perceived gap as feminist scholars called for an increased focus on women refugees.[29] The FRE critiques depictions of refugees as suffering feminine subjects by underlining ways in which refugees, through their artistic productions, enact a politics of living.[30] The FRE successfully marks its intersectional approach through claims that refugeehood is shaped by colonialism, and through the framework's rejection of the objectification of refugee women's bodies. However, in practice, the FRE swaps this objectification with over-emphasising refugee women as inherently political, and their refugeehood as a predominant aspect of their identity. This is not dissimilar to the victim imagery used by settler governments and NGOs to depoliticise refugee women in order to make them worthy of care. Therefore, the FRE has provided a framework of the victim/activist binary which I use to make visible colonial narratives within the lives of refugee women as manifesting through binaries. However, I note its limitations insofar as it relies on a binary that does not bear up in all women's accounts.

Art and Knowledge Production of Refugee Women

The literature on refugee art and knowledge production within the Australian context is relatively limited. The existing discourse aligns itself with two key points of view: art and knowledge production as a settlement tool or as a means of refugee advocacy. The first approach notes that refugee art is interacted with by scholars and program creators not as an

[29] Yến Lê Espiritu, and Lan Duong, "Feminist Refugee Epistemology: Reading Displacement in Vietnamese and Syrian Refugee Art," *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society* 43, no. 3 (2018): 587.
[30] Espiritu and Duong, 588.

act of cultural production, but rather as a tool of intervention, useful in supporting the emotional aspect of the refugee experience as part of the broader settlement process. Khorana provides a broad overview of art-based methodologies use in social work, noting how these programs foster reflexivity on experiences of displacement resulting in refugees' and communities' wellbeing.[31] While researchers such as Fitzpatrick cement the usefulness of arts approaches in trauma recovery specific to those of refugee backgrounds,[32] and researchers of these supported spaces acknowledge participants as knowledge holders, where the understanding of instrumentalising refugee art falters is that there still exists a heavy emphasis on the role art plays in fostering assimilation and social cohesion as opposed to participants being understood as artists.

Conversely, when the work of refugees is recognised as cultural production, the literature predominantly engages with refugee art as a means of exploring the refugee position through the evocation of interpretations of trauma, and activism concerning critiques of state management. Khoo highlights this activist approach as refugee art mediating the experience of displacement for a broader Australian audience.[33] This framing can be summarised by Hughes's work on 'refugee film as advocacy',[34] in which the author sees the genre of refugee films as a direct response to the damaging ways refugees have been portrayed in the media and political scare campaigns. This approach instrumentalises said art to the politicisation of refugeehood.

[31] Sukhmani Khorana, "How to Make Arts-Based Interventions Appropriate for Young Refugees? Towards a Decolonial Framework," *Journal of Youth Studies* 25, no. 7 (2022): 967.
[32] Fiona Fitzpatrick, "A Search for Home: The Role of Art Therapy in Understanding the Experiences of Bosnian Refugees in Western Australia," *Art Therapy* 19, no. 4 (2002): 152.
[33] Olivia Khoo, "A Post-Apology Carceral Regime: Encountering Refugee Art in Australia," *Australian Humanities Review*, no. 61 (2017): 5.
[34] Mandy Hughes, "Collaborating with Refugees: Power, Ethics and Reciprocity in Documentary Filmmaking," *Alphaville*, no. 18 (2019): 163.

In stark contrast, Kwapisz Williams's work on post-WW2 Polish migrants to Australia is a key exception to the reductive lens. Indeed, Kwapisz William's work examines the gendered realities as shaping refugeehood and challenges ideas of victimhood and vulnerability by highlighting the diversity of gendered personal narratives held by women who experienced forced migration to Australia.[35] Unfortunately, within the Australian context, a similar approach has not been taken to the narratives or experiences of SWANA women, or other refugee populations racialised as non-white, and especially those who, in their work, do not foreground migration stories as their knowledge contribution. Additionally, there is a considerable gap in understanding the work of refugee women that is unrelated to experiences of displacement.

In recognising the transnational space the interviewees inhabit, it is key to note the place of art, activisms and cultural production across and beyond the SWANA region, as well as the ideas, tools and platforms within it. Art based activism – 'artivism' (a term that started circulating in the US and Europe in the late 1990s, to describe the combination between art and social activism), itself played a large role in regional protests, particularly from 2011 onwards, and when speaking on SWANA feminist theory, the role of art needs to be acknowledged as a key site of praxis. In the SWANA context, recent scholarship focuses on the work of women art activists not only to dismantle stereotypical representations of the region, but also to produce new narratives about the global issues. This phenomena is

[35] Katarzyna Kwapisz Williams, "Beyond Stories of Victimhood: Narrating Experiences of Displacement," *Life Writing* 11, no. 4 (2014): 438.

explored through the work of Sara Borrillo[36] and Mounira Soliman,[37] as well as Nevine El Nosseiry.[38]

A key gap identified through the literature review conducted is how the lives of women resettling in Australia are affected by the limitations that the imposed condition of refugee puts upon them in their daily lives, beyond the administrative settlement service touch points, and their subsequent navigation of resulting realities. This study considers not just the personal narratives and experiences of SWANA refugee women, but also the conditions under which they partake in knowledge production. The scope of this study is inclusive of art, writing, film, and any other creative medium the participants use to share their knowledge in a broad range of creative forms and social experiences. Therefore, along with an exploration of the women's settlement experiences, I also engage with refugee art spaces, and how they are operationalised and consumed by Australian audiences as a way to understand how the refugee identity affects cultural products and creative processes. These matters are, to date, insufficiently addressed in the extant literature. In this research, I am guided by two axiological assumptions; namely, that refugee women artists must be seen as knowledge producers and not as mere objects of knowledge. As well as that the security narrative of Australian institutions and services through the logics of service provision and administrative procedure obscure the understanding of the migration process as it is disclosed through

[36]Sara Borrillo and Mounira Soliman, "Introduction," *Studi Magrebini* 18, no. 1 (2020): 131-134.
[37] This is particularly explored in Borrillo and Soliman's special edition of *Studi Magrebini* where long form interviews with artists present "first-hand knowledge that facilitates the deconstruction of stereotypical representations of the region".
[38] Nevine El Nossery, *Arab Women's Revolutionary Art: Between Singularities and Multitudes*, (Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2023).

women's narratives. Both assumptions form the basis for decolonising epistemologies about refugee women in line with the work of Moreton-Robinson,[39] Motta,[40] and Tuhiwai-Smith.[41]

Overview of the Settlement Process

To contextualise the participants' experiences, I provide a brief overview of the settlement process. This process is described and operationalised to fit a linear model that focuses on predominantly material markers of success — such as housing, employment, education, and health — as consequential markers of securing these spheres of personal well-being. The idealised process as outlined by the Australian Parliament research paper,[42] and Settlement Services International,[43] is as follows: Once an individual is recognised as a refugee by the UNHCR and is granted by the Australian Immigration Department one of the four offshore refugee categories visas (subcategories; 200, 201, 203, 204),[44] the individual is transported to Australia and supported by the Department of Home Affairs Humanitarian Settlement Program (HSP), which is delivered by state-specific providers. The HSP is a six-month program that seeks to meet immediate resettlement needs including registering for essential services such as banks, Medicare, schools, and the Adult English Migrant Program. The HSP provides education on Australian rights and responsibilities through NGOs. This support also encompasses plans for refugees to find secure housing, employment, engage with the community, and access training. Upon exiting the HSP, individuals and their dependants will

[39] Moreton-Robinson, *The White Possessive*.
[40] Motta, 100-133.
[41] Linda Tuhiwai Smith, *Decolonizing Methodologies: Research and Indigenous Peoples*, 3rd ed. (London: Zed Books, 2021).
[42] Department of Parliamentary Services, *Refugee Resettlement to Australia: What Are the Facts?* Elibritt Karlsen, (Canberra: Department of Parliamentary Services, 2015), https://www.aph.gov.au/about_parliament/parliamentary_departments/parliamentary_library/pubs/rp/rp1617/refugeeresettlement.
[43] Settlement Services International, "Refugee Support Services Humanitarian Settlement Program," accessed May 11, 2022, https://www.ssi.org.au/services/newcomers-refugees-and-migrants/refugee-support-services.
[44] Department of Parliamentary Services, *Refugee Resettlement to Australia*, 3.

be referred to a local settlement services organisation that they can contact for additional support for the first five years of their settlement. This is funded under the Settlement Engagement and Transition Support (SETS) program.

This, of course, is not the process every refugee or asylum seeker partakes in, but this is the process that informs service design, delivery, and funding. The above process is culturally recognised as the 'right' way to seek asylum and resettlement in Australia despite this having been debunked as a misguided assumption.[45] This process does not consider 'deterrents' such as the use of either offshore or onshore processing centres or the use of community detention or temporary protection visas (TPVs). TPVs and bridging visas greatly limit the rights and access to services granted to refugees within Australia and have been criticised for the lack of protection they provide.[46]

A key factor of the settlement process is how deeply entangled it is across multiple agencies, services, and social spheres. Each relationship is governed by a different set of social expectations and laws. These relationships are also key sites of power where, according to the testimonies of the participants in this study, Australia's coloniality is expressed. I designed the following chart which, although not comprehensive, provides an overview of the key sites of power and processes the participants interact with and shows their web of interconnection. The purpose of the diagram is not to provide a full understanding of the settlement services or the associated agencies, but to highlight its non-linearity and deeply complex reality that is navigated differently by each of the participants in this study.

[45] Department of Parliamentary Services, *Refugee Resettlement to Australia*, 4.
[46] Department of Parliamentary Services, *Immigration Detention in Australia* (Canberra: Parliamentary Library, 2013), 44.

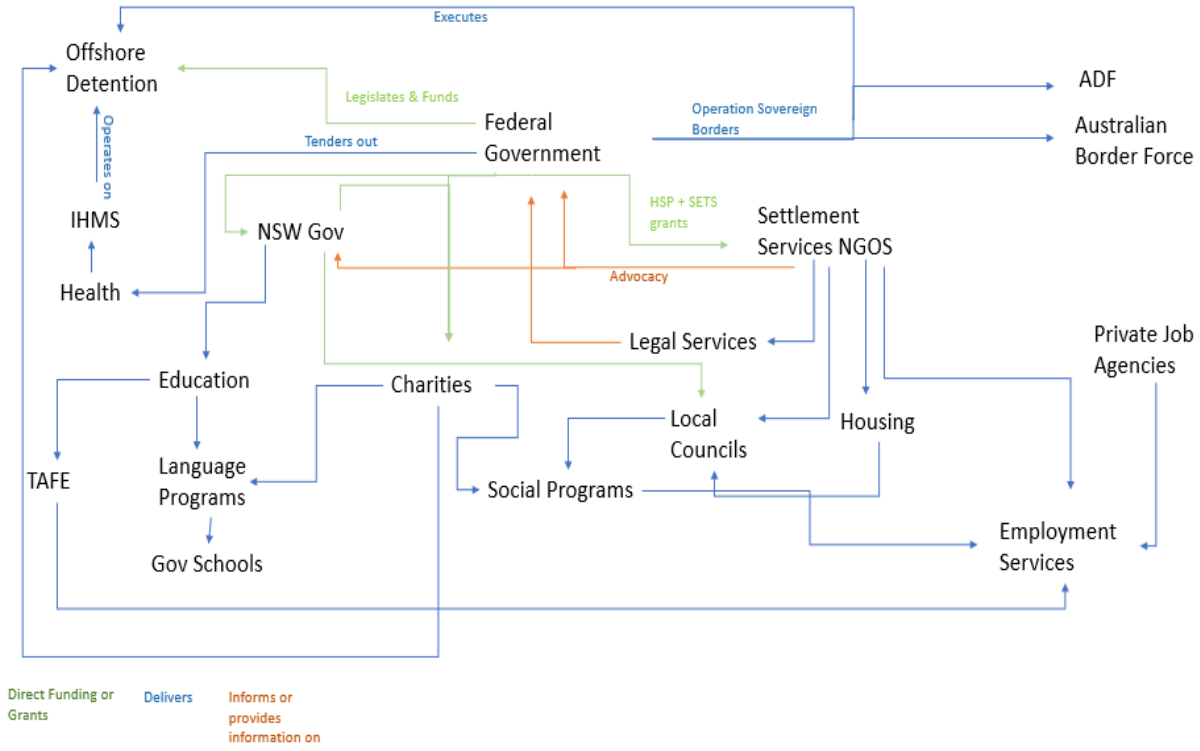

Fig 1. Diagram highlighting the interconnected nature of settlement services (graphic by author).

The focus on relationships and the complex interconnecting web of services; organisational bodies; and personal, domestic, and professional interactions women maintain as a result of their refugee status can be understood through the concept of entanglement, which I refer to throughout this work. Entanglement, as explored by Ríos, highlights the way identity is neither non-fixed, nor internal. Instead, identity is relational.[47] In regard to individuals for whom refugeehood constitutes an aspect of their identity, we may see entanglement as an expression of their continual relationship with the state as different and more intensive than what many other Australian residents experience.

[47] Raquel Ríos, *Teacher Agency for Equity: A Framework for Conscientious Engagement* (New York: Routledge, 2017), 133.

1.2 Methodology

Decolonising Methods

In seeking to challenge colonial narratives regarding refugee women, and to simultaneously critique the ways Australia's coloniality affects the refugee position, it must be acknowledged that many of the traditional tools, such as anthropological and broader academic language are not necessarily fit for a study that seeks to center decolonial epistemologies. Indigenous scholars have noted that colonial settings and disciplines, particularly anthropology, have been used to 'translate' non-settler identities into the language of the colonisers'.[48] This specific position in the system of knowledge production is then enshrined and replicated through institutional processes, before being reflected back to the colonised population, as a means to maintain control through the creation of a singular, authoritative cultural representation to which colonised people are compared.[49] Therefore, there is the danger that in the research process under-examined tools, language, and methods may obscure the participants' experiences, and actively recreate the established power structures that exist within institutions, leading to potential re-traumatisation, and perpetration of a colonial status quo. Conversely, decolonial methods highlight how historically dominant practices favour a stagnant, universal image of the subject and subject position that aids and reinforces colonial power structures. Centering decolonial methods allows for a more nuanced understanding of positions within settler-colonial societies and makes space to critique how individual subjectivity, as a site of experience and understanding, is affected by coloniality.

[48] Tuhiwai Smith, 8.

[49] Tuhiwai Smith, 1-2.

Ethnography on a Transnational Subject

Decolonial methods are useful in examining refugee experiences since tools such as ethnography have been noted by anthropologist Jean Comaroff as problematic when dealing with transnational subjects. Ethnography's conceptual reliance on studying within a fixed space is questionable as contemporary groups and individuals commonly interact with multiple social, physical, and ideological spheres, both locally and internationally.[50] Refugees are inherently transnational subjects that transcend a basic understanding of the relationship between subject and place through their displacement. This is further complicated by their existence within a liminal space, where statelessness and government management have placed them outside traditional spheres of bureaucracy and community. Ethnography's relationship to an authentic 'truth' and experience has assumed that societies remain stagnant, mirroring the colonial anthropological model that seeks to frame colonised subjects as static through the construction of a 'traditional' position that is rooted in the past. The concept of 'traditional' is subsequently used to measure contemporary individuals' authenticity of accounts and lived experiences against which it ultimately paints the colonised subjects' accounts as insufficient.[51]

I note here, the concept of a fixed space has in more recent times been challenged in Cultural Studies and Anthropology George Marcus' interest in the emergence of 'multi-sited' approach to ethnography is a stark example of this shift, as well as the acknowledgement of tracing relationships between sites, spaces and communities is cruicial to peeling away stereotyped ethnography.[52] This nuanced approach of moving beyond a fixed space has cemented itself in ways anthropologists seek to represent the complex relationships to space

[50] Jean Comaroff and John Comaroff, "Ethnography on an Awkward Scale: Postcolonial Anthropology and the Violence of Abstraction," *Ethnography* 4, no. 2 (2003): 151.
[51] Irene Watson, *Aboriginal Peoples, Colonialism and International Law: Raw Law*, 1st ed. (London: Routledge, 2015), 69.
[52] George E. Marcus, *Ethnography Through Thick and Thin*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1998), 14

around country borders within post-colonial nations. Among them, Malini Sur's work along the Bangladeshi-Indian border highlights the relationship between changing border ecology and militarisation as governing mobility of societies living and working between the areas in a unique way.[53] Australian Indigenous Scholar, Irene Watson, identifies this disciplinary shift as a movement towards Indigenous Knowledge.[54] However, Watson proposes the ethnography deployed within an Australian context have the potential to maintain colonial power imbalances, particularly with Australian Indigenous communities, because of their ability construct identities on behalf of Indigenous communities and discredit local knowledge in tandem with governments and corporations to further exploit natural resources and seize stolen land.[55]

All together, these studies suggest that a refugee subject position requires analyses in the context of their relationships and the spaces they create and give meaning to on an ongoing basis, as opposed to analyses that attempt to uncover a centralised experience. In the research reported here, ethnography focuses on how individual participants' relationship to the state manifests day to day. The relationship is examined through the lens of their testimonies and art to understand how place, in this case The Third Space, is constructed.

The Researcher's Position within Decolonial Methods

Regarding the specific colonial power dynamics between researchers working within settler-colonial nations such as Australia and their refugee subjects, cultural studies scholar and member of the Forced Migration Research Network Caroline Lenette draws attention to the tensions between cross-cultural encounters and how the refugee position is commonly

[53] Malini Sur, *Jungle Passports: Fences, Mobility, and Citizenship at the Northeast India-Bangladesh Border*. (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2021,) 2.
[54] Watson, 71.
[55] Watson, 73.

painted as 'vulnerable'.[56] Lenette argues that, due to experiences of displacement and their ongoing interfacing with the potentially violent system of settlement, refugees are seen to occupy a victim position and thus hold no autonomy or power. This perceived power imbalance is entrenched in and replicated through institutional research and ethics processes which construct the refugee subject as an object of cultural vulnerability.[57] This perceived power imbalance is acknowledged to be a point of risk mitigation regarding the dynamics between white researchers and refugee subjects from previously colonised countries. Despite researchers' demographics shifting to include more individuals from migrant and refugee backgrounds,[58] this does not fully prevent the researcher from causing potential harm by replicating or creating new power dynamics that feed into a broader Australian social hierarchy.[59] I note my position not to align myself with my subjects and distance myself from colonial institutions, but to show how living in Australia entwines all citizens with coloniality. Despite members of my family identifying more with the term 'migrant', my family would come under a broad definition of refugee, considering the complicated internal and external displacement following a series of conflicts, themselves spurred by colonial powers and proxy ethno-nationalism within Cyprus in the 1960s and the 1970s. The experience of displacement that I have heard from the participants in my research echoes my own family's memories. However, this experience and the intergenerational effects I have witnessed do not change the fact that I was born and raised in Australia, have benefitted from both public and private education and studied at the University of Sydney, the oldest colonial higher education institution in Australia. I have had relatively easy access to health, social and economic services provided by the state through my Australian citizenship, and, although

[56] Caroline Lenette, *Arts-Based Methods in Refugee Research Creating Sanctuar*y, 1st ed. 2019. ed. (Singapore: Springer Singapore, 2019), 89.
[57] Lenette, 89.
[58] Lenette, 90-91.
[59] Lenette, 91.

I am a dual citizen, my place within this country is secure. I admit to having experienced racialised treatment and share some similar cultural traditions and day-to-day experiences with the participants in this research. Conversations about these commonalities allowed me to develop a deeper relationship and trust with the participants. However, ultimately, I have learned, worked, and lived within institutions and colonially informed circles that seek to propagate the status quo of white supremacy.

My identity alone as a Cypriot-Australian is not enough to decolonise this work. Therefore, I have drawn upon the work of decolonial and Indigenous scholars, practitioners, and community activists to develop a decolonial tool kit. This includes employing, and being in conversation with research methods conceived by First Nations and SWANA scholars coupled with trauma-informed and reflexive ethical storytelling practices that seek to minimise the power discrepancies between researcher and participant.

Using a Decolonial Methodology

I have incorporated decolonial methods and principles pioneered by Māori academic Tuhiwai Smith, alongside employing tools used by SWANA feminist thinkers in their fieldwork with communities, as well as looking to activist spaces and communities of practice to make use of tools outside the academic space.

To minimise the risk of emotional distress, the interview methodology implemented was informed by both trauma-informed research as well as decolonial qualitative methodologies.[60] This methodology accounts for the unique transnational position of refugees who may have experienced colonial state violence, while minimising the 'extractionist' and inequitable power relationship between researcher and participant that may cause additional distress. This has been combined with the methods and principles of ethical research codified

[60] Tuhiwai Smith, 2.

by Lenette.[61] To adhere to trauma-informed practices, the research will incorporate the concepts and tools noted below.

Self-reflexivity and Collaboration

Visweswaran defines self-reflexive anthropology as juggling questioning and abandonment of authority.[62] Bringing self-reflexivity into this research means that I not only acknowledge the fallibility of my position, its power, and the biases I potentially carry, but I also seek to minimise the effect of these factors on the research by challenging my own thoughts and previous academic discourses as I deal with women's own interpretations of their lived experiences and stories. My approach does not offer a universal authority on refugee women artists from the SWANA region but, instead, highlights the diversity of refugee women's individual subjectivity and notes the commonalities of experience that exist despite such diversity. Additionally, I prioritised the participants' ability to dictate and communicate the meaning of their words and experiences. This was made possible through the participants' ability to interact with my interpretations and challenge them if they felt they did not accurately represent them and their experience. Tuhiwai Smith emphasises that decolonial methods do assert colonised subjects as knowledge holders that are to be engaged with within a long-term commitment.[63] This aims to frame the relationship and research as an ongoing learning experience for the researcher, as the experience and knowledge of the colonial subject cannot be encapsulated and understood within the lifetime of a single project. It also highlights a commitment and interest in the subject's life beyond the immediate benefit of data extraction. Therefore, my starting point has been talking about the theoretical basis of

[61] Lenette, 89-91.
[62] Kamala Visweswaran, *Fictions of Feminist Ethnography* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1994), 79.
[63] Tuhiwai Smith, 16.

my research with participants. Lenette also notes the importance of a reciprocal research model that seeks to provide mutually beneficial outcomes for all parties, particularly when dealing with women from refugee backgrounds who sit at an intersectional disadvantage.[64] Other features of reciprocal models I incorporated include informed consent and justice, and the challenge of "dip in and out research methods".[65]

In connection with self-reflexivity, I incorporated tools and techniques used by SWANA feminist theorists in their own fieldwork. One of my major sources of methodological inspiration to minimise the risk of 'othering' regarding lived experience of marginalised communities is the work of the Egyptian-American anthropologist Lila Abu-Lughod.[66] By masterfully weaving the stories of the participants with the context of which they are a part accompanied by an explicit explanation of how she has worked, Abu-Lughod's work gives a clear pathway to understand how positionality is inevitably constructed.[67] This transparency and self-reflexivity, when used in my own research, to allow the reader to understand how the coloniality of Australia thoroughly affects the subject's lives even in work seeking to illuminate that fact.

Ethical Storytelling

Ethical storytelling methods are appropriate in the context of this study as they assert the power of the individual through their knowledge sharing and deconstructs colonial processes by empowering autobiography as ethnography. In seeing ethical storytelling as a means through which autobiography becomes ethnography, I could analyse the information and data shared with me through a micro-historical lens. Interviews conducted with participants are

[64] Lenette, 89.
[65] Lenette, 89.
[66] Lila Abu-Lughod, *Writing Women's Worlds: Bedouin Stories,* 15th anniversary ed. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2008), 27.
[67] Abu-Lughod, *Writing Women's Worlds,* 18.

autobiographical catalogues, examples of oral history, and when combined with other forms of creative production, such as art, create a multi-faceted historiography of the individual subjectivity of refugee women.

Principles of ethical storytelling in an Australian context are being pioneered in activist spaces led by Cronin's work, particularly regarding the use of personal testimony to bolster social justice causes and campaigns.[68] In these spaces, the tools I observed to be associated with the practice of ethical storytelling include providing formal preparation of the storyteller for the event; ongoing aftercare including a debrief; centering the storyteller's perspective; not challenging foundational experiences, particularly as they relate to identity; and understanding their subjective account as evidence for broader social trends and experiences. Additionally, it is considered best practice to let the storyteller use their own words, whatever tone, manner, or language they see fit to express themselves. By interacting with the participant as an expert in their experience, the researcher can engage with not just the words spoken by the participant but understand their position through their actions and priorities in what they share. As Visweswaran's work notes, the researcher requires an understanding of how gaps can be created and understood in the ways women speak. This is encapsulated by her use of the concept of 'situated knowledge'[69] and 'subject refusal' where personal positioning is seen as a feminist epistemological process, certain aspects of their story are foregrounded, and others minimised, omitted, or their account and participation are denied completely.[70] These acts are just as valid points of data related to how participants view their own participation, boundaries, and power, which researchers should be particularly aware of in the case of refugees where those with insecure residency may have their words and

[68] Doug Cronin, "Flipping the Power of Storytelling: Committing to Anti-racist Storytelling," *ADEM; Australian Drama Education Magazine* 16 (2020): 36.
[69] Visweswaran, 76.
[70] Visweswaran, 67.

knowledge used against them. Ethical storytelling allows for knowledge holders to create and maintain these lines and boundaries and, therefore, retain power in their testimony while also showing the limitations certain identities have in sharing their experiences. As a poet, a professor, and a *mestiza salvaje*, Motta explores through the work of Gloria Anzaldúa and Maria Lugones, the power of storytellers, including those outside of institutional networks and education, who push against limits of oppression and create a new terrain that interweaves a fractured and multiple understanding of the self that nurtures processes of critical intimacy. This sentiment is echoed in Rania Abdelrahman's work on women artists in contemporary Egypt, in which she poses art's unique ability to create new subjectivites – and through interviews and interpreting artists' own narratives we can challenge biased representations of women in the society.[71] This is a process that stands in stark contrast with the colonial narrative placed upon marginalised women.[72] Ethical storytelling can be used both within the participant interviews and readings of their art and cultural knowledge production and therefore is useful in examining the epistemological weight of the personal histories of creatives.

1.3 Participants and Relevant Demographic Data

Sample Size

I conducted a series of semi-structured interviews with three refugee women who are actively involved in creative knowledge production. A small sample size of three participants was deemed an acceptable number due to the nature of the research and its focus on individual subjectivity. In the interest of not distilling data into a single explanation of the refugee

[71]Rania Abdelrahman, "Envisioning 'Freedom': Liberated Gender Identities in Young Egyptian Women Artists' Oral and Visual Narratives." *Studi Magrebini* 18, no. 1 (2020): 137.
[72] Motta, 126.

subject, a small sample size was deemed as not a risk to the academic rigor and validity of the research.

Eligibility Criteria and Relevant Definitions

The study was open to participants who identified as women and as artists/creatives, from a refugee background, having been displaced from countries within the SWANA region, having arrived in Australia between 2001 and 2019. This period has been chosen as it marks a stark shift in Australia's approach to refugee and asylum seeker rhetoric, which was framed by the adoption of the Pacific Solution, and Operation Sovereign Borders, a period that will be explored in more depth in Chapter 2.

I purposely did not incorporate strict definitions of refugee or artist. The open definitions allow for participants' own identification and understanding of their identity and work to be foregrounded. Thus, the research moved away from labels that rely on Australian-specific criteria for who is and is not deemed an 'artist'. Some of these markers may include a certain amount of notoriety, regular monetary compensation for their work, and access to certain spaces and audiences. The label 'artist' is problematic due to our own cultural assumptions about the term that do not sufficiently address the socio-economic barriers refugees face in being recognised as artists while sitting at the intersection of multiple, marginalised identities. This is the case particularly when one's artistic output is not necessarily seen as 'art' within its new context. Within the scope of this study, the category of refugee has been left as a category of self-definition, including those who have been granted humanitarian, bridging or temporary protection visas, as well as those who are currently detained with no legal status awarded to them. Participants' status ranged from currently being on a temporary protection visa, to having secured Australian citizenship.

As settlement services are delivered at the state level, my focus was on those who had been settled in New South Wales. All participants currently reside in Sydney, one participant was originally settled outside of NSW for an initial detention period before being moved. Participants had arrived in Australia between 2007 and 2017, before which some had lived in 'transitional' countries including Indonesia and Turkey after their initial displacement from their country of birth.

All participants joined the project via recommendations from mutual friends and colleagues. In two cases, I had a pre-existing relationship with the participants prior to this project. Due to the refugee women artists scene's small size, some of the participants had pre-existing relationships with one another or knew of each other's work.

Recruitment

As part of the recruitment process, I reached out to organisations that support creative individuals from refugee backgrounds. This included organisations that I had worked with directly through my professional career or in my activist work. Interested parties were engaged in an initial meeting to get to know me, the project, the key ideas the research was based on, and responsibilities associated with being a participant. After this initial meeting, they were provided with participation information sheets and consent forms that they were able to sign and return if they were interested in partaking in the project. Those who expressed interest were all individuals with whom I had a pre-existing relationship or mutual connections and colleagues. This highlights the importance of trust and relationality in this kind of research.

Participants' Varied Experiences and Backgrounds

Due to the nature of this study, and the participants' varied backgrounds, a range of variables such as languages spoken, cultural and religious background, and time spent in Australia were identified. Also noteworthy are the potential discrepancies in the services experienced by the women during their settlement which would vary depending on their age, their arrival period, the provider, and the caseworker they were assigned. Participant ages ranged from 23 to 40. Two of the participants identified as Iranian, and one as Egyptian-Albanian. Religions of the participants included Baha'i and Muslim, both practising and non-practising, and first languages spoken included Farsi and Arabic. All women had completed tertiary education, with one participant having multiple degrees awarded both in Australia and her country of birth. Mediums used by the women in their work included photography, graphite drawing, animation, and comics. At the demographic level, the participants had minimal points in common; their main commonality was that they had experienced exile and resettlement in Australia. This allows my research to dive deeply into how this facet of identity affects the way the participants live their lives in Australia and intersects with the other aspects of their identity.

Semi-structured Interviews

Semi-structured interviews were conducted in January through to March 2022, with participants answering a range of twenty-eight questions split into eight themed sections.[73] They aimed to gather a set of demographic and qualitative data on their creative practice, their settlement experience, and the relationship between their experiences and their artistic production. Interviews were conducted in a flexible, discussion like-manner in a public space

[73] Susan E. Kelly, "Qualitative Interviewing Techniques and Style", in *The SAGE Handbook of Qualitative Methods in Health Research*, ed. Ivy Bourgeault, Robert Dingwall and Raymond De Vries (London: SAGE Publications, 2010), 307-326.

that was easily accessible by all parties. Interviews lasted from one to three hours and incorporated breaks – breaks took place after groups of four questions. All three interviews were completed in a single sitting. Follow-up interviews were conducted on an ad-hoc basis when additional clarification was required during the coding process. Participants were given access to the questions before the interview, so they were able to prepare, minimising the potential distress. Participants enjoyed the opportunity to review the topics, and many provided feedback on the questions. This strategy also ensured that the interview was focused on what the participants felt were the most pertinent areas and themes relevant to their experience. All interviews were conducted using these decolonial methods listed above along with trauma-informed practices such as regular breaks, safe accessible venues, and the flagging of troubling topics.[74]

Observations

To obtain additional qualitative data on how art produced by refugee women is interacted with, understood, and disseminated, I observed a series of events in which the artists participated as well as those that advertised themselves as 'refugee art' in which they were not involved. This data included general demographic data about participants, organising bodies, audience, and venue which was collected through field notes. Participants were able to provide additional context and information on the organising process for events in which they were involved.

[74] Nadine Liddy & Helena deAnstiss, "National Youth Settlement Framework," *Multicultural Youth Advocacy Networ*k, 2020, https://myan.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/myan0004-revised-nysf_fa_low-res.pdf.

Analysis of Data

After the fieldwork and data collection phase, I spent over thirty hours transcribing interview data and re-confirming information with participants. I spent an additional ten hours collating and codifying my observation notes and comparing them to the few articles on the same events published by outlets such as *The Daily Telegraph*[75] and *SBS.*[76] Once all material was standardised, I was able to code the data and find where the participants' experiences overlapped significantly, and where they deviated to a point of interest. As this study is concerned with subjectivity, narrative analysis was used to allow for the participants' individual understanding and to avoid conflating the women's varied experiences.

1.4 Overview of Chapters

Given the ambit of this research, it is first necessary to explore via Chapter 2 how Australia's historical relationship with refugees and refugee policy since Federation has been heavily shaped by the nation's colonial identity and interest in tightly managing its population to continue to empower whiteness. Chapter 3 explores the theoretical framework of my research in more depth, focusing on how Indigenous epistemology and SWANA feminist theory are appropriate tools to understand the settlement experience of SWANA refugee women within Australia. Chapter 4 presents the first half of the findings while introducing each of the participants and their work in a way that analyses the settlement experiences of each of the women through a lens of their own understanding. Chapter 5 builds on the previous findings

[75] Alexi Demetriadi, "Refugee art exhibition shows the world through their lens," *The Daily Telegraph*, February 18, 2022, Inner West Courier, https://www.dailytelegraph.com.au/newslocal/inner-west/through-our-lens-refugee-art-exhibition-at-community-refugee-welcome-centre-callan-park/news-story/eec3379a1ddde8062e85f77be51cf5fc.

[76] Abdullah Alikhil, Mujeeb Muneeb and Felicity Davey, "Strength and resilience' as Afghan women share powerful artworks amid persecution back home," *SBS Pashto*, February 4, 2022 3:03 pm AEST, https://www.sbs.com.au/language/pashto/en/article/strength-and-resilience-as-afghan-women-share-powerful-artworks-amid-persecution-back-home/uu5ha7xza.

by focussing on the participants' processes of knowledge creation, the broader scene dubbed 'refugee art', and how each of the participants reconcile their work and identity - while my analysis culminates in my conclusions in Chapter 6.

The aim of this research was to gather a sample of refugee women's experiences. Through analysing the processes of knowledge production by refugee women, I offer an alternative history of Australia, its state institutions, and multicultural ambitions, one where refugee women, as artists, are knowledge producers.

Overall, this thesis aims to contribute to the fields of decolonial studies grounded in Australian society. This is done by offering an alternative understanding of Australia's migration and settlement processes and histories through the highly individualised stories of refugee women navigating settlement within Australia as an ongoing relational process.

Chapter 2 - Australia's Relationship to Refugees: A Project of Colonial Progeny

In understanding the frameworks of coloniality deployed in this study and how they affect the lives and knowledge production of refugee women, it is crucial to conceptualise 'refugees' as a colonially managed population within the context of Australia. Refugees can thus be understood in this context as a group of people whose relationship to the government and to the relevant policies that inform their interactions and participation within Australia, are framed by a colonial relationship to racial hierarchies that do not necessarily affect or become visible within the lives of Anglo Australians. In this chapter I explore how the historical relationship between the state and refugees, and how Australia manages population through adhocratic policy governed by a need to minimise potential 'disruptions' migrants may pose. Indeed, the nation-state of Australia, as a British settler-colony, continually has been inscribed with coloniality of power,[77] a system of compounding hierarchies across racial, linguistic, labour, and gendered lines.[78] In analysing this system, the coloniality of power framework examines societal power and domination that socially and economically reproduces itself under the guise of progress and capitalist relations. [79]

This relationship between Australia's colonial identity and refugees is reflected within Australia's history of migration and a need to protect the nation from perceived threats to the racialised hierarchical cultural makeup through border control. The connection between coloniality and border policing in Australia's case shows the adhocracy shaping policy decisions that seek to uphold and enshrine colonial power structures. These power structures

[77] Sonia Magdalena Tascon, "Refugees and the Coloniality of Power: Border-Crossers of Postcolonial Whiteness," in *Whitening Race: Essays in Social and Cultural Criticism*, ed. Aileen Moreton-Robinson (Canberra: Aboriginal Studies Press, 2004), 245.
[78] Vek Lewis, and Dan Irving, "Strange Alchemies: The Trans Mutations of Power and Political Economy," *TSQ: Transgender Studies Quarterly* 4, no. 1 (2017): 9.
[79] Lewis and Irving, 9.

may be visible through all touch points between refugees and the state as policy seeks to uphold a conceptualisation of citizenship that is predicated on infrastructural whiteness and evokes a citizen/enemy dichotomy between citizens and those coloniality perceives as non-citizens.[80]

Here, I note that the categories of refugee and migrant are not interchangeable, but rather the management of refugees has been predominantly executed through migration policy historically in Australia, particularly in the absence of formal settlement systems, and therefore the two categories can be explored in parallel.

2.1 Adhocratic Policy and Coloniality

Coloniality, as explored by Quijano and Ennis, refers to the long-standing, global patterns of power that were established through colonialism. Coloniality relates to the very makeup of institutions that reflect or uphold colonial interest, having survived the imperial projects of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. These institutions, by design, favour race-based hierarchical structures.[81] This racial hierarchy manifests itself through migration policy and what Indigenous feminist and scholar Aileen Moreton-Robinson terms 'border stress'. Moreton-Robinson describes Australia's border stress as stemming from the illegitimate nature by which Australia was founded through the invasion and property claim of unceded land from the Indigenous population and through the accompanying processes of dispossession.[82] Within Australia, subsequent migration cannot be uncoupled from labour needs, as neoliberal globalisation is an expression of the coloniality of power in its search for

[80] Perera and Pugliese, 478.
[81] Anibal Quijano and Michael Ennis, "Coloniality of Power, Eurocentrism, and Latin America," *Nepantla* 1, no. 3 (2000): 533.
[82] Moreton-Robinson, *Sovereign Subjects*, 147.

cheap, flexible labour.[83] This political-economic dimension interacts with the adhocratic policy landscape and is particularly visible in the post WW2 multiculturalism projects that sought to create a national monoculturalism that sets social protocol, minimises difference and ultimately does not affect the racial hierarchy and associated power. [84]

The problematic colonial foundations of Australia and its resulting need to affirm legitimacy has informed Australia's historical rationale and execution of migration policy in addition to a tranche of systems of classifications of citizenship, technologies of surveillance, and systems of incarceration. These same systems uphold bureaucratic management of Indigenous lives and communities, including via the breaking of kinship and relation to country, displacement and (re)settlement, within micro-level, micro-management. It is these ongoing management sites where policing and social welfare governance intersect beyond the initial processes and policies of migration. The adhocratic policy approach adopted as a result of these systems seeks to defer refugee matters in a way that maintains multiple 'others' who must be managed to serve both colonial ideations of Australia, and economic needs in line with global trends of expansive immigration policies.[85]

Adhocratic Humanitarianism and its Connection to Australian Policy

Adhocratic humanitarianism is explained by political anthropologist Elizabeth Cullen Dunn as the transformation of bureaucracy into a vehicle for delivering and implementing programs based on guesswork and satisficing criteria — where decision making seeks to be 'good

[83] Raúl Delgado Wise, & Humberto Márquez Covarrubias, "The Migration and Labour Question: Lessons from the Mexico-Us Corridor," *UNRISD Conference Regional Governance of Migration and Socio-Political Rights: Institutions, Actors and Process* (Geneva: Switzerland United Nations Research Institute for Social Development, 2013), 1.

[84] Elizabeth A Povinelli, *The Cunning of Recognition: Indigenous Alterities and the Making of Australian Multiculturalism. Politics, History, and Culture* (Durham N.C: Duke University Press, 2002).

[85] Douglas S. Massey, "The Political Economy of Migration in an Era of Globalization," In *International Migration and Human Rights*, ed. Samuel Martinez (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2019), 34.

enough' — with a sense of immediacy.[86] This adhocracy often results in short-term 'fixes' that breed insecure environments, unproductivity, and mistakes. The principle of adhocratic humanitarianism can be expanded to encompass government policy and its reactions to humanitarian issues, particularly, refugee intake and settlement. Indeed, Carpi, when analysing the adhocratic humanitarianism surrounding Syrian refugees in Lebanon, emphasised the concept's connection to 'emergency' and an immediate need to treat, not fix, the issue. In an Australian context, the 'emergency' which inspires adhocratic policy is the migration of refugees.[87] In examining Australia's migration history, it becomes evident that the government's dealings with displacement seek to alleviate the state of the immediate perceived issue or 'threat' of unacceptable migrants as they arise rather than seeking to manage the broader issues that have caused their situation. This approach creates a precedent of reactivity which allows governments to ideologically exploit the issue.[88] Therefore, just as Dunn and Carpi suggest that NGOs seem to avoid engaging with the root causes of conflict that create refugees, the Australian government similarly distances itself from its complicity in this global order of security and firm borders with only a few state-sanctioned exceptions which I will discuss throughout this chapter. I bring attention to these concepts and their relationship to one another as they are conspicuously present throughout Australia's migration history and highlight an important foundation from which contemporary refugees' experiences originate.

[86] Elizabeth C. Dunn, "The Chaos of Humanitarian Aid: Adhocracy in the Republic of Georgia," *Humanity* 3, no. 1 (2012): 2.
[87] Estella Carpi, "Adhocratic Humanitarianisms and Ageing Emergencies in Lebanon: from the July 2006 War in Beirut's Southern Suburbs to the Syrian Refugee Influx in Akkar's Villages," (PhD diss., The University of Sydney, 2015), 38.
[88] Massey, 35.

2.2 Australia's Eras of Migration

Australia's migration history is often presented in four eras by a wide range of anecdotal and historical sources: The introduction of The White Australia policy (1901-1930), the period surrounding WW2 (1930s-1965), the Indochinese refugee crisis (1965-1992), and post-Tampa Affair (2001-2021). However, migration to the continent started long before 1901, with 1788 a significant date that marks the start of the colonisation of Indigenous populations and the dispossession of their land that ensued.

These eras do not encompass all of the state's notable actions as I will discuss later. By focussing on refugee histories when examining how the framework of coloniality has created our current migration climate, I question this traditional timeline segmentation by deviating from it. In further problematising this understanding of eras, I note that, since they are not truly delimited, many of the major policies and events transcend these eras to cumulatively affect Australia's migration responses. For example, the White Australia Policy was not formally ended until 1973 and has had long standing effects on migration policy.[89] In challenging the framing of these periods, it is possible to better understand how Australia's relationship to refugees is entangled with its history of and ongoing colonialism. This becomes particularly evident when highlighting Australia's perceived need to create militarised spatial boundaries to protect an engineered population — resulting in a de-prioritisation of any long-term, or proactive refugee programs that do not uphold or further the established 'character' of the nation.

[89] James Jupp, *From White Australia to Woomera: The Story of Australian Immigration* (Melbourne: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 50.

The Foundations of the White Australia Policy (1901 – 1930s)

The Immigration Restriction Act of 1901 was one of the first Commonwealth laws passed in Federated Australia. It acted as the base for the commonly known White Australia Policy (WAP). The WAP explicitly sought to keep the national ideal of Australian citizenship white, through what Ghassan Hage calls a propagation of a "fantasy position of cultural dominance born out of the history of European expansion."[90] As an identity that is born out of expansion, whiteness, therefore, must maintain its central position of associated cultural power, along with the material spoils it has tied itself to such as land and resources. This means that Australia's legitimacy must be constantly securing itself against an 'other'.

The WAP, hence, created an immediate precedent for categories of acceptable and unacceptable migrants within Australia. An 'acceptable' individual would be one who would be seen to continue the whitening of Australia — primarily understood as British expatriates who could propagate the colonial flavour of the nation by taking up space on unceded land. Migration scholars such as James Jupp have described this as a conscious act of population planning and engineering.[91] Supporting this approach is the analysis of various artefacts, such as the English dictation test, which aimed to embed the concept of an 'ideal' migrant at an administrative level. Thus, the identity of the acceptable individual is tethered to colonial whiteness that is propagated and maintained through governance and administrative bodies. Therefore, institutions will find security in using bureaucratic channels to heavily manage and mitigate non-whiteness, and its ability to amass power or, as Hage puts it, accumulate governmental belonging.[92] This belonging is the belief that one has a right over the nation,

[90] Ghassan Hage, *White Nation Fantasies of White Supremacy in a Multicultural Society* (New York: Routledge, 2000), 20.
[91] Jupp, 17.
[92] Hage, 46.

and involves the understanding in one's possession of the right to contribute and manage the home nation through the everyday politics of living.

Traces of this are still present in today's citizenship procedures, one example being the Department of Home Affairs 'Australian Values' document which new migrants and refugees are required to sign. The document is a series of statements outlining what behaviours and ideologies Australia supposedly ascribes to. One 'value' directly states English as the 'national language, and as an important unifying element of Australian society'[93] echoing the relationship to language in the dictation test which acted as a bureaucratic block, which filtered individuals' capacity through a Eurocentric understanding of language. [94]

During this broad period, refugees were not understood as a separate migratory category as was highlighted by the Royal Institute of International Affairs' 1937 survey of the global refugee problem.[95] The report noted that Australia did not distinguish between refugees and other "alien immigrants."[96] Additionally, Australia's immigration policy remained unaffected by the introduction of the Nansen Passport from the UN High Commission of Refugees which provided legal, international refugee status to those seeking it.[97] A need for Australia to maintain its national character through a preference for white migration would be seen to take precedence even over British directives, as shown by the government's 1921 rejection of the Australian High Commission in London's enquiry into whether Australia would resettle 40,000 Jewish anti-Bolsheviks. The Australian government cited that accepting said group

[93] Department of Home Affairs, *Life in Australia Australian Values and Principles* (Canberra: Department of Immigration and Border Protection 2020), 6-8.
[94] It must be noted that whiteness in this context refers to Western European. The term has since grown at institutional convenience to include other nationalities and ethnicities, as well as mixed individuals deemed 'white passing'.
[95] Klaus Neumann, *Across the Seas: Australia's Response to Refugees: A History* (Melbourne: Black Inc, 2015), 31.
[96] Neumann, *Across the Seas*, 31.
[97] Neumann, *Across the Seas*, 27.

would be at the expense of British ex-servicemen and family nominees.[98] This example demonstrates the lack of a specialised avenue for refugee migration. Hence, potential asylum seekers would be subject to the same racially hierarchical processes characteristic of the state's broader migration schemes. In examining this period, it becomes evident that the coloniality of the state was propagated and protected administratively by cementing a dichotomy of desirable and undesirable migrants. This was a classification predicated on racial lines and enacted through the White Australia Policy. In doing so, Australia was able to perpetuate the importance of a cultivated de-facto white Australian identity within the country's social makeup. This was reflected in Australia's hesitance around the acceptance of international refugee communities.

World War Two and its Aftermath (1930s – 1960s)

The immense population displacement due to the Second World War marked a global turning point in the management of asylum seekers.[99] The war imposed the immediate necessity for institutionalised mechanisms and bodies to govern the immense number of refugees that it generated. However, Australian policies and migration processes did not reflect asylum provision as a priority despite the international focus on resettlement at that time. In the lead-up to the Second World War, as the European refugee crisis continued to develop, Australia did not participate in any of the ten intergovernmental conferences held between 1921–1938 to discuss refugee issues.[100] Australia's lack of interest in resettlement responsibilities was spotlighted by its continual attempts to amend UN drafted agreements to retain nation-state sovereignty and the ability to reject refugees, minimising their settlement obligations as

[98] Neumann, *Across the Seas*, 22.
[99] Katy Long, "When Refugees Stopped Being Migrants: Movement, Labour and Humanitarian Protection," *Migration Studies* 1, no. 1 (2013), 12.
[100] Neumann, *Across the Seas*, 26.

signatories.[101] Australia did not see its position within the agency as one that carried the burden of resettling beneficiaries; rather, the organisation was to be focused on aid and relief.[102] This was echoed in Australia's 1947 refusal to facilitate migration despite becoming a signatory to the International Refugee Organisation's constitution.[103]

However, it would be incorrect to state that Australia refused to take in any refugees during this period. On several occasions Australia adapted its policies to accommodate the rapidly changing global situation, albeit in a reactive manner. This was particularly the case in response to the opening of the Pacific front; the theatre of conflict operating in the Pacific and Indian oceans—primarily driven by Japanese forces pushing down into Southeast Asia and Oceania. Throughout the time of the Pacific War, Australia took in 15,000 refugees evacuated from Southeast Asia.[104] Though mostly European colonials, the Asian population amongst those fleeing constituted the first sizeable number of non-European migrants that Australia allowed into the country.[105]

Despite these concessions, Australia sought to adapt policies within existing frameworks of racialised hierarchies. One example of this occurred in 1938 when John McEwan, the then Minister for the Interior and Department of the Interior, announced the intake of 15,000 refugees over three years.[106] It is noted that this policy was not to supersede the existing immigration policy. For instance, Jewish refugees would still be categorised under 'white aliens'.[107] This highlighted how the existing racial hierarchies used to manage the population

[101] Neumann, *Across the Seas*, 231.
[102] Neumann, *Across the Seas*, 80.
[103] Neumann, *Across the Seas*, 100.
[104] Neumann *Across the Seas*, 70.
[105] Neumann, *Across the Seas*, 71.
[106] John McEwan, "Statement on Acceptance of European Refugees in Australia - Statement from John McEwan," *National Archives of Australia*, accessed on July 01, 2021, https://www.naa.gov.au/learn/learning-resources/learning-resource-themes/society-and-culture/migration-and-multiculturalism/acceptance-european-refugees-australia-statement-john-mcewen?fbclid=IwAR0V8GH8mgy7BNZCy5FM5CPIgEGO50_LQ-y5K8uNsLWIUzSEzVmBH338mU0.
[107] Neumann, *Across the Seas*, 38.

would remain intact, foregrounding the state's prioritisation of its existing ideas of border management and security over vulnerable individuals; and forcing extraordinary circumstances to conform to existing administrative structures.

This supposed 'relaxing' of migration measures to mitigate immediate crises and maintain a cooperative international image did not supersede existing migration policy. The state's need for colonial progeny through migration policy was exemplified in Arthur Calwell's involvement in the 1945 formation of the Immigration Department of Australia, and his subsequent management of this department. Calwell led major migration programs from continental Europe, aiming to facilitate population growth, a strategy still relied upon to keep the economy productive and compensate for Australia's low birth rate.[108] The Department was also tasked with maintaining control over which individuals would be allowed into the country. During his tenure, Calwell put forward his vision of a hierarchy of migrants by race,[109] and oversaw a reinvocation of the WAP. He introduced the *War-time Refugees Removal Act 1949*,[110] subsequently using the legislation to perform deportations of refugees, some of which had been settled with Australian families.[111] Calwell justified these actions by asserting that the presence of certain refugees posed potential threats to Australian sovereignty and racial-cultural identity.[112] This point marks an important step in the conceptualisation of refugees and migrants through a racialised security framework. These state activities demonstrate how the priority of Australia was to manage refugees within the confines of existing processes which were shown to be insufficient to meet the migration

[108] Neumann, *Across the Seas*, 83.
[109] Commonwealth, *Parliamentary Debates*, House of Representatives, September 25, 1945, 185 *(*Arthur Calwell, Minister of Immigration) http://historichansard.net/hofreps/1945/19450802_reps_17_184/#debate-11.
[110] War-time Refugees Removal Act 1949 (Cth). http://www5.austlii.edu.au/au/legis/cth/num_act/wrra1949321949287.
[111] Gwenda Tavan, "Leadership: Arthur Calwell and the Post-War Immigration Program," *The Australian Journal of Politics and History* 58, no. 2 (2012): 216.
[112] Tavan, 216.

demands. The lack of meaningful changes that would facilitate migration of non-white groups highlights the WAP ideology as embedded within migration policy.

Indochinese Refugee Crisis (1965 – 1990s)

In the Australian refugee narrative, the Vietnam War ushered in a new way of thinking when it came to the Australian population's understanding of conflict, human collateral damage, and the nation's relationship to these issues. The resulting refugee crisis from 1975 onwards was a driving force in refugee policy and in interest in the resettlement process. It was then that the concept of refugee began to be divorced from that of migrant in the Australian political context. This led to the introduction of formal policy ensuring asylum seekers would be assessed in line with the international refugee convention and government structures acknowledged a clear distinction between refugees and migrants.[113]

This period, due to multiple factors including the ideological convenience of the Cold War, is known for an Australian government bipartisan choice of humanitarian rhetoric and stronger collaboration with international agencies such as the UNHCR, as opposed to the hesitancy of earlier years.[114] Yet, hanging over these decisions was still the colonial ideation of an 'appropriate' refugee which was then understood as an individual who could be depoliticised.[115] This shift shows how Australia's humanitarian refugee approach was still constructed within the colonial framework established by the WAP and Calwell's rhetoric, both of which viewed asylum seekers as potential civil disruptors. Therefore, any political ties they had needed to be eliminated or managed.

[113] Claire Higgins, *Asylum by Boat: Origins of Australia's Refugee Policy* (Sydney: New South, 2017), 31.
[114] Higgins, *Asylum by Boat*, 10.
[115] Neumann, *Across the Seas*, 233.

The government's overall response to Vietnamese and Indochinese refugees was acceptance. However, in confronting the geographical and political involvement Australia had in the Vietnam war, Australia still suffered from adhocratic policy approaches, racing to keep up with the situation.[116] The government's adhocratic approach manifested itself in decisions being made in response to public attention as highlighted in reactions to other vulnerable displaced groups such as those from Chile, Cyprus, and Lebanon throughout the 1970s.[117] Community groups and other invested parties were required to partake in heavy lobbying to elicit a direct response from the Australian government in the form of asylum passage, which was dismissed in favour of aiding these groups seeking refuge through the standard migration process.[118] This was an action which once more highlighted sanction 'exceptions' and continued to use unfit channels to uphold ideals of a 'desired' refugee.

Despite some existing support for specific asylum pathways, these later eras saw keen examples of the government's adhocratic policy approach seeking military-based solutions in response to its understanding of refugee intake as a 'threat'. This could be seen in the rhetoric of Australian politicians positioning refugees as threats that require military intervention by referring internally to fleeing groups throughout the Vietnam war in militaristic terms such as 'armada'.[119] This terminology directly conjured the image of refugees as 'boat people' which was the broad term given to refugees fleeing Indochina via boat due to the conflict in Vietnam.[120] The term came to encompass all those traveling to Australia by boat, escaping other regional conflicts throughout the 1970s and 1980s as the label was reproduced by media

[116] Higgins, *Asylum by Boat,* 16.
[117] Neumann, *Across the Seas,* 252.
[118] Neumann, *Across the Seas,* 252.
[119] Klause Neumann, "Oblivious to the Obvious? Australian Asylum-seeker Policies and the Use of the Past*,"* in *Does History Matter?* ed. Klaus Neumann et al. (Canberra: ANU E Press, 2009), 48.
[120] Irial Glynn, *Asylum Policy, Boat People and Political Discourse: Boats, Votes and Asylum in Australia and Italy* (London: Palgrave Macmillan UK, 2016), 18.

and politicians alike.[121] Currently, in Australia, 'boat people' is the colloquial term used to refer to any irregular maritime arrivals, holding connotations of deviancy. The coloniality of the state —the institutions and systems that have inherited and continue to perpetrate colonial power structures — and its approach to immigration did not evaporate with the changes and policy systems implemented in response to the Vietnam War's refugee influx. Instead, Australia was able to simultaneously manage refugee movement, while offsetting criticism by following international laws.[122] This 'self-interest' and maintenance of the White Australian identity is exercised through the fraught relationship to land, border, and colonial appropriation of land to support a sense of 'security' that is otherwise 'threatened' by refugees.

Detention and Precursors to the Pacific Solution (1965 – 2000)

The portrayal of refugees as a threat to national security that requires heavy management was expressed in this period most keenly through detention policy. Both detention policy and historical relationships to sites of detention in the Pacific highlighted the tight relationship between migration policy, Australia's colonial need for expansion and extraction of resources – such as phosphorus – on unceded spaces, and the growing militarised security framework within which refugees were managed. These approaches transpired parallel to the Indochinese refugee crisis but were not overtly discussed within the same openness.

The establishment of Manus detention centre is an example of the state expanding past its national borders when it considers it is required to use foreign land to act as a buffer, both, in terms of physically holding potential refugees and in acting as a deterrent. In 1968, Manus

[121] Glynn, 21.
[122] Higgins, *Asylum by Boat*, 88.

was used to hold West-Papuan refugees fleeing persecution in Indonesian-occupied West Irian and Australian Papua. Contemporary reports highlighted the depressing and inhumane circumstances these individuals faced in these 'holding centres' which were akin to the state of detention centres currently operating in the same area.[123] In this instance, Australia's use of Manus was a key refugee management tool, reinforcing the concept of a refugee as a 'threat' to national security in need of incarceration outside of Australia itself.

The history of Nauru — another contemporary detention site — serves as an additional example of the relationship established between coloniality, border politics, and refugee management in Australia. Throughout the 1960's the Indigenous population of Nauru needed to be resettled due to phosphate mining by Australia and other settler-colonial powers which rendered the area uninhabitable. It was noted by Nauru leaders during the resettlement process that Australia could not provide a suitable space within its territory where their sovereignty would be maintained.[124] Although the state created these refugees, it was unable to 'verify' and allow for an enclave of community sovereignty that was not administered by the Australian government whether it be within or near Australian territory, because they risked diluting their narrative of security.[125] Therefore, Australia pushed for highly assimilationist gradual resettlement programs. Australia's failure to mediate Indigenous concerns of autonomy and a 'fear' of said autonomy encroaching on Australia led to the Nauruans ultimately seeking the cessation of its UN trustee agreement in 1968.

As was the case with Manus, Nauru shows how Australia's use of unceded land, as subsequently seen in Villawood and Woomera detention centres, is linked to its ongoing need to propagate its power and re-affirm itself in a way that has a deep relationship to refugees,

[123] Neumann, *Across the Seas*, 197.
[124] Gil Marvel Tabucanon and Brian Opeskin, "The Resettlement of Nauruans in Australia: An Early Case of Failed Environmental Migration," *The Journal of Pacific History* 46, no. 3 (2011): 338.
[125] Tabucanon and Opeskin, 347.

whether in their management or creation. When compared to Australia's current relationship with the Pacific territories, these past events in the region regarding refugees and exile highlight the conjunction between Australia's colonial power transcending into unceded spaces and its modern-day militarisation of the area to continue to manage and deter refugees through initiatives such as *Operation Sovereign Borders*.

Villawood Detention Centre, opened in 1976. The process of detention directly echoes the earlier treatment of the 'enemy alien' category in interment projects undertaken during the first and second world wars where foreign nationals were seen as potential threats to the nation and therefore detained. The need to detain refugees under the category of threats came to a head in 1992 with the introduction by the Keating Labor government of mandatory detention for all 'illegal immigrants'. This policy marked a move away from the case-by-case nature of refugee policy to a more standardised approach based on identity groups, solidifying the categories of appropriate and inappropriate migrations which ultimately fall on racialised lines.

When examined in light of this history and the use of detention on non-Australian territory, the system of detention complicates what areas are deemed as 'Australian land' open to exiled figures and bolsters the narrative in which non-Australians are justifiably seen as threats, which must be tightly mitigated by the state through detention management.

Post Tampa Affair (2001 – 2019)

In late August 2001, a Norwegian cargo ship named 'MV Tampa' responded to a call from the Australian Maritime Authority to rescue 433 asylum seekers after the fishing boat that had been taking them from Indonesia to Australia became stranded. The MV Tampa, which

was harbouring mostly Hazara Afghans, was prohibited from disembarking the asylum seekers on Christmas Island as per their request. However, due to the ill-health of many of the passengers, and the Australian authorities' inaction on multiple requests for assistance by the Tampa crew, the vessel entered Australian waters where it was intercepted by Australian Naval forces.

This situation referred to as 'the Tampa affair' has been considered by scholars as a landmark event in Australian refugee history.[126] This sentiment is shared in feature pages recounting the event and its impact by the National Museum of Australia and by the ABC in their exploration of key Australian moments.[127] The Tampa affair, against the global backdrop of an international emergence of security fears tied directly to migration post-Cold War, empowered the Howard government to use a discourse of security when talking about the incident. [128] As Moreton-Robinson and Hage discuss a rhetorical shift built on Howard's fundamentalism which was an ideology characterised by 'white colonial paranoia' that appeared as border politics. Moreton-Robinson argues that Howard employed a discourse of security, in which he prioritised economic, military, and cultural protection in response to perceived threats of the 'other'.[129] This rhetoric was deployed strategically after the Tampa affair as a rallying point and justification for the introduction of offshore detention 'processing' facilities known as 'The Pacific Solution'. This strong messaging coupled with the 9/11 attacks in New York the following month created an exploitable sense of fear regarding the 'Muslim other' which was one of the factors that contributed to the Australian

[126] Robert Manne, "26 August– September 2001 from Tampa to 9/11: Seventeen Days that Changed Australia," in *Turning Points in Australian History*, ed. Martin Crotty et al. (Sydney NSW: UNSW Press, 2008), 246.
[127] National Museum Australia, "Defining Moments 'Tampa affair' 2001: Australian Troops Take Control of Tampa Carrying Rescued Asylum-seekers," *National Museum Australia*, accessed April 20, 2022, https://www.nma.gov.au/defining-moments/resources/tampa-affair.
[128] Shahram Khosravi, *'Illegal' Traveller: An Auto-Ethnography of Borders* (London: Palgrave Macmillan UK, 2010), 100.
[129] Moreton-Robinson, *The White Possessive*, 140.

population re-electing Howard in 2001. It is important to note that he had been predicted to lose the election before the support garnered post the Tampa affair. [130]

The Pacific Solution required the stripping of island nations of their Australian territorial status and the building of offshore 'processing' centres on these islands. This created a buffer between mainland Australia and 'boat people' by making their ability to claim asylum on Australian soil increasingly difficult. This strategy was implemented by the Howard government by passing *the Migration Amendment (Excision from Migration Zone) Bill 2001,*[131] and *the Migration Amendment (Excision from Migration Zone) (Consequential Provisions) Bill 2001*.[132] The government's criminalising rhetoric described refugees as detrimental to the well-being of Australia's social body.[133] Media outlets translated this into fear-based language, characterising asylum seekers as a looming 'threat'.[134] The media rhetoric reinforced the dualism of an 'acceptable' migrant through the falsified idea that there exists 'incorrect' channels for individuals to seek asylum. A claim that is not held up by international convention.[135]

This offshore approach was first introduced by the Howard Liberal government, and later endorsed by subsequent Labor governments led by Kevin Rudd and Julia Gillard in response to an increase in the number of asylum seekers due to the conflicts in Iraq and Syria. The detention network underwent a significant multi-million-dollar expansion to increase

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[130] Manne, "26 August– September 2001 from Tampa to 9/11," 244.
[131] Migration Amendment (Excision from Migration Zone) Bill 2001 (Cth) http://classic.austlii.edu.au/au/legis/cth/num_act/mafmzpa2001777/.
[132] Migration Amendment (Excision from Migration Zone) (Consequential Provisions) Bill 2001 (Cth) S.4. http://classic.austlii.edu.au/au/legis/cth/num_act/mafmzpa2001777/s4.html.
[133] Khosravi, 100.
[134] Natascha Klocker and Kevin M. Dunn, "Who's Driving the Asylum Debate? Newspaper and Government Representations of Asylum Seekers," *Media International Australia Incorporating Culture & Policy* 109, no. 1 (2003): 71.
[135] Guy S Goodwin-Gill, "Article 31 of the 1951 Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees: Non-penalization, Detention and Protection," in *Refugee Protection in International law: UNHCR's Global Consultations on International Protection,* ed. Erika Feller, et al. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 85.

detention centre capacity and security.[136] Projecting the message that those arriving via boat were not welcome became an undeniable feature of these political choices that also showed a commitment to detention management of non-Australians and racialised migrants.

In maintaining this hostile approach, a series of administrative changes to the Pacific Solution was undertaken by the government to continue managing the situation of offshore detention. For example, in 2010, Gillard announced that children and vulnerable family groups would be moved out of detention into community-based accommodation. However, in 2011, in response to detainees' increasing unrest, it was announced that the character test component of the refugee assessment process would be toughened, with any offence committed within detention affecting a refugee's assessment outcome. This seems to re-affirm the bureaucratic management of 'appropriate' refugees through behavioural management that would affect visa administrative management.

As the Liberal Party returned to government in 2013 under the leadership of Tony Abbott, the state saw an escalation of force in an uncharacteristic moment of proactive migration policy in *Operation Sovereign Borders*.[137] The initiative was characterised by boat turn-backs, non-settlement for boat arrivals, offshore detention, and the accompaniment of anti-asylum adverts played most recently in areas considered 'high risk'.[138] These aggressive measures highlighted Australia's perception of refugees as a security issue that would otherwise jeopardise the state's engineered population and, therefore, needs to be mitigated by strategies that value the nation over human lives and international convention. Accompanying

[136] Phillips and Spinks, 12.

[137] Migration and Maritime Powers Legislation Amendment (Resolving the Asylum Legacy Caseload) Act 2014 (Cth) S. 8. https://www.legislation.gov.au/Details/C2014A00135.

[138] Paul Farrell, "Revealed: How Australia 'Dumped So Much Fucking Money' on Asylum-seeker Ad Campaign," *The Guardian*, August 1, 2017 04.00 AEST, Australian Immigration and Asylum, https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2017/aug/01/revealed-how-australia-dumped-so-much-fucking-money-on-asylum-seeker-ad-campaign.

these strategies was an intense militarisation of security initiatives supposedly aimed at curtailing this 'inappropriate' migration.

The intertwining of settler-colonialism, militarisation of unceded space, and border protection discussed above was enshrined through the formation of the Australian Border Force in 2015. This relationship was amplified by the introduction of 'Secrecy and Disclosure Provisions' within the *Australian Border Force Act 35–42*,[139] which included the threat of two years' imprisonment to deter whistleblowing by medical, social services, and security personnel in the detention centres.[140] By moving the actions of these agencies outside the domain of democratic scrutiny, a connection was made to the original centres on Manus and Villawood as signifiers of the need to separate these perceived 'threats' to Australian identity and border security from the community both physically and ideologically. It is worth noting that these initiatives were predominantly directed toward 'boat arrivals'.

More recently, the hesitation around humanitarian acceptance of asylum seekers and the need to maintain colonial borders have manifested themselves in the Coalition's excuses against the 2019 *Medevac bill*,[141] as the Coalition stated that aiding asylum seekers would come at the expense of current Australian citizens. The legislation allowed medically vulnerable asylum seekers detained in offshore facilities to be evacuated to the Australian mainland to receive necessary treatment. Despite the weaponising of the Coalition's concern for Australian citizens' access to medical and housing support, this worry did not result in increased funds and initiatives for these areas; instead, the Bill was overturned within the year. MPs like Peter Dutton have complained about refugees risking Australians' access to

[139] Australian Border Force Act (Cth) S. 35–42. https://www.legislation.gov.au/Details/C2016C00650.

[140] In response to reports of abuse and mismanagement by offshore detention staff the Liberal Government cited section 70 of the Crimes Act which criminalises the 'unauthorised disclosure' of information by a Commonwealth officer, and those performing services on behalf of the Commonwealth.

[141] Migration Amendment (Repairing Medical Transfers) Bill 2019 (Cth) https://parlinfo.aph.gov.au/parlInfo/search/display/display.w3p;query=Id%3A%22legislation%2Fbillhome%2Fr6343%22.

government support.[142] However, the government poured continual public funds into maintaining offshore detention centres, and committing violence against Australian-born children, as exemplified by the case of the Murugappan family.[143] The State, through these actions, places its need to maintain its colonial progeny within a narrative of 'security' over the welfare of its own people and international obligations.

In a post-Tampa climate, Australia's coloniality is characterised by military escalation and the expansion into foreign sovereign lands to detain, manage, and discourage 'undesired' populations. The state has strengthened these strategies through the passing of legislation that supports it.

2.3 The Current State of Refugee Rhetoric and Management

In recent years this ad hoc security approach has manifested itself in Australia's disappointing response to the increased need for humanitarian visas for Afghan nationals, visa gridlocks, the lack of support for individuals on temporary visas during Covid-19 lockdowns, as well as the narratives around European refugees from Ukraine. Currently, Australia has the lowest refugee intake in 50 years with only 4,558 individuals being accepted on humanitarian grounds.[144] Though this is partly due to the Covid-19 pandemic, this pandemic has shone a light on the flaws in Australia's adhocratic approach to refugees and the refugee management processes in place. One example of these flaws is the lack of support provided to individuals on Temporary Protection Visas (TPVs) during lockdowns.

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[142]Robert Manne, "The Myth of the Great Wave," *The Saturday Paper*, March 2, 2019, Opinion, https://www.thesaturdaypaper.com.au/opinion/topic/2019/03/02/the-myth-the-great-wave/15514452007565.
[143] Australian Associated Press, "After four years, Murugappan Family Begin Journey Home to Biloela," *The Guardian*, June 8, 2022 11.14 AEST, Biloela family, https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2022/jun/08/after-four-years-murugappan-family-begin-journey-home-to-biloela.
[144]Asylum Seeker Resource Centre, "As Ukrainians Glee, Australia Marks its Lowest Refugee Intake in Half a Century." Media Release, February 29, 2022, https://asrc.org.au/2022/02/28/as-ukrainians-flee-australia-marks-its-lowest-refugee-intake-in-half-a-century/.

While citizens and certain visa holders were entitled to Jobkeeper or Jobseeker, those on TPVs were ineligible for most covid support schemes.[145] Another indicator of Australia's flawed and ad hoc migration approaches is the continued gridlock of bridging visas which keeps individuals, particularly refugees, in precarious situations and unable to fully resettle, thus leaving them ripe for exploitation.[146]

A further example came in August 2021, when Afghanistan saw a mass exodus from citizens who were endangered by the incoming Taliban regime and its fundamentalist politics. The event provided clear insight into the ongoing adhocratic nature of Australia's refugee management, where government approaches echoed the previous era's hesitancy around intake. The Morrison government failed to allocate the called upon 20,000 visas which were equivalent to the offerings of other nations such as Canada and the United States, instead, only allocating a maximum of 15,000 over four years within existing quotas of 13,750 annual places.[147] Additionally, Afghan nationals residing in Australia on TPVs or other bridging visas were not given assurance that they would not be deported, with Foreign Affairs Minister Marise Payne stating they would not be asked to return 'at this stage.'[148] This highlighted once more Australia's preference in not settling refugee populations despite their vulnerability having been acknowledged. This approach was heavily criticised particularly

[145] Rob Koch, "Overview of Financial Support for People of Refugee Backgrounds during COVID-19" (Melbourne: Monash Health Refugee Health & Wellbeing, 2021) https://monashhealth.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/06/COVID-19-Financial-Supports-Summary-Version-4.0-June-10-2021.pdf

[146]Abul Rizvi Abul Rizvi, "Visa Backlog A Sign of Weak Border Control," *Independent Australia*, February 14, 2022, https://independentaustralia.net/politics/politics-display/visa-backlog-a-sign-of-weak-border-control,16048.

[147] Eden Gillespie, "Australia to Allocate 15,000 Places for Afghans in Humanitarian and Family Visa Program," *SBS News*, January 21, 2022 7:00pm AEST, Immigration, https://www.sbs.com.au/news/article/australia-to-allocate-15-000-places-for-afghans-in-humanitarian-and-family-visa-program/hv6yy39pu.

[148] Claire Higgins, "Afghan Refugees Can No Longer Wait — Australia Must Offer Permanent Protection Now," *The Conversation*, August 16, 2021, https://theconversation.com/afghan-refugees-can-no-longer-wait-australia-must-offer-permanent-protection-now-166180.

regarding Australia's involvement in the conflict.[149] Additional criticism was levelled when compared to historical intake efforts including 12,000 Syrian nationals accepted during the Abbot government which clearly showed Australia's capacity and ability to appropriately resettle large groups of vulnerable people when deemed necessary.[150]

Australia's interest in maintaining racialised control over borders becomes increasingly transparent when the response to the Afghan refugee crisis is compared with the more recent Ukraine crisis following the Russian invasion in February 2022. In response, the Australian government announced it would prioritise the processing of visa applications from Ukraine.[151] This action foregrounds the ad-hoc and lack of unified approach to migration intake. The perceived increased sympathy towards Ukrainian refugees which was attributed to their European status and whiteness added to a perceived racialised double-standard in Australia's migration policy.[152]

2.4 How Coloniality Manifests Through Histories of Adhocratic Policy

This chapter showed that the attitudes adopted, and the systems and processes established within the colonial project of Australia have remained entrenched within migration policy as a whole and have informed the adhocratic nature of Australian refugee policy. The latter may thus be understood as 'concessions at the border', in which refugees are seen to be dealt with

[149] Ben Doherty and Daniel Hurst, "Plea for Afghans in Australia to be Allowed to Stay as Rescue Mission from Taliban Planned," *The Guardian*, August 13, 2021 8:21am AEST, Australia News, https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2021/aug/14/australia-faces-pleas-to-allow-afghan-nationals-to-stay-as-rescue-mission-from-taliban-planned.
[150] Higgins, *Asylum by Boat*, 8.
[151] Tom Stayner, "'Not Good Enough': Australia Urged to Offer More Refugee Visas for People Fleeing Afghanistan and Ukraine," *SBS News*, March 2, 2022, Politics. https://www.sbs.com.au/news/article/not-good-enough-australia-urged-to-offer-more-refugee-visas-for-people-fleeing-afghanistan-and-ukraine/qujk4m5o2.
[152] Nilanthy Vigneswaran, "Ukraine Response Shows Australia's Refugee Hypocrisy," *Independent Australia*, March 11, 2022, Politics Opinion, https://independentaustralia.net/politics/politics-display/ukraine-response-shows-australias-refugee-hypocrisy,16139.

on a case-by-case basis. Abul Rizvi, former Deputy Secretary of the Department of Immigration, highlighted Australia's lack of any long-term plan for migration and refugee settlement, citing many of the actions of consecutive governments as being band-aid solutions or political dog-whistles.[153] Refugees, who by the definition of their newly separate category, are deviating from the strict administrative migration controls the state had originally put in place. This has drawn attention to glaring holes in Australia's border plans. Further, the hesitancy Australia displays in engaging with long-term refugee admittance solutions highlights a need to constantly re-affirm its control over its land and population. This phenomenon has been explored in this chapter through the discussion of Australia's distancing itself from resettlement obligations, the criminalisation of refugees depending on their asylum passage, and the use of policy decisions to bolster security narratives and colonial expansion into militarising unceded space. Due to the lack of accessible channels of migration and a long-term system of migration management, the path of refugees to and in Australia is made increasingly difficult. Australia's hesitation in dismantling its population's racialised hierarchies and its adhocratic approach to migration measures and policy simultaneously stem from, and feed into long-standing patterns of power founded within colonial structures, often exclusively furthering the interests of White Australia. This is evident when treating migration 'deviations' as a potential threat while simultaneously distancing Australia from the Indigenous community and, therefore, from the evidence of its own history of invasion and dispossession.[154] This is further proof that the coloniality of power within the State's policy and processes seeks to propagate itself against an 'other'

[153] Abul Rizvi, "Looking Forward: Welcoming Migrants" (lecture, Welcoming Australia Symposium, Canberra, ACT, May 11, 2022).

[154] Moreton-Robinson, *The White Possessive*, 148.

resulting in a colonially managed population in the case of refugees and First Nations communities.

The above contextual outline aims to paint the picture of Australian policy regarding migrants and refugees as sitting at the conjunction of coloniality and security concerns and, therefore, resulting in adhocratic policy responses and militarised actions. Engaging with this background, better positions researchers to understand the unique relationship refugee artists have with this country and the settlement services the immigration system has birthed.

Chapter 3 – Decolonising the Victim/Activist Binary and Opening up the Third Space

Refugees, as colonially managed populations of which First Nations communities are an example, draw attention to the inherent coloniality of the modern Australian state by which they are managed. In other words, when looking at the relationship of both Indigenous peoples and refugees to so called Australia, the category of coloniality can be productive in highlighting the continuity of colonial practices and epistemes in contemporary times.

Considering this understanding of coloniality's usefulness in analysing refugee positions, this chapter argues the victim/activist dichotomy is a colonial tool used to minimise refugee women's position to one that serves macro narratives of settler-colonial host nations. To substantiate this claim, I explore how a decolonial framework that is built upon both the work of Southwest Asian and North African feminists and Indigenous epistemology illuminates The Third Space between the reductive victim/activist poles. The complexity of intertwining both Indigenous scholarship and that produced in the Global South and settler-colonial countries is a point of interest and requirement in connecting the experiences of colonised individuals from transnational contexts as posited by Warraimay historian and writer Victoria Grieves-Williams.[155] In using this theoretical framework to engage with marginalised women's own narration of relationships that constitute The Third Space, the focus shifts from SWANA and Indigenous women as objects of knowledge to producers of knowledge and theory.

[155] Grieves-Williams, 61.

3.1 The Perfect Victim

Palestinian-American scholar Lila Abu-Lughod writes about the figure of the oppressed Muslim woman in her book *Do Muslim Women Need Saving?*[156] She discusses the use of the image of the Muslim women as a victim to justify colonial exploitation and the rule over the Middle East by powers such as the United Kingdom and France. These colonial representations continue to influence the public discourse in the postcolonial age, becoming particularly virulent at the turn of the twenty-first century when the feminine victimhood at the hands of cultural patriarchy was used to justify military intervention in both Iraq and Afghanistan post 9/11. Indeed, this discursive construction of women as victims has been central in framing legitimate socio-political issues in the Middle East as related to religion and culture, rather than being a product of historically developed repressive regimes with which Western countries, such as the United States, were involved.[157] Twenty years later, once again, the plight and suffering of women is at the forefront following the withdrawal of allied forces from Afghanistan in August 2021, as the Taliban resumed control over the country.

However, the focus solely on women's suffering distracts from the culpability of the United States and allied forces such as Australia in creating danger for women through occupation and destabilisation of states within the Middle East and Africa.[158] This obfuscation allows the victimhood of SWANA women to be constructed in a way that reductively ties their situation to their relationship with their state and culture, as opposed to the myriad of global and local factors that create their reality.

[156] Lila Abu-Lughod, *Do Muslim Women Need Saving?* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2013), 33.
[157] Abu-Lughod, *Do Muslim Women Need Saving*, 31.
[158] Abu-Lughod, *Do Muslim Women Need Saving*, 32.

When the plight of SWANA women is compared to that of men, it becomes evident that the victim position affects perceptions of female political engagement. Women are painted as subjects with no agency, even as they enter exile, whereas men are read as potential threats. Law and gender anthropologist Arzoo Osanloo refers to this 'masculinist prohibition' as targeting men-as-terrorists.[159] Colonial and security-based narratives use the victim representation of women refugees not only to intervene internationally but to manage borders in a way that excludes SWANA men from being seen as vulnerable and deserving of refuge. This gendering of exile as a reactive position for women, and an active, politically motivated position for men diminishes feminine agency and, as Osanloo notes, this rhetoric erases the agency of the women who make up most refugees worldwide.[160] The victim position can be used in this way to strip women of their political identity.

Queer migration scholar Eithne Luibhéid posits that the victimhood of refugee women stems from and benefits global coloniality as this narrative maintains a position of settler-colonial supremacy rooted in the idea of women's liberation.[161] Luibhéid also notes that the victim image is favoured and reproduced through the migration process.[162] This creates a bureaucratic precedent for an idealised form of exile that is acceptable to Anglophone nations. This phenomenon and how it manifests within Australia via a racialised hierarchy and bureaucratic trials were explored in the previous chapter. A focus on legitimising refugee claims through victimhood is also discussed in Sari's work on LGBTQI asylum seekers in Turkey where individuals during their Refugee Status Determination Interviews are required

[159] Arzoo Osanloo, "On Not Saving the Muslim Women (and Men)," *Journal of Middle East Women's Studies* 13, no. 3 (2017): 481.
[160] Osanloo, 481.
[161] Eithne Luibhéid, "'Treated Neither with Respect nor with Dignity': Contextualizing Queer and Trans Migrant "Illegalization," Detention, and Deportation," in *Queer and Trans Migrations: Dynamics of Illegalization, Detention, and Deportation*, ed. Eithne Luibhéid and Karma R. Chávez (Champaign: University of Illinois Press, 2020), 22-23.
[162] Luibhéid, 23.

to ‘prove’ their gender identity or sexuality to establish themselves as potential victims.[163] This process further entrenches shallow ideas around the relationship between victimhood, gender identity, and an assumed performance of this relationship.

As established in the previous chapter, refugees are seen as a potential disrupting force to settler-colonial societies. Therefore, those that are given the ability to resettle must perform in particular ways in accordance with state-inscribed scripts to offset their disruption to the colonial hegemony that favours white, middle-class, heterogender, reproductive heterosexuality.[164] This is done bureaucratically and socially by evaluating an individual’s ‘deserving’ of refuge according to ethnocentric and essentialist stereotypes that characterise refugees as victims of an inferior culture in a way that, as Luibhéid highlights, allows the Global North to remain unaccountable for its interventions and role in migration generation and ongoing violence experienced by migrants.[165]

The victim image can also be challenged by colonial host nations to delegitimise asylum seekers’ claims. This could be seen in the Howard government’s ‘children overboard’ campaign where, in the wake of the Tampa affair, refugee parents were accused of the deviant and un-parental behaviour of throwing their children from the boats in which they were travelling in to secure safe passage through Australian waters.[166] Although this story was later debunked, the narrative directly called into question refugee women’s maternal qualities as a point of cultural difference, constructing them as perpetrators of violence.[167] This campaign highlights the relationship between victimhood and femininity and, in doing

[163] Elif Sari, "Unsafe Present, Uncertain Future LGBTI Asylum in Turkey," *in Queer and Trans Migrations: Dynamics of Illegalization, Detention, and Deportation*, ed. Eithne Luibhéid and Karma R. Chávez (Champaign: University of Illinois Press, 2020), 92.
[164] Luibhéid, 4.
[165] Luibhéid, 22.
[166] Klocker and Dunn, 81.
[167] Kathleen Blair, "Race to the Bottom: Constructions of Asylum Seekers in Australian Federal Election Campaigns, 1977–2013," in *Refugee Journeys: Histories of Resettlement, Representation and Resistance*, ed. Jordana Silverstein and Rachel Stevens (Canberra: ANU Press, 2021), 148.

so, seeks to distance these refugee women from both these qualities to question their claim for refuge and construct them as culturally incompatible to Australia.

Despite the work of feminist and migration scholars, the victim image is still a prevalent feature of Australian and colonial narratives. As this image informs the treatment and understanding of refugee women, it is important to scrutinise how it is deployed to minimise the cultural disruption supposedly caused by refugees throughout the ongoing settlement process.

3.2 The Convenient Activist

In contrast to the victim image discussed above, another image that is used to characterise refugees is that of 'the activist.' This image is a fetishisation of SWANA women's 'transgressions' which frequently appears through feminist scholarship across the political spectrum as explored by Edith Szanto. In relation to the refugee as activist, this author points to the example of the romanticisation of Kurdish female fighters, their quasi-communist communal life, and socialist ideology to highlight the Anglophone interest in what it sees as women's resistance within the SWANA region.[168] To aid an understanding of how the activist position is used by dominant powers within the Anglophone world, Szanto draws on the example of Syrian women during the recent civil uprisings. The author explores how the typification of the activist, along with other reductive stereotypes, camouflage the socioeconomic realities of politically engaged women and obscures the lived dynamics of personal relationships between men and women.[169] Szanto highlights how the preoccupation with the activist position divorces women's political activism and engagement from their

[168] Edith Szanto, "Depicting Victims, Heroines, and Pawns in the Syrian Uprising," *Journal of Middle East Women's Studies* 12, no. 3 (2016): 309.
[169] Szanto, 307.

lived experiences and the circumstances that have informed their choices and activities. Thus, the construction of the activist position creates an essentialised view of politically engaged women and their motivations.

The issue that emerges with the use of this construction is that, like that of the victim, the activist label positions refugee women at the opposite end of a spectrum of political engagement. It assumes that all actions of a refugee woman are in service to the greater community, or to greater narratives, and erases a woman's personal motivations and life within domestic and intimate spaces. It also puts an immense burden on refugee women to provide for the broader refugee community and their ethnic diaspora within the host nation. This role entails large amounts of often unpaid labour, time, and energy. As Chapter 4 further explores, many refugee women are using their knowledge and community to compensate for service gaps in Australian services and systems. Here I draw parallels to how Indigenous scholars point to the act of living as an Indigenous person as a radical act.[170] However, it is important to note that radical existence is not an inherent trait of either Indigenous or refugee identities. Rather, it is a situational position resulting from these identities being heavily managed by the modern colonial state. An example of how Australia's coloniality creates and manages identities can be seen in the political construction of men as aggressors and women as victims requiring political intervention both for Indigenous Australians and refugees as mentioned above.[171]

The activist, like the victim, can also be co-opted by colonial power structures to uphold narratives regarding the inferiority of SWANA nations and cultures. This can be seen in the case of writer Irshad Manji and her book, *The Trouble with Islam Today*, which sought to

[170] Pamela Palmater, "The Radical Politics of Indigenous Resistance and Survival," *In Routledge Handbook of Radical Politics*, ed. Gordon Uri et al. (New York: Routledge, 2019), 134.
[171] Grieves-Williams, 70.

highlight what she thought were incompatibilities between Islam and modernity. Published in 2003 in a post 9/11 United States of America and Canada, Manji's work garnered institutional praise for its 'brave' critique of Islam that was deemed useful to both liberal and neo-conservative talking points that stoked the image of a racialised Muslim other, and re-affirmed American ideology as superior.[172] Manji's work was heavily criticised by the broader Muslim community, scholars, and Middle Eastern activists alike for its derision and demeaning perspective of Islam and Muslims.[173] However, Manji has since used criticism surrounding her work and other flawed representations of Islam to further distance Muslim communities from so-called 'western values', particularly around principles of democratic freedoms, through her questioning of their inability to engage with dissent.[174] Lebanese-American professor of political science As'as Abukhalil directly challenged this claim by highlighting the hypocrisy of Manji's arguments and noting that community outrage itself is within the scope of freedom of speech.[175] Manji has since published several books on similar matters, the latest being in 2019. Her ability to maintain a prolific career, despite criticisms, showcases how certain activisms that are deemed convenient by the dominant culture are promoted and rewarded, irrespective of the critique they receive. Furthermore, the convenient framing of women's beliefs and actions as 'heroic acts of resistance',[176] is not only exhibited by those living in settler-colonial nations but is seen in interpretations of women's work within SWANA countries. Szanto points to a trend in Anglophone media where Syrian female protesters who were forced to flee were framed as overcoming social and government

[172] Junaid M. Alam. "The Only Good Muslim is the Anti-Muslim," *Counter Punch,* August 27, 2008, https://mronline.org/2008/08/27/the-only-good-muslim-is-the-anti-muslim-liberals-fear-of-islam/.
[173] Alam.
[174] Kelly Hearn, Manji Irshad, AbuKhalil, As'ad. "Freedom of Speech or Incitement to Violence? A Debate Over the Publication of Cartoons of Prophet Muhammed and the Global Muslim Protests," *Democracy Now*, February 7, 2006, https://www.democracynow.org/2006/2/7/freedom_of_speech_or_incitement_to.
[175] Hearn et al.
[176] Szanto, 307.

control and were referred to as 'heroines of a new era.'[177] This activist position is understood as speaking out against the oppressive regimes of their home country. However, as mentioned in Abu-Lughod's work, the conflation of issues in Middle Eastern countries as being cultural and religious as opposed to political means that the knowledge producers within settler-colonies can reframe the rhetoric of activism as rejecting features of local culture. This culturalist tactic is also seen in the justification of interventions in Australian First Nations communities.

Additionally, as highlighted by feminist media scholar Katty Alhayek, there is a tendency for SWANA women activists to self-orientalise, particularly when operating on social media and in diaspora, where modes of activism can be greatly disconnected from the experience of refugee women.[178] Sometimes, this is deemed a necessity in order to elicit funding and support from transnational organisations, while others see it as a way to 'de-fang' women's activism.[179] Despite activists bringing attention to refugee issues, these cases are still feeding into the victim narrative and legitimising colonial tropes. They also highlight the limits of the language of activism as carried out in the settler-colonial contexts and diaspora in dealing with lived realities of SWANA refugee women.

This critique presented here regarding refugee activists is not to minimise their work, or their critiques of colonialism, capitalism, and the social structures of the country they reside within. This work is made difficult as, when activists do challenge host countries, they can be

[177] Szanto, 307.
[178] Katty Alhayek, "Double Marginalization: The Invisibility of Syrian Refugee Women's Perspectives in Mainstream Online Activism and Global Media," *Feminist Media Studies* 14, no. 4 (2014): 696.
[179] Rula Asad, "Attempting to Organize a Syrian Feminist Movement: War, Exile, and Intergenerational Tensions," *Kohl: A Journal for Body and Gender Research*, 6 no. 1 (2020): 43-44.

portrayed as ‘ungrateful’ and have their refugeehood brought into question.[180] As mentioned above, not all those that engage with the ‘activist’ label seek to uphold colonial ideologies.

The activist position is also prevalent within post-colonial discourses. Where it manifests itself as an interest in seeing all acts of refugee women as inherently transgressive and in conversation with institutional discourses around hetero-capitalist patriarchy. This perspective centres western forms of feminism in a transnational debate and has informed ways of engaging with refugee women. This phenomenon can be seen in the aforementioned Feminist Refugee Epistemology (FRE), which inspired this overall thesis framework.[181]

The FRE’s hyper-political view of refugee women and interest in a universalised transnational feminist ‘toolkit of practices’, glosses over the local histories, cultures, and contexts these women come from and currently inhabit. This framework views all artistic ‘transgressions’ as inherently feminine or in opposition to hegemonic masculinity in a way that Abu-Lughod has historically cautioned against as being reminiscent of ‘reverse’ Orientalism.[182] These framework limitations highlight the need for more nuanced and localised approaches that consider the settlement experience as an individual one. By acknowledging refugee women as occupying a third space that bridges and extends beyond the victim/activist binary, a broader avenue is open in order to understand refugee women who are partaking in active critique and knowledge production. It allows these women to

[180] Carolina Moulin, “Ungrateful Subjects? Refugee Protests and the Logic of Gratitude,” in *Citizenship, Migrant Activism and the Politics of Movement,* ed. Peter Nyers and Kim Rygiel (Florence: Taylor & Francis Group, 2012), 60.
[181] Espiritu and Duong, 587.
[182] Lila Abu-Lughod, "Writing Against Culture," *in Recapturing Anthropology: Working in the Present*, ed. Richard G. Fox (Santa Fe: School of American Research Press, 1996), 55.

narrate their own work in a way that challenges external categorisations as either submission to the binary or benefitting from the voyeurism of misery testimonies.

Although the activist stereotype provides the suggestion of action and agency, particularly regarding refugee women, much like the victim figure, it is used by the dominant culture, including transnational feminism, to reduce the range of refugee women's experiences. The activist stereotype obscures the multifaceted realities of violence experienced through the migration and resettlement process at the hand of host nations. Instead, this stereotype perceives women refugees as occupying a 'feminist' role, who exclusively critique the religious patriarchy of their birth country, and in some cases systems of their host nation. Therefore, just like the victim stereotype, the activist one must be interrogated and deconstructed through the narratives of those with refugee lived experiences.

3.3 SWANA Feminist Theory

SWANA Feminist Theory as a de-colonial and feminised practice is useful to understand the individual subjectivity of refugee women. Women's movements in the SWANA region were formally organised in response to both colonial and local discourses around ideal womanhood, gendered rights, and public participation, creating a basis for what I refer to as modern SWANA Feminist Theory. I note here that this trajectory of women's movements and feminist literature refers only to formalised movements and published work that throughout the region was disseminated through a top-down approach from the aristocracy and middle classes.[183] Therefore, it does not account for the informal, community practices and lived experiences of rural or lower-class women.

[183] Noga Efrati, "The Other 'Awakening' in Iraq: The Women's Movement in the First Half of the Twentieth Century," *British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies* 31, no. 2 (2004), 158.

Pratt points out that, during the European colonial period, gender and sexuality were integral to racialised hierarchies and central in constructing the coloniser - colonised power dynamics between the European powers and local populations.[184] During the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, in this context of gendered racial subordination, key figures such as Druze Lebanese scholar Nazira Zeineddine,[185] Egyptian Islamic activist Labiba Ahmad and Egyptian jurist Qasim Amin,[186] rationalised a 'new woman'. These authors sought to balance a recognition of European achievements — such as perceived broader access by women to the public sphere — with local cultural norms and values.[187] This period also saw the production and circulation of multiple magazines and journals, owned, edited, and published by women which focused on debates on women's societal roles.[188] Additionally, collectives and organisations were formed which aimed at advocacy for women and increasing their public participation.

In the 30 years between the 1950s and the 1970s, a number of countries gained independence from European colonial mandates marking a broad period of decolonisation. Women's rights, building off the established local discourses, were a feature of anti-colonial nationalist rhetoric that saw women's public participation and cultural embodiment as key to building an anti-colonial national identity.[189] Key figure of the latter end of this period, Moroccan writer Fatima Mernissi,[190] is hailed as a pioneer feminist in the region. Her narration of feminine voices and subjectivities coupled with her exploration of feminine Muslim identities has been

[184] Nicola Christine Pratt, *Embodying Geopolitics: Generations of Women's Activism in Egypt, Jordan, and Lebanon* (Oakland, California: University of California Press, 2020), 9.
[185] Nazira Zain Al-Din. "Unveiling and Veiling: On the Liberation of the Woman and Social Renewal in the Islamic World (1928)" In *Documenting First Wave Feminisms: Volume 1: Transnational Collaborations and Crosscurrents* ed. Maureen Moynagh and Nancy Forestell (Toronto: Toronto University Press, 2011).
[186] Qāsim Amīn. *The Liberation of Women; and, The New Woman: Two Documents in the History of Egyptian Feminism* (Cairo: American University in Cairo Press, 2000).
[187] Miriam Cooke, *Nazira Zeineddine: A Pioneer of Islamic Feminism* (Oxford: Oneworld, 2010), 7.
[188] Cooke, 6.
[189] Pratt, 16.
[190] Fatima Mernissi. *Beyond the Veil: Male-Female Dynamics in Modern Muslim Society*. Rev. ed., 1st Midland Book ed. (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1987).

foundational in discourses around Muslim women's autonomy.[191] Mernissi's work also established a firm interest in women's testimonies as a strong method through which to explore their ideas. Contemporary gender studies focus on the SWANA region and include key works such as *Do Muslim Women Need Saving* and *Writing Women's Worlds* by Lila Abu-Lughod, and *What Kind of Liberation? Women and the Occupation of Iraq* and *Secularism, Gender and the State in the Middle East: The Egyptian Women's Movements* by Nadje Al-Ali. Another noteworthy volume is Haideh Moghissi and Halleh Ghorashi's *Muslim Diaspora in the West: Negotiating Gender, Home and Belonging*. These works are some examples that position SWANA feminist theory as a discipline that is concerned with the examination of lived experiences of women across the region, and in diaspora. These lived experiences are analysed with a focus on global Islamophobia, The War on Terror, and authoritarian renewal in the region since these three factors are seen as deeply entwined in the transnational construction and positioning of SWANA women within the colonial imaginary.

SWANA Feminist Theory inherits the diverse work of early women's movements across a broad range of countries and contexts, each directly informed by varying individual subjectivity and political conjuncture. However, these diverse positions are connected by their concern with women's negotiation between the public and private spheres. This movement in between spheres is shaped by factors such as coloniality, religion, politics, cultural and social expectations. These factors can be effectively used when mapping the movement of individuals within The Third Space.

In addition, SWANA feminist literature's usefulness in this study relates to its embodiment of decolonisation through a centring of local feminine experiences. Abu-Lughod's essay *Writing Against Culture*— an exploration of the inherent tensions between anthropology, feminism,

[191] Norma Claire Moruzzi, "In Memoriam: Fatima Mernissi, 1940–2015," *Journal of Middle East Women's Studies* 12, no. 3 (2016): 456.

and dealing with subjects from the Global South — positions my research to be somewhat sceptical of transnational feminism as 'trafficking generalisations' in a mode akin to imperialist assumptions of communities and their culture.[192] Therefore, transnational feminism and projects that claim intersectionality need to be scrutinised and examined as their relationship to the Global North can obscure the understanding of SWANA women's experiences. This may manifest through reliance on false binary interpretations or on minimising the usefulness of local theory. Similarly to the need to examine how anthropology and academia's institutional foundations bring power imbalances, an examination on power hierarchies that can manifest within transnational feminist theory is also required. To challenge these power relations, claims made around refugee women must be validated against not only their lived experiences but also their own understanding and communication of those experiences, as outlined in the methods section above. Nadje Al-Ali also locates her feminist approach as one that has been developed through the criticism by Black and "Third-World feminists" and which recognises the intersectional oppression experienced by SWANA women in a way that understands transnational power relations,[193] a pertinent and useful convergence to understand the subjectivity of exile and refugee status.

SWANA feminist literature takes a transnational approach that does not centre western or imperial feminist dialectics, nor does it assume that all feminist work operates in the same theatre of understanding. Therefore, it rejects the generalisation of colonial narratives such as the victim/activist binary and provides a broader toolkit that allows my research to better understand the realms of intimacy and domesticity of refugee women as topics worth examining.

[192] Abu-Lughod, *Writing Women's Worlds*, xix.
[193]Nadje Sadig Al-Ali and Nicola Christine Pratt, *What Kind of Liberation? Women and the Occupation of Iraq*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2009), 21.

In debunking generalisations and binary constructions of refugee women, participants' narratives must be critically examined within the socio-political contexts these women have experienced throughout their settlement process. SWANA women's writing supports this approach as it has been conceived and practised across a greatly diverse area, both in-country and in diaspora.[194] Though there is an understanding of the power of common experiences, SWANA feminist epistemes highlight a need to critically analyse individual experiences within the context of regional histories and cultures, As Abu-Lughod states:

> Much of the best recent literature in Middle East women's history and anthropology can be conceived of as working against universalizing discourses about patriarchy, Islam, and oppression. Scholars have been seeking to specify, to particularize, and to ground in practice, place, class, and time the experiences of women and the dynamics of gender. Even when they make comparisons, it is with a deep respect for the historical, regional, and political economic specificities. In a variety of senses, these scholars now working on gender and women can be thought of as telling feminist stories.[195]

Abu-Lughod warns that generalisations that obscure the experiences of women are best contested through critical examination of the social lives of individuals.[196] She explains that the examination of lived experiences through the lens of individual subjectivity can provide critical insight into refugee women's lives in a way that does not seek to create generalisations or replace macro-narratives with equally generic claims. In examining individual subjectivity, this approach acknowledges women's experiences as multiple and

[194] Asad, 40.
[195] Lila Abu-Lughod, *Writing Against Culture*, 55.
[196] Lila Abu-Lughod, *Writing Against Culture*, 55.

diverse. Therefore, my research aims to replicate this approach by critically analysing the participant's testimonies with an understanding that the work does not seek to describe a universal experience.

The SWANA feminist theories I have chosen to privilege in this study are an appropriate tool to help decolonise the victim/activist dichotomy and articulate The Third Space through a decolonial thought process and a focus on how testimonies of lived experiences centre SWANA women's understandings of their position as agents of their own destiny. This approach contrasts the way in which transnational feminism may overestimate the importance and centrality of discourses constructed in the Global North when critically evaluating the everyday experiences of refugee women.

3.4 Indigenous Epistemology

Social sciences scholars refer to Indigenous epistemology as an understanding of the world based on Indigenous knowledge. Indigenous epistemology is also considered a living act of decolonial practice that provides a unique exploration of the relationship between coloniality, borders, and relationships to place. Additionally, as this study is engaged with the Australian context, it is vital to understand how Australia's systems of population and borders management are informed by not only their relationship to non-white migrants but to Indigenous populations, whose displacement has made all other migrations possible. Indeed, Indigenous scholars' relationship with and understanding of the modern Australian state highlight the coloniality of modern institutions as having been directly informed by not only the dispossession of Indigenous land but the creation of state and legal systems to justify it. These systems were founded on the legal myth of Terra Nullius — the idea that the Australian land mass was not under previous occupation or custodianship and hence

‘claimable’ without treaty or agreement to claim such sovereignty — and enact colonial violence on a broad scale. Such strategies and terms of invasion, seizure of lands and the creation of institutions through the colonial enterprise were the bases on which the Australian state was founded. In the words of Irene Watson, professor of law and Tanganekald and Meintangk Boandik woman:

> This muldarbi sovereign erases peoples’ memories and ideas of laws, in constituting its own statehood, one which assumes a foundation based on law, and not by force.[197]

Watson asserts that the modern Australian state has created a narrative of its own legitimacy as one based on legal systems introduced during the colonial project, obscuring the states’ foundational violence against First Nations’ own systems of people and governance. The relationship between Australian legal and governance processes, and the erasure of the state violence that they cause is useful in understanding the settlement services as potential inheritors of this legacy of dispossession and genocide is similar to how migration policy holds coloniality of power as discussed in the previous chapter. This relationship provides an important site of critical evaluation to better understand the potential tensions between the settlement sector and individuals who have experienced exile.

As mentioned in Chapter 2, Moreton-Robinson examines the Howard government's enactment of white colonial patriarchy, particularly post the Tampa affair, to draw attention to the cultivation of types of migrants that legitimise “patriarchal white sovereignty through their presence and subscription to national core values tied to capital.”[198] The victim/activist

[197] Irene Watson, "Buried Alive," *Law and Critique* 13, no. 3 (2002): 257.
[198] Watson, "Buried Alive," 257.

binary is one example of how migrants are used to disavow Indigenous sovereignty. Each time the binary is evoked regarding refugee women, it reinforces colonial images of power, simultaneously legitimising the macro-narratives around white possession, superiority, and saviourism, especially via white feminism. Through Indigenous epistemology, one can better understand that borders and their relationship to exile are continuous and ever changing. Therefore, borders and 'otherness' are reinvented to protect and further enshrine colonial power systems.

To better understand this notion of borders and to question it, the work of the Chicana philosopher Gloria Anzaldúa in the 1980s has been ground-breaking. Anzaldúa's conceptualisation as the self as a *mestiza*,[199] as a figure of exile, shows the poignant ways marginalised women theorise their own subjectivity. Anzaldúa's construction of the *mestiza* as multiple, as alienated by conflicting cultural spheres, and as a specifically feminine figure that creates culture can be extrapolated to combat the shifting social and physical borders settler-colonial societies utilise to continually re-displace both refugee women and Indigenous communities. As mentioned above, Australia's current refugee policy and settlement services sector are born of a judicial and governance system based on dispossession. Both First Nations and refugees are noted by Perera and Pugliese to be connected by violent operations of the Australian biopolitical settler state.[200] These operations establish cultures of danger and vulnerability that fall across gendered lines which are then used to justify state management on the fringes. Therefore, the state's ability to engage with and support those experiencing exile, through an approach of negation and erasure is worth examining.

[199] Gloria Anzaldúa, *Borderland: La Frontera: The New Mestiza*, 4th ed. (San Francisco: Aunt Lute Books, 2012).
[200] Perera and Pugliese, 478.

In effect, in seeking new ways to interpret refugee women's knowledge production, their relationship to Australia as a host nation and their interactions with the settlement interface, it is key to understand the parallel between refugees' and Indigenous Australians' relationship to the Australian State, to explore the potential violence that this state perpetuates towards both groups.

In exploring the connection between Indigenous epistemology and the process of refugee settlement, it must be noted that in Australia Indigenous epistemology narrates the state's ongoing coloniality, and it speaks to how current processes, including settlement, exist within and are shaped by a colonial system of power. Moreton-Robinson's critical race theory project interacts with Toula Nicolacopoulos and George Vassilacopoulos's claim regarding the place of recent migrants in further dispossessing Indigenous peoples in Australia, and their ability to be simultaneously affected by and complicit in White Australia's coloniality.[201] The question of displaced peoples displacing other is a position that is increasingly appearing in the reflexive work of academics, authors and activists from migrant backgrounds across the disciplinary spectrum as highlighted in the examination of James Nguyen's art by Soo-Min Shim.[202]

This analysis highlights the ambivalent position of migrants in Australia, where they are structurally complicit with colonisation and dispossession,[203] while simultaneously being subject to the same colonial biopolitical policies that shape -although in different terms- the life of Aboriginal people. This ambiguity allows the creation of solidarity between significant segments of the two populations: migrants/refugees and Indigenous communities.

This connection between Australian First Nations knowledge and refugee rights, continues in activisms and solidarity work – examples of course being the ongoing collaboration of

[201] Moreton-Robinson, "Writing off Indigenous Sovereignty," 147.
[202] Soo-Min Shim, "The Land Between Us," *Running Dog,* 7 June, 2019. rundog.art/the-land-between-us-james-nguyen-portion-53/
[203] Moreton-Robinson, "Writing off Indigenous Sovereignty,"150.

organisations such as, First Nations Liberation (FLN), Refugees, Survivors and Ex-detainees (RISE) and Warriors of the Aboriginal Resistance (WAR).[204]

Other examples include a series of solidarity projects such as that of Land Back, particularly in the context of Palestinian refugee activists working with Indigenous Australians, as well as the individual activisms from key figures such as Victorian Senator Lidia Thorpe, who has through both parliamentary and direct action stood in solidarity with refugee rights from the positionality of a Sovereign Woman.[205]

Most of these actions and collaborations are not academic and/or academic-led, yet, I argue that the insights and the intellectual function of these grassroots movements can ground future academic work, such as seen in the Black-Palestinian Solidarity Conference, hosted at the University of Melbourne in 2019. This thesis is part of and continues this pioneering effort.

Regarding the connection between First Nations activisms and solidarity with refugee rights I am not posing an equivalence of displacement of Indigenous people on their own land to refugeehood as experiences by the interviewees. Rather I'm using Indigenous epistemology to shows the ongoing impact of colonialism entrenched in Australia's systems of governance. By incorporating Indigenous epistemology, the focus on refugees in Australia allows for an approach to the decolonisation of the category of refugee that steers clear from aiding and abetting the continual displacement and disenfranchisement of First Nations peoples. Instead, I am seeking to highlight similarities between two groups with the acknowledgment that

[204] Refugees, Survivors and Ex-Detainees (RISE). 2016. "Sovereignty + Sanctuary: A First Nations/ Refugee Solidarity Event." Media Release, 13 July, 2016, https://www.riserefugee.org/media-release-sovereignty-sanctuary-a-first-nations-refugee-solidarity-event-13072016/

[205] Rayane Tamer and Amy Hall, "Senator Lidia Thorpe demands explanation after police clash with protesters at immigration detention centre," *SBS News*, Immigration, May 4, 2022 6:30pm AEST, https://www.sbs.com.au/news/article/no-regard-for-human-life-lidia-thorpe-demands-police-explain-violent-clashes-with-protesters-outside-melbourne-immigration-centre/a4euur0r2

refugees, and all migrants, have benefited and continue to benefit from living, working, and existing on unceded land.

3.5 Conclusion

In order to deconstruct the pervasive, unproductive colonial narratives that remove agency from refugee women, and those that use their position as political tools to justify harmful systems of management, the space between these assumptions must be critically analysed. This is the term The Third Space, which exists between the victim/activist binary that regulates refugee women's lives, stories, and public participation. Using a decolonial framework that centres SWANA feminist theory and Indigenous epistemology, I can critically engage with the personal histories of refugee women in a way that explores their subjectivity as occupying this Third Space. Some limitations of this work include that much of the literature, particularly that of Indigenous feminists and those engaging with critical race theory within Australia sit outside the academy and within activist spaces. This state of affairs is due both to institutional barriers and, at times, an inherent incompatibility between agile community-based care and academia. Therefore, as indicated in the methods section of this thesis, in making use of this framework, I engage with community practices that occur outside of a scholarly context.

By engaging with women refugee experiences through a direct conversation, the refugee subjects can be contextualised within the Australian context. In so doing, they can be analysed as interfacing with self-perpetuating colonial systems that seek to further marginalise SWANA refugee women and to propagate a security-based narrative that attempts to alleviate white anxieties that stem from this nation's original First Nations people's dispossession.

Chapter 4 – Gaps of Settlement

In analysing the interview transcripts, certain themes arose; such as: insufficient services, social isolation, and a wariness of Australia's ability to provide settlement support. However, this chapter aims to show that the similarities of experiences reported by the interviewees do not point to the existence of a uniform refugee experience in Australia. Instead, these shared experiences highlight how there is no innate refugee position; rather the position of refugeehood is crafted throughout the process of settlement.

The analysis presented below demonstrates that these commonalities are the result of the Australian systems that manage displaced peoples. As I am interested in highlighting the subjectivity of the participants' responses, I point out that it is important to note that these commonalities are understood and experienced differently by each of the women that I interviewed. The severity and perceived importance of the events discussed during the interviews vary depending on the individual, and their impact is mediated by the different intersections of identity and context each of the women occupy as well as the inconsistencies and variations of the settlement system that they experienced. This variation has been reported by other researchers. For example, Nadje Al-Ali, in her work on Egyptian women's movements, noted that women's autobiographical accounts and life stories are not private and subjective. In fact, they are products of the relationships and general circumstances faced by the storyteller both as an individual, and as a member of a greater collective.[206] This understanding can help examine the stories of the women that I interviewed, as a way to use subjective and personal experiences to not only dispel ideas of a universal concept of refugeehood within Australia but also to show how systems of government management

[206]Nadje Al-Ali, *Secularism, Gender and the State in the Middle East: The Egyptian Women's Movement*. Vol. 14. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 90.

create shared experiences. The variations of these stories highlight how the refugee experience is not innate but instead develops and is made visible through its entanglement with government and settlement services that reveal latent colonial power structures which the individual must manage.

4.1 Settlement as Navigation of a Series of Gaps

Within Australia, the coloniality of power has shifted to forms that appear non-raced.[207] Instead, privilege seems to be awarded based on class, socio-economic status, and education without acknowledging the way race, ethnicity, and citizenship status affect access to these social markers. Therefore, the concept of meritocracy has obscured the ways in which certain people receive privilege.[208] It is important to understand this shift as it may result in an oversight of refugees' occupying a racialised underclass which informs the systematised way services operate. Indeed, these services utilise material-based criteria to mark settlement success, in turn ignoring the complexities of settlement and, in some cases, failing to interact with the unique challenges faced by racialised individuals.

As education development practitioner and researcher Goshu Wolde Tefara's study on Ethiopian refugees in Australia notes, the migration experience is difficult to quantify due to its temporal particularities. The author advises that considering the experience as non-linear allows for the relational aspects of the experience to be accounted for.[209] This is contrary to current approaches that attempt to make the settlement experience linear and adhere to markers of success focused on material access. Such approaches highlight the systems'

[207] Tascon, 242.
[208] Tascon, 242.
[209] Goshu Wolde Tefera, "Pre-arrival Temporalities of Displacement in Refugee Migration: The Case of Resettled Ethiopian Refugees in Australia," *Population Space and Place* 27, no. 4 (2021): 3.

neoliberal framework which does not necessarily work in a way that provides equal opportunity access for all as was highlighted by the interviewees. Instead, as these participants pointed out, gaps form between individuals' needs and the services they are provided with which becomes a key point of the women's experience reported. Therefore, the current mode of understanding of refugees and settlement in Australia that informs the systems and spaces the participants interface with does not account for large swathes of their experiences due to its view of settlement as linear, which results in gaps refugees must fill themselves.

4.2 The Experiences of SWANA Refugee Women in Their Settlement

As part of the research conducted to produce this thesis, I interviewed three women refugees: Tabz, Zee and P3. Some excerpts of their responses are transcribed and analysed below.

Tabz is a 23-year-old self-taught graphite artist and aspiring graphic designer from Egypt. Since she was 12, Tabz has developed a visual arts practice influenced by horror, Japanese Manga, and European fantasy illustration. Since being in Australia she has held solo exhibitions at Thirning Villa Gallery in Ashfield Australia, and has exhibited at Documenta15 in Kassel, Germany.

I was introduced to Tabz originally via Instagram by a mutual friend whom we both knew through our work with Refugee Art Project. After messaging back and forth and an initial 'meet and greet' over Zoom, she excitedly agreed to chat about her work and experiences. We met at our shared studio space. During our meeting, I also had the pleasure of meeting her sisters who had driven with her. After realizing we had been locked out of our studio, we made our way up and down a nearby major road, sifting through the unseasonably busy cafés

nearby looking for an air-conditioned place to sit and chat. This unexpected search helped break the ice in preparation for the interview.

In speaking with Tabz, she noted that the practicalities of her settlement were heavily shaped by the fact that she was in high school during this period, which was where she studied English and built social connections. She felt her status as a young person meant that settlement services did not reach out to her. She also explained that she felt that their programs did not offer her the support that she saw as relevant as much of their offerings — language and social networking — were being met by her school. However, she spoke to how attending school also created a 'middle ground' where she felt both a part of the wider Australian community in some ways, but also hyper-aware of her being outside of it. Tabz expanded on this concept to which she expanded the 'middle space' as a product of the visa she and her family were on. Due to it they were placed in community detention which dictates their inability to work. As a consequence, her family's ability to 'settle' in line with the government's own material criteria had been made impossible by the state's laws.

In fact, despite employment being a key settlement indicator of the National Settlement Framework,[210] Tabz pointed to how the lack of support in this area created distress since employment was a shared goal by both her family and the state.

> It affects our lives a lot. It creates a lot of problems. My brother, for example, he wants to work because all his friends are working. And he's really stressed about it, he has panic attacks and stuff like that. Even the rest of my family, we have so many plans for the future, so many things we want to do but when here we can't do anything. So it is, it is something we are, you know, aware of… It's hard to forget.

[210] Department of Home Affairs, *The National Settlement Framework* (Canberra: Department of Home Affairs, 2006), https://immi.homeaffairs.gov.au/settlement-services-subsite/files/the-national-settlement-framework.pdf.

This liminality that Tabz describes as being able to interact with some institutions and facets of Australia such as schools and universities but not others is noted by numerous researchers including the aforementioned Georgina Ramsay,[211] and Fazel et al.[212] Refugee settlement studies commonly site a bridging of this 'middle space' as being marked by a feeling of acceptance by broader Australian communities. When I asked Tabz directly if any organisations or services attempted to help her with this issue, she gave the following answer:

> I don't think they tried to. I don't think we needed any of the [basic] services. I know there is like English courses for refugees and stuff like that. They would help refugees find jobs and stuff like that. We didn't really need that because we went to school and learned English there. And then, we went to uni. So, we didn't really need many of the services…I remember even the English courses, I think most of them were for people outside our situation. Because I remember my mum a few years ago. She wanted to learn English. I think it was a TAFE course or something like that. But she wasn't qualified, something like that, I don't know why. But she tried to go a few times, and they were like 'no you're not qualified.' I don't know why.

The ways in which Tabz and her family's life are managed by government agencies regarding what is accessible to them, and their compromised 'freedoms' was an aspect that Tabz identified as further separating her family unit from the broader Australian community. This was seen both in the ways they are blocked from certain spaces as well as how it affects priorities. She also indicated that this management by government agencies creates a wedge between Australian communities who have access to civil liberties but may struggle with certain material aspects such as housing when they see that refugees are provided with

[211] Ramsay, 175.
[212] Mina Fazel, Jeremy Wheeler, and John Danesh, "Prevalence of Serious Mental Disorder in 7000 Refugees Resettled in Western Countries: A Systematic Review," *The Lancet* 365, no. 9467 (2005): 1309-1314.

accommodation while in community detention. As Tabz and I opened the discussion to politics and what it meant to be political in Australia, she shared the following thoughts:

> I feel most people have an opinion about things that don't concern them, like refugees for example. They have an idea that I don't know how to express it, but they have one idea that they were told by the media, but they don't look more into it. A while ago there was this thing where people were like 'oh refugees have everything paid for them'; like us, for example, because we are in the community detention centre we don't pay for the house, bills, stuff like that. But they'll be like, oh you have everything, why are you complaining about it? There's more to it than that, what do you mean? I have no freedom. So, you know, they don't bother looking.

This difference in perceptions of refugee lived realities is combined with existing narratives and sentiments around refugees within Australia as having their 'needs met' further isolates refugee communities from the broader social society. This division is entrenched by the settlement process that creates ideological tension by keeping refugee communities socially separate from the broader population.

When I asked Tabz what she would change about her settlement experience, she focused more on the opportunities and support she wished her mother had had access to, particularly around learning English. Although Tabz and her siblings were able to access English lessons through school, Tabz noted that there was not the same easily accessible opportunity for her mother who was told she was ineligible for courses delivered through TAFE. A lack of explanation as to why her mother was ineligible and why no alternatives were presented to her led to Tabz's older sisters having to use their English skills to support their parent when she needed to communicate in English. This gap between Tabz's mother's needs and services that were provided to her was noted by Tabz as one example of many where the system

created age-based privileges, and increased individuals' burdens since they were expected to bridge these gaps by themselves.

> Yeah, like those services are there but only for certain people. They want you to go figure it out.

A lack, or limited, knowledge of general entitlements throughout the process of settlement, and of Australian social services and how they operate is a key issue that Tabz flagged as contributing to her family's social isolation from other Australian communities as well as personal distress in the case of her mother. The purposeful denial of information and obfuscation of the settlement process systems is central to creating gaps in an individual's knowledge and, therefore, keeps refugees in a dependent position by sustaining uncertainty through handicapping their ability to navigate their settlement experience.

This became evident when Tabz shared her settlement experience and the confusion created by a lack of communication and information given to her and her family throughout the process:

> So, when we came here, we were put in the detention centre in Adelaide, where we stayed for one year. It was our whole family together…. But people who came with us were all going on, and people who came after us had gone. So, it was just us and one family. So, I think that was when we started being like 'ok it's not going to be as easy as we thought it was going to be.' Then, they brought us to Sydney. And they drove us by car.
>
> …Then they stopped in front of the detention centre, and they were like, 'ok, your dad has to go to another section'. So, they took my dad away and I don't know. I felt so betrayed at that moment. Because we [our family] always stuck together, and they're like 'yeah no, your dad is going to go'… [And] they didn't even say why. Even today

> there is no reason. He's still there by the way. There's no reason, they were just like, we're going to separate the family. So, it hasn't been great. So, then, they opened the detention centre where the families are now. We can come and go whenever we want. So we went to school, finished school, we went to uni, finished uni. So, we're trying to be part of the community but, not really, we don't have the rights, we don't have the papers, we don't have any of that. But we are still, I guess, are part of the community. So, it's kind of a pain being in between. And it's been like that for 7 years.

Tabz's story highlights the gaps between her and her family's needs and the support they had access to throughout their settlement. It also brings to the fore the gaps in knowledge Tabz's family were subjected to as an additional site of distress and confusion. This is seen in their lack of information about her family's situation within the context of their settlement journey and about the reasoning behind certain decisions such as placement and familial separation. This was coupled with the minimal knowledge provided around interacting with and navigating Australian society and services. In analysing Tabz's experiences, one can see a series of tensions appear at the intersections of identities such as age. Whether due to lack of funding, oversight in programming, or blind spots in paternalistic program design, gaps are evident within the settlement apparatus and act as points of refusal or blocking refugees' ability to amass social or economic capital, and, therefore, privilege.

The second respondent was Zee, is in her early forties and came to Australia in the 2000s while she was a tertiary student. Zee is a multidisciplinary artist, graphic storyteller, and comic maker who explores the themes of identity, displacement, and personal history in her works. She has exhibited her work in group exhibitions at the Chrissie Cotter and Cement Fondue in Camperdown and Paddington, Sydney, and has self-published several comic zines. Her work has most recently been featured at Documenta15. Zee and I were brought together

by mutual friends and met at an artists' dinner that I attended. We both had the intention to potentially collaborate with another artist on a project they were ideating at the time.

In speaking with Zee about her settlement experience, the gaps and inconsistencies of the system became increasingly clear as she explained that she had not been engaged by settlement services at all. She knew there was support available but did not know where to find it. She spoke about having to mitigate this gap and find information out on her own regarding work, accommodation, and pathways to study.

Knowledge gaps in services available have played a key role in Zee's experiences. Here, I refer to knowledge gaps as a lack of awareness, understanding, or interaction with services, systems, and processes not only available to refugees and migrants but those also available to and sometimes required by Australian residents such as Medicare, Centrelink, and scholarships offices, to name a few. Zee pointed to the material consequences of these gaps such as debt caused by a lack of information being provided to her on study and housing options, despite her operating within institutions with key touch points such as university. Zee found that the fact that she had to rely on herself was ultimately detrimental. The experience caused her to lose opportunities for support and career success, while she grappled with securing the basics of living in Australia:

> [I] think universities should chase people. I don't know, because most people don't know the process, how 'here' works, regarding university, work, everything. It takes a while, maybe four to five years until you realise how the system works like taxation, superannuation, university, yeah.…[As] I arrived, I think they should have come to me because I don't know what it was, if because I came by air. People who come by boat, because they come through boats, they are more known. But people who come by air it's very random; they still have a case, but nobody approaches them. Like I had

> a scholarship, I went to study engineering and there was a place for a scholarship for me, and I wish I knew about it. Now I have a $20,000 debt.

Zee and I spoke directly about her biggest frustration during her 'non-serviced' settlement. She explained the effect this lack of service had on her career and her need to rely on informal networks as follows:

> Well, first I came, I knew there was support but I didn't know anything about it. So, I did everything myself. I worked, I did casual jobs, I rented a place, I went to university. Yeah. So, there was no help with my settlement…The frustration was accommodation and work. I wasn't allowed to study properly. Because I studied engineering back home there was this frustration because I wanted to work, I didn't want to have a work gap. So, I [felt]very frustrated in terms of my career. The good thing was that I met some people that help[ed] me. So, I did a lot of networking and put myself out there.

Zee was very forthcoming with the idea that someone less outgoing and social would have completely fallen through the cracks. Her comments highlight the additional, highly personal, barriers faced by individuals who seek to navigate settlement gaps. However, Zee also pointed to the potential positive of not having interacted with formal services, citing its potential to have traumatised her further based on her own observations on the effect on other refugees in her social spheres.

Zee further explained that she was independent in her own settlement as she did not make use of welfare or state support. This was not by direct choice but due to a lack of access and knowledge about her options. Critical feminist scholars have pointed out how experiences like Zee's are often used to frame and fetishise 'female refugee success stories' in

Australia.[213] This framing has been critiqued by Huq and Venugopa who state it flattens the complex experiences of women refugees where neoliberalised services take credit for individual women's ability to overcome issues of survival that neoliberal systems have forced them to face.[214]

My practice of deep listening of Zee's narrative revealed a different story as well as Zee's strong sense of self-awareness. Zee did not mean to tell me a story of neoliberal 'successes of self-sufficiency'; instead, she wanted to point to the amount of energy this early period of her settlement took from her. Although now she has acquired Australian citizenship, she spoke about her being too exhausted to fully engage with a capitalist system and being hyper-aware of the issues she would face career-wise which had shaped her choice to have fun and 'surf universities':

> It is so much energy that you put on the first few years, you just…[B]ut after this [settlement] finishes and you get into a safer spot [the government] expect you to work more, and pay taxes and I say stuff it, I don't want to do it anymore.

Zee's education in political economy and business engineering informed the way she spoke about capitalism and how her migration sat within that broader system, highlighting the way an idealised version of the self was assumed at every level of the system. This meant that the realities of life were barely considered by business or government in their treatment of refugees. The comparison she made, as transcribed below, indicated how she felt both government and business were governed by the same overarching principles of capitalist production:

[213] Afreen Huq and Vidhula Venugopal, "DIY Entrepreneurship? – Self-Reliance for Women Refugees in Australia," *International Migration* 59, no. 1 (2021): 126.
[214] Huq and Venugopal, 137.

> I think this happened to asylum seekers because, as they arrive, they're like numbers. I think we all are numbers currently. How the top level sees us as replaceable. It doesn't totally make sense to me; like, as a human, they always expect you to be on the best level. Wake up every day at 8 o'clock, be happy, go to work. Pretend everything is fine and be the most efficient, it doesn't make sense. Like a human, what if you don't sleep well? What if one night in the week you don't sleep, what's going to happen?

By sitting outside the settlement sector, Zee's experience and hyperawareness of the potential harm services can inflict demonstrates how the gap between settlement services provided and the needs of refugees underpins power structures. Refugees, within institutions outside of settlement, are also managed so that they hold minimal power through the withholding of knowledge. In Zee's case, this required that she weave her own solutions through a system in which she was enmeshed but was not formally a part of.

The third respondent did not wish for her name to be used and, thus, is referred to here as P3. P3 is originally from Iran and in her mid-twenties. She is a documentary photographer and agricultural scientist who is interested in using her photography to share marginalised stories that otherwise go unexplored. P3's work has been displayed in a wide range of exhibitions and spaces such as Casula Powerhouse Arts Center, Peacock Gallery in Auburn, and 107 Projects Gallery in Redfern, and has been featured on SBS radio. I had come across P3's work through her involvement in a Curious Works-produced exhibition and reached out to a mutual colleague to put us in touch. P3 and I were able to meet at a café on the campus of the university we both attended in between classes to get to know one another before we went ahead with our interviews.

P3's settlement experience saw her pass through the settlement system as it is laid out and communicated to the public in the 'standard' way which I outlined in the Introduction section

of this thesis. P3 is part of a religious minority whose persecution is widely recognised, and after leaving her country-of-bith she spent time in a transition country, where her refugee claim was assessed. She was then brought to Australia, where her settlement program was supported by Settlement Services International (SSI). When P3 explained her settlement, she focused on how her experience was probably considered 'easier' than that of others, due to her having family members already settled in Australia:

> Yeah, for me my settlement was easier, I think, than others because my siblings were living here when I came to Australia, so I lived with them. They helped me to know the environment. But also, the government like SSI, helped me as well. On my arrival, at the airport, someone came to the airport and guided me. [Also] a few days later she [the caseworker] helped me [with] my settlement work like banking, registering for Centrelink, going to GP and something like that.

P3 was able to focus on the more material aspects of her settlement and the formal processes that were provided by settlement services as she had additional support from her family. When I asked about any specific moments of frustration during her initial settlement, P3 explained that her family incidentally was as a buffer to avoid what might have, otherwise, been an issue:

> You know, because my siblings were here, I didn't have too [many] problems for settlement because they already had a house, and I didn't need to find a house for renting something like that. It was easy for me, and because here they guide me and help me to know the environment.

Despite the relatively positive experience P3 had throughout her settlement, she referred to the isolation she felt from a broader Australian community as a side effect of the way settlement services crafted and managed social programs. The gaps in fostering meaningful

social connections with those outside of refugee communities was greatly felt by P3 as becomes evident in the following extract of the interview:

> The problem I'm dealing with as I settled here, the settlement service like organisations like SSI had me in the community, providing some art exhibitions and being with people. But the problem is they're gathering people like myself, from my community. People who are like myself, who are from one background, not with people who are different to me. For example, they always tell me to come to this gathering, to meet with other people. But when I go there, I see lots of people who are the same as me. They are not different from me from other communities or other backgrounds. They're all refugees and almost the same background. That's why I don't have too much communication with Australia you know. ... They want to help me to engage with the community to become familiar with other communities but, when I go there, in a meeting, all people are the same background. They are the same.

P3 also pointed out that this systematised social separation from the broader Australian society created gaps in her own knowledge. For instance, she feels that her English language skills and understanding of the Australian lifestyle continue to be poor, and this has cut her off from the artistic community of practice, affecting her work as an artist. In addition, P3's settlement experience shows how knowledge gaps compounded as they were exacerbated by the advent of Covid lockdown and created a widening breach between P3 and her goals in Australia, as an individual and photographer who is keen to take part in inter-community projects.

4.3 Settlement Gaps and Their Effects on One's Opinion of Australia

The system hoops refugees jump through and become entangled in can be seen as their direct interfacing with the Australian State's priorities and agendas. This relationship and management of the refugee position by the state mediated by a system of partially privatised and NGO-delivered welfare services impacts the refugees' experience and indeed their perception of Australia. To make explicit how the settlement experience within Australia had affected the participants, I asked them what their thoughts of Australia were prior to settling in the country. Here are their answers:

> Tabz: My idea of Australia before I came was very positive…too positive. (Laughs) I think it came from the way people talk about it. They were all refugees, and they were all, you know, looking forward to coming to Australia. I remember when we were in Indonesia. We are a big family: there are eight of us, and people were like: 'the Australian government likes big families.' So, we were like: 'oh great, we're a big family so this is going to be great.' We are just going to come here, be in detention or whatever for a short time, and then we'll be out. But that wasn't the case obviously. So, yeah, I don't know. My perspective of Australia was very positive, but when we came here it obviously was not, not as positive.

> Zee: Before coming here, I thought here was very democratic, free. Then I thought of a career, the wages are higher, life would be easier. That's what I thought.

> P3: Before I came here, I had no plan to come to Australia; I didn't think about it too much. But I knew Australia was a good country with lots of opportunities. I knew if I emigrated to Australia I can study at university, I can have my human rights, because

there is no human rights in my country. I can't study at university in my country because of my beliefs. Everyone here is equal before the law, even if you belong to a minority group. I know there was freedom here, there is no censorship here for example in art, there is no censorship in literature, in cinema in everything.

Since I was interested to know where she had got this information from, I asked the following question: “How did you kind of find out about that, was that through media, or research? Where did those ideas come from?”

P3: Yeah, because I belong in a minority group in Iran, so many people immigrate overseas to countries like Australia, America, Europe. Many of my family and also my friends came to Australia. My siblings came here before me. So, I knew a little bit about immigrating to Australia. And how I can come here.

To ascertain whether the impression they had about Australia had changed after settlement, I asked them the following question: “How has your settlement experience in Australia changed your view of the country and its government?” Their responses are transcribed below.

Tabz: Um, it changed it in a negative way. I don't know. Like I said, I had a very positive idea of Australia and what it was going to be like - and it wasn't that. I guess, the government, the community was very unwelcoming, I think. It's why I won't really meet new people. I would say the government, I think, I would say, I don't trust them at all now. Like when I came here, I thought I couldn't trust the government, but you know, you had hope. But, then, when I came here, I noticed it's just like any other government. It is still a nice country; I still want to live here. But, you know, my experiences are… I don't know what the word is, but you get it.

> Zee: Settlement? No because this is what I expected, I saw it in the students that come and they have to do everything themselves. I think it happens for a lot of people. But there is this one thing, when you put someone in their twenties under so much pressure, they get depressed or get a lot of mental problems. Even the students, like in your twenties you have five years of waiting, lots of pressure, lots of work. Like when I got citizenship, I just said 'stuff it'. I'm not doing anything. (Laughs) I'm so tired, you know what I mean? …[It's] very inhumane, migration, for students and refugees.

> P3: No, because I think everything in Australia is by law and people and government organisations do their work very good. They don't ignore their jobs, they do their work and it's very different with my country. Everything is organised. My experience didn't change.

Each of the women have a unique relationship to Australia which has been heavily informed by their own experiences. A commonality amongst these women is that they had built a positive understanding of Australia through media consumption, information from peers, and the general global awareness of Australia. This differs slightly from the general attitudes towards Australia found in Boucher's research into pre-migration opinions of Australia. Having conducted surveys across key source countries of migration to Australia, Boucher found that, overall, the image of Australia is largely neutral.[215] This deviation may be a result of Boucher's emphasis on 'skilled migration opportunities', as opposed to those who may be categorised as forcibly displaced despite there being potential overlap of these groups. Therefore, those surveyed may have been assessing Australia's suitability against different

[215] Anna Boucher, "What Do People Really Think About Immigration to Australia? We Analysed Their Internet Usage to Find Out," *The Conversation*, December 16, 2020, https://theconversation.com/what-do-people-really-think-about-immigration-to-australia-we-analysed-their-internet-usage-to-find-out-151026.

criteria that focus more on economic opportunity or on clear pathways to permanent residency as opposed to the women interviewed whose decision was made for them due to age, or accessibility.

The positive image of Australia held by the participants was either directly challenged or supported through their own experiences of settlement and the experiences of those around them, such as family. There also exists in some cases the comparison between their country-of-birth and Australia where the realities of settling in the host country are seemingly weighed up against life elsewhere. It is worth noting at this stage that each of the women had nuanced opinions about Australia. The interviewees acknowledged the positives and the negatives of life within Australia throughout our conversations. The respondents also had an understanding of the fact that each country has cultural narratives, processes, and governance structures that can both help and hinder one's lifestyle and, more importantly, one's relationships both within their respective communities and with non-refugee or migrant populations. However, it is interesting to note how the actions of the Australian state and the systems of migration and welfare support it implements affect the overall image of the country in the eyes of someone who has experienced life in Australia and overseas.

4.4 Bridging Neoliberal Gaps

The testimonies of the participants have illuminated the existence of gaps within their settlement experience. I posit that these gaps manifest due to programs holding the coloniality of power which is expressed through the neoliberal frameworks and agendas that underpin them. In the Introduction, I discussed the linear nature of refugee settlement programs and the subsequent heavy focus on program outcomes as opposed to a focus on interrogating the frameworks of service delivery. This focus on linearity and paternalistic pathways to

settlement can be understood as related to the resettlement services being outsourced and delivered via NGOs who are required to fit into neoliberal systems of competitive tendering that have been imposed upon the sector.[216] This tendering system favors programs that have clear objectives and measurable evaluation data, provide ongoing reporting and can adopt the language of the grant body to communicate their aims and achievements. When this structural reality is coupled with the overall aims of settlement grants to aid in refugees becoming self-sufficient as soon as possible,[217] it becomes evident how, through the eyes of the state, settlement is framed as static and linear. Neoliberalism as a vector for coloniality,[218] when interfacing with the state's need to create precarity amongst undesirable populations produces policy and programs that are incapable of servicing the needs of marginalised groups.[219]

These systems, as the participants' comments demonstrate, contain gaps that do not meet the needs or expectations of the women I interviewed for the research reported here. In the case of P3 who felt her settlement was relatively easy, she still noted the ways in which she felt separated and even alienated from the broader Australian society. Moreton-Robinson's concept of the white possessive highlights how capitalism, which the resettlement services are linked to, is one system propagated by and used to maintain power structures within settler-colonial nations.[220] This is furthered by a naturalised authority of whiteness and inferiority of non-whiteness as assumptions that underpin settlement programs.[221] This relationship between coloniality and service provision is a site of tension for the racialised refugee whose settlement is managed in line with neoliberalised service targets and goals. The participants' reliance on their networks and their own research to supplement the

[216] Sampson, 106.
[217] Department of Home Affairs, *The National Settlement Framework*.
[218] Delgado Wise and Márquez Covarrubias, 17.
[219] Grieves-Williams, 75.
[220] Moreton-Robinson, *The White Possessive*, 30.
[221] Ramsay, 184.

information provided and navigate the gaps in the resettlement system, shows how these tensions manifest sites of service refusal, where refugees and communities are forced to take on additional burdens. These gaps can also be connected to Grieves-William's localisation of Giorgio Agamben's 'states of exception' where state law is suspended to allow violence towards colonially subjugated populations.[222] Where a certain erasure of the colonised subject occurs in spaces both physically and metaphorically managed by the state it leads the way for violence to occur. In the case of the interviewees, this violence occurred through unmet socio-economic needs, bureaucratic violence, a lack of equitable and accessible services, and the maintenance of refugee communities as disempowered through their inability to amass social or material capital. Although sites such as gaps, and 'cracks' can create conditions for unique knowledge creation, and foster sites of gendered resistance as suggested by Anzaldúa's 'borderlands', this management within the margins can also hinder knowledge gathering and development of the necessary skills required to exist within a host nation.

In line with the issues discussed above, the interviewees' testimonies show an example of how women refugees are managed to be socially, mentally, and relationally separated from the broader society. Sometimes this separation manifests physically in refugee enclaves, detention centres and that they inhabit but this can extend beyond literal spaces into social spheres – I also refer to these social 'camps' as colonially managed spaces, which as Grieves-Williams posits are also out of the gaze of white Australia.[223] These physically and administratively hide the disadvantages refugees experience. The questionable quality of settlement services exacerbates this erasure and invisibility by collecting minimal data and providing few funding opportunities around TPVs, thus creating invisible non-citizens.[224]

[222] Grieves-Williams, 75.
[223] Grieves-Williams, 63.
[224] Perera and Pugliese, 489.

This invisibility further entrenches service gaps through the erasure of women's lived realities and needs.

This invisibility results in self-reliance of refugee communities as noted in the Hugo report,[225] which has found refugee communities undertake large amounts of unpaid labour in an attempt to support other arrivals and their advocacy.[226] Sociologist John Holloway adds that individuals occupying these gaps and 'cracks' can be understood as taking part, in their own way, of community care as an expression towards social self-determination.[227] This phenomenon of mutual aid practices has been noted as a long standing feature of Australia's migrant and refugee communities through the operations of many 'ethnic organisations' formed in the twentieth century that specifically sought to fill in social welfare gaps for recently arrived communities.[228] Refugee communities continue to actively work to make themselves visible and are filling long-standing service gaps that government services create by predominantly focusing on shallow material markers of settlement.

4.5 Conclusion

The stories from the three SWANA refugee women I have presented in this chapter show the ways in which the coloniality of the settlement sector creates common denominator experiences regardless of the individual's particular circumstances. This commonality of experience is chiefly expressed in the idea of varying degrees of gaps that each of the interviewees identified. These gaps were both services-based and knowledge-based, which

[225] GJ Hugo et al., "Economic, Social and Civic Contributions of First and Second Generation Humanitarian Entrants," (Canberra: Department of Immigration and Citizenship, 2011), 216.
[226] Sampson, 109.
[227] John Holloway, *Crack Capitalism* (London: Pluto Press, 2010), 22.
[228] Mark Lopez, *The Origins of Multiculturalism in Australian Politics 1945-1975* (Carlton: Melbourne University Press, 2000), 163.

the respondents recognised as barriers to their settlement which they felt they had to surmount.

Among the gaps identified, service gaps manifested as unmet needs in the settlement process. This shortcoming stemmed from linear, neoliberal program models that do not account for lived realities as expressed through the respondents' narratives. Complementary to the service gaps are knowledge gaps that showed themselves within the narratives as arising from the withholding of knowledge by colonial institutions. This resulted in the maintenance of a power imbalance between the refugee women who are the focus of this research and, probably, those around them. This power imbalance emerged both in their relationships with organisations and broader communities within Australia.

These service and knowledge gaps increase refugee isolation by having their experiences sit within a 'middle space', separating the women from the dominant society and, therefore, acting as points of refusal not only to certain privileges but also to the amassing of cultural capital. Ultimately, the stories of state management shared by the participants bring to the fore the state's inability to address settlement needs and opportunities in order to create a sense of belonging for refugee women from the SWANA region, despite these being explicit settlement goals communicated to settlement providers.[229] These findings pose that the neoliberal funding arrangements and program delivery, which inherit the coloniality of power, create insufficient services. These insufficiencies require refugee women to seek out and rely upon alternative supports and personal networks to help manage their settlement needs.

[229] SETS Community of Practice & Migration Council Australia, *Settlement Service Providers' Guide To Working Effectively With Employers*, (Canberra: Migration Council of Australia, 2020), 5, https://setscop.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2020/12/SETSCoP-Employment-Guide-Dec-2020.pdf.

Tabz, *Never Ending*, (2021, graphite, black and red ink 10.5 x 14.5cm)

Chapter 5 – Knowledge Production as a Colonially Managed Subject

In building on the immediate events of settlement, I go on to explore how the interviewees' colonial management into a refugee position affected their processes of knowledge and cultural creation within Australia. I begin with an overview of the refugee art space, an expression which I use to refer to a web of interconnected organisations, institutions, individuals, creatives, services, and government programs that operate within the realm that is labelled refugee art, and its relationship to the actors of the settlement system that I am discussing throughout this thesis. Using this approach, I outline how the knowledge production of refugee women is equally entangled within this complex web of interpersonal and political relationships, which encompasses The Third Space, and how this in turn shapes the sites of production, consumption, and identity.

5.1 Refugee Art – an Instrumentalised Practice of Management

Refugee art is closely supported by the settlement services sector, local councils as well as other non-government organisations through programs such as the *Artists Development Program*. Due to these associations and relationships, the way refugee art is framed and consumed is heavily shaped by organisational priorities and funding structures available to knowledge producers who have been categorised as refugees. These relationships manage art produced by refugees as a social program which, due to funding arrangements, are required to produce a measurable sense of social cohesion.[230] I argue that this approach replicates dominant discourses that refugee art is to be understood as either a settlement tool or as a

[230] Australian Government, Settlement Engagement and Transition Support (SETS) - Client Services, Community Grants Hub, accessed May 9, 2022, https://www.communitygrants.gov.au/grants/sets-client-services.

point of advocacy, as opposed to cultural products in the way mainstream creative pursuits are consumed. Through my observations of a series of events labelled 'refugee art' exhibitions or that featured an artist who was identified as coming from a refugee background throughout Sydney, I was able to note recurring ways these art spaces were held and managed. One feature was that the events relied heavily on the involvement of a small number of organisations. These included settlement service providers through an arts-based program, as well as local councils, and small community-specific NGOs, often working in collaboration to produce an event within a council-owned venue. Across the eighteen months of field research, I attended five exhibitions/art-based events, as well as examined archives and articles of several previous exhibitions held throughout the greater Sydney area. During this period, there was one exhibition that fit this criterion that, unfortunately, I was unable to attend: *Second Chances* (2022), held at Bankstown Arts Centre. I note here the small sample size as a reflection of the small quantity of events held in this field and the difficulties in tracking the work of artists who have their background obscured. A centrally recurring body in the organisation of these events was Settlement Services International (SSI) and their artist pathways program. Other observations that I made included the role of local politicians or sector representatives in the ceremonial aspects of these spaces, often speaking at openings or on associated panels. Exhibitions tended to be curated to exclusively show refugee artists alongside one another and were framed to be highlighting the refugee experience even in cases where the artist had stated otherwise.

Understanding audiences, and who is consuming the knowledge produced by refugee women is also helpful in comprehending how the space interfaces with the broader Australian society, particularly in the context of free and open events which these all were. Although the audiences that I observed varied in age, it was clear that there was a high representation of those connected to the event's organisers, either directly as co-workers or as sector

colleagues. Other recurring audience groups include diaspora community members known to the artists as well as outspoken allies of refugee causes. One exhibition, *Through Our Lenses; Callan Park Stories* (2021) held in the Community Refugee Welcome Centre in Lilyfield stuck out to me as heavily embedded within the Sydney Iranian community. Most of the audience and attendees were from an Iranian background and it was assumed by multiple people at the event that I, by virtue of being in that space, was Iranian. I was later informed that this close association with one specific community was not originally planned but came out of a curatorial leaning towards Iranian artists. The presence of a predominantly migrant audience was in line with many of the other events that I attended. This pattern may have been a result of the lack of advertising and outward engagement that I observed when it came to these events. Most of the exhibitions that I attended, I found out about via active research online, or I was invited in my capacity as a worker within the settlement sector through NGOs mailing lists. Although some of the events received one or two reviews within major news outlets or online art sites such as ArtsHub, they often sat behind a paywall. Other acts of audience building include NGOs organising trips for the individuals and families that they are supporting to visit these events.

The lack of advertising through formal arts-based channels and the overreliance on organisers, which are often NGOs or councils, unintentionally shapes the audience. Regarding *Through Our Lenses*, I was unable to find any information on the actual opening online and had to rely on details from a friend who was exhibiting. This unintentional limiting of audiences constructs the spaces of refugee cultural production to be understood as sites of consumption only by other migrants and workers or activists in refugee related areas. This limiting of audiences is compounded by the fact that these events often take place in Western Sydney, which has a high population of migrant communities. Consequently, those

living locally to these events are highly likely to be in contact with the councils supporting these projects and have the most direct access to the physical space.

Since the work of refugee women is managed within the same systems that are applied to settlement, it is kept in relationship with the inherent coloniality of power embedded within their settlement providers and their art is constructed an attaché, separate from broader cultural production within Australia.

The way refugee art is managed in close proximity to the state, through direct involvement of local councils, or support predominantly coming from organisations that are funded by settlement grants (SETS), and associated programs, means that the cultural and knowledge production of women in these programs is by nature of the scene funded and curated by the state. This management system also creates and maintains a precedent that art produced by refugee women must exist in a supported environment dedicated to a singular facet of their identity, and separate from the broader cultural sphere of Australian knowledge. As mentioned previously, P3 experienced a great amount of frustration in her lack of exposure to the broader art community, and felt that this isolation heavily affected her creative pursuits. When asked what she would specifically change about her settlement experience P3 replied:

> To be more engaged, as I said, with different people, with different backgrounds, have more communication with people to improve even my English language or also my work. I'm in a limited community, I can't find people to do my projects with them. For example, portrait projects, when I'm limited to only some communities, I can't find people to take photos of.

P3 was in the middle of a two-year break from her photography work when I interviewed her. The factors leading to her hiatus, as explained by P3, were Covid-19, the lack of connections

to the broader artist community, and the demands of the university degree that she was completing. In her own words:

> Yeah, the big one was lockdown and being unfamiliar with the community, with people. Because I wasn't amongst people and I do not know them well. I don't know how they're feeling or how I can communicate with them. So, it's hard for me to find people and artists. And also studying, because I was studying, I wasn't able to do too many works as well.

Besides their individual concerns, a commonality among the women interviewed was a lack of knowledge about their options when it came to showcasing their work. This sentiment echoes the knowledge gaps highlighted in the previous chapter. During the interviews, each of the women spoke about how they did not know who to approach or where to go if they were interested in working with other arts organisations outside their current relationships. P3, in particular, saw this as an issue as she was interested in a project that specifically explored First Nations communities in Australia, informed by her lived experiences as being part of a discriminated minority group within her birth country. However, her being managed in refugee predominant spaces made it difficult for her to cross inter-community barriers and build the appropriate connections, relationships, and knowledge needed for the project to be undertaken appropriately and respectfully. P3 cited this issue as not just stemming from the separation from non-refugee communities, but also from how this separation affected her ability to practise English with native speakers — she saw her language skills as a barrier to connecting with broader Australia both socially and professionally.

A real consequence of the refugee women art scene operating as a niche and being structured around the identity marker of refugee is that artists are inadvertently blocked from external opportunities through a lack of knowledge sharing. The same apparatus used to manage their

settlement is used to mediate their cultural production which sees certain communities occupy a space separate from broader society.

I do wish to note here Documenta15 - a 100-day arts exhibition and festival that takes place in Kassel Germany every five years. Seen as a premier art event in Europe I want to acknowledge that two of the participants, Tabz, and Zee - as well as myself exhibited at the latest Documenta in 2022 with Refugee Art Project. The participant's art being showcased on this international stage is a stark deviation from the niche and supported spaces I speak about in Australia. However, Documenta15's curation by Indonesian art collective Ruangrupa actively sought to bring in voices from marginalised groups and colonised peoples whose work is often institutionally shunned. This deviation from so-called curatorial norms was noted, criticised, and in some cases dismissed as incompatible to the broader art world.[231]

5.2 Self-democratising Spaces

The cultural and knowledge production of refugees, and in particular women, seems to sit outside of the realms of valued art and culture. Even within these 'program' spaces, they often exist within their own silo, outside of legitimising institutions such as well-known galleries. They also have limited funding opportunities with only a few notable exceptions. Zee and I spoke extensively about the broader art scene within Australia, and how inaccessible it was for those from a minority background, not just refugees. To Zee, culture in Australia was hidden within galleries, with the rare public exceptions being sterile and offering little social critique. She compared this to Iran, where street art was common and easily consumable by everyone and acted as social commentary. Regarding this, she added:

[231] Kate Brown, "Documenta Presents an Invigorating Alternative to a Market-Driven Art World. Maybe That's Why the Industry's Establishment Has Largely Dismissed It." *Artnet*, July 1, 2022, Market, https://news.artnet.com/market/documenta-art-market-2135862.

> But they're not artists, I have this criticism, the art is more commercialised here. I think it's more an aesthetic to promote happiness. That's another critique that I have, this whole system promotes happiness, with music and everything. And that's how they try to make a happy citizen… There's a lot of sorrow and there's no art about it in Australia. If you think, there's no art for workers, they suppress it, I think it's part of this national whiteness; they suppress all the communities that represent that. Because I think they want to promote that they are happy, a happy society and don't want people to tout their miseries, through art or something.

This knowledge of how inaccessible these traditional and formalised spaces are informed Zee's choice to create comics, due to their connection to street art, their ease of creation, and how they can be circulated with ease. Part of our discussion regarding this is transcribed below.

> Zee: [Firstly] comics, they don't have to be pretty, professional, beautiful, aesthetic things. Like you can do ugly drawings. And it's some sort of street art: like everybody can draw simply and express themselves. That's why I like comics. You don't have to go to art school or learn to do watercolours or anything, you can just draw simply and make your story.
>
> I: Would you say the more important part of the comic to you is the message as opposed to the art?
>
> Z: Yeah, it's the simplest tool, and it's more of street art, I think.
>
> I: Very democratised.

> Z: Yeah, and [Iranians] publish these zines cheaply and hand them out [laughs] and it goes across [the city]. Because in Australia, art is very isolated. It's mainly in art museums, among artists' communities. Whereas the wider Australian society is not involved in art and artists' activities. It's very strange because, when I was in Iran, art is out in the streets and it's very different.

In addition, social media and photo sharing were topics the interviewees spoke to as important for them. Although they all have different reasons and motivations for sharing their art, they found platforms such as Instagram, and other photo sharing sites to be a key channel through which they disseminated their work, sought feedback, and connected with other creatives within a space they completely controlled. In the previous chapter, I discussed the way the participants had to rely on their own research to find avenues and support structures that suited their needs which were otherwise going unmet during their formal settlement relationships with providers. The close relationship between refugee art spaces and the settlement system results in the same phenomenon discussed above, i.e., the same gaps exist in the field of arts and settlement between individual needs and the support provided to meet them. Similarly, women refugee artists are left to navigate the systems on their own.

5.3 Gender and Art Production

My observations and research within the Australian 'refugee art scene' in NSW pointed to a heavy gender bias in the artists being showcased: they were often male. However, notable exceptions exist, such as Maryam Zahid's exhibit '*My Life, My Story* (2022) which focussed exclusively on Afghan women from both diaspora and in country, and their experiences. Another exception is *Through Our Lens* (2021) which incidentally showcased a majority feminine identifying artists. In asking the participants about their views regarding the lack of

women artists in the exhibitions, each one of them focused on different aspects of the topic and potential issues. For instance, Tabz cited cultural institutions as not holding space for women in general:

> Tabz: I mean, so, when it comes to the Refugee Art Project, there are a lot of women, and it's great that they're there. But, I know if I were to say art galleries, in general, are mostly men. There isn't a lot of diversity, they're not known for their diversity. So yeah, I did notice that definitely.
>
> I: Why do you think that? You're right, Refugee Art Project is the exception, but why do you think there aren't a lot of refugee women, more refugee women artists, or creatives?
>
> Tabz: I'm really not sure. I don't think I've thought about it before. Also, I don't know. Maybe because they [galleries/ curators] don't like diversity, they're not welcoming to me, or refugee women. Something like that. I don't know if this is true, but I don't know a lot of refugee women that try to go into these spaces. So, maybe, that's a factor too. Maybe because they feel unwelcome. I don't know why, to be honest. Like, for me, personally, if I came in and said I wanted to work with a gallery or something, I would feel very hesitant to do that because I know they're not welcoming to people like me. So, I think that would drive me away; so I would imagine it would be the same for other refugee women.

Tabz's sentiment was corroborated in a recent *Settled/Unsettled (2022)* exhibition held at Manly in which there was only one female artist from refugee background. Other female artists who participated were white women whose work told the stories of migrant women of colour or focussed on their personal reactions to the refugee crisis. The latter were also given a prominent space, within the first room that visitors accessed as they entered.

For her part, Zee pointed to cultural barriers, and to the fact that some women prefer to operate in feminine-only spaces. She commented:

> Yeah, that's what I've noticed. That it's mainly the same people. But I've noticed, with the Iranian refugee community, there is a lot of women involved, and the different types of art they do…But I tried to make some Afghan women involved here, but they don't come. When I say to Iranians, they come, but Afghans or Arabs don't come. There's a lot of nationalism that goes around.

On the other hand, P3 referred exclusively to the issues that she saw in her field of documentary photography as it works transnationally:

> P3: Yeah, it is something I've noticed that there are less women in this photography, especially documentary photography. There are too many men in this field. There is less females. I think one of the barriers, for example, documentary photographers have to travel to other parts of their country or other countries. For example, to Afghanistan or Syria, Iraq; and they are very dangerous travelling to those countries, especially for women. So, one problem that there are less women in this field travelling to other countries…They have limitations on this. Maybe, another thing is that women are mothers. They have to stay home with their children.
>
> I: Is that motherhood aspect something a lot of people talk about?
>
> P3: Yes, yeah.

The varied interpretations and answers to the question I posed illuminate the complex and differing ways in which individual women understand gender as it affects their own, and other women's participation in the arts and knowledge creation. What unifies these ideas, nevertheless, is that within the sphere of Australian cultural production, neither mainstream programs nor instrumentalised supported spaces for 'refugees' account for or mitigate

women's discomfort or material risks and needs that arise from their gendered position. In examining the spaces, it becomes evident how refugee women producers have their work and experience of dissemination shaped by these relationships ascribed to their position as refugees.

5.4 Political Motivations and Essentialising the SWANA Refugee Women.

In Chapter 3, I detailed the victim/activist binary which is one manifestation of how audiences essentialise refugees and, particularly, feminine knowledge producers. The critique that I presented of the approach of the mainstream Australian audience's understanding of the art produced by SWANA refugee women, as dictated predominantly by their refugee status, echoes the critique Abu-Lughod put forward in her essay *Writing Against Culture,* where she posited Muslim women were categorised by dominant society as being oppressed.[232] Although Abu-Lughod was referring to specifically women's Muslim identities, this phenomenon is recreated for those seen exclusively as refugees. As explored previously, The Third Space that sits within and beyond this binary is the interplay between political identities of individual women, their relationships, and their public and domestic lives. This heterogeneous entanglement greatly informs their unique artistic perspectives and their individual experiences. To better understand the space beyond dominant assumptions of victimhood within SWANA refugee women's work, I asked the participants about their motives and aims in knowledge production, and also whether they had a relationship with politics. Tabz highlighted the very personal nature of her creative practice. She added that the informal and organic practice was therapeutic for her as can be read in the following excerpt:

[232] Abu-Lughod, "Writing Against Culture," 471.

> I don't think there is an aim. There is a reason why I make art: I like the feeling of when I finish an art piece. I like that, being proud of what I've made. I look at a piece and go 'I made that'. I like that feeling. And the creative process is very therapeutic, so I would say that's the main reason why I make art. Because it's not my job or anything…So, I don't do painting or anything like that. It's just for me, I guess. I love the way it makes me feel.

Throughout our conversation, Tabz continually referred to her work as being for her and not having a political agenda. When I asked directly if she saw herself as a political person she answered:

> Not really, like I have political views, obviously. And my family is quite political: they talk about politics a lot. But I tend to, I guess, stay away from it, in a way, because it depresses me, to be honest. So, when something major happens, my family talks about it. But I don't, like, I stay away from it because it really bums me out. So, I wouldn't say I'm political; like, I don't talk about politics very much either. But I'm aware of what's happening and stuff like that. I think everyone should be aware to some extent. But you don't have to, if you don't feel comfortable talking about.

Tabz's answer pointed to an attitude that I had seen in my own community and in my work in the settlement sector: a difference and personal separation of political knowledge and political action as a means of self-preservation.

Moving towards how audiences saw her work, Tabz pointed out the high level of interest in the meaning of her work in the following terms:

> Tabz: I think most people, I've noticed this especially in the exhibition, most people came to think my art has a lot more meaning than what it does. So, like, when I create a piece, I don't think about what it is for the most part. Some of them, sure, but most

> of them I just have an idea and I draw. But a lot of people be like 'oh she meant this by this.' [laughs]. But I really love to hear what people have to say about it and share their own interpretation. I usually don't tell them what it means or if it even means anything. But I love to hear what they think it means. But it's always funny because they seem to think it means a lot more than it does.
>
> I: Are there any common questions you're asked about your art?
>
> Tabz: Just about the meaning mostly… 'What does that mean?' [A] lot of people seem to think it means… like, it's more related to me being a refugee…That one... bothers me. Because most of my work has nothing to do with me being a refugee. Like some of it does. But my personal work rarely has anything to do with that. A lot of people think it's tied automatically to that. Which I don't, I don't blame them, at the same time, but there's more to me than that, you know? So yeah, I don't know. But for my family, my mum seems to think it's linked to my mental health, my sanity [laughs].

Tabz then contrasted this with the humorous reactions that her extended family in Egypt had to her work, who, like her mother, were startled by the horror elements which she would approach in a humorous way. The reactions of Tabz's family are seemingly more in line with her stated aims, which she described as giving the audience a controlled unsettled feeling inspired by the horror elements in her work. When I asked Tabz if she felt the need to correct people's assumptions about her work, she explained that she did not think it was worth it. This element, in particular, highlights the way audiences seem to consume cultural production by individuals who happen to be refugees: they anticipate meaning and attempt to box their work, therefore, reducing the complexity of their humanity in the process. Tabz's frustration also points to a disconnect between audiences' assumptions on how a single facet

of her identity plays a part in her work, despite her own multifaceted artistic motivations and acts of autonomy. Additionally, these interactions and Tabz's choice to not correct people showcase the way power exists and operates between a marginalised creator and a dominant cultural audience.

Zee further discussed the motivations and aims of her works as providing critiques of life in Australia. She explained that, although her comics are heavily inspired by her own lived experiences, her work extends beyond what would be understood by an audience as unique problems faced by refugees as revealed in this quote:

> Zee: [I'm] a very critical thinker, and this society, the way the system operates, that's what my work is about. It's mainly about Australian society, racism, and working conditions.
>
> I: Is that exclusively your experiences, or ones that you see other people have as well?
>
> Zee: It was until now my own experiences, but I'm doing this comic about racism, which I interviewed some people on their experiences of racism. So, it's about their experiences too.

This interweaving of her personal experiences and those of others around her were in action throughout the interview and some casual conversations we had prior to and after the interview. Indeed, there were moments where Zee would suggest she should do a comic about whatever we were just chatting about, whether that be the economy or relationships. My conversations with Zee often drifted towards the broader political state of our lives; so, I was keen to hear how she understood her own political identity. Zee described herself as 'a bit political' and gave the following answer when I asked if she had a positive relationship with politics:

Zee: Oh, I don't think there is any positive thing about it. No, no, politics is very stressful; but, when I was in political economy, it was very stressful. And there's no solution to it and it's just stressful [laughs]. You know how bad everything is.

I: So, do you try to remove yourself from it a little bit?

Zee: Yeah, I think so. I think I decided for my mental health it's better to just accept that this is what it is.

As discussed in the previous chapter, Zee's exhaustion had shifted her focus to cultivating fun and joyful experiences. However, she also noted the ways political identities are very much present within individuals and, thus, hard to separate from. Using the example of refugee art spaces, she spoke on how she felt the community of practice is shaped quite heavily by the politics of individuals within it. Revisiting the *Through Our Lenses* exhibition, Zee highlighted its lack of Arab and Afghan artists, citing the curator's connections to Iran as a potential reason for this. I asked Zee if she felt that current programs and management of refugee knowledge production ignored this internal diversity and tended to group everyone by their refugee status.

Zee: I think so. Like, even in the refugee communities' people don't agree with each other's politics. So, I prefer not to know what [people's] background [is]. It's very complex, that's why I never ask what their cases is, what they've done, their opinion. I prefer not, I try to keep it just as art.

I: To make it easier?

Zee: Yeah, it's very complex because the Middle East's situation is very complex. There's lots of different refugees, if you want to dig into everybody and their ideas, and political identity it's very hard.

The lack of visible awareness and understanding of the political identities and tensions between groups within refugee communities means that these tensions fail to be mitigated not

just art spaces but in their broader settlement; hence these spaces fail to support individuals. Zee explained that, ultimately, she tries to remove herself from the interpersonal politics and debates within her circles.

During my observations it was noted that within the realms of knowledge production, refugees are grouped by organisations and programs under an assumed shared experience of exile. In doing so, they assume this to be the defining facet of their identity that cohesion can stem from. However, the discussion above shows that there is no universal and binding experience of refugeehood. Much like the issues of grouping 'multicultural' communities under a single banner, the diversity of experience, interests, politics, and needs becomes obliterated to fit an incredibly varied group into linear programs or to aid in maintaining the label of refugee art as a cohesive body of work that stems from a unified experience which, obviously, is not the case.

Considering Zee's dynamic political position, her insertion within and removal from political spaces depending on her needs and comfort level, I asked her if this made creating her art difficult given the critical nature of her work.

> Zee: I'm more critical towards Australia because I've lived here 15 years, I don't want to do criticisms about 20 years ago. I don't want to go back. And what I realised is the refugees that have been through detention, talk about detention, and the ones that didn't go through detention talk about their back home country.
>
> I: So, there's a clear split between what's been formative?
>
> Zee: Yeah, yeah, like the one that hasn't gone through detention that much, maybe just one month on Christmas Island they still have a strong political identity against their homeland. Whereas the ones that have gone through detention, are more critical of

> Australian government here. After eight years or five years, they may think it wasn't worth it for the experience.

Zee's answer points to a difference in how she views her political critiques of Australia, and that of her birth country. Zee posed an idea of political orientation, where the object of political critique was directly informed by the varied settlement experiences faced by refugees in Australia, highlighting the importance of personal experiences. When we further discussed this, she noted that she did not necessarily see her critiques of Australia as political per se. She explained that she was just sharing her experiences and allowing the audience to see the inherent injustices and blatant issues within these interactions. The comics Zee creates are not necessarily an expression of her identity as a refugee but, rather, her identity as an Iranian woman living within Australia.

The keen awareness of the political position that they inhabit demonstrated by the participants can be seen as an expression of historical events, and political trends mixed with personal experiences of oppression and marginalisation. The stories recounted above highlight that the subjectivity of these 'formative experiences' opens the door for an analysis to centre on the heterogeneity of subjects as is a key feature of SWANA feminist theory. These 'formative experiences' do not necessarily determine political action, but frame choices.[233] This includes the movement in and out of political spaces and discussion at the will of the individual women regardless of their perceived identity and position as refugees.

5.5 The Interplay Between Refusal and Entanglement

By examining the participants' testimonies, one can see how the participants' lives are shaped by a series of relationships entangled with one another. However, the settlement system that

[233] Al-Ali, *Secularism, Gender, and the State in the Middle East*, 217.

manages them and their art perpetuates a one-to-one relationship between refugeehood and identity, where one's experiences as a refugee are seen as the central identity marker of a person. The tension between an audience's expectations of knowledge produced by refugee women and creator intentions comes to the fore when engaging with the complex entanglement of relationships and identity the refugee women experience and, therefore, are inspired by.

In relation to this, Zee described her comics as specifically for Australians. Nevertheless, her direct critiques of Australia seem to elicit varied responses. She told the following story of a woman who challenged Zee's story directly:

> Zee: Sometimes [audiences] give me feedback. Like after they read some comments, they opened up if they had similar problems, or if they think differently. That's very good. Like when I did my comic about bombardment in my childhood. There was this woman who came and said 'This is lies. This never happened.' It was very strange. I was surprised people think like that, you know.
>
> I: Was that someone who had lived in Iran?
>
> Zee: No, Australian. Like this bombardment never happened. [First] we told the story in a gathering of military people, lawyers, and artists. And that was one of the audience member's reactions. [Some] people have very bad reaction when I was telling a story that happened. Yeah, one of them said it's not real. It's not real. [laughs] So, you think I made this up?

This story highlights how, when challenged, Zee felt that the audience member needed to distance herself through denial and discrediting Zee and her work.

P3 mentioned a different factor. She defined her identity as someone who has existed within a minority, both within her country-of-birth and in Australia. This was a key factor informing

her work and project interests, particularly around visibility of minority issues. She explained this as follows:

> Yeah, as I said, I always liked to do photography because, as I was in a minority group in Iran, and [I] had a lot of problems. I always liked to do documentary photography in these groups to show their problems and their issues with the community, with the broader community, with the government, with other people from other communities. I see some works of other famous documentary photographers that I am inspired by them.

P3's work deals with the intersectional experiences of minority groups, how they interact with dominant society, their access to certain services such as health care, as well as their inter-community relations. She characterised her work as an act of solidarity through shared experiences and her unique ability to relate to the vulnerable position of an oppressed group. This came up as a particular passion in the way she spoke about her drive to create a piece in collaboration with First Nations groups.

Taking into consideration P3's keen interest in how her marginalisation is crucial to her work, I asked if she felt she was a political person. Her answer, reproduced below, clearly shows her negative views regarding politics.

> I listen to the news, and I want to know what's happening in the world because I think everyone should know what is happening in the world, in their country, in everything. But I'm not an active person in politics. Because I think politics is something, it's not a beautiful thing. Every group in every party they are against each other, they fight, they are not clear about what they're doing. There are too many things behind them that we do not see. It's not beautiful, I think.

Like that of the other participants who I interviewed, P3's relationship to politics and her political identity is highly personal and mediated as a means of self-care and preservation. P3 expressed her opinion of formal political spaces and politicians as harbouring violence that she wanted to remain separate from. As P3 and I spoke about audience reactions to her work, she focused predominantly on her intentions, what she wanted the audience to take away from her work, and her interest in improving her craft through critique. One of her comments is reproduced below.

> Something I feel as far as people engaging [with] me, [they] encourage me for doing my work even if it is study or a photography job. I see more encouragement than seeing me as a victim. I feel that they encourage me, they say it's very good: you came here and learned English language and you're studying and working. I really like people seeing my work and giving their real feedback and critiques. They say if there is something bad in my work, so they can give their feedback and I can improve my work. I don't want to be told 'your photos are good or something.'

P3's concerns related more to the framing of her as an artist and her work by organisations as opposed to the audiences' opinions:

> [S]ometimes organisations tell me 'come here for this meeting' or something. For example, there is an exhibition for refugees, always I think they want to label me. The thing is I don't like this.

As shown above, each of the participants discussed their decision to remove themselves from certain dimensions of the political sphere. I use the term dimensions here as the participants indicated their distaste for certain political spaces and expressions that are directly tied with political parties and government agencies. The self-mediation of these relationships between

individuals, state apparatus, and government affairs was identified earlier in the chapter as a difference between political knowledge and political action and can be understood as acts of political refusal. Coined by Mohawk anthropologist from the Kahnawake community Audra Simpson, the notion of refusal denotes the ways certain Indigenous individuals resist the structure of settler-colonialism which chiefly manifests itself through the touchpoints between people and their governments, for example, in taxation, military service, and voting.[234] Taking into consideration that these touchpoints that Simpson singled out are not necessarily rights awarded to refugees depending on their visa status, Simpson herself points to the politics of refusal as a tool of analysis as opposed to a practice.[235] Therefore, the idea of refusal may be used to understand the way other groups who face violent management by settler-colonial regimes choose to interact with certain realms of politics that do not affect their relationships with agencies and organisations managing their settlement journey and, therefore, do not put them at any unnecessary risk.

It could be argued that partaking in acts of refusal, particularly when one occupies a highly politicised position as a refugee, is itself a political act. However, in the research reported here, I wish to emphasise the act of refusal primarily as a method of autonomy and self-care which allows for the varied motivations of the respondents. I also wish to foreground their desire to not view themselves through a hyper-political lens.

5.6 Understandings of the Self

In the interest of subjectivity and to celebrate the individual as carrying a unique experience that cannot be understood to be emblematic of a unified refugee position, I asked each of the

[234] Audra Simpson, "The Ruse of Consent and the Anatomy of 'Refusal': Cases from Indigenous North America and Australia," *Postcolonial Studies* 20, no. 1 (2017): 19.
[235] Simpson, 19.

participants how they would describe themselves. Needless to say, putting one's identity into words will always be difficult. One edits aspects of the self, depending on the audience. However, in this context, it is a useful exercise to examine not just how the respondents describe themselves in their own words, but what they leave out or seek to overtly refute. Their responses follow:

> Zee: I don't know, I think I just am. I don't even see myself as an artist that much. I think I'm just expressing myself.

> P3: Yeah, so... I came as a refugee here because I am from a minority group. Even when I was in Iran and here, but I don't like to have the label on myself. I think here people are labelling each other. I don't do this. For example, saying this 'as a woman' 'as a refugee' 'as a photographer' I don't' see a difference between myself and other people. Even if there are some limitations, for example, English language or something like that. I don't like to see myself that I'm different to people. I think all people are the same and equal. I don't like to have a label on myself.

Tabz was unsure of how to respond to this question, feeling it was too broad to answer. But even that inability to put oneself into words speaks to the point each of these women mentioned regarding the complexity and fluidity of their identities and how they extend beyond the reductive lenses dominant Australia seeks to understand them through, particularly regarding their status as refugees. Since our initial interviews, Tabz and I collaborated on an artist profile for an upcoming RMIT publication, in which she expressly chose to completely omit her experiences of refugeehood: she felt they were irrelevant to a piece devoted to her life as an artist.

5.7 The Third Space Through Narratives of the Self

As previously discussed, the knowledge production of refugee women is entangled with systems of management - which includes the relationships between the production and showcasing of cultural and creative knowledge through settlement services, NGOs, and government. This term is inclusive of the way spaces are created and gatekept through internal politics, and consumed by audiences in a way that overemphasises the concept of refugee within the respondents' identities. The knowledge produced by these women, despite the instrumentalisation of the space and the dominant narratives around migration and trauma that their work is contextualised within, is shaped in different ways and assists in their navigation of these spaces. These differing interactions with their work, audiences, and political framings they find themselves within are what make up The Third Space.

As I have drawn out the complexities of The Third Space through the stories presented above, I now intend to bring some concepts from activist ethnography, such as reification, into conversation with the politics of refusal and entanglement. Reification within the context of refugee management includes the way individuals from refugee backgrounds are spoken about within the settlement sector, media narratives, legislation, how sector workers interact with communities, and the stratification of visa types are just a few examples. Reification can be understood as the processes that feed into carving out the limits and pathways of The Third Space and builds the image of what springs to the collective consciousness when one says 'refugee women'. The 'image' produced by reification informs and supports ruling relations that are not just top-down, but an active set of arrangements for managing the world as posited by Marie Campbell and Dorothy Smith.[236] These relationships become clear when one performs institutional ethnography as presented in the analysis of the respondents'

[236] Marie Campbell, "Dorothy Smith and Knowing the World We Live in." *Journal of Sociology and Social Welfare* 30, no. 1 (2003): 12.

testimonies as they seek to locate their embodied experiences and understand particularities of their lived world. [237]

Earlier in this chapter, I theorised the removal of oneself from political discussions could be seen as an autonomous act of political refusal for the respondents. However, accompanying this strategy are also the more subtle acts of rejection and 'transgression' that sees the women acknowledging or directly pushing back on political assumptions that manifest in their relationships and interactions with the dominant Australian societal groups which they may not necessarily frame as political moments. Examples of this are most notable in the way the respondents interpret and interact with audiences' consumption and organisational framing of their work. This can also be seen in the way the women chose to answer my questions, such as Tabz's repeating her work's aims, or P3's lesser interest in audience reactions. These more relational decisions made by each of the women may be understood as moments of anti-reification as seen in activist ethnography.[238]

Here, I wish to reaffirm that, in highlighting a framework that uses the term 'activist', I am not grouping the respondents' experiences and actions as activisms, which has been a point I argued against in earlier chapters. Despite the naming conventions, which I have problematised above, activist ethnography is useful in analysing acts of opposition, resistance, and transformation as acts of agency.[239] I have expanded these acts beyond active political organisation to include acts of self-care by those individuals who are positioned away from the power of dominant society such as refugees.

Anti-reification, in contrast, is making visible these social relations, scripts, and how, in this case, refugee women can transform social relations either through language, direct challenges

[237] Campbell, 18.
[238] Caelie Frampton, Gary Kinsman, and A. K. Thompson, *Sociology for Changing the World: Social Movements/Social Research*, (Winnipeg: Fernwood Publishing, 2006), 135.
[239] Frampton, et al., 136.

of power, or refusal to define themselves within problematic victim or activist narratives even just on the interpersonal level. This can be seen in the way the participants shared the discrepancies between their motivations and audience interpretations. It can be seen, as well, in the implicit power relations they noted between themselves and those organising art spaces.

The Third Space, where these women produce their knowledge, is a set of entanglements that connect them to many of the same institutions that manage their settlement. These include government apparatus, government funding structures, settlement service organisations, and community-specific NGOs. However, it also includes the attitudes and narratives consumed by the dominant Australian population. The challenging of these organisations' framing around events, pointing out the flaws in their organisational capacity, their blind spots, and voicing general dissatisfaction are points where one can see how the respondents navigate these webs of relationships in a way that moves between acts of anti-reification or points of political refusal. The lines between the two remain highly subjective and governed by boundaries drawn by the individual respondent depending on what they would classify as a relational moment and what would be perceived as a political one.

Once more, I re-affirm that these acts are not described by the respondents as inherently political choices or movements but, rather, as expressions of the self and, therefore, one must understand The Third Space and navigation of it as not a realm exclusively of politics, but a site of autonomy and agency filtered through the experiences, relationships, and classifications of the individual.

5.8 Conclusion

In examining the personal narratives of SWANA refugee women regarding their processes of

knowledge production through art and their observations of the refugee art scene, one can appreciate how coloniality affects their work and ability to be seen as knowledge producers.

Coloniality's effect on their knowledge production is made clear through the way the participants' art is managed within the same settlement systems which have been established to carry colonial markers and frameworks. Similarly to the aforementioned colonially managed spaces and 'camps', these associated power dynamics construct the participants' art as niche by limiting specific audiences and spaces which, separate from the broader art world, minimise opportunities for these women. This framing within an instrumentalised refugee art space emphasises the women's identity as primarily that of a refugee. This in turn feeds into audiences' readings of the work primarily through a lens of exile and refugeehood. This was seen in the audience's reactions that the participants discussed as anticipating victim/activist narratives. Through personal narratives of the respondents, it can be seen how the web of relations, personal actions, and questions of identity inform their reaction to this colonial reality in The Third Space which, in turn, manifests not just as political self-management, but the communication of how colonial management affects their day-to-day lives in a process of anti-reification. It is only through personal narratives and individual histories that recenter SWANA refugee women as knowledge producers and active agents that exist beyond binaries in The Third Space and the issues of colonial management that the true meaning of their art can be made visible.

Chapter 6 – Conclusion

Throughout this thesis, I have examined the personal narratives and processes of creative production of refugee women from the SWANA region within the context of Australia in order to understand how coloniality, and its subsequent navigation through The Third Space, is articulated in the lives of the interviewees. In examining subjective testimonies through a decolonial framework, I was privy to micro-historical accounts that highlight the individualised boundaries of The Third Space as a manifestation of relationships and experiences. These relationships and experiences are heavily managed through an assumed refugee identity, often at odds with that which interviewees feel is their true identity. Additionally, I have positioned the accounts provided by the respondents to ascertain how coloniality is expressed in their lives through both the settlement system and the modes of refugee knowledge production and consumption.

6.1 How Coloniality Manifests in the Lives of SWANA Refugee Women

In Chapter 2, I established that Australia's colonial identity and its need to maintain colonial progeny is highly entwined with its policy, systems, and processes around migration of which the settlement system is an extension. As Hage notes, colonial institutions are characterised by their desire for expansion.[240] Inversely, this requires the minimisation and separation of those seen to be hindering this progress. As noted in the historical background analysis presented in Chapter 2, Australia's colonial population management seeks to manage its border stress by painting refugees as threats. Therefore, to deal with said 'threats' the state enacts policies and programs that distance refugee groups from its core population through

[240] Hage, 20.

ad-hoc approaches that delay meaningful engagement with refugee groups, and maintain refugees in a dependant, subordinate position via separation while also making invisible their experiences and complicating their access to services. This tactic has also been seen in the physical displacement and creation of 'border existences' across Australia's First Nation communities.

Separation of refugees is achieved in a multitude of ways, including physical separation in refugee-exclusive social spaces as mentioned by P3. As well as barring access from economic spheres through visa requirements, Tabz framed this divide within a broader trend of services and educational institutions failing to debunk harmful narratives around refugees. Chapter 4 also discussed the emergence of socio-political divisions with the broader community when the material support of settlement services was compared by Australian citizens to their lack of access to certain services provided to refugees such as state housing which in the accounts of Tabz created social tension.

However, according to the respondents, the major way in which the womens' separation from the broader Australian society manifested itself is through knowledge and service gaps. These gaps, as explored initially in Chapter 4 ultimately keep refugees in a dependency situation by presenting additional hurdles to their settlement, which in turn makes it difficult for individuals or groups to amass cultural or social capital within Australia. These gaps keep women refugees within a liminal 'middle space' as described by the interviewees. Through the direct accounts of women, it can be understood that Australia's entrenched colonial power is reflected in the way services are designed and delivered, the way refugee women are managed, and how, through these processes, the identity of refugees is crafted as a continual other. In turn, the refugee position becomes characterised not by their shared experience of exile but rather by their managing and navigating of these gaps that seek to manage them as a separate population.

The emphasis on the refugee position as the main identity lens through which the participants were perceived on a daily basis is another manifestation of how colonially informed government systems and strategies create a refugee position that is understood to be the quintessential facet of their identity.

A refugee position as a single, all-encompassing identity creates a subject that is easily serviced by neoliberal linear models of care and settlement. As seen in each of the respondents' testimonies, tensions arose between services and the individual's needs when the nuanced realities of their lives and intersecting identities were not acknowledged or catered for. A key example of coloniality seeking to reduce SWANA women from a refugee background into a manageable population by denying their diversity and limiting their access to complex narratives of the self is the continual prevalence and proliferation of the victim/activist binary framework. In the case of the respondents, this binary was predominantly seen through its effect on how their knowledge and art was produced and received.

In effect, the victim/activist binary directly mirrors the refugee art space's instrumentalisation and framing of refugee-produced work as either therapising the victim or activist advocacy. Ultimately, this lens blocks broader audiences from viewing the interviewees as knowledge holders or producers. Instead, their work is framed to centralise and emphasise their refugee identity, diminishing the personal complexities of their lives both within Australia and overseas. This construction of refugee art as only consumable as narratives of exile excludes refugee women from alternative and mainstream spaces. Once more it feeds their continual separation from mainstream populations, while overemphasising an identity of refugeehood.

6.2 The Third Space

In response to the understanding of the participants' navigation of the realities of colonial management which manifests itself as them being boxed within a reductive identity and separated from the broader population through sustaining gaps in knowledge and service access, I looked to The Third Space as a concept to underpin the analysis of this issue. Through the varied and unique experiences of all the participants, The Third Space can be seen taking shape as a myriad of relationships with other individuals, organisations, the self, as well as political spaces, and concepts. As shown in Chapter 5, The Third Space is a subjective entanglement of these spheres, unique to each individual, and heavily informed by the prism of their own experiences and identity.

The Third Space in the respondents' accounts can be most clearly seen in the way they move in, and within different modes of politics, public life, and domesticity through their art and personal boundary-setting which may be understood as radical self-care. But it is also present in the micro-relational moments of power, or lack thereof, that may not have existed in other contexts outside of their settlement in Australia. Examples of this are the reliance Tabz's mother has on her children to support her low English language skills, Zee's own self-settlement experience, as well as P3's search to push her professional relationships beyond the current parameters of her managed social bubble.

The Third Space is dynamic and ever-changing by its nature of multi-relational entanglements. However, it is deeply coloured by intersections of identity that may not align with an individual's own self-perception. In the cases of the participants, the refugee identity was seen to be a primary factor in many of their non-personal relationships despite the stories highlighting their multifaceted existences. It is through The Third Space that one can see the complexities of the lives of refugee women, and how they do not necessarily ground their

own identity in a foundation of exile, despite the insistence of Australia's settler-colonial systems and narratives on this facet of their lives.

The factors that inform the way The Third Space, as the site of knowledge creation, operates and sustains itself in its current form tie back to the construction of refugee women's art as being separate and a niche attached to mainstream forms of cultural knowledge. This includes their work being instrumentalised through social programs by organisations that are founded on aims of social cohesion and social harmony for refugees and migrants. This framing is reinforced by these organising bodies grouping artists of a refugee background together and focusing on their art as being informed by the creators' experience of exile and refugeehood. This same perspective is bolstered by reviews, news articles, and promotional material that codify 'empowerment' language around these experiences. As a result of the space being constructed as refugee-specific, audiences anticipate a certain narrative that fits with their own preconceived notions that have been shaped by Australian media and government narratives. These notions either put refugee women in boxes as victims, activists, or in some cases criminals. This is in direct contrast with the aims and work of the women I interviewed and diminishes their own political experiences, knowledge, and relationships that make up The Third Space. These assumptions can also create violent exchanges between the women and members of the dominant Australian society, as well as obscure inter-community violence that results in political tensions within refugee spaces which programs do not engage with. This, in turn, further informs the participants' decisions to remove themselves from political spheres and discourses.

In further exploring the intentions, aims, and opinions of the participants who occupy The Third Space, it becomes clear that acts of political refusal and removal take place to protect themselves and maintain general well-being. This happens both on the larger scale of choosing to not take part in activities they see as political, but also in the small relational

moments that can be read as acts of anti-reification such as discussing with me the issues that they experience.

In Chapter 3, I presented The Third Space as existing between the binary of victim and activist. However, it is clear through the stories and testimonies of the participants that The Third Space is multidimensional and expands beyond these poles in a way that is still tightly connected to and informed by the associated assumptions and narratives discussed throughout this thesis. Based on this understanding, the dynamic and highly intersectional entanglement of The Third Space is better described as a prism. The prism of relationships is still somewhat contained by boundaries that exist across the legal rights and the rules of engagement drawn up by different programs, local government, and community organisations that support and manage the space of settlement and, by extension, refugee artistic production. Yet, the day-to-day realities and interactions reveal themselves differently depending on the positions of the respondents. Thus, these realities and interactions can be understood as intersections of identity, movements of power, and the examples of refusal and anti-reification undertaken by the individual women. Ultimately, the acts of autonomy that the participants partake in serve to highlight how unique the complex relationships and systems that they are placed in truly are. There is no singular way to claim autonomy or undergo self-care within this entangled prism of experience. What unifies the interviewees is a desire to be seen as individuals and, therefore, have their multifaceted experiences, wishes and thoughts acknowledged in a way they see fit for them as individuals.

6.3 The Place of Personal Narratives and Micro-histories

The unique experiences and entanglements with systems of management, and The Third Space where individuals bridge and navigate divides become most present through the

examination of personal narratives as confirmed by the interviews that I conducted for this thesis.

As found by Nadje Al-Ali in her work with women involved in Egyptian women's movements,[241] the importance of heterogeneity of experiences is crucial in decolonising the ways one talks to politicised narratives of marginalised people. This is particularly useful when examining personal narratives and oral histories of women of refugee background from the SWANA region, since a focus on heterogeneity of experiences allows researchers and individuals to emphasise the importance of acts of autonomy as being understood in the words and logic of the marginalised actor as opposed to automatically being ascribed political intentions. The use of SWANA Feminist Theory as both a framework and methodology has allowed this research to focus on personal histories in a way that has provided full context and space for the interviewees, allowing me to become privy to specific examples and features of their identities and experiences that cannot be captured by approaches that seek to create generalisations. One example is the ways the participants expressed how they were hyper-aware of their position, the narratives around them, the systems, and their realities. These elements are not necessarily present in the literature which tends to synthesise such elements through lenses that seek to divorce the actions and opinions of women who have been forcibly displaced from their intentions and autonomy, as seen in frameworks such as the FRE previously discussed.

Personal narratives as used in SWANA feminist theory, that account for personal bias, points of political entry, and put the narrator's knowledge at the centre allow SWANA refugee women such as the interviewees to discuss and theorise about their own experiences in a way

[241] Al-Ali, *Secularism, Gender, and the State in the Middle East*, 221.

that highlights relationships and self-care strategies in response to colonial management within their lives.

6.4 Implications for this Research

This thesis seeks to make contributions in the fields of critical race theory and decolonial studies grounded in Australian society. This is done by offering an alternative understanding of Australia's migration and settlement processes and histories. The testimonies and experiences of refugee women from the SWANA region discussed above act as a micro-historical segment that highlights how insufficient services for refugees hindered by colonially charged policy and neoliberalised funding structures affect refugees at the individual level. These testimonies also show how ad-hoc policy and funding flaws fail to meet the state's proclaimed goals of social cohesion or to promote an understanding of what true 'settlement' should be. This thesis also aims to challenge the claim of Australia's multicultural success as it shows how communities such as refugees are managed to maintain colonial power structures that seek to create a monoculture of minimal disruption.

This research also highlights the importance of individual subjectivity in breaking down generalisations of oppressed and marginalised groups while acknowledging that these generalisations uphold colonial power structures and obscure day-to-day lived realities. Additionally, focusing on individuality brings the focus back onto the shared structural issues refugees are managed by, shifting culpability of systemic insufficiencies back onto the managing body rather than on the individual. In continuing to build frameworks that centre colonially managed groups as knowledge holders and experts in the manifestation of colonial power systems, this thesis furthers collaborative approaches that minimise cultural, social, and psychological harm and illuminate the importance of subjectivities and autonomy as decolonial tools that can challenge the paternalism of government services.

6.5 Other Opportunities for Research

This research opens other opportunities such as questioning why, despite the acknowledgment of gaps in service areas, issues of insufficiency persist. Government commissioned reports into the settlement of migrant and refugee women highlight the service gaps in current programs available to women five years after arrival. These issues, if unaddressed, can manifest into ongoing long-term social difficulties.[242] Considering that these issues were discussed by the interviewees, it becomes clear that there is a need to further explore how a meaningful feedback loop between colonially managed populations and the systems they interact with could be put in place.

Additionally, this thesis assists in building a deeper examination between First Nations' and refugees' parallel experiences and how both groups are managed by coloniality in such a way as to further dispossesses and disenfranchise First Nations communities. In current systems of population management, these 'other' populations — of which migrants, refugees, and Indigenous peoples are considered a part — are constructed as separate from the broader social body and kept bureaucratically apart from each other overseen by state Multicultural and Indigenous Affairs departments. This separation creates a mental and socio-political divide between these two groups, preventing their experiences from being examined in parallel. However, their parallel has already been explored by Aileen Moreton-Robinson Watson, Irene Watson,[243] Eugenia Flynn, and Tasnim Sammak.[244] This is also an area of particular interest in the U.S.A context as shown through the work of Lee-Oliver Leece et al.[245] and Eithne Luibhéid. An in-depth, comparative analysis of these groups and their

[242] John De Maio et al., *Empowering Migrant and Refugee Women: Supporting and Empowering Women Beyond Five-Year Post-Settlement* (Melbourne: Australian Institute of Family Studies, 2017), 50.
[243] Watson, "Buried Alive."
[244] Eugenia Flynn and Tasnim Sammak, "Black Australia to Palestine: Solidarity in Decolonial Struggle," *Indigenous X*, June 10, 2021, https://indigenousx.com.au/black-australia-to-palestine-solidarity-in-decolonial-struggle/.
[245] Lee-Oliver Leece et al., 226-256.

ongoing relationships to government agencies and services could potentially challenge the social status-quo by further shining a light on Australia's colonial approach to managing these groups and help break barriers between the dispossessed.

6.6 Final Thoughts

Throughout this thesis, I have shown how The Third Space manifests as an individualised entanglement of relationships that are used to navigate a feminine refugee identity and the settlement experience within a settler-colonial host nation. In highlighting the subjectivity and autonomy of the participants who exist in a highly politicised position and are very much managed by the state, I have demonstrated that it is important to celebrate their unique identities and multifaceted nature. Breathing humanity into marginalised groups of women is vital in continuing the highly relational work set out in this thesis and in attempting to mitigate the colonial power structures that exist in their day-to-day lives, even at the interpersonal level.

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