Building Space, Building Selves: Revealing the Feminist Architectures of Everyday Places in Contemporary Narratives of Forced Migrant Women

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ABSTRACT

Building Space, Building Selves: Revealing the Feminist Architectures of Everyday Places in Contemporary Narratives of Forced Migrant Women explores contemporary film and literary representations of women whose lives are shaped, and who shape their lives, by the everyday spaces of sanctuary seeking. An interdisciplinary project, this thesis seeks to address the lack of critical attention given to gendered representations of forced migration in creative works, offering an alternative epistemological approach that explores how the stories and identities of forced migrant women unfold in relation to the spaces they encounter rather than the bodies in which they move.

This work takes shape as a journey that traverses various architectures. Through a decolonial feminist lens, each chapter examines representations of forced migrant women 'building selves' in different spatial contexts, ultimately identifying feminist architectures that reveal sites of resilience and reclamation, thus highlighting the complexities of their experiences. Chapter One explores gendered frameworks of liminality and transition by examining the significance of doorways as symbolic thresholds for protagonists Nogreh and Nadia in *At Five in the Afternoon* by Samira Makhmalbaf and *Exit West* by Moshin Hamid. Studying the spatial dynamics within rooms of the Immigration Reception Centre and the playhouse rehearsal space in Chapter Two illustrates dualling politics of hospitality and hostility for the women in *The Bogus Woman* by Kay Adshead and *The Baulkham Hills African Ladies Troupe* by Ros Horin. In Chapter Three, critical analysis of physical and symbolic walls considers their impact on both fictional and real-life women fleeing Mexico for the United States, emphasising their conflicting roles as sites of oppression and support in *American Dirt* by Jeanine Cummins and *Los Lobos* by Samuel Kishi. Finally, in Chapter Four, a feminist contrapuntal reading of the fraught site of home transforms it into a creative construction of self-identity in *MATANGI / MAYA / M.I.A.* by Stephen Loveridge and *The Girl Who Smiled Beads* by Clemantine Wamariya and Elizabeth Weil.

Over these four chapters, the spatial significance of doors, rooms, walls, and rooms emerges. Rather than a distinct design style or practice, this thesis identifies them as feminist architectures, for and on behalf of forced migrant women. This is to say in identifying and understanding these tropes, we can read creative engagements and approaches to challenge traditional power structures and reclaim place for those often considered ‘placeless’. We can identify spatial moments of inclusivity and resistance, solidarity, and self-actualisation. Doors, rooms, walls, and rooms are symbolic and site-specific responses to the diverse needs and experiences of all individuals, either from their inception or by inscription through lived, embodied interaction with them. With the cultural critical identification and exploration of such feminist architectures, this thesis responds to the urgent need for more nuanced readings of the narratives of forced migrant women, and spatial and relational approaches to understanding them in the real world.

CONTENTS

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 51: Still image from *MATANGI / MAYA / M.I.A.*

Figure 52: Still image from *MATANGI / MAYA / M.I.A.*

INTRODUCTION

In *Borderlands / La Frontera: The New Mestiza*, renowned Chicana scholar, feminist, writer and activist Gloria Anzaldúa, declares, 'If going home is denied me then I will have to stand and claim my space, making a new culture – *una cultura mestiza* – with my own lumber, my own bricks and mortar, my own feminist architecture'.[1] It is from this point that this thesis begins. Concerned with contemporary filmic and literary representations of women whose lives, like Anzaldúa's, are determined by inhospitable border politics and a hostile migration milieu, this work draws on the above sentiment of intersectional and decolonial solidarities.[2] It aims to explore the importance of space and place to the narratives of forced migrant women, a supremely marginalised and often misrepresented group of people seeking sanctuary.[3] More specifically, *Building Space, Building Selves: Revealing the Feminist Architectures of Everyday Places in Contemporary Narratives of Forced Migrant Women* works with twenty-first century texts across a range of genres by authors of various gendered, racial, sociopolitical and citizenship positionalities to uncover and make space for diverse and productive representations of the lifeworlds of forced migrant women.[4] The purpose is to challenge the emphasis that has been placed on the extreme journeys, as well as the gendered stereotypes and erasures, of forced migrant women by seeking an alternative critical approach that explores how their stories, and identities, unfold in relation to the spaces they encounter. Ultimately this project leads to a more considered and interdisciplinary mode of understanding that highlights the engagements of self-construction and spatial determination forced migrant women perform: engagements I understand as 'feminist architectures'.

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[1] Gloria Anzaldúa, *Borderlands / La Frontera: The New Mestiza*, 4th ed. (Borderlands / La Frontera: The New Mestiza 4th ed. (San Francisco, California: Aunt Lute Books, 1987), p. 44.

[2] See also: Kimberlé Williams Crenshaw, 'Mapping the Margins: Intersectionality, Identity Politics, and Violence Against Women of Color', *Stanford Law Review*, 43: 6 (1991), 1241-65, pp. 1296-99; Avtar Brah and Ann Phoenix, 'Ain't I A Woman? Revisiting Intersectionality', *Journal of International Women's Studies,* 5:3 (2004), pp. 75-86; María Lugones, 'Toward a Decolonial Feminism', *Hypatia*, 25:4 (2010), pp. 742–59.

[3] See definition on page 9 of 'forced migrant' and rationale for specific vocabulary use throughout this thesis.

[4] This work understands lifeworlds as 'the world of lived experience inhabited by us as conscious beings, and incorporating the way in which phenomena (events, objects, emotions) appear to us in our conscious experience or everyday life.' Joanna Brooks, 'Learning from the "lifeworld"', *The Psychologist* in The British Psychological Society, 14 July 2015 <https://www.bps.org.uk/psychologist/learning-lifeworld> [accessed 29 October 2023]

Building space, building selves

The postcolonial preoccupation with space and place, with leaving and arriving, with concepts of hospitality, and with home and the unwelcome other, forms an essential entry point for this work's key focus and contribution.[5] Indeed, the importance of place in the forced migrant woman's narrative is central; it marks out temporality, progress, and pitfalls. More importantly, the forced migrant woman's story *is* one of place. It is of leaving one space that is no longer viable for one that, while unknown, is hopefully more so. This holds true for all experiences of forced migration, in which one is forced from of one location and made to seek out another. This may be due to any singular manifestation or combination of political, economic, social, and environmental factors, including conflict and war, persecution and human rights violations, political instability, environmental/ climate disasters, economic hardship, gender-based violence, discrimination, genocide, terrorism, or statelessness. This is why, in my discourse, I consciously use the term 'forced migrant' over 'refugee' or 'asylum seeker' due to its encompassing nature. A forced migrant woman within this understanding, therefore, transcends narrow definitions. She represents someone compelled to leave her home amid complex, often hostile, contemporary forms of displacements. This inclusive language acknowledges the myriad factors forcing individuals to seek refuge. It recognises the evolving landscape of displacement, emphasising the necessity to cast a wider net in understanding and addressing the diverse challenges faced by those who must migrate.[6] And certainly, the spatial experiences accompanying forced migration also are complicated and harrowing in new and different ways from those of initial displacement. They are hostile architectures encountered as perilous routes of escape and unsympathetic bureaucratic processes. They are violent borders and borderscapes determined by imperial and colonial histories and present realities. They are roads, camps, and processing centres that exist as extraordinary states of exception and exclusion.[7] They are makeshift shelters that end up making do for decades and

[5] See Andrew Teverson and Sara Upstone, eds, *Postcolonial Spaces: The Politics of Place in Contemporary Culture* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011).
[6] Within this understanding, the term 'forced migrant' applies to all protagonists soon to be introduced in this work. It defines Nogreh, an internally displaced Afghan woman in *At Five in the Afternoon*, as much as it it does to Lucia, a mother seeking a safer life for her children after their father died from drugs use in *Los Lobos*, and Clementine Wamariya, a refugee of the Rwanda civil war in *The Girl Who Smiled Beads*.
[7] Giorgio Agamben, *State of Exception*, trans. by Kevin Attell (Chicago: University of Chicago Press 2004)

reception centres that are anything but receptive. These spatial and physical realities are architectures layered with geopolitical, racial, and gendered brutalities, against which forced migrant women must contend for their and their families' safety.

Safety, however, will remain elusive as long as the spaces encountered remain charged with hostility and marginalisation. This assertion is writ large in media coverage, in academic research, and in creative narratives such as those explored in this thesis. 'The concept of sanctuary,' writes Victoria Canning in 'Sanctuary as Social Justice: A Feminist Critique', 'should be understood as a spatialised form of safety, whereby previous subjections to or threats of harm are alleviated, and where one can live free from further harm in the present'.[8] Therefore, tracing the spaces forced migrant women encounter, are affected by, and must navigate, and exploring the ways in which agency is represented in architectural terms, is a necessary way of understanding their complete stories, in both real or represented realms. Employing a significantly interdisciplinary approach which considers decolonial, postcolonial, and feminist theories, transcultural feminist approaches, architectural and spatial discourse, critical-textual analysis, and feminist geography, gender, and development, the refugee humanities and refugee studies, this project herein links together places of origin and spaces of settlement with the journeys in between. Importantly, it explores the familiar and mundane experiences of women, because these are the sites where hegemonic powers play out.[9] Reflected in the often vivid and pivotal importance afforded to portrayals of space and place within narratives of women's forced migration themselves, the significance is often overlooked or misinterpreted.[10] However, as Romola Sanyal affirms, 'refugee spaces are not just potent political symbols but also strategic tools for negotiations'.[11] With this thesis, I identify ways in which filmmakers, authors, and forced migrant

[8] Victoria Canning, 'Sanctuary as Social Justice: A Feminist Critique' in *Feminist responses to injustices of the state and its institutions politics, intervention, resistance*, Kym Atkinson, Úna Barr, Helen Monk and Katie Tucker, eds (Bristol: Bristol University Press, 2022), p. 141.
[9] Linda Basch, Nina Glick Schiller and Cristina Szanton Blanc, *Nations unbound: transnational projects, postcolonial predicaments, and deterritorialized nation-states* (London: Routledge, 1994), p. 6.
[10] As Anna Ball affirms in *Forced Migration in the Feminist Imagination*, the 'narratives, lives, and imaginations' of displaced women, 'is a terrain that has often been traversed clumsily, even violently, including when approached in 'feminist' terms that have at times paid little heed to the places, roles, experiences, or voices of women who have experienced forms of forced migration themselves.' Anna Ball, *Forced Migration in the Feminist Imagination* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2022), pp. 1-2.
[11] Romola Sanyal, 'Urbanizing refugee spaces', *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research*, 38 (2014), p. 570.

women themselves reclaim ownership of space through the construction and negotiation of feminist architectures. In turning my analysis towards forced migrant women and the environments they navigate I shift the narrative away from gendered subject to gendered experience and spatialised imaginings. I believe this critical-textual analysis of space, aware and inclusive of gender, is ultimately fundamental to the task of responsibly reading and responding to the journeys, experiences, and identities of forced migrant women.

The particular spaces identified for focus in this research present an intimate and everyday journey, and they structure the thesis as such. They are doors, rooms, walls, and homes, sites which may not seem the most obvious for forced migrant women's narratives; however, they have been chosen for precisely that reason. While pronounced spatial tropes such as the road, the camp, and the sea, are certainly present in the select narratives this research examines – and indeed in the real lives of forced migrant women – I believe that focusing on these extraordinary, circumstantially-specific locales constrains and defines the forced migrants, particularly women, in limited ways.[12] Doing so freezes their livelihoods in those horrific and heightened experiences, neglecting the completeness of their actual selves, before and after the immediate journey to seek safety. Doors, rooms, doors, walls, and homes, rather, may be part of the ordinary, or also extraordinary, movements of any woman, just as they are a part of the tedious and likewise exceptional situations forced migrant women are forced into. As Gillian Rose explains in *Feminism and Geography: The Limits of Geographical Knowledge*,

> For feminists, the everyday routines travelled by women are never unimportant, because the seemingly banal and trivial events of the everyday are bound into the power structures

[12] Texts which focus on the extraordinary journey rather than spatial sites of everyday resistance include, for example: *Enrique's Journey* by Sonia Nazario (2007), marketed on the book's cover as 'a boy's dangerous odyssey to reunite with his mother' and renowned artist/ activist Ai Weiwei's disturbingly named *Human Flow* (2017). Both centre the intense physical journey to sanctuary as a key narrative device, driving the story arc and evoking drama, fear, and empathy. While the plot lines of these and similar stories are not altogether different than those in the texts I have chosen for this thesis, where they differ is in their persistent focus on the extraordinary 'quest' of forced migration, rather than drawing out the everyday spatial experiences through which forced migrants, fictional or otherwise, may reclaim agency. In 'Migrant Cinema: Scenes of Displacement', Catherine Russell looks to make the case that depictions such as Weiwei's are groundbreaking in their 'richly evocative cinematography'. She cites several other films that employ the same technique, including *El mar la mar* by J. P. Sniadecki and Joshua Bonnetta (2017), *Fire at Sea* by Gianfranco Rosi (2016) and *May They Rest in Revolt (Figures of War)* by Sylvian George (2010), arguing they 'engage constructively with the challenges confronting displaced people precisely by seeing and hearing them within the sensual, geographic, and architectural spaces in which they move'. Though I agree with the importance of representing such stories of refugees and refugeedom in impactful, engaged ways, I dispute that these are the only 'architectural spaces in which they move' that should be explored. Of further note, none of the films Russell references feature with female protagonists, a point which this thesis confronts as a key focus. See Bibliography for film full citations; Catherine Russell, 'Migrant Cinema: Scenes of Displacement', *Cinéaste*, 43: 1 (2017), p. 21.

> which limit and confine women… The everyday is the arena through which patriarchy is (re)created – and contested.[13]

Indeed, position is related to power in multifarious ways, including the most prosaic. Homing in on the places and spaces that forced migrant women encounter beyond the extreme, often life-threatening circumstances sounding their flight to safety, turns the focus to their complete lifeworlds, their positionalities as gendered beings, citizens, family members, caretakes, mothers, employees, and so on, rather than strictly as women on the move. What's more, it identifies the unique ways forced migrant women engage with space, examining the everyday 'tactics' as Michel de Certeau might articulate, of embodied forms of resistance, recreation, ambivalence, and exploration.[14] Therefore, the spatial tropes examined here have been identified not by random, nor are they instrumentalised for the sake of the project's own narrative, but doors, rooms, walls, and homes drew clear focus due to their discernible recurrence in the films and literatures surveyed.

The everyday is particularly important because forced migrant women are responding to displacement and more than displacement, and our readings must consider as much. This project's approach, therefore, seeks to afford forced migrant women spatial opportunity and respect, and to promote their subjectivity and agency in critical and creative ways. In this sense, it embraces the work of scholar Yến Lê Espiritu and her colleagues in their 2022 introduction to the field of Critical Refugee Studies (CRS). Espiritu's work focuses on 'centering refugee lives—and the creative and critical potentiality that such lives offer'.[15] Further, CRS, as well as this project, 'takes seriously the hidden and overt injuries that refugees experience but also the joy and survival practices that play out in the domain of the everyday'.[16] With its sociospatial attention, this work asserts that the characters in question – fictional and real alike – are somewhere specific, not lost in perpetual transition. Likewise, it reinforces that they are *someone* specific – as Agnes Woolley describes in *Contemporary Asylum Narratives: Representing Refugees in the Twenty-First Century*, 'whole and knowable beings… not metaphors but socially situated subjects'.[17] Woolley's point marks the need to recognise forced migrants as complete individuals with distinct experiences and

[13] Gillian Rose*, Feminism and geography: the limits of geographical knowledge* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1993), p. 17.
[14] Michel de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984) p. xix.
[15] Ibid., p. 22.
[16] Ibid., p. 34.
[17] Agnes Woolley, *Contemporary Asylum Narratives: Representing Refugees in the Twenty-First Century* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), p. 4.

needs. In writing and reading them, there ought to be emphasis on their unique humanity and social context rather than mere symbolic reduction. For forced migrant women, this includes a foregrounding of gender and gendered experiences. However, even if, within this narrative scope, forced migrant women remain reduced to evocative figures of speech, Avtar Brah explains that 'metaphors are not simply abstractions of concrete reality, but rather they undergird the discursive materiality of power relations'.[18] The connection between forced migrant women and the spaces they traverse, therefore, calls for a new realm of inquiry, one in which their identities and stories unfold in intimate relation to the sociospatial and cultural landscapes they navigate to better understand and begin to contest that oppressive undergird.

Finding feminist architectures

Beginning with the idea, contexts, and sociocultural topographies of those very landscapes, this section is dedicated to the conceptualisation of 'feminist architectures' as an interdisciplinary framework that both informs and is formed by this project. As identified in the first sentence of this thesis, the word pairing here is drawn from Gloria Anzaldúa's own sense of displacement and her creative and intellectual determination to make a new space of her own. 'If going home is denied me,' she writes, not as a forced migrant, but as a bicultural Chicana who lives among both physical and emotional borders, 'then I will have to stand and claim my space... '[19] For Anzaldúa, the denial of space is unacceptable, and if no one will make space for her, or indeed if she is actively denied or forced out, then she might only rely on her own resources, tools, and methods: her 'own feminist architecture'.[20] As I believe, and will lay out in the work to follow, feminist architectures are not specifically designed buildings, nor must they be spaces created solely by women or for women. Rather, they are physical sites and embodied practices that challenge the traditional notion of space as neutral and objective. Feminist architectures are reclamations of space by and on behalf of those traditionally overlooked and oppressed, including, and pertinent to this thesis, forced migrant women. Moreover, feminist architectures are social products that acknowledge and push back on

[18] Avtar Brah, *Decolonial Imaginings: Intersectional Conversations and Contestations* (London: Goldsmiths Press, 2022), p. 99.
[19] Anzaldúa, p. 44.
[20] Ibid.

the ways space reflects and is shaped by gender relations, power dynamics, and cultural hegemonies. In examining how authors, filmmakers and those who have lived the experience themselves represent forced migrant women in relation to everyday spaces, feminist architectures offer spatial prospect and spatial dignity, promoting forced migrant women's subjectivity and agency, beginning in creative representations and subsequently manifesting in tangible, real-world contexts.

The term 'feminist architecture' is at once familiar and largely unused in either academia or professional practice. 'Feminism and architecture', 'feminist spatial practice', and 'feminist geography', are all, perhaps, more commonly considered, however they do not appropriately capture the nuances of the gendered aspects of space, spatial negotiations, and sociospatial experiences that this project examines. Locating the term as interdisciplinary, it carries insights from the above, as well as the wider fields of feminist and decolonial study, sociology, architecture, and urban planning. Feminist architecture is, therefore, a diverse and evolving field, if it might even be called such. There is no clear definition, and published work around the concept upholds similarly broad characterisations.[21] There is much to learn in this sense, however. As a field yet to be fully determined, then surveying the many and varied approaches to similar concepts can help form a more concrete understanding of the concept. In arguably more dynamic spaces, as well as online journals, industry newsletters, and public forums, conversations around feminist architectures have indeed arisen. One example is the November 2023 conversation hosted by London's Open City charity. This debate hosted five theoretically and practically engaged participants presenting 'micro manifestos' to answer the question 'What actually is feminist

[21] Relevant, but still only indirectly pertinent literature, includes: *Space, Place, and Gender* by Doreen Massey (1994), *Architecture and Feminism* by editors Debra Coleman, Elizabeth Danze and Carol Henderson (1997), *Gender Space Architecture: An Interdisciplinary Introduction* by editors Iain Borden, Barbara Penner, Jane Rendell (1999), *Design and Feminism: Re-Visioning Spaces, Places, and Everyday Things* by Joan Rothschild (1999) *Feminist Practices: Interdisciplinary Approaches to Women in Architecture* by Lori A. Brown (2011), 'Styles of Queer Feminist Practices and Objects in Architecture' in *Architecture and Culture* by Meike Schalk and Karin Reisinger (2017), *Architecture and Feminisms: Ecologies, Economies, Technologies* by Hélène Frichot, Catharina Gabrielsson, Helen Runting (2017), *Women (Re)Build: Stories, Polemics, Futures* by Franca Trubiano, Ramona Adlakha, Ramune Bartuskaite (2019), *Feminist City: Claiming Space in the Man-Made World* by Leslie Kern (2020), 'Architecture of care: social architecture and feminist ethic' in *The Journal of Architecture* by Shelly Cohen and Tovi Fenster (2021)*, Queer Spaces: An Atlas of LGBTQIA+ Places and Stories* by Adam Nathaniel and Joshua Mardell (2022). See Bibliography for full citations.

architecture?'.[22] Relatedly, earlier in 2023, designers and researchers Bryony Roberts and Abriannah Aiken published an extensive spatial/visual diagram – see Figure 1 below – that maps the 'undulating terrain of interconnected' feminist spatial practices (notably still not using the term 'feminist architectures'), from 1970 to 2022, across six modes of practice: experimental pedagogies, expanded histories, embodied theories, collaborative practices, spaces for non-conforming bodies, and alternative materialities.[23]

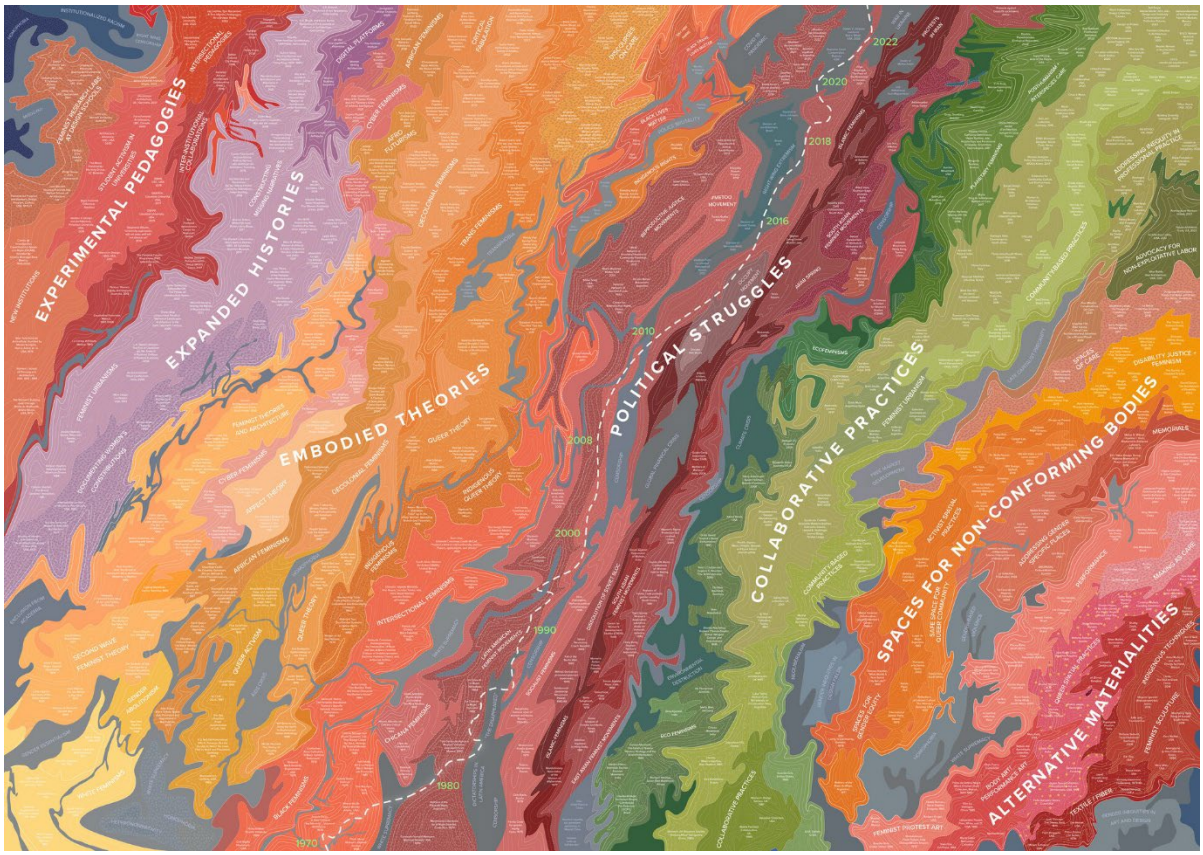

Figure 1: Feminist Spatial Practices, Part 1. Created by Bryony Roberts and Abriannah Aiken, 2023 [24]

Quoting cultural theorist and author Elke Krasny, Roberts and Aiken draw attention to the dynamic, multiscalar ways feminist architectures can emerge:

> Feminist spatial practices are multidimensional and multifaceted expressions of thinking and acting, with an aim to build spatial justice and enable better caring in a world defined by ideologies of injustice and regimes of inequity.[25]

[22] 'What is Feminist Architecture?', *Open City*, 23 November 2023 <https://open-city.org.uk/events/what-is-feminist-architecture> [accessed 23 November 2023]
[23] Bryony Roberts and Abriannah Aiken, 'Feminist Spatial Practices, Part 1 *e-flux.com*, March 2023 <https://www.e-flux.com/architecture/chronograms/506357/feminist-spatial-practices-part-1/> [accessed 1 November 2023]
[24] Roberts and Aiken, 2023
[25] Elke Krasny, 'Scales of Concern: Feminist Spatial Practices', in *Empowerment*, ed. Andreas Beitin, Katharina Koch, and Uta Ruhkamp (Wolfsburg: Kunstmuseum Wolfsburg, 2022), p. 185.

Their emphasis on the many access points and manifestations of feminist architectures supports my own thought process, particularly around the interdisciplinary connections between literal architectures and sociospatial approaches.

Inspired, in part, by Roberts and Aiken's mapping, therefore, I want to use a small amount of space in this introduction to highlight a cross-cultural cross-section of collaborative work informing feminist architecture both in practice and in theory. While not all examples are relevant to the forced migrant women, nor to the doors, rooms, walls, and homes in the rest of this thesis, their presence within the field roots the conceptualisation of feminist architectures overall. Just as Roberts and Aiken identified modes of practice, I translate spatial practices, knowledges, and interventions, into productive models for literary-critical reading, thus conceptualising core premises of feminist architecture. These premises include: reshaping structural landscapes, empowered action, challenging power dynamics, collaborative relationships of resistance, and reclaiming everyday spaces. They are present in spatial practice as well as the textual representations analysed throughout this research and they form a working understanding of feminist architecture as both a practical and theoretical concept.

Empowered action

Ideas around self-initiated projects and co-building construction come to life through Femingas, a project founded in 2022 in Quito, Ecuador, shown below in Figure 2.[26] The initiative coordinates participatory construction sessions 'with a gender perspective', aiming to instil an inclusive gender approach in the built environment in Ecuador's capital city. By fostering hands-on experiences, Femingas rehabilitates physical spaces through empowered and dynamic engagement. As of November 2023, 12 workshops have been held, involving 25 cisgender women, a trans woman, two boys, and four girls, exemplify the inclusive grassroots, ground-up approach, and illustrating agency and empowerment inherent in feminist architectures.

[26] Florencia Sobrero, 'Construction as a Means', *Roca Gallery*, 20 August 2023 <http://www.rocagallery.com/construction-as-a-means> [accessed 2 November 2023]; see also Vania Masalías, 'Femingas: Participatory Construction with a Gender Perspective in Ecuador', *Arch Daily*, trans. by Amelia Pérez Bravo, 10 June 2022 <https://www.archdaily.com/983016/femingas-participatory-construction-with-a-gender-perspective-in-ecuador> [accessed 02 November 2023]

Figure 2: Feminigas, a feminist (de)construction alternative, intervention in an apartment in the historic center of Quito, 2020. Photo ©Taller General, 2020 [27]

Similarly recognising gender imbalances in certain spheres of the built environment, Make Space for Girls is a campaign and research organisation established in 2013 in the U.K. that addresses challenges faced by girls in accessing and participating in public life.[28] Through workshops, mentoring programs, and research residencies, Make Space for Girls strategically focuses on fostering girls' confidence, creativity, and leadership skills within the spaces they inhabit. By actively involving girls in the planning and design process, the organisation empowers them to contribute to the creation of spaces that reflect their needs and voices. The collaborative research conducted with girls offers valuable insights, creating a resource for designers, local governments, and planning departments to better design public outdoor space for teenage girls.

Reshaping structural landscapes

The City for Women Laboratory, established in 2020 in Nepal, represents a transformative initiative in research and policy led by the United Nations Office for Project Services Nepal Office and

[27] Sobrero.
[28] 'About Us', *Make Space for Girls* <https://www.makespaceforgirls.co.uk/about-us> [accessed 1 November 2023]

Cities Alliance.[29] This project actively seeks to reshape urban planning and development by prioritising gender-inclusive policies. Focused on key areas such as urban development, building construction, housing, water supply, and sanitation, the laboratory's primary goal is to integrate women into decision-making processes. By advocating for gender mainstreaming, the City for Women Laboratory aims to influence the formulation of policies and offers extensive training programs for government officials, urban planners, and stakeholders. This commitment extends to actively supporting projects that foster gender equality within urban development, including the creation of women-friendly public spaces and affordable housing tailored to women's needs. In essence, the laboratory is dedicated to long-term structural change, ensuring that urban spaces are not just welcoming to women but are designed with women's needs at the forefront. [30]

Operating for just over a year, the Women Designer Policy Research Group (WOO) in South Korea is an exemplar of designer solidarity.[31] Focused on providing support to women designers who have faced sexual violence and gender discrimination, WOO aimed to document and raise awareness about their experiences. The group proposed policy solutions tailored to the unique context of South Korea, with the ultimate aim of creating equal working conditions for all. Notably, WOO welcomed men who share the vision of equity. By addressing gender-based violence and discrimination at a structural level, WOO exemplified an initiative that not only acknowledges but actively challenges and changes the systems perpetuating inequality, promoting a more inclusive and equitable landscape for women in the design industry.

Challenging power dynamics

The multi-sited project Feminist Perspectives on Architectural Histories of Migration by Anooradha Iyer Siddiqi Rachel Lee reveals and records feminist architecture narratives concerning people on the move. A series of published writings, recordings, art reproductions and a film, the

[29] Jenna Dutton, Chiara Tomaselli, Mrudhula Koshy, Kristin Agnello, Katrina Johnston-Zimmerman, Charlotte Morphet and Karen Horwood, 'Feminist Planning and Urbanism: Understanding the Past for an Inclusive Future' in *The Palgrave Encyclopedia of Urban and Regional Futures* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2022).
[30] See also: 'City for Women Laboratory in Nepal', *Cities Alliance*, 4 August 2020 <https://www.citiesalliance.org/newsroom/news/cities-alliance-news/city-women-laboratory-nepal> [accessed 02 November 2023]
[31] Lynn Kim and Soojiin Park, 'Korea Feminist Design Practice Analysis', *Archives of Design Researc*h, 34:1 (2021), p. 47.

2019 project, according to the authors, 'test the concept of migration as a method of writing antipatriarchal, antiracist, anticasteist, and antiformalist architectural histories', and in doing so, reveals the power dynamics embedded in the built environment and upheld and reproduced through the sociospatial, political and epistemological constructs of the colonial and patriarchal border projects.[32]

Grassroots initiative Sister's House, established in 2018 in Belgium, stands as a tangible manifestation of challenging power dynamics within the context of refugee accommodation facilities.[33] Initiated by a group of women volunteers, the house addresses the unique needs of undocumented or illegalised women, particularly focusing on safety and physical integrity. Aligned with the concept of 'safe spaces' advocated by Black feminist scholars, Sisters' House provides non-mixed temporary housing built on trust, confidentiality, and mutual support. Departing from a traditionally security-focused approach, the house accommodates up to 80 women, each registered for 30 days, promoting access to all spaces, and encouraging personalisation for a homely atmosphere. The core idea of Sisters' House is centred around 'care', emphasising dignity and agency to redefine power relations.

Reclaiming everyday spaces

Matrix Feminist Design Cooperative (Matrix), established in London, England in 1980, stands as an exemplary model of redefining spatial practice and narratives through acts of reclaiming everyday spaces. This pioneering, multi-racial, all-women architectural collective embraced feminist principles within their methodologies and design processes and is sited today as a global influence on equity in architectural history.[34] Operating as a cooperative with a non-hierarchical management system, Matrix published 'Making Space: Women and the Man-Made Environment', a formative work exploring the socio-political context of designing the built environment through

[32] Anooradha Iyer Siddiqi and Rachel Lee, 'On Collaborations: Feminist Architectural Histories of Migration', *Aggregate*, 10, November 2022 <https://we-aggregate.org/piece/on-collaborations-feminist-architectural-histories-of-migration> [accessed 1 November 2023]
[33] Alan Hope, 'New home found for Sister's House homeless migrant shelter', *Brussels Times*, 8 March 2020 <https://www.brusselstimes.com/99160/new-home-found-for-sisters-house-homeless-migrant-shelter> [accessed 9 November 2023]; Sister's House – BelRefugees, Facebook.com <https://www.facebook.com/sistershousebelrefugees/> [accessed 9 November 2023]
[34] Matrix, *Making Space: Women and the Man-Made Environment* (London and Sydney: Pluto Press, 1984).

the lens of feminist theory. Matrix implemented participatory design strategies, prioritising co-design, and focusing on spaces typically disregarded by the male-dominated architectural profession, such as women's centres and daycares. By challenging normative practice and directing attention to less-expected places, akin to the scrutiny given to everyday spaces in this thesis, Matrix manifested a feminist ethos that reclaims locales commonly marginalised by patriarchal structures.

Under the leadership of artist Cheril Linet, another bold and embodied feminist activist 'collective' called Yeguada Latinoamericana coordinates gendered performances enacted in public spaces across Chile. As Céire Broderick explains in 'Insurgent Bodies in Cultural Responses to Reproductive Justice in Chile and Ireland', 'Yeguada Latinoamerica has taken over public spaces throughout Chile to protest heteropatriarchal, colonial legacies, and neoliberal powers that seek to dominate and control those who do not conform to social norms'.[35] In physically taking over the street or square, loud, costumed, sometimes pyrotechnic-clad participants (comprising '*los no binaries, compas trans, putas y toda cuerpa disidente que quisiera ser parte*' / 'the non-binary colleagues, trans friends, whores and any dissident body that wanted to be part'), shout and move as a form of protest.[36] With this reclamation of urban spaces through acts of civil disobedience, Yeguada Latinoamericana unequivocally exposes and reinserts the lived realities of oppressions in the everyday public realm.

Collaborative relationships of resistance

Warch(ée) emerges as a noteworthy illustration of collaboration within architecture and construction professions. Founded in Beirut, Lebanon by architect and activist Anastasia Elrouss, the organisation serves as a social enterprise championing social and gender equality in these fields and promoting mentorship and partnership as a driver for professional success.[37] Utilising the pedagogical philosophy of 'learning by doing', Warch(ée) is dedicated to helping women identify and cultivate their interests and skills in construction. By categorising participants into Builders or

[35] Céire Broderick, 'Insurgent Bodies in Cultural Responses to Reproductive Justice in Chile and Ireland', *Journal of the Society for Latin American Studies*, 42 (2023), p. 51.
[36] Carmela Torres, 'Performance. Chile: Latin American Stud Farm in "State of Rebellion"', *La Izquierda Diario*, 13 November 2019 <https://www.laizquierdadiario.com/Yeguada-Latinoamericana-en-Estado-de-Rebeldia> [accessed 2 November 2023]
[37] 'About Warchée', *Warchee.org* <https://www.warchee.org/about-warchee/> [accessed 02 November 2023]

Future Creators (architects, engineers, landscapers, urban planners) and Artisans or Dream Crafters (painters, blacksmiths, electricians, carpenters, plumbers, tile installers), the platform creates pathways for clear and useful connections to similar practitioners.[38]

The Women's Social Architecture Project in Bangladesh embodies resistance through collaboration as a formalised Oxfam research initiative.[39] This project strategically engaged female architects from the U.K. and Bangladesh in collaboration with Rohingya women and girls, specifically those with a background or interest in social or feminist architecture. Over nine months, the initiative (which is yet to implement further phases) undertook a comprehensive process involving collaborative data collection workshops, concept design creation, detail design development, and stakeholder discussions with the community. The focus on re-siting and redesigning water, sanitation, and hygiene facilities at Cox Bazar refugee camps addressed issues of access, privacy, and respect for women and girls. Rooted in spatial dignity, The Women's Social Architecture Project reflects a collective response to gendered challenges within the camp environment, contributing to transformative spatial practice.

In my own professional career alongside academia, I also have pursued creative discourse around collaborative feminist architectures, particularly in terms of welcome, hospitality, and spatial justice, which reinforces my specific knowledge contribution. One example is through participation in the 2023 Davidson Prize, which sought solutions for 'new kinds of home communities'.[40] For this project, my ongoing academic and activist experience with feminist architectures allowed me to engage theory-based research with an interdisciplinary network of practitioners, including architects (Coffey Architects), urbanists (Soft Cities), an anti-racist homelessness and human rights charity dedicated to supporting refugees and migrants (Positive Action in Housing/ Room for Refugees), a refugee-founded mental health charity (Vanclaron CIC) and videographers (Studio 50Two) to create a proposal for an alternative reception centre model to those the U.K. Home Office currently utilises. Following creative design workshops with

[38] Christele Harrouk, '"Warchée" Demolishes Gender Inequality in the Construction Field', *Arch Daily* <https://www.archdaily.com/941607/warchee-demolishes-gender-inequality-in-the-construction-field> [2 November 2023]
[39] Michelle Farrington, 'Social and feminist design in emergency contexts: The Women's Social Architecture Project, Cox's Bazar, Bangladesh', *Gender & Development*, 27:2 (2019), pp. 295-315.
[40] 'The 2023 Brief', *The Davidson Prize* <https://www.thedavidsonprize.com/the-prize> [accessed 01 November 2023]

individuals in the process of seeking asylum in the U.K., our entry, entitled 'Rights of Passage' – below Figures 3, 4, and 5 – reimagined the Immigration Removal Centre as a series of group-build, co-living developments that involved recently arrived asylum seekers in creating their new, albeit temporary, homes as welcoming, personalised, and vastly different from existing options. It was designed to become a repeatable model of hospitable, co-delivered communities that could roll out across the U.K. to provide new physical and emotional entry into the fabric of British society. This entry was ultimately longlisted for the prize, receiving press recognition and commendation for its collaborative approach.[41]

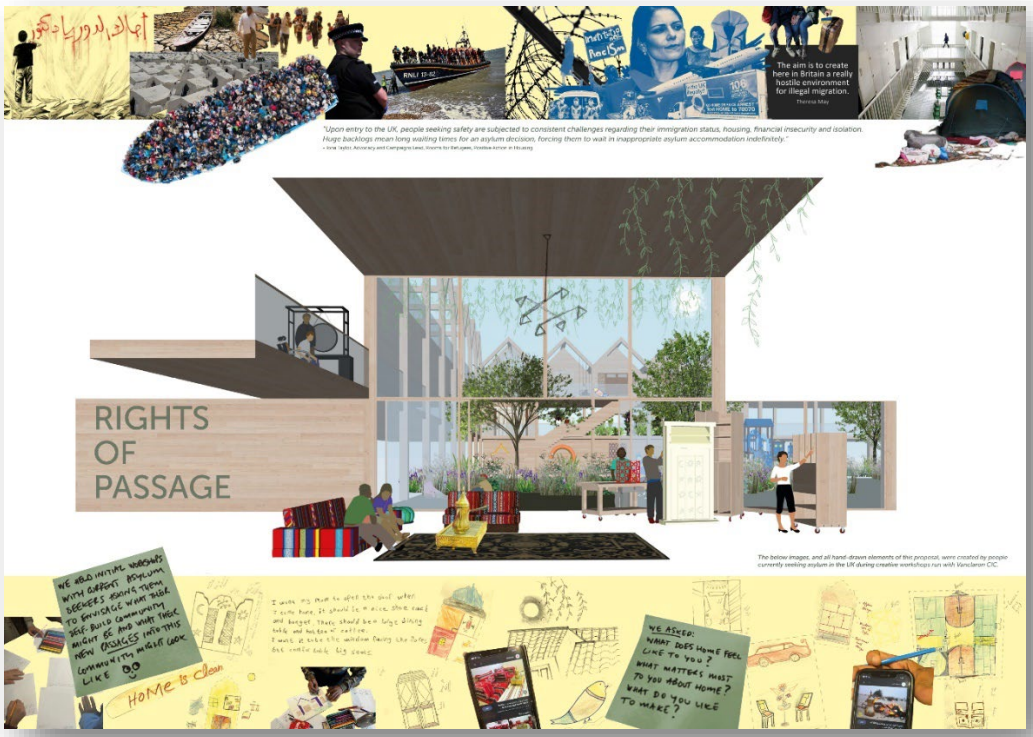

Figure 3: Original image created by Margaret Ravenscroft and Coffey Architects

[41] Casja Carlson, 'Davidson Prize longlist features 16 designs to mitigate homelessness', *Dezeen*, 2 March 2023 <https://www.dezeen.com/2023/03/28/davidson-prize-longlist-designs-mitigate-homelessness/> [accessed 01 November 2023]; Tom Lowe, 'Longlist for this year's Davidson prize revealed', *Building Design*, 28 March 2023 <https://www.bdonline.co.uk/news/longlist-for-this-years-davidson-prize-revealed/5122489.article> [accessed 01 November 2023]

Figure 4: Original image created by Margaret Ravenscroft and Coffey Architects

Figure 5: Original image created by Margaret Ravenscroft and Coffey Architects

What is evident from the above examples, including my own interdisciplinary involvement, is that while there are no clear definitions of feminist architectures, there are key concepts that recur around creative engagement, approaches to challenging power structures and claiming space. What's more, there is a foundational acknowledgment of gendered spatial practices. This refers to the ways in which women and men use and experience space differently. Jane Freedman and Marianne Githens, in particular, write about this reality for forced migrant women under the lens of feminist geography and immigration politics, whereas theorists and practitioners such as the Matrix collective and urbanist Leslie Kern have approached it with a more direct focus on space and place within architecture and urban design.[42] In understanding how gendered spatial practices are shaped by and reinforce existing social structures, particularly those of imperial, colonial, and patriarchal hegemonies, we can begin to understand how policies can be reworked and spaces can be redesigned for more equitable experiences across genders, as well as other intersecting positionalities such as race and citizenship, thus becoming feminist architectures.

A similarly important concept in feminist architectures is the idea that they are made of everyday spaces, as identified as a core concept in the studies above and throughout this thesis. If we are to be concerned with safe, accessible, welcoming, potential-filled places for all, then we must pay attention to the ordinary spaces of everyday life, as these are the geographies where gendered power relations regularly occur. By examining how women use and experience everyday spaces, including within the scope of forced migration, we can identify and challenge how their gendered aspects often manifest as oppressive rather than empowering, and seek to correct them accordingly. Finally, feminist architectures are inherently political, even as doors, rooms, walls, and homes – and can also be public squares, schools, banks, galleries, mosques, skyscrapers, prisons and more. This is because feminist architectures transcend mere physical design; they are engagements, practices, and creative approaches that challenge traditional power structures. Feminist architectures are spatial movements of inclusivity, resistance, dignity, and self-

[42] Jane Freedman, 'Engendering Security at the Borders of Europe: Women Migrants and the Mediterranean "Crisis"', *Journal of Refugee Studies*, 29 (2016), p. 570; Marianne Githens, *Contested Voices: Women immigrants in today's world* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), pp. X, 15; See: Matrix; Kern.

actualisation. And, throughout this thesis, they serve as literary-critical tools. These tools support my interpretive reading strategies for understanding equitable, and responsive approaches to the diverse needs and experiences of women with lived experience of forced migration, either from their inception or by inscription through lived, embodied interaction with them. These feminist architectures of self-construction and spatial determination are principles and concepts that, while not always overtly present within the texts under scrutiny within this thesis, nevertheless, inform the critical readings I conduct throughout it: a feminist practice that constructs its own framework for a newly spatialised engagement with the representation of forced migrant women's experiences, real and imagined.

Contemporary context: Critical landscape, narrative field, and the forced migrant women at stake

Over the last two decades, there has been a rise in the dissemination of literary and filmic texts by and about forced migrants of the so-called 'European migrant crisis', Central America migrant caravan mobilisations and conflict, climate and repression driven migration from across Africa.[43] According to the UNHCR, in 2018 when I began this project, there were an estimated 70.8 million forcibly displaced people and 25.9 million refugees in that year.[44] This number has sadly continued to climb, and now (as the site's most recent update on 24 October 2023) the number of people forcibly displaced is 110 million, with over 36.4 million refugees.[45] Arguably, the inception of the globally recognised World Refugee Day in 2001, and later the U.K.-based Refugee Week which began in 2009, have helped to spark cultural interest in platforming works by and about refugees/forced migrants/ displaced people, however what is clear is that the sheer number of people on the move matters. And from 2015, when an unprecedented 1.3 million people migrated to Europe to request asylum, and onward, there has been a particular surge of textual creative responses, and the interest in stories of sanctuary seeking from publishers and public alike is

[43] 'European migrant crisis' is a problematic but ubiquitous title that places the onus on those being displaced from their homes, rather than the causes of displacement. I use it here to situate this discourse within contemporary context.
[44] 'Global Trends: Forced Displacement in 2018', UNHCR, 12 June 2019 <https://www.unhcr.org/dach/wp-content/uploads/sites/27/2019/06/2019-06-07-Global-Trends-2018.pdf> [accessed 19 October 2023]
[45] 'Refugee Data Finder', UNHCR, last update 24 October 2023 <https://unhcr.org/refugee-statistics/> [accessed 29 October 2023]

clear.[46] In the development of this project I set out to find new avenues for exploring the lives of forced migrant women by thinking differently about this current cultural landscape and the creative texts produced by it.

When my thesis proposal was conceived, it was from within a sparse critical arena. Although a few influential theorical texts were being developed and would be published midway through my work, including *Refugee Imaginaries: Research Across the Humanities* (2020) edited by Emma Cox, Sam Durrant, David Farrier, Lyndsey Stonebridge, and Agnes Woolley; *Departures: An Introduction to Critical Refugee Studies* by Yến Lê Espiritu, Lan Duong, Ma Vang, Victor Bascara, and Khatharya Um (2022) and *Forced Migration in the Feminist Imagination: Transcultural Movements* (2022), by Anna Ball, I originally proposed to introduce a conceptually and critically engaged project that spanned multiple fields as there was not one yet clearly established.[47] With particular attention to literary and filmic contributions by and about forced migrant women and the everyday spaces they inhabit, therefore, I aimed to expand the small yet important body of work that attends to relevant representations by sitting most appropriately within the context of an increasing critical awareness of what can be considered 'refugee humanities', 'refugee literature', 'refugee film' and 'refugee theatre' as focused genres of literary and cultural studies. These fields have been developed by contemporary theorists, led in large part by the editors and contributors to *Refugee Imaginaries*. However, in distinction, my project works with an urgent interdisciplinarity that foregrounds forced migrant women's spatial negotiations, exploring the resulting feminist architectures as outlined above, to offer a new perspective on the stories of those who have been forced from their homes and homelands. With this work, I wanted to make sense of the gendered representations of forced migration that were sometimes hypervisible, sometimes

[46] 'Number of Refugees to Europe Surges to Record 1.3 Million in 2015', *Pew Research Center*, 2 August 2016 <https://www.pewresearch.org/global/2016/08/02/number-of-refugees-to-europe-surges-to-record-1-3-million-in-2015> [29 October 2023]; See also Melani Barlai, Birte Fähnrich, Christina Griessler Markus Rhomberg and Peter Filzmaier, *The Migrant Crisis: European Perspectives and National Discourses* (Zürich: Lit Verlag: 2017)

[47] Emma Cox, Sam Durrant, David Farrier, Lyndsey Stonebridge, and Agnes Woolley, eds, *Refugee Imaginaries: Research Across the Humanities* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2020); Espiritu, Duong, Vang, Bascara, Um, Sharif, and Hatton; Ball.

rendered hidden, and most often incomplete, and I found that with interdisciplinary discourses, this could be possible through the exploration of spatial negotiations.[48]

In recent years, research on how forced migrants are represented in the media and the impact this has on the broader migration narrative and politics of arrival and acceptance certainly has been addressed, and while my work recognises these important cultural studies, it remains distinctly focused on textual-critical analysis of creative works concerned with sanctuary seeking women.[49] Woolley confirms the relevance of this creative focus, noting, 'oscillating between in-visibility and overexposure in the public sphere, forced migrants have an ambivalent relationship to the aesthetic forms that seek to represent them, one which touches on questions of communicability, visibility and ethics'.[50] Through contemporary film and literature, specifically developed during the twenty-first century context previously outlined, therefore, I have sought representations to help paint a more complete picture than media has typically allowed and to reveal more than the standard story arch which consists simply of gendered body being displaced, moving or moved, and resettled in some form. Instead, I have looked to identify narratives, or even just strands of narratives, that allow us to see beyond traditional figurations and typical borders, and as such, have conducted a broad critical cultural review of transcultural and creative acts of representation of forced migration with women at their centre. In doing so, I encountered many texts that fit within the tired approach of representing forced migrants as either suffering or superior. Importantly, however, in this survey, I also identified the prevalence of spatial tropes

[48] As aforementioned, this encompasses interdisciplinary decolonial, postcolonial, and feminist theories, transcultural feminist approaches, architectural and spatial discourse, critical-textual analysis and feminist geography, gender and development, and refugee studies.

[49] For an indicative list of contemporary media analysis of representations of forced migrants/refugees, see: Antxoka Agirre, Maria Ruiz Aranguren, and Maria Jose Cantalapiedra, 'News coverage of immigration detention centres: Dynamics between journalists and social movements', *Revista Latina de Comunicación Social*, 70 (2015), pp. 913–33; Noor Ghazal Aswad, 'Biased neutrality: The symbolic construction of the Syrian refugee in The New York Times', *Critical Studies in Media Communication*, 36:4 (2019), pp. 357–75; Kathleen Beckers and Peter Van Aelst, 'Did the European migrant crisis change news coverage of immigration? A longitudinal analysis of immigration television news and the actors speaking in it', *Mass Communication and Society*, 22:6 (2019), pp. 733–55; Samantha Cooper, Erin Olejniczak, Caroline Lenette, and Charlotte Smedley, 'Media coverage of refugees and asylum seekers in regional Australia: A critical discourse analysis', *Media International Australia*,162:1 (2016), pp. 78–89; Stergios Fotopoulos and Margarita Kaimaklioti, 'Media discourse on the refugee crisis: On what have the Greek, German and British press focused?' *European View*,15:2 (2016), pp. 265–79. Lindsey Blumell and Glenda Cooper have analysed the gendered influence of reporter and migrant in a 2019 paper published in the *International Journal of Communication*. Their research yielded interesting findings around the gatekeeping of journalism, gender bias and influence. Lindsey Blumell and Cooper, Glenda, 'Measuring gender in news representations of refugees and asylum seekers', *International Journal of Communication*, 13 (2019), pp. 4444–64. Likewise, projects such as the 2022 EU-funded *Re:framing Migrants in the European Media* seek to understand, map out and influence how migrants are viewed in the media space. Its aim is that 'newcomers can engage as participants, rather than subjects of public debate.' *Re:framing Migrants in the European Media*, February 2022 - May 2023 <https://reframingmigrants.eu/online-platform/> [accessed 26 October 2023]

[50] Woolley, p. 3.

emerging. Space and place, although not explicitly marked as core themes in the texts reviewed, were undoubtedly essential and enlightening components of the stories of forced migrant women. This is not altogether surprising, however, given what Alison Blunt and Gillian Rose assert in *Writing Women and Space: Colonial and Postcolonial Geographies*, 'Certain political projects construct spaces according to their strategic context and needs'.[51] As aforementioned, the 'political project' of gendered forced migration is undoubtedly spatial, as displacement and sanctuary demand locations to leave and sites to attain.

As identified, the particular architectures that materialised throughout my survey were doors, rooms, walls, and homes. Although other spaces such as courtyards and places of worship also appeared, these spatial tropes were consistent. This is perhaps because they were also unequivocally 'everyday', in the background of narration and visual scene-setting, whilst remaining foregrounded in their significant spatial presence. Blunt and Rose further contend, 'it is important to consider the ways in which different epistemological claims about women's identity produce different interpretations of space itself'.[52] The recurring spatial tropes at hand were both revealed and revealing. Following an extensive cross-genre survey of the film and literature landscape of gendered force migration from the twenty first century, I was led by their emergence to look at what texts do in terms of cultural relevance and through different modes of articulation. I began to understand that the varied creative interpretations of forced migrant women and their negotiations and resistances with those spaces should not be limited by genre, or indeed by author positionality – though in the chapters of this thesis I address how both can produce unlikely and revealing forms of reading and research. For example, while the self-representation of forced migrant women is essential, it is not the only form of representation occurring, and thus informing reception and shaping cultural narrative. Therefore, through my unique critical approach, the texts identified for study in this thesis promote an urgent interdisciplinary and intersectional approach that foregrounds forced migrant women's spatial negotiations above all else. Some of the texts are co-created by forced migrant women; some are directed by people from the global south. Others

[51] Alison Blunt and Gillian Rose, *Writing Women and Space Colonial and Postcolonial Geographies* (Guildford Press, 1994), p. 7.
[52] Ibid., p. 5.

are written by migrants who were not forced but chose to move because of social mobility, or produced by white women in the Global North who, like myself, profess a solidarity and desire to advocate through the arts. They are multiform, spatial, and gendered at their core. The texts are: *The Bogus Woman* by Kay Adshead (2001) – a damning polemic play about the treatment of asylum-seeker set mainly in U.K. detention centres (with some flashback scenes to an unnamed African country); *At Five in the Afternoon* by Samira Makhmalbaf (2003) – a fictional film concerning an internally displaced Afghan woman and her family in the aftermath of the United States toppling the Taliban-ruled Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan; *The Baulkham Hills African Ladies Troupe* by Ros Horin (2016) – a documentary of the making of a play which gives insight to the reception of four forced migrant women from across Africa into Australia; *Exit West* by Moshin Hamid (2017) – a fantastical novel about two people living under war in an invented, composite country and their imaginative escape from it; *MATANGI / MAYA / M.I.A.* by Stephen Loveridge (2018) – a documentary of the unlikely story of a Sri Lankan civil war refugee turned global pop star; *The Girl Who Smiled Beads* by Clemantine Wamariya and Elizabeth Weil (2018) – a collaboratively written memoir that follows a forced migrant girl turn adolescent turn woman from the Rwanda civil war to resettlement in the U.S.; and *Los Lobos* by Samuel Kishi (2019) and *American Dirt* by Jeanine Cummins (2020) – both fictional stories, the former a film and the later a novel, of modern-day mothers fleeing unsafe lives in Mexico for seemingly safer spaces in the U.S.[53]

Amongst an ever-growing list of texts for choice, these stories illustrate the gendered and spatial preoccupations of this thesis with great clarity and cohesiveness as comparatively read works.[54] As signalled in the title, they are all narratives of forced migrant women. This is to say

[53] Note: These titles are listed by date order, not as they are examined per chapter. Adshead, Kay, *The Bogus Woman* (London: Oberon Books, 2001) based on *The Bogus Woman*, dir. L. Goldman, produced by Red Room in association with Mama Quilla at the Bush and Traverse Theatre (2000); *At Five in the Afternoon,* dir. by Samira Makhmalbaf (Makhmalbaf Productions, Bac Films, Wild Bunch, 2003); *The Baulkham Hills African Ladies Troupe* dir. by Ros Horin (Reflex Films, 2016); *Matangi/Maya/M.I.A*., dir. by Stephen Loveridge (Cinereach, 2018); Clemantine Wamariya and Elizabeth Weil, *The Girl Who Smiled Beads* (New York: Penguin Random House, 2018); Moshin Hamid, *Exit West* (UK: Penguin Random House, 2017); *Los Lobos* dir. by Samuel Kishi (Animal de Luz Films, Alebrije Cine y Video, Cebolla Films, DDN Pictures, Eficine, 2019); Jeanine Cummins, *American Dirt* (New York: Flatiron Books, 2020).

[54] An inconclusive but indicative list of relevant film and literature concerning refugees/forced migrants/displaced people includes *We Need New Names* by NoViolet Bulawayo (2013), *Queens of Syria* by Yasmin Fedda (2014), *Signs Preceding The End Of The World* by Yuri Herrera (2015), *Go, Went, Gone* by Jenny Erpenbeck (2015), *Nujeen: One Girl's Incredible Journey from War-torn Syria* by Nujeen Mustafa and Christina Lamb (2016), *Happy End* by Michael Haneke (2017), *Human Flow* by renowned artist and political activist Ai Weiwei (2017), *The Map of Salt and Stars* by Zeyn

that they are concerned with protagonists identified as women, who are or have experienced some form of forced displacement and migration. Across genres including theatre, fictional film, documentary film, fictional novel, and memoir/life narrative, what was most significant was that they illustrated the identified spatial tropes in equally remarkable and routine ways. Though diverse in formal approaches, each text challenges the notion that space is neutral for the women at its centre, and the multiplicity of genres illustrates the openness of the spatial and its lived practices. Doorways manifest as liminal, not limiting, spaces between agency and repression, safety, and danger. Rooms proved similarly dichotomising, particularly in terms of the politics of hospitality for sanctuary seeking women. A clearly divisive symbol of colonial and patriarchal anti-migration measures, walls in these texts emerged as simultaneously oppressive and full of opportunity. Finally, homes are represented as sometimes physically unreachable, but also always emotionally available through creative forms of homemaking. Throughout the course of analysis, the nuances of gendered displacement and resilient engagement as revealed through feminist architectures in varied topographies offer an urgently new and interdisciplinary perspective on the stories of those very figures.

Shifting then to a focus on the project's gendered concern, I confirm from the title of this thesis to its concluding sentence, this work is about, and therefore uses the term, 'women'. I defer to Sara Ahmed in *Living a Feminist Life* for further explanation:

> What do I mean by women here? I am referring to all those who travel under the sign women. No feminism is worthy of its name would use the sexist idea 'women born as women' to create the edges of feminist community, to render trans women 'not women' or 'not born women' or into men.[55]

In applying a truly intersectional and decolonial feminist approach to this research, I subscribe to Ahmed's distinction, even though the eight texts examined here all portray cisgender women.[56]

Joukhadar (2018), *Butterfly: From Refugee to Olympian, My Story of Rescue, Hope and Triumph* by Yusra Mardini (2018) and its film adaptation *The Swimmers* directed by Sally El Hosaini (2022), *No Friend But the Mountains* by Behrouz Boochani (2018) and a documentary set on the same government managed detention centre, *Manus* (2019), *For Sama* (2019), *The Ungrateful Refugee: What Immigrants Never Tell You* by Dina Nayeri (2019), *His House* by Remi Weeks (2020), *Limbo* (2020) and *Flee* (2021) alongside many others. See Bibliography for full citations.

[55] Sara Ahmed, *Living a Feminist Life* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2017), p. 14.

[56] I draw further on Espiritu and Duong who explain, 'feminist not in the sense of focusing on women's lives but in the sense of paying attention to the intersection between private grief and public commemoration; of listening for unsaid things by relying on other realms, such as feelings and emotions; and of looking for the hidden political forces within the site of intimate domestic and familial interaction.' Yến Lê Espiritu and Lan Duong, 'Feminist Refugee Epistemology: Reading Displacement in Vietnamese and Syrian Refugee Art', *Signs*, 43:3 (2018), pp. 610-11.

Certainly, there are some moments of queer reflection, as with Moshin Hamid's protagonist Nadia in *Exit West*.[57] Although I encountered a few explicitly queer texts during the course of my research—such as *The Map of Salt and Stars* by Zeyn Joukhadar and *Under the Udala Trees* by Chinelo Okparanta—I found none appropriate to explore for this research, particularly in terms of the sociospatial content, and I acknowledge that this lack of representation is problematic.[58] What's more, as a white cisgendered woman living in the Global North, my own intersectional solidarities feel insufficient with the real and represented women of this project. I recognise that the reality of intersectional feminism means my awareness is always partial and always biased with my own lived experience of race, class, gender, sexuality and citizenship, and that my knowledge is primarily of anglophone feminisms, also situated in the Global North.[59] Nevertheless, I am committed to a deeply personal form of feminism that seeks to expand the important, interdisciplinary issues at hand through a combination of academic and activist efforts. A longstanding concern of mine, this dedication was identified more than a decade ago when I earned my MA in Aesthetics of Kinship and Community from Birkbeck, University of London. The research programme focused on the artistic representation of human bonds and belongings in film, literature, photography, fine art, architecture, and other creative forms, and my unique work looked at the gender and identity politics of queer Black artist Janelle Monáe. In my thesis entitled *Mapping the Lines of Flight from Harlem to Metropolis: How the Harlem Renaissance and Janelle Monáe (Re)present Post-Communities*, I explored how creativity from the margins of racialised and gendered communities in the U.S. has long-refused standard subjection, instead constructing bottom-up subversion of stagnant power relations. This work's lasting impact has guided my academic and activist commitments, which includes a career in the field of architecture, in which my preoccupations with spatial equity and feminist architectures have driven the strategic communications, outreach, and engagement efforts and social priorities of an award-winning practice. What's more, this background sparked my initial interest in serving as a host to an Iraqi

[57] See Chapter One: The Door: 'Navigating Gendered Frameworks of Liminality and Transition in Exit West by Moshin Hamid and At Five in the Afternoon by Samira Makhmalbaf', subsection 'She steps through first: The feminist possibilities of the doorway in Exit West'.
[58] Zeyn Joukhadar, *The Map of Salt and Stars* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 2018); Chinelo Okparanta, *Under the Udala Trees* (Boston, Massachusetts: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2015).
[59] Donna Haraway, 'Situated Knowledges: The Science Question in Feminism and the Privilege of Partial Perspective', *Feminist Studies,* 14:3 (1988), pp. 575–99.

Kurdish asylum seeker through the Rooms for Refugee hosting programme.[60] Alongside my own experience as a (non-forced) migrant from the U.S. to the U.K., this involvement has led to an even more intimate commitment to exploring migration in varied and creative ways. I, therefore, remain dedicated to working in solidarity with those whose experience I do not fully understand, and, in this way, I aim to contribute to a more empathetic, comprehensive, and effective approach to addressing intersectional inequalities across fields.

Transitioning from my personal commitment to understanding migration through varied perspectives, I recognise that such an approach is crucial in addressing the inadequacies within discourses concerning forced migration. Indeed, across these discussions, a gender-specific focus has remained largely undeveloped, perpetuating dangerous oversimplifications and statistical erasures that fail to capture the varied experiences of forced migrant women in particular. The failure by media, academic, and creative spheres to appropriately recognise and represent forced migrant women as agentic and significant, despite a 50/50 male-female gender split among those seeking sanctuary according to the UNHCR, is an echo of political and humanitarian trends.[61] Elsewhere, I have written about the dangerous categorising exclusions that subsume women into catch-all categories to mark vulnerability, particular in terms of forced migration – See Figure 6 for reference. In 'Staging Presence for Spatial Dignity: Exploring Representations of Refugee Girlhood' for *Girlhood Studies, An Interdisciplinary Journal* issue 'Girls on the Move: Girlhood and Forced Displacement, Migration and (Re)settlement', I explain, 'Statistics overwhelmingly neglect age and gender in terms of forced migration, combining "women and children" (or as Cynthia Enloe identifies in *Bananas, Beaches and Bases: Making Feminist Sense of International Politics,* "indistinguishable womenandchildren [Enloe, 2014: 25]")'[62] Likewise, there is a danger in *over*representing women. In upholding forced migrant women as the ultimate sufferers or

[60] Room for Refugees is a grassroots initiative dedicated to providing temporary housing and support to refugees and asylum seekers in the United Kingdom. The project connects individuals and families who have spare rooms in their homes with refugees in need of a safe place to stay. Hosts volunteer their extra space, offering an environment where refugees can find shelter, support, and a sense of community as they navigate the challenges of displacement. For more information, see: *Rooms for Refugees* <https://www.roomforrefugees.com/> [accessed 9 November 223]
[61] UNHCR, *Women* <https://unhcr.org/uk/what-we-do/how-we-work/safeguarding-individuals/women> [accessed 26 October 2023]
[62] Margaret Ravenscroft, 'Staging Presence for Spatial Dignity: Exploring Representations of Refugee Girlhood', *Girlhood Studies, An Interdisciplinary* Journal, 17(1), p. 22; Cynthia Enloe, *Bananas, Beaches and Bases: Making Feminist Sense of International Politics*, 2nd edn (Berkeley, California: University of California Press, 2014), p. 25.

deserving victims, it renders them devoid of agency and perpetuates a narrative that diminishes their resilience, obscuring the diverse experiences and strengths that characterise their lifeworlds. As Heather L. Johnson writes in 'Click to Donate: Visual Images, Constructing Victims and Imagining the Female Refugee', 'It is significant that, as the refugee has been racialised and victimised, she has also been feminised'.[63]

Figure 6: Image of Little Amal from 'Staging Presence for Spatial Dignity: Exploring Representations of Refugee Girlhood'. © Margaret Ravenscroft. 23rd October 2023 [64]

At best a tactical move to elicit support, at worst an ignorant overlooking of the presence of real, gendered people, eliding data about women, girls or whoever, ignores the specific challenges faced, and solidarities – specifically in terms of support and services – needed. In *The Feminist Politics of Refugee Migration* Jennifer Hyndman offers a slightly dated but still indicative snapshot: 'Interestingly, since the inception of the *Journal of Refugee Studies* in 1988 until March 2009, 497 articles were published in the journal. Of these, 45 – or just under 10% – contained references to either feminism, feminist, gender or women in the abstract or title'.[65] Jane Freedman further makes the point in her groundbreaking *Gendering the International Asylum and Refugee Debate*,

[63] Heather L. Johnson, 'Click to Donate: Visual Images, Constructing Victims and Imagining the Female Refugee', *Third World Quarterly*, 32:6 (2011).
[64] Margaret Ravenscroft, *Little Amal at St. Paul's Cathedral*, London, 23rd October 2023.
[65] Hyndman, p. 454.

suggesting one reason 'women's agency and voice' have been ignored is due to 'a lack of interest on the part of governments…in issues concerning gender in the asylum process'.[66] Although gender-consciousness is increasingly present in governmental and non-governmental spheres with the increased adoption of gender mainstreaming strategies and tactics, complete, nuanced approaches remain insufficient.[67]

From vulnerable figurations on NGO funding calls to the ultimate image of deserving refugee, therefore, the representations of forced migrant women often fall short of the gendered realities faced by half the migrating population.[68] Mothers, in particular, have become shortcut symbols: as Rita Manchanda writes in 'Gender Conflict and Displacement Contesting "Infantilisation" of Forced Migrant Women', 'The contemporary image of the forcibly displaced, the refugee and the internally displaced, fleeing life and livelihood threatening situations, is a woman usually with small children clinging to her'.[69] See, for example, below Figure 7.

[66] Jane Freedman, *Gendering the International Asylum and Refugee Debate*, 2nd edn (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), p. 23.
[67] Gender mainstreaming is a strategy to improve gender equality by integrating a gender perspective into the design, implementation, monitoring, and evaluation of policies, programmes, and projects across all sectors and at all levels. The goal of gender mainstreaming is to ensure that the needs, priorities, and experiences of both all genders are considered and addressed in all areas of decision-making and development. For more on gender mainstreaming, see: Rebecca Dingo, 'Gender Mainstreaming' in *Networking Arguments: Rhetoric, Transnational Feminism, and Public Policy Writing* (University of Pittsburgh Press: 2012), pp. 28–66.
[68] See, for example: Johnson.; Alice Szczepanikova, 'Performing refugeeness in the Czech Republic: Gendered depoliticisation through NGO assistance', *Gender, Place & Culture*, 17:4 (2010), pp. 461-77; Ellen Sweeney and Sonja Killoran-McKibbin, 'Selling Pink: Feminizing the Non-Profit Industrial Complex from Ribbons to Lemonaid', *Women's Studies*, 45:5 (2016), pp. 457-74; Laura Briggs, 'Mother, child, race, nation: The visual iconography of rescue and the politics of transnational and transracial adoption', *Gender and History*, 15:2 (2003), pp. 179–200; Augusta C. del Zotto, 'Weeping women, wringing hands: How the mainstream media stereotyped women's experiences in Kosovo', *Journal of Gender Studies*, 11:2 (2002), pp. 141–50.
[69] Rita Manchanda, 'Gender Conflict and Displacement: Contesting "Infantilisation" of Forced Migrant Women', *Economic and Political Weekly*, 39:37 (2004), p. 4791.

Figure 7: The above image is the header for a news article by the United Nations Population Fund entitled '10 things you should know about women & the world's humanitarian crises'. In this article, nine of eleven photos used to represent 'the world's human humanitarian crises' use the image of a woman or multiple women, and seven evoke maternity or motherhood. © UNFPA/Sawiche Wamunza [70]

As this, and other research shows, on one hand, mothers continually are used to represent the most vulnerable of sanctuary seekers, in need of support, fundraising, and empathy. On the other, they are seen as welfare/benefit cheats who are abusing systems of safety.[71] Manchanda elaborates,

> The woman refugee/ IDP represents the epitome of the marginalisation and the disenfranchisement of the dislocated. Her identity and her individuality are collapsed into the homogeneous category of 'victim' and community, devoid of agency, unable and incapable of representing herself, powerless and superfluous… Indeed the dyad of women and children in the dominant statistical discourse of forcibly displaced persons of UNHCR and the humanitarian agencies reinforces the configuration of women IDPs/refugees as victims and deems them as devoid of the possibility of agency.[72]

It is this lack of agency that my work seeks to reinstate, by revealing the possibilities of their representations when removed from 'collapsed' figuration and instead revisiting their stories with an attention to sociospatial context.

Importantly, along my research journey I discovered an impactful article in *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society* by Yến Lê Espiritu and Lan Duong entitled 'Feminist Refugee Epistemology: Reading Displacement in Vietnamese and Syrian Refugee Art'.[73] While this

[70] Sawiche Wamunza, '10 things you should know about women & the world's humanitarian crises', UNFPA.org, photograph, 23 May 2016 <https://www.unfpa.org/news/10-things-you-should-know-about-women-world%E2%80%99s-humanitarian-crises> [accessed 29 October 2023]
[71] This is discussed in greater length in Chapter Three: The Wall: Forced migrant women's bodies at and as borders in American Dirt by Jeanine Cummins and Los Lobos by Samuel Kishi, see Catherine Powell, 'Race, Gender, and Nation in an Age of Shifting Borders: The Unstable Prisms of Motherhood and Masculinity', *UCLA Journal of International Law and Foreign Affairs*, 24:1 (2020), p. 135.
[72] Manchanda, p. 4791.
[73] Espiritu and Duong.

research formed part of the developing field of Critical Refugee Studies that Espiritu and her colleagues would later formalise in *Departures*, as a starting point, it introduced the titular idea of a 'feminist refugee epistemology'.[74] This is a reconceptualisation of 'displacement as being not only about social disorder and interruption but also about social reproduction and innovation'.[75] Using Nadera Shalhoub Kevorkian's words, the authors explain that the thinking 'draws our awareness to routine, intimate and private sites where power is both reproduced and contested'.[76] Further, a feminist refugee epistemology 'also acknowledges the multiplicity and openness of the spatial (Massey 2005, 88) and the importance of considering not only the geometry of space but also its lived practices (Lefebvre 1992)'.[77] While the concept is concerned primarily with visual art by 'ordinary' (non-famous, 'not publicised') women refugees displaced principally by war, its ontological approach affirms my focus on everyday spaces, on gendered experiences of forced migration, and on cultural productions in some form.[78] While there is substantive work that addresses contemporary texts, such as *Contemporary Asylum Narratives: Representing Refugees in the Twenty-First Century* by Agnes Woolley and *Narratives of Forced Mobility and Displacement in Contemporary Literature and Culture* by Roger Bromley, and the otherwise comprehensive *Refugee Imaginaries*, they remain, for the most part, limited in attention to gender.[79] The later includes just one lone chapter that works with gendered experiences of forced migration. Sudeep Dasgupta's 'Sexual and Gender-Based Asylum and the Queering of Global Space: Reading Desire, Writing Identity and the Unconventionality of the Law' turns to the 'politics of sexual asylum' to understand the legal implications around asylum seeking while queer.[80] An important exploration, it is a narrow representation of the role of gender in the refugee humanities in an otherwise comprehensive critical survey. Therefore, it remains, with the exception of this work and Ball's

[74] See footnote 15.
[75] Espiritu and Duong, p. 588; They specifically qualify 'war-based displacement', though my work considers various causes as similarly viewed.
[76] Ibid., p. 588; See: Nadera Shalhoub-Kevorkian, *Security Theology, Surveillance, and the Politics of Fear* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), p. 2.
[77] Espiritu and Duong, p. 589.
[78] Ibid., p. 811.
[79] Woolley, 2014; Roger Bromley, *Narratives of Forced Mobility and Displacement in Contemporary Literature and Culture* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2021)
[80] Sudeep Dasgupta, 'Sexual and Gender-Based Asylum and the Queering of Global Space: Reading Desire, Writing Identity and the Un-conventionality of Law', in *Refugee Imaginaries: Research Across the Humanities*, Emma Cox, Sam Durrant, David Farrier, Lyndsey Stonebridge, and Agnes Woolley, eds (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2020), pp.86–102.

Forced Migration in the Feminist Imagination, that gender in the refugee humanities has not been prioritised. Noting this lack of gendered analysis is not so much a critique, however, as the aforementioned analyses have been crucial to developing the broader field. Rather, it is a marking out of the critical context in which this thesis emerges and the discursive gap it seeks to fill.

Building on, rather than disputing, the existing work of the refugee humanities, this thesis thus works with a gendered focus that is derived from the intersecting and well-established fields of post- and decolonial feminism and gender and development studies. It draws on leading cultural theorists such as Gloria Anzaldúa, Sara Ahmed, and Judith Butler, as well as sociological and human geographical research into women's forced migration by scholars working such as Jennifer Hyndman and Jane Freedman in particular, as well as feminist geographers Gillian Rose, Nicky Gregson, and Doreen Massey. Significantly, I also engage with postcolonial theorists like Edward Said, Edward Soja, and Homi Bhabha, exploring their contributions regarding the enduring impacts of colonialism and its social and spatial consequences. However, remaining focused on the spatial experiences and engagements of forced migrant women in contemporary contexts, I reimagine their once revolutionary ideas within decolonial feminist framings. This ultimately allows for a more inclusive understanding of power dynamics and resistance on behalf of forced migrant woman, platforming their represented struggles and successes for self-determination in sanctuary seeking.

Text as spatial structure

Bookended by this introduction and a critical conclusion chapter, the core of this thesis takes the shape of a spatial journey itself, with each chapter crossing into a new space, one ultimately rendered as a feminist architecture through my reading. The sections concern two texts, read comparatively and with a feminist/feminocentric lens, beginning at the threshold of the doorway, journeying into the privacy and enclosure of the room, moving onward to the equally divisive and supportive spatial trope of the wall, and finally, toward an expansive understanding of home. With this structure, this research aims to unpack representations of forced migrant women in those places, to gain a depth of understanding of their complex varied stories.

Chapter 1. The Door: Navigating Gendered Frameworks of Liminality and Transition in *Exit West* by Moshin Hamid and *At Five in the Afternoon* by Samira Makhmalbaf

This initial chapter, concerned with doors and doorways of many kinds, serves itself as an entry into the theoretical discussion of feminist architectures in the everyday lives of forced migrant women. Beginning with the significance of doorways within the context of architectural and literary theory, positioning them as pivotal symbols of passage and transition, this chapter underscores the ways doorways might delineate relationships between spaces and individuals, effectively serving as liminal locations and sociospatial thresholds. Analysing Iranian filmmaker Samira Makhmalbaf's 2001 film *At Five in the Afternoon* and Pakistani-British author Mohsin Hamid's popular 2018 novel *Exit West*, the central argument becomes that doorways, seemingly mundane in their ubiquitous presence and materiality, can reveal sociocultural and gendered significance depending on who interacts with them and in what capacity.

Identifying the transformative potential of the fictional doorways the author and filmmaker offer their women, this chapter portrays the architectural elements as productive threshold or third spaces. The study explores how these seemingly restrictive borders have the potential to instead serve as potent symbols for choice, transition, and agency. The doorway is a space that George Simmel refers to in 'The Bridge and the Door' as where the limited and limitless converge, providing a platform for 'continuous alteration'.[81] The research further draws upon the works of postcolonial theorists such as Edward Soja, Homi Bhabha, and Gloria Anzaldúa to establish this liminal concept of thirdspaces, denoting creative and open-ended sites that exist between dominant and subaltern discourses. This theoretical lens reinforces the idea that identities are not static but fluid, allowing the rejection of binary distinctions. Ultimately, this study underscores the feminist potential in the texts by viewing the doorway as a feminist architecture. It contends that the spatial trope enables a particularly gendered mobility for protagonists Nogreh and Nadia, allowing them to reclaim everyday spaces through alternative topographies for the negotiation and performance of their identities within the context of forced migration.

[81] George Simmel, 'The Bridge and the Door' in *The Domestic Space Reader*, eds. Chiara Briganti and Kathy Mezei (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2012), p. 250.

Chapter 2. The Room: Reading Spatial Hostipitalities in *The Bogus Woman* by Kay Adshead and *The Baulkham Hills African Ladies Troupe* by Ros Horin

Crossing the threshold of the doorway and moving inward, Chapter Two considers the complex spatial dynamics, power relations, and gendered experiences within the context of rooms encountered by forced migrant women. The exploration centres two room-types in particular: those within the Immigration Reception Centres that purport to host, but instead hold and withhold forced migrant women; and rehearsal rooms, which might be spaces of potential but also display disturbing executions of multilayered power. The chapter calls attention to the spatial realities that forced migrant women encounter and the implications of these experiences. It illustrates the power dynamics inherent in the rooms they traverse, ultimately revealing the fine lines of spatial agency that must be negotiated in the quest for sanctuary.

By analysing cultural representations of forced migrant women in seemingly disparate rooms, such as the detention room in Kay Adshead's *The Bogus Woman* and the rehearsal room in Ros Horin's *The Baulkham Hills African Ladies Troupe*, this chapter uncovers the multifaceted roles that the room as an everyday space can play. Initially meant to provide safety, these locations are revealed to be spaces of oppression and hostility due to the demands and dynamics they impose. Drawing attention to the gender-based harassment, violence, and precarious spatial vulnerabilities that forced migrant women face, the work questions the possibility of creating rooms and relationships that genuinely accommodate forced migrant women, considering the inherent power dynamics between hosts and guests, as articulated by Derrida's concept of 'hostipitality' and expresses an urgent need for feminist strategies of more direct hospitality. Ultimately, this work advocates for rooms that reject the double bind of power dynamics in reading the space as a feminist architecture, and thus aiming for mutual benefit and non-hierarchical relationships on behalf of forced migrant women.

Chapter 3. The Wall: Forced Migrant Women's Bodies at and as Borders in *American Dirt* by Jeanine Cummins and *Los Lobos* by Samuel Kishi

The third chapter of this thesis wrestles with the complicated reality of both epic and everyday walls in the lives of forced migrant women. This is a critical exploration of the role of walls as both physical structures and symbolic representations within the context of displacement, the gendered

experience of them and, specific to the texts considered here, motherhood as a relevant politic. Considering how history, context, politics, and identity infuse meaning into these spatial elements, this inquiry turns to the 2018 novel *American Dirt* by Jeanine Cummins and the 2019 film *Los Lobos* by Samuel Kishi, both of which illustrate the impact of walls on women fleeing Mexico for the U.S.

Written during a period of heightened political action against undocumented migrants on the Mexico-U.S. border, this chapter highlights specific, gender-based challenges that forced migrant women face. It also considers the physical and invisible walls they confront and the feminist architectures they construct along the way. The adoption of the concept of 'feminist border rhetorics', as outlined by Minu Basnet, serves as a critical framework to scrutinise how walls go beyond mere physical barriers and take on complex sociospatial meanings.[82] The narratives of protagonists Lydia and Lucia reveal that walls are not only oppressive but can also serve as sites of resilience and empowerment for women seeking sanctuary. Analysing their stories draws attention to the dichotomy of walls, as they symbolise security and danger simultaneously; this dual role prompts a critical question regarding who these walls truly safeguard. Ultimately, in emphasising the embodied and creative interventions, relationships with other women and motherhood as an inherently political position, the work highlights the potential for feminist architectures of reclamation and resilience to emerge within the confines of walls.

Chapter 4. The Home: Making Space with Contrapuntal Feminism in *MATANGI / MAYA / M.I.A.* by Stephen Loveridge and *The Girl Who Smiled Beads* by Clemantine Wamariya and Elizabeth Weil

Finally, in the concluding chapter, this thesis moves to perhaps the most contested site of all for forced migrant women: the home. It explores the dialectics between the acts of leaving, or indeed being forced from, one's homeland and the urgent need to construct a new sense of self without a home in which to do so. This chapter highlights that home, often subjected to feminist scrutiny in relation to issues of work, consumption, design, and tenure, takes on new significance when examined in the context of complex representations of real-life forced migrant women. It does so

[82] Minu Basnet, 'Envisioning Feminist Border Rhetorics Through the Twenty-First Century Domestic Workers' Movement', *Women's Studies in Communications*, 42:2 (2019), p.116.

through textual critical exploration of domestic spaces and self-construction in the life narratives in the feature-length documentary *MATANGI / MAYA / M.I.A.* by Stephen Loveridge, which offers a vivid portrayal of Mathangi 'M.I.A.' Arulpragasam, and in *The Girl Who Smiled Beads* by Clemantine Wamariya, a Rwandan genocide survivor and human rights advocate (written with co-author Elizabeth Weil). Specifically, this study uncovers the ways in which these women construct and negotiate their identities within the material domestic sphere and introduces the concept of 'contrapuntal feminism' to render the often hidden, ignored, or co-opted narratives more visible. Adapted from postcolonial theorist Edward Said's theory of contrapuntal reading, this idea allows for harmonious yet independent actions within postcolonial selves.

In identifying concepts of creative homemaking within feminist contrapuntal readings of *MATANGI / MAYA / M.I.A*. and *The Girl Who Smiled Beads*, this chapter ultimately aims to reveal how these protagonists harmoniously build spaces and selves in navigating the challenges and realities of forced migration. The outcome is a feminist potential found in the feminist architectures of the home that redefines it as a space transcending traditional and confining notions of fixed female identity. Instead, analysis here showcases the diverse sociospatial experiences of home, a site of self-creation and a truly self-built feminist architecture as Anzaldúa intended.

'Freedom is a place'

As I close this introduction to open the rest of the thesis, I recognise the larger sociopolitical landscape within which this work sits. Though I write of forced migrant women, and do believe they are uniquely mis- and underrepresented, the reality is that forced migrants, regardless of gender or specific asylum status, face grim spatial realities. As noted earlier, since I began writing this thesis in 2018, there has been a 55% increase in the number of forcibly displaced people around the world.[83] In the U.K., where I live and have conducted this research, there have been five home secretaries in as many years. The political turmoil caused by the instability of a position meant to shape and implement thoughtful and viable policies around immigration has had stagging effects on forced migrants seeking asylum here. The results are not hypothetical, rather they are

[83] 'Global Trends: Forced Displacement in 2018'.

visceral. They have emerged as 'rehoming' tactics that send asylum seekers to live on offshore barges, only to be evacuated over the discovery of contagious, life-threatening bacteria.[84] They are also threats by the government in power to fly asylum seekers to Rwanda and ban their return, threats the U.K.'s highest court has since determined would be a 'human rights breach' if enacted.[85] In the U.S. where I grew up, the landscape is no better. In response to the ongoing arrival of Central and South American asylum seekers in caravans via Mexico, 'migrant bussing' is taking place across the country, in which state governments are shifting people to shift responsibility.[86] With no end in sight, these forced migrants remain in a state of errant transition and prolonged danger. The denial of a place of sanctuary, of a safe place to live, is the outright denial of human rights. In her essays on *Abolition Geography*, prison abolitionist and scholar Ruth Wilson Gilmore claimed, 'freedom is a place', an 'infrastructure of feeling'.[87] The idea is that true sanctuary is both an abstract concept and a tangible and rooted reality that must be actively constructed and maintained within the social and physical spaces we inhabit. This perspective underscores the necessity of transforming oppressive structures and creating new spaces where all can thrive and exercise agency. It is why I understand this work as so relevant to our contemporary context and any equitable way forward from it.

[84]William Wallis, 'Asylum seekers evacuated from U.K. barge over legionnaires' disease fears', *Financial Times*, 11 August 2023 <https://www.ft.com/content/dd8469d3-2119-4b11-94f8-431287d286fa> [16 November 2023]
[85] Memorandum of Understanding between the government of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland and the government of the Republic of Rwanda for the provision of an asylum partnership arrangement', Gov.uk, Home Office, 13 April 2022 <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/memorandum-of-understanding-mou-between-the-uk-and-rwanda/memorandum-of-understanding-between-the-government-of-the-united-kingdom-of-great-britain-and-northern-ireland-and-the-government-of-the-republic-of-r> [accessed 16 November 2023]; Dominic Casciani and Sean Seddon, 'Supreme Court rules Rwanda asylum policy unlawful', BBC.co.uk, 15 November 2023 <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-67423745> [accessed 16 November 2023]
[86] Miriam Jordan, 'G.O.P. Governors Cause Havoc by Busing Migrants to East Coast', *New York Times*, 4 August 2022 <https://www.nytimes.com/2022/08/04/us/migrants-buses-washington-texas.html> [accessed 16 November 2023]
[87] Ruth Wilson Gilmore, *Abolition Geography: Essays Towards Liberation* (New York: Verso Books, 2022), pp. 6, 489.

CHAPTER ONE

The Door: Navigating Gendered Frameworks of Liminality and Transition in *Exit West* by Moshin Hamid and *At Five in the Afternoon* by Samira Makhmalbaf

> If one were to give an account of all the doors one has closed and opened, of all the doors one would like to re-open, one would have to tell the story of one's entire life.
>
> - Gaston Bachelard, *The Poetics of Space*, 1957[88]

In architectural and literary theory, doorways serve as physical and metaphorical possibilities of passage.[89] They distinguish spaces inside, outside and through, and delineate the relationships between and experiences of places. Doors are commonplace elements that connect and separate, everyday border sites of inbetweenness. On their own, doors are materially innocuous, but as this chapter will reveal, they can become charged, sociospatial structures, particularly depending on who is identified in and among them, and why. Among a multitude of alternative dichotomies, doorways may expose boundaries between private and public life, places of division and equality, sites of resistance and ambivalence. They thus articulate conditions of liminality and of transition, marking wider social experiences and reminding us of the ways in which the act of opening, passing through or closing a door is always a loaded experience for the physical – and inherently sexed and gendered – body undertaking that act.

Acknowledging doorways as sites of spatial phenomena in many forms, this initial chapter focuses on their presence in two contemporary fictional narratives of women's forced migration. It looks in depth at Iranian filmmaker Samira Makhmalbaf's 2003 critically acclaimed *At Five in the Afternoon* and Pakistani British novelist Moshin Hamid's 2017 Booker-prize shortlisted *Exit*

[88] Gaston Bachelard, *The Poetics of Space* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1969), p. 224.
[89] Throughout this chapter, I use door, doorway and doorframe interchangeably. The focus is on the architectural element as a whole and I will differentiate clearly when necessary.

West.[90] Occupying diverse contexts in terms of authorship, genre, geography and time, protagonists Nogreh and Nadia are nevertheless connected through their negotiations of doorways amidst displacement. By engaging with these tangible, everyday thresholds throughout circumstances of forced migration, both women perform identity in ways that are highly gendered, negotiating tensions between tradition and modernity, submission and subversion, safety and danger. In identifying such, this work highlights the comprehensive and revelatory strength of engendered and spatialised readings of forced migration.

In their respective texts, Makhmalbaf and Hamid employ the symbol of the door as a recurrent site for liminal sociospatial experience. They engage it as an everyday borderspace that facilitates passage. Importantly, in both texts, the significance lies not with the door itself, even though this trope does recur in further narratives of contemporary forced migration. For example, in Yuri Herrera's *Signs Proceeding the End of the World*, protagonist Makina is written as a threshold herself. She is, 'the door, not the one who walks through it', writes Herrera.[91] Sent from Mexico by her mother to find her brother who went to the United States in search of land and money, Makina becomes the liminal space between the two worlds and their embodiment of tradition and modernity, poverty and wealth, contentment and ambition. Another example is found in Terry Farish's *The Good Braider*. [92] For protagonist Viola the door serves as a barrier to the 'real world' in which she must face the realities of war and its consequences. While still in her home in Sudan, she often stands at the door of the courtyard to listen to the adults' gossip, in one graphic instance it was about a bombing at the school. And later, when she is living in Portland, as she confronts her teacher about her rape experience, the teacher asks if she wants the door open for a feeling of safety, but Viola finds that closed is more protective. Finally, for broader resonance, there is work by performance and multimedia artist Richard Lou. In 1998, Lou installed a freestanding door hinged on a frame on the border of Mexico and the United States, a few miles from the Tijuana International Airport. The artwork, entitled 'Border Door', serves as a socio-political statement of hospitality, dignity and transformation. In 'Border Consciousness and Artivist

[90] Makhmalbaf; Hamid.
[91] Yuri Herrera, *Signs Proceeding the End of the World* (Sheffield: And Other Stories, 2015), p. 19.
[92] Terry Farish, *The Good Braider* (Las Vegas: Amazon Publishing, Skyscape, 2012), pp. 29, 183.

Aesthetics: Richard Lou's Performance and Multimedia Artwork', Gisela Latorre explains, 'Aside from providing a symbolic portal into a dignified existence in the United States, the "Border Door" also transformed the space of the border itself thus disrupting the desolate and inhospitable environment of the region'. [93] Here, the phenomenological impact of the door affects/transforms the personal, visual and spatial experiences of the border. On both a metaphorical and practical level, the door turns the border into a welcoming site. The barren no-man's land is traditionally inhospitable to all who pass through seeking sanctuary, but Lou's art transforms the space to a destination. In *At Five in the Afternoon* and *Exit West*, focus is on the forced migrant woman and her specific, gendered, and agentic response to the architecture. 'Space defines people in it, (and in turn) people define space,' Shirley Ardener argues in *The Partition of Space*.[94] This 'mutual dependency' brings in a phenomenological aspect, whereby the experience is constructed in the interplay between physical built space, the physical encounters of the people within it, and the emotional response engendered between the two.[95] As such, this work considers the extent to which doorways reveal, or indeed frame, the represented experiences of two forced migrant women. They allow us to consider the processes of transition, passage, and precarity for identities in the narrative realm.

In both *At Five in the Afternoon* and *Exit West*, the doorway is an everyday space that appears in unassuming sites amidst extraordinary geopolitical circumstances of displacement. Seemingly, the doorway, as metaphorical and/or physical manifestation, would operate as yet another restrictive border for Nogreh and Nadia. Through nuanced analysis, however, this work reveals that at times it instead creates a productive threshold space and ultimately serves as a potent symbol for locating choice, transition and, by implication, agency, for the forced migrant protagonists. As Simmel writes,

> The door becomes a symbol for the threshold on which humans always stand or can stand… the door is the line of demarcation where the limited and limitless meet, but not in

[93] Gisela Latorre, 'Border Consciousness and Activist Aesthetics: Richard Lou's Performance and Multimedia Artwork' in *American Studies Journal*, 57 (2012)
[94] Shirley Ardener, 'The Partition of Space', *Intimus: Interior Design Theory Reader* (UK: John Wiley & Sons, 2006), p. 17.
[95] Ibid.

> the dead geometrical form of merely a partition wall, but rather as a permanent possibility of continuous alteration.[96]

Here, Simmel confirms the banal doorway may be understood as a uniquely transformative liminal, not limiting, space. Drawing then, on postcolonial theorists Edward Soja, Homi Bhabha, and Gloria Anzaldúa, doorways resonate as 'thirdspaces', identified by Bhabha as 'creative space that lies between the discourse or position of the ruling subject and the discourse or position of the subaltern subject'.[97] Urban geographer Soja furthers the definition, explaining that thirdspaces are an 'open ended set of defining moments'.[98] For Nogreh and Nadia, this suggests their identities are not fixed as any one essentialised version of a forced migrant. The symbol of the doorway, rather, allows Makhmalbaf and Hamid to reject the binaries of safe or unsafe, history or progress, success or failure, by providing a unique threshold in which the protagonists can move fluidly – Simmel's 'continuous alternation'.[99] In *Strange Encounters: Embodied Others in Post-coloniality*, Sara Ahmed likewise maintains, 'Spaces are claimed, or "owned", not so much by inhabiting what is already there, but by moving within, or passing through, different spaces which are only given value as places (with boundaries) through the movement of "passing through" itself'.[100] In these texts then, doorways may be considered feminist architectures as they facilitate a specifically gendered mobility for Nogreh and Nadia as they move through them. The everyday thresholds provide alternative spatial arenas for the women to perform, relate and negotiate forced migration, and for the texts' audiences to witness them doing so.

Finding thirdspaces in the thresholds of *At Five in the Afternoon*

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[96] Simmel, p. 250.
[97] 'Third Space' in *A Dictionary of Critical Theory* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010) <https://www.oxfordreference.com/display/10.1093/oi/authority.20110803103943993;jsessionid=211E15002D73D181FC6EF1AF08305AA1> [accessed 18 August 2023]
[98] Edward Soja, *Thirdspace: Journey to Los Angeles and Other Real- and-Imagined Places* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1996), p. 260; Postcolonial and post-structural literary critic Homi Bhabha further discusses the importance of thirdspace in *The Location of Culture*, noting 'What is theoretically innovative, and politically crucial, is the need to think beyond narratives of originary and initial subjectivities and to focus on those moments or processes that are produced in the articulation of cultural differences. These "in-between" spaces provide the terrain for elaborating strategies of selfhood – singular or communal that initiates new signs of identity, and innovative sites of collaboration and contestation, in the act of defining the idea of society itself.' Homi K. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (London: Routledge, 1994) pp. 1-2. See also Anzaldúa's *Borderlands/ Frontera, The New Mestiza* (1987) and Adela C. Licona, '(B)Orderlands' Rhetorics and Representations: The Transformative Potential of Feminist Third-Space Scholarship and Zines', NWSA Journal, 17:2 (2005), pp. 104–29.
[99] Simmel, p. 250.
[100] Sara Ahmed, *Strange Encounters: Embodied Others in Post-coloniality* (London: Routledge, 2000), p. 32.

At Five in the Afternoon, the third film from prodigious Iranian writer-director Samira Makhmalbaf, follows ambitious and earnest protagonist Nogreh as she moves through doorways in the ruins of U.S.-occupied Kabul, Afghanistan. Set in 2001, Afghanistan is emerging from five years of the Taliban's fundamentalist rule and thrust straight into to post-9/11 occupation.[101] Intending to bring liberation from the Taliban's archaic and aggressive territorial and social control, Western forces' execution of Operation Enduring Freedom in 2001 instead served to put into place new forms of oppression and displacement, specifically for Afghan women.[102] This display of imperialist feminism, the idea that the civilised West might save the 'helpless' women of the East, proved far more damaging than redemptive, indeed illustrated here in Nogreh's own displacement and disenfranchisement.[103] Through her characterisation and cinematography, Makhmalbaf counters these realities with a narrative that addresses the effects of oppressive religious, colonial, and patriarchal power structures, which were, and continue to be now, harmful to women. By highlighting Nogreh's position physical and metaphorical representations of doorways, Makhmalbaf not only showcases, but also engages with and responds to the myriad gendered oppressions suffered by Afghan women at the hands of the Taliban and Western occupation.

It is perhaps unsurprising Makhmalbaf is preoccupied with the threshold of the door, as she herself sits on the threshold of the Global East and West, as well as tensions of hegemonic and progressive powers. Her own feminist vision emerges from an ability to navigate transcultural, patriarchal structures in her own life and subsequently through fiction by the exposing nature of her films. The eldest daughter of post-revolutionary cinema icon Moshen Makhmalbaf, Samira trained under him from an early age as a member of the family's privately-owned film production

[101] Zachary Laub, 'The Taliban in Afghanistan', Council on Foreign Relations, 4 July 2014 <https://www.cfr.org/backgrounder/taliban-afghanistan>, [accessed 08 December 2022]; On 15 August 2021, the Taliban retook control of the government in Afghanistan, ousting the Western-backed Islamic Republic. At the time of writing (20 August 2023), they remain in power.

[102] According to the Council on Foreign Relations, the Taliban's rule from 1996 – 2001 included archaic and aggressive territorial and social control. 'The regime neglected social services and other basic state functions' and its Ministry for the Promotion of Virtue and Prevention of Vice enforced strict gendered policies such as requiring women to wear the full burqa or chadri, prohibiting them from work and school and indeed from holding any post of representation within government. Laub, 2014. Gendered oppressions have resurfaced in their present day rule, despite an early promise that women would have greater rights. *UN Women*, 'In focus: Women in Afghanistan one year after the Taliban takeover', 15 August 2022 <https://www.unwomen.org/en/news-stories/in-focus/2022/08/in-focus-women-in-afghanistan-one-year-after-the-taliban-takeover> [accessed 09 December 2022]; Operation Enduring Freedom was the U.S.-led and British-baked series of air strikes and combat in 2001 that ultimately dismantled the Taliban's stronghold. For more, see Elaneh Rostami-Povey, *Afghan Women: Identity and Invasion* (London: Zed Books, 2007)

[103] See Carol A. Stabile and Deepa Kumar, 'Unveiling imperialism: media, gender and the war on Afghanistan', *Media, Culture & Society*, 27:5 (2005), pp. 765–82.

company and school, Makhmalbaf Film House.[104] This uniquely liberal model of parenting and schooling has certainly pushed forward Makhmalbaf's agenda, enabling her in a distinctly privileged position to access and pass through thresholds (of class, country, gendered expectations) which may otherwise be closed to women in similar sociopolitical situations – women like Nogreh.[105] While this mobility allows Makhmalbaf to respond assertively to her oppressive cultural and colonialised backdrop (In Nicole Mowbray's profile of Makhmalbaf in *The New Statesmen* she notes, 'On set, she is ruthless, energetic, even a bully. She knows what she wants, and her directing is ferocious'), Nogreh remains quietly defiant, and even then, only to an extent.[106] If Makhmalbaf's personal passions are driven by 'a natural, instinctive self-belief' that arguably comes from her socioeconomic and cultural capital, Nogreh's personal rebellion is far from privileged. She is first and last a dutiful daughter, remaining veiled in public, reciting texts from the Quran, and ultimately forfeiting her own ambitions to wander the Afghan desert in search of a religious town her father deems superior to the liberated capital.[107]

[104] Moshen Makhmalbaf's involvement in his children's careers, especially Samira Makhmalbaf's meteoric rise, is well documented and often referenced. His own success was bolstered by early career support from the Iranian state. At 17 he was involved in an Islamic militia group fighting against the Shah, and he later become a propagandist filmmaker for Ayatollah Khomeini. Moshen eventually garnered international cultural recognition with 14 feature films. This goodwill has undoubtedly benefited the careers of his family. Hannah McGill, 'Iranian House Style', *Sight and Sound*, April 2004, London <http://old.bfi.org.uk/sightandsound/feature/57> [accessed 27 March 2019]. Note: To differentiate family members, I will refer to Samira Makhmalbaf by her surname, 'Makhmalbaf', and other family members by their first names (i.e., Moshen, Hana).

[105] Makhmalbaf is not unaware of her distinctive circumstances. 'My situation isn't normal in Iran' she said in an interview with *Sight and Sound* magazine. While the family has been accused of nepotism (in fact, Moshen served as executive producer for *At Five in the Afternoon*), they have defended the collaborative working model. When asked about the accusations of nepotism in the same interview, Makhmalbaf noted, 'In a world where everyone is separating, having a family like this is a good model.' McGill, 2004. Notably, these criticisms of preferential treatment also bring with them gendered biases. As, despite her successes, Makhmalbaf is portrayed by Western media as a 'daddy's girl' living in her father's shadow. Fiona Morrow, 'Samira Makhmalbaf: Like father, like daughter', *The Independent,* 23 May 2003 <https://www.independent.co.uk/arts-entertainment/films/features/samira-makhmalbaf-like-father-like-daughter-105716.html> [accessed 27 March 2019]

[106] Nicole Mowbray, 'Samira Makhmalbaf', *The New Statesmen,* 17 October 2005 <https://www.newstatesman.com/node/199938 > [accessed 27 March 2019]; Sally Weale, 'Angry Young Woman', *The Guardian*, 15 December 2000 <https://www.theguardian.com/film/2000/dec/15/iran.culture> [accessed 28 March 2019]

[107] Makhmalbaf, 01:23:23.

Figure 8: Still image from At Five in the Afternoon; *Nogreh, her father, and Leylomah move slowly across barren land searching for a town which has remained fundamentally religious since the fall of the Taliban to U.S. forces* [108]

It is only through the liminal site of doorway that Nogreh steps into another realm, one in which she can step into modern, high-heeled shoes, sneak away to attend a secular girls' school, and dream of becoming president of Afghanistan. Unlike Makhmalbaf, Nogreh's social and spatial movements remain restricted due to forced displacement, social immobility, and gendered oppression.

Liminality characterises every facet of women's lives in this film, and we see it nowhere more clearly than in the physical, set, filmed in-situ in Afghanistan, which serves to mirror the protagonist's own condition and that of her country, too. Never entirely indoors, the scenes always sit in a liminal inside/outside space, among walls and broken entries, plane and palace ruins, but there are no roofs or actual functioning doors. Examples of liminal female experiences in the film include the prominence of the doorway motif in the scenes in which Nogreh's teacher speaks at the progressive school.[109] Notably, she always stands within one, a potential symbol of the country's emergence from the strict Taliban rule against girls' education. We also encounter the doorway as a place of liminality as the poet's elderly mother waits at Nogreh's school and later in the ruined palace.[110] Beyond the doorway, liminality is portrayed in the cyclical and cynical death of Mina,

[108] Ibid.
[109] Makhmalbaf, 00:06:24.
[110] Ibid., 00:32:39; 00:45:38.

Nogreh's schoolmate, who dies in a bombing by the Taliban, a repeat of the same way her father and brother were killed years before.[111] Notably, Nogreh's particular experience of forced migration is one of internal displacement.[112] After Pakistani refugees move into the brick and concrete ruin where she lives with her father and sister-in-law, Leylomah, Nogreh and her family are forced out of their home, yet remain dislocated within Afghanistan's borders. Already disenfranchised under Taliban rule and subsequent Western occupation, this displacement renders her situation even more precarious, and indeed highlights the particular vulnerability of internally displaced women in Afghanistan. A 2018 report commissioned by the Norwegian Refugee Committee, the Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre and Samuel Hall confirms that heightened risks for women include greater gender-based violence, intensified socio-economic conditions, as well as lack of physical and psychosocial support and protection mechanisms.[113] This is illustrated, in part, in the lack of resource for Leylomah's baby, and more broadly, the concept of forced marriage and lack of opportunities to generate income. From the first establishing shot, therefore, Makhmalbaf uses the set as symbolic of the country's current state of dissonance and the uncertainty of future. A lack of physical structure, city, or civilisation suggests a lack of change, in any direction, and a pervading ambiguity. Furthermore, by choosing to begin and end the film with Nogreh walking, seemingly without end, in the Afghan desert, Makhmalbaf cements the tone for the protagonist within her country's current condition. With this relationship between character and country, Makhmalbaf addresses what Thomas Elsaesser and Malte Hagener refer to in *Film Theory, Cinema, the Body and the Senses* as the 'spatio-temporal relations between the bodies and objects depicted in a film, and between the film and the spectator'.[114] With nothing to mark time or distance, no limits or structures to show approaching destinations, she imparts on viewers an inescapable uncertainty, an errant and gender-determined displacement.

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[111] Ibid., 01:07:00.

[112] According to the data from the Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre, by the end of 2021, an estimated 4.3 million Afghans were considered to live in internal displacement due in large part to conflict and disaster. Migration Data Portal, 'Afghanistan - Internal Displacement' <https://www.migrationdataportal.org/afghanistan/internal-displacement#:~:text=By%20the%20end%20of%202021,violence%20(IDMC%2C%202022)> [accessed 9 December 2022]

[113] 'Escaping War: Where to Next? A study on the challenges to IDP Protection in Afghanistan', by Norwegian Refugee Council, Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre, and Samuel Hall, 2018, p. 11 <https://www.samuelhall.org/publications/a-research-study-on-the-challenges-of-idp-potection-in-afghanistan> [accessed 9 December 2022]

[114] Thomas Elsaesser and Malte Hagener, 'Film Theory: An Introduction Through the Senses', 2nd edn (New York: Routledge, 2012), p. 5.

Between the opening and closing scenes of ambivalence, doorways feature as sites of transition not only through space but also between conflicting social realms within the film. To demarcate significant transitional stages for Nogreh, Makhmalbaf and cinematographer Ebrahim Ghafori often use dark black shadows and backlighting in the framed doorways, as below in Figure 9.[115] This is a reference to the ancient Persian performance technique *saye-bazi* (shadow play), serving as a visual tool that taps into a historic consciousness, while also introducing a symbolic Afghan 'everywoman' without flattening the character of Nogreh. [116]

Figure 9: Still image from At Five in the Afternoon; *A backlit Nogreh moves through a doorway-like passage in the first narrative scene of the film* [117]

In *At Five in the Afternoon*'s first narrative scene, viewers see the protagonist walk through a wide, framed stone passageway. Immediately her figure becomes backlit, showing only the flowing, shapeless burqa. It is as if Makhmalbaf is calling 'scene' on one Nogreh and introducing another. This is part of a sequence of shots in which Nogreh leaves her current 'home', veiled, carrying water through a series of ruined thresholds, and then walks out, under the doorways to the open air.[118] It is a tactic in transitioning Nogreh's space as well as her own journey of selfhood.[119] Viewers directly encounter her specific experience of womanhood through gendered acts

[115] Ebrahim Ghafori, Cinematographer, *IMDB* <https://www.imdb.com/name/nm0315476/> [accessed 24 May 2019]
[116] Shahin Parhami, 'Iranian Cinema: Before the Revolution', in *Early Cinema in Asia* ed. Nick Deocampo (Indiana: Indiana University Press, 2017) p. 256.
[117] Makhmalbaf 00:03:54.
[118] Ibid., 00:01:30.
[119] Ibid., 01:19 - 01:51.

performed here (fetching water, submitting to her father) and performative dress (veiling), as well as her displacement through the ruins of the city.[120] Referencing *saye-bazi* in conjunction with gendered and spatial motifs, Makhmalbaf introduces viewers to resonances of the doorway: in passing through doorways, Nogreh shifts from traditional to modern, darkness to light, private to public. Elsaesser and Hagener explain that film has the 'capacity to dynamically transport us as spectators into an imaginary world, connecting disparate spaces through camera movement, editing, and other devices,' and here Makhmalbaf does exactly that. While the world of female displacement in Afghanistan is in no way imaginary, the director clearly engages the spatial trope to ensure viewers testify to the represented life of a displaced Afghan woman.

Nogreh's aforementioned position as 'everywoman' is just one of the ways Makhmalbaf connects with everyday Afghan womanhood and its changing realities in 2001. She also does so in her casting of amateur actor Agheleh Rezaie. A former school teacher and young widow, Rezaie brings young Nogreh to life, playing her as bold, wry, and loyal, all while her very presence is contested.[121] Rezaie, after all, was the director's second choice, as the original lead decided not show her face on camera for fear of political retribution.[122] This casting process was documented by Makhmalbaf's 14-year-old sister, Hana, who filmed the behind-the-scenes footage on a small digital camera and compiled it into a 70-minute documentary entitled *Joy of Madness*.[123] What also emerges in the documentary is Makhmalbaf's sometimes conflicting artistic intensity and her commitment to feminist practice. Obviously frustrated and at times demanding to a point of extreme, her desire to work with untrained actors for authenticity and local empowerment/employment (similar to her filming in-situ in Afghanistan) withstands as a feminist act, breaking down hierarchies as well as barriers between real life and mediated creative representation, and revealing that which is not often seen. Makhmalbaf further creates a creative

[120] Ibid., 00:01:15.
[121] Sally Vincent of *The Guardian* writes of Makhmalbaf insistence for Rezaie's ordinariness to be acknowledged because of the important political statement it makes. Vincent writes, 'And she [Makhmalbaf] is indignant again when I talk about the actor in her film. Because she was not an actor. She might be now, but when they made the film, she was an ordinary woman, a young widow with two children who agreed to take part, to bring something of her own to Samira's venture. As did everyone else. These are real people, expressing themselves.' Sally Vincent, 'Beyond Words', *The Guardian*, 2 April 2004 <https://www.theguardian.com/film/2004/apr/03/features.weekend> [accessed 13 April 2019]
[122] Geoffrey Macnab, 'A Woman's Place', *The Guardian* <https://www.theguardian.com/film/2003/may/19/cannes2003.cannesfilmfestival> [accessed 13 April 2019]
[123] *Joy of Madness*, dir. by Hana Makhmalbaf (Makhmalbaf Film House, 2003).

gendered response to the conflict with the use of everyday dress to facilitate acts of feminist resistance (Nogreh's burqa and shoes, as below in Figure 10), whilst displaying the adherence to oppressed experiences of womanhood (Leylomah's helplessness and hopelessness as a widow, as below in Figure 11) and subversion of them (Nogreh's presidential aspirations, as below in Figure 12).

Figure 10: Still image from At Five in the Afternoon; *Nogreh changes into white patent leather heels as a form of liberated costuming* [124]

Figure 11: Still image from At Five in the Afternoon; *Leylomah is desperate to care for her child amidst dire circumstances of loss, displacement, and ill health* [125]

[124] Makhmalbaf, 00:05:20.

Figure 12: Still image from At Five in the Afternoon; *When Nogreh's teacher asks the all-female class who wants to be Afghanistan's next president, Nogreh is one of few who steps forward* [126]

These tactics are complex however, as with each seemingly positive step toward agency, the director underlines Nogreh's condition of ambiguity. While she grants Nogreh freedom of movement to some degree, countering one of the despotic restrictions against women of the Taliban's 'gendered apartheid', the protagonist is ultimately destined to wander interminably within the borders of the country that has displaced her.[127] Though she situates Nogreh within a framework of democracy, throughout the film Nogreh eyes the role of president of her school, and one day, the country, we meet her at time when 1,300 Western troops already occupy Afghanistan.[128] However, despite, or due to, the push and pull of ambivalence and progress, Makhmalbaf offers Nogreh the doorway – a site for navigating both spatial and self-determined transition.

Two particular scenes embody the visual and metaphoric strength and complexity of Nogreh's relationship to, and identity within, the doorway. In both, Makhmalbaf links disparate emotions, suggesting safety, progress or personhood, vis à vis fear, doubt and stagnancy, and she

[125] Ibid., 00:15:40.
[126] Ibid., 00:35:07.
[127] Stabile and Kumar, p. 769.
[128] Makmahlbaf, 00:08:05; Eventually the number will swell to more than 100,000 at its peak in 2010. 'A timeline of U.S. troop levels in Afghanistan since 2001', *Associated Press* <https://apnews.com/fe3ec7e126e44c728978ce9f4b5ebabd> [accessed 05 December 2023]; In 2021, under the Biden administration, the U.S. withdrew all troops from Afghanistan without residual force. The result was a chaotic evacuation of military personnel and civilians, leaving Afghanistan entirely under Taliban rule.

places Nogreh in between. The first comes just after Nogreh experiences the tragic death of her schoolmate Mina, another 'presidential hopeful', whose father and brother were also killed by the Taliban.[129] Notably, the repetition of violence experienced here echoes Makhmalbaf's cyclical filming structure. In the same way she signifies a lack of progress by using the same unpromising first and last scene, the repeated violence across generations offers little prospect for advancement. However, Makhmalbaf signals her audience toward hope in the scene immediately following, as viewers hear the clack of Nogreh's heeled shoes hitting the ground while she walks with measure toward the once regal palace doorway – here, again, Makhmalbaf utilises *saye-bazi* to create the backlit Afghan everywoman – eventually looking out onto city with a contemplative stare.[130] When she arrives at the doorway of above Kabul, Nogreh stomps her heels repeatedly on the hard, reverberating stone floor. Between a dance and a tantrum, she makes a protesting noise as if to say, 'I am here' in response to own Mina's brutal erasure.[131] Yet, quickly bringing the scene back to ambivalence, Nogreh kicks off her shoes and hopscotches back toward the doorway at the end of the corridor, creating a new slapping sound of bare feet on stone.[132] One might interpret this as a rejection of her autonomy, a reversion to childhood in the face of inevitable despair. Alternatively, perhaps Makhmalbaf is provoking viewers, letting them see Nogreh vacillate from trauma to hope, autonomy to infantilism. With either interpretation, the protagonist is seen in the doorway, in transition and in liminality.

The second scene is brief, yet perhaps the most palpable with symbolism. Just before the film's foreboding ending, Nogreh emerges from a darkened doorway, into the ruined palace's colonnade where she has been living. Here, her friend, the Pakistani poet, has hung Nogreh's presidential photo on each column-cum-doorway, framing the perimeter of the building and repeating beyond the vanishing point, as seen below in Figure 13. Instead of embracing this bold

[129] Makhmalbaf, 1:07:00.
[130] Ibid., 1:10:00.
[131] Ibid., 1:11:00.
[132] Ibid., 1:12:42.

and affirming action, however, Nogreh is concerned, uneasy of what her father may say of her aspiration.[133]

Figure 13: Still image from At Five in the Afternoon; *Nogreh's presidential headshots line the walls of the ruined palace in which she temporarily lives* [134]

In this scene Nogreh's autonomy and liberation are so close she can literally stare her own potential in the eye. Still, Makhmalbaf engages the spatial potential of the doorway to ask, will Nogreh, like her country, be occupied and oppressed indefinitely? More broadly, are Nogreh and displaced women like her actually only destined for a displaced limbo? Returning to Soja, Bhaba and Anzaldúa, if doorways are considered creative 'thirdspaces' with transformative potential, perhaps not. Makhmalbaf uses the trope in this scene and throughout the film to connect distinct, often oppositional spaces, with everyday transitional sites that bridge the gap for the film's protagonist and those she represents. According to Soja, that space does not reject existing realities, but allows for movement beyond constructed binaries such as subject/object, centre/margin, real/imagined, material/mental.[135] The doorways with Nogreh's multiplied headshot, therefore, are indeed sites of possibility, however, they do not necessarily represent tangible progress or advancement. Instead, they serve, as Anzaldúa explains in *Borderlands*, as 'a path/state to something else', a liminal space

[133] Makhmalbaf, 1:15:28.
[134] Ibid., 01:15:14
[135] Soja, p. 126

among many contested locations, for Nogreh and viewers alike to rethink personal aspirations, kinship ties and, ultimately, power relations.[136]

Like Nogreh, the film itself sits in the threshold of ambivalence when it comes to taking a stance on hope and oppression in contemporary Afghanistan. On one side of the threshold, it boldly dreams of equitable education, cross-cultural hospitality, and women in power. On the other, viewers are confronted with patriarchal and social family politics, lingering Taliban violence, continued occupation by international troops and an ending that is undoubtedly sullen, denying progress and suggesting perpetual malaise. Perhaps the title may provide a final analysis. *At Five in the Afternoon* is taken from a Federico García Lorca poem about the death of a bullfighter, 'Lament for Ignacio Sanchez Mejias'.[137] An anguished reflection on mortality, it is also a poem about the beauty, courage, passion, and heightened emotion of the bullfighter. In Lorca's poem, Ignacio Sanchez Mejias is commended for bravery but ultimately destined for death. Nogreh's fate may be similar, with a forlorn ending that culminates with her, her father, and sister-in-law leaving the city, riding into the vast and barren desert. Compounding metaphors, they encounter an elderly man who does not even know the war is over. Makhmalbaf seems to note that so little has changed since the end of Taliban-rule that maybe nothing has. What's more, they must bury Leylomah's baby who has died from malnourishment. Have women's opportunities to flourish dried up for good? Is Makhmalbaf suggesting the future of Afghanistan is destined for demise? It could be that she subscribes to what Anzaldúa writes in *Borderlands*, that, 'as refugees in a homeland that does not want them, many find a welcome hand holding out only suffering, pain and ignoble death'.[138] Contrastingly, however, Makhmalbaf's film on the whole could be read as a successful, if not optimistic, feminist response. Though she is an outsider by nationality, and indeed hailing from a far more affluent class and clout than Nogreh, Makhmalbaf's engagement as an Iranian woman addressing the contemporary issues of Afghan women points toward a transnational feminist response through South-South alliance.[139] With this, Makhmalbaf's own position as another woman

[136] Anzaldúa, p. 95.
[137] Federico Garcia Lorca, 'Lament for Ignacio Sanchez Mejias' (1933).
[138] Anzaldúa, p. 34.
[139] See: *Routledge Handbook of South-South Relations,*1st Edition, Elena Fiddian-Qasmiyeh and Patricia Daley, eds (London: Routledge, 2018).

from the Global South engenders a solidarity with Nogreh.[140] What makes this fellowship so powerful is that it not only seeks out agency for fellow colonised and marginalised women, but it more broadly challenges overarching power dynamics within a patriarchal society and between the Global North and Global South. In offering Nogreh the doorway, Makhmalbaf offers Nogreh potential, a thirdspace to fluidly transition between multiple opposing worlds. Here she accesses sites of temporary safety for her and her family, as well as a liminal arena and a feminist architecture, not necessarily to save or progress her or her country's future, but at least a space to negotiate within an unstable reality.

She steps through first: The feminist possibilities of the doorway in *Exit West*

> I saw people staring at screens all the time: at their televisions, in the cinemas, and—above all—on their phones. These screens were like portals, and people were venturing through them constantly. So I thought, what if people could physically move that easily? What if these rectangles were actually physical portals, doors? What would happen?[141]

The starting point for Moshin Hamid's *Exit West* is possibility. 'What would happen?', the author asks.[142] He wants to know – what would happen if war, racism, and class conflict remained a reality, but our ability to transition was significantly altered? What would happen if mobility was unrestricted, travel was instantaneous and, overall, life was more malleable? 'Fiction can imagine differently,' Hamid told *The New Yorker* in an interview that accompanied his short story, 'Of Windows and Doors', a 2016 piece which would eventually expand to become his novel, *Exit West*.[143] By working through 'realist and irrealist registers', which Amanda Lagji identifies in 'Waiting in Motion: Mapping Postcolonial Fiction, New Mobilities, and Migration through Mohsin Hamid's "Exit West"', Hamid indeed employs fiction – in the form of a series of time and space

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[140] Siba Grovogu clarifies that 'The "Global South" is not a directional designation or a point due south from a fixed north. It is a symbolic designation meant to capture the semblance of cohesion that emerged when former colonial entities engaged in political projects of decolonization and moved toward the realization of a postcolonial international order.' Siba Grovogu, 'A Revolution Nonetheless: The Global South in International Relations', *The Global South*, 5:1 (2011), p. 175.

[141] Cressida Leyshon, 'Moshin Hamid on the Migrants in All of Us', *The New Yorker*, 6 November 2016 <https://www.newyorker.com/books/page-turner/this-week-in-fiction-mohsin-hamid-2016-11-14>, [accessed 12 April 2019]

[142] Ibid.

[143] Hamid's quote continues and further contextualises, 'Fiction can imagine differently. Wrenching climate change will happen. Mass migration will happen, on a vast scale. But maybe our children and grandchildren can still inhabit a world where they have a chance at hope and optimism. Fiction can explore this possibility, it can make us feel something other than the sense of either doom or denial that is so prevalent in our nonfiction discourse. It can make human beings less unmoored by the endless nature of change. Maybe that is partly why our ancestors invented fiction in the first place. We certainly need it now. Because if we can't imagine desirable futures for ourselves that stand a chance of actually coming to pass, our collective depression could well condemn humanity to a period of terrible savagery.' Ibid.

defying doors – to imagine the potential of an entirely new reality among contemporary global issues.[144] What's more, he offers readers Nadia, an independent and forward-looking female protagonist, to navigate his supernatural doorways and ultimately become an agentic driver of the narrative. With her character, Hamid demonstrates that although fiction may not provide a solution for the realities of oppression, conflict, and forced migration, when it is considered, in part through tangible, everyday spaces, feminist motivation and mobility can emerge, and so too can the space to explore the tactics of navigating sociospatial complexities and gendered experiences of war, identity, and forced migration.[145]

Hinged on the strength of Nadia's character, Hamid writes *Exit West* with woman as active protagonist while positioning man, co-lead character Saeed, as deuteragonist. Throughout the novel, it is clear that Nadia operates strategically to drive the pair's onward movement for survival. Pre-exile, she is a liberal woman living alone in a conservative city; she smokes marijuana and takes mushrooms. When she hears 'the blows of distant artillery, the unmaking of buildings, large-scale fighting', she confidently bolts her door closed and barricades herself within the small, but significant, space she occupies.[146] Likewise, the open-top roof terrace of her apartment overlooks the market and sits under the stars, serving as a symbol of possibility, suggesting she has access to a world broader than we are initially led to think.[147] And while *Exit West* is in some respects a love story, it is ultimately clear that for Nadia, it is not about romantic love, but rather about caring for Saeed while accessing self-love in the finding and claiming of her own identity amidst oppressive patriarchal powers and the destabilising realities of war. More than just gender-consciousness, Hamid's use of a central female character reimagines traditional gender roles, emphasising Nadia's position as leader in the quest for sanctuary, as well as the significance of her individual agency. Her actions and decisions throughout the novel demonstrate resilience and determination in the face of adversity, and her journey becomes a powerful narrative of self- and spatial discovery. Ultimately, Hamid's characterisation of Nadia illustrates the strength of forced migration women

[144] Lagji, 219.
[145] Ibid., p. 219.
[146] Hamid, p. 62.
[147] Ibid., p. 24.

moving in a world in flux, navigating unstable realities whilst maintaining the position of caregiver and sense of self.

With Nadia's ideal characterisation – feisty, sexual, independent – however, Hamid verges on the creation of an Orientalist fantasy.[148] Writing from a position of authorial power, Hamid is a highly educated, wealthy, male professional and dual citizen; thus the decision to create Nadia as a caricature composition of attributes attractive to Western readership could be read as reductive.[149] While her depiction is potentially problematic, I believe, however, that there is enough hybridity in her character, and in Hamid's own intersectional positionality and awareness, that Nadia remains dimensioned beyond otherwise flattening characteristics.[150] One noteworthy point lies in Hamid's revelation of Nadia's queer identifications. Presented differently than the idealistic 'rebel' qualities described above, qualifiers for what may make Nadia an interesting and acceptable forced migrant to a Western audience, it is her inner thoughts that persist against hegemonic discourse in subtle but important ways. In reflecting on her changed relationship with Saeed since the pair began moving through the doors, she considers her own increasing awareness of self:

> It was not that her sensuality, her sense of the erotic, had died. She found herself aroused readily, by a beautiful man she passed as she walked down to work, by memories of the musician who had been her first lover, by thoughts of the girl from Mykonos. And sometimes when Saeed was out or asleep she pleasured herself, and when she pleasured herself she thought increasingly of that girl, the girl from Mykonos, and the strength of her response no longer surprised her.[151]

Here, Nadia's consciousness of the various forms of crossing she undertakes leads readers to an even deeper understanding of her experience. As Ball confirms, 'When we follow queer paths into forced migrant experience then we become able to explore alternative understandings of home,

[148] Orientalism refers to the problematic patronizing and essentializing representations of people and cultures of 'The East'. Here, I use the term 'orientalist fantasy' to refer to the focus on the exotic, romanticized, and often sexualized, aspects of these flattened projections. Edward Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Vintage Books, 1978), p. 3.
[149] Landon Thomas Jr, 'Akhil and Mohsin Get Paid: Moonlighting Salomon Smith Barney, McKinsey Guys Write Novels', *Observer.com*, 23 April 2001 <https://observer.com/2001/04/akhil-and-mohsin-get-paid-moonlighting-salomon-smith-barney-mckinsey-guys-write-novels/> [accessed 14 December 2022]
[150] Record of Hamid's background notes he was born into a popular and privileged family, yet his childhood and adolescent years in Pakistan were politically complex. In a 2007 *New York Times* article to mark 60 years of Pakistan's independence, Hamid explains a personal history which echoes many of Nadia and Saeed's experiences in *Exit West*: 'Growing up in Lahore in the 1980s was unsettling. Assault rifles and heroin, byproducts of the war in Afghanistan, flooded the city. I had friends with drug problems, others who sometimes carried guns. Our parents had been able to mingle freely and go to the cinema. But we lived in a time of censorship and of women news anchors being forced to cover their heads on television. Preventing teenage boys and girls from falling in love seemed to be an official concern of the state, and avoiding police checkpoints became part of every date.' Moshin Hamid, 'After 60 Years, Will Pakistan Be Reborn?', *The New York Times*, 15 August 2007 <https://www.nytimes.com/2007/08/15/opinion/15hamid.html > [accessed 14 December 2022]
[151] Hamid, p. 199.

belonging, and community to those established through biopolitical, heteropatriarchal state boundaries'.[152] In a similar vein, Hamid offers a gendered depth of character to Nadia by not precluding her embodied vulnerability, as read in her insistence on wearing a robe despite apathy toward faith (so 'men don't fuck with me', she explains) and the scene at the bank in which she is groped over her clothing.[153] Finally, though not conclusively, it is through her relationship to the doors that Hamid sets Nadia free from fetishisation, suggesting they are primarily intended for her. Reading the first encounter with the dark, featureless door, in which Saeed insists Nadia pass through first, and as she does not dwell in her own fear but makes the bold leap, the text supports this notion.[154] In adding layers to Nadia's personality, Hamid fleshes out a complex and gendered character through which he can engage with spaces of potential to creatively explore experiences in conflict, statehood, and forced migration.

Hamid continues to develop Nadia's character by juxtaposing her demeanour with Saeed's to show the strength of her agency. He writes, 'Nadia had long been, and would afterwards continue to be, more comfortable with all varieties of movement in her life than was Saeed, in whom the impulse of nostalgia was stronger'.[155] She plays a mirrored image to him, who, while caring of Nadia, generally needs protecting and responds to her strength with nerves and pessimism. We see this clearly in the dichotomy of their spatial experiences. Through the door, Saeed is first bitter and reclusive. He does not connect with his new setting, an experience symbolically reinforced by his lack of mobile phone connection: 'Saeed tried to call his father but an automated message informed him that his call could not be completed'.[156] This experience contrasts Nadia's: 'Nadia tried to connect with people via chat applications and social media, and an acquaintance who had made it to Auckland and another who had reached Madrid replied right away."[157] Further, Saeed wishes to stay on the periphery in the first camp in Mykonos and in 'the Nigerian house' they inhabit in London, and he is not motivated to pass through additional doorways outside of Nadia's prompts:

[152] Ball, p. 131.
[153] Hamid, pp. 16, 59.
[154] Ibid., p. 97.
[155] Ibid., p. 90.
[156] Ibid., p. 103.
[157] Ibid.

> When she suggested one day, out of the blue, under the drone-crossed sky and in the invisible network of surveillance that radiated out from their phones, recording and capturing and logging everything, that they abandon this place, and give up their position on the housing list, and all they had bult here, and pass through a nearby door she had heard of, to the new city of Marin, on the Pacific Ocean, close to San Francisco, he did not argue of even resist, as she thought he might…[158]

As illustrated in the quote above, the doorways are sites of mobility and possibility for Nadia. Where Saeed chooses alienation and is 'intimidated' and 'emasculated', Nadia embraces community, forging close relationships to volunteers (the woman in Mykonos), other migrants (the Nigerians in London) and locals (her boss and his wife in the London Halo).[159] In 'Gender, Ethnicity and "The Community"', Tijen Uguris explains this as a specific tactic among forced migrants, noting that, 'through "the community" a sense of belonging is constructed which develops bonds between individuals and groups as well as between people and places'.[160] Likewise, in discussing how migrants may reclaim space and identity amidst displacement, Sara Ahmed notes,

> The very experience of leaving home and 'becoming a stranger' involves the creation of a new 'community of strangers', a common bond with those others who have 'shared' the experience of living overseas. It is the constitutive link between the suspension of a sense of having home to the formation of new communities that we need to recognize.[161]

This is the space Nadia occupies – accepting of and engaging with their situation of displacement (Hamid confirms that 'Nadia thought it was madness to expect anything else') – while Saeed is less able to assimilate.[162] With these character contrasts, Hamid is presenting a particularly feminist potential in his alliance of woman as source of momentum and creativity, rather than imbuing this in the male point of view, as in traditionally patriarchally situated narratives.

Looking closer at Nadia's first encounter with the doorway, we find insight into the ways Hamid approaches, explores, and genders forced migration. Understandably, in her initial interaction she is alarmed, 'struck by its [the doorway's] darkness, its opacity, the way that it did

[158] Ibid., p. 189.
[159] Ibid., p. 146-7, 114, 143, 182.
[160] Tijen Uguris, 'Gender, Ethnicity and "The Community" in *Global Feminist Politics: Identities in a Changing World* ed. by Suki Ali, Kelly Coate and Wangui Wa Goro (London, Routledge: 2000), pp. 49-68.
[161] Ahmed, 2000, p. 84.
[162] Hamid, p. 129.

not reflect what was on the other side, and so felt equally like a beginning and an end'.[163] However, despite uncertainty, she is motivated to seek safety and adjusts her response to offset Saeed's fear. It may be argued that here that she is enacting resistance tactics learned to navigate gender oppression and reworking them for this new reality. These types of forced migrant female fortitude are identified in *Gendering the International Asylum and Refugee Debate*, as Jane Freedman writes that for forced migrant women 'agency is apparent in a multitude of strategies for survival and resistance which enable them to adapt and continue to live in their new circumstances of displacement'.[164] Arguably, women (outside of forced migration) are accustomed to operating in the face of daily oppressive patriarchal structures that deny them power and agency. Therefore, during experiences of forced migration, they may be more able to access what Anzaldúa designates, a 'tolerance for ambiguity' to translate strategies for surviving, or indeed succeeding, into their new realities.[165] For Freedman and Anzaldúa, and indeed for Hamid, these women are not limited in the face of the liminal, but instead employ it as a space of negotiation, or, indeed, a feminist architecture.

Remaining with Nadia's initial experience of the surreal doors, we can further see how her gendered response propels the couple's mobility. With the unspoken understanding that she is in charge of their futures, Hamid writes that Nadia sees Saeed 'staring at her, and his face was full of worry, and sorrow, and she took his hands in hers and held them tight, and then, releasing them, and without a word, she stepped through'.[166] She does not succumb to fear, but pushes forward, comforting Saeed and taking the first leap into the unknown. With this step, Hamid's feminist allegiances contest refugee women's victimhood and lack of agency. His writing reflects insight by Freedman, who notes that despite the 'physical risks of border crossing for women and the higher rate of mortality at the borders for women than for men' women continue to 'escape conflict, violence and persecution in their home countries to find a safer home for them and their

[163] Ibid., p. 98.
[164] Freedman, 2007, p. 44,
[165] Anzaldúa, p. 101.
[166] Hamid, p. 98.

children'.[167] Likewise, Freedman's 'Engendering Security at the Borders of Europe: Women Migrants and the Mediterranean "Crisis" shows that forced migrant women often have 'clear ideas about where they wish to go and what they wanted to achieve through their migration'.[168] Not unlike the forced migrant women in Freedman's research, Nadia's loyalty to Saeed motivates her. And while this relationship creates yet another border for her to cross, a hinderance to complete independence in which she might thrive or fail autonomously, I believe she ultimately benefits from it. She is able to claim the liminal space created through the couple's multiple geographic and relational transitions to process and progress wholly, not just responsively. This is to say, she does not flee to the first safe space, i.e. the refugee camp in Mykonos or marriage to Saeed – at the end of the novel she even poses this thought to him, saying, 'imagine how different life would be if I had agreed to marry you'.[169] Instead, through her engagement with the doors, she can explore different geographies, communities, and relationships to determine which suit her. In the end, the doors open the potential for choice for Nadia, promoting agency and action through their presence.

For Nadia, passage through the doors leads to a significantly personal and gendered experience of migration and in turn, her own thirdspace. While Makhmalbaf's doorways were liminal in their physicality, unstable and incomplete, Hamid's are something different (albeit liminally detached as well), as they are acute sites of immediacy. With them, his fiction allows readers to explore a reality in which forced migrant women are not subjected to the restrictive realities of time and distance, but instead can access and, in part, control their potential with unrestricted mobility. As Lagji notes, Hamid challenges 'assumptions and relationships between time and space, mobility and immobility, and the possibilities for action that inhere in states otherwise assumed to be periods of passive, protracted waiting'.[170] Indeed, some of the greatest barriers for forced migrant women in reaching safety and self-governance are the physical and temporal restraints of mobility. Interestingly, both *At Five in the Afternoon* and *Exit West* avoid the contemporary flight story motif. Contemporary texts such as *Nujeen: One Girl's Incredible Journey*

[167] Here Freedman is specifically addressing the reality of women (mainly Syrian) crossing the Mediterranean to reach Europe, though this research translates across geographies. Freedman, 2016, p. 570.
[168] Freedman, 2016, p. 597.
[169] Hamid, p. 228.
[170] Lagji, p. 219.

from War-torn Syria (Nujeen Mustafa and Christina Lamb, 2016), *Butterfly: From Refugee to Olympian - My Story of Rescue, Hope, and Triumph* (Yusra Mardini, 2018), *The Girl Who Smiled Beads: A Story of War and What Comes After* (Clemantine Wamariya and Elizabeth Weil, 2018) among many others, tell of the lengthy, harrowing and often defining period of flight. Instead, both Makhmalbaf's and Hamid's narratives uses the doorway to as a stand in for distance. In Hamid's case, the door cuts across both time and space – a tactic that speaks to the immediacy of our present age, where, via Internet there is potential to access to whomever and whatever we desire. For Makhmalbaf, however, Nadia's internal displacement does the opposite, it demonstrates how little distance she can travel, thus illustrating the restricted, stagnant reality of many rendered homeless within their own homeland. With his doors, Hamid introduces instantaneous movement, as spatial thresholds have been removed with the compression of time and space between departure and destination. Here Hamid accesses a phenomenological theory that geographer David Harvey identified in 1989 as time-space compression. This refers to the many ways humans have 'shrunk' space, i.e., cut out the time it takes to cross certain distances, for example by airplane travel and communication technologies. Harvey's explains the concept as 'processes that so revolutionize the objective qualities of space and time that we are forced to alter, sometimes in quite radical ways, how we represent the world to ourselves'. [171] Ultimately, the theory underlines the reality that time and space are equally objective and subjective, not a linear line as generally viewed, but overlapping, intersecting and looping sequences. They can be changed based on cultures, economies, technology and so on. As such, Nadia's liminal experience does not come while she is physically in the doorway like Nogreh's; instead, it is in the emotional space she occupies once she is on the other side of the doors. It is in her 'playing house', 'doing the negotiating', and performing her gender as a resilience tactic that her agency is reclaimed among displacement.[172] With access to these forms of potential, vis-à-vis the doors, Nadia has the chance to enact adaptability and self-sufficiency.

[171] David Harvey, *The Condition of Postmodernity: An Enquiry into the Origins of Cultural Change* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1991), p. 240. See also David Harvey, 'Between space and time: Reflections on the geographical imagination', *Annals of the Association of American Geographers*, 80 (1990), pp. 418–34.
[172] Hamid, p. 102.

While Nadia's strength is admirable as a symbol of forced migrant feminist potential, her power is limited. Returning to the Orientalist implications in Hamid's text, it is accepted that Nadia is strong and independent, but it is impossible to ignore that she is bordering on unrealistically so. With Nadia, Hamid writes what a 'successful' refugee ought to look like. She is a model migrant, able to self-actualise amidst trauma, and is endlessly confident whilst seeking sanctuary. Drawing on 'model immigrant' theories from sociologist Grace Yukich, we see that Hamid portrays Nadia as specifically deserving.[173] In addition to Nadia's hyperbolically attractive caricature, when we meet her, she is gainfully employed and a student furthering her opportunities. During exile, she remains motivated, communicative, and connected. But what about those who are unlike Nadia – the reserved, disenfranchised, under-resourced? How, or would they ever, engage with Hamid's doors? Could Nogreh? Harald Bauder and Christian Matheis expound,

> When activists invoke the figure of the 'model immigrant' to raise public opinion about immigrants in general, this often unintentionally creates hierarchies of 'deservingness' within migrant communities. In other words, the act of labeling a particular person or group as 'exemplary' (Yukich 2013b, 113) or 'deserving' (Yukich 2013a, 302) signals that there are others who are less so... As Yukich (2013a, 316) demonstrates, this kind of binary framing, while often employed in an effort to safeguard collective rights, frequently jeopardizes a group's most vulnerable members.[174]

In Hamid's engagement with female-driven potential, he excludes – and with that potentially jeopardises – those who do not start from Nadia's position and perpetuates a form of misrepresentation. It is possible that this perspective stems from Hamid's own mobile and transnational identity, which certainly influences the narrative. In one way, it helps him identify with his characters. Hamid classifies himself as a 'mongrelized, mixed hybrid person' and he makes clear that his intention is to use fiction to claim back space for people who identify similarly.[175] However, Hamid's, like Makhmalbaf's, is a position of elite, upper-class liberalism. Born in Lahore, Pakistan (on which elements of Nadia and Saeed's hometown are based) and

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[173] Grace Yukich's research expands the 'model minority stereotype' which 'constructs distinctions between "deserving" and "undeserving" racial groups in the United States by highlighting "models" who embrace dominant American values such as hard work and self-reliance (e.g., Asian Americans) and distinguishing them from those who are unfairly and inaccurately perceived as rejecting those values (e.g., Latinos and African Americans). Grace Yukich, 'Constructing the Model Immigrant: Movement Strategy and Immigrant Deservingness in the New Sanctuary Movement', *Social Issues*, 60:3 (2013), pp. 302-320.

[174] Harald Bauder and Christian Matheis, 'Migration Policy and Practice' (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016), pp. 107-08.

[175] Kristina Dorsey, 'Mohsin Hamid Discusses "Exit West," His Acclaimed Novel about Migration and Refugees', *The Day*, Sep 23, 2018 <https://www.theday.com/article/20180923/ENT10/180929980> [accessed 24 May 2019]

educated at Princeton University and Harvard Law School, Hamid's socioeconomic status affords him mobility as a means of success, not merely survival.[176] Though he may claim a hybrid cultural identity, his movement is based on choice and opportunity, and he has written Nadia similarly. Lagji's research supports this by noting, 'These doors exacerbate the existing unequal power dynamics between the global North and the global South even as they challenge migrants like Nadia and Saeed to redraw their affective, internal maps of belonging'.[177] This disconnected reality, in which Hamid's own life as a transnational elite who can determine if he wants to live in Lahore or London, New York or Mykonos, is merely a fantasy, far from the realities of many forced migrants. With this divide, Hamid undermines the potency of Nadia's symbol for forced migrant women.

Clearly, Hamid's deployment of fiction has its limitations, and while the doors do not hold enough resonance in regard to the real-world migrant 'crisis', when matched with Nadia's potential, the trope opens a liminal space ripe or exploration.[178] With his time/space compressed portals, Hamid successfully taps into an established strategy discussed by Hilary Dannenberg in 'Windows, Doorways and Portals in Narrative Fiction and Media': 'In the field of fantasy literature, the idea of the doorway to another world has long been one of the most evocative vehicles for suggesting ontological escape in the human imagination'.[179] In her negotiations with doors, readers can easily subscribe to the idea that the agency Nadia possessed pre-war remains intact and, perhaps, is even strengthened. Motivated by her loyalty to Saeed, and ultimately her desire to discover her own way, she makes use of their transformative spatial and emotional powers. Interestingly, like *At Five in the Afternoon*, *Exit West* begins and ends in the same place, in Nadia and Saeed's unnamed home city. However, unlike Nogreh, Nadia does not wander aimlessly, stuck in the liminality. Instead, she engages the potential of the doors, ultimately transitioning through to a life she wants with agency and choice.

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[176] Ibid.
[177] Lagi, p. 223.
[178] Freedman explains the complexity in the term 'crisis' to describe a long-standing reality, 'Although media and politicians have portrayed this is a new problem facing the EU, in fact this Mediterranean 'crisis' is not a completely new phenomenon. Migrants have been attempting to cross the Mediterranean to reach Europe (and dying on the way) for many years. What is new is the scale of the influx of migrants… and also a more diversified demographic spread amongst the migrants, with more and more women and children on the boats crossing to Europe.' Freedman, 2016, p. 568.
[179] Hilary Dannenberg, 'Windows, Doorways and Portals in Narrative Fiction and Media' in Elmar Schenkel and Stefan Welz, eds, *Magical Objects: Things and Beyond* (Berlin: Galda + Wilch Verlag, 2007) p. 185.

Finding ways through: Doors as feminist architectures

At Five in the Afternoon and *Exit West* are tactical transition stories, in and through cultural contexts and geopolitical situations. In them, forced migrant women must negotiate new mobile realities and to situate their protagonists, the director and author use the symbol of the doorway as a narrative, political, and gendered tool. What results is an extraordinary form of feminist architecture in an otherwise everyday place – a recurring theme which will emerge in forthcoming chapters as this thesis address additional spatial tropes in literary and filmic texts. As David Farrier notes in *Postcolonial Asylum*, 'the threshold is a place of potential newness', and Makhmalbaf and Hamid are certainly revealing alternative arenas of possibility for their protagonists through their engagement with the doorway motif.[180] In some instances, that arena is an empowering, agile space for identity creation and personal transition. It is within the threshold of the doorway that we see Nadia and Nogreh evoke acts of gendered performance and self-governance. Nadia and Nogreh enact gender through cultural costuming, engaging in *purdah* or veiling, as a form of performative destabilisation, considering their rejections of traditional religious values.[181] We also see the subversion of traditional gender roles: both women are childless and unmarried, perhaps rejecting complexities of the hackneyed metaphor of mother/land.[182] They are not traveling alone, however, nor are they passive followers. Nogreh and Nadia are leaders among kin in their respective exiles. In fact, both repeatedly create semblances of home for themselves and their travelling companions amidst experiences of forced homelessness – Nogreh's are among ruined doorways and Nadia's are just beyond them. This confirms Freedman's research that forced migrant women often 'actively take initiative, driving change and progress for familial and personal situations'.[183] These experiences, framed in and around the space of the doorway, illustrates how each woman constructs identities and seeks agency throughout their respective narratives. Further, the gender/space intersection situates Nogreh and Nadia as characters in legible sociocultural realties, and through

[180] David Farrier, *Postcolonial Asylum: Seeking Sanctuary Before the Law* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2011) p. 23.
[181] See: Leila Ahmed, 'Women and the Advent of Islam', Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society, 11 (1986): pp. 665 – 91, Fatima Mernissi, *The Veil and the Male Elite: A Feminist Interpretation of Women's Rights in Islam* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Perseus Books, 1991) and Norma Claire Moruzzi, 'Women's Space/Cinema Space: Representations of Public and Private in Iranian Films', *Middle East Report* (2006).
[182] See Nira Yuval-Davis, *Gender and Nation* (London: Sage Publications, 1997); see also work by Patricia Hill Collins.
[183] Jane Freedman, 'Women's experience of forced migration: Gender-based forms of insecurity and the uses of "vulnerability"' in Jane Freedman, Zeynep Kivilcim, Nurcan Özgür Baklacıoğlu, eds, *A Gendered Approach to the Syrian Refugee Crisis*. 2nd edn (New York: Routledge, 2017), p. 136.

their engagement with the motif, the women can break convention while negotiating their ambitions with personal loyalties and cultural hegemonies.

In the same way the doorway provides a symbol of hope and progress, or at least the possibility of such, however, its representations in both texts can symbolise progress thwarted. One way this is represented is that doorways for Nogreh and Nadia are always detached, never fully framed or closed off, doing the actual, distinct separating for which they are intended. Not quite a boundary of inside or out, the doorway may indicate absence or a shapeless future. 'In using doors in everyday life we make them legible, through situated, embodied, lived practice,' Stuart Andrews asserts in 'At Home with Doors: Practising Architectural Elements in Yes, These Eyes Are the Windows and Between 13 and 15 Steps'.[184] Indeed, a door that closes, opens, or locks can offer dependability. Its users may understand aspects of inclusion, exclusion, and safety when closed, and hospitality, welcoming, or unknown possibility or danger when open. In 'The Bridge and the Door', Simmel presses the relevance, and satisfaction, of a doorway that closes:

> The door cancels the separation of the inside from the outside because it constitutes a link between the space of the human and everything which is outside of it. Exactly because the door can be opened, its being shut gives a feeling of being shut out, that is stronger than the feeling emanating from a solid wall. The wall is silent but the door speaks. It satisfies their deepest nature when humans define their own limitations but do so with freedom, i.e. in such a fashion that they can remove the limitation and put themselves outside of it.[185]

For Nogreh and Nadia, there is no enclosure or exclusion, no clear delimiters, no host – welcoming or otherwise. Instead, the spatial boundaries and spatial sequences – also identity boundaries and identity sequences – remain unstructured. As Nogreh passes through a serious of detached doorways, she struggles, and perhaps fails, to situate her progressive identity in post-Taliban, still conservative and occupied, Afghanistan. Her wider setting never changes, as Nadia's so dramatically does. Rather, the broken and repetitive doorways highlight both her and her country's lack of progress. Conversely, Hamid's doors are a means of escape but also a dramatic unknown. In his text, even a standard, non-portal door becomes anthropomorphised as 'an object with a subtle power to mock, to mock the desires of those who desired to go far away, whispering silently from

[184] Stuart Andrews, 'At Home with Doors: Practising Architectural Elements in Yes, These Eyes Are the Windows and Between 13 and 15 Steps', *Contemporary Theatre Review*, 27:4 (2017), p. 465.
[185] Simmel, p. 250.

its door frame that such dreams were the dreams of fools'.[186] The potency of the doorway trope is summarised here. Hamid suggests that the door's subtlety, or, indeed, its everydayness, is a constant opportunity for transition, from one site to another, through thresholds and across borders. However, for forced migrant women, accessing that mobility may be a distant dream, as unrealistic as Hamid's portal doors.

Negotiating competing outcomes – of progress and regression, safety and danger – Makmahlbaf and Hamid ultimately use the doorway as an overt symbol to locate and identify their forced migrant protagonists, and the liminality to do so at their own pace. This threshold space of potential, choice, and opportunity is the making of the feminist architecture. For Makhmalbaf, doorways serve as dynamic symbolic and cinematic devices. Crumbling and detached, they are a result of the everyday experience of Afghans under Taliban rule turned Western occupation. Hers are transitional sites between oppression and freedom, tradition and modernity. In this, they represent the condition of Afghanistan's women more broadly – also poised between competing political forces that render them vulnerable to displacement, as well as offering them sources of social advancement. Hamid, on the other hand, makes magical the commonplace architectural element to reveal an extraordinary alternative reality. With his doors, he celebrates the importance of female resilience, will, and opportunism in the experience of forced migration. And, as both authors share liminal doorway spaces, they explore and reclaim the everyday scenery of women's lives. Freedman specifically accounts the pursuit of possibility for forced migrant women, affirming that they often have 'strategies for onward migration, and clear ideas about where they wished to go and what they wanted to achieve through their migration'.[187] In Nogreh's case, this means straddling the conservative patriarchal past of Afghanistan while pursuing an ambitious and independent life. In her negotiation with doorways, she actively chases the school presidency, a stand-in for the idea of democratic rule, by asking questions, negotiating internally, participating in debate, and seeking friendships that bolster this ambition. Yet, she is continuously brought back to hegemonic reality by her fundamentalist father, precarious living situations, and heavily militarised

[186] Hamid, p. 70.
[187] Freedman, 2017, p. 136.

environment. Nadia, conversely, is allowed instantaneous teleportation through Hamid's doors. She can physically flee one space to find herself another, avoiding the banal time and space restrictions of real-world mobility. She adapts to each new world with optimism and autonomy.

In both texts the audience is connected to the protagonists' places and spaces, so as to better understand two instances of the female experience of forced migration. The door is one of the few architectural elements with which physical engagement is frequent. It can be touched, pushed, and leaned against. Its width and weight are measurable; its quirks and creaks are tangible. Its realness and everydayness, even in fictional texts, offer a touchpoint to the reader/viewer. As Dannenberg claims, the doorway bridges the space between real and imagined, lived and written.[188] In their texts, Makhmalbaf and Hamid offer spaces and characters that are tangible, too. Far from the common figuration of forced migrant woman as ultimate sufferer, desperate mother, heartbreaking Madonna, Nogreh and Nadia are mediated in their respective doorways to unearth a complex gendered potential amidst displacement. And with this, we return to the beginning of the chapter. As Gaston Bachelard observed, the door tells the story of one's entire life, and the forced migrant woman's story is often too hidden or to co-opted to be heard. In contrast then, reading doors as feminist architectures allows us to begin reading the lifeworlds of these fictional forced migrant women in a specific, everyday place to reveal the extraordinariness of their complex identities.

[188] Dannenberg, p. 185.

CHAPTER TWO

The Room: Reading Spatial Hostipitalities in *The Bogus Woman* by Kay Adshead and *The Baulkham Hills African Ladies Troupe* by Ros Horin

> The room is the beginning of architecture. It is the place of the mind. You, in the room with its dimensions, its structure, its light, respond to its character, its spiritual aura, recognizing that whatever the human proposes and makes becomes a life.
>
> - Louis Kahn, *The Room, The Street, and Human Agreement*, 1971[189]

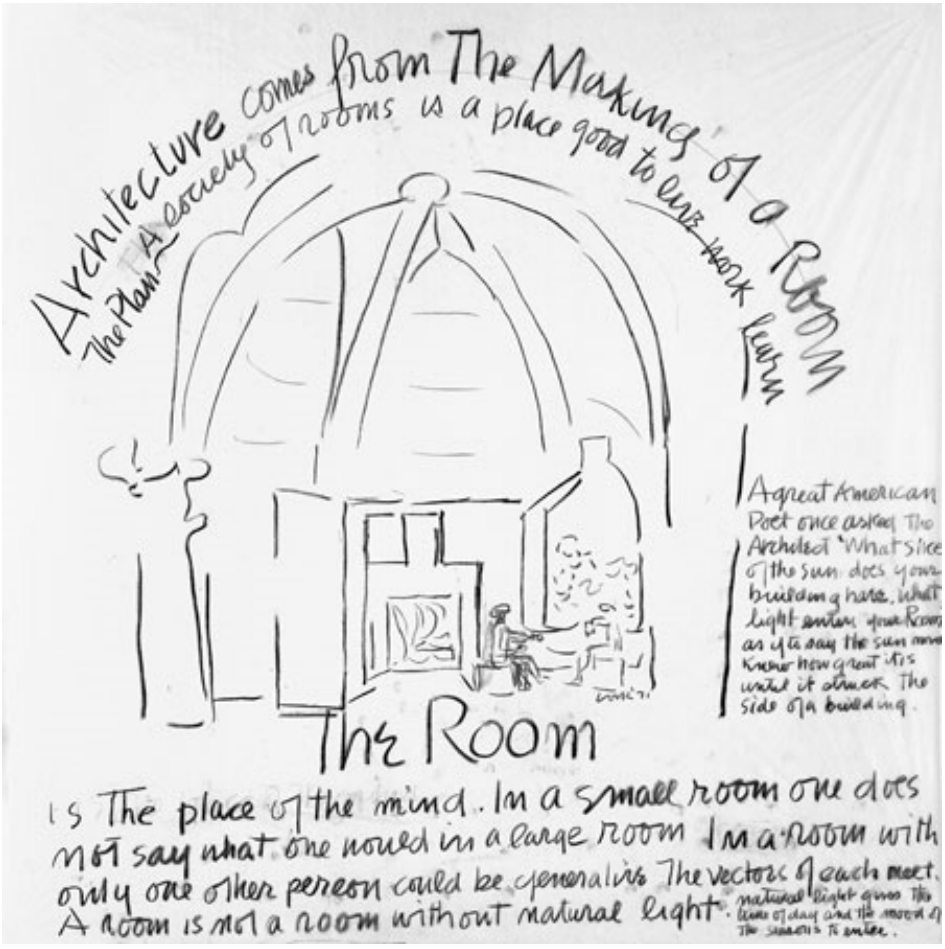

Figure 14: 'Architecture comes from the making of a room', drawing by architect Louis Kahn

[189] Louis Kahn, 'The Room, the Street, and Human Agreement', *American Institute of Architects Gold Medal Acceptance Speech* (1971) <http://www.arthistory.upenn.edu/themakingofaroom/catalogue/section4.htm> [accessed 14 April 2021]

Passing through the liminal and transitional potentials of the doorway, this work now enters the defined space of the room to further explore the everyday, sociospatial experiences of forced migrant women. Because, if within the room 'whatever the human proposes and makes becomes a life,' as famed architect Louis Kahn claimed in his 1971 American Institute of Architects' Gold Medal Acceptance speech, we might ask what lives are forced migrant women proposing and making?[190] What agency do they have to do so? More broadly, what can rooms mean or do to forced migrant women? And, a question which emerges from this chapter, how does reading the room's charged and changeable functions therefore reveal the unavoidable power dynamics forced migrant women encounter in their search for sanctuary? To address these questions, this chapter turns to cultural creative representations of forced migrant women in seemingly dissimilar rooms: the detention rooms within the Immigration Removal Centre (IRC) in Kay Adshead's fictional 2001 play, *The Bogus Woman*, and the rehearsal room for a theatre production performed by forced migrant women in Ros Horin's 2016 documentary, *The Baulkham Hills African Ladies Troupe*.[191] Although the rooms in both *The Bogus Woman* and *Baulkham Hills* claim to provide safety, through the implicit or explicit performances they demand, these rooms become unsafe, unhospitable, and ultimately hostile, revealing the fine and blurry lines of spatial agency for many forced migrant women who seek sanctuary.[192]

Reading the room as simultaneously a basic backdrop, a site for oppression, and a feminist architecture that creates empowered spaces and potential stages in the creative imagination locates the spatial experiences with it as central and affecting to the representations and realities of forced migrant women. In Adshead's *The Bogus Woman*, the detention room at the IRC provides a composite context for the performance of the asylum-seeking process in the United Kingdom. In the real world, this space proposes to offer 'humane and just treatment' during legal immigration procedures but is frequently rendered unsafe for forced migrants, particularly those who identify as

[190] Kahn.
[191] This chapter uses the written play published by Oberon Books in 2001 and a live recording of a 2000 performance starring Noma Dumezweni at the Bush and Traveres Theatre, accessible on YouTube.com. Adshead; 'Bogus Woman wmv' uploaded by Lisa Goldman, YouTube.com, 29 June 2015 <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=83eiIsh9YE0&t=4s> [accessed 08 February 2023]; Horin.
[192] Nishat Awan, Tatjana Schneider, and Jeremy Till, *Spatial Agency: Other Ways of Doing Architecture* (London: Routledge, 2011).

women, through hostile demands and physical and mental abuse.[193] Within the IRC, women are made to perform as vulnerable and worthy in the face of being treated as 'bogus' and illegal.[194] What's more, it is a disturbing reality that in the IRC they often face the real threat of gender-based harassment, violence, or even death.[195] Though both forced migrant men and women alike face the perils of the detention room, including the inhumane threat of indefinite detention in the U.K. context, this chapter is concerned with the gendered violence which led forced migrant women to the room in the first place, as well as the oppressive gendered experiences they have within it, and the feminist efforts and architectures which could promote hospitality over the usual hostility. While *The Bogus Woman* displays the prevailing spatial power of the room, *Baulkham Hills* reveals the particular emotional power a room can hold. Horin's documentary invites the interrogation of rooms that intend to be safe, welcoming and, considering her subjects and subject matter, even feminocentric, but instead reveal and reignite trauma due to persistent power dynamics. Despite some considered efforts, the well-intentioned director navigates the room with an unchecked and oblivious position of class and racial privilege, revealing that, as with the IRC room, it is not only, or necessarily, the room's four walls that cause harm, but the relational politics exercised within them. Importantly however, alongside these institutionally racialized and gendered oppressions, in both texts there also emerges room – within the room – for protagonists to resist expected scripts and begin to build feminist architectures. In these instances, they negotiate both physical space and their own identities, leading to the exploration of feminist strategies of hospitality, that aim to counteract enduring, frequently gender-based hostilities outlined above.

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[193] 'Annual Report of the Independent Monitoring Board at Campsfield House Immigration Removal Centre for Reporting Year 2017', by *National Prevention Mechanism* (May 2018) < https://s3-eu-west-2.amazonaws.com/imb-prod-storage-1ocod6bqky0vo/uploads/2018/05/Campsfield-House-2017-AR-FNL-28-5-18.pdf> [accessed 14 April 2021]

[194] The term 'bogus' has been widely used to describe asylum seekers the state does not deem 'genuine'. Gillian McFadyen, 'The Language of Labelling and the Politics of Hostipitality in the British Asylum System', *British Journal of Politics and International Relations*, 18 (2016), p. 600. Yet, according to the UN Refugee Agency, 'There is no such thing as a bogus asylum-seeker or an illegal asylum-seeker. As an asylum-seeker, a person has entered into a legal process of refugee status determination. Everybody has a right to seek asylum in another country. People who don't qualify for protection as refugees will not receive refugee status and may be deported, but just because someone doesn't receive refugee status doesn't mean they are a bogus asylum-seeker.' 'Asylum in the UK', *UNHCR*, <https://www.unhcr.org/uk/asylum-in-the-uk.html> [accessed 14 April 2021]. With this, very few sanctuary-seeking migrants would be considered bogus.

[195] Mark Townsend, 'Sexual abuse allegations corroborated at Yarl's Wood immigration centre', *The Guardian*, 21 September 2013 <https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2018/oct/10/immigration-detention-how-the-uk-compares-with-other-countries> [accessed 03 February 2023]

In considering what is spatially at stake in regard to gendered agency in the room, Virginia Woolf's 1929 foundational essay *A Room of One's Own* sheds light on the relationship between gender and power within it.[196] In this influential feminist critique, Woolf contests the patriarchal structures around space and place, boldly stating that 'intellectual freedom depends on material things', property included.[197] She argues that women have, since the beginning of time, had less of it then men and asserts the necessity of dedicated space and financial equity to ensure gender equality in the world of literature: 'A woman must have money and a room of her own if she is to write fiction,' she maintains. Although the room Woolf advocates for is not described in aesthetic or architectural details, resonance is in the space itself.[198] Not dissimilar to Woolf, a clean, private room with a door to lock, somewhere to remain, is a demonstrable end goal for many forced migrant women. Though, as they exist in a state of extreme spatial vulnerability and persistent transition, the urgency of this need is certainly more visceral than Woolf's. Without anywhere safe to call their own, forced migrant women must negotiate myriad different rooms, from the dangerous spaces that drive them out of their home countries to the varied rooms they pass through as they seek sanctuary. These might include rooms occupied by obvious threats such as traffickers or sexual predators, or indirectly aggressive 'holding' rooms such as those in processing or removal centres and hostels. Woolf's writing, however, results in a similar failing as will appear in the analysis of *Baulkham Hills*. Appropriate for her own sociopolitical context, Woolf's work nonetheless remains blind to the intersectional injustices for marginalised women, including women of colour, those in underrepresented socioeconomic classes and, certainly, forced migrant women. Woolf's advocating call is for white, middleclass women in the Global North who have the means to write as a career or a hobby.[199] It does not consider the likelihood of threatening rooms, such as those within England's notorious women's only immigration detention centre, Yarl's Wood,

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[196] Virginia Woolf, David Bradshaw, Stuart N. Clarke, *A Room of One's Own*/ *Virginia Woolf* (Malden, MA: John Wiley/Blackwell, 2015), p. 3.
[197] Woolf, p. 78.
[198] Woolf does reflect on spatial aesthetics, though in an imagined scenario, leaving interpretation and meaning open: 'One thought of all the books that were assembled down there; of the pictures of old prelates and worthies hanging in the panelled rooms; of the painted windows that would be throwing strange globes and crescents on the pavement; of the tablets and memorials and inscriptions; of the fountains and the grass; of the quiet rooms looking across the quiet quadrangles. And (pardon me the thought) I thought, too, of the admirable smoke and drink and the deep armchairs and the pleasant carpets: of the urbanity, the geniality, the dignity which are the offspring of luxury and privacy and space.' Woolf, p. 18.
[199] See Alice Walker, *In Search of Our Mothers' Gardens: Womanist Prose* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich: 2004), p. 235.

nor the symbolic IRC, as depicted in *The Bogus Woman*.[200] Similarly, it does not confront complex geopolitical, class, or race relations as the *Baulkham Hills* rehearsal room ought to do. Just as rooms can evoke the unease of spatial dynamics, so too can representations of and negotiations with them. While Woolf's feminist polemic demands access to the room, its myopia restricts who exactly gains that access.

Approaching the spatial trope intersectionally, it is becomes clear within or in regard to the room that contemporary representations of forced migrant women have a particularly gendered presence. For example, one might consider the rooms depicted as the backdrop for daily strife, as in the 2016 graphic novel *Madaya Mom*. This digital comic about a mother struggling to survive amidst Syria's civil war is primarily set in kitchen, bedroom, living areas.[201] Likewise, the emotive 2019 documentary *For Sama* follows Syrian journalist, activist and young mother Waad al-Kateab across shifting 'room' sites that serve as proxy for the home she had to abandon.[202] These rooms that Madaya Mom and al-Kateab encounter are overtly domestic, likely meant to serve as familiar places that situate female protagonists in recognisably 'women-led' realms. The following readings of *The Bogus Woman* and *Baulkham Hills*, however, eschew the notion of the domestic room, pushing past a simplified reading of gendered space. As Alison Jeffers writes, 'Examining the cultural products made both by and about refugees reveals layers of thinking and practice that are dissected with discourses on performance, diaspora, migration and identity'.[203] Here, 'layers of thinking' include complex identities in terms of race, gender, and immigration status, complicating a basic understanding of a basic space, revealing it as far more complex. They leads us to question if there can ever be rooms and relationships of egalitarianism, designed with feminist intentions or as feminist architectures, which may accommodate forced migrant women, even in a purely representational scope.[204] Or, are they all doomed by 'hostipitality', the portmanteau put forth by Jacques Derrida which suggests that with hospitality there will always be a counter of hostility due

[200] 'Yarl's Wood Immigration Removal Centre', Serco <https://www.serco.com/uk/sector-expertise/immigration/yarls-wood-irc> [accessed 17 February 2023]
[201]Xana O'Neill and Rym Momtaz, 'Madaya Mom', *ABC News*, 3rd October 2016. <https://abcnews.go.com/International/fullpage/madaya-mom-42363064> [accessed 14 April 2021]
[202] *For Sama* dir. by Waad Al-Kateab and Edward Watts (PBS Frontline, Channel 4 News and ITN Productions: 2019).
[203] Alison Jeffers, *Refugees, Theatre and Crisis: Performing Global Identities* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), p. 4.
[204] For reading on intersectional feminist critique of and approaches to urban design, see Kern.

to the spatial power dynamics between host and guest?[205] Sara Ahmed furthers this line of thinking in her work around the precarity of hospitality for women in U.K. migration/multiculturalism contexts, claiming, 'the cultural politics of emotion is deeply bound up with gendered histories of imperialism and capitalism, in which violence against the bodies of subaltern women is both granted and taken for granted in the making of worlds'.[206] Considering this framework, it is possible to engage the space of the room in *The Bogus Woman* and *Baulkham Hills* to illuminate the interplay between the right to seek asylum and the actual treatment of asylum seeking women. In doing so, what Derrida called a 'double bind' is revealed, in which the structure of the relationship between host and guest is continually affected by power struggle and self-protection.[207] However, critical and creative analysis also allows us to read opportunity in the room. In exploring how the room might be designed or treated as a feminist architecture, this chapter envisions a dynamic space to reject the double bind, and instead seek collective, imaginative, and non-hierarchical understandings of mutual benefit for all involved.

Rethinking the IRC with feminist hospitality

Set in a layered series of rooms – within the theatre, the Immigration Removal Centre, the home, and the hostel – *The Bogus Woman* by Kay Adshead is a revelatory play in the world of refugee theatre.[208] A critical reflection on the U.K. asylum system, the impassioned story takes shape as an exposing and accusatory monopolylogue in which one actor plays multiple characters across time sequences, traumas and, indeed, spaces. The protagonist, the anonymously named 'Young Woman', is a black journalist and poet who has fled to England from an unspecified African country after witnessing the massacre of her entire family. The targeted murders were performed as retaliation for a human rights article she wrote criticising the ruling regime. Immediately upon entry to Heathrow Airport in London, the Young Woman is met with aggressive and othering opposition. She is questioned and accused by immigration officials before she can reach the safety she seeks, to which her response is frantic and confused:

[205] Derrida insists the paradox is implicit because of 'the troubling analogy in the common origin between *hostis* as host and *hostis* as enemy, between hospitality and hostility.' Jacques Derrida, 'Hostipitality', *Angelaki Journal of The Theoretical Humanities* (2000), p. 15.
[206] Sara Ahmed, *Cultural Politics of Emotion*, 2nd edn. (Edinburgh University Press: 2014).
[207] Derrida, p. 5.
[208] For further reading on refugee theatre see: Jeffers, 2011.

> Take your hand off my arm! | Yes I have a passport | I don't know, in my bag… I don't know my name… I don't know which flight | I can't remember. | I don't know | where from, | you tell me. | No, I have no family | in England… | I told you in my bag! I told you in my bag! | No I'm not on holiday! No I've no one meeting me! | No I'm not saying with friends! | I don't know yet! | Does it matter? | Does it matter?[209]

Hostility continues to reverberate throughout her journey. 'So far | we can find no evidence | to substantiate | that claim', she, like so many seeking asylum in the U.K., is told by a suspicious interrogator.[210] 'Perhaps you came over… | have a holiday | do a bit of seasonal shopping | see the sights | and then stay on | just a few weeks | or a few months', she is accused by another. [211] Applying Derrida's theory of hostipitality to *The Bogus Woman* in terms of space, gender and the asylum-seeking process as a whole, the impossible situation the Young Woman faces becomes clear. Following the unwelcoming arrival, she is not forced to immediately return to her home country and is thus shown a degree of hospitality from the nation state. Yet, she is subsequently sited in a series of hostile rooms, treated with humiliation, aggression, and doubt, and forced to live like a criminal while pursuing safety, a human right protected by Article 14 of the United Nation's Universal Declaration of Human Rights: 'Everyone has the right to seek and enjoy in other countries asylum from persecution.'[212] To better understand these seemingly inevitable hostipitalities, a focus on the Young Woman's observations of the IRC rooms in which she resides before and throughout the process of seeking asylum reveals the significant spatial effect, and suggests how some of the real forced migrant women her story represents are affected, too. In exposing and addressing these spaces through critical textual analysis, it becomes possible, as Espiritu, et al. write in *Departures: An Introduction to Critical Refugee Studies*, to 'centre refugee lives' – here, it is the somatic and spatial lives – 'and the creative and critical potentiality that such lives offer'.[213] In recentring the Young Woman spatially, this reading recentres her narratively as well.

It is readily discernible that the spaces encountered by *The Bogus Woman*'s protagonist are both banal and extraordinary, as are all at stake in this thesis. Often originally built as prisons, the

[209] Adshead, pp. 13-14.
[210] Ibid., p. 17.
[211] Ibid., pp. 17-18.
[212] Universal Declaration of Human Rights, *United Nations*, from United Nations General Assembly (Paris, France: 10 December 1948) <https://www.un.org/en/about-us/universal-declaration-of-human-rights> [accessed 03 March 2023]
[213] Espiritu, Duong, Vang, Bascara, Um, Sharif, and Hatton, p. 11.

rooms inside actual IRCs are bare and unwelcoming; they are small and sparsely furnished – see Figures 15 and 16.

Figure 15: Interior image of the central communal space in Colnbrook IRC in Harmondsworth, England, Photo ©AFP/Getty Image [214]

Figure 16: Interior image of a bedroom in Yarl's Wood IRC in Bedford, England ©Reuters [215]

[214] Peter MacDiarmid, *Colnbrook Immigration Detention Centre*, ©AFP/Getty Image, FT.com (2015) <https://www.ft.com/content/97e025d6-3128-11e5-91ac-a5e7d9b4cff> [accessed 16 February 2023]

Likewise, these rooms are supremely remarkable. They are holding cells that have the proven power to inflict violence, oppression, and segregation. The IRC as a built space sits within similar liminal typologies as the camp, the road, and the sea as a hackneyed trope in refugee representation, defining key moments in the journeys of many forced migrant women.[216] However, in deconstructing the institutional space into discernible room components and emphasising the impact of these architectures, rather than solely their functions, this work allows for exploration of the relational role that space plays in terms of gender, power, and performance in Adshead's play.[217] Implementing what David Farrier (drawing on Jacques Rancière) calls 'aesthetic disruption', an act which 'makes visible what had no business being seen', such a focus looks at and names the hidden and dehumanising interior realties – and realistic fictional depictions – of detention and seeks out the spatial counteractions which might support the forced migrant women held within them.[218]

In her Author's Note prefacing the 2001 Oberon Books edition of the play, Adshead remarked that her work was created 'before xenophobia hit the headlines', at the turn of the twenty-first century.[219] Adshead, in fact, wrote *The Bogus Woman* as a means to confront the U.K.'s hostile asylum system to address the 'sad', 'sickening', 'horrifying', 'almost unreadable' stories she had come across in her research.[220] Adshead explained, 'I have written it because I hope it will give people an insight into what it can really be like to seek asylum in this country. I also hope it may change minds.'[221] In her efforts, she employs what the editors of *Refugee Imaginaries* refer to as 'the 'humanising' qualities of art, literature and narrative'.[222] To inform her work, the author accessed numerous refugee stories and abundant documentary material given by The Medical

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[215] Cole Moreton, 'Yarl's Wood: Undercover tour of detention centre with dreadful reputation for its treatment of asylum seekers', *The Independent*, 16 November 2014 <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/crime/yarl-s-wood-undercover-tour-of-detention-centre-with-dreadful-reputation-for-its-treatment-of-asylum-seekers-9863842.html> [accessed 08 November 2023]

[216] 'Third annual inspection of "Adults at risk in immigration detention"', Independent Chief Inspector of Borders and Immigration, June – September 2022, Gov.uk <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/third-annual-inspection-of-adults-at-risk-immigration-detention-june-to-september-2022> [accessed 17 February 2023]

[217] In *Postcolonial Asylum: Seeking Sanctuary Before the Law*, David Farrier more broadly considers 'the extent to which the aesthetics of detention are complicit in the promulgation of inclusive exclusion.' Farrier, p. 58.

[218] Farrier, p. 59; Jacques Rancière, *Disagreement: Politics and Philosophy* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1999), p. 30.

[219] *The Bogus Woman* started as a short piece written by Adshead for the 'Seeing Red' sessions at The Red Room, London in 1998. It later was developed at Waterman's Art Centre in London in June 2000 and was put on at the Traverse Theatre for the Edinburgh Fringe Festival in August 2000 and eventually found its home in Adshead's production company, Mama Quillo, at The Bush Theatre in London in 2001. Elaine Aston, '"The Bogus Woman": Feminism and Asylum Theatre', *Modern Drama*, 46 (2003), p. 7; Adshead, p. 9.

[220] Ibid.

[221] Ibid.

[222] Cox, Durrant, Farrier, Stonebridge, and Woolley, p. 3.

Foundation for the Care of Victims of Torture and The Refugee Council.[223] She also studied the transcripts of the 1998 Campsfield Nine trial, at which nine detainees from the very centre Adshead sets the majority of her play were tried for protesting conditions.[224] This progressive position, alongside positive critical reviews solidified *The Bogus Woman*'s status as a seminal piece of asylum theatre in the twenty-first century.[225] As such, the play has been discussed widely in cultural and academic discourse around theatre and refugee studies. Across this thesis it is by far the most reviewed text, both as a written and performed play, but it is rarely considered in gendered or spatial terms. For example, scholars Agnes Wooley, David Farrier, and Alison Jeffers all have written productively about *The Bogus Woman* in terms of biopolitics, testimony, and performance – work which indeed informs this writing but does not address the gendered and spatial inequalities it reveals.[226] Notably, Pietro Deandrea works with *The Bogus Woman* in 'Spatial Counter-Actions in Contemporary British Literature on Migrants' to explore how space affects migrants' journeys and receptions, and Elain Aston situates the text as a 'narrative of asylum within a matrix of gender, race, and nation in 'The "Bogus Woman": Feminism and Asylum Theatre'.[227] However, neither use an intersectional approach to analyse what the play reveals in mutually affecting terms of space and place for forced migrant women. Adding space to Aston's identified 'matrix' of asylum narratives alongside gender, race, and nation allows for a more inclusive response to the realities forced migrant women face when seeking asylum.

Considering the space of the room indeed makes room to explore spatial agency through sociospatial analysis, and within *The Bogus Woman* there is a varied panoply of rooms to discover. In the same way there is only one actor but multiple characters, the acting area remains in one single room with one primary set design, yet many different geographies. Aston describes visuals from a 2001 studio venue performance at the Royal Exchange Theatre in Manchester:

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[223] Adshead, p. 9.
[224] Aston, p. 9; 'Campsfield Nine Defence Campaign', Close Campsfield <http://www.closecampsfield.org.uk/background/defence.html> [accessed 10 March 2023]
[225] Michael Billington, 'People like us', *The Guardian*, 9 August 2000 <https://www.theguardian.com/culture/2000/aug/09/artsfeatures.edinburghfestival2000> [accessed 13 February 2021]; Brian Logan, 'Unkindness of strangers', *The Guardian*, 10 August 2000 <https://www.theguardian.com/culture/2000/aug/10/artsfeatures.edinburghfestival20002> [accessed 13 February 2021]
[226] Woolley, 2014, pp. 123-140; Farrier, 2011; Jeffers, 2011.
[227] Pietro Deandrea, 'In Every Holt and Heath: Spatial Counter-Actions in Contemporary British Literature on Migrants', *Le Simplegadi*, XVI (2018), pp. 52-64; Aston, 2003.

> While three roughly-hewn pieces of wood were suspended to one side of the performing space and used to beat out memories of Africa, the other side was occupied by a large corrugated sheet, evocative of an England which is not the England that the young woman first imagines …[228]

As a result of this basic, 'bleak construction', intended as a 'diasporic space', the narrative scenes morph throughout the play into different, distinct rooms via stage cues written by Adshead as lighting changes ('Sudden dazzling light', Adshead, p. 20) and background soundtrack ('African music suddenly climaxes and then dips', Adshead, p. 22).[229] The Young Woman and her audience are transported across a series of varied and evocative locations and her narration announces where she is: 'I have been moved | to Tinsley House. | A detention centre | for asylum seekers | near Gatwick…'.[230] Identifying the many rooms the Young Woman accesses, or is forced into, across the course of her detention, asylum-seeking process, granting of Temporary Admission, and deportation, displays how the written and unwritten spatial elements of these scenes are a means to understanding the agency and hospitality denied to the Young Woman. In studying them, we can call for a more just reception, more feminist architectures, for her and her asylum-seeking, forced migrant counterparts 'outside the theatrical frame'.[231]

Despite taking place on a mostly empty stage with a singular set design, Adshead utilises textual narration and dialogue to move the Young Woman from one continent to another, one room to another, one trauma to another. Adshead gives simple italicised stage direction by way of the stage's lighting ('Lights snap up', Adshead, p. 13; 'Lights change', Adshead, p. 16.) to denote when the Young Woman is transported elsewhere. With these cues, she presents the room as Robin Evans does in *Translations from Drawing to Building and Other Essays*: 'a boundary of experience', 'an edge to perception'.[232] For the Young Woman, the room is an enclosure of boundaries and visibility and, simultaneously, a connector and a separator. She is in the U.K. but does not have access to it. She is in a building with other asylum-seekers yet withheld from communing with them. The room imageries of the Young Woman's detention serve as powerful representations of 'the paradigms of

[228] Aston, p. 10.
[229] Ibid.
[230] Adshead, p. 64.
[231] Jeffers, 2008, p. 217.
[232] Robin Evans, 'Figures, Doors and Passages', *Translations from Drawing to Building and Other Essays*, annotated edition AA Documents 2 (Architectural Association Publications: Oct, 1996), p. 69.

confinement that characterise migrants' lives'.[233] She reflects, 'In bed | I watch the small | grey rectangle of England, | the veins of English cloud, | and weep.'[234] Stating where she is, she explains what she can see, desire, and feel within the IRC rooms through which she is moved. 'A *different* white square room'; 'I am taken to *another* | square room | with a high window.'[235] Isolated and emotional, these fragments of contested space are all she is afforded when seeking refuge from grave danger, and she clearly has little control of them.

Although Adshead's portrayal of the Young Woman's spatial experience is sparse, it is effective. Where there is a window, she notes it, always high enough one cannot climb out, meaning England, and sanctuary and freedom, are just out of her of her reach: "England is a | rectangle | above my head, | out of the corner | of my eye, | a small grey rectangle | of sky. [236] Some rooms are described simply as 'white', evoking a feeling of sterility, or 'square', suggesting encaged confinement. As designer and curator of virtual collaboration project Future Architecture Rooms, Anastassia Smirnova, explains, 'the room is the base unit of a building'; the Young Woman's descriptions, therefore, inform the audience of some of the most essential spatial experiences of seeking asylum.[237] Notably, rooms outside the Young Woman's detainment are activated too, as an interrogator transports her from the detention room at Campsfield or Tinsley (it is unclear which, as the timeline is disarranged as a means of mirroring the Young Woman's own disorientation) back to her home on the day of the massacre of her family. The interrogator paints a scene the Young Woman can neither confirm nor deny, having lost or confused her memories from the trauma of that day: 'Well, was it | a very large room | you were in?' the interrogator asks with accusation.[238] Here, and in subsequent passages, the interrogator makes unambiguous indictments through antagonistic questioning. She demands a spatial account to locate the actions and timeline leading up to the Young Woman's exile, further indicating that place, the room in particular, defines the Young Woman's experience as a forced migrant. From recollecting the day her family was

[233] Deandrea, p. 59.
[234] Adshead, p. 19.
[235] Emphasis mine. Adshead, p. 16, 18.
[236] Ibid., p. 14.
[237] Anastassia Smirnova, 'Curatorial statement', *Future Architecture Rooms* <https://futurearchitecturerooms.org/info-room> [accessed 17 February 2023]
[238] Adshead, pp. 80-81.

killed, to her hiding, detainment, and eventual desperate unravelling before deportation, it is made clear that everyday spaces have been co-opted and drawn out of her control. Further, they depict Derrida's double bind of hostipitality in her quest for sanctuary, asking for legal, humanitarian protection, and instead being met with humiliation, scepticism, and even danger, as she awaits judgment of her worthiness.

Through her narration, Adshead implores the audience to understand the Young Woman's spatial struggle, within and outside the room. After her interrogation at the airport, the Young Woman arrives at a new destination – the IRC.[239] The hostile 'welcome' is visceral in her initial description of the exterior of Campsfield Detention Centre's ominous architecture: 'A tangled tower | of twenty-foot-high razor wire | secretly coils all the way | from Oxford. | (*Very anxious*) Where am I? | How long will I be here? | What happens next? | What happens now?'[240] The place is a notorious immigration removal centre outside of Oxford, England, though not known to her. Its gnarled, aggressive architecture immediately strikes the Young Woman as devious, secretive, dangerous. Paired with a lack of explanation of her whereabouts or the plan ahead, the building is disorienting and unnerving. The Young Woman's reaction to the hostile-looking building is not surprising; in *Between Borders and Bodies Revealing the Architectures of Immigration* Ella den Elzen denotes detention centres as 'architectures shrouded in secrecy'.[241] Den Elzen continues,

> Migrant detention facilities are made inconspicuous in multiple ways. They are sited in far-flung suburban areas obscured by layers of fencing, and bureaucratic euphemisms, such as Immigration Holding Centres (IHCs) in Canada, Processing Centers in the United States, or Reception Centers in certain European countries, are enabled to misconstrue their function.[242]

Campsfield Detention Centre, also referred to as Campsfield House IRC, is no different. Both a real centre and the primary setting in Adshead's fictional play, it sits near the airport, on the outskirts of Oxford, in Kidlington, England.

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[239] Indefinite: 'The days have congealed into a grey viscous lump, into a week,' Adshead, p. 14; Undefined: 'A different white square room,' Adshead, p. 16.
[240] Ibid., p. 23.
[241] Ella den Elzen, 'Between Borders and Bodies: Revealing the Architectures of Immigration Detention', *Journal of Architectural Education*, 74 (2020), p. 288.
[242] den Elzen, p. 288.

Figure 17: Screenshot of Google Maps Street View of Campsfield House [243]

The massive building is surrounded by tall, PVC-coated fencing topped with swirling razor barbed wire fencing, as viewed above in Figure 17. Harsh and unwelcoming, the exterior foreshadows the unpleasant, and often dangerous, spaces within.[244]

Considering this spatial confrontation in terms of Derrida's hospitality/ hostility paradox, it may be useful to turn to the concept of 'hostile architecture'. Hostile architecture refers to the design of buildings, public spaces, and infrastructure that actively discourages certain uses, activities, or groups of people. This can be achieved through physical barriers, such as spikes on ledges, narrow benches, or sloped surfaces that are uncomfortable to sit on, or through technological means, such as sound barriers or surveillance cameras.[245] Generally used in

[243] Google Maps (June 2022), Campsfield House IRC – Google Street View <https://www.google.com/maps/@51.8276159, 1.3120878,3a,75y,163.23h,90.83t/data=!3m6!1e1!3m4!1sRClWBFnYmcICpcSVXFDz4Q!2e0!7i16384!8i8192> [accessed 17 February 2023]

[244] According to a 2014 report by the charity Women for Refugee Women, '40 women said they had been guarded by male staff and 70% of these said this made them uncomfortable. 50% said a member of staff had verbally abused them. Three women said they had been physically assaulted and one said she was sexually assaulted.' Marchu Girma, Sophie Radice, Natasha Tsangarides and Natasha Walter, 'Detained', *Women for Refugee Women*, January 2014 <https://www.refugeewomen.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2019/01/women-for-refugee-women-reports-detained.pdf> [accessed 23 March 2021]

[245] See further: Karl de Fine Licht, 'Hostile Architecture and Its Confederates: A conceptual framework for how we should perceive our cities and the objects in them', *Canadian Journal of Urban Research*, 29 (2021), pp. 1-17; Kurt Kohlstedt, 'Hostile Architecture: "Design Crimes" Campaign Gets Bars Removed from Benches', *99% Invisible*, 09

conversations around public urban design and homelessness, it can more broadly be understood as design intervention meant to discourage certain uses and undesired behaviours, and it shares similar complexities as Derrida's hostipitality around spatial power.[246] Robert Rosenberger writes in 'On Hostile Design: Theoretical and Empirical Prospects', 'A theory of hostile design is an account of power enacted through the reconfiguration of objects and space'.[247] Space is designed with controlled use intentions and hostility can be subtly implicit, such as sidewalk benches with armrests placed mid-seat to serve as anti-sleep mechanisms, or explicit, such as 'anti-homeless spikes' on ledges and benches to stop loitering or rough sleeping.[248] Indeed Campsfield's coiling 'twenty-foot-high razor wire' reads as hostile, as do its stripped and sterile rooms.[249]

Extensive research around 'systems of power, surveillance, privatisation and discrimination' make the term 'hostile design' applicable to this reading of *The Bogus Woman*, and generally to the discourse exploring spatial dynamics and dignity for forced migrants.[250] Here, the detention room's hostility may not take shape as sharp spikes, but in the form of an enclosed and bleak, agency-stripping space, a visual representation of Hannah Arendt's reference to the 'banality of evil'.[251] Philip Hancock and Yvonne Jewkes draw on Gresham Sykes' 1958 text *The Society of Captives: A Study of a Maximum Security Prison* to explain similar design interventions and effects,

> The physical compression induced by such environments with their 'naked electric lights, echoing corridors, walls encrusted with the paint of decades, and the stale air of rooms shut up too long', serve a further function – the concomitant psychological compression of inmates. Such compression is not only experienced as a pain, a deprivation, a restriction, but, it can be argued, also leads to the production of an institutionalized mode of subjectivity; one congruent with the demands of docility and dependency continually placed upon the prison population.[252]

Though the detention room may seem innocuous in its simplicity, as with punitive prison design, targeted deprivation and restrictions charge it as hostile. Without delving fully into carceral design,

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February 2018 <https://99percentinvisible.org/article/design-crimes-artist-launches-campaign-highlight-hostile-architecture/> [accessed 16 February 2023]

[246] Robert Rosenberger, 'On Hostile Design: Theoretical and Empirical Prospects', *Urban Studies*, 57 (2020), p. 883.

[247] Ibid., p. 884.

[248] Ibid., p. 886.

[249] Adshead, p. 23.

[250] Rosenberger, p. 889.

[251] See: Hannah Arendt, *Eichmann in Jerusalem* (1963) and *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (2017).

[252] Philip Hancock and Yvonne Jewkes, 'Architectures of Incarceration: The Spatial Pains of Imprisonment', *Punishment and Society*, 13 (2011), p. 617.

it is useful to explore some of the overlapping principles which lead to the Young Woman's spatial experiences in asylum-seeking because, as Deandrea notes in 'In Every Holt and Heath: Spatial Counter-Actions in Contemporary British Literature on Migrants', 'The use of prison-like spaces as destinations for non-criminal migrants constitutes a widespread practice in contemporary Britain'.[253] That practice is evident in *The Bogus Woman*, with themes of punishment, humiliation, and power working against the Young Woman's physical detainment in hopelessly systemic ways. However, as Ali McGinley discloses in *Detention of women: principles of equality and non-discrimination*, it may be worse in the IRC: 'There is still no gender-sensitive policy for female detainees in the U.K.–unlike in the prison system – and in many areas the immigration detention operating standards fall short of prison standards'.[254] Rosenberger confirms, observing that 'those not targeted by, say, skatestoppers or anti-sleep benches may often not register these devices as 'hostile', or even really see them at all. Targeted populations, on the other hand, may find those same devices hard to ignore.'[255] This is why to her lawyer, guards, and perhaps even the audience, Tinsley and Campsfield's rooms are a hospitable, or at least harmless, place to await asylum proceedings. Yet to the Young Woman, they are aggressive reminders she has not yet found sanctuary and the potential dangers that correspond.

The paradox of hostipitality helps us to understand and problematise the rooms the Young Woman inhabits. Whilst vaguely hospitable in their mere presence (she is safer in a detention room in England than she was hiding in a hole, 'down a thousand | stone cold steps' where 'a bucket smells of shit', for more than four weeks awaiting false papers, Adshead, pp. 29-30), the rooms she encounters are a series of confinements that strip away the Young Woman's spatial agency and sense of safety. They offer little to no generosity in terms of mental or physical health, and only negatively affect social behaviour or environmental stressors such as boredom, stimulation, and noise. These rooms are thus rendered hostile in their lack of humanity. In *The Bogus Woman*, this harmful stalemate is clearly illustrated by the tragic and unnecessary death of the Young Woman following deportation. Adshead writes, 'a group of three young men | in part military uniform |

[253] Deandrea, p. 54.
[254] Ali McGinley, 'Detention of women: principles of equality and non-discrimination', *Forced Migration Review*, 44 (September 2013), p. 31.
[255] Rosenberger, p. 888.

burst into the apartment | where she and her three friends | were drinking morning coffee. | They were killed outright.'[256] She ultimately dies in yet another room meant to offer security – one inside a safehouse apartment in her home country, where the U.K. Home Office's decision implied she would be fine. 'We arguably need to push hospitality to do more', Dan Bulley writes in 'Ethics, power and space: International hospitality beyond Derrida', 'to extend our understanding of the ethics and power of hospitality in order to further Derrida's aim of understanding, transforming and "bettering" the practice of hospitality...'[257] To 'push hospitality', as suggested, it may be productive to turn to Maurice Hamington's work on feminist hospitality as one positive approach. It identifies a simple application of feminist theory as a start. Hamington suggests, 'Because feminist theory has been driven by the experience of those marginalized in society, feminist hospitality should be particularly attentive to inclusive definitions of guest'.[258] Likewise, her chapter 'Feminism, Hospitality, and Women in Exile' in *Feminism and Hospitality: Gender in the Host/Guest Relationship* (edited by Hamington), Ileana Szymanski explains, 'Feminism understood as an equality-seeking movement aims at ending instances of power imbalance,' such as the host country/ asylum-seeker relationship witnessed in the play. By first identifying the flagrant power dynamics between host (here, the U.K.) and guest (the Young Woman), a less aggressively hierarchical, and therefore less punitive, relationship might begin to form.

On a material level, if detention rooms must inevitably mimic, or indeed inhabit, disciplinary architectures as they do in the play's account and real IRC designs, then mirroring the most progressive, hospitable of these spaces is an obvious and necessary step to take on behalf of forced migrants. Engaging a feminist approach to spatial design would be a start in addressing and interrogating hierarchy, power relations, and hospitality to promote a more equal relationship between host and guest.[259] One form this could take is to model architectures of restorative justice rather than punitive justice. As 'innovative, imaginatively designed prisons prove, it is possible to

[256] Adshead, p. 127.
[257] Dan Bulley, 'Ethics, power and space: International hospitality beyond Derrida' in *Hospitality and Society*, 5: 2-3 (2015), p. 200.
[258] Maurice Hamington, 'Toward a Theory of Feminist Hospitality', *Feminist Formations*, 22:1 (2010), p. 22.
[259] For early work on feminist approaches to spatial design, see Leslie Weisman, *Discrimination by Design: A Feminist Critique of the Man-made Environment* (Urbana, Illinois: University of Illinois Press, 1992).

reconcile justice and aesthetics'.[260] Thus, detention rooms, like those housing the Young Woman, have potential to inspire community, creativity and care.[261] Evidenced in work by U.S.-based architect Deanna van Buren and her practice, Designing Justice + Designing Spaces, it is possible to consider creating new building typologies that replace prisons and detention centres altogether.[262] For examples, see below Figures 18 and 19. A resulting architecture would create spaces that 'make amends and repair the damage if possible', rather than punishing or placing blame. [263] This type of design might see the Young Woman instead emplaced in a room created for conversations, learning, and therapeutic exercises. It could help her address the trauma she has faced instead of reinscribing it. Practically, a room like this might include soft furnishings, natural light, and comfortable, communal, and private spaces. It could have areas for socialising and areas for privacy. Importantly, it could be co-designed alongside the real women who spend time within it. Regardless of the decorative details, a feminist approach as such would move these spaces away from fear, danger and punishment toward equality, intersectionality, and reparation.

Figure 18: Restore Oakland, the first centre for restorative justice and restorative economics in the US, by Designing Justice + Designing Spaces [264]

[260] Hancock and Jewkes, p. 624.
[261] Ibid.
[262] Designing Justice + Designing Spaces <https://designingjustice.org> [accessed 17 February 2023]
[263] Ibid.
[264] Emily Hagopian, 'Restore Oakland by Designing Justice + Designing Spaces', *Dezeen* <https://www.dezeen.com/2020/06/25/deanna-van-buren-prisons-jails-mass-incarceration/> [accessed17 February 2023]

Figure 19: The Women's Mobile Refuge, co-designed by female prisoners in County Jail #2 in San Francisco and Designing Justice + Designing Spaces [265]

And, while Adshead does not go so far as to redesign the detention room, through the voice and tragic fate of the Young Woman she similarly confronts the failures of the unforgiving rooms into which she is placed. The spatial significance of where her family was murdered ('My sister at the table'…they kicked in the door', Adshead p. 43), where she hid for safety ('a back door | in the city', Adshead, pp. 29-30), where she is detained and interrogated ('a tangled tower', Adshead, p. 23), and all the spaces in which she is denied sanctuary does not go ignored in an account of reclamation and recentring.

The Bogus Woman further challenges spatial and gendered oppression with Adshead's explicit empathy for the Young Woman, a clear way in which she identifies and pushes back on the dysfunctional balance of hostipitality. Adshead and/as the Young Woman makes clear the place-based injustices which Deandrea affirms, 'constrain the lives of migrants and the ensuing impact on their identity', in the many instances the Young Woman names her location, with disgust, resignation, or directness: '…the small | grey rectangle of England' (Adshead, p.16), 'another | square room | with a high window' (Adshead, p. 16), 'two hundred souls | did I tell you? Broken |

[265] *The Women's Mobile Refuge* by Designing Justice + Designing Spaces <https://designingjustice.org/womens-refuge-trailer> [accessed 17 February 2023]

or breaking | in Campsfield | England' (Adshead, p. 33).[266] What's more, the play is performed with an angry fervour; the Young Woman shouts and spits her oppressions out loud. '(*Knocking over a chair*) You fucking | fish-faced | English cunts. | She's dead!'[267] Stage directions match her screaming response to blatant misinformation during her initial interrogation. 'I am NOT A CRIMINAL!'[268] she shouts as she acts out the character of an old man prisoner involved a protest fire. In these practices it is possible to see further glimpses of the author's own feminist hospitality, as she ensures it is the Young Woman who tells the whole story. Adshead offers the protagonist, a lifelike representation of real forced migrant women, 'agency and epistemology', in this way.[269] As a nameless black African woman, written by an established white British author, she is at risk of being reduced to an emotive symbol of weakness. Yet, the author's own political and intersectional hospitality ultimately centres her as in control in an otherwise powerless situation. Keeping her at the forefront, the Young Woman's personhood and voice are always accessible to the audience, even if she is enacting another character. In this way, her narrative stands as a fictional, yet clearly feminised retelling of the true story of the Campsfield Nine.[270] It reimagines the harrowing tale of the nine male detainees in the violent IRC by reasserting that space with a singular and commanding female voice that speaks to the sexual violence, reproductive rights, and gendered racialisation forced migrant women face. It is with this, alongside the use of the minimalist yet evocative stage set and the unsettling conclusion, that Adshead ultimately charges the audience to imagine a room of resolution. She has written a character with feminist solidarity and afforded her the space(s) to tell her story, yet cannot afford her to save her life within the narrative. The socio-political, gendered, racialised, and spatial realities of the time – which indeed persist today – are too grim; they all need to be redesigned entirely with feminist architectures.

'Where the magic is hatched, explored and exploded': The emotional architecture of the rehearsal room

If *The Bogus Woman* illuminates the possibility of creatively approaching architectures of asylum with feminist hospitality, then *The Baulkham Hills African Ladies Troupe* severely complicates

[266] Deandrea, p. 53.
[267] Adshead, p. 18.
[268] Adshead, p. 60.
[269] Espiritu, Duong, Vang, Bascara, Um, Sharif, and Hatton, p. 28.
[270] CloseCampsfield.org.uk.

them. While the above analysis looked at the rooms present in the play itself, focusing on the problematic spaces of detainment as written in Adshead's text and the real-world immigration removal centres they represent, this section shifts focus to those on the periphery of the play. It steps outside the production context and pays specific attention to the rehearsal room, exposing this behind-the-scenes space as one of simultaneous potential and precarious performance. Once again applying the Derridean concept of hostipitality, it becomes possible to analyse how these spaces might welcome, reject, and affect forced migrant women.

Baulkham Hills is a 2016 documentary about the production of a play of the same name.[271] Marketed as an 'emotional and uplifting experience', the film follows Australian writer and director Ros Horin and four forced migrant women, each different ages and from different countries in Africa, who have settled in Australia.[272] It captures the journey of scripting, choreographing, and rehearsing a retelling of the women's journeys to seek asylum. Notably, the documentary only shows clips of the play, splicing them with to-camera interviews, B-roll footage and, central to this analysis, film from the rehearsal room. This section, therefore, examines the process of making the play within the rehearsal room, as represented in the documentary, rather than focusing on the production or documentary as text. It attempts to read the spatial, gender, and power politics of directorial engagement visible in the film, which are filtered through the complex representational layers of genre (documentary and theatre), director/producer (Horin), primary subject (again, Horin) and secondary subjects (the four forced migrant women). Although as an act of representation this does not reveal the unfiltered reality of the process of film- and play-making, as it is mediated by director Horin herself, the scenes in the rehearsal room provide a narrative that can be critiqued. Hospitable in many ways the IRC is not, the rehearsal room in *Baulkham Hills* is a complicated space. The rehearsal room can be a welcoming haven, promoted with positivity and camaraderie. These spaces may nurture creativity, offering a safe environment for artistic

[271] The play itself premiered in March 2013 at Parramatta Riverside Theatre in Sydney in March 2013 and had subsequent iterations across the city, as well as an international tour to London's Southbank Centre for the Women of the World Festival in 2015 immediately followed by a season at the Sydney Opera House. Caroline Wake, 'Theatre of the Real with Resettled Refugees: Old Problems and New Solutions in The Baulkham Hills African Ladies Troupe', *Performance Research*, 24 (2019), p. 20.
[272] Poster for the film *The Baulkham Hills African Ladies Troupe*, IMDB.com (2016) <https://www.imdb.com/title/tt5986050/mediaviewer/rm1685351680/?ref_=tt_ov_i> [accessed 16 February 2023]

exploration and expression. Conversely, they can be fraught with complex tensions, hierarchies, and limitations. Whereas the IRC detention room is a documented physical threat, one that sites sexual violence, abuse, and a blatantly dangerous racist and patriarchal asylum system, Horin's rehearsal room can be read as unassumedly dangerous in its unsteady emotional handling of the women's stories and the retraumatisation that follows, specifically by a presumed ally/advocate. As Jeffers confirms, 'In re-staging stories of refuge within a fictional frame that is peopled by refugees who are directly affected, applied theatre practitioners tread a precarious line between producing validation, on the one hand, and victimhood, on the other'.[273] This section, therefore, exposes the possibilities and limitations of this specific creative response to forced migration vis-à-vis its spatial dynamics. Such a reading asserts that set design and blocking are not the only spatial or physical deployments in a theatre production, but that the geographies leading up to and supporting the play are affecting as well. In this context, rehearsal rooms can be read as active and receptive spaces that influence or reveal the participants' experiences. As migration, in any form, is so entwined with space and place, this avenue will allow for new inquiry into how forced migrant women are represented in environments that seem to be for their benefit, but fall victim to Derrida's concept of hostipitality, presenting problematic hostility alongside any intended hospitality.

Staying briefly with the play itself before entering the rehearsal room, it is fundamental to note the genre context at stake. Similar to *The Bogus Woman*, *Baulkham Hills* is considered 'refugee theatre' or 'asylum theatre', but it is more specifically categorised as 'Theatre of the Real'. Caroline Wake explains the categorisation 'includes autobiographical theatre (based on the author's life), verbatim and testimonial theatre (based on interviews), documentary theatre (based on archival documents and audio-visual recordings), tribunal theatre (based on legal transcripts), post-Internet theatre (based on materials found online) and immersive or installation theatre (based on or in real places)'.[274] This popular mode of storytelling, 'with and about refugees and asylum seekers', however, draws 'ethical, political, and theatrical concerns,' Wake confirms. The genre is

[273] Alison Jeffers, 'Dirty truth: personal narrative, victimhood and participatory theatre work with people seeking asylum', *Research in Drama Education*, 13:2 (2008), p. 217.
[274] Wake, p. 21.

complicated with what it offers or strips from its subjects. Certainly, Theatre of the Real has been lauded for providing representation, authenticity, and voice to previously dismissed subjects. Anna Bernard explains in 'Genres of Refugee Writing',

> It seeks to counter the public demonisation of refugees by providing information about detention practices, asylum policies and procedures, and the extreme circumstances in which people decide to migrate, emphasising the potential for empathetic identification with the protagonists.

However, it is also heavily criticised for risking the retraumatisation of those whose stories are being told.[275] Considering *Baulkham Hills* within this framework and its multi-layered complexities provides a basis for analysing Horin's documentary, which essentially is a behind-the-scenes look at the ways making and executing this type of play may transform and trouble representations of forced migrant women. Despite boasting on her website 'a passion for thoughtful, provocative contemporary writing, engaged with important social, political and personal issues,' Horin herself has been condemned previously for a 'well-meaning but problematic' approach.[276] In 2004, years before *Baulkham Hills*, she directed a similar theatre production focused on asylum seeking called *Through the Wire*, which similarly told the stories of forced migrants in Australia.[277] In *Through the Wire*, however, Horin cast all professional actors but one and merged vastly unique experiences in a problematic essentialisation of refugee voice. Caroline Wake rightly criticises her approach, saying it led to 'a vague and generalized humanity that collapses difference and depends on sentiment'.[278] With *Baulkham Hills*, Horin, indeed, attempted to correct or pre-empt some of the same problems she incurred in *Through the Wire* in terms of representation, safeguarding, and a gendered solidarity. However, the tension between potential and precarity remains evident.

Pursuing that tension, this section presents two close textual readings of the documentary: firstly, of the spatial dynamics of the rehearsal room, and subsequently of the spaces immediately

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[275] Bernard further explains that asylum seeker's personal stories 'are often edited and performed by non-refugee artists for an implied audience of other non-refugees. They thus foreground the problems of voice, substitution and identification that underlie all depictions of refugee experience, situating the performers as a point of liaison between the audience and the real people that the protagonists represent (Cox 2015: 23–60; Farrier 2011: 182–93).' Anna Bernard, 'Genres of Refugee Writing', in Emma Cox, Sam Durrant, David Farrier, Lyndsey Stonebridge, and Agnes Woolley eds, *Refugee Imaginaries: Research Across the Humanities* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2020), p. 67.
[276] *Ros Horin biography*, RoninFilms.com <https://www.roninfilms.com.au/person/14401/ros-horin.html#:~:text=For%2012%20years%20Ros%20was,them%20now%20considered%20Australian%20classics> [accessed 17 March 2021]; Wake, p, 21.
[277] *Through the Wire*, dir. by Ros Horin (Performing Lines & Melbourne Theatre Company, 2004).
[278] Wake, p. 22.

outside the rehearsal room. Indeed, within the theatre context, the space of the stage and the rehearsal room can play host to what Jeffers calls the 'discourse about the ethical and political responsibilities of citizenry in relation to refugees and people seeking asylum'.[279] Horin's setting is a dedicated space for the participating women involved to work through their experiences, ideally supported and encouraged by the community they encounter there. However, drawing on Mireille Rosello's work *Postcolonial Hospitality: The Immigrant as Guest,* Jeffers sheds light on the ways these intentions can be misguided and poorly executed: 'In offering a hospitable stage on which refugees can re-enact the stories that matter to them, we enter into a set of relationships that have been called 'a complicated ballet of proposals [and] expectations' (Rosello 2001: 127).'[280] For this reason, it is worth considering if the rooms intended for performance and practice in *Baulkham Hills* are bound by an inevitable hostipitality. We might ask, therefore, if the spaces and scenes outside the rehearsal room are instead best for addressing the reality of unequal power relations within it? As forthcoming analysis will reveal, in this documentary these are the locations where women can share their fears openly and honestly among what is intended to be a work of empowerment and solidarity.

Although *Baulkham Hills* is not explicitly about the spaces forced migrant women inhabit, place indeed plays a prominent role. The script the women speak and act for their performance cannot avoid mention of the forests and roads on which they fled or the arrival at Sydney Airport. As such, the behind-the-scenes places they move through or inhabit for the documentary should not be ignored. Early in the film, viewers are shown the rehearsal room in which Horin and the women spend most of their time. Following a brief introduction to the women participating, including flashes of their identification cards, arrival dates, home countries and neighbourhoods suggesting where they live now, the view settles on the entrance of Connect Studios Parran.[281] This space is

[279] Jeffers, 2011, p. 43.
[280] Alison Jeffers, 'Hospitable Stages and Civil Listening: Being an Audience for Participatory Refugee Theatre', *Refugee Performance: Practical Encounters* ed. by Michael Balfour (UK: Intellect, Ltd. 2012) p. 307; Mireille Rosello, *Postcolonial Hospitality: The Immigrant as Guest* (California: Stanford University Press, 2002).
[281] Horin, 00:06:00; Alison Jeffers reflects on this problematic trope used by Horin: 'Stressing the non-partisan ordinariness of the women seems to be a strategy not only to individuate them but to give their stories legitimacy in an attempt to remove them from the taint of propaganda or media interference, in effect "humanising" them to make the audience receptive to them as survivors of war and as refugees.' Alison Jeffers, 'The Politics of the Empty Gesture: Frameworks of Sanctuary, Theatre and the City', in Emma Cox, Sam Durrant, David Farrier, Lyndsey Stonebridge, and

presented with amateur and professional dancers moving and clapping to lively music. The camera pans across drums – see Figure 20 – suggesting music will be made here, and a whiteboard, suggesting it is a place for learning.[282] There are large windows, bright overhead lights, and photos tacked to the wall. Setting this scene, Horin highlights the significance of the rehearsal room.

Figure 20: Still image from Baulkham Hills*; The first view of the rehearsal room* [283]

Not only is the rehearsal room the primary setting for the documentary, but it is where the subjects, four forced migrant women, become known. They are interviewed directly and filmed candidly. Viewers see them working through performances of trauma, putting on brave faces for their director, and consoling each other. In their article 'Enough About the Ideal Theatre; What About the Ideal Rehearsal Studio?', written for the American Society of Theatre Consultants, stage and lighting designer Robert Shook and theatre consultant Robert Long expound on the room's importance to the overall theatrical process:

> Rehearsal studios are… where the real magic of performance is hatched, explored, and exploded. Actors, directors, and stage managers spend long, intensive hours in rehearsal studios during the weeks leading up to Opening Night, and the planning and design of the rehearsal studio can contribute greatly to – or work against – the artistic process.[284]

Agnes Woolley, eds., *Refugee Imaginaries: Research Across the Humanities* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2020), p. 134.
[282] Horin, 00:06:03 - 00:7:30.
[283] Horin, 00:06:05.
[284] Robert Long and Robert Shook, 'Enough About The Ideal Theatre; What about The Ideal Rehearsal Studio?', *TheatreConsultants.org* <https://theatreconsultants.org/enough-about-the-ideal-theatre-what-about-the-ideal-rehearsal-studio/> [accessed 17 March 2021]

Shook and Long confirm that the space of the rehearsal room can intensely affect the work and the people within it. When layered with the complexities of asylum, trauma, and safeguarding, the place becomes doubly charged, and takes on Derrida's double bind. While '"hostipitality" is not necessarily hostile', confirms Aleksandra Bida in her chapter 'Derrida and "Hostipitality"' in *Mapping Home in Contemporary Narratives*, it 'is always potentially so through the power relations that are involved in "giving" place and being welcomed'.[285] Further considering the gendered dynamics in place due to Harin's feminocentric focus, one must also consider relational roles such as gendered solidarity and vulnerability. The all-women rehearsal room is thus anthropomorphised by the people and actions in it, concurrently welcoming and rejecting, soothing and fracturing.

The physical space of the rehearsal room provides room for exactly that – rehearsing. It intends to be a supportive, practical place to practice, 'large enough to re-create the full performance area of the proscenium, arena or thrust stage theatre,' Shook and Long write.[286] Note, for example, the size of the rehearsal room in plan below in Figure 21. They also explain that 'for most theatre rehearsals, as well as rehearsals that involve dance and movement', like Horin's, 'a resilient under-structure is necessary…' and 'whenever possible, allowing daylight into a rehearsal studio is advantageous for the well-being of the users and may be required by code if the space is considered a "classroom"'. [287]

[285] Aleksandra Bida, 'Derrida and "Hostipitality"' in *Mapping Home in Contemporary Narratives* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018) p. 125.
[286] Long and Shook.
[287] Ibid.

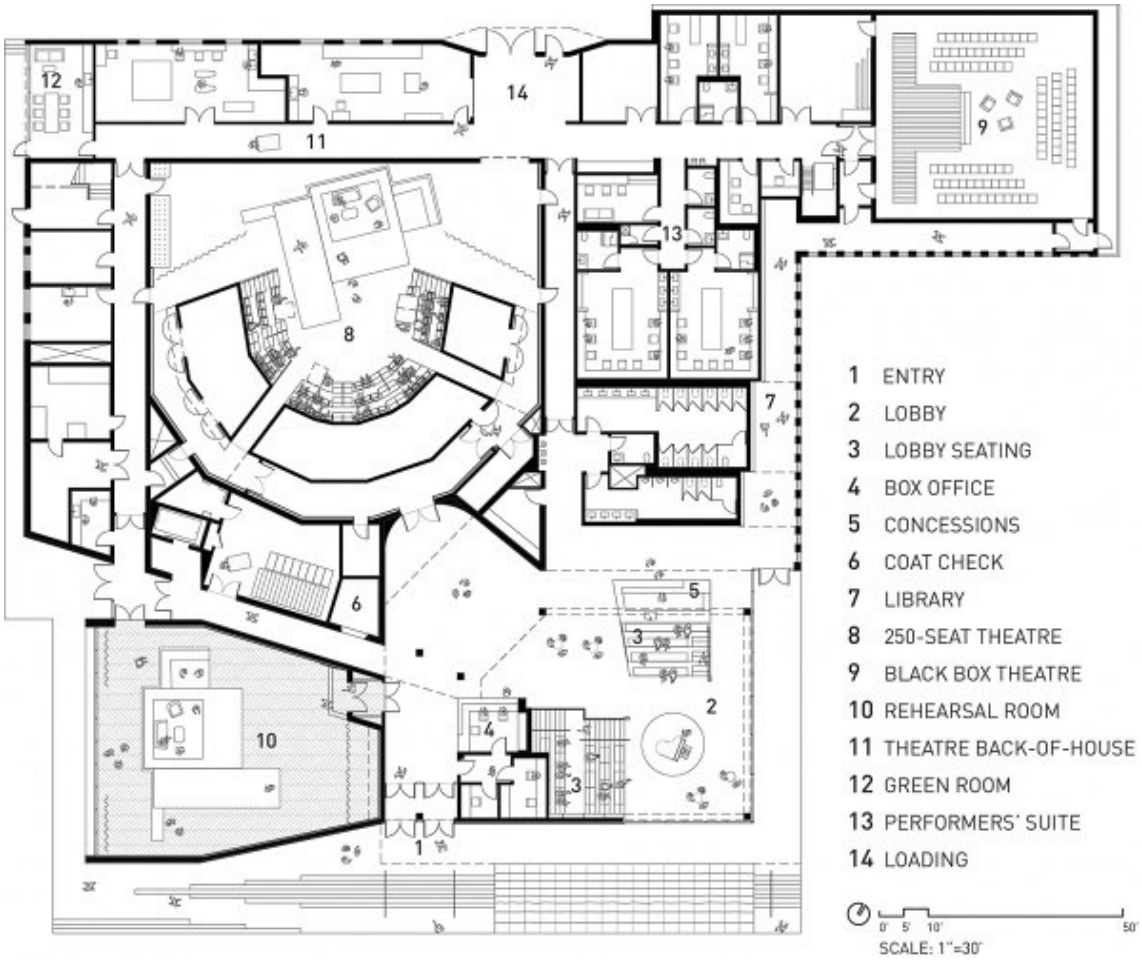

Figure 21: Level 1 floor plan of Writers Theatre designed by architecture practice Studio Gang. The plan is included here to show the position and scale, and therefore prominence, of the rehearsal room (10) in context with the rest of the theatre [288]

These observations of the architecture and design of the rehearsal room perhaps are obvious, but they specifically underpin the relevance of the room for the experience of the actors. In using them to analyse *Baulkham Women*, the metaphoric parallels are evident. For example, Connect Studios Parrans' large windows and whiteboard suggest a type of lucent learning environment, or classroom, as Shook and Long note, but the safeguarding for 'students' is questionable. Although the director worked with a trauma counsellor throughout the course of the project, it is evident that a 'resilient under-structure' – perhaps not in physical but emotional terms – is lacking with Horin's directorial style. At one point her voiceover plays as she is driving in the car, 'So I went home that night with a massive headache and I just kind of again thought, "My God, am I doing the right thing?" Maybe I'm mad you know this really is too much, perhaps we just should not go ahead...

[288] Writer's Theatre, *StudioGang.com* <https://studiogang.com/project/writers-theatre> [accessed 17 March 2021]

You know, we don't actually have to continue if it's not right.'[289] Horin's uncertainty about 'doing the right thing' is not the sensitive, informed approach these amateur actors discussing personal histories of trauma deserve. What's more, it is voiced while Horin is driving, an obvious act of freedom and autonomy set outdoors – a juxtaposition to the enclosed, loaded space of the rehearsal room she controls. In giving herself an open-air, open road to speak her worries, yet changing little about her process and expected outcomes, she makes the women adapt to the power dynamics and anxieties being exposed within the room. Julie Salverson notes in 'Transgressive Storytelling or an Aesthetic of Injury: Performance, Pedagogy and Ethics', engaging in activist theatre or video production, 'does not prevent us from reproducing dominant relations of power even as we investigate them. Realist representations such as documentary and Theatre of the Real or verbatim plays, therefore, can replicate the political structure they seek to challenge'.[290] Horin's attempt to offer a platform for these women is instead presenting some of the hostility of which Derrida warns.

A feminist hospitality, on the contrary, would create an awareness of the possibility of hegemonic re-inscription, instead addressing and working to dismantle hierarchical structures and ensuring the space is mutually beneficial to all involved through co-production and co-design. A 2021 study by the British Red Cross on co-production and people seeking asylum affirms,

> People with lived experience of the asylum process are the experts on what it is like to navigate this complex process. They are best placed to suggest what information can help people and how this should be conveyed.[291]

Changing from a top-down approach to one of empowerment and inclusivity would alter the use and outcome of the rehearsal room entirely. Equal partnership can ensure relevance and accessibility to those the room, and ultimately the performance, intends to serve. In the case of *Baulkham Hills*, this could have manifested though a non-traditional, hands-off directorial approach in which the women led rehearsals, or perhaps a co-director or co-producer role for

[289] Horin, 00:42:29:00.
[290] Julie Salverson, 'Transgressive Storytelling or an Aesthetic of Injury: Performance, Pedagogy and Ethics', *Theatre Research in Canada / Recherches théâtrales Au Canada*, vol. 20 (Jan. 1999), p. 8.
[291] Lilah Davidson, 'Co-Production Case Study: Co-Design of the U.K. Asylum Process Course, Glasgow', British Red Cross <https://communityengagementhub.org/wp-content/uploads/sites/2/2020/04/Co-Design-of-the-UK-Asylum-Process-Course-Glasgow.pdf> [accessed 16 April 2021]

someone with lived experience of forced migration. Horin also could have allocated time for the actors to be alone in the rehearsal room, ensuring a break from the ever-present politics of citizenship, race, and class. Instead, however, the space she offers remains charged with common hostilities of power, pressure, and expectation.

If the space inside the rehearsal room is unavoidably burdened with hostilities for the forced migrant women in Horin's film, stepping outside of it may offer a hospitable solution as in Figure 22. Just beyond Horin's domain, with the building filling up the background space, seemingly looming above her, one of the play's amateur actors, Yordy Haile-Michael, starts to process the immense amount of emotional trauma rehearsals are evoking in her.

Figure 22: Still image from Baulkham Hills; *Play actor and forced migrant woman Yordy steps outside the rehearsal room to share her concerns* [292]

'What the hell is I'm doing here?' she angrily asks, immediately following a scene rehearsal in which she reveals she had to leave a newborn daughter when she was just age 13: 'I mean, I hate it. I just… I have to be honest, I feel like they know what they are asking. I didn't like it being repeated again and again.'[293] It is noteworthy that Yordy shares this *outside* the rehearsal room, the place beyond where Horin holds the power. Shortly after, again in a setting outside the rehearsal room, this time in her own living room, Yordy confides, 'I know Ros knows what she's doing, but I

[292] Horin 00:40:25.
[293] Ibid., 00:40:25.

felt like it's just one sided. She knows what she's doing. But did I know what I'm doing?'[294] It is clear that Yordy's position within the power dynamic prohibits her from confessing this realisation within the rehearsal room. The pressure and potential of the space appears to block her from admitting the pain she feels when in it. Her need for a space outside of Horin's control is even further made understandable, as the director's response to Yordy's decision to drop out of the play is thoughtlessly blameful: 'She found the intense rehearsal for the public showing too much. She's still incredibly fragile.'[295] Rather than doing the work of feminist hospitality to counteract hostipitality by investigating a more therapeutic and less traumatising way forward for all for the women, Horin pins the problem on Yordy and fails to consider how this should alter the processes embedded in her production.

The potential to retraumatise participants is inherent to Theatre of the Real, and therefore within its associated rehearsal spaces, where they must persistently repeat for practice-sake, this may be an unrelenting pain. Wake says that 'soliciting testimony can reinjure refugees either because they have already told their story too many times and/or they have never never told it on their own terms'.[296] Likewise, Salverson explains that forced migrants in well-meaning creative productions may be 'caught recycling a story they may wish they had never remembered'.[297] This aligns with another of the amateur actors, Rosemary Kariuki, who admits to never telling her living children of a baby she miscarried in Kenya, nor of the years of secretive sexual abuse she encountered by a family member.[298] 'I never talked to anybody until I talked to Ros,' she shares, though yet again, not in the rehearsal room, but instead in her own private living room.[299] In *Strange Encounters: Embodied Others in Post-Coloniality,* Sara Ahmed states that 'the central question for post-colonial feminism has been, "who is speaking here?"'[300] *Baulkham Hills* complicates the answer, in that the women do vocalise their stories, but it is Horin's voice that is most prominent. Her judgement, emotions and decisions are at the centre of the documentary and,

[294] Ibid., 00:41:57.
[295] Horin, 00:41:20.
[296] Wake, p 21.
[297] Julie Salverson, 'Performing emergency: Witnessing, popular theatre, and the lie of the literal', *Theatre Topics* 6(2): 1996, p. 188.
[298] Horin 00:46:10; 'Specifically, playwrights risk injuring asylum seekers by soliciting stories that have not been shared before and would be better heard in a therapeutic setting.' Wake, p. 21.
[299] Horin, 00:44:33.
[300] Ahmed, 2000, p. 60.

seemingly, the production of the play. Rather than offering the feminist hospitality that was evident in Adshead's work, within the rehearsal room Horin offers a limited and conditional hostipitality. Further pushing Ahmed's question 'who is speaking here?', this work suggests it should also be asked, 'where is here?'. For Yordy it is outside the room, walking through the woods and in her own living space. Equally for Rosemary, the spaces beyond Horin's well-intentioned but misguided control are where she is most honest. It must be considered, however, that even this is under Horin's control. She determined when the cameras would film, where the women would be interviewed, and which clips made the final cut. Ultimately, the power always remains with Horin.

In *Strange Encounters: Embodied Others in Post-Coloniality*, Ahmed also asks, 'How do bodies re-inhabit space?... how do spaces re-inhabit bodies'?[301] Although this could be questioned of any body and any space, it is particularly apt when applied to forced migrant women in a personal and potential-filled space like Horin's rehearsal room. In *Woman's Theatrical Space,* Hanna Scolnicov asserts that 'woman is so closely associated with space that almost any articulation of space on stage [. . .] is directly expressive of her position, her lifestyle, her personality'.[302] For Yarrie, Aminata, Yordy, and Rosemary, the forced migrant women rehearsing and acting the *Baulkham Hills* play, the spaces they have previously inhabited have essentially determined their livelihood and now they must relive them. The gendered dangers around witnessing war, being kidnapped, raped, and made homeless have forced them from their homes and families to seek asylum in a foreign land.[303] They have been stripped of their histories, motherhoods, and agencies because of the places they lived or moved through. In contrast, the opportunity for asylum, creativity, and community in Australia gives them a lifeline that their previous locations did not. It is for these reasons that exploring the rehearsal room in *Baulkham Hills* as a space of dualling hostilities and hospitalities is so revealing. Jeffers suggests that performance can open the space between analysis and action, and the rehearsal room seems the

[301] Ahmed, 2000, p. 90.
[302] Hanna Scolnicov, *Woman's Theatrical Space* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1994), p. xiii.
[303] Jane Freedman further explains that women are particularly affected by external obstacles when it comes to forced migration, as difficulties 'may prevent women from migrating' according to their own will. She suggests that 'economic resources, responsibility for children and children's welfare, restrictions on women travelling alone both within their own country and outside of it, and fears of violence during migration' affect when, where, and how women can migrate. Freedman, 2016, p. 574.

ideal place to explore that.[304] In the first instance, it does seem that Theatre of the Real, and some of the sites Horin's work creates, can be read as feminist architectures – locations of agency, fellowship, and engagement. However, despite this potential, in analysing *Baulkham Hills*, it becomes clear that Horin centralises a problematic white saviour model of feminism instead of a feminist hospitality that could build such sites.[305] Her approach seeks to rescue or liberate women from other cultures according to Western standards and does not pay proper attention to the egalitarian politics of hostipitality, nor does it invoke a consciousness that would consider the intersections of privilege, racism, classism, or imperialism as reinforcers of power imbalances. The result is an ambivalent, and perhaps destructive, territory.

As explored above, the physical and emotional architectures of the rehearsal room are meant to be designed for support. They ought to be robust, enriching, and safe. This rings true for the design of rehearsal rooms from purpose-built theatres to community-run spaces serving multiple, everyday functions. Within her rehearsal room Horin could have worked to create feminist architectures for these acts through an approach of feminist hospitality. Beyond the hiring of a trauma counsellor, she could have more openly engaged and empowered the women, moving away from 'an unchangeable, impermeable guest/host relationship' in which she is the director, they are the actors and there is no space between for compromise.[306] Likewise, Horin's rehearsal room could have worked to disrupt or reverse power, through co-designed and co-produced efforts such as placing the women in charge of workshops, training them to generate the narratives they wanted to share, or moving the script away from its reliance on their personal and traumatic testimonies. Rather, Horin's power is reinforced with her role as omnipotent director and the hierarchical politics remain. While she is not intentionally antifeminist nor intentionally inhospitable, Horin remains systemically blind to her position of privilege and to her own agenda of humanitarianism. As Liisa Malkki's research in *The Need to Heal: The Domestic Arts of*

[304] Jeffers, 2011, p. 43.
[305] See: Ashlee Christoffersen, Akwugo Emejulu, '"Diversity Within": The Problems with "Intersectional" White Feminism in Practice', *Social Politics: International Studies in Gender, State & Society*, 30:2 (2023), pp. 630-53; bell hooks, 'Sisterhood: Political Solidarity between Women', *Feminist Review*, 23 (1986), pp. 125-38; Matthew W. Hughey, *The White Savior Film: Content, Critics, and Consumption*, (Philadelphia, Pennsylvania: Temple University Press, 2014).
[306] Stephanie Burdick-Shephard, 'Reading Feminist Hospitality in Plato's Timaeus: Possibilities for Education in Feminism and Hospitality' in *Feminism and Hospitality: Gender in the Host/Guest Relationship* ed. by Maurice Hamington (Maryland: Lexington Books: 2010), p. 282.

International Humanitarianism stresses, it is important to acknowledge 'the frequent weakness, neediness, and non-universality of the humanitarian "benefactor" – the giver who, no less than the receiver, always sets out from a social and existential position both specific and precarious."[307] In doing so, it is made clear here that Horin embodies the hostipitality of the rehearsal room herself, welcoming the women in, yet permitting, and even prompting, their retraumatisation and essentialisation at the same time.

Overall, the rehearsal room in *Baulkham Hills* serves the women best in the instances when they have each other. When Horin intervenes, unease follows. Ahmed explains,

> One could argue that such a model of the relationship between Western feminism and women who inhabit spaces other than the west involves a refusal to encounter others at all: 'the other' is held in place as 'the stranger', as the object of Western feminist enquiry who is not (like) us (yet) and whose difference serves only to confirm who we are, a defining who we have become or what we have overcome in relation to a past that is spatialised as the 'elsewhere'.[308]

This leads to the question, is Horin's position as director only tenable in its unbalanced power relationship to the actors? If so, this is neither sustainable nor productive. For this reason, a specific feminist hospitality in which women support other women, not for altruism but for mutual benefit, ought to have been Horin's focus. Maurice Hamington explains,

> The implication is that acts of feminist hospitality can contribute to an alternative identity, one that is less restrictive and more empowering than is offered through traditional understandings of hospitality. Women who help other women, not in the spirit of charity or to alleviate class guilt but with a generous disposition and for mutual benefit, exemplify acts of feminist hospitality.[309]

Rather than reinscribing the women's traumatic experiences of gendered violence through the repetition of rehearsal and ultimate exposure on the stage, Horin's efforts in the rehearsal room could have worked more intentionally to reinstate a sense of agency through participant empowerment and peer fellowship, benefitting the production and her own creative goals at the same time.

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[307] Liisa H. Malkki, *The Need to Help: The Domestic Arts of International Humanitarianism* (Duke University Press, 2015), p. 8.
[308] Ahmed, 2000, p. 165.
[309] Hamington, 2010b, p. 25.

Figure 23: Still image from Baulkham Hills; *For women who have experienced the traumas of forced migration, rehearsal rooms have the potential to be locations of agency, fellowship, and engagement* [310]

Figure 24: Still image from Baulkham Hills*, Professional and amateur actors joyously dance together* [311]

Visible in the two preceding screenshots – Figures 23 and 24 – viewers witness a camaraderie between the women in the rehearsal space. They sit, dance, and create together in a place of exploration, supporting one another and sharing stories. This fellowship may be attributed to Ahmed's concept of a 'community of strangers' discussed in Chapter One, a fellowship created with others who similarly live away from their original homes.[312] Crucially however, Ahmed also explains, 'community is not just established through the designation of pure and safe spaces, but

[310] Horin 00:10:52.
[311] Horin 00:22:01.
[312] Ahmed, 2000, p. 84.

becomes established as *a way of moving through space* (streetwise, safe, trustworthy, harmless)'.[313] More than just being new together, they are new, operating in this specific space of potential and creativity together – a space where Horin fails to meet them, or perhaps fails to leave them be. Chandra Talpade Mohanty further expounds,

> The idea of imagined community is useful because it leads us away from essentialist notions of Third World feminist struggles, suggesting political rather than biological or cultural basis for alliance. It is not color or sex that constructs the ground for these struggles. Rather, it is the way we think about race, class, and gender – the political links we choose to make among and between struggles.[314]

Unfortunately, with *Baulkham Hills*, Horin's intentions to perform an act of feminist solidarity by telling the women's stories are undercut as she reinforces hostipitality, retaining control over the narrative and the spaces in which they are rehearsed and performed. As Mohanty's work highlights, here the personal and political work needed to support is superseded by Horin's own 'need to help'.[315]

The act of acknowledging the rehearsal room's hostipitality in *Baulkham Hills* allows us to begin rethinking how Horin's work could have created a more inclusive and empathetic theatre environment. This, in turn, might have influenced her ultimate intentions of fostering equally hospitable responses beyond the theatre.[316] Jeffers notes in *Refugees, Theatre and Crisis: Performing Global Identities* that 'the arts, especially performing arts, hold the potential to challenge preconceptions and validate refugee experience, some even pointing to a more hopeful and optimistic future for refugees and 'host' communities'.[317] She also suggests that the theatre (and, this work adds, its encompassing places and people) can serve to 'create alternative narratives', to 'gather and galvanise' for action and to facilitate 'opportunities for ethical practice

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[313] Ibid., p. 34; 'The community is reached through reaching across different spaces, towards other bodies, who can also be recognised - and hence fail to be recognised - as out of place, as uncomfortable, or not quite comfortable, in this place. Migrant bodies, selves and communities cannot be understood as simply on one side of identity or the other, or on one side of community or another: rather, it is the uncommon estrangement of migration itself that allows migrants to remake what it is they might yet have in common.' Ahmed, 2000, p. 94.
[314] Chandra Talpade Mohanty, *Feminism Without Borders: Decolonizing Theory, Practicing Solidarity* (Duke University Press, 2003), p. 46.
[315] Ibid.; Malkki.
[316] RoninFilms.com.
[317] Jeffers, 2011, p. 110. See also: Erene Kaptani and Nira Yuval-Davis, 'Participatory Theatre as a Research Methodology: Identity, Performance and Social Action among Refugees', *Sociological Research Online*, 13:5 (2008), pp. 1–12; Sara Sakhi, Lina Kreidie, Farah Wardani, HH Al Sabah and Karima Anbar, 'The Power of Theater Expression and Communication: A Psychological Therapeutical Intervention in a Refugee Camp: An IPA Study Into the Narratives of Women Refugees' Experience With Drama Therapy', *Journal of Psychology Research*,10:1 (2020), pp. 10-23; and Rebekka Dieterich-Hartwell and Sabine C. Koch, 'Creative Arts Therapies as Temporary Home for Refugees: Insights from Literature and Practice, *Behavioral Sciences*, 7:4:69 (2017).

which could be characterised as a conversation, at its best a rich national debate about the possible limits of hospitality'.[318] So while the rehearsal room's specific architectural elements need not be re-designed as the IRC did in *The Bogus Woman*, the relationships, actions, and outcomes within it ought to be repositioned. As explored, Horin's rehearsal room might have manifested in co-designed, non-hierarchical rehearsal practices, collaborative script writing, or a shift in emphasis – away from trauma and onto any empowering focal point the women themselves may identify. There may have been a greater focus on the ways the women controlled the space to determine their own outcomes, or perhaps the director could have left the room entirely, removing the threat of hostility through power dynamics all together. Any of these changes might have contributed to creating the feminist hospitalities and feminist architectures needed to recognise, address, and build spaces of safety and solidarity for the forced migrant women inside the rehearsal room.

Beyond a backdrop: Rooms as feminist architectures

Throughout this chapter, the architecture of the room has been diversely represented as 'the beginning' (Khan), a 'base unit' (Smirnova), 'white' (Adshead, p. 16), 'square' (Adshead, p. 16), supportive and practical (Long and Shook); it has been read as backdrop to situate the forced migrant women in *The Bogus Woman* and *Baulkham Hills*. However, a close analysis has exposed the ways these considered rooms, the detention room at the IRC and the rehearsal room as part of a Theatre of the Real production, are charged and what they can mean and do for forced migrant women. Revealing the architectural and emotional power of the room through textual spatial analysis confirms what Japanese scholar Okakura Kakuzo posed in his influential 1906 work, *The Book of Tea*: the essence of a room is 'to be found in the vacant space enclosed by the roof and the walls, not in the roof and walls themselves'.[319] If the room is not just about the space itself, but likewise what happens in it, then it matters who is in it. The rooms examined here prove to be spaces of slippage, between hospitality and hostility, agency, and lack of power. In making sense of these locations in which forced migrant women are drawn into the spatial power and politics of the state, the cast, the playwright, and the director, we might begin to confront sustained patriarchal

[318] Jeffers, 2011, p. 44.
[319] Okakura Kakuzo, *The Book of Tea* (New York: Putnam's, 1906), p. 16.

architectures and instead find or build feminist architectures, regardless of the rooms' original design intent.

For the Young Woman in *The Bogus Woman*, the power relationship between refugee and interrogator/guard/solicitor is ever-present. Likewise, her spatial rights are consistently contested through the demand for testimony and lack of safe space and private refuge. In the IRC room, the hostile environment of the U.K.'s asylum-seeking process is physically manifested in the hostile design of the bare and punitive detention space. Hamington writes, 'feminist hospitality drives at a non-hierarchical understanding of hospitality that migrates the expression of power differential, while seeking greater connection and understanding for the mutual benefit of both host and guest'.[320] Accordingly, Adshead uses the dynamic and disturbing power of performance to address ways forced migrants are treated with spatial injustice, in real time and through memory and testimony.[321] She empowers the Young Woman with multiple voices, letting her tell the story and explain its spaces. While governmental and humanitarian efforts lack nuance around forced migrant women, the play proves that, without downplaying severe truths, fiction can access a deeper empathy. The counterpoint to the detention, which is always hostile, dominant, and institutional, could, in theory, be the theatre. Here possibilities are imagined, created, opened up, and critiqued. Setting the IRC within a theatrical frame allowed Adshead to offer a feminist hospitality seemingly inaccessible in the actual detention room, thus designing an altogether different feminist architecture for the Young Woman.

Considering the four forced migrant women in *Baulkham Hills*, the rehearsal room also suggests a place ripe for potential creation and recreation. Its meanings and possibilities depend entirely on what is done within it. An innovative, behind-the-scenes space, the rehearsal room has potential to be truly hospitable, rehearsing, and reworking potentialities, enacting limitless stories in limitless ways. However, it is clear in *Baulkham Hills* that this is not the case. In her position as director, Horin co-opts the positive creativity due to a blindness to her own racial and cultural

[320] Hamington, 2010b, p. 23.
[321] Amelia Hill, '"Hostile environment": The hardline Home Office policy tearing families apart', *The Guardian* (28 November 2017) <https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2017/nov/28/hostile-environment-the-hardline-home-office-policy-tearing-families-apart> [accessed 16 April 2021]

position. Reflecting on the work of Gayatri Spivak, Ilan Kapoor illuminates this common tendency among humanitarians, like Horin, from the Global North:

> Our interaction with, and representations of, the subaltern are inevitably loaded. They are determined by our favourable historical and geographic position, our material and cultural advantages resulting from imperialism and capitalism, and our identity as privileged Westerner or native informant. When the investigating subject, naively or knowingly, disavows its complicity or pretends it has no 'geo-political determinations', it does the opposite of concealing itself: it privileges itself (Spivak 1988a: pp. 272, 292). It is liable to speak *for* the subaltern, justifying power and domination, naturalising Western superiority, essentialising ethnicity, or asserting ethnocultural and class identity, all in the name of the subaltern. In so doing, it is liable to do harm to the subaltern.[322]

Kapoor's text explains that what is at risk for Horin is incomparable to what is at risk for the women involved. Had she intentionally taken a more egalitarian approach, moving aside or at least co-designing and co-producing alongside the women to centre their voices and promote their intentions and input at the forefront, then a feminist hospitality would be at work and a feminist architecture would result. While not a perfect solution, it would have addressed, and potentially begun to break down, the race, class, and geopolitical hierarchies at play in her rehearsal room.

Turning, in conclusion, to *The Room of One's Own: The Architecture of the (Private) Room* by research-led design practice Dogma, it is acknowledged that 'the room is the product of specific historical circumstances and is therefore always undergoing transformation and change'.[323] As Dogma suggests, the room is the outcome of a wider physical process and, always, the outcome of a process of power. Analysis of *The Bogus Woman* and *The Baulkham Hills African Ladies Troupe* illuminates that this seemingly innocuous space, a simple interior unit, comprising at minimum a door and only sometimes a window, is not neutral, and, clearly, neither are the experiences of the forced migrant women within. Rather, the room and its sociospatial architectures must be actively anti-hostile and anti-hierarchical. It must be co-designed and co-programmed by those it intends to serve to begin to tip the balance between welcome and rejection, warmth and angst. The result would be proactively welcoming, egalitarian, and inherently feminist spaces that counteract inevitable hostipitality against forced migrant women. Certainly, rooms within and outside the

[322] Gayatri Spivak, 'Can the subaltern speak?', *Marxism and Interpretation of Culture*, ed. by Cary Nelson and Lawrence Grossberg (Chicago, IL: University of Illinois Press, 1988), pp. 271–313; Ilan Kapoor, 'Hyper-self-reflexive development? Spivak on representing the Third World "Other"', *Third World Quarterly*, 25:4 (2004), p. 631.
[323] Dogma, *The Room of One's Own: The Architecture of the (Private) Room* (New York: Black Square, 2018)

creative frame must be reimagined and redesigned with intentional and equitable interventions that serve guest and host alike.

CHAPTER THREE

The Wall: Forced migrant women's bodies at and as borders in *American Dirt* by Jeanine Cummins and *Los Lobos* by Samuel Kishi

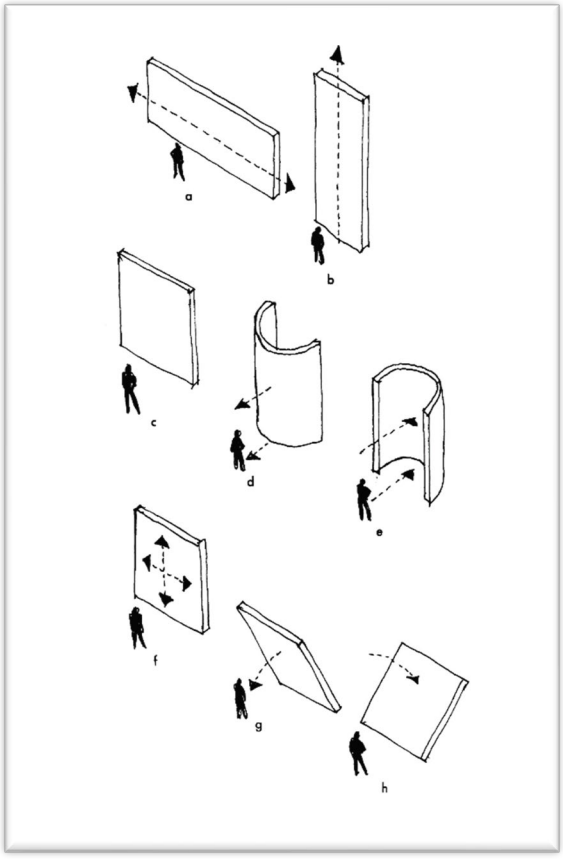
On 11 April 2022 Griselda Verduzco Armenta arrived at the slatted steel wall on the border of Agua Prieta, Mexico and Douglas, Arizona, U.S. After leaving her two young daughters, aged nine and one, and traveling 750km (465mi) from her home in Sinaloa, Mexico, she reached the super-size, rust-coloured posts that held a repelling harness attached by a coyote who had been paid to smuggle her across country lines. A ladder was propped against the wall, a call to action coaxing her up and over, evoking the words she had once assured her cousin, 'Es mejor alla'.[324] *It's better there.* 'There' referred to the U.S., north of the border which runs 3,145km (1,954mi) from the Atlantic to the Pacific Ocean. 'There' was on the other side of the 9m (30ft) ominous and imposing security wall which covers 1126km (700mi) of that stretch. Like many forced migrant women seeking sanctuary at the U.S.-Mexico border, however, the 32-year-old mother of two would never find out if it was actually better there.[325] This is because, after paying a smuggler to bring her overland without accepted documentation, Verduzco Armenta died trying to scale the imposing border wall. High atop the barrier, a seemingly cruel and poetic position in which her last vantage point was back toward her past in Mexico and forward to a desired future in the U.S., Verduzco Armenta's foot and leg became trapped among the fence slats. Eventually she was entangled and asphyxiated by the repelling harness meant to lower her to safety. She was left by her coyote. She

[324] Noticias Telemundo, 'Un familiar habla de la mexicana que murió colgada del muro', YouTube.com, 15 April 2022 <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=W39Je92mxzk> [accessed 28 July 2022]

[325] According to the El Paso Times, 'the number of women dying more than doubled from last year and more than tripled from 2021'. Lauren Villagran, 'Migrant deaths surge at US-Mexico border', *El Paso Times*, 30 November 2023 <https://www.elpasotimes.com/story/news/immigration/2023/11/30/us-mexico-border-sees-surge-migrant-deaths-el-paso-juarez/70726958007/> [accessed 13 December 2023]; Women's Refugee Commission and Instituto para las Mujeres en la Migración A.C., 'Stuck in Uncertainty and Exposed to Violence: The Impact of U.S. and Mexican Migration Policies on Women Seeking Protection in 2021', February 2022 <https://www.womensrefugeecommission.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/02/Stuck-in-Uncertainty-2.pdf> [accessed 28 July 2022]

was found unresponsive by Border Patrol agents.[326] Verduzco Armenta was killed by the wall, while on the wall, trying to get to the other side of the wall.

Like Verduzco Armenta, women and men around the world encounter walls every day. They pass by, sit within, lean against, hide behind, and try to scale over or even dig under them. At its most perceptible level, the wall is a basic, delineating structure 'as old as the world of human groups and communities,' writes Alberto Gasparini in *The Walls Between Conflict and Peace.*[327] It is an architecture found or erected between two spaces, creating two sides. 'Walls,' further notes architectural researcher Do-Sik Kim, 'traditionally, have a function to define a boundary. A boundary as an area defining factor, breaks up the space not only physically, but also psychologically and visually'.[328] The wall may be natural – a rock face or dense forest tree line – or manufactured – from steel or brick, timber or plasterboard, formed as below in Figure 25.



[326] Ramon Antonio Vargas, '"They left her hanging": Details emerge of woman's death at US-Mexico border', *The Guardian*, 16 April 2022 <https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2022/apr/16/woman-us-mexico-border-death-update> [accessed 28 July 2022]
[327] Alberto Gasparini, 'Walls Dividing, Walls Uniting: Peace in Fusion, Peace in Separation' in *The Walls Between Conflict and Peace* (Leiden, The Netherlands: Brill, 2016), p. vii.
[328] Do-sik Kim, 'A Study on Mies van der Rohe's Wall as "Objet" and its Spatial Characteristics', *Journal of Asian Architecture and Building Engineering*, 4:1 (2005), p. 9.

Figure 25: Thomas Thiis-Evensen, 'Archetypes', diagrams illustrating the main forms of the wall: (a) horizontal, (b) vertical, (c) flat, (d) convex, (e) concave, (f) straight, (g) leaning toward, (h) leaning away [329]

However, history, context, politics, and identity undoubtedly activate walls, whether visible or invisible, phenomenologically charge them with meaning. In 'Walled States, Waning Sovereignty', Wendy Brown confirms, 'walls themselves are increasingly linked by a diverse ensemble of circuitries, including border-fortification technologies, contractors and subcontractors, protest murals and graffiti, and, of course, legitimation'.[330] Indeed, the structure itself, from geological barriers such as caves, rivers, and hills to neighbourly party walls, school classroom walls, or nation state border walls, is deeply rooted in the practical and ideological structures of our embodied engagements with it. When engaged, walls may create homes, hold works of art, provide space for ceremony, gathering, or sanctuary. They may also devise harmful divisions that separate land and communities. They can break up or scar, enacting social and cultural violence. As Verduzco Armenta experienced, they can also serve as necropolitical forces that block freedom, safety, or even life.

Turning to two fictional narratives which inscribe the line of the wall on the lives of women fleeing Mexico for the U.S., this chapter employs what academic Minu Basnet terms 'feminist border rhetorics' to consider how the spatial trope of the wall means more than a structured delineator in the novel *American Dirt* by Jeanine Cummins (2020) and the film *Los Lobos* by Samuel Kishi (2019).[331] According to Basnet, feminist border rhetorics encourage 'understanding how masculinist and imperialist ways of knowing impact women and transnational interconnections,' by 'unpacking the intersection of the physical borders with other inequalities'.[332] In this chapter, I use Basnet's conceptual framework to highlight the multidimensional nature of feminist discourse at the border, allowing it to bridge the gap between traditional verbal rhetoric and embodied forms of experience and knowing. At its core, feminist border rhetorics aim to

[329] Thomas Thiis-Evensen, *Archetypes in Architecture* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, Inc, 1987), p. 142.
[330] Wendy Brown, *Walled States, Waning Sovereignty* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2010), p. 39; Gasparini elaborates, 'The idea of a wall evokes classic models such as the Great Wall of China, the Roman limes, the modern fence, the ghetto, the metropolitan banlieue, the favela, the gated community. Walls thus conceived generally function for empires and (less frequently) states and within cities; they are built by wealthy social groups and nations to protect themselves from or marginalise the poor and the different. There are also ethnic and ideological groups which erect walls or see them erected around them. Walls have been present in every age and every society; although they may be metaphorical and invisible, they are no less effective than physical walls.' Gasparini, p. vii.
[331] Basnet p.116.
[332] Ibid.; Cummins; Kishi.

deconstruct the ways in which oppressive hegemonies have historically defined and controlled the boundaries and borders that impact the lives of women across the globe. It recognises that these borders, and encounters with them, are not merely physical, but also symbolic, cultural, and economic, and that they perpetuate and reinforce existing inequalities. Feminist border rhetorics underscore the importance of understanding that responses to these border dynamics are more than just spoken or written words; they are an embodied form of knowing that takes into account the lived experiences of individuals, the social and political structures that enforce these borders, and the emotional and physical toll these boundaries extract. For protagonists Lydia (*American Dirt*) and Lucia (*Los Lobos*), the sociospatial significance of walls in their many forms is necessary to consider to fully understand the systemically repressive conditions they face in seeking sanctuary for themselves and their families, as well as the many ways they push back despite the circumstances. Sometimes that resistance is with clarity and confidence and sometimes it is merely instinctual for the sake of survival. Importantly, in locating the harmful walls of exclusion in this chapter, walls of possibilities also begin to emerge. These are feminist architectures, built through somatic interventions, relationships with other women, motherhood, and creativity. Acknowledging 'the ways in which gender is entangled with other inequalities to produce the in/visible bordered experiences,' provides a more complete representation of their characters and the forced migrant women they represent.[333] What's more, understanding these texts within a feminist border rhetoric framework sheds light on how borders on the whole can function as sites of both oppression and resistance. It encourages a deeper exploration of the power structures that govern these borders and advocates for more spatially just border spaces.

Produced during the height of U.S. political action against undocumented migrants entering from the Mexico border – across the presidential tenures of Barack Obama, who some Latinx immigrants have nicknamed 'Deporter-in-Chief', and Donald Trump, who campaigned and presided with ardently anti-immigration rhetoric and policy enforcement – the novel and film both feature female protagonists moving themselves and their children through hostile territories, against and over visible and invisible walls, in search of physical and economic safety from Mexico to the

[333] Basnet, p. 116.

U.S.[334] Megan Elizabeth Morrissey writes of this specific geopolitical space in 'Border matters: A new materialist critique of installation art on the U.S.-Mexico border':

> The U.S.-Mexico border functions ideologically and materially to organize peoples' lives, producing the conditions that lead to protection or persecution. As one of the world's most fortified border zones, this boundary between the United States and Mexico functions as a profound site of disciplinarity, conditioning the ideological commitments and practices in which U.S. citizens engage, and establishing the grounds upon which immigrants might access belonging.[335]

Here Morrissey identifies the indiscriminatory phenomenological power of the Mexico-U.S. border wall to organise, protect, and persecute those who engage with it. In fact, The International Organization for Migration (IOM) has identified it as the world's most deadly land migration route, having documented 686 deaths and disappearances among in 2022 (though actual figure is likely higher due missing data).[336] However, further research shows that the lives of those who identify as women at the border, like Lydia, Lucia and Verduzco Armenta, are particularly vulnerable due to their gendered bodies. To begin, their decision to seek sanctuary is often made to escape gendered violence. According to the 2021 report by Women's Refugee Commission and Instituto para las Mujeres en la Migración A.C., entitled 'Stuck in Uncertainty and Exposed to Violence: The Impact of U.S. and Mexican Migration Policies on Women Seeking Protection in 2021, 'approximately 60 percent of surveyed women seeking asylum from Honduras, Guatemala, and El Salvador were fleeing gender-based violence, which includes any form of sexual, physical, mental, and economic harm directed at an individual due to their gender'.[337] However, it is not only the case that women are running *from* body-driven, gender-based violence, but that they are running into it as well.

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[334] Under the Obama Administration, more than three million noncitizens were formally removed. Bill Ong Hing, *Deporter-in-Chief: Obama v. Trump* - Excerpts, University of San Francisco Law Research Paper No. 2019-03 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018) <https://ssrn.com/abstract=3254680≥ [accessed 05 October 2022]; According to research by EconoFact, 'The use of detention was one area of immigration enforcement that expanded dramatically and reached record highs during the Trump administration – 28,000 in 2015 and 50,000 in 2019. Tara Watson, 'Immigrant Deportations During the Trump Administration', EconoFact, 25 March 2021 <https://econofact.org/immigrant-deportations-during-the-trump-administration≥ [accessed 05 October 2022]

[335] Megan Elizabeth Morrissey, 'Border matters: A new materialist critique of installation art on the U.S.–Mexico border*', Journal of International and Intercultural Communication*, 14:1, 2021, p. 5.

[336] 'US-Mexico border is world's deadliest land migration route, IOM finds', *Reuters*, 12 September 2023, <https://www.reuters.com/world/us-mexico-border-is-worlds-deadliest-land-migration-route-iom-finds-2023-09-12/> [accessed 13 December 2023]

[337] Women's Refugee Commission and Instituto para las Mujeres en la Migración A.C., p.2; A 2021 report by Kids in Need of Defense (KIND), found this reality of gendered violence has been amplified by the Covid-19 pandemic, due to stay-at-home measures, economic insecurity, the closure of schools and public spaces and opportunistic gang / organised criminal activity. Significantly, the report noted that 'women from marginalised backgrounds, such as rural, indigenous, and Afro-descendant communities, who have faced systemic discrimination and limited access to resources, have been particularly impacted.' Kids in Need of Defense, 'Dual Crises: Gender-Based Violence and Inequality Facing Children and Women During the Covid-19 Pandemic in El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras' (2021), p. 5 <https://supportkind.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/12/KIND-GBV-Report_Final.pdf> [accessed 28 July 2022]

Considering also the risks identified by the Women's Refugee Commission's report, 'Displaced Women and Girls at Risk, including 'rape, beatings, torture, hunger and abandonment', and the site specific reality that women are 2.87 times more likely to die of exposure at the border than men, these findings make clear, the biopolitical violence of the wall is not just a bureaucratic threat to vulnerable women in terms of documentation for asylum.[338] What's more, in 'The Special Plight of Women Refugees', Kelly Oliver explains,

> In general, the journey to safety is perilous for men and women, but women and girls face unique challenges both on the road and in the camps. Inadequate food and medical care disproportionately affect women, especially pregnant women who lack access to prenatal care, adequate nutrition, and midwives or hospital facilities. In addition, lack of feminine hygiene products, birth control, and ob-gyn services present unique problems for girls and women. Furthermore, insofar as women are seen as primarily responsible for children, their burden on the road and in camps is wrenching.[339]

Indeed, the danger is real and physical and it results in starkly gendered experiences, including family separation, human trafficking, sexual violence, and death.[340]

Running toward, hiding behind, cleaning, coveting, and even becoming walls themselves, Lydia and Lucia's characterisations reveal the manifold ways walls can affect forced migrant woman, and how the women themselves push back through embodied interventions. At once an exceptional and everyday space that forced migrant women must engage with, contend, and ultimately transform for the success of their own livelihoods, these works by Cummins and Kishi illustrate the wall as a persistent aesthetic and spatial trope in varied harmful and hopeful narratives of gendered forced migration. Cristina Giudice and Chiara Giubilaro confirm, 'border symbolisation extends into different media and strategies: literary landscape, iconography, film, information, and mindscapes. Recognising and deconstructing meanings and intent hidden inside

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[338] Women's Refugee Commission, 'Displaced Women and Girls at Risk', June 2015 <https://www.womensrefugeecommission.org/resources/document/ 516-displaced-women-and-girls-at-risk-identifying-risk-factors-and-taking-steps-toprevent-abuse> [accessed 24 June 2022]; Maria Jimenez, 'Humanitarian Crisis: Migrant Deaths at the U.S. – Mexico Border', ACLU, 1 October 2009 <https://www.aclu.org/sites/default/files/pdfs/immigrants/humanitariancrisisreport.pdf> [accessed 28 September 2022]; For more on background on biopolitics, see Michael Foucault, *Society must be defended: Lectures at the Collège De France*, *1975–1976*: 'Biopolitics deals with the population, with the population as a political problem, as a problem that is at once scientific and political, as a biological problem and as power's problem.' Michael Foucault, *Society must be defended: Lectures at the Collège De France*, *1975–1976*, Mauro Bertani, Alessandro Fontana, Francois Ewald, Arnold Davison, eds., trans. by David Macey (New York: Picador, 1997), p. 245.

[339] Kelly Oliver, 'The Special Plight of Women Refugees' *Decolonizing Feminism: Transnational Feminism and Globalization*, ed. by Margaret A. McLaren (New York: Rowman & Littlefield International, 2017), p. 182.

[340] Four thousand children were separated from their parents under Trump's 'zero tolerance' policy. Women's Refugee Commission and Instituto para las Mujeres en la Migración A.C., 2022.

this imaginative apparatus is a fundamental task in understanding border phenomenology'.[341] Consider the notorious 'Build the wall!' rally cry of Donald Trump's 2016 presidential campaign, a dog whistle call, in part, for draconian biopolitical violences against women such as family separation and forced sterilisation.[342] Likewise, views of the crumbling walls of bombed-out homes in Aleppo, Syria, the layered infrastructure of the Shantila Refugee Camp in Beirut, Lebanon that has been growing on itself since 1949, and the white, plastic tent sides of the detention centre pods in Donna, Texas shown below in Figure 26 tell the conflicting visual and material stories of these structures. They are walls that intend to offer security, yet so often restrict the bodies of forced migrant women, leading us to ask who, then, are they actually keeping safe?[343]

Figure 26: U.S. Customs and Border Protection temporary overflow facility for women in Donna, Texas [344]

[341] Cristina Giudice and Chiara Giubilaro, 'Re-Imagining the Border: Border Art as a Space of Critical Imagination and Creative Resistance', *Geopolitics*, 20:1 (2015), p. 83.
[342] For more on family separation under the Trump Administration see: Stephen Lee, 'Family Separation As Slow Death', *Columbia Law Review*, 119:8 (2019), pp. 2319–84; Reilly Frye, 'Family Separation Under The Trump Administration: Applying An International Criminal Law Framework', *The Journal of Criminal Law and Criminology* 110:2 (2020), pp. 349–77; and Danilo Trisi and Guillermo Herrera, *Administration Actions Against Immigrant Families Harming Children Through Increased Fear, Loss of Needed Assistance*, *Center on Budget and Policy Priorities* (2018). On forced sterilisation see: Izabela Tingali and Martha Kinsella, 'Forced Sterilization Accusations at ICE Facility Fit with Trump's Poor Treatment of Immigrants', *Brennan Centre for Justice*, 18 September 2020 <https://www.brennancenter.org/our-work/analysis-opinion/forced-sterilization-accusations-ice-facility-fit-trumps-poor-treatment> [accessed 8 November 2023]
[343] Elliot Spagat and Norman Merchant, 'Over 4,000 migrants, many kids, crowded into Texas facility', Oregon Public Broadcasting, 30 March 2021 <https://www.opb.org/article/2021/03/31/over-4000-migrants-many-kids-crowded-into-texas-facility/> [accessed 5 October 2022]; 'Child migrants: First photos emerge of Biden-era detention centres', BBC <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-us-canada-56491941> [accessed 5 October 2022]
[344] Stef W. Kight, 'Scoop: Inside a crowded border patrol tent in Donna, Texas', Axios.com, 22 March 2021 <https://www.axios.com/2021/03/22/photos-overcrowded-border-patrol-migrant-tents> [accessed 5 October 2022]

Conversely, creative interventions with the wall such as those by artist Raeda Sa'adeh offer a different perspective. In her series *Walls of Concrete*, Sa'adeh mobilises her body against the wall to depict a feminist subversion at the West Bank on the border of Israel and Palestine. A Muslim Palestinian living in Jerusalem, the artist accesses her own intersecting and conflicting ethnic, cultural, and national identities to explore 'woman' as 'living in a state of occupation'.[345] She acts against the wall as a problematic and patriarchal force that manifests danger more than safety and division over structure. Sa'adeh's work creatively subverts 'the hegemonic visual dominance' of statehood, gender, and the border through embodied photographic portrayal of a woman trapped by (*Angel*, 2013, Figure 27), preparing to climb (*Going to School*, 2013, Figure 28), and pulling down (*One Day*, 2013, Figure 29) the concrete barrier.[346] In these stills she uses symbolic and overtly feminine costuming, an innocent angel dress with wings, a purple rucksack covered in hearts, alongside tools, a hammer and ladder, to symbolically challenge, dismantle, and destroy.

[345] Sharjah Art Foundation, Raeda Sa'adeh artist profile <http://sharjahart.org/sharjah-art-foundation/people/saadeh-raeda> [accessed 5 October 2022]
[346] Nayrouz Abu Hatoum, 'Unsettling Visual Politics: Militarized Borders in the Work of Palestinian Artist Raeda Saadeh', *American Quarterly*, 71:4 (2019), p. 1059.

Figure 27: 'Angel' by Raeda Sa'adeh, 2013, ©Raeda Sa'adeh

Figure 28: 'Going to School' by Raeda Sa'adeh, 2013, ©Raeda Sa'adeh

Figure 29: 'One Day' by Raeda Sa'adeh, 2013, ©Raeda Sa'adeh

Certainly, a wall can serve as a social or political signpost. It can become a charged object and an ideological tool. This chapter, therefore, explores the broad border concepts, structures, and emplacements of the body and the wall through feminist border rhetorics to understand the ways the architecture is implicated in the bodily safety and/or danger, promise and/or persecution of the forced migrant women in *American Dirt* and *Los Lobos*. Ultimately, it seeks to reveal productive avenues for reading their agentic interventions, and in doing so works toward reclaiming walls as feminist architectures on behalf of the women they represent.

Building and becoming walls with *American Dirt*

Turning first to the women and the walls in Jeanine Cummins' *American Dirt*, this section seeks to locate a feminist border rhetoric within the controversial 2020 road novel. In *American Dirt*, Cummins writes the sanctuary-seeking journey of a Mexican woman named Lydia Quixano Pérez and her son Luca, who become forced migrants after the murder of their entire family by a national drug cartel. As they rush toward the U.S. border, Lydia and Luca encounter stereotypical hurdles and subtle solidarities, making it a page-turning, if not conflicting, read. Initially lauded by the publishing industry, *American Dirt* received high acclaim from literary superstars such as Stephen

King, John Grisham, and Sandra Cisneros, as well as a seven-figure advance from publisher Flatiron Books, a division of Macmillan.[347] Decisively critical reviews were not far behind the praise, however, with feedback deeming the narrative essentialising 'trauma porn'.[348] The initial and most vitriolic critique was writer Myriam Gurba's 'Pendeja, You Ain't Steinbeck: My Bronca with Fake-Ass Social Justice Literature':

> Unfortunately, Jeanine Cummins' narco-novel, *American Dirt*, is a literary licuado that tastes like its title. Cummins plops overly-ripe Mexican stereotypes, among them the Latin lover, the suffering mother, and the stoic manchild, into her wannabe realist prose. Toxic heteroromanticism gives the sludge an arc and because the white gaze taints her prose, Cummins positions the United States of America as a magnetic sanctuary, a beacon toward which the story's chronology chugs.[349]

Gurba's critique charges Cummins with racially stereotyping a country and community to which she does not belong. Her anger was echoed by many Latinx authors, and the work was called into question in particular due to Cummins authorial position as 'American with Irish and Puerto Rican heritage'.[350] Rather than celebrating a story that could have been rooted in authentic experience or forged solidarity, they condemned *American Dirt*'s early fame and financial success as being based on voyeuristic fiction, conflating the realities of hundreds of thousands of migrants from various countries, who are forced to migrate for various reasons. The strength of the response spurred the grassroots social media campaign #DignidadLiteraria, a collective challenge 'to combat the invisibility of Latinx authors, editors and executives in the U.S. publishing industry and the dearth

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[347] Katie Law, 'Jeanine Cummins on American Dirt: "I wrote the story that was in my heart"', *Evening Standard*, 31 March 2020 <https://www.standard.co.uk/culture/books/jeanine-cummins-interview-american-dirt-review-a4402526.html> [accessed 05 October 2022]; Cummins' editor at Flatiron, Amy Einhorn, also spearheaded *The Help* by Kathryn Stockett, which journalist Lila Shapiro called 'another divisive best seller written by a white woman from the perspective of characters of colour. Early commercial interest in the book was also bolstered by its choice as a coveted Oprah's Book Club pick. However, over 140 authors, including Viet Thanh Nguyen, Kiese Laymon, and Rebecca Solnit, petitioned Oprah to reconsider the appointment. Lila Shapiro, 'Blurbed to Death How one of publishing's most hyped books became its biggest horror story — and still ended up a best seller', *Vulture*, 5 January 2021 <https://www.vulture.com/article/american-dirt-jeanine-cummins-book-controversy.html> [accessed 05 October 2022]

[348] Alex Zaragoza, 'The "American Dirt" Controversy Illustrates the Media's Thirst for Immigrant Trauma Porn', *Vice*, 22 January 2020 <https://www.vice.com/en/article/wxenzm/the-american-dirt-controversy-illustrates-the-medias-thirst-for-immigrant-trauma-porn> [accessed 05 October 2020]; Evette Dionne, '10 Stories to Read to Understand the "American Dirt" Controversy', *Bitch Media*, 27 February 2020 <https://www.bitchmedia.org/article/american-dirt-stories-to-read> [accessed 05 October 2022]

[349] Myriam Gurba, 'Pendeja, You Ain't Steinbeck: My Bronca with Fake-Ass Social Justice Literature', *Tropics of Meta*, 12 December 2019 <https://tropicsofmeta.com/2019/12/12/pendeja-you-aint-steinbeck-my-bronca-with-fake-ass-social-justice-literature/> [accessed 05 April 2023]; Gurba's title for the *Tropics of Meta* story is in reference to novelist Don Winslow calling *American Dirt* 'a Grapes of Wrath for our times.' Don Winslow (@donwinslow), 17 January 2020 Twitter <https://twitter.com/donwinslow/status/1218266817287708673?lang=en-GB> [accessed 05 October 2022]

[350] Catherine Conroy, 'Jeanine Cummins: 'I didn't know if I had the right to tell the story', *The Irish Times*, 25 January 2020 < https://www.irishtimes.com/culture/books/jeanine-cummins-i-didn-t-know-if-i-had-the-right-to-tell-the-story-1.4138464> [accessed 9 November 2023]

of Latinx literature on the shelves of America's bookstores and libraries'.[351] Likely due, in part, to these critiques, *American Dirt* has remained relatively untouched by academics aside from analysis of the publishing process. This thesis, however, seeks to find potential in what might be revealed when Cummins' text is read within a feminist border rhetoric framework. If Basnet's approach seeks to understand how 'imperialist ways of knowing impact women and transnational interconnections', then looking at the women and the walls in the *American Dirt*, 'toxic heteroromantic' 'sludge' and all, has the potential to reveal the everyday bordering that produced it, runs through it, and might be addressed by engaging with it.[352]

Considering the intersecting borders around race, representation, and class in *American Dirt*, a feminist border rhetoric views the cross-sections and counter-actions of migrant motherhood and female solidarity as appropriate spaces to find agency for protagonist Lydia and her co-characters. In particular, it is in the instances of emplacement and embodiment in relation to the wall that Cummins' writing might disprove the claims of essentialisation in regard to her fictional migrants' experiences. Instead, these are the spaces in which she offers convincing and nuanced interventions. As Lydia 'pins Luca to the wall beside her and then cracks the door' in the hotel their first night on the run, readers understand the corporeal realities of her motherhood at that moment.[353] With the sign that hangs on a wall in El Verde garden reading '*MIGRANTES PUEDEN DESCANSAR* AQUÍ' – 'MIGRANTS CAN REST HERE', Cummins indicates that sociospatial politics are a relentless threat for many refugees.[354] And, when Marisol, a female traveling companion attempting to cross the border alongside Lydia, expresses gratitude that her contact lens solution dried up during her detention, so she 'didn't have to look at the walls closing in', the

[351] The movement vociferously called for the U.S. publishing industry to increase representation of Latinx authors and staff within the writing world. Latino Rebels, 'The #DignidadLiteraria Campaign Issues Statement About AMERICAN DIRT Book Event Cancellations', 27 January 2020 <https://www.latinorebels.com/2020/01/27/dignidadliteraria/> [accessed 05 October 2022]; *Dignidad Literaria* <http://dignidadliteraria.com/> [accessed 15 November 2023]
[352] Basnet p.116; Gurba, 2019.
[353] Cummins p. 56.
[354] Ibid., p. 222.; Though I have italicised non-English words throughout this thesis thus far, I pause here to acknowledge what Gloria Anzaldúa explains in *The Gloria Anzaldúa Reader*, 'Such italics have a denormalizing, stigmatizing function and make the italicized words seem like deviations from the (English/'white') norm.' Gloria Anzaldúa *The Gloria Anzaldúa Reader*, ed. Ana Louise Keating (Durham: Duke University Press, 2009), p. 10-11. In this chapter, in particular, beyond following a referencing style, I believe it is necessary to italicise to follow the same formatting as Cummins in *American Dirt*.

legitimacy of desperation is viscerally understood.[355] In *American Dirt*, a feminist border rhetoric highlights the complex interplay of gender, the body, and space in response to the violence of border-determined displacement by serving as a critical lens through which to understand how physical and metaphorical borders that shape the lives of the women in the novel, and how they must respond in equally as diverse ways.

Exploring these sites and strategies supports Lisa Flores' assertion in 'At the Intersections: Feminist Border Theory' that 'feminist border perspectives are critical to understanding the violences that pervade everyday practices'.[356] Certainly, violences for the forced migrant women in *American Dirt* are not only found in the extremes of rape and murder, though they do not preclude them. Violences, indeed, make up everyday discord for asylum seeking women, including Cummins own reductive contributions. She paints broad brush strokes of a dangerous, two-dimensional Mexico. She uses Spanish words at random as a way to exoticise. She caricaturises the cartel members as 'modern bogeymen of urban Mexico'.[357] Gruba specifically criticises Lydia's conflicting description as 'the smartest woman' her husband Sebastian knows, whilst she is continually surprised by the very world in which she lives: 'It shocks Lydia to learn that some central Americans migrate to the United States by foot! It shocks Lydia to learn that men rape female migrants en route to the United States! It shocks Lydia to learn that Mexico City has an ice-skating rink!'[358] The suggestion is that Cummins' lack of proximity to actual experience, or solidarity with women who have lived it, renders the entire narrative as nothing more than a disconnected misrepresentation. The author is likewise criticised by Boston Globe journalist Tina Vasquez for misrepresenting current statistics of forced migration through her characters: 'If it is true — as Cummins claimed — that she put years of research into "American Dirt," speaking to lawyers, migrants in shelters, children in orphanages in Mexico, activists and helpers, deportees, and border crossers, it seems a glaring, unforgivable misstep to approach her stated goal of humanizing migration as if Latinx migrants' stories, histories, and reasons for migrating are simply

[355] Ibid. p. 368
[356] Lisa A. Flores, 'At the Intersections: Feminist Border Theory', *Women's Studies in Communication*, 42:2 (2019), p. 114.
[357] Gurba.
[358] Cummins p. 77; Gurba, 2019/

interchangeable. Or worse yet, that the identities of migrants and the conditions of their countries of origin are inconsequential or inconvenient details in storytelling about migration.'[359] Vasquez's own research explains that in 2018, 'Customs and Border Protection apprehended more than 38,000 unaccompanied children and nearly 104,000 people traveling as families from the Northern Triangle Countries of El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras, according to the Migration Policy Institute. As of June 2019, CBP had apprehended more than 363,000 migrants in families from the three countries during the first nine months of the fiscal year, more than tripling the total apprehensions for 2018'.[360] While readers understand that characters Soledad and Rebeca were fleeing violence in Honduras, Vasquez's point is that perhaps Lydia should have been too. However, this work argues that centring the embodied engagements and emotional experiences with the recurring trope of the wall begins to bridge the gap of Cummins' (lack of) lived experience and stereotyping, as well as wider representational chasms of mischaracterisation and essentialisations too often present in the stories of forced migrant women. Flores notes,

> Since at least 1987, with the groundbreaking publication of Gloria Anzaldúa's *Borderlands/La Frontera*, feminism and borders have been connected. Scholars both within and outside of the field of communication have addressed feminist border questions. We are surrounded with political crises—family separation, caravans of refugees, transnational labor populations, restrictions on visas and travel—that demand feminist border answers.[361]

To work toward some of these answers, this section focuses on two passages concerning static and shifting walls.[362] It considers those that protagonist Lydia faces and becomes, particularly in the context of motherhood amidst forced migration, as well as embodied border engagements for Soledad, the elder of two sisters Lydia and Luca meet, travel alongside, and eventually settle with at their journey's end.

Readers' first encounter with protagonist Lydia is, in fact, amongst walls. Alongside her 8-year-old son, she is 'wedged' between the tiled shower stall walls; they are hiding from members of

[359] Tina Vasquez, 'What we're missing in the controversy around American Dirt', *Boston Globe*, 30 January 2020 <https://www.bostonglobe.com/2020/01/30/opinion/what-were-missing-controversy-around-american-dirt/> [accessed 15 November 2023]
[360] Ibid.
[361] Flores, p. 113.
[362] Liam Connell, 'A Wall of Words: Representing Border Securitisation in Contemporary Fiction, Parallax', 27:1 (2021), p. 34.

Los Jardineros, who have brashly entered a family *quinceañera* party at Lydia's mother's house.[363] With a 'wash of bullets', 'booming, and thudding, clack-clacking with helicopter speed', the cartel thugs murder nearly everyone there: Yénifer – the 15 year-old about to enter womanhood, her parents, and younger brother, Lydia's mother; and her husband.[364] Cummins writes,

> Mami shoves Luca into the corner. There's no door on this shower, no curtain. It's only a corner of his *abuela*'s bathroom, with a third tiled wall built to suggest a stall. This wall is around five and a half feet high and three feet long – just large enough, with some luck, to shield Luca and his mother from sight. Luca's back is wedged, his small shoulders touching both walls. His knees are drawn up to his chin, and Mami is clinched around him like a tortoise's shell.[365]

The introduction to Lydia against and as a wall structure sets a symbolic spatial tone for the rest of the novel, as before she walks the 2550km (1500 mi) journey to the border wall between Acapulco, Mexico and Nogales, Arizona, she shoves her son against one in desperate hope it could keep them alive. This parallel presence of domestic walls versus geopolitical barrier walls positions them as duplicitous structures that create both safe and unsafe scenarios.[366] In this scene they are an insubstantial excuse for safety, not much more than a visual shield for Lydia and Luca to hide behind. Still, obscured in silent, fearful desperation, the two depend on the tile wall for protection. Cummins describes this corner in which they hide with careful detail. She lists the height and width, the material and layout. What's more, she describes the outermost layer, created by Lydia's own maternal body, likening it to the hardened thick layer of bone and skin that encases a tortoise: 'Luca's mami rocks in her squatting position, pushing Luca even harder into the tiled wall.'[367] Up against the bathroom stall wall, Lydia is placed amongst her fellow, real-life forced migrant mothers as she fears for her and her son's lives. It is here she establishes maternity as the basis of a political and social incentive to engage in forced migration.

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[363] Cummins p. 1.
[364] Ibid., p. 1.
[365] Ibid.
[366] Walls resonate beyond Lydia's present-day existence seeking sanctuary. Cummins reinforces their importance in various ways, including through one poignant memory of Lydia's younger life, which she recalls as searches her old university library for a way out of Mexico: 'The ceilings are cathedral high, the cavernous space is saturated with natural light from above, and the walls are completely wrapped by the color-drenched murals of Vlady. Sebastián had once warned Lydia that she'd fail her exams if she persisted in doing her studying here; she squandered most of her time staring at those walls. She's long dreamed of bringing Luca to see this astonishing place, but she never imagined it would happen like this.' Cummins, p. 112.
[367] Ibid., p. 3.

While neither gender nor motherhood are recognised as reasons for refugee qualification by the 1951 Refugee Convention, which includes 'race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion', a feminist border rhetoric ascertains the many intersecting inequalities these categories may involve.[368] Reading experiences like Lydia's as necessitating a 'moral imperative for protection', a feminist border rhetoric takes serious the threat of endangerment, impoverishment, and loss of home or life she faces, and suggests motherhood, in this context, may be recognised as more than a relationship, but a legitimate politic for seeking asylum. Mothers (indeed, parents) around the world remain committed to raising their children somewhere safe, even if this means undertaking the uncertain destiny of a migrant.[369] In 'Feminist Approaches to Border Studies and Gender Violence: Family Separation as Reproductive Injustice', Leandra Hinojosa Hernández explains this drive as the search of reproductive justice, 'a feminist framework that blends reproductive rights and social justice', including 'the right to parent children in safe and healthy environments.'[370] Lydia's instinct, therefore, to build a wall of protection with her own body, is an embodied enactment of the need to provide safety. So, too, is her carnal impulse to 'staple him to her, sew him into her skin, affix her body permanently to his now, if she could', to 'grow her hair into his scalp to become his conjoined twin-mother'.[371] Her subsequent race to cross the U.S. evokes the same primal drive to protect. These actions suggest that physical intervention and embodiment might take the place of words as a distinctly feminist rhetoric at and in response to the border.[372]

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[368] According to the UN's International Conference on Population and Development, reproductive rights 'rest on the recognition of the basic right of all couples and individuals to decide freely and responsibly the number, spacing and timing of their children and to have the information and means to do so, and the right to attain the highest standard of sexual and reproductive health. It also includes their right to make decisions concerning reproduction free of discrimination, coercion and violence, as expressed in human rights documents.' 'Report of the International Conference of Population and Development', United Nations, Cairo, 5-13 September 1994 <https://www.un.org/development/desa/pd/sites/www.un.org.development.desa.pd/files/a_conf.171_13_rev.1.pdf> [accessed 05 October 2022]; *Convention and Protocol Relating to the Status of Refugees*, UNHCR.

[369] Rebecca Maria Torres, 'A crisis of rights and responsibility: feminist geopolitical perspectives on Latin American refugees and migrants', *Gender, Place & Culture*, 25:1 (2018), pp. 13-36.

[370] Leandra Hinojosa Hernández, 'Feminist Approaches to Border Studies and Gender Violence: Family Separation as Reproductive Injustice', *Women's Studies in Communication*, 42:2 (2019), p. 131.

[371] Cummins, p. 352.

[372] Further critique of Cummins novel is that 'misrepresents the United States as a safe harbor for women fleeing violence. Instead, four women a day are shot by their partners in this country. Femicide is a public health crisis on both sides of the US-Mexico border.' Myriam Gurba, 'I called out American Dirt's racism. I won't be silenced', Vox.com, 12 March 2020 <https://www.vox.com/first-person/2020/3/12/21168012/racism-american-dirt-myriam-gurba-jeanine-cummins> [accessed 08 November 2023]

The impulse for Lydia to construct a secure space for her child using her body, and its ability to be interchanged with one ('Luca lets go of Mami's hand and leans his pack against the wall behind him', Cummins, p. 181, 'Luca sits back-to-back with Mami', Cummins, p. 392), speaks to what Caroline Lenette, Mark Brough, and Leonie Cox call 'the dynamic nature of resilience' in 'Everyday Resilience: Narratives of Single Refugee Women with Children'. They constitute this resilience as 'an ongoing process' embedded in 'ordinary environments'.[373] Certainly a massacre in the middle of a *quinceañera* is not an everyday situation, but the walls of the bathroom and the mother's body are. In identifying Lydia's resilience in these spaces, she is revealed as an active, dynamic determiner. Drawing on the work of Jouni Hakli and Kirsi Pauliina, the element of embodiment is key to imbuing agency:

> … asylum seekers are not powerless in these situations if we consider domination and resistance in a Foucauldian sense as always coupled and co-constitutive. While their possibilities to act are often far from 'manifestations of heroic resistance' and closer to political practices of counter-conduct with 'potentially transformative power', as Conlon (2013: 136) argues, it is evident that the practices through which asylum seeking is governed reflect (explicitly or implicitly) the power vested in refugees' embodied presence (Scheel, 2013; Sigvardsdotter, 2013; Ansems de Vries, 2016).[374]

Lydia's performances at and as the wall, therefore, are central to locating this feminist border rhetoric, empowering her as decision maker with embodied survival tactics. She co-opts what has the potential to be a life-threatening architecture, instead erecting her own varied walls of assurance in the face of dramatic uncertainty as a display of her autonomy and authority as counter-conduct. Her body responds instinctively, protecting her son physically, as in the shower stall, and emotionally, as 'she feigns confidence in the way all mothers know how to do in front of their children. She wears the fierce maternal armor of deceit'.[375] As Mariastella Pulvirenti and Gail Mason write, resilience is 'a dynamic process of shifting, changing, building, learning and moving on'.[376] Just as the walls in Lydia's life are not static, neither can she afford to be. She must

[373] Caroline Lenette, Mark Brough, and Leonie Cox, 'Everyday Resilience: Narratives of Single Refugee Women with Children', *Qualitative Social Work*, 12 (2013), p. 639.
[374] Jouni Häkli and Kirsi Pauliina Kallio, 'Bodies and persons: The politics of embodied encounters in asylum seeking', *Progress in Human Geography*, Tampere University, Finland, 45:4 (2021), p. 685.
[375] Cummins, p. 255.
[376] Mariastella Pulvirenti and Gail Mason, 'Resilience and Survival: Refugee Women and Violence', *Current Issues in Criminal Justice*, 23:1 (2011), p. 46.

intervene – hide from the cartel, protect her son, cross the border, make decisions about who to avoid and who to befriend.

As Lydia and Luca journey north, the novel follows the relationships they build along the way. Specifically fostering Lydia's relationships with other women, Cummins' writing offers her some of the fictional female solidarity that her own authorial position does not always achieve. There are brief yet impactful encounters of sisterhood, such as with Paolo, who says she will risk her job at the bank to ensure Lydia receives the money from her deceased mother's bank account, and the old woman in the border town who gifts her a knitted hat for the cold nights crossing the dessert.[377] However, most revealing is the in-depth kinship she creates with fellow forced migrant woman Soledad. Cummins writes of a connection between the two women, based on an unknown but shared feminine knowledge and experience at the border:

> Soledad has told Lydia nothing of where she and her sister came from or what they endured. Lydia's said nothing of her family's circumstances either, but there's that silent bond of knowing between them regardless, a magic that's marginally maternal, but entirely female.[378]

She later elaborates, 'It's the bond of trauma, the bond of sharing an indescribable experience together... It solders them together so they feel like an almost-family now'.[379] This bond is reinforced with mirrored embodied border experiences. In one instance, readers find Soledad, a teenage girl fleeing from a life of gender-based violence in Honduras, standing at the U.S.-Mexico border wall's imposing presence, a barrier that divides the land in two and stops all but her fingers and saliva from crossing:

> The border is unnatural here, a sharp and arbitrary line that slashes through the desert, restraining the surging city behind it to the south. There is almost nothing Soledad can see on the northern side of that line – perhaps there really isn't anything over there, or perhaps whatever's there is hidden by the buckles and folds of the landscape… She sticks her hand

[377] Cummins p. 356.
[378] Cummins, p. 201; Though Cummins looks to identify this lack of knowledge as an unspoken bond, her own prose gives away the disconnect between the author, her protagonist and the real, lived situation of forced migration in Mexico: "Lydia had been aware of the migrant caravans coming from Guatemala and Honduras in the way comfortable people living stable lives are peripherally aware of destitution. She heard their stories on the news radio while she cooked dinner in her kitchen. Mothers pushing strollers thousands of miles, small children walking holes into the bottoms of their pink Crocs, hundreds of families banding together for safety, gathering numbers as they walked north for weeks, hitching rides in the backs of trucks whenever they could, riding La Bestia whenever they could, sleeping in *fútbol* stadiums and churches, coming all that way to *el norte* to plead for asylum.' Cummins pp. 276–77.
[379] Ibid., p. 249.

> through the fence and wiggles her fingers on the other side. Her fingers are in *el norte*. She spits through the fence. Only to leave a piece of herself there on American dirt.[380]

Soledad's reflection at the wall exemplifies the profound entanglement of physical and invisible borders that women face throughout the novel. Through this embodied encounter in which she sees, touches, and spits in order to understand the structure, the space and its powers to hide, reveal, secure and withhold, a feminist border rhetoric is formed.[381] This rhetoric is not verbal, but somatic, and not long after Soledad's encounter, Cummins writes 'the moment of Lydia's crossing' in a strikingly similar way:

> Somewhere in the Tumacacori Mountains, Lydia sheds the violet skin of everything that's happened to her. It rolls down from her tingling scalp off the mantle of her shoulders and down the length of her body. She breathes out. She spits it into the dirt.[382]

Although not at a physical border but an emotional crossing, like Soledad, Lydia feels the two sides with her whole being. She sheds this feeling down her entire body, breathing, and expulsing it from her mouth. As Liam Connell suggests, borders are 'a kind of textual event', 'under a constant process of inscription and therefore, are capable of being read'.[383] It is, therefore, in these layered, embodied border readings that readers see Soledad and Lydia tactilely confront real and metaphoric walls. The passages speak to the complexities of the migrants' situation, showing that they are driven by ambivalence, anger, and naivety just as much as by urgency, love, and resilience. And importantly, reading the women and walls in such way unearths a complexity that a surface level reading of Cummins' *American Dirt* lacks, redressing its more obvious failings with the strength of the feminist border rhetoric.

Among yet another set of walls, those of a hotel room in Navolato, Mexico, a second encounter with Soledad illustrates the strength of an embodied feminist border rhetoric. In an unknown space, among near-strangers and her own sister who do not know that she is pregnant, Soledad miscarries her child. Engaging the bond Cummins says is found in shared experience, trauma, gender, Lydia silently steps in to create a wall once again: 'She positions the flimsy curtain

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[380] Ibid., p. 359.
[381] Basnet, p. 116.
[382] Cummins p. 435.
[383] Liam Connell, 'A Wall of Words: Representing Border Securitisation in Contemporary Fiction, Parallax', 27:1 (2021), p. 4.

to give Soledad as much privacy as possible while she miscarries her baby'.[384] A brief but resonating passage, Lydia holds Soledad's body with her own, walking her from bed to the corner of the room. Here Lydia assumedly stretches out her arms to hold the curtain, emplacing her own self in between the pained mother and the others in the room to offer spatial dignity. This embodied act of care, a stunning act of feminist architecture as this research understands it, evokes a 2017 political art performance, which also engages solidarity through bodily intervention. On the day of Donald Trump's inauguration as president of the United States, 52 women from Mexico and the United States stood back-to-back in pairs, with each one's hair braided into the other's and linking hands with those across from them.[385] Across the international pedestrian bridge that connects El Paso, Texas and Juarez, Mexico they created an unequivocally intertwined human bridge to counter the border, using their own bodies, to protest and protect. The site-specific performance was entitled *Braiding Borders* – refer to Figure 30.

Figure 30: Braiding Borders, photo by Jose Luis Gonzalez, 2017 [386]

[384] Ibid., p. 295.
[385] 'Braiding Borders + Trenzando Fronteras', posted by Boundless Across Borders, *Facebook.com* 29 June 2017 <https://www.facebook.com/watch/?v=679311438929593&paipv=0&eav=AfZ3j2y901PD0nGvFFbNivZ_t_2yMNrZpnyBeCf8eBzgsie4U8lfP63c3AY6hvHB86I> [accessed 8 November 2023]
[386] Beth Greenfield, 'Women Braid Hair Together in Show of Solidarity at U.S.-Mexico Border', *Yahoo.com*, 23 January 2017 <https://uk.finance.yahoo.com/news/women-braid-hair-together-in-show-of-solidarity-at-u-s-mexico-border-205349431.html> [accessed 8 November 2023]; Yara Simón, 'These Women Wove Their Hair Together Into a Powerful

An ‘embodied, collective, feminist intervention’, Katlin Murphy explores the importance of the physical and emotional work in ‘Braiding Borders: Performance as Care and Resistance on the U.S.-Mexico Border’.[387] She marks its gendered, spatial, and embodied relevance, identifying the act of braiding as a specifically cultural, traditional, intimate, and female experience and the border bridge as a ‘highly scripted space, entirely defined by its function: to regulate the conditions of bodily crossing from one country into the other.[388] A feminist border rhetoric in its own right, this piece organised by Xochitl Rodriguez Nicholson and Sandra Paola López Ramírez exemplifies the importance of Lydia’s own bodily intervention on behalf of Soledad. Her physical act of caretaking, as Soledad experiences the traumatising loss, is a directly intimate and gendered act, one that, in linking mother to mother, counters the ‘top-down, disembodied, and state-centered traditional geopolitics and international relations’ the women have been up against on their journeys thus far.[389]

Just as with the specific physical, cultural, and locational details of *Braiding Borders*, it is in the complexities of the characters’ embodied spatial interventions and experiences that forced migrant women are appropriately represented as multi-dimensional in *American Dirt*. In these experiences among extreme and everyday walls, Cummins, and indeed readers, create foundations, if not complete feminist architectures, then to reclaim representations back from neglectful language and extreme depictions of helpless precarity, vulnerability, and victimhood. Instead, a feminist border rhetoric places the women in the novel as being somewhere, no longer placeless, and identifies their embodied and agentic interventions at varied personal and political lines of demarcation. As Murphy writes:

> When we study performance and other bodily practices, we are often seeking frameworks for understanding what is accomplished by bodies gathering in particular ways and what affective, sensorial, and political resonances are created through ephemeral bodily contact in specific spaces and moments.[390]

Chain of Solidarity on the US-Mexico Border’, *Remezcla*, 23 January 2017 < https://remezcla.com/culture/us-mexico-border-braid-solidarity/> [accessed 08 November 2023]

[387] Kaitlin M. Murphy, ‘Braiding Borders: Performance as Care and Resistance on the US-Mexico Border’, *TDR/The Drama Review,* 64:4 (2020), pp. 72–83.

[388] Murphy, p. 78.

[389] Torres, 2018, p. 17.

[390] Murphy, p. 82.

Thus, evoking Lydia and Soledad's somatic interventions that shield and safeguard, structures for others to rest against and emotional partitions that protect those around them, it becomes possible to identify both bold and subtle acts of resilience in their somewhat stunted narrative lives. Here, Lenette, Brough, and Cox's research in, 'Everyday Resilience: Narratives of Single Refugee Women with Children' is affirmed: 'The idea of ordinary achievements in everydayness, even when perceived as relatively minor triumphs, deserves more attention.'[391] Recognising where, how, and who Lydia and Soledad hide and help, which walls they can create and which they can cross, gives them an agency not often attributed to forced migrant women. Further, acknowledging the extreme and everyday racialised, gendered, and representative walls within *American Dirt* opens avenues of critique that can both consider and look beyond the novel as simply a page-turning melodrama to unearth its embodied, 'entirely female' potential.[392]

Her body intervenes: Maternal mediation at the wall in *Los Lobos*

Remaining at the same U.S.-Mexico border, this chapter moves to consider another, arguably more rooted representation of forced migrant motherhood, in which embodied engagements at and as the wall effectively educe a feminist border rhetoric. *Los Lobos,* a 2019 film by Mexican director Samuel Kishi, follows exhausted but determined single mother Lucia as she attempts to resettle her two young children, Max and Leo, from Mexico into the United States. Considering Lucia's roles as mother, migrant, provider, protector, employee, and non/citizen, this section explores the depth of her experience through Basnet's framework, addressing walls as both psychosocial boundaries and physical violences. It does so as a means to identify the ways she, as a complex characterisation of these deeply constrained and challenged figures, is restricted within the biopolitical systems of migration, as woman, mother and other, and how she pushes against those limitations. In doing so, it provides a clearer framing than *American Dirt* could for how forced migrant women, and forced migrant mothers in particular, might be viewed as having greater agency, drive, and direction than typically afforded to them in the representational realm.[393]

[391] Lenette, Brough, and Cox, p. 648.
[392] Cummins, p. 201.
[393] As argued in the introduction, motherhood often has been co-opted to both victimise and demonise forced migrant women. See footnotes 70-72.

In contrast to Cummins' impersonal, and at times reductive, tropes of deserving maternal figures packaged for her audience's consumption, Kishi's film is anchored in a lived understanding. Written as a 'love letter to his mother' rather than a Hollywood hit, he uses his personal access to the mother/son relationship to represent Lucia convincingly, despite his own identification as a male writer and director.[394] Kishi's memories of his mother working 'till the point of total exhaustion', only to be treated like 'a ghost in the system, invisible' helped to create a complex persona, a filmic feminist border rhetoric played out on screen.[395] *Los Lobos* is a textual recognition of 'what she had put at stake… how brave and smart she was'.[396] Performed by actor (and Kishi's real-life partner) Martha Reyes Arias with concurrent sorrow, reserve, and tenderness, Lucia not only embodies Kishi's maternal memories, but she centres the narrative as maternally-driven and built with feminist architectures from the start.[397] The nuanced tension in her characterisation demonstrates what Anzaldúa observes *Borderlands*: 'Alienated from her mother culture, alien in the dominant culture, the woman of color does not feel safe within the inner life of her Self.'[398] Despite having crossed the physical border with apparent ease in comparison to Lydia's hyperbolic journey – Lucia arrives by bus on a temporary tourist visa, under the guise of a trip to Disneyland – via a feminist border rhetoric, the film effectively shows that transcultural migration entails more than just being on one side of the wall or the other.[399] Instead, the wall is both a physical and mental barrier between locations and identities. It is charged with multilayered politics that affect those who seek to confront it. As such, Lucia must grapple with the challenging practicalities of resettling, a decision seemingly forced upon her by the drug overdose of the children's father and subsequent financial instability, and the intertwined complexities of motherhood and statehood. Her focus, at present, is on existing. To illustrate, Kishi highlights Lucia's resolve to keep her children safe, fed, and entertained, and herself employed. With a trip to Disneyland as a distant promise to the boys, however, it is implied that she has hope for a positive,

[394] Beth Uta, 'Samuel Kishi Leopo about *Los Lobos*: A love letter to my mother', *European Children's Film Association*, 1 May 2020 <https://www.ecfaweb.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/01/ECFA-02-2020-02-Los-Lobos.pdf> [accessed 08 November 2023]
[395] Ibid.
[396] Ibid.
[397] Ibid.
[398] Anzaldúa, p. 42.
[399] Uta.

empowered future that involves one day doing more than just surviving. Drawing on two distinct creative engagements with the wall, therefore, this section explores Lucia's journey, not just beyond the border line, but toward a freeing maternal agency. Engaging with the tensions of what is introduced first as a biopolitical state architecture designed to keep out migrants, and then as a protective and creative domestic intervention and feminist architecture, the filmic encounters with the wall studied here demonstrate how the structure is charged by the embodied presence and intervention of Lucia, as a woman, mother, and forced migrant.

First addressing the actual geopolitical border, it is relevant to note that Kishi devotes little on-screen attention to the site of the security wall, despite its important role in the narrative. In fact, whereas *American Dirt* focused on the arduous and extreme route to cross into *el norte*, the story of Lucia, Max and Leo is set almost entirely on the U.S. side of the border, in Albuquerque, New Mexico. Rather than concentrating on the extraordinary journey of migration and crossing, there is, instead, a brief but methodical reveal of the young family's approach. The clicking of the tape recorder comes first, with opening credits appearing on a black screen. As an ambient score builds, cinematographer Octavio Arauz begins the film with a rich sunrise across desert plains. This shot is followed by a steady but constant pan of the views beyond the road – parked cars, telephones poles, half-built concrete foundations – all while the youngest son, Leo, voices over with a children's rhyme.[400] A still from this scene is below in Figure 31. Notably, the tape recorder will come to play an important role in the bodily interventions of the film, one of Kishi's richly layered elements of mixed-media present throughout the narrative.

[400] Kishi, 00:00:40.

Figure 31: Still image from Los Lobos*; The opening scene in which Lucia's son Leo sings a nursery rhyme over a panning view of the landscape* [401]

Kishi and Arauz captures the rolling landscape from inside the moving bus that transports them, and point-of-view camera shots linger on the banal but beautiful open spaces as they approach the border wall. This brief but focused scene suggests that this place holds deep significance. As Leo chants playfully and melodic, '*Chumbala cachumbala / cachumbala*', the camera shifts, trading the passing scenic footage for a still and direct shot of the congested and heavily surveillanced border at Ciudad Juarez seen below in Figure 32 and 33; so, too, does this place.[402]

Figure 32: Still image from Los Lobos; *Leo continues singing as their bus crosses the heavily surveillanced border from Mexico to the U.S.* [403]

[401] Ibid.
[402] Ibid., 00:01:03.
[403] Ibid.

Figure 33: Still image from Los Lobos; *A close-up camera shot shows the border sign, 'Welcome to the United States, Bienvenidos a los Estados Unidos'* [404]

In a matter of seconds, however, viewers see the large green highway border sign that reads '*Welcome to the United States*, Bienvenidos a los Estados Unidos' and Lucia's material and maternal voice joins Leo on the grainy recorder tape.[405] She asks him to narrate the scenes as they begin moving and the landscape comes back into view, 'Qué ves?' *What do you see?*[406]

Leo: Un pine.	*Leo: A pine tree.*
Lucia: Se llama nopal.	*Lucia: It's called a prickly pear.*
Leo: Nopal... la playa… un hotel.	*Leo: Prickly pear… the beach… a hotel.*
Lucia: Que mas?	*Lucia: What else?*
Leo: Un camino, un castillo, y arena.	*Leo: A road, a castle, sand.*[407]

There is no direct encounter with the wall, no scaling or skirting, and even the physical crossing itself is edited out. Instead, the sensorial intervention of Lucia's voice creates the division, interjecting to support, entertain, and mother her child; it is a form of feminist border rhetoric that prioritises the act of speaking over what is said. Further, in replacing the wall with Lucia's voice, Kishi ensures the experience is narrated through a female and familial tone. What could be, and often is, a disruptive or violent experience in the face of patriarchal nation state structures, engagement with the border wall is instead mediated by the mother, her mere voice reclaiming the family's experience of it. This embodied, maternal decentring of the border wall, and the recentring of the woman, allows Kishi to impart a feminocentric intervention that highlights the same

[404] Kishi, 00:01:12.
[405] Ibid.
[406] Ibid., 00:01:10.; Note: Here I italicise the English words as they are the translated subtitles.
[407] Ibid., 00:01:11 - 00:01:22.

maternal strength and agency in the face of migration he felt his mother embodied in their own family's journey from Guadalajara, Mexico to the Santa Ana, California.[408]

This opening encounter sets the precedent for Lucia's somatic interplay with forthcoming, and arguably more 'everyday', walls. The clarity with which she faces the border wall at its entry point, metaphorically becoming the division and maintaining control of the narrative through playful dialogue, powerfully counters the defenceless or demonising 'illegal immigrant' narratives that politicised forces put out.[409] Rather than seeing women like Lucia as asylum seekers entitled to safety, harmful racialised and gendered tropes and misrecognitions are often perpetuated, as Catherine Powell points out in *Race, Gender, and Nation in an Age of Shifting Borders: The Unstable Prisms of Motherhood and Masculinity*, 'through the lenses of motherhood' to construct additional and ideological exclusionary walls.[410] Women, regardless of parental status, are overwhelmingly visualised with children, a misrecognition which 'centres around the lack of agency that they are constructed to have', Hannah Ryan and Katie Tonkiss explain in 'Loners, Criminals, Mothers: The Gendered Misrecognition of Refugees in the British Tabloid News Media'.[411] Further, they are often depicted as deceptive criminals, 'invading' (Barragan, 2022), 'smuggling' (Bier, 2019) and violently overrunning the border (Scott, 2019) by politicians and sensationalist media outlets.[412] In the particular geopolitical circumstances at the U.S.-Mexico borderwall, Powell further explains that these false narratives rely on 'characterizing Latinas, in particular, as irresponsible mothers who bring their children to the United States or give birth to

[408] Uta; As a cisgender male, Kishi raises concerns about how his perspective may impact the portrayal of gendered experiences among forced migrants, particularly given the central role of protagonist Lucia's gender and experiences, especially related to motherhood. Despite these concerns, Kishi backs *Los Lobos* with a significant sense of personal experience, drawing from his own encounters in a similar migration experience, notably represented through Lucia's two young sons. Adding another layer to the dynamic, Kishi and Martha Reyes Arias are partners, potentially contributing another level of personal intimacy to the representation.

[409] See: Ala Sirriyeh, *The Politics of Compassion: Immigration and Asylum Policy* (Bristol: Bristol University Press, 2018); Miriam Ticktin, 'A world without innocence', *American Ethnologist*, 44:4, (2017), pp. 577–90; Katherine Tonkiss and Tendayi Bloom, *Theorising Non-citizenship: Concepts, debates and challenges*, 1st edn (London: Routledge, 2017)

[410] Powell, p. 135.

[411] Hannah Ryan and Katie Tonkiss, 'Loners, Criminals, Mothers: The Gendered Misrecognition of Refugees in the British Tabloid News Media', *Sociological Research Online*, June 19, 2022, p. 14.

[412]James Barragan, 'Republican county officials in South Texas want Gov. Greg Abbott to deport migrants. Only the federal government can do that,' *The Texas Tribune*, 5 July 2022 <https://www.texastribune.org/2022/07/05/texas-migrants-deportation/> [accessed 29 July 2022]; David J. Bier, 'No Evidence Migrant Families Are Aiding Drug Smuggling', Cato Institute, 19 July 2019 <https://www.cato.org/blog/no-evidence-migrant-families-are-aiding-drug-smuggling> [accessed 28 July 2022]; Eugene Scott, 'Trump's most insulting — and violent — language is often reserved for immigrants', *The Washington Post*, 2 October 2019 <https://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/2019/10/02/trumps-most-insulting-violent-language-is-often-reserved-immigrants/> [accessed 29 July 2022]

'anchor babies' in the country as a way to take advantage of the American welfare state'.[413] Considering the physical border alongside intersectional inequalities, therefore, reveals what Lucia is up against: relentless and racialised physical and emotional violence because she, a Mexican mother, dares to seek sanctuary.[414] However, as she pushes back against gendered and cultural stigmatisations such as these by finding work, making a home, and caring for her children – and here, with her voice demarcating the before and after, becoming the wall itself – Kishi empowers her with an uncommon agency, a display of feminist border rhetorics in action.

Lucia's encounters with walls further serve as a productive approach to bordering conditions as she finds and makes a home. Understood as a typically gendered act, her specific 'homemaking' does not entail hackneyed, female or feminine stereotypes. Rather, Lucia's homemaking is comprised entirely of acts of survival. With no fixed end destination on the northern side of the borderwall, Lucia must get herself and the boys ready for their day in the bus station bathroom, brushing teeth and hair alongside other migrants who are shaving and applying makeup, assumedly also just having crossed the border with nowhere to live. Her resolve continues, as she leads them around the new city by bus and on foot, carrying all their belongings in backpacks and suitcases, sometimes carrying the children themselves, searching for a home. In this filmic sequence, Lucia faces wall after wall, both physically and metaphorically. There is the dank, wood panelled wall of the apartment which she will eventually resign to renting for an exorbitant $500 per month, the convenient store notice board covered in flyers for vacant jobs and homes, below in Figure 34, and the series of matter-of-fact landlords who ask too much for too little.[415]

[413] Powell, p. 135.
[414] Basnet, p. 116.
[415] Kishi, 00:04:58; Ibid., 00:05:34.

Figure 34: Still image from Los Lobos*; Lucia and her sons look for advertisements for available housing on a public notice board* [416]

Each wall she encounters represents 'everyday bordering', a concept coined by Nira Yuval-Davis, Georgie Wemyss, and Katheryn Cassidy.[417] Like Lydia, the walls in Lucia's life are unreliable. These borders can shapeshift in ways that are physical and psychological; they are ever-present and everyday.[418] Yuval-Davis, Wemyss, and Cassidy accordingly propose that 'de- and re-bordering processes involve the territorial displacement and relocation of borders and border controls that are, in principle, being carried out by anyone anywhere – government agencies, private companies and individual citizens,' an understanding that echoes the U.K. government's current 'compliant environment' policy.[419] Present as she searches for a place to live, everyday borders are most obvious in Lucia's lack of legal paperwork. Walls are erected because she does not have a work permit or a social security card – Yuval-Davis, Wemyss, and Cassidy's research reveals that 'everyday employment bordering can have a greater impact on women with limited opportunities' – and during the search for a suitable, affordable apartment.[420] These everyday borders are the reason she cannot afford childcare or find less exploitative working conditions; they introduce the structural inequalities and oppressions of migration into her home life and affect the ways she can mother by hindering what she can offer and when she can be present.

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[416] Kishi, 00:05:34.
[417] Nira Yuval-Davis, Georgie Wemyss, Kathryn Cassidy, 'Everyday Bordering, Belonging and the Reorientation of British Immigration Legislation', *Sociology*. 52:2 (2018).
[418] Although developed a markedly different geopolitical context, an epistemological response to the U.K. withdrawal from the European Union, the idea nonetheless is centered around a transcultural understanding of the 'contemporary politics of belonging'. Nira Yuval-Davis, Georgie Wemyss, Kathryn Cassidy, 'Everyday Bordering, Belonging and the Reorientation of British Immigration Legislation', *Sociology*. 52:2 (2018), p. 229.
[419] Yuval-Davis, Wemyss, Cassidy, p. 229.; Spencer Bienvenue, 'What Is The Compliant Environment (Formerly The Hostile Environment) And Is It Working?', *Gherison.com*, 22 Jun 2020 <https://www.gherson.com/blog/what-is-compliant-environment/> [accessed 14 September 2023]
[420] Yuval-Davis, Wemyss, Cassidy, p. 238

Kishi's commitment to giving these encounters screentime builds the filmic foundation of Lucia's determination. In *Film Art - An Introduction*, David Bordwell and Kristin Thompson, reveal this intentional narrative form as a pattern, linking large and small details to 'connect sequences into a larger whole'.[421] With a similar method, viewers get glimpses of Lucia's maternal subtleties. In providing water for the boys, holding one's hand, and coming prepared with a notepad of addresses to visit, we understand the stable structure she becomes in this obviously destabilising time. After they are housed and she finds work, the details continue to compound: Lucia lovingly spreads jam over bread and surprises the boys with a late-night snack, despite obvious frustration and exhaustion. Layered into the film, these moments convey authenticity in their smallness and make up a feminist border rhetoric through the ways their tenderness counteracts the intensity of the border's effects. Contextually, they read differently from Lydia's gestures toward Luca because they are acts of everyday care as opposed to intensifying, lifesaving gestures. Similar to Lydia, however, a pattern of compassion and a politics of care indeed permeate Lucia's every choice, such as her decisions to take work where and when she can get it, using a false social documentation, clocking late hours, traveling long distances.[422] Both women represent many migrant mothers' quests for (an often withheld) reproductive justice, at the heart of which, Loretta Ross and Rickie Solinger explain, is the claim that 'all fertile persons and persons who reproduce and become parents require a safe and dignified context for these most fundamental human experiences,' including 'high quality healthcare, housing, education, a living wage, a healthy environment'.[423] These realities reinforce Basnet's understanding that 'physical borders intertwine with invisible borders to contribute to low wages and poor working conditions' for many migrant women and acknowledging them as part of the complex experience of forced migrant women is essential to appropriate representation, even in fiction.[424]

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[421] David Bordwell, Kristin Thompson, Jeff Smith, *ISE EBook Online Access for Film Art: An Introduction*, 12th ed. (Maidenhead: McGraw-Hill, 2019), p. 51.
[422] Max picks up on these injustices, the reality that Lucia must work within the limiting structures of maternity while living in a capitalist system that exploits migrants and illegal workers, as exemplified in the following dialogue: Lucia: 'I need to work so we can have money to live… and go to Disney.' Max: 'You need a card to work?' Lucia: 'Here you do.' Kishi, 00:11:24.
[423] Loretta J. Ross and Rickie Solinger, 'A Reproductive Justice History.' *Reproductive Justice: An Introduction*, 1st ed. (California, USA, University of California Press: 2017) p. 9.
[424] Basnet, p. 116.

Lucia's undeniably fraught relationship with walls further emerges in the mundane, even disregardable, architecture of the family's new apartment. She only rents it as a last resort – all others were too expensive or not private – and it lacks proper bedrooms and beds. The paint and wood panelling are stained; the wallpaper is peeling. Stills below in Figure 35 and 36 illustrate.

Figure 35: Still image from Los Lobos*; The walls of the rental apartment are outdated, stained and unwelcoming.*[425]

Figure 36: Still image from Los Lobos*; Wallpaper is discoloured and peeling, suggesting years of neglect* [426]

This dilapidated space, however, is now her shelter, and following payment she sets out to clean the walls, floors, kitchen, and bath. In physically addressing the materiality of walls in this way, Lucia tactually begins the construction of her own feminist architecture, pushing back against the potentially violent structures of migration. These actions are embodiments of her determination to protect her children. Similarly, Lucia commits to finding a job, obtaining a fake social security card, and hunting out opportunities advertised on posters, enduring a long commute and late hours. Her actions here demonstrate ways that 'resilience embedded in daily routines challenges the focus

[425] Kishi, 00:05:00.
[426] Kishi, 00:07:42.

of much of the resilience discourse on "extraordinary" events'.[427] She continues to overcome barriers around economics, housing, and employment, despite having crossed the geopolitical borderwall. Lucia's resolve is not limitless however, affirming what Stacey Sowards writes in 'In Bordering Through Place/s, Difference/s, and Language/s: Intersections of Border and Feminist Theories'. There is a 'contingency and precariousness of our identities,' Sowards suggests, that 'shift in various contexts and circumstances'.[428] In tandem with her determination, Lucia displays an immense vulnerability through tears, hiding away in the bathroom, and ultimately asking for support from her landlady and neighbour, Mrs Chan, and later, a local church offering food and Sunday school childcare.

The relationship between Lucia and Mrs Chan is of particular note, as it represents the feminist architectures of relationship that might be drawn out by a feminist border rhetoric. To begin, the landlady is distant; worse however, she is part of the exploitative system. She rents an overpriced and unsuitable apartment to a woman with no other options. However, there is a glimpse of the support that will come as she hands Lucia keys, followed by cleaning products to prepare the space. Later, we see Mrs Chan's own intervention unfold scene by scene: she gives the boys buns to eat, lets them inside their home when they are locked out and takes them trick-or-treating on Halloween – a childcare arrangement the two women ultimately formalise in an intimate seen but sound-less conversation, another display of an unvoiced feminist border rhetoric.[429] At one poignant point of connection, as Lucia sees and hears Mr and Mrs Chan fighting in their neighbouring apartment, the two women both exhale, light a cigarette, and acknowledge each other in solidarity.[430] Sarah De Los Santos Upton explains, 'Through building coalitions, individuals uncover and experience new ways of identifying and relating to one another while at the same time

[427] Lenette, et al. further explain: 'As single refugee women adapt to new lifestyles and systems, some concurrently bear the primary responsibility for ensuring their children's successful transition to a new country. Many refugee women are isolated and experience significant emotional, financial, and physical risks post-resettlement (Pittaway, 1999). Single migrant and refugee women with children are at a higher risk of developing mental health problems than the rest of the Australian population (Office of the Status of Women, 2001).' Lenette, Brough and Cox, p. 639.
[428] Stacey K. Sowards, 'Bordering Through Place/s, Difference/s, and Language/s: Intersections of Border and Feminist Theories', *Women's Studies in Communication*, 42:2 (2019), p. 122.
[429] Kishi, 01:19:00; Ibid., 01:26:00.
[430] Ibid., 01:16:00.

unveiling new possibilities and strategies for combating marginalization and oppression'.[431] In this moment both migrants, both women of colour, acknowledge each other in a world that rarely will via a rhetoric that is embodied rather than outrightly spoken. With this relationship, it seems Kashi is suggesting that if Lucia's maternal intervention is strong enough to help her family survive, then additional female solidarity and support could help them thrive.

Returning to Sowards' idea of 'contingency', however, it is necessary to recognise that even with the agency Lucia gains vis à vis the walls, whether through independent resolve or a relational feminist solidarity, her autonomy remains compromised by them.[432] She searches out and provides walls, builds, and cleans them, but cannot remain within them to protect her children. Despite scrubbing the apartment thoroughly, she must step away, hoping she has made a space that is clean and safe to keep her children while she ventures out for work, imploring the dingy walls of her apartment to become a proxy form of childcare. Far from ideal, Lucia understands this slippage as her only option given their precarious and isolated situation. As such, before she leaves, she secures her vocal presence, another embodied intervention, leaving behind tape recorded rules for their wellbeing: 'Rule number two: Do not step on the carpet without shoes'.[433] These rules repeat throughout the film, crackling through the dated recorder, similar to the early scene at the border crossing. The recordings are an intratextual mixed-medium, laid over crucial scenes that allow Lucia's mothering, albeit challenged at times, to remain present via the tangible soundtrack. As she charges the children: 'Do not leave the apartment', 'Rule number four: Look after your brother', she is, in fact, charging the walls to fill in for her as caregiver/mother.[434] Without the privilege of financial or social resource, Lucia must make compromises and improvisations in care due to the structural violences of oppression. The overall 'decision' to migrate is the classic exemplar. The sentiment is expressed in poet Warsan Shire's 'Home': 'no one leaves home unless/ home is the mouth of a shark/ you only run for the border/ when you see the whole city running as well/ … you have to understand,/ that no one puts their children in a boat/ unless the water is safer than the

[431] Sarah De Los Santos Upton, 'Nepantla Activism and Coalition Building: Locating Identity and Resistance in the Cracks Between Worlds', *Women's Studies in Communication*, 42:2 (2019), p. 137.
[432] Sowards, p. 122.
[433] Kishi, 00:12:19.
[434] Kishi, 00:12:06; Ibid., 00:12:30

land.'[435] There is a precarious balance between being forced out and choosing to leave, a line between subjection and agency, which Lucia's portrayal of motherhood straddles through the film. By including this ambivalent reality, Kishi represents the real constraints many vulnerable women face in motherhood.

Reading Lucia's interventions as a display of feminist border rhetoric that considers the comprehensive realities of forced migrant women, it is possible to see how her character operates among the vying tensions of oppression and choice, limitation and potential. Kishi fills the space with Lucia's narration via the presence of the recordings, and these commands, songs, and memories themselves become maternally defined boundaries within which the boys can exist and build resilience, like the opening scene at the border wall where her voice becomes the divider. In a particular day-long montage set inside the apartment, Lucia's voice plays over as Max and Leo mark the walls as an expression of creativity, depicted below in Figure 37. Their play is a combatant to boredom and a familiar act of childhood.[436] They measure their height, outline their muscles, and create whimsical cartoon drawings.[437]

Figure 37: Still image from Los Lobos*; Max and Leo draw imaginative characters on the wall which come to life through animation* [438]

[435] Warsan Shire, 'Home', *Facing History & Ourselves*, 5 January 2017 <https://www.facinghistory.org/resource-library/home-warsan-shire> [accessed 16 November 2023]
[436] These cartoon sketches, created by Platypus Animation, a Guadalajara-based studio co-founded by Kishi. Carlos Aguilar, 'Los Lobos', RogerEbert.com, 31 July 2020 <https://www.rogerebert.com/reviews/los-lobos-movie-review-2020> [accessed 28 July 2022]
[437] Kishi, 00:20:10.
[438] Kishi, 00:20:03.

Just as Lucia uses her body to clean and prepare the walls of the apartment for the safety of her family, the boys discover they can use theirs to engage them in creativity, entertainment, and imagination at the very same site. This is an outlet they may access because of the groundwork she has laid, both practical, cleaning the walls, and emotional, emboldening them to imagine. Coming alive through animation, the crayon-marked figures play, dance, and fight along the surface of the walls that hold them and across colourful printed flyers that Lucia brought home for the boys to decorate. In particular, the brothers draw a recurrent symbol present across the film, Lucia's nickname for the close-knit family and the film's allusive title: *los lobos*, the wolves. Employing their mother's loving moniker, a dual symbol of a fierce predator as well as a loyal pack, the boys are empowered to assume the wolves as caricature alter-egos through imaginative play, costuming and, as here, drawing. This creative infusion of magic realism, spurred on by their own physical intervention against the wall, is yet another powerful layering of medium. What could be a solemn and restrictive environment instead becomes an enlivened canvas for expression and imagination, changed and charged by maternally-led intervention.

Play, as a form of subversive resistance that pushes against the confines of a capitalist, nationalist, bordered reality is another manifestation of feminist border rhetoric, enabled here by what Anna Ball terms the 'transcultural feminist imagination'.[439] A 'mobilisation of assertively gendered agency', the family's reinscription of the walls of their apartment, led by the complex mother character, enacts what Ball describes as a 'political critique, imaginative resistance, and creative transformation'.[440] Lucia has created the spatial opportunities for her sons to thrive through her decision-making, intervention, and creativity, and as a result the walls can be both restricting and protective. The limitations placed on motherhood by the demands of the bordered state are, indeed, still visible, however, in that Lucia cannot celebrate the very creative engagement for which she worked hard to lay the foundations. Rather than joining in to mark the walls with imaginative drawing, she is bound by the restrictive stressors of being undocumented, underpaid, and unsupported. Arriving home after an exhaustive day of work – her precarious financial and

[439] Ball, p. 14.
[440] Ibid.

improperly documented position means she is vulnerable to harsh and unfair job conditions like so many in her same position – she reprimands the boys for drawing on the walls, '*Max, qué es eso?* What is this?', 'Rule number three, keep the apartment clean and tidy!'.[441] The destabilising factors involved in seeking sanctuary are inevitable, despite her resolve. They put restrictions on the ways she can care, meaning she cannot embrace the same freedoms she wants her sons to have. Nevertheless, in casting protection over the place that was meant to protect them, we can read this as her continued maternal provision, rules to set boundaries to ensure the children's security and promote their wellbeing, including play, in this new and uncertain environment. Her politic of care is physical, vocal, and engaged – the feminist border rhetoric in action – addressing intersectional violences and building feminist architectures of resilience.

Whilst the wall has the potential to be Lucia's biggest threat, and certainly it is a proven persistent biopolitical weapon used against real forced migrant women, this work has revealed that when considered with a feminist border rhetoric, Kishi's protagonist also embodies resolve and hope in the face of its many oppressive layers. She is tired and scared, oppressed and constrained, but more prominently, she is creative and involved. Lucia uses her own body to intervene at the geopolitical border, engaging her voice to guide the family as they cross from Mexico into the U.S. at Ciudad Juarez's highly militarised border entry. With this, she asserts control over their journey, caused by a seemingly desperate and uncontrollable situation. Her embodied actions continue to steer the narrative, as she finds housing and work and provides stability and entertainment with imaginative solutions: maintaining a tape recorder with rules, music, and memories; saving free flyers to use as scrap paper for drawing. Undoubtedly, Lucia's experiences represent many of the ways forced migrant women must chronically contend against multiple oppressions. Identified by Ayelet Shachar as 'shifting borders', similar to Yuval-Davis, Wemyss, and Cassidy's 'everyday bordering' these blockades materialise before, during, and after the family's actual point of entry into the U.S.[442] Physically, everyday/ shifting borders can present as legal barriers such as transit points, airport check-ins, visa controls, and so on, and psychosocial borders included stereotyping,

[441] Kishi, 00:23:10, Ibid., 0:12:25.
[442] Ayelet Shachar, *The Shifting Border: Legal Cartographies of Migration and Mobility: Ayelet Shachar in Dialogue*. 1st ed. (Manchester, Manchester University Press: February 2020), p. 6.

exploitation, racism, and oppressive gendered experiences including kidnapping, sexual assault and family separation.[443] Importantly, Kishi is not dismissive of these realities, or essentialising in the ways Lucia addresses them. In contrast to Lydia's flattened characterisation, Lucia is made real through small, recurring acts of painful, hopeful humanity and a thoughtful representation of forced migrant motherhood. Through her many detailed, embodied interventions, viewers believe she is determined, and equipped, to break through any border, mental or material, for the sake of her children.

Bodies and borders: Walls as feminist architectures

Drawing on Minu Basnet's 2019 research on the twenty-first century domestic workers' movement, this work has engaged the term 'feminist border rhetoric' as a useful framework for reading forced migrant women in the representational realm. Whilst the approach was conceived to discuss the 'in/visible borders that [female] domestic workers encounter and the strategies of solidarity they seek to build alliances across differences,' this chapter has employed it specifically at the site of the narrative wall, a simultaneously in/visible, everyday and exceptional border.[444] In reading the interventions of two fictional characters, Lydia and Lucia, with this feminist border rhetoric, it has revealed the present, and necessary, corporal interventions that make up their transnational and intersectional responses to navigating agency in experiences of forced migration. This includes addressing the presence of space, race, class, and gender as decisive, and often defining, factors in their efforts to seek safety. A focus on embodiment rejects a gender-blind reading that fails to acknowledge the particular nuances, agencies, and vulnerabilities around forced migrant women's efforts to seek safety.[445] In 'Borders, Embodiment, and Mobility: Feminist Migration Studies in Geography', Rachel Silvey explains,

[443] Shachar draws on documents from the Canadian government that outlines the 'opportunities' for officials to identify 'violators of citizenship or immigration laws.' Government of Canada, Preamble, Canada U.S. Statement of Mutual Understanding <www.canada.ca/en/immigration-refugees-citizenship/corporate/ mandate/policies-operational-instructions-agreements/agreements/statement-mutual- understanding-information-sharing/statement.html> [accessed 16 November 2023]; Shachar p. 6.
[444] Basnet, p. 116
[445] Several theorists focus on the body in within asylum and refuge contexts, including: Jouni Häkli and Krisi Kallio (2021); Sara Smith, Nathan W. Swanson, and Banu Gökarıksel (2016); Alison Mountz (2018) and Paul Hodge (2019).

> In revising gender-neutral approaches to the subject, concern with embodiment reworks unmarked masculinist assumptions about the migrant. The socially differentiated migration process itself is not just understood as an outcome of gendered bodies, but is viewed as part and parcel of the various gender politics constructing migrant bodies and processes of embodiment in particular places.[446]

Instead, this chapter has considered the 'unique layer of epistemic violence' that women who encounter in/visible walls must endure.[447] At these sites, the body, an everyday site itself, can be both vulnerable and radical, running away and running towards.

At times for Lydia in *American Dirt*, walls provide a space of safety, to hide from bullets or to rest along her difficult journey. On other occasions, Lydia's own body embodies the wall, physically sheltering her son with her own self or creating spatial privacy for a fellow mother as she miscarries her child. Lydia also assembles a boundary of motherhood to fight beyond her reserves. In *Los Lobos*, Lucia, has less backstory than Cummins' Lydia, less dialogue, and generally less attention in terms of narrative, but is arguably more productive as a representation of a forced migrant woman seeking a safer life for her family. For Lucia, walls also emerge in both physical and emotional ways. Viewers first encounter her at the Juarez border wall. Immediately after crossing, bags still in hand, she tirelessly searches for shelter and then spends hours scrubbing the only and depressingly dirty apartment she can afford. Lucia eventually instructs her sons to stay behind its walls, employing the space as de facto childcare so she can tackle the larger and limiting structures of unsanctioned migration, such as finding a cash-in-hand job within a system that exploits vulnerable un- or falsely documented workers. The bodily and spatial encounters of both women reinforce what Ball writes: 'Women's forced migration surfaces as a phenomenon that demands attention to the ways in which both gendered embodiment and gendered space function in relation to one another, radically complicating understandings of the gendered, spatial, and

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Häkli and Kallio, in particular, note that 'embodiment itself remains undertheorized, especially when it comes to the interplay between refugee agency and state-based migration regimes.' Häkli and Kallio, 'p. 682; Sara Smith, Nathan W. Swanson, and Banu Gökarıksel, 'Territory, bodies and borders', *Area*, 48:3 (2016), pp. 258–61; Allison Mountz, 'Political Geography III: Bodies', *Progress in Human Geography*, 42:5 (2018), pp. 759–69; Paul Hodge, '# LetThemStay# BringThemHere: Embodied politics, asylum seeking, and performativities of protest opposing Australia's Operation Sovereign Borders', *Environment and Planning C: Politics and Space*, 37:3 (2019), pp. 386-406.

[446] Rachel Silvey, 'Borders, Embodiment, and Mobility: Feminist Migration Studies in Geography', in *A Companion to Feminist Geography*, eds. Lise Nelson and Joni Seager (New Jersey: Blackwell Publishing Ltd, 2005), p. 142.

[447] Elena Ruíz, 'Feminist Border Theory', in *The Routledge International Handbook of Contemporary Social and Political Theory*, Gerard Delanty and Stephen Turner, eds (London: Routledge, 2011), pp. 350-61.

representational agency experienced by "the forced migrant woman"'.[448] Indeed, intervention with the wall is revealed as an essential and embodied tactic for Lydia and Lucia. It allows them to navigate violent and biopolitical realities, as well as the creative and protective potentialities of this everyday, yet simultaneously exceptional, object/place/force. Ultimately, the political, relational, and spatial tensions reveal what is at stake for forced migrant women and illuminates ways they might be able to perform their own embodied interventions to create their own feminist architectures and radically alter the course of their safety-seeking journeys.

As a creative mediation to counter displacement and disenfranchisement, moments in *American Dirt* and *Los Lobos* echo some of the very real and enlivened ways contemporary artists have led embodied, and arguably feminist, approaches to intervene at the geopolitical border. As Francesco Moze and Samuel Spiegel assert in 'The aesthetic turn in border studies: Visual geographies of power, contestation and subversion', there are 'vibrant artistic environments which are transforming the fence (border wall) from a material marker of state power into a symbolic canvas of resistance (Amilhat Szary, 2012)'.[449] These 'environments' include Raeda Sa'adeh's photography referenced in this chapter's introduction, in which her own body becomes the subject, escaping from, pulling down, and climbing over the wall dividing Israel and Palestine. Architects Virginia San Fratello and Ronald Rael further evoke a bodily engagement with the wall in a spirited approach not dissimilar to Max and Leo in *Los Lobos*: they play. On 28 July 2019, working alongside Colectivo Chopeke, the designers stealthily slotted in a neon pink seesaw for residents on each side of the wall to sit upon. In situ for less than 40 minutes, San Fratello explains that this installation, *Teeter-Totter Wall* seen below in Figure 38, demonstrates how 'play can be an act of resistance'.[450] In repurposing the wall as 'a literal fulcrum for U.S.-Mexico relations', the spatially

[448] Ball, p. 8.
[449] Francesco Moze and Samuel Spiegel present a noteworthy and comprehensive review of contemporary research into the political and aesthetic links of border art, including work on mapscapes, photoscapes, videoscapes, and broader artscapes and cultural productions. Francesco Moze and Samuel J. Spiegel, 'The aesthetic turn in border studies: Visual geographies of power, contestation and subversion', *Geography Compass*, 16:4 (2022), p. 7.
[450] Jennifer Hahn, 'Pink seesaws that straddled US-Mexico border named Design of the Year 2020', Dezeen.com, 19 January 2021 <https://www.dezeen.com/2021/01/19/design-of-the-year-2020-rael-san-fratello-border-seesaw/> [accessed 03 December 2023]

significant artwork acts as a consequential connector, successful only when engaged in solidarity, equally by both sides at the same time.[451]

Figure 38: Rael San Fratello, Teeter-Totter Wall, 2019 [452]

Finally, though certainly intervention at the wall does not stop here, Mexican artist Ana Theresa Fernández's 2011 *Erasing the Border / Borrando la Frontera* can be read as a directly gendered and physical intervention at the wall.[453] For the 'social sculpture', as her website categorises it, the artist wears high heels and a cocktail dress as she climbs a ladder to paint the borderwall a blue that matches the sky. With these actions, she effectively erases the wall and in doing so confronts the 'sensual/labouring female body in the specific context of the U.S.-Mexico border'.[454] In these instances it is clear that creative, embodied engagement with the wall does something to change the way it is seen: these are feminist acts and architectures that challenge the wall's patriarchal state powers and imagine alternative narratives through creativity, play, and counteraction. 'Art of this kind draws the viewer's attention to the substance of the border rather than only to its function in

[451] Ibid.
[452] Kishi, 00:20:03.
[453] Additional examples include ERRE and Margarita Garcia Asperas' *Re/flecting the Border* and Jill Marie Holslin's *Testing Trump's Wall: Light Graffiti Testing of the Border Wall Prototypes* and the above discussed Braiding Borders + Trenzando Fronteras' human chain of braided hair across the US-Mexico border. 'For Artists, the U.S.-Mexico Border Is Fertile Territory', *Artsy.net* 7 May 2017 <https://www.artsy.net/article/artsy-editorial-mexican-artists-threat-trumps-wall-fuel-inspiration> [accessed 8 November 2023]; JillMarieHolsin.com <https://www.jillmarieholslin.com/travel-gallery#0> [accessed 8 November 2023]; 'Braiding Borders + Trenzando Fronteras'.
[454] For more on Fernandez' gendered intervention, see Ball, p. 14; Ana Teresa Fernandez, *Erasing the Border*, 2011 <https://anateresafernandez.com/borrando-la-barda-tijuana-mexico/> [accessed 28 July 2022]

order to defamiliarise the logic of securitisation as proof of governance,' confirms Connell.[455] Visual reinterpretation affects how it is experienced, and as Morrissey adds, these interventions 'act on audiences in ways that can physically, emotionally, or spiritually move them into new modes of identity and relation'.[456] Further, they 'call audiences to critique the colonial logics that uphold borders as essential elements of government, citizenship, and international relations'.[457] Viewed as bottom-up critiques of the capitalist and patriarchal biopolitics of the border, therefore, the embodied interventions explored throughout this chapter indeed represent a form of feminist border rhetoric. They are, to some degree, feminocentric cultural productions that call for a dismantling of hegemonic injustice, addressing forced migrant realities in the round to affect both place and people.

As these artistic interventions, and indeed Lydia and Lucia's own somatic engagements, demonstrate, 'embodied experience and relational longings are not only epistemologies, but also ontologies that make the border knowable and that materialize the border's reality'.[458] In the case of this work, particular attention to gendered embodiment in relation to everyday borders, therefore, may have the potential to likewise make forced migrant women knowable. It calls out the continual interventions their bodies make to build resilience, strengthen relationships, and seek sanctuary. It also recognises their shortcomings, restrictions, and contingencies. 'The border is in a constant state of being made and remade through the emerging, ongoing, and dynamic relationships between people, language, and physical space that actualize it as a vital, influential actant in the meaning making process,' writes Morrissey.[459] Indeed, the wall's ontological relationship with the body has proven a site ripe for analysis of extraordinary as well as 'mundane acts of resistance and rebellion as well as compliance' in the two texts considered here.[460] For both *American Dirt* and *Los Lobos*, this chapter ultimately reveals an entwined reality, between walls that protect and walls that harm, women who desire to bypass walls and women who, themselves, become walls, as well

[455] Connell, p. 33.
[456] Morrissey, p. 3.
[457] Ibid.
[458] Ibid., p. 6.
[459] Ibid.
[460] Kathy Davis, 'Embody-ing Theory, Beyond Modernist and Postmodernist Readings of the Body', in *Embodied Practices: Feminist Perspectives on the Body* ed. by Kathy Davis (New York: Sage Publications, 1997), p. 12.

as the invisible walls they come up against and the different feminist architectures they build and negotiate in response.

What the gendered body does, and where it does it, can mean something for forced migrant women, real and fictional. These interventions can steer the entire experience, offering agentic opportunity – or at least the potential for it – in apparently powerless situations. Explaining how a broader 'feminist rhetoric' can operate in relevant and subversive ways, Cheryl Glenn writes in 'The Language of Rhetorical Feminism' of 'the transactional success of alternative rhetorical deliveries, especially those long considered feminine, such as rhetorical listening and productive silence'.[461] Embodied engagement may, too, be considered an alternative rhetorical delivery, particularly in the context of the borderwall. Lydia and Lucia's physical efforts, interruptions, and replacements serve to disturb, propel, and protect: Lydia's convex shielding of her son and Lucia's vocal delineator are both powerful languages themselves. These narrative actions help the women to reclaim the wall as a feminist architecture, as they call audiences as witnesses to pay particular attention to the spatial and experiential politics of in/visible border crossings for forced migrant women. Employing a feminist border rhetoric among true or metaphorical border walls allows for analysis that sees beyond the forced migrant woman as a vulnerable female body and instead considers the structures that deter and the feminist architectures that empower her forward throughout her journey to sanctuary.

[461] Cheryl Glenn, 'The language of rhetorical feminism, anchored in hope', *Open Linguistics*, 6:1 (2020), p. 340.

CHAPTER FOUR

The Home: Making space with contrapuntal feminism in *MATANGI / MAYA / M.I.A.* and *The Girl Who Smiled Beads*

> There is perhaps no refugee imaginary more essential, more poignant, or with a greater capacity to shape lived experience than *home*.
>
> - David Farrier, 'Home', *Refugee Imaginaries*[462]

This final chapter explores the tensions for forced migrant women between leaving and making home and what results in terms of losing and claiming identity. It does so by tracing domestic spaces and selves among transcultural landscapes for English Tamil singer, songwriter, refugee of the Sri Lankan civil war and activist Mathangi 'Maya' Arulpragasam (M.I.A.) in the 2018 feature-length documentary *MATANGI / MAYA / M.I.A.* by Stephen Loveridge, and author, human rights advocate and Rwandan genocide survivor Clemantine Wamariya in her collaboratively written 2018 memoir (with Elizabeth Weil), *The Girl Who Smiled Beads*.[463] Specifically, this research identifies creative presentations of homemaking in each text to consider the material domestic sphere as a complex location of self- creation and negotiation for forced migrant women, because like Iris Marion Young in 'House and Home: Feminist Variations on a Theme', this chapter acknowledges that homemaking has 'a crucial human value'.[464] In contrast to a traditional, hegemonic view of homemaking, which evokes images of housekeeping and home management, this chapter takes a wider view to rethink the term. As Paolo Boccagni poses, it can be 'a process through which people negotiate a sense of home vis-a-vis their external circumstances'.[465] While highly distinct in terms of cultural and geographical context, genre and creative process, the

[462] Cox, Durrant, Farrier, Stonebridge, and Woolley, p. 501.
[463] Loveridge; Wamariya.
[464] Iris Marion Young, 'House and Home: Feminist Variations on a Theme', *In Intersecting Voices: Dilemmas of Gender, Political Philosophy, and Policy* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1997), p. 157.
[465] Paolo Boccagni, *Migration and the Search for Home: Mapping Domestic Space in Migrants' Everyday Lives* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017), p. 3.

narratives of M.I.A. and Wamariya present an opportunity to explore how homes and their representations might shape the life-narratives of two forced migrant women. Ultimately, this chapter takes on the question of Chiara Briganti and Katy Mezei in *The Domestic Space Reader*, asking, 'How is the construction of self and subjectivity connected to one's domestic space?'.[466] Moreover, it asks, how is this construction problematic or particularly productive for forced migrant women, as represented within the realm of 'real-life' but mediated in representational forms such as documentary and life narrative?

A site of physical and psychological complexity, the overall concept of home has left postcolonial and sociopolitical theorists replete with similar questions regarding the 'home-migrant nexus'.[467] In *Feminism Without Borders: Decolonizing Theory, Practicing Solidarity* Chandra Talpade Mohanty expands on the above as she asks,

> What is home? The place I was born? Where I grew up? Where my parents live? Where I live and work as an adult? Where I locate my community, my people? Who are 'my people'? Is home a geographical space, a historical space, an emotional sensory space?[468]

In *MATANGI / MAYA / M.I.A.* and *The Girl Who Smiled Beads*, we see protagonists working through ontological questions such as these through varied means of performance and self-representation while located within different physical spaces of home. In her childhood home on South London's notorious Phipps Bridge housing estate, M.I.A.'s world is small but her ambition is big. Against pink painted walls and a saggy, tired couch, she dances for the camera. Later, in her high-end penthouse in trendy Hackney, London, she reflects on her roots, telling stories as she nostalgically sorts through a room seemingly dedicated to old music equipment. Director Steven Loveridge uses the setting of the home to emplace M.I.A. as a performer, woman, mother, and activist beyond the stage. For Wamariya, home is also intimately associated with identity construction and the historical basis of her story. She begins her co-authored memoir by immediately tying her identity to the domestic, introducing who she is alongside where she lives: 'I was eighteen, living Monday through Friday with the Thomas family in Kenilworth, a fancy

[466] Chiara Briganti and Kathy Mezei, eds., *The Domestic Space Reader* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2012), p. 3.
[467] Boccagni, vii.
[468] Mohanty, p. 126.

suburb.'[469] 'I was whoever anybody wanted me to be,' she continues.[470] Home is undoubtedly a critical and potentially problematic site when addressing the intersecting dynamics of female and forced migrant identity. It is also uniquely intertwined in postcolonial narratives such as M.I.A.'s and Wamariya's. Avtar Brah speaks to the domestic experience of migrants in *Cartographies of Diaspora: Contesting Identities*, as she identifies '"home" as the site of everyday lived experience' for the migrant.[471] 'It is a discourse of locality, the place where feelings of rootedness ensue from the mundane and the unexpected of daily practice.'[472] Extending this claim, I argue that for women forced to leave their homes, including M.I.A. and Wamariya, home is an even more complex site regarding freedom and oppression than for others, due to the complex intersection of both gendered and migrant identities and their relationships to power and oppression. It is an essential and political site in its potential to simultaneously reveal, critique, and imagine the potentials of gendered agency within the landscape of forced migration.

Long read as a gendered location, home is often subjected to extensive feminist critique. As Shelley Mallett notes, 'analyses of the relationship between gender and the meaning of home generally focus on issues of: work or production, consumption, spaces including house design, and/or housing tenure and the house as an expression of status'.[473] This research, whilst remaining attentive to those focuses, moves beyond them to consider the interstices of gender, home, and forced migration in complex filmic and literary representations of real-life forced migrant women. Concentrating on this site in *MATANGI / MAYA / M.I.A.* and *The Girl Who Smiled Beads*, it is evident that both texts use domestic space as Bardwell-Jones identifies, 'as an essential component in identity formation'.[474] Likewise, as Briganti and Mezei highlight in *The Domestic Space Reader*, 'the seemingly practical space of the home offers a surprisingly rich resource to mine for the understanding of cultures, peoples and histories'.[475] In *MATANGI / MAYA / M.I.A.*, viewers are presented with M.I,A, as a multicultural refugee-turned-pop star, celebrity, and activist. Directed by

[469] Wamariya, p. 1.
[470] Ibid.
[471] Avtar Brah, *Cartographies of Diaspora: Contesting Identities* (New York: Routledge, 1996), p. 4.
[472] Ibid.
[473] Shelley Mallett, 'Understanding Home: A Critical Review of the Literature', *The Sociological Review*, 52 (2004), p. 63.
[474] Bardwell-Jones, p. 152.
[475] Briganti and Mezei, p. 8.

her longtime friend, Steven Loveridge, the project reveals intimate insight into M.I.A.'s unique story. Though not ostensibly focused on the space of the home and instead charting M.I.A.'s rise to fame, the documentary engages with domestic spaces such a M.I.A.'s childhood flat in a South London council estate, her extended family's home in Sri Lanka, and her current London penthouse. Each of these spaces, I will argue, speak to differently strategic and creative performances of her identity and narrative as a displaced woman. While musical creativity and stage performance seemingly mark out her career, M.I.A.'s domestic performances can be read according to what Jennifer Hyndman calls 'the often hidden geographies of cultural politics and social negotiations'.[476] Likewise, In *The Girl Who Smiled Beads*, Wamariya works determinedly through years of exile and the baggage that accrued to ultimately locate her identity as a writer, advocate, and transnational migrant. Her drastically different homes across eight countries – from temporary shelters to affluent American host houses – each come with varied performances to secure agency and assert identity amidst recurring feelings of placelessness and hopelessness. In exploring the familiar yet fraught site of home as feminist architecture for both women, it becomes apparent that despite being contested in many ways, domestic spaces remain important sites for producing and contesting identity, agency, and belonging for forced migrant women.

To render Hyndman's 'hidden geographies' more visible in the narratives of M.I.A. and Wamariya, I propose the term 'contrapuntal feminism'. The general idea of the contrapuntal is borrowed and adapted from postcolonial theorist Edward Said, who himself appropriated it from music theory, to suggest intentionally harmonious but independent actions. It is a compositional technique made from the combining of two distinct yet congruous and rhythmic melodic lines.[477] For Said, contrapuntal reading is a model for critical thinking that approaches voices within postcolonial narratives as 'counterpoint' to one other, working harmoniously but maintaining their independence. It considers 'both' sides – recognising complexities whilst embracing realities. Said specifically references 'local slave narratives, spiritual autobiographies, prison memoirs', to which I now add narratives of forced migrant women, among marginalised accounts that 'form a

[476] Hyndman, p. 453.
[477] Steven G. Laitz, *The Complete Musician*, 2nd ed (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), p. 96.

counterpoint to the Western powers' monumental histories, official discourses, and panoptic quasi-scientific viewpoint'.[478] With a feminist application, and through an examination of different 'homemakings', I believe the contrapuntal may help us understand the domestic spatial experiences of forced migrant women, and more broadly, the balancing of home and away, world citizen and refugee, agent and subject.

Said observed, 'No one today is purely one thing… Survival is about the connections between things'.[479] While he is speaking to a cultural counterpoint, handling discourse around colonialism, hybridity, and otherness, I invoke transnational feminist writers – as I have throughout this thesis – such as Gloria Anzaldúa, Yến Lê Espiritu, Avtar Brah, Iris Marion Young and Chandra Talpade Mohanty to consider a new, contrapuntal feminism. The proposition of this term does not reject Said's, but nuances it for the specifics of women's experiences, and can be particularly fruitful in regard to their performance, belonging, and negotiation of home. It considers the multiple roles and approaches women must adapt to and manage to assert agency in oppressive, patriarchal realities. In carrying out feminist contrapuntal readings of *MATANGI / MAYA / M.I.A.* and *The Girl Who Smiled Beads*, it may be revealed how the protagonists build feminist architectures through the harmonious balance and utilisation of domestic space and its gendered inferences in everyday ways to manage, resist, and survive their realities of forced migration. The result is an overall feminist potential, which can be read in both texts as a way of understanding home that runs counter to the space's common reading as a site of traditional and confining fixed female identity. Rather, in the many and varied sociospatial experiences of home, a feminist contrapuntal reading allows us to find productive and hybrid forms of self-creation for M.I.A and Wamariya within the representational texts at hand. It accepts the unique situations of displacement for M.I.A. and Wamariya, and explores ways in which they creatively home-make, indeed build feminist architectures, outside conventional expectations and constraints for women to form both identities beyond forced migrancy, and homes beyond their original homelands.

[478] Edward Said, *Culture and Imperialism* (London: Vintage Books, 1994), p. 260.
[479] Edward, 1994, p. 336.

A contrapuntal feminist reading of *MATANGI / MAYA / M.I.A.* and *The Girl Who Smiled* makes clear that the experiences of some forced migrant women represent a different type of homemaking – but how and what exactly? M.I.A. outright asks, 'As a first-generation person, that lived through a war, came as a refugee – what are the goalposts?'[480] And in her mediated memoir, Wamariya must work her way through the retelling of 'a story of war and what comes after' – as the book's subtitle reads.[481] In forging new paths while seeking safety and success, both women play into and counter forced migrant livelihoods through their contrapuntal performances and the sociospatial site of the home provides an essential environment, central to self, for them to do so. This research considers this 'homemaking', or 'homing' as Paolo Boccagni identifies in *Migration and the Search for Home: Mapping Domestic Space in Migrants' Everyday Lives,* in terms of both the material environment and cultural and social aspects of the home experience. Boccagni expands, writing broadly on migrants,

> As a discursive category and an assemblage of settings and relationships, home is a unique source of insight on migrants' self-representations and social identifications; on the reproduction and intergenerational transmission of their life values and styles (and of the underlying patterns of inequality); on the scope – if any – for them to achieve a sense of security, familiarity and control over their life environments; on their alignment vis-à-vis sending and receiving society; on their relative exclusion from the latter as 'home' to the natives.[482]

Accessing this insight, in light of Said's work on contrapuntal reading, and Anzaldúa's, Espiritu's, Brah's, Young's, and Mohanty's specifically transnationalist feminist approaches to gender and home, we, therefore, may be able to form an understanding of the homemaking enacted by M.I.A. and Wamariya as they build both spaces and selves amidst histories and presents of displacement.

Her-making through homemaking: Reading the creative counterpoint in *MATANGI / MAYA / M.I.A.*

The complexities of contrapuntal self-identification for the protagonist of Steven Loveridge's 2018 documentary are perhaps nowhere more apparent than in the film's title: *MATANGI / MAYA / M.I.A*. Each are names for the film's focus, British-Sri Lankan forced migrant turn pop star best known as M.I.A. Her given name is Matangi Arulpragasam.[483] She is a political refugee and the

[480] Loveridge, 01:28:30.
[481] Wamariya, front cover.
[482] Boccagni, p. xxiv.
[483] Her first name is also alternatively spelled Mathangi.

daughter of a founding member of the Sri Lankan resistance organisation commonly known as the Tamil Tigers.[484] Loveridge and others who know her from London, specifically from her art school days at Central St. Martins, call her by her nickname, Maya. M.I.A. is the name that made her a world-famous pop icon. It is an initialism for the politically charged phrase 'Missing in Action' – also an initialism for her name when sounded out. Listing these three names in the film's title asserts that Loveridge is interested in her complex hybrid, hyphenated, and multi-layered identity as daughter, friend, mother, refugee, artist, activist, and performer all in one. Equally, they serve as an introduction to the mosaic-like documentary film, which Loveridge refers to as 'a cut-and-paste assembly of old videotapes'.[485] Ideas of collage and hybridity, in fact, play a large role in the storytelling that occurs in *MATANGI / MAYA / M.I.A.* The film itself replicates the creative template of M.I.A.'s own life as she balances counterpoints of refugeedom and stardom, and, this chapter's focus, home, and exile, or as rock journalist Simon Reynolds wrote of her, 'sub-bass and subaltern pressure'.[486] These contradictions form the basis of her creative contrapuntal performance, which this work argues is a feminist tactic for home- and self-making, a foundation for building feminist architectures. Borrowing Said's method of contrapuntal reading, we can 'think through and interpret two experiences that are discrepant, each with its particular agenda and pace of development, its own internal formations, its internal coherence and systems of external relationships, all of them co-existing and interacting with others'.[487] It is a tactic many forced migrant women must navigate in their realities of multilayered oppression. For M.I.A. this means embracing all the realities of who and where she is, including her class and upward mobility, asylum and claim to identity, messaging, motherhood, and music career to creatively make and remake home as a feminist architecture throughout her life.

Similarly, as for many forced migrant women, home presents a source of conflict and trauma in M.I.A.'s life-narrative. The location and domestic format of her home stems from her

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[484] 'Tamil Tigers', *Encyclopaedia Britannica* <https://www.britannica.com/topic/Tamil-Tigers> [accessed 08 November 2023]
[485] Erik Luers, 'How to Make a Documentary About a Subject You're Close To: Steve Loveridge on "Matangi / Maya / M.I.A."', *NoFilmSchool.com*, 5 October 2018 <https://nofilmschool.com/2018/03-matangi-maya-mia-steve-loveridge> [accessed 08 November 2023]
[486] Simon Reynolds, 'Piracy funds what?', *Village Voice*, 15 February 2005 < www.villagevoice.com/2005-02-15/music/piracy-funds-what/> [accessed 27 August 2019]
[487] Said, 1994. p. 36.

family's quest for asylum, which was necessitated by her father's involvement in the Tamil resistance movement. Notably, Hounslow-born M.I.A.'s early understanding of home was contested, as fear related to her father's political allegiances meant M.I.A., her mother, sister and brother moved from London to Sri Lanka to India and back to London again all within the first decade of M.I.A.'s life.[488] Despite, or perhaps because of, this instability of home and homeland, domestic scenes serve as a recurring backdrop to Loveridge's film. This is particularly revealing, as we know that most of the footage was filmed by M.I.A. herself.[489] Before her rise to fame within the music world, M.I.A. had amassed hours of film from her formative years in a London council flat and slightly later, from her 2001 pilgrimage to her extended family's home in Sri Lanka. M.I.A. had initially wished to create a film about her cousin who was killed as part of the conflict between the Sri Lankan government and the Tamil Tigers – a way of reconnecting with her roots of resistance and reconciling what Momtaza Mehri calls in her piece 'On M.I.A.' for *Granta* the 'bourgeoisie navel-gazing and hackneyed postcolonial theory' she was studying at university.[490] Instead of using the footage for this intended documentary, however, Loveridge extracted the diary-like, behind-the-scenes clips in which M.I.A. was speaking to the camera, reflecting personally on her cultural and familial history and present. He used what M.I.A. referred to as 'the bits that [she] would have left on the cutting room floor', combined with interview material shot in her London home from 2012-2016, to give viewers intimate access to unscripted content, heavily featuring the three aforementioned main home settings (M.I.A.'s South London council estate flat, her relative's home in Sri Lanka, and her deluxe London penthouse).[491] Ultimately, locating her as a forced migrant woman in the domestic spaces she inhabits offers intimate insight into the creative homemaking she undertakes, which, for M.I.A., involves a balance of contradictions and embrace of counterpoints.

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[488] Miranda Sawyer, 'MIA: "I'm here for the people"', *The Guardian*, 13 June 2010 <https://www.theguardian.com/music/2010/jun/13/mia-feature-miranda-sawyer> [accessed 8 November 2023]

[489] 'I reckon about 70% of that film is shot by me, don't you think?' M.I.A. says to Loveridge in a joint interview with *The Guardian*. 'Maybe about 10% shot by you. No, not even 10.' Steve Rose, 'Interview : "The first cut I saw, I puked": the story of MIA's turbulent new documentary', *The Guardian*, 14 September 2018 <https://www.theguardian.com/music/2018/sep/14/the-first-cut-i-saw-i-puked-the-story-of-mias-turbulent-new-documentary> [accessed 08 November 2023]

[490] Momtaza Mehri, 'On M.I.A.', *Granta*, 4 December 2018 <https://granta.com/on-m-i-a/> [accessed 05 November 2023]

[491] Throughout the documentary we also see M.I.A. in a hotel room while on tour with British band Elastika, in refugee rapper Afrikan Boy's council flat along with director Spike Jonze, and filming and making music at home with then-boyfriend Diplo.

To better understand the socio-spatial sites of home for M.I.A., we may begin with how they are presented to us, followed by what exactly is being represented. Using a mix of archival and observational documentary, Loveridge positions M.I.A.'s story at what Agnes Woolley calls 'the intersection of fact and narrative fiction'.[492] This is not to say that what Loveridge presents of the pop star is untrue, but that exploring her story as a forced migrant woman requires creative negotiation between his (and indeed her) aesthetic output and the ethics of authentic representation. Woolley further explains,

> documentary is well-placed to deal with the complexities of the narrative environment of refugee movement and life on and at the border. Asking to whom, and how, people tell their stories, documentary negotiates the point at which representation meets reality; concerned both with revealing truth and examining how that truth is mediated through narrative forms.[493]

Documentary as a representational practice intersects with both forced migrant studies and feminist practice in that its focus is on telling the 'real' stories of bodies, memories, histories, and presents. This is evident with Wamariya in the forthcoming section as well, because as Gillian Whitlock, drawing on Judith Butler, notes in *Postcolonial Life Narratives: Testimonial Transactions*, 'testimonial transactions connect directly to the most fundamental questions of who counts as human, whose lives count as lives, and what makes for a "grievable life."'[494] Likewise, documentary draws attention to power dynamics, realism, voyeurism and, often, socio-political interventions. *MATANGI / MAYA / M.I.A.* display all the above as an assembly of historic archival material from the Sri Lankan civil war and M.I.A.'s professional stage performances and interviews, as well as footage shot by Loveridge and M.I.A. herself. This combination illustrates the ways in which the forced migrant woman's story is not straightforward, but a complex assembly of experiences and narratives. Notably, throughout these varied sources we repeatedly see domestic spaces of home emerging, serving as a source of unity within M.I.A.'s complex assemblage of experiences.

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[492] Agnes Woolley, 'Docu/Fiction and the Aesthetics of the Border', in Emma Cox, Sam Durrant, David Farrier, Lyndsey Stonebridge, and Agnes Woolley, eds., *Refugee Imaginaries: Research Across the Humanities* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2020), p. 149.
[493] Woolley, 2020, p.149
[494] Gillian Whitlock, *Postcolonial Life Narratives: Testimonial Transactions* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2015), p. 169.

For M.I.A., the space of the domestic does not simply feature as a site of banal homemaking, though it is indeed a location of everydayness. Viewers are offered glimpses of messy bedrooms, family gatherings and a work-in-progress young woman. But, as much of the footage comes from M.I.A.'s pre-fame days, the documentary uses the quotidian to examine the identity of the extraordinary figure. Here, home is presented as a deeply creative locale of self-realisation and as a place in which M.I.A. lives out her artistic aspirations. In an early scene, see Figure 39, an adolescent M.I.A. dances without care in the living room during a family party as her mother cooks in the kitchen.

Figure 39: Still image from MATANGI / MAYA / M.I.A.; *A young M.I.A. dances in her family living room* [495]

Her desire to express is palpable. As a teenager, in front of a mirror in her bedroom, she performatively tries on a trendy jacket, see Figure 40, as if trying on an identity to match the Wu-Tang Clan poster hanging on the wall behind her.

[495] Loveridge, 00:06:28.

Figure 40: Still image from MATANGI / MAYA / M.I.A.; *A teenage M.I.A tries on a red leather jacket in front of a Wu-Tang Clan poster* [496]

Later, we see footage from her family home in Sri Lanka while on her post-university pilgrimage. M.I.A. is propped against the crude bedroom wall, seen below in Figure 41, as if trusting the house itself for both physical and emotional support as she reflects on what she has learned while within it. 'I'm not going to forget,' she pledges to camera. 'What I'm hearing over here is becoming a part of me and a part of my life.'[497]

[496] Ibid., 00:09:10.
[497] Ibid., 00:56:48.

Figure 41: Still image from MATANGI / MAYA / M.I.A.; *M.I.A leans on the wall of her family home in Sri Lanka as she reflects on what she has learned while there* [498]

The physical and practical role of the home in these scenes facilitates M.I.A.'s homemaking tendencies and their inclusion in the documentary provides a spatial framing for her internal trajectory. Loveridge explains this intention and the challenges that came with it regarding editing and presenting the final film to M.I.A. – which she was not allowed to see until its completion – to website *Film Comment*: 'I've gone through the footage and selected those bits that focus on Maya's own personality and discoveries more than the subjects that she was pointing the camera at. I've taken all the bits where she's pointing the camera back at herself to piece together a portrait of her at that time.'[499] What M.I.A. thought of as mundane B-roll, in fact, reveals a great amount about who she was and was becoming.

[498] Ibid.
[499] Devika Girish, 'ND/NF Interview: Stephen Loveridge', *Film Comment*, 29 March 2018 <https://www.filmcomment.com/blog/nd-nf-interview-stephen-loveridge/> [accessed 8 November 2022]

M.I.A.'s response to the film highlights the domestic scenes as some of the hardest to watch: 'The first cut he showed me, I puked,' she told Steve Rose in *The Guardian*.[500] 'The shots with my mum, and us in the bedroom… and there was much more footage of my brother, which was really tough during those times. It still makes me emotional to think about it…'[501] Without detailed context about what exactly was 'really tough', it remains evident that the intimacy of these private spaces for the public figure is jarring. Similarly disconnected, viewers witness each domestic scene through an undeniably postcolonial filter. Despite her childhood as a forced migrant or the years spent trying to 'make it' as an artist, we are aware of her power and positionality today as a wealthy, educated outsider; it is impossible to ignore the foresight we have into her future as a world-famous celebrity. In some ways, that is what makes Loveridge's film suitably provocative and contrapuntal. It is not just the gloss and glamour of a celebrity biopic that ignores or forgives M.I.A.'s contradictions.[502] Rather, Loveridge highlights the counterpoint, as Said would say, as 'fundamentally integral, coherent, separate'.[503] Loveridge expressed this same sentiment to *Film Comment*: 'I felt like it was important to depict the identity she has of being a displaced person caught between two cultures.'[504] The site of the home allows him to do so, and as M.I.A.'s initial squeamish response reveals, this depiction of deeply personal domestic identity, remains, in Anzaldúa's words, 'never comfortable, but home'.[505] Loveridge's representational strategy works because, according to documentary theorist Bill Nichols, within documentary alliances are formed between the filmmaker(s), subject or social actors, and audience.[506] In *MATANGI / MAYA / M.I.A.*, Loveridge takes on what Nicholas identifies as a classic documentarian formulation: 'I speak about them to you' for relating one to the other, yet again contrapuntally.[507] Curating footage collated by M.I.A. alongside his own interviews, the filmmaker at once shapes her existing narrative and creates a new one. From behind the editing desk, he 'takes on a personal persona, either directly or

[500] Rose.
[501] Ibid.
[502] Momtaza notes that Loveridge 'avoids hagiography and contextualises the blanks, but still leaves us room to fill them in.' Mehri.
[503] Said, 1994, p. 31.
[504] Girish.
[505] Anzaldúa, p. iii.
[506] Nichols notes that it is important to question, 'How do filmmaker and social actor respond to each other? Does a sense of respect, despite disagreement, emerge, or is there a feeling of deception, manipulation, distortion at work? How do they negotiate and control responsibility?' Bill Nichols, *Introduction to Documentary*, 2nd edn (Indiana: Indiana University Press, 2010), p. 182.
[507] Nichols, p. 59.

through a surrogate', firstly, in providing voiceover to narrate the film in the first person.[508] Nichols suggests this 'edges the documentary form toward the diary, essay and aspects of avant-garde or experimental film and video,' an approach that proves relevant in the forthcoming section on M.I.A.'s own creative process of homemaking.[509] Secondly, at times we hear Loveridge speak to the audience, explaining his own position and M.I.A.'s history, and his use of the third person pronoun in these cases separates himself as the speaker and her as the subject, aiming to relay a seemingly authentic and comprehensive view that is close enough to trust, but distant enough to present, what appears to be, an impartial view.[510] As Nichols notes, this approach means subjects 'may be rendered as rich, full-rounded individuals with complex psychologies of their own'.[511] While it leans toward problematic that Loveridge is a European, white, cis-gender man controlling the representation and retelling of an Asian, forced migrant, woman of colour's story, the alliance Nicholas discusses is critical.[512] Loveridge and M.I.A. have a decades-long relationship, and to create the film, she entrusted him with 'more than 700 hours of footage', unreviewed and unedited, most of which she originally shot in the early 2000s.[513] This included family videos, tapes from her university years and the film she took while researching her own potential documentary in Sri Lanka: in some ways it is as if she packages up and commits her homemaking to him.

The use of hybrid material and co-creation is exemplary of feminist counterpoint in this story. M.I.A. is in control and not at all at the same time. This creates an argument for a more complex exploration of gendered agency, rather than a straightforwardly feminist stance in the film. M.I.A. home-makes and story-makes in nontraditional ways, which include both direct and indirect authority. As Loveridge noted when speaking to *No Film School*:

> It's a weird reversal of every other filmmaker, every other kind of bio doc. Traditionally, after the person gets famous, that's when all the good stuff happens, but Maya turned the camera off and stopped filming herself. She didn't need to anymore because people were

[508] Ibid.
[509] Ibid. p. 60.
[510] Ibid., p. 61.
[511] Ibid.
[512] This resonates with the recurring and problematically sexist criticism that M.I.A. is 'actually a limited musician who relies on the skill and creativity of her (male) producers.' Anamik Saha, 'Locating MIA: "Race", Commodification, and the Politics of Production', *European Journal of Cultural Studies*, 15 (2012), p. 743.
[513] Luers.

> listening and were asking her about her story. Journalists were doing the documenting and the recording for her. That's why my film then switches over to archival.[514]

This idea is especially potent considering Nichols' observation that unlike the actors in most fictional films, the subjects in a documentary act as 'cultural participants rather than theatrical performers'.[515] In *MATANGI / MAYA / M.I.A.*, she is an active participant, by way of voiceover and direct interviews, but also in that she creates so much of the film content herself, including 'those domestic scenes' journalist Steve Rose references in a *Guardian* interview with the director and singer.[516] This dynamic, paired with Loveridge's desire to present an authentic, identity-driven narrative about displacement, culture, and M.I.A.'s unique trajectory, ultimately creates an intimate film where M.I.A.'s reality as a forced migrant turned political activist emerges as more relevant and urgent to share than her career as a pop star.

Loveridge's collage-meets-diary documentary is significant in its commitment to revealing an authentic history, but also because this approach mirrors M.I.A.'s own personal, hybridised-style of performance. Both are high-energy, bordering on chaotic. They are nonlinear juxtapositions of everything causing and caused by forced migration, a 'head-on play with and subversion of Orientalist codes', and the cultural capital that comes with immense talent. These are manifestations of her contrapuntal livelihood.[517] In a similar way that filmmaking constitutes homemaking for M.I.A., counterpoint further manifests through her creative performances within the site of the home. There is no doubt that she has made a home on stage and in the spotlight, asserting her vibrant, multi-dimensioned, multi-cultural identity with pointed lyrics that address conflict, an amalgam of pan-global sounds, and an overall discourse of resistance. However, on a more intimate and everyday level, what the documentary shows is her negotiation of space and self

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[514] Ibid.
[515] Nichols, p. 46.
[516] Insight from Loveridge in his interview with *No Film School* helps to contextualise the immense amount of intimate material M.I.A. provided him to make the documentary: 'It was 700 hours of verite stuff, but it was really, really intense because she was an amateur or student documentary major. It's not 700 hours of random home movies of birthday parties and just the general stuff that everybody has. It was 700 hours of her trying to make films and unfinished documentaries…It's a weird reversal of every other filmmaker, every other kind of bio doc. Traditionally, after the person gets famous, that's when all the good stuff happens, but Maya turned the camera off and stopped filming herself. She didn't need to anymore because people were listening and were asking her about her story. Journalists were doing the documenting and the recording for her. That's why my film then switches over to archival. There were about 100 hours of archival stuff of her being interviewed in various ways and about 100 hours of her on tour performing, of people who professionally filmed the gigs in one way or another. So all in all, nearly 1000 hours.' Luers.
[517] Saha, p. 741.

in the private domestic sphere. A significant example is visible in an early scene, in which M.I.A. is filming from behind the camera, sitting with family members in a living room in Sri Lanka – see below Figure 42. It is nighttime, and pale floral-patterned curtains hang against the wooden framed windows creating a familiar familial scene. In this setting, which we understand as her relative's home and not her own, M.I.A.'s confidence is challenged. She is defending her own experience of war, protesting that her father's involvement rendered the family intensely affected, only to be contradicted by her cousin who says she never had the true 'war zone experience'.[518]

Figure 42: Still image from MATANGI / MAYA / M.I.A.; *M.I.A is confronted by her cousin about her lack of 'true' warzone experience while in their family home in Sri Lanka* [519]

The scene is juxtaposed by subsequent clips of M.I.A. performing everyday homemaking activities; she is looking through a photo album, below in Figure 43 – though the purpose is not to recall

[518] Loveridge, 00:29:35.
[519] Ibid.

happy memories, but instead to count the family members who have survived and those who have been killed by conflict.[520]

Figure 43: Still image from MATANGI / MAYA / M.I.A.; *M.I.A looks through a photo album in Sri Lanka* [521]

Next, she sits in her bedroom, seen in Figure 44, reflecting on what she has 'found' so far in Sri Lanka, when a young boy reaches in through the window bars to hold her radio playing Bob Dylan's 'Mozambique'.[522] As M.I.A. turns the volume up, the boy covers his ears and walks away. Is her Western reality too imposing?

[520] Ibid., 00:29:35.
[521] Ibid.
[522] Ibid., 00:28:46.

Figure 44: Still image from MATANGI / MAYA / M.I.A.; *In her bedroom in Sri Lanka, M.I.A plays Bob Dylan on the radio and a young boy covers his ears and leaves* [523]

Viewers are not left long to consider, as Loveridge cuts these two clips quickly, juxtaposing with scene-setting footage of bustling London and an exterior view of M.I.A.'s home, seen below in Figure 45.

[523] Ibid.

Figure 45: Still image from MATANGI / MAYA / M.I.A.; *View outside M.I.A.'s penthouse in East London* [524]

Inside are modern, arguably sanitised white walls with oversized art propped against them, double-height ceilings, and contemporary furniture. Colours jar against the plain palette and undeniably bourgeois domestic space, having been strewn around – vibrant clothes dry on the banister, bright flag bunting is strung across the width of the door as in still Figure 46. Yet another contradiction to the rather sterile backdrop, M.I.A. emerges in a casual pink t-shirt and yellow shorts to sort through a messy music media room – see Figure 47. Continuing from her childhood flat where she was sampling identities, or her family's home in Sri Lanka in which she straddled her past and present to aim to affect her future, in present-day London M.I.A. is both in control of herself and her space and a wannabe rebel, seemingly out of place. Contradiction emerges as she presents examples of her graffiti-style propaganda art drawn from her political experiences, all while speaking from an untouchable security that comes with fame and fortune.

[524] Ibid, 00:30:15.

Figure 46: Still image from MATANGI / MAYA / M.I.A.; *M.I.A.'s modern penthouse home is dressed in a mix of colourful flags and tapestries* [525]

Figure 47: Still image from MATANGI / MAYA / M.I.A.; *M.I.A's own outfit adds to the colourful collage of fabrics strewn around her otherwise minimal contemporary penthouse* [526]

Here we see that, never read as wholly authentic or wholly 'at home', domestic spaces are sites of contested narrative in which M.I.A.'s dual belongings sit uneasily against one another. At play are

[525] Ibid, 00:30:17.
[526] Ibid, 00:30:25.

contrapuntal melodies of East and West, tradition and radicalism, and security and danger. Authentic in neither/any, she is uniquely at home in both/all.

In reflecting on the role of the home as a site for creative feminist potential in *MATANGI / MAYA / M.I.A.*, we can interpret it with varied readings. Perhaps it was the easiest place to meet and film for both M.I.A. and Loveridge. M.I.A. may have been restricted to the domestic setting by class and money in her youth, and later by her schedule or desire for privacy now that she is an international star. On the other hand, it might be that home and identity for forced migrant women are intertwined and impossible to disconnect. Perhaps the 'why' of the presence of home in the documentary is not as necessary to understand as the 'how'. When we look at how home functions for M.I.A., we can see it clearly as an alternative stage. With this in mind, and in adapting a feminist approach to contrapuntal reading, we see M.I.A. living out what Briganti and Mezei refer to in *The Domestic Space Reader* as 'the elasticity of the concept of home'.[527] She demonstrates that boundaries for what constitutes home are not rigid lines of bricks and mortar or inside and out. Rather, home, as a feminist not *feminine* architecture, comes and is created in many forms at the same time. Importantly, it is not M.I.A.'s stardom that leads us to read feminist potential in the home, but her persistent, everyday negotiation and ultimate balance with identity while in it. In one voiceover, she tells Loveridge, 'It's amazing that in one lifetime you have to figure out so many things, but I've made it all fit together'.[528] As we see in the home explored above, M.I.A. reveals and reflects that it is exactly creative homemaking that got her to where she is today. While she nostalgically sorts through tapes and discusses her early music with an off-camera Loveridge, she shares, 'I knew how to tell a story because it was all there, in front of me'.[529] Her present-day voice lays over photos and film footage from her early career days. 'When you walked into my room, there was photographs I'd just taken, tapes of the Tigers'.[530] Viewers are transported to the walls of M.I.A.'s late 90's bedroom – Figure 48 – to see the way she has made her home a canvas, an inspirational storyboard. Her own spray paintings, as in Figure 49 below, news clippings from the

[527] Briganti and Mezei, p. 8.
[528] Loveridge, 01:28:50.
[529] Ibid., 00:23:52.
[530] Ibid.

Tamil conflict, and other ephemeral content are tacked up on walls around her because creating was all she wanted to see and think about; she 'was desperate' for it, she says.[531]

Figure 48: Still image from MATANGI / MAYA / M.I.A.; *M.I.A's bedroom walls were lined with images of the Tamil Tigers for ever-present motivation* [532]

Figure 49: Still image from MATANGI / MAYA / M.I.A.; *M.I.A.'s spray paint creations inspired her musical output* [533]

[531] Ibid., 00:35:06.
[532] Ibid.
[533] Ibid.

Creating was her way out of a typical, confined livelihood of homemaking (i.e. cooking, cleaning, washing) that many forced migrant girls and women face.[534] Instead, in her home M.I.A. makes a radical aesthetic, an intense and interior sanctuary that lends itself not to patriarchal construction, but an extraordinary, self-manifested reality.

Ultimately, M.I.A. homemakes strategically by balancing her many realities – the daughter of a resistance leader, a young girl growing up in council housing, a burgeoning female artist at a prestigious university, a pregnant woman and eventually mother, and finally, a successful superstar and vocal activist. Mehri addresses this, writing, 'M.I.A. has always walked the tightrope between militancy and mega-stardom. Billionaire baby daddies to H&M sponsorships, detractors have picked apart her contradictions'.[535] Importantly, she reflects, 'Authenticity is an unstable pedestal rooted in meticulously cultivated performance'.[536] If then, as this argument concludes, we read M.I.A.'s contradictions instead as feminist contrapuntal performances, we can see them as forms of reaction and resistance that serve to create new, productive spaces of feminist architecture. In *Reflections on Exile*, Said suggests 'only someone who has achieved independence and detachment' can perform contrapuntally. [537] Exiles, he says, have a 'plurality of vision'.[538] In refusing to conform to traditional, subjugated gender roles, or the position of passive, deserving forced migrant throughout her childhood, young adult years, or as part of her present-day persona, M.I.A. corrects severe disenfranchisement into power. She advances home as a site of imagined, and eventually achieved, mobility by creating her art, her music, and her space in order to create herself.

[534] A slightly dated but nonetheless informative article by Susan Forbes Martin and Emily Copeland outlines how forced migrant women indeed contribute to their household's economic situation, however it notes that often this is in terms of supporting wage-earning family members, rather than generating income themselves: 'Refugee women in developing countries (like their host national counterparts) are an integral part of the family's economic activities whether those entail assisting in food production, marketing goods or providing services such as cooking and laundry for other family members who engage in wage labor activities.' Susan Forbes Martin and Emily Copeland, 'Making Ends Meet?: Refugee Women and Income Generation', *Humboldt Journal of Social Relations*, 15:2 (1988), pp. 29–91.
[535] Mehri.
[536] Ibid.
[537] Edward Said, *Reflections on Exile and Other Essays* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1983), p. 186.
[538] Ibid.

Homemaking through narrative, performance, and othermothering in *The Girl Who Smiled Beads*

In the same way the home serves as an unassuming yet essential set for M.I.A. and Loveridge's documentary, they also mark out Clementine Wamariya's story in *The Girl Who Smiled Beads*, albeit in more transient and traditionally displaced ways. The memoir tracks Wamariya as she moves through life as a forced migrant for over 20 years. Driven from her comfortable home in Kigali, Rwanda at the age of six, Wamariya and her older sister, Claire, first flee to their grandmother's house in Butare, near the Burundi border. Subsequently they travel to and through seven African countries over six years, living in camps and rented accommodation, shared and private spaces, before resettling in the United States. Wamariya's displacement was a result of the 1994 Rwandan Genocide, a brutal ethnic conflict in Rwanda that was primarily a result of longstanding ethnic tensions between the Hutu and Tutsi populations. During a span of approximately 100 days, an estimated 800,000 people, mainly Tutsis, were killed in a wave of systematic violence.[539] Additionally, hundreds of thousands of Rwandans became refugees, approximately 1 million people were internally displaced and another 1.2 to 1.5 million people, like Wamariya, crossed the border to nearby countries.[540] The role of gender in the conflict was complicated, as on one hand, sexual violence was often used as a militarised weapon against both Hutu and Tutsi women, and on the other, some 96,000 Hutu women have been convicted for their involvement in the genocide. According to the BBC, 'some killed adults… some killed children, and others egged on men to commit rape and murder'.[541] To tell this story, Wamariya uses various domestic spaces as more than just mile markers. Instead, they are insights into the homes she makes, and the many ways they make her. Throughout the narrative, Wamariya maps her exilic journey not chronologically, nor necessarily geographically, but domestically. She begins in 'a grey stucco ranch house'. [542] Later, home is a 'tent with a unit number on it' (Wamariya, p. 43); a 'green shingled house with the green lawn, a large porch on the front, and a detached garage in the back'

[539] Dominique Legros, Christophe Paquet, and Pierre Nabeth, 'The Evolution of Mortality Among Rwandan Refugees in Zaire Between 1994 and 1997', *in Forced Migration & Mortality, Roundtable on the Demography of Forced Migration Committee on Population*, Holly E. Reed and Charles B. Keeley, eds (2001).
[540] Ibid.
[541] Natalia Ojewska, 'Rwanda genocide: 'I am a mother - I killed some children's parents', *BBC*, 1 June 2020 <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-africa-52938283> [accessed 5 November 2023]; See also: Jennie E. Burnet, 'Rape as a Weapon of Genocide: Gender, Patriarchy, and Sexual Violence in the Rwandan Genocide', *Anthropology Faculty Publications*, 13 (2015).
[542] Wamariya, p. 10.

(Wamariya, p. 55); and also ‘a long red-brick, single-story building with glass windows and front, wooden shutters on the sides, and a tin roof’ (Wamariya, p. 79). The descriptions of the homes she moves through are optimistic, they hold the potential of refuge and pause. They also evoke transience and unease – she describes the ‘dilapidated red-brick hut’, she must sleep in.[543] ‘We lived outdoors,’ she writes.[544] In illustrating these spaces Wamariya illustrates various aspects of herself, and she speaks to Brah’s insights on the counterpoints of journeys and arrivals. ‘If the circumstances of leaving are important,’ Brah notes, ‘so, too, are those of arrival and settling down. How and in what ways do these journeys conclude, and intersect in specific places, specific spaces, and specific historical conjunctures?’[545] Examining those circumstances and conjunctures, where and how they happen to Wamariya, or where and how she makes them happen, can reveal the ways she is assembling her own contrapuntal identity to create feminist architectures that assert agency and creative counteractions in conditions which seek to strip it from her.

Throughout the narrative, readers understand that home is a constantly moving target for the young Rwandan girl turned refugee teen and, eventually, resettled young adult. From the country’s heinous 100 days of mass slaughter in 1994 to publishing the memoir in 2018, Wamariya’s story tells of her chasing and creating space for herself and her family across eight countries – ‘In Malawi... In Zaire... In Tanzania...’, she lists where she is to explain who she is.[546] This is amidst ordinary and extraordinary, safe and unsafe semblances of home – ‘In our backyard... In our front yard...’[547] she writes. ‘The apartment was on the third floor, across the street from a brothel.’[548] In these diverse spaces and places Wamariya homemakes as a practice of self-making or self-identification, and this work identifies her strategies for doing so through a feminist contrapuntal reading. It looks at how she tells her story – both in in terms of authorship, which is collaborative, and structure, which is nonlinear. It also considers how and where she performs gender throughout the narrative, as well as her relationships with other women within domestic spaces. In each of these areas, Wamariya asserts a double agency, an aspect of Said’s counterpoint

[543] Ibid., p. 43.
[544] Ibid., p. 120.
[545] Brah, 1996, p. 179.
[546] Wamariya, p. 6.
[547] Ibid., p. 10.
[548] Ibid., p. 150.

that Wendy Brown explains is 'a deliberate art, at once open ended and tactical, that emanates from an antihegemonic sensibility'.[549] Considering her roles in the home, as a woman and in relation to other women, a feminist contrapuntal interpretation allows for a reading that explores the ways she pushes back against both the cultural and gendered forms of oppression by reclaiming and building space in ways that ultimately serve her.

Briefly setting aside Wamariya's spatial negotiation of home, the first and most fundamental way of engaging her with the feminist contrapuntal is by exploring how she tells her story, which is at once critical and compelling. She writes not from a position of privilege, but experience and authority, and it is clear that gaining power over her own account is essential for the development of her sense of identity. Wamariya recognises the importance of imposing her own sense of order and clarity over what is a very disordered history, as she reflects, 'I was trying to braid my story together, keep all my various lives connected'.[550] This ownership of story and voice is especially relevant as the book sits within the genre of collaborative life narrative, a complex and sometimes challenged form of co-authorship. *The Girl Who Smiled Beads* was co-written with journalist Elizabeth Weil (writer-at-large for the New York Times Magazine), similar to M.I.A. and Loveridge's collaboration.[551] While commercially strategic, the practice of working with an established, white Western, writer draws a postcolonial criticism of double colonisation.[552] As Whitlock observes, the genre of life narrative can be deemed a 'soft weapon'.[553] It 'can personalise and humanise categories of people whose experiences are frequently unseen and unheard'.[554] In Wamariya's case, 'to attach a face and recognize a refugee is to make powerful interventions in debates about social justice, sovereignty, and human rights'.[555] However, she importantly adds, 'it

[549] Wendy Brown, 'At the Edge', *Political Theory*, 30:4 (2002), p. 568.
[550] Wamariya, p. 186.
[551] *Elizabeth Weil* <http://www.elizabethweil.net/> [accessed 8 November 2023]
[552] Examples of this form include indigenous codices and annals, slave narratives, Inquisition records and judicial depositions, captivity narratives, religious confessions, common place books, "as told to" accounts, testimonios, ethnographies, oral histories, and genealogies. Contemporary writers, artists, and critics working in prose, installation art, cinema, video, and visual and performance art frequently choose collaborative modes of working, often to put forth and simultaneously render ambiguous their representations of subjectivity, cooperation, history, and/or authenticity within the life-narratives they construct.' Kathleen McHugh and Catherine Komisaruk 'Something Other Than Autobiography: Collaborative life-narratives in the Americas', *Biography*, 31:3, p. vii.
[553] Whitlock, 2015, p. 3.
[554] Ibid.
[555] Ibid.

is a "soft" weapon because it is easily co-opted into propaganda'.[556] Assumedly, co-author Weil has altruistic intentions, or at least shared ambitions for the book, and she indeed uses her professional history and platform to amplify Wamariya's story. However, the journalist's involvement, an inevitable mediation, cannot help but complicate. Perhaps not propaganda, she still 'props' up the story with her whiteness, Western-ness, and literary clout. She provides access to media and literary worlds, professional endorsements, and cultural credibility that Wamariya might not otherwise be granted. Pessimistically, we can read her involvement as part of the never-ending cycle of first-world intervention and commodification. Employing a feminist contrapuntal reading, on the other hand, might allow us to celebrate the collaboration between Weil and Wamariya instead. Although Wamariya may not be able to assert complete autobiographical independence in her storytelling, perhaps she can disrupt or complicate the expected forced migrant woman discourse with counterpoint, by both narrating and being narrated. As Said's contrapuntal seeks a harmonic balance, we may read Wamariya as benefitting, not suffering, from her co-author's position if she uses it to her advantage. Whitlock explains that 'shifting relations among various genre – testimony, autoethnography, and memoir, for example – signifies a dynamic flow of life story that signals who gets to speak autobiographically, and how they sustain their authority and power'.[557] In retaining the sole authorial voice across book junket interviews and news features, and in presenting her own TED Talk, I believe that she sustains empowered levels of authority and power.[558] Wamariya embraces the counterpoint here, letting the solidarity and support of her joint author tip the balance of collaboration in her favour.

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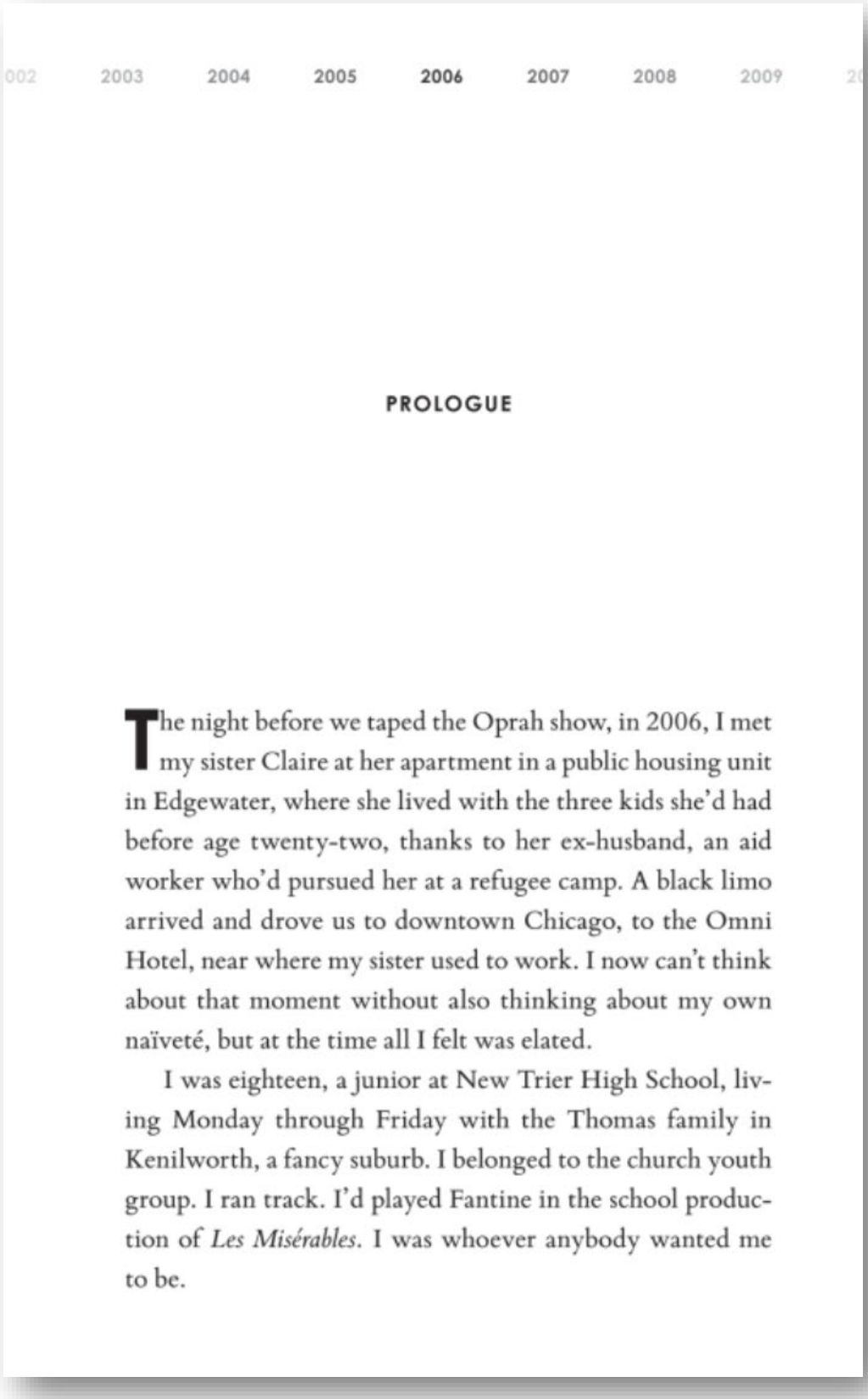
[556] Ibid.
[557] Ibid., pp. 16-17.
[558] Diane Cole, 'She Fled Rwanda To Survive — But Does Not Like The Words "Refugee" Or "Genocide", *NPR*, 19 April 2019 <https://www.npr.org/sections/goatsandsoda/2019/04/19/714652428/she-fled-rwanda-to-survive-but-does-not-like-the-words-refugee-or-genocide> [accessed 19 November 2019]; 'Clemantine Wamariya: "The Girl Who Smiled Beads"', *Talks at Google*, 8 February 2019 <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-ktVsmBeTvg> [accessed 19 November 2019]; Megyn Kelly, '*Clemantine Wamariya, Survivor Of Rwandan Massacre, Shares Her Long Journey To US*', *Today*, 2 May 2018 <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ilLTJxSGlp8> [accessed 19 November 2019]; Joanna Moorhead, 'I was reunited with my long-lost family on Oprah', *The Guardian*, 28 April 2019 <https://www.theguardian.com/lifeandstyle/2018/apr/28/i-was-reunited-with-my-long-lost-family-on-oprah> [accessed 19 November 2019]; Nora Krug, 'A moment on 'Oprah' made her a human rights symbol. She wants to be more than that', *Washington Post*, 19 April 2018 <https://www.washingtonpost.com/entertainment/books/a-moment-on-oprah-made-her-a-human-rights-symbol-she-wants-to-be-more-than-that/2018/04/18/f394dd0c-3d98-11e8-a7d1-e4efec6389f0_story.html> [accessed 19 November 2019]; Clemantine Wamariya, 'War and what comes after' *TEDWomen 2017* <https://www.ted.com/talks/clemantine_wamariya_war_and_what_comes_after?language=en> [accessed 19 November 2019]

In addition to authorship, the structure of Wamariya's storytelling is revealing. It is significant that despite a linear mappable journey, out of Rwanda to a refugee camp in Burundi and then on to Zaire (now Congo), Tanzania, Malawi, Mozambique, South Africa, and finally the United States, her story is not told in that order. Instead, she chooses a nonlinear narrative to tell of the spaces she encounters and those which she makes, specifically when writing of home. From the first sentence on the first page, home defines who and where she is more than any traditional narrative structure. 'The night before we taped the *Oprah* show, in 2006,' she begins the book, 'I met my sister Claire at her apartment in a public housing unit in Edgewater, where she lived with the three kids she'd had before age 22, thanks to her ex-husband, an aid worker who pursued her in a refugee camp'.[559] In this opening line she evokes an almost hyperbolic North American setting – a guest spot on *Oprah*, social housing in a diverse urban neighbourhood. And although she is describing Claire's home and domestic situation, the journey of the two sisters is so intertwined, it serves as an echo of her own. Throughout the memoir, this tactic operates as more than scene-setting. Rather, it is a form of homemaking, of speaking these spaces into existence, and thus, speaking herself into existence. Wamariya is not just a forced migrant on the run, but a girl trying to understand war, as well as herself and her place among it.

The varied but important role of place in Wamariya's narrative is paralleled by a similarly challenged, and de-essentialised perception of time. For her, Hadji Bakara's belief that 'the warp of territory is bound up with the weft of temporality' rings true.[560] Wamariya's story weaves backwards and forwards: it starts in the middle, in 2006; her own life begins in 1988; our earliest introduction to her is at the age of six, when the genocide in Rwanda begins.[561] From 1994 to 2000, 2002 back to 1995, the physical book itself affords each chapter title page a graphic timeline that rolls back and forth, highlighting the year each section confronts.

[559] Wamariya, p. 1.
[560] Hadji Bakara, 'Time, Sovereignty, and Refugee Writing', *PMLA,* 137:3 (2022), p.442.
[561] The assassination of Rwandan President Juvenal Habyarimana, a Hutu, sparked the beginning of the 100-day genocide on 6 April 1994. 'Rwanda: How the genocide happened', *BBC*, 17 May 2011 <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-13431486> [accessed 12 November 2023]


002 2003 2004 2005 2006 2007 2008 2009

PROLOGUE

The night before we taped the Oprah show, in 2006, I met my sister Claire at her apartment in a public housing unit in Edgewater, where she lived with the three kids she'd had before age twenty-two, thanks to her ex-husband, an aid worker who'd pursued her at a refugee camp. A black limo arrived and drove us to downtown Chicago, to the Omni Hotel, near where my sister used to work. I now can't think about that moment without also thinking about my own naïveté, but at the time all I felt was elated.

I was eighteen, a junior at New Trier High School, living Monday through Friday with the Thomas family in Kenilworth, a fancy suburb. I belonged to the church youth group. I ran track. I'd played Fantine in the school production of *Les Misérables*. I was whoever anybody wanted me to be.

Figure 50: A graphic timeline lines the top of the first page of every chapter in The Girl Who Smiled Beads *by Clemetine Wamariya*

Guided by these fluctuating date markers, Wamariya exposes key moments of flight, fear, relationship, and triumph. We may pause here to consider co-author Weil's, or publisher Penguin Random House's, hand in shaping the tale for dramatic purpose. The nonlinear method sets up an intriguing narrative and physical structure for the book, and perhaps may be more of a publishing tactic than a feminist reclamation or meaningful representation of 'refugee time'.[562] Regardless, as in *MATANGI / MAYA / M.I.A*, it remains important, as rendered visible in the familiar home-setting (and often for Wamariya in its uncanny, transient version of it), it mirrors a contrapuntal process of self-realisation amidst trauma.[563] As Leah Gilmore explains in *The Limits of Autobiography: Trauma and Testimony*, 'crucial to the experience of trauma are the multiple difficulties that arise in trying to articulate it'.[564] This type of struggle is evident in a key scene in her temporary camp-home in Maputo, Mozambique. Wamariya describes:

> The camp was set up like a hostel—a long barracks with lines of cots. Claire and Rob had a mattress and sheets. Mariette and I slept on the floor. I felt safe. A few days after we arrived, Claire approached a woman who'd been living in the camp for twenty years. Twenty years, here? The unit of time made no sense.[565]

Despite remembering the camp as 'surprisingly nice' and her feeling of safety in this provisional home, Wamariya cannot fathom twenty years of displacement. [566] As she says, 'the unit of time made no sense'.[567] She is further displaced by this confounding misunderstanding of the permanency and temporality of home. Indeed, the refugee camp has long been identified by Giorgio Agamben's terminology, a 'state of exception', in which normal legal and political order is suspended, and the sovereign authority exercises exceptional powers.[568] It is 'a zone of

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[562] Bakara, p. 443.
[563] See: Stef Craps, *Postcolonial Witnessing: Trauma Out of Bounds* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013) and Cathy Caruth, *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative and History* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996). Of particular relevance, Craps examines the complex dynamics of witnessing and bearing witness to postcolonial traumas. She foregrounds the experiences of those who have been historically marginalised and oppressed by colonial powers and discusses how their traumas challenge traditional modes of representation and memory. Likewise, Caruth explores how traumatic experiences can disrupt traditional narrative structures and our understanding of the past. Caruth's work highlights the importance of bearing witness to traumatic events and the role of literature and narrative in providing a means of expression and healing.
[564] Leah Gilmore, *The Limits of Autobiography: Trauma and Testimony* (Ithica, New York: Cornell University, 2001), p. 6.
[565] Wamariya, p. 133.
[566] Ibid.
[567] Ibid.
[568] Giorgio Agamben, *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life*, trans. by Daniel Heller-Roazen (Stanford: Stanford University Press: 1998), p. 170. See also: David Farrier, 'Horizons of Perception', *Postcolonial Asylum: Seeking Sanctuary Before the Law*, NED-New edition,1, 1:9 (Liverpool University Press, 2011), pp. 57–91.

indistinction between outside and inside, exception and rule, licit and illicit'. [569] Later, in retelling her story however, Wamariya uses the incomprehensibility of linear time to her creative advantage. She balances these disconcerting memories while working through her reality. Perhaps an approach to reconciling trauma, she rearranges her history into a form that finally makes sense to her. Bakara argues that this is resistance tactic of reclamation, used 'to loosen control of time from the power of the nation-state form'.[570] Contrapuntally, Wamariya does not ignore parts of her past, but rationalises them as they fit into her whole story and contribute to creating her whole self.

The process of living and remembering in counterpoint allows Wamariya to remain in control of her memories and how they have made her. At times she doubts what was appropriate to feel: 'I tried to remember who I was *before*', 'To say I missed our childhood home would have felt perverse', 'I kept my fierce self hidden,' Wamariya shares. [571] However, counterpoint becomes a specifically feminist counter-practice if we consider it as Hélène Cixous' *écriture féminine.*[572] In her essay 'The Laugh of the Medusa' Cixous postulates, 'woman always occurs simultaneously in several places. Woman un-thinks the unifying, regulating history that homogenizes and channels forces, herding contradictions into a single battlefield'.[573] In pairing her transnational forced migration with a self-regulated transtemporal storyline, Wamariya, too, resists singularity and dismantles expected narrative form to regain agency within her account. Further, this approach removes her from a traditional historic retelling of the Rwandan civil war, as well as what Whitlock refers to as the 'carefully controlled and contained' refugee narrative that echoes the systemic containment of 'the bodies of refugees and asylum seekers themselves'.[574] In repackaging her story outside of the colonial and chronological, Wamariya takes on multiple forces of oppression that target her specifically as a forced migrant woman. If she can rework time and space, she opens the possibility to redirect her own story.

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[569] Ibid. See also: David Farrier, 'Horizons of Perception', *Postcolonial Asylum: Seeking Sanctuary Before the Law*, NED-New edition,1, 1:9 (Liverpool University Press, 2011), pp. 57–91.
[570] Bakara, p. 445.
[571] Wamariya, p. 48, 40, 62.
[572] 'Hélène Cixous, 'The Laugh of the Medusa', *Signs*, trans. by Keith Cohen and Paula Cohen, 1:4 (1976), p. 875.
[573] Ibid., p. 882.
[574] Gillian Whitlock, *Soft Weapons: Autobiography in Transit* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006), p. 18.

A secondary way Wamariya navigates her precarious relationship to home is through performative homemaking. Accessing a feminist contrapuntal reading, we can unpack the different ways she enacts both (and often, at once) traditional and subversive roles in the various homes present in her narrative. 'One of the most valuable skills I learned while trying to survive as a refugee was reading what other people wanted me to do,' Wamariya confesses at the beginning of the book.[575] Performance is an intentional approach for her, as evidenced throughout this thesis it is for many forced migrant women, specifically though not solely around domestic and gendered roles. As Judith Butler famously wrote, 'gender proves to be performative – that is, constituting the identity it is purported to be'.[576] Nogreh and Nadia dressed performatively for their own forms of safety and subversion, drawing on traditional female clothing and Lucia and Lydia feign confidence amidst trauma on behalf of their children. Likewise, M.I.A. and the women in *Baulkham Hills* all perform beyond the stage setting, trying on personas, saying what they think others want them to, as a means of adapting either because they desire to or because they feel they must. In 'Home: Mobilities, Belongings and Identities' David Ralph and Lynn Staeheli reflect on this notion, observing that often 'the onus falls on migrants to blend with the host society's normative expectations, and through the adoption of language, accent, dress, intermarriage with the dominant group and so on, are gradually said to "belong" to their countries of settlement'.[577] So while the many ways forced migrant women perform might offer them a tool to counteract, it is also always an underlying demand. For Wamariya, there is persistent movement, persistent re-homing, and therefore, persistent making through blending and adapting. Each home allows for, or requires, a new self.

Within this discourse of performativity, Wamariya's gender and cultural construction can be read as a process of homemaking, again through the feminist architectures of the feminist contrapuntal. She is able to access or preform multiple selves at once, in terms of gender, culture and agency, supporting Boccagni's view that 'the notions of home and domesticity, and their underlying household practices, have always been subject to gendered scripts and behaviours, in

[575] Wamariya, p. 5.
[576] Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (Taylor & Francis Group, 2006), p. 34.
[577] David Ralph and Lynn Staeheli, 'Home: Mobilities, Belongings and Identities', *Geography Compass*, 5 (2011), p. 524.

historically and culturally variable ways (Gurney, 1997; Hollows, 2012)'.[578] It appears that, to counter domestic instability, Wamariya must build and rebuild distinct identities to rely on, though as a forced migrant woman this must manifest in 'historically and culturally variable ways'. [579] She articulates this reality once living safely, yet still transiently, in the Thomas' affluent host home on the north shore of Chicago, she says,

> So many times, in a former life, I had become someone else in order to stay out of a refugee camp or out of jail. To stay alive, I had played a mother. I had played a yes-ma'am younger sister. I had made myself a nobody, invisible. Now I have become the strange creature: an American teenager.[580]

Physical home structures are present, albeit in unfamiliar and shifting forms, but homemaking for Wamariya cannot constitute traditional, socially constructed 'women's acts', though these do frequently appear in Wamariya's story, and indeed comprise some of her own contrapuntal homemaking.[581] Instead, or as well, the homemaking she performs comprises a type of self-creation. Constructed on ever-changing grounds, however, it is prone to instability. 'In public, I played the part of myself,' she reflects on her life once settled in the US. 'I wore the right makeup, the right jewellery, the right dress. I was nobody and I was everybody. But no role felt exactly right. Each performance felt distancing, a ruse,' she says.[582] As Wamariya's homes are always contested, as well as temporary and hosted, we can assume 'public' includes her domestic spaces – in camps, with Rob's family, and once 'settled' in the Thomas' home. Whereas home is private for many, for Wamariya that intimacy seems to only be found in the deepest recesses of herself, which the memoir works to slowly reveal.

While *The Girl Who Smiled Beads* is not specifically a book about gender, we can read the many ways feminist interventions affect her, specifically in relation to the home – including the notions of nonlinearity in storytelling and gendered performance, as above. We may also, however, look to the role of female relationships within domestic sites for an examination of how

[578] Boccagni, p. 14.
[579] Ibid.
[580] Wamariya, p. 53.
[581] For more on the social constructions of gender: Tanja Hentschel, Madeline E. Heilman Madeline E, Claudia V. Peus, 'The Multiple Dimensions of Gender Stereotypes: A Current Look at Men's and Women's Characterizations of Others and Themselves', *Frontiers in Psychology*, 10:11 (2019) and Elizabeth Saewyc, 'A Global Perspective on Gender Roles and Identity', *Journal of Adolescent Health*, 61:4 (2017)
[582] Wamariya, p. 239.

homemaking is also self-making for the author.[583] Particularly with her non-biologically related female relationships, it may be argued that Wamariya engages in contrapuntal acts of 'othering' – not in terms of subaltern alienation or oppression, but in embracing connections to help homemake. In 'Understanding Home: A Critical Review of the Literature', Shelly Mallett observes, 'A vast literature on cross-cultural notions of kinship, place and belonging suggests that the nuclear family and the nuclear family house are of limited relevance to the meaning of home and family for many people'.[584] As such, this reading considers 'othermothering' as a form of 'otherhoming', and a productive and counterhegemonic domestic practice that again taps into the feminist contrapuntal as a harmonious acceptance, rather than rejection or replacement.

The placement of the mother within the home is highly gendered and comes with conflicting feminist opinions. On one hand, the domestic sphere carries the history of a burdened, isolated, and oppressive site of traditional, patriarchally inscribed gender roles.[585] Alternatively, home also has been argued as a space of ownership, independence, and fulfilment for women and people who are mothers.[586] In *Of Woman Born: Motherhood as experience and institution*, Adrianne Rich reflects on this dichotomy of motherhood more broadly, writing,

> At certain points in history, and in certain cultures, the idea of woman-as-mother has worked to endow all women with respect, even with awe, and to give women some say in the life of a people or a clan. But for most of what we know as the "mainstream" of recorded history, motherhood as institution has ghettoized and degraded female potentialities.[587]

For Wamariya, however, othermothering destabilises these competing assessments of the role and the space, and thus traditional views of homemaking. Instead, it presents another option of neither/both – a feminist counterpoint. The concept of othermothering refers to women who are not a child's biological mother but provide maternal care for short to long term periods in informal or

[583] Notably, male relationships are given little attention by Wamariya. Her sister's husband, Rob, is by far the most frequently mentioned male character, but he is loathed by Wamariya, described as abusive, cheating, and often setting them back in terms of finding refuge. Her father plays a small role, but clearly it is her complex relationship with her mother that is the primary parental focus.
[584] Mallett, p. 74.
[585] See: Chris Kynaston, 'The everyday exploitation of women: Housework and the patriarchal mode of production', *Women's Studies International Forum*, 19: 3 (1996), pp. 221-37; Mary Becker, 'Patriarchy and Inequality: Towards a Substantive Feminism', *University of Chicago Legal Forum*, 1:3 (1999).
[586] See: Young, 1997; Samah Sabra, 'Re-Imagining Home and Belonging: Feminism, Nostalgia, And Critical Memory', *Resources For Feminist Research*, 33:1 (2008), pp. 79-102,156.
[587] Adrianne Rich, *Of Woman Born: Motherhood as experience and institution* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1996), p. 13.

formal situations, is significant for Wamariya, who's own mother remained in Rwanda until she and Claire had settled.[588] Focusing on their significant, albeit sometimes fleeting, presence in Wamariya's life and story, it is evident that othermothers are crucial in making and moving her to and from home to home.

Throughout her story, as she relocates to and through precarious and untenable homes, Wamariya narrates the instances in which she turns to othermother figures for comfort, normality, and strength. Beginning with memories from her early life, when she and Claire first flee home, the lack of maternal care is tangible: 'Nobody in my world was tender and protective of me anymore,' she reflects.[589] With the elimination of both a safe domestic space and her biological mother, Wamariya feels the elimination of nurtured protection. However, as her story develops, so does the list of othermothers who appear in Wamariya's new home spaces or invite her into theirs. This includes Mucyechuru (the grandmother-figure in one of the camp's), Linda (an Afrikaans woman in South Africa), the Pastor's wife in Zambia, many of Rob's aunties – specifically Mama Nepele (who cared for Wamariya while she suffered from malaria, depression and malnutrition), Mrs Kline, Mrs Thomas and Mrs Beasley (carers for Wamariya in the U.S.), the memory of Mukamana (Wamariya's childhood nanny), and of course, her sister and guide, Claire.[590] The bonding that occurs between them and Wamariya is tangible. Each relationship helps to create new semblances of home, anchoring Wamariya to these women, rather than to a physical place.

Looking closely at one brief yet notable encounter of an othermother relationship, we can understand the importance to Wamariya's sense of homemaking and own development. The scene comes after Rob has kicked Claire, her children, and Wamariya out of the house in a fit of rage.[591] Wamariya focuses on the details of the space as she explains that they moved in 'with another family on the edge of Lusaka, in a modest neighborhood of tiny stand-alone houses with tin

[588] See: *Theorizing Black Feminisms: The visionary pragmatism of black women*, eds. Stanlie M. James and Abena P.A. Busia (New York: Routledge, 1993); Rosalie R. Troester, 'Turbulence and tenderness: Mothers, daughters, and "othermothers" in Paule Marshall's Brown Girl, Brownstones', *SAGE: A Scholarly Journal on Black Women,* 1:2 (1984), pp. 13-16; Shelley Grant, 'Sympathetic Distances of Black Motherhood: Reflections on the Political Agency of Cultural Remembering', in *Reconceiving Motherhood*, ed. Patricia Hill Collins (Ontario: Demeter Press, 2014)
[589] Wamariya, p. 32.
[590] Evidenced here, othermothers 'can be, but are not confined to, such blood relatives as grandmothers, sisters, aunts, cousins or supportive fictive kin,' write Stanlie James and Abena Busia in *Theorizing Black Feminisms: The visionary pragmatism of black women*. James and Busia, p. 46.
[591] Wamariya, p. 201.

roofs'.[592] She notes watching the mother of the house, a Rwandan woman in Zambia who offered to take them in:

> She wore long house dresses and offered to take me and Claire's children in. I loved her hands, her long nails painted red, her skin hennaed from knuckles to wrist. I sat in her kitchen for hours and watched her cook. She chopped, peeled, and stirred with precision. She never chipped her nails.[593]

Wamariya's focus on this woman, her home, and the actions she performs in them, evokes an embodied engagement with materiality: the body, repetition, and movement, a connection to the physical. For Wamariya, the long house dress, the painted nails, the exactness enacted in the kitchen, all seem to invite her home. They link her to a space and a feeling she has had stripped away from her. Later, when she, Claire and the children move out of the woman's house and back on their own, Wamariya has a need to be seen in the same way she saw that woman. She writes:

> I wanted to say, I am here. I need you to see me, I need you to see that I am here. You, world, cannot make me crumble. I am alive, I am alive, I am alive. I wanted everybody to turn, stare, and say, 'Oh my goodness, look at that beautiful dress. Who do we have here?' I needed to tell myself, every day, I exist. I am bathed, my hair is washed. My clothes are ironed. I am taking care of these kids. These kids are clean. I, too, am clean.[594]

The role of Rwandan woman is not a stand-in for Wamariya's own mother, nor is she simply a role model of feminine performance, with her henna, a house dress, and painted nails. A feminist contrapuntal reading suggests instead that the relationship between she and Wamariya imbues a crucial multi-dimensionality. We can accept her function as a necessary hybrid for Wamariya. Although she is not her mother, she cares for, inspires, and roots the young girl, lending their relationship to be one part of Wamariya's ongoing homemaking.

Ultimately, Wamariya's relationship to the domestic is interesting because it is and is not dependent on the gendered and material qualities of home. She takes time in each chapter, with each new location, to sketch her varied homes, their uniqueness, and differences. And through this parsing, readers can access the contrapuntal feminism that carries Wamariya from sometimes repressive and reductive experiences of the domestic through to liberating and creative engagements with it. In 'Homeplace: a site of resistance', bell hooks illuminates, 'The home is no

[592] Ibid.
[593] Ibid.
[594] Ibid., p. 202.

longer just one place. It is locations. Home is that place which enables and promotes varied and ever-changing perspectives, a place where one discovers new ways of seeing reality, frontiers of difference.'[595] Wamariya's journey is not straightforward, and neither are her encounters with home. She moves over and back across borders, in and out of safety and precarity; there are many failures and some lifesaving successes. Although the making of home and self may feel elusive for Wamariya throughout this journey, her memoir reveals that she never stopped trying to create it. A revealing scene surfaces while at the Beasley home, arguably Wamariya's most traditionally comfortable domestic space:

> One day after breakfast, Mrs Beasley drew a picture of a house on a piece of paper. Then she slid across the kitchen table to me, along with the bags of crayons, so that I could show her what my home in Rwanda had looked like. I did not cooperate. I could not. I did not feel, not yet, that she knew what she was asking of me. I did not want to scratch back through my memory. I did not even really know how to access that once safe place with the outdoor kitchen, the red roof, the birds-of-paradise. Nostalgia was a destructive exercise, a jab at is still tender wound, stitched up poorly.[596]

For Wamariya, domestic memories are too painful to securely or authentically access. Home, while the ultimate goal, is still the ultimate cause of pain. 'It's strange how you go from being a person who is away from home to a person with no home at all,' Wamariya writes. 'The place that is supposed to want you has pushed you out. No other place takes you in. You are unwanted, by everyone. You are a refugee.'[597] For Wamariya, displacement is a rejection, not just of her space, but of herself. If, in the safe, exceedingly comfortable home above, she is unable to craft even a two-dimensional recollection, then perhaps homemaking can only be found, and feminist architectures built, in nontraditional negotiations and relationships remembered and rendered through the course of her narrative.

In contrast to M.I.A.'s creative trajectory from recording in her garage to performing at the Grammy Awards, Wamariya's homemaking is not so tidy. Just like her nonlinear narrative and map to safety, it is an assembly of efforts spanning from ad hoc to intentional that help her negotiate agency and self-governance in situations that generally strip her of such tools. Similarly,

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[595] bell hooks, 'Homeplace: a site of resistance', in *Yearning: Race, Gender and Cultural Politics* (London: Turnaround Books, 1991), p. 148.
[596] Wamariya, p. 39.
[597] Ibid., p. 29.

her homemaking is not traditional – despite her mother's early training in conventional housework ('My mother insisted that Claire and I learn how to do these chores') and the actual domestic labour she enacts throughout her journey to keep herself and her family cared for and clean.[598] Rather, Wamariya's homemaking encompasses what may be considered a messy yet melodic feminist contrapuntal approach as she engages in co-authorship and intentional reworking of text and timing, gendered performances, and othermothering. How she produces her story, reflecting, processing, and documenting home, is reconciled and retold in a way that allows her to retain ownership. Her many gendered performances – such as caring for her niece, immersing herself in a teenage dance troupe – are socially constructed efforts Wamariya uses to cope with her unstable life. They allow her one strategy for moving past the immobilising realities of forced migration toward a crafting of home and self. And finally, Wamariya draws on relationships from women across her narrative to create her own semblance of womanhood among displacement. She watches, adapts, and accepts these women in her life, not as substitutions for her own mother, but as guides to 'otherhomes' along her route. Perhaps, ultimately, it may be most productive to think of the text itself as one such otherhome for Wamariya. If a feminist contrapuntal reading of forced migration requires us to accept the multiscalar realities of her experience, then inclusive is our acknowledgment of both physical and emotional understandings of home for Wamariya. With this, the text and its balance of domesticity, gender, longing, and belonging, may become a site of sanctuary itself. Afterall, as hooks notes of home, 'it is locations'.[599]

Redrawing the boundaries: homes as feminist architectures

This chapter has examined home as a way of understanding how two creative representations of forced migrant women establish both self and space amidst dislocation. It positions the physical, material site of the home as crucial to these women's narratives but does not deny the space's elasticity in terms of immaterial and emotional importance, viewing it as far more than a feminine space as it historically has been classified, but instead as possible site of embodiment: a feminist architecture. Accessing Edward Said's theory of the contrapuntal and pairing it with feminist concepts around home, homemaking, and belonging, it has explored the physical and emotional

[598] Ibid., p. 11.
[599] hooks, 1991, p. 148.

realms and representations of home in *MATANGI / MAYA / M.I.A.* and *The Girl Who Smiled Beads*. Interestingly, neither text is deliberately about or representative of forced migrant women in or among the home. Likewise, neither has been marketed with home as central to the plot, nor are scenes overtly focused on the physical or emotional role of the domestic for each protagonist. But perhaps that is why these spaces are so interesting and important for this chapter's reading. As Karen Culcasi shares in '"We are women and men now": Intimate spaces and coping labour for Syrian women refugees in Jordan', understanding 'displaced people's intimate spaces of home and household can help reveal the rather invisible yet complex ways that macro-scaled geopolitics of forced displacement is entangled with daily life, coping practices and gender relations'.[600] Considering M.I.A.'s childhood council flat, family house in Sri Lanka and current East London home, and Wamariya's many transient domestic spaces encountered and created through her journey of flight to resettlement, filmic footage, and textual attention to these sites are revelatory. Home, for M.I.A. and Wamariya, is both a scene setter and an essential space. It creates a backdrop for Loveridge's collage-type documentary and a guide for Wamariya's remapped and reclaimed journey. Yet it also remains simultaneously an ever-elusive and ever-present reality, helping to shape the perceived identities in each narrative in varied ways. This complex reality leads Bardwell-Jones to evoke Anzaldúa in her description of home as 'both a place of confinement, oppression, and exclusion as well as a place that generates a sense of belonging and establishes temporary homes, open for further interpretations'.[601] Home is the root of displacement and the destination for M.I.A. and Wamariya, as it is for all forced migrants. That is why, through feminist contrapuntal readings we can consider how it is made differently in these creative representations, how it can be read as a feminist architecture.

In many ways, M.I.A. and Wamariya share 'similar ways of experiencing home that eventually transcend cultural boundaries', a phenomenon identified by Maria Kreuzer, Hans Mühlbacher, and Sylvia von Wallpach in 'Home in the Re-Making: Immigrants' Transcultural

[600] Karen Culcasi, '"We are women and men now": Intimate spaces and coping labour for Syrian women refugees in Jordan', *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers*, 44: 3 (04 March 2019) p. 466.
[601] Bardwell-Jones, p. 156.

Experiencing of Home'.[602] Both women approach homemaking as imperative to their livelihoods to ensure they are always moving forward toward safety and success. One particular similarity is revealed in how their stories of, or at least because of, home are told. Both texts are an amalgam of hybridity and nonlinearity, a tactic for sharing trauma, working through personal history, and regaining agency through different forms of the life narrative genre. As Whitlock explains,

> [life narrative] plays a vital role in the public sphere as it deals in and through private lives. It renegotiates and redefines how we imagine and rehearse cross-cultural encounters and how we know and identify ourselves in relation to others. Because this is work going on in and around and through us (as readers, critics, consumers, teachers, citizens) we can grasp how contradictory, complicated, and historical the transits of life stories can be, and just how variously we can be drawn into quite different and perhaps contradictory affinities, identifications, and ways of imagining the self.[603]

This nuanced narrative strategy, read with a feminist lens, shows the potential of voice, ownership, and a reclamation of story. However, mediation in both must be considered. For M.I.A., her story is facilitated two-fold: firstly, by her director and secondly, by her fame. Although Loveridge works to present a balanced story, and to an extent 'succeeds' – we remember that M.I.A. was not originally happy with the final film – the film, and specifically the homes she moves through throughout it, are entirely affected by his decision-making and editorial eye.[604] Similarly, as a global superstar her persona is inevitably calculated. Throughout her years of fame, she has worked to present a specific self, a mix of high- and low-brow culture and fashion, the considered figure of a rebel refugee. This image precedes her, and certainly viewers take the impression into each viewing of Loveridge's documentary. Wamariya, on the other hand, was an unknown survivor and activist when her book was released. Her readers may not have preconceived understandings of her, but like M.I.A., she too has worked to calculate a precise persona. Due to years of being stripped of agency and identity through traumatic forced migration, Wamariya admits that self-presentation has become her way of regaining those elements of herself. Her story is also mediated by her collaborating author, a Western journalist and mainstream publisher who shift the work from autobiography to mediated life narrative. Finally, both women have used their forced migrancy in some way to make a living. M.I.A.'s history informs her politics, and her politics inform her

[602] Kreuzer, Mühlbacher, von Wallpach, p. 339.
[603] Whitlock, 2006, p. 10.
[604] Rose.

celebrity. Wamariya has turned her story into an award-winning and money-making output. However, in reading home, this chapter attempts to read with and beyond these different interventions, ultimately illuminating the ways the protagonists' performances use build impactful feminist architectures.

Although both charged and creative, M.I.A. and Wamariya's homemaking, of course, cannot sustain a straight-forward comparison, as their contexts, timelines, geographies, race, class positions are vastly different. For example, in the ways that M.I.A. homemakes loudly and subversively, rejecting the role of compliant refugee and passive and patriarchally defined woman, Wamariya's refusal is more subtle. Though this is out of strength, not weakness; she understands the necessity of performance as her best chance for survival. What's more, for Wamariya, home is a transitory site of psychological turmoil. The text is strife and she must work through a narrative of trauma versus triumph. Her homemaking, explored in textual form, social performance, and relationships to other women, helps Wamariya make sense of herself in a tumultuous world. In her life circumstances, M.I.A., conversely, is able to rework the energy other forced migrant women might need to save for survival into a force of creative cultural production. She redefines and reclaims what it means to be a forced migrant woman from a uniquely powerful position. As Boccagni explains:

> Social inequality has clearly an influence on homing pathways, in terms of both material and relational arrangements. Individuals' socio-demographics, the assets (or forms of capital) accessible to them and the external structure of opportunities do affect the meanings attached to home, and the chances to achieve a satisfactory home experience.[605]

For M.I.A. a stable, working-class upbringing in the U.K. allows for the actual, physical sites of M.I.A.'s homes to take spatial form as traditional flats and houses. They are full of material items and busy with family. She has opportunities to repurpose her home as a stage or bricolage, allowing her to create in addition to, not instead of. Wamariya's homes are often fleeting, mere shelters or stopovers that she relies on, nonetheless. So, while some of the ways M.I.A. and Wamariya homemake overlap, their strategies for finding and making space amidst displacement are ultimately upheld by their social, economic, and cultural statuses and lead to significantly different experiences.

[605] Boccagni, p. 8.

Broadly, this chapter charges us to think about home differently for forced migrant women. Using the representational realm, it has discussed how both protagonists create a harmony out of discord and enact a homemaking when home is not necessarily stable or even present. This is not to say their experiences are entirely positive, fruitful, or fully feminist, but that they access hybrid resilience and resistance to creativity negotiate their specific circumstances of forced migration. What's more, their homemaking is not that of a traditional, hegemonic understanding. Certainly, these typically gendered actions – cooking, cleaning, childrearing – do appear. The first scene in M.I.A.'s childhood flat shows her mother preparing food as she dances with family members in the other room – see Figure 51.[606]

Figure 51: Still image from MATANGI / MAYA / M.I.A.; *M.I.A.'s mother cooks for a family party in their London flat while M.I.A. dances in the other room* [607]

Later, the star slouches comfortably on her couch in Los Angeles, her mother nearby, talking to and filming her pregnant belly – see Figure 52.[608]

[606] Loveridge, 00:06:28.
[607] Ibid.
[608] Ibid., 57:32.

Figure 52: Still image from MATANGI / MAYA / M.I.A.; *M.I.A. A pregnant M.I.A. sits relaxes on her sofa as her mother speaks to her from off camera* [609]

Likewise, Wamariya writes of her physical creation and cleaning of home, claiming 'Even at four, I was compulsively neat, straightening the shoes by the door and re-sweeping the slate in the courtyard'.[610] Wamariya's role as caregiver for her sister's children is a recurring theme, too. However, revisiting Said's claim that 'no one today is purely one thing… survival is about the connections between things,' this chapter has looked beyond, while still acknowledging, these actions to consider the multilayered ways the texts subversively homemake through form, creative performance, and relationships.[611] With these elements, which represent Anzaldua's 'lumber… bricks and mortar' that build a feminist architecture, it finds home, which is often understood as private, static, and apolitical, as very much the opposite.[612]

Engaging with a feminist contrapuntal approach provides a feminist response to texts that may not necessarily be defined as such. It identifies the feminist potential in recognising ways that contradictions are inherent to both homemaking and to forced migrancy for women, revealing them

[609] Ibid.
[610] Wamariya, p. 11.
[611] Said, 1994, p. 336.
[612] Anzaldúa, p. 44.

as unavoidable, everyday realities. Undoubtedly, forced migrant women live in everyday contradictions – vulnerable yet rejected, 'placeless' yet always somewhere – but in these creative representations we can see ways they turn them into potential for belonging and self-identification. For a final conclusion, we return to Bardwell-Jones who draws on Iris Marion Young and Alison Weir:

> While feminist theorists have previously thought about home as a site of exclusion and oppression for marginalized subjects, both Young and Weir advocate for a positive critical value of home that is able to ground one's identity and become a source of social criticism.[613]

Indeed, home for M.I.A. and Wamariya may threaten to exclude and oppress.[614] Yet through reading the feminist contrapuntal we see that there is an alternative, or more accurately, an *also*. Home and homemaking hold a positive critical value that root M.I.A. and Wamariya when they have been uprooted. As Young argues, 'home carries a core positive meaning as the material anchor for a sense of agency and a shifting and fluid identity. This concept of home does not oppose the personal and the political, but instead describes conditions that make the political possible.'[615] So for M.I.A. and Wamariya, home can be equally an *imagined* and also an *actual* geography, a place of fear and also of comfort, strife, and also success. It does not have to be just one, just as these women do not have to give up their own contradictions to thrive. Rather, they may instead balance them, accessing their own internal feminist architectures to construct ways home and self may each emerge from and because of one another.[616]

[613] Bardwell-Jones, p. 164.
[614] Warsan Shire writes eloquently of the forced migrant's experience, 'no one leaves home unless/ home is the mouth of a shark.' Shire.
[615] Iris Marion Young, *On Female Body Experience: 'Throwing Like a Girl' and Other Essays* (Oxford University Press USA, 2005), p. 149.
[616] Anzaldúa, p. 4.

CONCLUSION

Over these chapters I have argued that alternative modes of reading forced migrant women in the creative realm, which in turn affect their reception in real-life contexts, are both necessary and possible. They are necessary because forced migrant women have historically not been recognised as complex, agentic, or significant despite representing half the population of people seeking sanctuary.[617] The tendency among high profile representations such as news media and charity marketing is to subsume all women into to one universally vulnerable group, underrepresenting the nuances and complexities of individual lifeworlds. Likewise, overrepresenting women as the worthiest of all diminishes their agency and further perpetuates flattened victim narratives. As Jane Freedman states, 'it would be wrong to paint [these] women merely as passive victims without their own migratory strategies and their own systems for coping with insecurity'.[618] Though forced migrant women are, by the very nature of their experience, forced from their homes, they are not without agency or acts of determination, resilience, or self-sufficiency, and we ought to be representing and reading them as such. Within academic discourse, foundations for identifying the 'creative and critical potentiality' of forced migrants on the whole have been laid, including within gender and development studies and the emerging field of the 'refugee humanities', but there remains the need for a more developed sub-discourse that works with an interdisciplinary crossover.[619] My work, therefore, has aimed to fill some of that gap, and has identified textual critical analysis of the intersections of space and gender, through the concept of feminist architectures, as one way in which it is possible.

In exploring feminist architectures through varied cultural representations, this project has revealed how everyday spaces and spatial experiences can be shifting rather than static; self-made and socially negotiated. They can provide frameworks for writing and reading the narratives of marginalised people with new and nuanced approaches that, among other considerations, reflect

[617] UNHCR, *Women.*
[618] Freedman, 2016, p. 579.
[619] Espiritu, Duong, Vang, Bascara, Um, Sharif, and Hatton, p. 11.

gender and more than gender, citizenship and sanctuary-seeking status, and spaces beyond structural design. In *Art on My Mind*, bell hooks eloquently explains,

> The kind of architecture we are talking about is really architecture as a cultural practice, because that sense of architecture acknowledges diversity of location, that wherever folks are dwelling in space, they can think creatively about the transformation and reinvention of that space, about design.[620]

Like hooks' perspective, this thesis expands a traditional definition of architecture, and in turn a 'traditional' reading of forced migrant women, emphasising the dynamic and culturally embedded process realised between the two. It has drawn out a transcultural architectural imagination in defiance of hegemonically bordered worlds, real and imagined, as well as the creative agency of individuals, fictional and not, to enlighten how stories of displacement might take a new shape. Following this thesis' interdisciplinary nature, in the final section of this work I will end with two concluding sections, considering both the textual critical analysis and the cultural critical aspirations inherent to the research. The initial focus will be on an examination of the literary and filmic examinations performed throughout the four core chapters, summarising how particular spatial tropes might be viewed as feminist architectures – how they build space – and how, when understood as a discursive, literary-critical approach, they might shed light on the complex experiences of forced migrant women – how they build selves. Then, the aim is to elucidate the potential impact and applicability of the feminist architectural frameworks developed herein, emphasising their capacity to inform and shape discourse in new and impactful ways. Broadly, this conclusion aims to thread the varied strands of feminist architectural exploration that emerged throughout my thesis, shedding light on the underlying patterns, connections, and innovative insights generated by the critical scrutiny of doorways, rooms, walls, and homes. Sitting at the intersections of gender, displacement, and spatiality, this project seeks to contribute not only to academic scholarship but also to more expansive conversations surrounding policies, advocacy, and social awareness. By exploring the interplay between theoretical frameworks and tangible realities, this conclusion will showcase the dynamic and transformative potential of feminist architectures in both real and imagined landscapes of forced migration for women.

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[620] bell hooks, *Art on My Mind: Visual Politics* (New York: The New Press, 1995), p. 156.

Textual critical findings

Looking at the broad cross-cultural array of texts examined over this thesis, it becomes apparent that the symbolic use of architectural elements, such as doorways, rooms, walls, and homes, can open up promising and productive space for analysing the multifaceted experiences of forced migrant women. Unbeholden to specific geopolitical or temporal contexts of forced migration, though not dismissive of their resonances, this work has embraced nuances rather than generalisations, crucially emphasising the immediate and everyday spatial significance embedded in women's narratives across different displacement stories. This comprehensive journey from Afghanistan to Mexico to the U.K. and beyond reveals the potential for a consistent discursive move away from conventional portrayals of women as oppressed, pitied, or condemned figures. In recognising the potential of both real and imagined spaces, it alternatively finds a profound understanding of how these spaces, identified as feminist architectures, can serve as transformative narrative sites for women navigating the complexities of displacement, and legible sites in which we might creatively and respectfully read their representations.

In Chapter One, my analysis of doorways as feminist architectures in *At Five in the Afternoon* and *Exit West* comprised exploration of the liminal spatial experiences of forced migrant women protagonists Nogreh and Nadia. I asserted that the symbolic use of doorways as narrative, political, and gendered tools created an unexpected location for a nuanced study of women's unique encounters of sanctuary seeking amongst what might otherwise be an unassuming architectural element of everyday life. Instead, when understood as a feminist architecture that works in the creative realm for and on behalf of forced migrant women, the doorway becomes a potent threshold site for personal transition, identity creation, and ultimately, the negotiation of agency. In *At Five in the Afternoon*, Nogreh moves between incomplete doorways, indictive of her protracted internal displacement in post-Taliban Afghanistan. However, her intentional actions among them suggest that she embraces their liminality to rationalise her own. Within doorways, she challenges gendered-specific religious and political oppressions, using dress to perform as either submissive or subversive. Importantly, I assessed that as she passes through these liminal

structures, Nogreh takes on new ambitions alongside obedient familial roles, depending on what serves her resilience at the time. Elsewhere, my analysis showed Nadia of *Exit West* accessing doors as magical, instantaneous teleportation devices for dramatic and self-initiated escape to new, ideally safer places. My reading of the doors in the novel displayed the ways Nadia is motivated to seek safety even at the risk of the unknown, as her own country is at the brink of a civil war. She leads the way, proposing unfamiliar transitions and mentally and physically making the first moves toward safety in displays of self-reliance and spatial reclamation.

As was evident in all my critical textual readings of forced migrant women's spatial experiences, doorways for Nogreh and Nadia are as layered spaces of both progress and repression. They are prominent symbols, charged by the circumstances of displacement and oppression faced. Safety has been stripped because of political violence, and in its place the director and author seem to offer these thresholds as geographies of liminality, thirdspaces of transformative potential. In line with Espiritu and Duong's 'feminist refugee epistemology', further explained in the introduction, I challenged the conventional view of war-driven displacement, emphasising its connection 'not only to social disorder and interruption' but also to processes of self-determination and adaptability.[621] While the doorway may signify an uncertain future, when viewed as a spatial tool for Nogreh and Nadia to change, move, or become, I proved that as a metaphor it instead offers the potential for women-led transition out of one repressed situation toward another in which she might claim agency. Ultimately, in my reading, Makhmalbaf and Hamid use doorways as to shape the narrative and enlighten their protagonists' experiences. Through their deployment, the texts celebrate the resilience, will, and opportunism of forced migrant women, offering characters with complex identities and experiences and legible spaces for their stories to play out.

Beyond the doorway, this work turned to the room to reveal some of the socio-spatial complexities and nuanced power dynamics that forced migrant women face. The obvious perception of rooms as mere backdrops was challenged through a close analysis of the detention room at the IRC and the playhouse rehearsal room in *The Bogus Woman* and *The Baulkham Hills African Ladies Troupe* in Chapter Two. Although the room as a design set itself is commonplace,

[621] See page 35.

my study here proved that some have the potential to be far more charged. For forced migrant women, the considered IRC and rehearsal rooms were exposed as extraordinary spaces, arenas of slippage between hospitality and hostility – identified by Derrida as 'hostipitality' through their architectural and emotional significance. Contrary to Chapter One, my analysis of the textual rooms at stake did not find a feminist architecture straight away. This was because in both narratives rooms were undeniably inhospitable to the forced migrant women inside them. For the Young Woman in Adshead's play, the spaces of the IRC are as volatile as they are in the real world. These detention rooms directly reflect the hostile environment of the U.K.'s asylum-seeking process represented in *The Bogus Woman* and my sociospatial reading found little hope within them. The rehearsal room, on the other hand, proved to be a space full of possibility. I explored the potential of this site for creative empowerment, yet outlined that in *Baulkham Hills* that prospect fell short due to the director's lack of awareness of her own positionality. Instead, power dynamics charged the room with inhospitable hierarchies, at times retraumatising the forced migrant women who it was supposed to be benefitting.

Far from being a mundane interior architectural unit, this project read the rooms in both texts as non-neutral and, at times, violent, requiring intentional and equitable interventions if they were ever to become anti-hostile and anti-hierarchical spaces of feminist architecture that support forced migrant women. I, therefore, prompted a reimagining and redesigning, both within and outside the creative frame, calling for the reshaping of these spaces to tip the balance toward welcome, warmth, and equity, as a way of challenging and dismantling prevailing patriarchal architectures. Approaching their physical and emotional construction with feminist hospitality, my analysis addressed the competing hostipitalities that were present in the texts. 'Welcoming' to some extent – it is seemingly safer inside the IRC than sleeping outdoors; and 'Theatre of the Real' intends to serve those whose stories it shares – there is also and always unavoidable spatial injustice in the relationship between host and guest, particularly, as in this case, if the host is the state or citizen and the guest is a forced migrant woman without resource, citizenship status, or authorial power. I proposed that feminist hospitality as a practice, therefore, would foreground co-designing and co-programming by those who might use the space.

In Chapter Three, I explored how within the discourse of forced migration, walls are persistently and, perhaps more blatantly, construed as symbols of systemic oppression. However, I directed the focus towards the embodied experiences of forced migrant women and the intersections of gender, space, and power, as these experiences proved particularly harmful. This shift aimed to reclaim walls from their association with aggressive colonial hostility, not to reduce them to simplified built objects, but instead to position them as feminist architectures of agency, resilience, and solidarity. By employing the concept of a 'feminist border rhetoric', the analysis moved beyond conventional interpretations of borders and walls as static physical structures. Rather, it accentuated the visible, invisible, everyday, and exceptional, aspects of walls as critical sites for examining corporeal interventions enacted by women like Lydia in *American Dirt* and Lucia in *Los Lobos* in response to the challenges of forced migration. For feminists engaging with the border, I argued that 'rhetoric' extends beyond a linguistic device or discursive act. Rather, it is a bodily strategy responding to lived experiences. This includes confronting the social and political structures constructing and maintaining borders, as well as the emotional and physical traumas imposed by these shifting boundaries. My specific emphasis on embodiment challenged gender-neutral approaches, recognising the inseparability of the experience of forced migration from gender politics and their resultant violences.

In examining the interventions of Lydia and Lucia, I revealed the outcomes of this embodied rhetoric: a reclamation of the dual nature of walls as sources of safety and barriers to agency. Reading them as feminist architectures, I argued that walls in these texts could became platforms for reimagining the journey to safety through solidarity with other women, displaying the instinctual adaptability of motherhood, and promoting the unique somatic interventions presented by women on the move in their own narrative spaces. Importantly, the texts drew parallels with contemporary artistic interventions along geopolitical borders, emphasising the transformative potential of creative, embodied approaches as both feminist acts and architectures that challenge hostile hegemonic landscapes. These interventions also disrupt conventional power structures as they reinterpret the wall and re-envision alternative narratives of it through feminist tactics of creativity, play, and counteraction.

In the final core chapter, my analysis illuminated the relationship between the physical and emotional dimensions of home in *MATANGI / MAYA / M.I.A*. and *The Girl Who Smiled Beads*. By finding components of feminist architectures within the contested space of home, this examination brought attention to the spaces' multifaceted nature, showcasing its complexity and elasticity. This perspective allowed for a deeper understanding of the varied creative processes and reclamation efforts often overlooked in discussions about forced migrant women's experiences of the domestic realm. Building upon Edward Said's postcolonial theory of the contrapuntal, the chapter recontextualised the approach through a feminist lens to better comprehend homespaces, homemaking, and belonging for forced migrant women. The analysis considered the ways in which the identities of M.I.A. and Wamariya were moulded by displacement and the resulting imperative to establish new, often hybrid homes as a means of establishing a lost sense of self. Application of a 'feminist contrapuntal', therefore, showcased a form of creative resilience and resistance through negotiation of home for forced migrant women.

Employing a sociospatial reading model, I identified the inspired homemaking strategies employed by both women as essential for their survival. Radical approaches, including contrapuntal identity creation, non-linear storytelling, gendered performance, and othermothering, were revealed as methods for reclaiming and rebuilding the concept of home from traumatic experiences and moving forward to assert agency and authority over their own, even though mediated, narratives. More broadly, in this chapter I challenged conventional notions of domestic spaces for forced migrant women. Home, therefore, emerged as both an imagined and actual geography, representing sources of fear, comfort, strife, and success. The chapter concluded by advocating for the acceptance of these contradictions, illustrating how embracing them allowed for a nuanced understanding of the ways M.I.A. and Wamariya, like all of the women considered in this project, constructed their own feminist architectures to navigate the intricate interplay between building space and building self.

Fundamentally, the textual critical analysis of this thesis advocates for disrupting prevailing patriarchal architectures of both space and discourse by turning towards feminist architectures that represent how forced migrant women build space, and in turn, selves, in determined and creative ways. In engaging with these texts and related cultural interventions through a breadth of founded epistemologies, often reframed by a feminist lens and always firmly grounded in considerations of gender and space, this study has ultimately revealed the immediate and everyday significance interwoven in the transcultural narratives of forced migrant women. It introduces new, productive perspectives on how these stories can be interpreted and demonstrates the potential in shifting to recognise an architectural imagination that transcends both within and beyond creative realms.

Cultural critical aspirations

Stepping out of the narrative realm, and into the extra-textual, one of the main motivations of this project was to further research on creative readings, responses, and representations of forced migrant women by pushing existing boundaries with a truly interdisciplinary approach. While I firmly believe that comparative literary and filmic analysis does offer important insights to understanding the complexities that shape the human experience through a creative lens, I also believe it has limitations. Firstly, there is a tendency for textual analysis to stay within textual critical fields. This is to say that that the often brilliant work of humanities scholars is not accessible to a wide-ranging audience. This may be due to the lack of open-source resources within academia, inaccessible language and analysis, or the academic inclination to remain within specialised realms. Consequently, this limits the wider dissemination of valuable research and erects barriers that obstruct the exchange of critical and creative knowledge. It keeps analysis out of critical dialogue with real world experiences and interventions that might reveal complementary insights. Secondly, I recognise the politics around textual representation. What is visible in the public sphere is always and already a specific kind of production, one that is, by its nature, visible. Seeking out ‘true’ or ‘authentic’ stories is inherently problematic and may involve degrees of voyeurism, particularly as I see it from my role as a white, Western, non-forced migrant researcher.

As such, I have chosen to engage with works that, at first reading might reinforce how and where we typically see forced migrant women, but when approached with interdisciplinary and intersectional analysis can reveal something new and different. This has driven me to think about how integrated textual and cultural research might reach beyond limiting borders to build frameworks that allow for greater access to new spaces and new selves altogether.

Acknowledging these limitations, my academic work throughout this research has been supplemented by relevant, co-created activism, including involvement in the formation of *The World is for Everyone: New Writing* anthology (2019) and the Hostile Environment, Art-Fuelled Learning (HEAL) project (2022-ongoing). *The World is for Everyone* was the result of a Nottingham Trent University Postcolonial Studies Centre collaboration with the Nottingham Refugee Forum. The project created co-design opportunities for spoken, written, and visual self-representation for refugee and asylum seeker members of the Forum's PAMOJA Women Together group.[622] As an assistant on the project, I supported in the facilitation of creative workshop sessions, including a sound-art producing riverwalk, a group writing session, and a baking and recipe sharing activity day, all of which formed the contents of the anthology. Working directly with women with experience of forced migration to co-produce a creative textual intervention similar those studied in thesis, I identified the ways research can affect processes beyond the page. For example, thinking about the spaces in which the abovementioned creative productions were imagined and actualised solidified my belief that feminist architectures are possible and necessary for both solidarity and self-empowerment. Sharing tea in a civic community space while discussing what we might tell the prime minister about how we can change the world and walking around a historic mill in Nottingham swapping stories of our family kitchens and actual spices brought from home were more than just outreach activities. Rather, they were spatial experiences that certainly

[622] *The World is for Everyone: New Writing* by PAMOJA Women Together emerged from Nottingham Trent University's 'Changing Wor(l)ds Partnership', a Postcolonial Studies Centre initiative formed of a network of literary professionals, arts venues, community organisations, publishers and translators. The programme was run collaboratively by Dr Anna Ball, Dr Jenni Ramone, and Dr Nicole Thiara. 'The Changing Wor(l)ds Partnership: Enabling Cultural Self-Representation for Marginalised Communities', NTU.ac.uk <https://www.ntu.ac.uk/research/impact-case-studies/ref-2021/the-changing-worlds-partnership-enabling-cultural-self-representation-for-marginalised-communities> [accessed 30 November 2023]; PAMOJA Women Together, *The World is for Everyone: New Writing by PAMOJA Women Together*, ed. by Anna Ball and Camilla Reeves (London: Palewell Press, 2019)

fell under the qualification of feminist architectures as this project understands them.[623] Collaborative relationships of resistance were formed in fellowship, everyday spaces were reclaimed as creative, productive sites, and power dynamic were challenged through the through the authorship of the anthology.

Similarly, the HEAL project, which I co-developed alongside Dr Anna Ball, Dr Alan Njanji, serves as a framework for feminist architectures of solidarity through its intersectional study, exploration, presentation, and performance of critical and creative work. Throughout this evolving project, our primary focus has been to establish a collective, transdisciplinary discourse on 'hostile environment and art-fuelled learning', as the project's title aptly suggests. HEAL has been deliberately structured to function at the intersections of critical thought, creativity, theory, activism, experience-based insights, and solidarity-driven engagement. It has been developed collaboratively with people who are intersecting the hostile environment through their own artful and spatial actions and insights, including scholars, people of lived refugee experience, community leaders, practitioners, activists, artists, poets, filmmakers, storytellers, comedians, writers, and thinkers. Working across organisational structures, some grassroots and some institutional, further grounds the project in varying structures of privilege and disenfranchisement, and diverse educational backgrounds. With these efforts, we aim to deconstruct hierarchies between inside/ outside the academy and between the idea that there are people who do creative work and who are the recipients of creative work; it is multiform and diverse, like the texts and authors throughout this thesis. Through HEAL, we seek to challenge the top-down processes of knowledge generation and dissemination that usually emanate from academic practices, to 'center refugee lives—and the creative and critical potentiality that such lives offer' as Espiritu, et al. write.[624] The project works 'artfully' against institutionalised and governmentalised hostilities via a complicated, non-hierarchical structure, and embraces the practice so far by thinking differently about how we operate, spark conversations, create spaces, and facilitate collaboration. This has involved small

[623] As further proof of the implications of such an enlightened and engaging project, the university impact report states, 'PAMOJA members reported improved mental wellbeing and educational/career ambitions: one participant subsequently published an advocacy piece for refugee women in the Huffington Post, obtained a place on the National Refugee Week Leadership Scheme, and in 2019 enrolled on NTU's BA in International Relations as a result of the skills and confidence she acquired through the project.' Ibid.
[624] Espiritu, Duong, Vang, Bascara, Um, Sharif, and Hatton, p. 22.

gestures, such as flipping our conference format. Atypical from traditional academic conferences, we foreground, as keynotes, artists who have not been supported by structures of institutional funding or prestige, and invite speakers not to respond to questions, but to ask questions of the audience, which then generates conversational outtakes between papers and provides solutions to problems that academic speakers are grappling with from multiple different angles. What's more, with our June 2023 event, we intentionally considered the spatial dynamics and politics of traditional academics event. *Hostile Environment, Artful Living: Seeking Creative Approaches to Sanctuary*, therefore, took place in an art gallery, rather than a lecture hall, and was deliberately designed for collaboration, with round tables to facilitate conversation and audio, visual, and hand-made art lined the walls for inspiration and contemplation. In other planned activities for the project (such as edited collection of essays and interviews, a digital platform, an AHRC funding application, and a 'sandpit' or 'creative retreat' that we hope plan to run in Spring 2024), we have discussed how to generate conditions of 'sanctuary' that are inclusive, that facilitate horizontal rather than hierarchical working patterns, and that invite collaboration across structures of intersectional complexity. For instance, we may seek to develop projects that enable people currently seeking asylum, housed within home office accommodation, to lead and drive conversation within the academy. Our HEAL planned publication intends to further push against academic expectations, creating space for creative contributions and non-academic voices and mainstreaming gender and race in organic and appropriate ways. Finally, we are looking at how we can represent this entire project online in interesting and accessible avenues.

These projects not only allow me to work through my understanding of how feminist architectures might affect experiences of forced migration, but they clearly extend beyond published or produced materials to encompass co-created and creative activist and academic endeavours. They exemplify a coherent thread, weaving in with my ongoing exploration of cultural and creative mediums to negotiate representations of and by sanctuary seekers. Moreover, these projects embody the findings of my critical analysis, understanding the intersections of space, gender, identity, representation, and forced migration as a cohesive whole. And, as in my critical textual findings, they illustrate that reclaiming everyday spaces as feminist architectures can occur

through visibility, engagement, attention, co-design, and collaboration. It is my aim to continue braiding critical and creative work together into one, impactful output. By forging connections between seemingly disparate disciplines, I aim to contribute to emerging discourse that transcends singular academic or activist boundaries, fostering thoughtful solutions and advocacy. Although only seeds of inspiration in line with the architectural imagination identified throughout this work, as a result I have begun to explore projects concerning wider applications of feminist architectures. This includes the exploration of historic and contemporary built spaces I believe can be classified as 'feminist sanctuaries', as well as a more tangible application of hooks' theory of 'architecture as cultural practice' that would build community spaces on principles of feminist hospitality for forced migrants in urban environments. [625] The former project would serve as a select textual and visual archive, either in online or print format, of spaces that may be classified as feminist architectures, built and experienced throughout time, to explore the depth of feminocentric socio spatiality, including but also beyond contexts of forced migration. With this review of interventions that provide physical and intellectual structure for feminist movements, ideals, and outreaches, the project intends to be an interdisciplinary, intersectional, and decolonial exploration of sites in the Global North and South, both urban and rural, where feminism thrives. It would include categorises drawn from this thesis such as 'everyday spaces for extraordinary lives' (such as lesbian bars, women-only parks, sanctuary spaces for refugee women and slut walks), 'civic structures of inclusion' (for example, London's LGBTQ+ Centre, The Pankhurst Centre, The Feminist Library, and Womanhouse), and 'world-making initiatives' (considering projects such as Womyn's Land and speculative works such as The Women's Building). The project's overall framework is rooted in the same understanding as this thesis, that buildings and spaces are not mere physical structures; they embody and reflect societal values and constraints and have the transformative potential to influence narratives and experiences. The second undertaking is an enduring brainstorm I have begun to explore with architects, developers, and local council authorities. It is a concept modelled after the Maggie's drop-in centres that aims to support those affected by cancer across the U.K. and Hong Kong and have historically been designed by leading architectural practices, illustrating the

[625] hooks 1995, p. 156.

importance of high-quality designed space and its lasting effects on physical and mental health.[626] I believe that applying a similar model to day centres for forced migrants, sanctuary seekers, refugees, and even resettled people in the U.K., would provide a spatial service of welcome and hospitality that counters the existing and certainly hostile environment in effect at present. Through these projects and an ongoing commitment to interdisciplinary engagement, particularly within the built environment sector in the U.K., the work of this thesis can continue beyond the page to catalyse meaningful change in academic, creative, and activist spheres, ultimately contributing to a more just and equitable world for forced migrant women and other intersections of marginalised communities.

Final thoughts

Returning one final time to Anzaldúa, I consider the journey of her thinking in the quote with which this thesis began: 'If going home is denied me then I will have to stand and claim my space, making a new culture – *una cultura mestiza* – with my own lumber, my own bricks and mortar, my own feminist architecture.'[627] Just as do the represented forced migrant women considered throughout this project, Anzaldúa must actively work to build agency and resilience in the face of displacement and denial of the spaces to which she once had access. In asserting why and how she will create 'a new culture', she illuminates that this process, of building something substantial and enduring that is an intrinsic part of who she is, is a deliberate and self-initiated effort to create a foundation for her own existence; it is building space to build self.[628] The journey to belonging does not just happen, rather is one of complex spatial and relational negotiation. Derek Gregory and John Urry confirm in *Social Relations and Spatial Structure* that the spaces we occupy or are restricted from should be considered 'not merely as arenas in which social life unfolds, but rather as a medium through which social relations are produced and reproduced'.[629] Within the context of gendered forced migration, the physical environment and the architectures one accesses, indeed, are dynamic forces that shape much about the experiences in them. Likewise, Blunt and Rose explain in *Writing Women and Space Colonial and Postcolonial Geographies*, 'it is important to

[626] Charles Jencks and Edwin Heathcote, *The Architecture of Hope: Maggie's Cancer Caring Centres* (London: Frances Lincoln, 2010).
[627] Anzaldúa, p. 44.
[628] Ibid.
[629] Derek Gregory and John Urry, *Social Relations and Spatial Structure* (London: Macmillan, 1985) p. 3.

consider the ways in which different epistemological claims about women's identity produce different interpretations of space itself'.[630] Throughout this thesis, and in completed and planned projects, I have argued that forced migrant women affect and are undeniably affected by everyday spaces amidst extraordinary circumstances, and that, with a careful and critical eye, we can identify this phenomenon for sociospatial reclamation. Neither in real nor representational realms should forced migrant women become lost in perpetual transition, nor should they be confined to mere symbolic representations. Instead, shifting the focus away from essentialised gendered bodies and toward the spaces in which forced migrant women are (re)presented to us, we promote a more nuanced interpretation of them as whole, knowable beings, existing within distinct contexts and situations and worthy of being read as such.

[630] Blunt and Rose, p. 5.

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