
# Women Talking Politics

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# From the editors

**Oluwakemi Igiebor, Juanita Rojas Palacio, and Sarah Hendrica Bickerton**

Tēnā koutou.

As we, the editorial team for this year's 'Women Talking Politics', look back at 2025, it could certainly be a moment to feel discouraged as scholars and academics who work in the area of gender. Many of the efforts fought for in previous years have been threatened or wound back in the current moment, both domestically and internationally. And through intersectional and post-colonial lenses we see such wind-backs happening not just through gender, but across all the axes of our selves, identities, communities, and partnerships. The very positions of Social Sciences and Humanities themselves as being relevant in our contemporary societies have been devalued and defunded, disciplines where many of us who research and study gender call home. The slow inching progress in the arc of history towards justice feels like it bends a little less in its supposed inevitability.

We say this as we look back particularly at the winding-back this year of Pay Equity Legislation advances that had been hard and sorely won over the previous decade or more, making our society, and particularly the position or women, less equitable and just. Legislation and policy had been researched, evidenced, designed, consulted on, redesigned, redesigned again, finalised, and then invested and participated in by hundreds of thousands of our fellow citizens and residents, so many of which were women and non-binary persons. The original effort to put together the pioneering Pay Equity work was the mahi of lifetimes, and celebrated for the amazing achievement that it rightly was. And in less that one governmental term in Aotearoa New Zealand, a term which is shorter than most countries, all this work has been undone through the Equal Pay Amendment Bill, passed under urgency. For many women, especially those in feminised sectors like education, health, etc., this is a setback, a signal that even as the overall pay gap narrows, structural levers still require attention.

We also look back at the Treaty Principles Bill, which shook and threatened the very core of our country, our partnership, and the advances we had made (however woefully incomplete), and particularly the lives, communities, and whānau of our Wāhine Māori. For, as we must remind ourselves and reflect on as non-Māori scholars ourselves, pākehā and tau iwi, Wāhine Māori are not wāhine without also being Māori, without also being mana whenua, there is no separation. They are woven together and intertwined, they are raranga as one, inseparable. And as such when the basis of Te Tiriti is made even more fragile, it is also a gendered issue, a feminist issue, part of the same

undermining of advances we have seen in regard to Pay Equity and others as old orders of power are threatened by those advances. Indeed, there are moments here to feel rightly discouraged.

But also, as with the theme of this year's NZPSA conference, there are occasions in amongst this for hope. We think on Foucauldian power analysis, where the very imposition of oppression itself is revealed in how it causes space of resistance to form. The tightly clenched fist leaves gaps between its fingers. Further, one of the most distinctive contributions of Afro-Latin American, Indigenous, and decolonial feminisms in Lain America is the concept of re-existence/re-existence, a concept that moves beyond resisting oppression to re-creating life despite the conditions of coloniality and violence. Francia Marquez, Afro-Colombian activist and currently Vice President of Colombia, has elaborated on this concept. According to her, re-existence means "Vivir Sabroso/ Living Joyfully" with dignity, spirituality, and environmental balance, even amid dispossession and violence. Her main idea is then that women, rural, indigenous and other communities who live under oppressive conditions are not only resisting but existing differently, with joy and ancestral joy.

Other Latin American thinkers add to the concept the importance of revitalizing community and communal knowledge, restoring reciprocal relationships (with others, with nature, with the ancestors), based in relationality and reciprocity. Therefore, re-existence means, the practice of living and thinking beyond the colonial, neoliberal, and heteropatriarchal project. Is the possibility of imagining and creating other possible worlds that put communities and nature -not money- at the centre, and value local knowledge, traditions, and identities (products, markets, arts, the protection of native seeds, etc.) and call for a life where we live with beauty and moderation (knowing that the resources in the planet are limited).

We see this in the overwhelmingly & historically record number of select committee submissions profoundly opposing the Treaty Principles Bill, from all walks of life, from all across the motu. Led often by Wāhine Māori. We saw a reaffirming of Te Tiriti as central to who we are as Aotearoa in signs and statements across the nation, in bumper stickers and flags, and while we continue to see other manifestations of backlash from the old orders to the power and mana Te Tiriti rightly has today, that mana has been affirmed.

We also see hope in the 'People's Select Committee on Pay Equity', which was set up by 10 former women MPs from across the political spectrum, in order that submissions from groups and individuals could be made on the Equal Pay Amendment Bill. There are generations of women that are present in those former MPs who achieved those positions through grit and work, thanks to the advances that feminists have fought for and achieved over the decades. These women are in places now where they can stand up for Pay Equity. Those previous decades of progress, however incomplete, imperfect, and unfinished, are manifest in the very presence of those women being able to stand up with power to demand that women are not relegated again. These are not marginal footnotes; they are the contemporary shape of the feminist hope. It is not simply that women are visible, but that more kinds of women are refusing invisibility

Additionally, we see it in the amazing work of women and non-binary researchers and scholars, within and outside the academy, across Aotearoa, that is reflected in the selection of contributors to this year's Women Talking Politics, as well as the range of topics.

This year's issue begins with *Articles*, the first by **Sonja Tamberg Dobson** examining how gender can, at times, offer women unique advantages in the practice of high-level United Nations peacemaking and mediation. **Smera Khandelwal** and **Sahin Shah** look at the narrative of the 1947 Partition that gave birth to the nations of India and East and West Pakistan, and how that narrative unfolds also as a gendered account of displacement and dispossession, a dual experience for women of large-scale widespread communal violence with realignment of family, community, and national identities.

The articles conclude with a piece by **Emily Law**, **Julija Sardelić**, and **Ayca Arkilic** examining the European Union's Pact on Migration and Asylum as a case study to unpack colonial influences and gendered vulnerabilities in Europe's border externalisation policies. We then have two *Research Briefs*, one by **Amanda Hay** on PhD research exploring the impact of inequality on the political engagement of young people in Aotearoa New Zealand. The second is by **Mariam Tayyab, Fatima Junaid and Sirley Barnett** that outlines a study examining how media narratives about leadership, success, and cultural identity indirectly marginalize introverted South Asian migrant women.

We then present three *Poems* by **Hua Dai**, and then this year's issue concludes with a Book Review by **Juanita Rojas Palacio** of Jacinda Ardern's 2024 memoir 'A Different Kind of Power' on her experiences as the youngest woman Prime Minister we have had in Aotearoa New Zealand, and an account of the momentous events that characterised her tenure in the role.

As early career researchers, we also want to thank the trust that is shown in us by the long history of previous editors and organisers of 'Women Talking Politics' to continue the legacy of this historic space for women & non-binary researchers, academics, and thinkers. A special thank you should of course go to all those who have contributed, to those who reviewed the articles, and finally to you, the reader; we hope you enjoy reading these as much as we did.

Ngā manaakitanga, e te whānau. Kia kaha.

# Articles

## Participating as a Woman Mediator in United Nations Peacemaking: Gender as Leverage, Not Equality

**Sonja Tamberg Dobson**
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Despite the last 25 years of commitments of the Women, Peace and Security framework, women's participation in United Nations peacemaking is increasing slowly. For those women who do reach the highest level of United Nations peacemaking and mediation, their experiences offer interesting insight. This article examines how gender can, at times, offer women unique advantages in the practice of high-level UN peacemaking and mediation. The lived experiences of the 12 women interviewed show that gender can sometimes serve as an asset providing women with access, influence and opportunities for relationship-building not always available to their male counterparts. In the situations where these women did not feel they were able to influence the process; it was rarely due to their gender but about another aspect of their identity altogether.

Keywords: feminist research; gender; peacemaking; substantive participation; United Nations; women mediators; Women, Peace and Security

### Introduction

The adoption of UNSCR 1325 in 2000 marked a critical juncture in the global recognition of women's roles in peace and security. It established the Women, Peace and Security (WPS) framework, which formally acknowledged that sustainable peace cannot be achieved without women's full, equal and meaningful participation in peace processes. By emphasising women's inclusion in decision-making, especially in leadership roles like Special Representatives and Envoys, the resolution sought to address historical exclusions and challenge male-dominated power structures within the peace and security field. Despite formal mechanisms introduced under the WPS framework, progress remains limited due to entrenched institutional barriers.

Scholars have emphasised the importance of addressing women's under-participation in peacemaking, highlighting that a peace process without women often results in an outcome that fails to adequately address the needs and interests of the entire population (Aggestam 2018; Aggestam and Towns 2018; Davies and True 2018; Paffenholz 2018b; Kostovicova and Paskhalis 2021). Their

ability to have an impact is important because the end of a conflict presents a critical juncture to negotiate a peace agreement that will subsequently influence new political structures and governance institutions, even new constitutions, that lay the groundwork for post-conflict reconstruction and socio-economic development (Aggestam 2018; Aggestam and Towns 2018).

This article will first address the topic of women's substantive participation in peacemaking processes before delving into the advantages of participating as a women mediator in UN peace efforts. It will then address the situations when gender is not the main factor in women's ability to influence a peace process. While the aim of this article is to highlight the positive aspects of participating as a woman in UN peacemaking and how women influence, it is not a message of closing the gender gap. While women may be able to use gendered perceptions to their advantage, and sometimes they must lean into them to make progress, these same perceptions stem from and reinforce patriarchal assumptions about women's role as more, caretakers and peacemakers.

The ability of women to leverage these perceptions is not an achievement of gender equality. Indeed, the reliance on stereotypical roles for women to gain influence speaks to the persistence of gendered institutions. These institutions may now include women more readily, but by allowing women influence due to their "non-threatening" or "familial" nature, men are failing to fully value women's leadership unless it conforms to preconceived notions of femininity. The women interviewed demonstrated remarkable agency and resilience, using their gender as a tool in mediations. But their agency is constantly shaped and bound by structures that expect them to mediate "like women" rather than recognising and valuing them simply as mediators.

**Women Substantive Participation**

In the literature, women's substantive representation in politics and their substantive participation in peacemaking typically refers to the ability of women representatives or participants to act on behalf of other women, primarily by championing so-called "women's issues" or by ensuring references to women and girls are included in policies and peace agreements (Aggestam and Towns 2018; Paffenholz 2018a; Turner 2018, 2020). While this line of research has provided important insights and contributed to advancing gender-sensitive peace processes, it also risks inadvertently reinforcing the very essentialism that much of feminist research seeks to contest. The implicit assumption that women are primarily, or exclusively, present to represent the interests of other women flattens the diversity of women's lived experiences and overlooks the many ways women exercise power, authority and influence beyond gender-specific advocacy. Moreover, it ignores the intersectionality of every woman. Women do not enter peacemaking spaces solely as spokespersons for their gender; they employ multiple, intersecting identities shaped by class, race, nationality, religion and other social positions.

Rather than evaluating women's presence only through the lens of whether they "act for women," this article advocates for a conceptual shift. It reframes the discussion on women's substantive participation in peacemaking by narrowing the question from how do women influence for women? to the more foundational question of how do women influence?

Substantive participation reflects the extent to which women can influence decisionmaking, set agendas and shape outcomes in peacemaking processes, irrespective of what that influence manifest as. Whether women champion gender-specific issues, promote community interests, advance political compromises or reshape peace process dynamics more broadly, the core concern is not what they influence, but whether and how they influence within the constraints of the structures they work in. This approach seeks to move feminist institutional analysis beyond assumptions of gender essentialism and toward a deeper understanding of women's agency within complex, gendered institutional environments.

## The Twelve Peaceful Women

This research draws on semi-structured, Zoom interviews with 12 women with experience in UN mediation and peace processes, representing diverse roles, regions and backgrounds. These participants were selected based on their direct involvement in UN mediation efforts, their expertise in peacemaking and their professional experience in negotiating peace agreements. Several of the interviewees have chosen to remain anonymous and therefore they have been assigned a vague title. The number of women who have such experience at such a high level are limited, therefore steps have been taken to ensure they are not identifiable.

### *Gender as Leverage*

A significant advantage women have in peace negotiations is their ability to be perceived as unthreatening. This perception can lead to more open dialogues with parties involved in conflict, who may view women mediators as less intimidating than their male counterparts, which can lead to incredible gains in the peace process. UN Deputy Special Representative van de Perre said:

> *I have found that it is much easier for a woman to negotiate with terrorists, armed groups, rebels, than it is for men. When a man tries to negotiate the same thing that I would, then they get a lot of push back, things get aggressive, they start shouting at each other, etc. They don't do that they same way with a woman, and they give them a lot more leeway. So, you're able to very sneakily get things done because you somehow get more respect and less aggression, and it really is a conducive environment to come to agreement.*
> (UN Deputy Special Representative Vivian van de Perre, interview, July 9, 2024)

This example shows how women mediators often find that their gender allows them to engage in discussions more freely, as parties are less likely to respond with aggression or hostility. Another interviewee confirmed: "… because I'm a woman I get away with saying things to them that probably if I was a man, I would be shot" (Dr. Marie Breen-Smyth, interview, June 21, 2024). In contexts where tensions run high, the ability to create a non-threatening environment is crucial, particularly in peace negotiations where mistrust and hostility often dominate.

***Women are non-threatening***

Women can leverage their gender to disarm aggressive postures, allowing them to engage with parties who might otherwise be resistant to dialogue. This skill becomes even more invaluable when we consider that their unique positioning often enables them to gain access to influential figures within conflict scenarios, such as warlords, terrorists, and rebel groups, who might be closed off to male mediators. These findings align with two previous studies undertaken by Catherine Turner, which argue that women are often seen as non-threatening, granting them unique access and leverage in tense situations by allowing them to build trust and navigate hierarchical male environments without competition, reinforcing existing policy literature (2018, 2020).

Women in peacemaking roles can also benefit from the perception of being a family member or a maternal figure, the latter of which can hold significant cultural weight in certain societies (Kaufman and Williams 2010). One woman said, when she was a young woman and engaging in negotiations, she was "treated…like a granddaughter, in the nicest possible way… you're kind of helping your grandfathers" (International Conflict Resolution Practitioner 8, interview July 26, 2024). Another said she "was a bit like the mama. And I don't… say it in a negative way" (Senior UN Mediator, interview, September 27, 2024). This perception can create an environment where warring parties are more willing to listen to women and consider their perspectives. In many cultures, women are seen as nurturers, and this aspect can be leveraged to foster dialogue and understanding.

During negotiations in post-conflict settings, women mediators have used their perceived roles as caretakers to encourage male leaders to consider the needs of women and children affected by conflict (Caprioli 2000; Anderlini 2007; Adjei 2019). An example from one of the interviewees, who is a senior government official with extensive diplomatic experience and several years of service in UN field missions, is when she convinced a government official "to be supportive of women's literacy, because that would allow them to read the medicine bottles for their children, which would allow healthier Afghan boys and girls growing up" (Senior Government Official, interview, August 28, 2024). It is a doubleedged sword: women are often relegated to "just" being caretakers and mothers, but this characteristic can also be an asset in peacemaking and mediation (Caprioli 2000; Porter 2000; Moola 2006; Anderlini 2007; Turner 2018, 2020; Adjei 2019).

Women mediators often have the ability to connect with civil society women, who can also open doors to the rebel leaders, armed groups and warlords if the women mediators are in a situation where their label as outsiders or foreigners and UN representatives is perceived negatively by the warring parties. Being a woman is not just an asset with the non-state actors, but also with the government officials. A woman with decades of experience in peace processes and peacemaking, including with the UN, described how her close relationship with the wife of one of the senior government officials during a UN peace process was an opening to building trust and forming a relationship with the government officials in an informal and more casual way that was an asset to the peace process (International Conflict Resolution Practitioner 8, interview, July 26, 2024).

### *Women Have Unique Access to Civil Society Women*

In addition to fostering trust and building relationships, women mediators often find that they can navigate sensitive issues with greater ease than their male counterparts. In many conflict situations, local women may be reluctant to engage with men due to cultural norms or past experiences of distrust. This dynamic can create barriers for male mediators trying to reach out to local women or address gender-specific issues. This is particularly relevant in conflict situations where there are high levels of sexual violence. Moreover, the voices of civil society women are integral to a durable and sustainable peace process but are rarely heard, let alone listened to.

The advantage of women connecting with civil society can be illustrated through the experience of UN Deputy Special Representative van de Perre when mediating in the DRC. As she describes it, women are "very wary of men, especially men in uniform, whereas for me, it's very easy to go and speak with them and they open up and tell you their real experiences" (UN Deputy Special Representative Vivian van de Perre, interview, July 9, 2024). Being a woman allowed her to gather crucial information about the needs and experiences of local woman, which can then be reported back to the mediation team and the negotiating parties.

Several of the interviewees explained how integral civil society women have been to their peacemaking processes: "they have been instrumental in talking to the armed groups… and the warlords" (UN Deputy Special Envoy Najat Rochdi, interview, August 8, 2024) and "the civil society women are like the real heroes and sisters and the mothers of these rebel groups" (International Conflict Resolution Practitioner 5, interview, July 1, 2024). Although women have historically been marginalised and excluded from formal peace processes, it is often that without the roles they play, the peace processes would either never have started/restarted or resulted in a signed peace agreement (Turner 2018).

We need the perspective of civil society women because women UN mediators likely do not have the experiences of civil society women from conflict areas, so they are unable to accurately reflect those wants and needs in a peace agreement. Their ability to engage directly with women affected by the conflict allow for a deeper understanding of the issues at hand, leading to the inclusion of provisions addressing women and girls in peace agreements, highlighting how women's participation can lead to more comprehensive and representative outcomes (Aggestam 2018; Aggestam and Svensson 2018; Paffenholz 2018a; Krause and Olsson 2022).

Despite pervasive gender biases, norms and stereotypes that often label women negatively, being a woman can offer unique advantages in peace processes. Women are often seen as less threatening, enabling them to initiate conversations that male mediators may struggle to access with warring parties (Turner 2018). Their identification as maternal or familial figures also fosters trust and connection, particularly among other women within communities. This perceived relatability allows them to build relationships crucial for lasting peace (Turner 2020).

However, this advantage is a double-edged sword: while women can be uniquely effective as mediators, rising to such positions remains exceptionally challenging due to entrenched gender dynamics, power structures and patriarchal norms. The very qualities that make women effective in

peacemaking also hinder their access to leadership roles in mediation. Thus, while women may have a distinctive edge in peacemaking, achieving a role as a UN mediator continues to be an uphill battle because even within formal structures, it is often informal relationships and gendered social expectations that determines who has power and who is included.

***When Gender is a Neutral Factor***

While there are advantages to being a woman in peacemaking and UN mediation, there are also contexts in which being a woman is not a defining factor. Instead, in certain situations, the mediators' affiliations with an organisation, the warring party's pre-determination that they would not be negotiating no matter what or other aspects of one's identity, such as age or class, held more weight than gender. The women interviewed are from nearly every corner of the world, are from various backgrounds, with diverse educations, and are of different generations and ages. Several of the women have worked on the same peace processes, in the same UN missions and in the same positions.

While they all acknowledge that being a woman in UN peacemaking and mediation involves navigating stereotypes, that "we all have a million stories about being treated in ridiculously sexist ways and being talked down to and being mansplained" (International Conflict Resolution Practitioner 8, interview, July 26, 2024), the way they speak about their work as a mediator conveys a different message: when their gender is not benefiting them, it is also not inhibiting them. That is not to diminish the daily experiences of women everywhere, especially at other levels of peacemaking, or to say that being a woman no longer matters once you earn a certain level of authority, it is just to recognise how those in formal, Track I mediation process seems to focus on different characteristics of a mediator beyond gender.

Before delving into the situations where gender is not of concern in a mediation process, it would be amiss not to note that women mediators in the formal, Track I mediation processes still receive comments like "who's this girl," from senior officials (International Conflict Resolution Practitioner 8, interview, July 26, 2024). They are in no way immune from sexist comments. Additionally, the inclusion of women is still often treated like a box ticking exercise. What is interesting and important to note is the same interviewee who described the experience of being talked down to also stated "that often the defenders of me have been senior Sudanese officials or senior Nigerians" (International Conflict Resolution Practitioner 8, interview, July 26, 2024).

Moreover, when asked about whether they interacted with many, if any, women in their negotiations, most of the interviewees said that was not the case and that they were often the only woman in the room or the process. While women as mediators or on the mediation team in Track I peace processes are not entirely unwelcome, and there are certainly more women involved than a decade ago, women as part of the peace negotiating teams of conflicting parties or the government are still rare and often unwelcome due to cultural and societal norms (Senior UN Mediator, interview, September 27, 2024). Thus, the influence of women's substantive participation in UN peacemaking and mediations as described by the interviewees are restricted to the high-level positions of UN Special Representative and Envoy, as well as their teams.

While formal inclusion efforts have enabled more women to attain high-level mediation roles, informal institutional norms – such as sexist attitudes, tokenistic inclusion and the rarity of women among negotiating parties – persist. Feminist research emphasises that gendered institutions do not operate uniformly; rather, gender intersects with other identity markers, shaping opportunities and barriers in increasingly complex ways (Ackerly and True 2010). Although some women mediators reported that their gender was either an advantage or a neutral factor for them once they achieve senior roles, their narratives still reflect the underlying resilience of informal, gendered power structures.

### *Who They Work For*

When women are part of a UN mediation process, their affiliation with the UN may be more important than their gender. This affiliation can also be either an asset or a detriment to their influence on the peace process. In many cases, the symbol of the UN holds significant weight, with the UN often perceived as a major global authority in international peace and security. This reputation can either serve as an advantage or a hindrance, depending on the situation and the perceptions of local actors.

On the one hand, being associated with the UN brings a level of respect and authority. This is due to the institution's historical standing and broad recognition. Ministers and officials, even in challenging political contexts, often grant UN representatives a level of deference due to their official status. Brandishing the UN insignia affords you a certain kind of status and respect in many peace processes. In the same vein, representatives from nongovernmental organisations may be viewed as less trustworthy compared to established institutions like the UN because local actors might question their motives or long-term commitment to the process.

However, this affiliation can also be a disadvantage. For some, the UN symbolises foreign intervention and an implicit reminder of their nation's challenges or perceived failures in maintaining peace. The presence of a UN mission in a country often signifies an inability to solve domestic issues without international support, creating a sense of failure or dependency. This view can cause resistance from local leaders or negotiating parties who may see UN representatives as outsiders with biases, unable to fully understand or address local needs.

In such cases, peace process participants may prioritise regional organisations, like the African Union, or place more weight on African voices, especially when cultural or regional authenticity is seen as essential for legitimacy. Consequently, a UN representative may find their input less welcome if it seems to conflict with local or regional interests, highlighting the complex dynamics of representing a global organisation in diverse contexts.

## The Importance of Intersectionality

Beyond gender, other aspects of identity, including age, nationality and background, often play significant roles in shaping a negotiator's influence and how they are perceived. The concept of intersectionality is essential in understanding how these multiple layers of identity interact and affect a negotiator's experience in peace processes (Ackerly and True 2010). A negotiator who is young,

for instance, may struggle to gain the same level of respect as an older, more seasoned counterpart, regardless of gender.

Dr. Marie Breen-Smyth stated: "A young woman going in there, chances are she'll get sexually harassed, you know? I mean, that's the world, that's the world we work in. So, it's kind of, it's almost as if you need to be old" (interview, June 21, 2024). In contrast, some situations may favour a younger representative, recalling the experience of one interviewee who was able to build trust and a relationship because her young age allowed her to be perceived as a granddaughter helping her grandfather.

Similarly, nationality can heavily influence the level of trust and acceptance one receives in different regions. UN Deputy Special Envoy Najat Rochdi explained that "I am from the region, and when it comes to Syria, it's very important to speak Arabic and it's very important actually to understand the mindset and it helps establishing contact and a dialogue" (interview, 8 August 2024). An individual who is not from the country, region or continent in which they are working may face suspicion or resistance, especially in peace processes where regional voices are prioritised.

However, in some contexts, being an outsider can be an asset, as it allows a negotiator to bring an impartial perspective, particularly in conflicts where local actors are heavily invested. Dr. Sara Cook, a mediator and conciliation specialist with experience working with the UN, stated that: "I think I was invited into that work because I was an insider outsider" highlighting that her familiarity with the conflict was an asset while her lack of "a horse in the race" allowed her to maintain an impartial identity that was valued (Dr. Sara Cook, interview, June 19, 2024).

The nature of being a woman in peacemaking offers distinct advantages; however, gender is not always the primary factor impacting one's effectiveness in this field. The ability to be perceived as unthreatening, connect with civil society and leverage cultural perceptions can enhance women's roles in mediation. In instances where warring parties are more concerned about a mediator's affiliation with a powerful organisation rather than their gender, the dynamics shift. These shifting dynamics illustrate how informal institutional norms related to intersectionality can be just as influential as gender, shaping access to influence and legitimacy in ways that formal institutional reforms alone cannot fully address.

**Resistance to Negotiations**

While gender can sometimes shape perceptions of a negotiator's authority or competence, there are instances in high-stakes negotiations where it becomes nearly irrelevant. In cases where parties are unwilling to engage in good-faith negotiations, the identity of the mediator, including gender, age or background, is secondary to the broader dynamics at play. A senior government official described her experience as a UN mediator with the Taliban as: "You could have put an elephant across the table negotiating with them from some country or other because they didn't care… they were not going to listen to foreigners" (Senior Government Official, interview, September 17, 2024). Here, the primary barrier to progress is the lack of commitment from the opposing side, rather than the negotiator's gender or affiliation, demonstrating how deeply rooted hostilities or resistance to external influence can make it nearly impossible to engage productively.

If parties are unwilling to negotiate regardless of whether the mediator is a man or a woman, the impact of gender on the mediation process diminishes. In such scenarios, the effectiveness of mediation often hinges on the mediator's ability to navigate political landscapes, rather than their identity. Moreover, there are contexts where local knowledge or being an outsider can be more crucial than gender. Mediators who have strong ties to local communities or those who come from outside the conflict zone can offer unique perspectives that resonate more deeply with warring parties. In situations where understanding local dynamics is paramount, gender may play a less critical role. The seeming irrelevance of gender in high-stakes negotiations illustrates how other informal norms, like nationalism, distrust or others or political resistance, can temporarily supersede gendered dynamics. However, even when gender appears neutralised in these contexts, it does not diminish the broader structural importance of gender within institutions.

Gendered power relations remain embedded in both formal structures and informal practices, shaping access to opportunities and perceptions of authority (Thomson 2018, 2019). The fact that gender becomes secondary in certain situations highlights not the disappearance of gendered institutions, but rather their coexistence with, and intersection alongside, other powerful informal norms. In this way, feminist institutionalism argues that understanding when and how gender is made visible or invisible is crucial to analysing how institutions both adapt to and reproduce broader systems of inequality (Ackerly and True 2010).

**Conclusion**

The women interviewed generally did not anticipate careers in peacemaking and mediation; for the majority, their involvement appeared to occur organically or unexpectedly. They were either destined to get involved in peace and conflict because they were born in conflict-affected areas, while others fell into it because their initial unforeseen experience in a conflict-affected area piqued their interest. Nevertheless, they had a few pieces of advice to pass on to those who do wish to pursue a career in mediation.

First, take every opportunity, particularly those involving more dangerous roles. This advice aligns closely with the need to embrace risks. These are ways to demonstrate that women are just as capable, as well as it essential for women to gain recognition in the field. Moreover, the traits of a good mediator were identified as the ability to listen and be impartial, humble and flexible. Finally, when the inevitable sexist comments occur, as a good mediator and diplomat, one must respond with composure and turn such moments into opportunities to challenge stereotypes.

In the complex and often delicate field of UN mediation, women encounter a distinctive array of opportunities and challenges that their male counterparts may not face. There are situations that are unique to being a woman, but there are also situations in which being a woman had no bearing on their experience. While being a woman in many scenarios can be a disadvantage due to entrenched gender bias and the patriarchal society we live in, being a woman can also be an advantage. As both insiders and outsiders, women bring distinctive perspectives and strengths to peace processes. They can often leverage their perceived neutrality, unthreatening presence and ability to connect with vulnerable groups. These perceived advantages can also lead to limitations. Ultimately, however,

one's identity as a woman is never the sole determinant of effectiveness or influence in mediation contexts, as gender is only one aspect of identity.

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# Re-evaluating the Zenana: Women and Politics in *The Women's Courtyard* and *Azadi*

**Smera Khandelwal and Sahin Shah**

The 1947 Partition marked the re-mapping of South Asia that created new borders and gave birth to nations of India and East and West Pakistan. This period witnessed a tumultuous sequence of events characterised by widespread violence, political polarisation, and mass displacement. While the narrative of 1947 celebrates the successful attainment of independence, it also unfolds as a gendered account of displacement and dispossession; of large-scale and widespread communal violence; and of the realignment of family, community and national identities. Kamla Bhasin and Ritu Menon, in their book chapter *Speaking for Themselves: Partition History, Women's History* (1998), explored the dual experience of women during the Partition.

The first dimension delves into how the lives of those not directly involved in the political sphere are shaped by such epochal events. The second facet examines how women's experiences provide a lens for critiquing political history and offer alternative perspectives for its narration. Furthermore, they referred to Jason Francisco (1996) to show how fiction as a genre has been able to portray the "rupture, protest and repair" surrounding partition better than any other genre (Bhasin & Menon, 1998, p. 7). This body of literature delves into the complexities of the Partition, exploring not only its political dimensions but also its metaphoric and symbolic significance. The depiction of the Partition in literature extends beyond mere historical accounts, bringing attention to the plurality of human experiences and challenging the arbitrary nature of nationhood, addressing issues such as class, gender, and religion, as seen in works like Shauna Singh Baldwin's *What the Body Remembers* (1999) and Amrita Pritam's *Pinjar* (1950).

Through fiction, the fragility of humanity and the extremes to which individuals may stoop are vividly portrayed, prompting readers to reflect on the concept of civilization itself. However, mainstream historical and literary narratives around the 1947 Partition tend to reinforce dominant narratives that are male-centric, which positions women as subordinates to men such as observable in Bhisam Sahni's *Tamas*, Khushwant Singh's *Train to Pakistan* and Chaman Nahal's *Azadi*. There is a noticeable dearth of accounts from women, children, and other marginalised groups. Women's presence tends to be highlighted primarily when their bodies become the focal point of institutional violence. Within Partition literature such as Chaman Nahal's *Azadi*[1] (1975), women are frequently depicted as passive and bereft of influence. *Azadi* which vividly recounts the pre- and post-Partition experiences of a Hindu family led by the patriarch Lala Kanshi Ram, migrating from Pakistan to India, women are portrayed as devoid of political engagement and lacking autonomy. The gates of political discussion are barred to them. At moments when we see the patriarch indulging his wife

[1] *Azadi* translated as freedom by author.

Prabha Rani in political news, he does so from a position of power and patronage. In contrast to this, in Khadija Mastur's *Aangan*/ *The Women's Courtyard* (1962), the protagonist navigates the challenges faced by women confined to courtyards as their husbands and sons participate in anti-British rallies. Despite being subjected to men's actions without recourse, the novel challenges and subverts prevailing notions about women as silent figures. In various capacities, female characters like Chammi and Aaliya in *The Women's Courtyard* seize agency and venture into the political arena, although within the confines of their courtyard.

The body of Partition literature becomes a space of resistance that challenges narratives of identity, power, and belonging. Alok Rai (1986) argued that literature that emerged from the events of 1947 has been effective in terms of challenging and subverting the binary of India/Pakistan as it is one of the significant "non-official" sources of contemporary events (p. 322). In that context, both the novels attempt to expose the oppressive and nationalist discourses and the various forms of political violences that have been bequeathed to the subcontinent through the Partition. *Azadi* focuses on the physical violence in the outside world and ignores the internal conflicts of families. The house is bereft of politics as if women were not even aware of the upheavals of the outside world. Rejecting the *ad nauseam* argument of female apoliticality, *The Women's Courtyard* takes the readers inside the *zenana*[2] to display the fierce political debates and switching allegiances of teenage as well as adult women. Mastur's female characters don't sit back for the men to educate them about national politics, rather they argue and question the former's politics and demand justification. The characters challenge and defy traditional stereotypes assigned to women in times of instability. They emerge as voices that resist the conventional portrayal of women as silent, apolitical, and lacking agency, thereby critiquing the position of *Azadi.*

To understand the difference in the treatment of female characters in both *The Women's Courtyard* and *Azadi*, the paper employs a feminist close reading and comparative literary analysis as its primary methodological approach. The theoretical frameworks of Edward Said's theory of 'filiation and affiliation', Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's (1988) idea of the 'doubly subaltern', and U.R. Ananthamurthy's (2006) idea on 'backyard and front yard' are deployed not just as descriptive tools but as **critical analytical lenses** that elucidate how female characters navigate the tumult of Partition. The analysis highlights the exploration of how identities, particularly those of women, undergo fragmentation, alteration, transformation, and modification within the narratives of the two novels.

**Filiation and Affiliation: A Non-linear Relationship**

In his introduction to his discursive work *Secular Criticism to The World, the Text, and the Critic* (1983) Edward Said articulates the difference between filiation and affiliation in relation to the critic. Said defines filiation as "the culture to which critics are bound [...] (by birth, nationality, profession)" and affiliation as "a method or system acquired [...] (by social and political conviction, economic and historical circumstances, voluntary effort and willed deliberation)" (p. 25). Said

[2] *Zenana* is a place reserved for women exclusively (translated by author).

explores the intricacies of relationship dynamics, associating filiations with what is perceived as "natural" and affiliations with elements of "culture." He posits that social entities like institutions and communities, once believed to be biologically predetermined, now operate as affiliations, offering connections that were once believed to stem from natural, biological bonds. Agreeing with Said, McCaulay Joann Singer-Milnes in *Failed Protection: Literature's Criticism on the Partition of India* (2014) underscored the evolving nature of social connections and their shift from biological foundations to culturally influenced affiliations (p. 8).

Edward Said, in articulating the distinction between filiation and affiliation, posits a developmental process whereby individuals commence with filial connections and progress towards affiliations. This progression implies that basic forms of identification evolve into more nuanced and complex senses of belonging, suggesting that the filiation-to-affiliation process is temporal and unidirectional, shaped by accumulated experiences over time. Edward Said recognizes the fluidity of assigned and chosen allegiances over time, noting that the distinction between what is seen as inherent and what is cultural can sometimes blur or become less rigidly separated in specific historical periods. By portraying affiliations as significantly "transpersonal forms," Said implies that the individual connection with the nation goes beyond personal encounters and becomes a shared collective experience.

This distinction between personal and cultural connections isn't always clear-cut; historical events like the Partition challenged this separation. The Partition caused shifts in borders and the formation of new nations, influencing individuals' identities. The dominance of a singular culture fragmented into multiple cultures linked to different nations, blurring individual associations with a single nation. This challenged the idea of a linear progression from filiation to affiliation. Instead, the Partition led to complexities where people's identities were influenced by both their inherited ties and their conscious choices within the newly established nations. Those who chose to stay in India, or what became Pakistan, rather than migrating complicated the alignments with the nation-state by making them a product of choice rather than birth. Similarly, individuals subjected to forced migration encountered a compelled disturbance in their self-identity, causing an external imposition that obscured the delineation between inherent ties and externally imposed affiliations.

In Nahal's *Azadi*, the narrative unfolds the migration from Pakistan to India, depicting a shift in the Hindu and Sikh characters' filiation to Pakistan, which transforms into an affiliation with India following the division of the Indian subcontinent on the basis of religion. Arun, a teenage boy, had initially been willing to convert to Islam for his lover, Nur, with hopes of a future marriage. However, with the unforeseen announcement of Partition spreading, he reconsiders his decision, stating, "We may have to go away from here... To India. We may have to leave Pakistan" (Nahal, 1975, p. 95). The escalating danger for Hindus in Pakistan compelled Arun and his family to migrate. Faced with this challenging situation, his filiation shifted to religious affiliation as he chooses not to stay and convert but instead decides to leave his home in Pakistan, leaving his beloved Nur behind.

Another example of a profound shift from filiations based on religion evolving into strong affiliations during the religious divide of the subcontinent can be witnessed through the character of

Niranjan Singh. As a Sikh man from Pakistan, he was compelled to cut his hair while migrating to India to escape targeted killings and ensure his and his family's safety. This act, however, went against the tenets of the Sikh faith. Despite the pleas of his pregnant wife, Isher Kaur, as well as his father-in-law and grandfather-in-law, Niranjan adamantly refuses to compromise his religious principles by cutting his hair: "I'll give my life for your safety. Only please don't ask me to cut my hair" (Nahal, 1975, p. 247). Niranjan's deep filiation to his religion underwent a transformation into an extreme form of affiliation as he tragically takes his own life, crying out in agony: "Life I'll gladly lose, my Sikh dharma I won't" (Nahal, 1975, p. 262).

Yet the gendered nature of affiliation in *Azadi* became starkly visible when women attempted to participate in decisions of filiation and affiliation. When Arun urges his father, Lala Kanshi Ram, to flee Sialkot after a nearby village witnessed brutal violence against Hindus. When Prabha Rani supports her son's advice, stating, "He's right," Lala Kanshi Ram "ignored his wife and addressed himself to his son," continuing the argument as though she had not spoken (Nahal, 1975, p. 130). His ignorance carries significant weight as he does not refute his wife's position, nor does he even acknowledge that she has entered the conversation. He simply continues speaking to his son, thereby erasing her contribution through dismissal rather than disagreement. Prabha Rani advocates for affiliating with a safer place, yet her pragmatic assessment is treated as irrelevant to the family's political decision-making. This moment reveals that women's affiliations in *Azadi* are not merely constrained, they are rendered inconsequential to the decisions that will determine their own fates. Prabha Rani ultimately migrates not through her own decision-making but because her husband arrived at this conclusion independently, according to his own reasoning and timeline. The violent events that follow prove her initial warning to leave correct and the family had to flee under dangerous conditions, yet the vindication yielded no acknowledgment of her foresight. While male characters such as Arun and Niranjan demonstrated autonomy in negotiating their affiliations, Prabha Rani's affiliation was dictated entirely by patriarchal authority. Her relocation, therefore, reflected imposed fate rather than chosen identity.

However, the female novelist Khadija Mastur complicates Said's theory through her characters. Chammi, a character from *The Women's Courtyard*, in contrast, aligns herself with the idea of Pakistan and aspires to relocate there once the new state is established. Despite societal expectations that confine women to the courtyard and discourage them from expressing opinions, Chammi takes the initiative to organise rallies in the locality. Chammi's political activism operates through a paradox. Though purdah prevented her from attending the rallies she organised, she directed them from the courtyard, sending young boys as her proxies. Her agency thus functioned through mediation; her political will materialises in public space even when her body could not. Using her "meagre monthly allowance" to finance these gatherings, Chammi demonstrates both material sacrifice and steadfast conviction towards the forming of Pakistan. In a particular instance, Aliya advises Chammi against spending her money in the rallies. Chammi responds resolutely, declaring, "I will sacrifice my life for the Muslim League" (Mastur, 2018, p. 109). By adopting the rhetoric of martyrdom typically reserved for male nationalists, Chammi claimed political seriousness for herself, refusing the position of passive supporter and instead casting herself as potential martyr. Her allegiance to Pakistan appears so resolute that it suggests her only conceivable course post-Partition would be to relocate there. Nonetheless, her underlying filiation identifies her as a resident

of the territory, which, post-Partition, is referred to as India. Her decision to remain in India implies a shift in her affiliations—her former affiliation tied to advocating for the Muslim League and the envisioned creation of Pakistan is supplanted by a new allegiance.

The contrast between Prabha Rani with Chammi reveals how differently the novels treat women's political voice. Prabha Rani migrates by her husband's will; her political views, though expressed, influenced nothing. Chammi, by contrast, articulate her political position and enacted it through organizing rallies, even as gender norms prevented her attendance. The key difference lies in how each narrative treats women's speech: Nahal silences women's political expression while Mastur validates it as consequential despite the limits of *purdah*[3].

Aliya, the protagonist of *The Women's Courtyard*, is compelled to make a journey from India to Pakistan at her mother's behest. Despite her inner turmoil and reluctance to leave her home, Aliya feels compelled to accompany her mother, expressing her emotional struggle and the agony of departing from her familiar surroundings: "Uncle, I am all the support Amma has in the world, how can I abandon her? She is intent on going, but you don't know how much I will suffer on leaving this house" (Mastur, 2018, p. 326). Unlike Prabha Rani, whose migration was dictated by her husband's decision, Aliya chose to migrate out of a sense of filial responsibility toward her mother, though she remained conflicted about the new affiliations this choice entailed. This dynamic indicates that affiliations and filiations do not strictly progress in a linear direction. During times of socio-political upheaval, such as the Partition, there exists a blurred line between the two, showcasing the complexity and fluidity of identity transformations amidst tumultuous events.

This complexity and fluidity of affiliative identity is also represented in the Shyam Benegal's (1994) film *Mammo.* The titular protagonist undergoes a notable shift in her affiliations when compelled to relocate to Pakistan following her marriage, influenced by her husband's wishes. Initially, Mammo's filiation is deeply rooted in her connection to her motherland, as evidenced in her conversation with Riyaz. When questioned about why she left if she loved her homeland, Mammo passionately responds, "*Apne watan ki mitti ki khushboo kya cheez hoti hai*"[4]. This statement reflects Mammo's strong affiliation with her native soil. The change in Mammo's affiliation post-marriage is attributed to her husband becoming the patriarchal anchor, directing her life through his actions. As Sahin Shah and Jasmeera Kohli (2023) argued that following the death of her husband, Mammo tries to unshackle herself from patriarchy and nationalism. Her attempt to locate her home becomes extremely difficult as "her identity as a widowed Muslim woman in India, who migrated at the behest of her husband to Pakistan in 1947" complicates her identity and questions her allegiance (Shah & Kohli, 2023, p. 12). Since she is a woman without a child or a husband, she ceases to serve any purpose to "patriarchy or the masculine idea of nation-building". She becomes disposable and for her upkeep, "she has to work like a serf" (Shah et al., 2023, p. 12). This interplay of patriarchy, nationalism, and personal identity unfolds as Mammo seeks to redefine her sense of belonging and reclaim agency over her life.

[3] Purdah translated as veil by the author.
[4] *Apne watan ki mitti ki khushboo kya cheez hoti hai* translated by author as Nothing compares to the fragrance of one's land.

The examples discussed in this section reinforce a consistent pattern in which women's affiliations during Partition were both negotiated through and constrained by patriarchal authority, whether through submission to or defiance of it. While male characters like Arun and Niranjan could reshape their affiliations through conviction and choice, women's affiliations were often mediated by men's decisions, even when the women themselves displayed political awareness. This disjunction between women's political consciousness and their limited political agency reflects Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's notion of the "doubly subaltern." Building on this framework, the following analysis examines how Azadi and The Women's Courtyard depict subalternity within spatial confines: in Azadi, the domestic sphere operates as a site of political silencing, whereas in The Women's Courtyard, the zenana becomes a space of articulation. Having established the contrast between the mediation of women's national affiliations in Azadi and the forms of resistance in Mastur's text, the discussion now turns to how women articulate political positions within domestic confinement.

**Negotiating with Subalternity in the Private Spaces**

In Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's (1988) theory of the doubly subaltern, she examined the subaltern concept, particularly concerning women, who are marginalised and oppressed in society, often lacking a voice and agency. Spivak contended that subaltern historiography faces challenges in representing the subaltern, especially in understanding women's roles. In her essay *Can the Subaltern Speak?* (1988), Spivak articulated that within the erased trajectory of the subaltern figure, the impact of sexual difference is doubly significant. She stated that:

*The question is not of female participation in insurgency, or the ground rules of the sexual division of labour, for both of which there is 'evidence.' It is, rather, that, both as an object of colonialist historiography and as a subject of insurgency, the ideological construction of gender keeps the male dominant. If, in the context of colonial production, the subaltern has no history and cannot speak, the subaltern as female is even more deeply in shadow (Spivak, 1988, p. 28)*

Using Spivak's (1988) notion of the doubly subaltern, Chammi in Mastur's *The Women Courtyard* seems to emerge as a triply subaltern figure, grappling with the intersectionality of her identity as a teenage girl, a Muslim woman confined to the courtyard, and the absence of her biological father. However, Chammi's character illuminates the inadequacy of applying Spivak's (1988) framework without accounting for the crucial distinction between historiographical erasure and lived political consciousness. While Spivak's theory addresses how subaltern women are excluded from historical records, rendered voiceless in official archives and colonial discourse, Mastur's literary representation reveals what such records obscure: that subaltern women did engage in political action during Partition, even if their contributions were systematically unrecorded. Chammi boldly voices her political views, an act met with disapproval from her family members, to the extent that her uncle, with whom Chammi, a motherless girl, resides after being abandoned by her father, demonstrates authority by physically confronting her when his political beliefs are ridiculed, "How strangely he was asserting his authority over the household today, and just because his political beliefs were being mocked" (Mastur, 2018, p. 155). This incident prompts reflection: do women truly possess the right and freedom to express their opinions, even within the private confines of

their homes? Chammi's experience mirrors that of numerous female characters in Partition literature. Chammi's vocal political activism directly challenges Spivak's formulation by demonstrating that subaltern women could and did speak politically during Partition. She not only voices opinions but organizes rallies and mobilizes others; her speech generates political consequences despite her spatial confinement. However, Mastur does not naively reject Spivak's theory. The novel depicts violent consequences of Chammi's speech and her ultimately constrained agency. This nuanced narrative shows that subaltern women spoke politically within domestic spaces, but at personal cost and with uncertain effects. The implication is profound. When women participated in political discussion within domestic courtyards, these spaces themselves became arenas of political engagement. To overlook them, therefore, is to miss a crucial dimension of Partition politics. Female-authored narratives such as *The Women's Courtyard* redefine the boundaries of the political by revealing how dialogue, dissent, and activism also took shape within private, gendered spaces. They contest the notion that the household was detached from public life or that women's speech within it lacked political significance. While Chammi represents overt defiance, her cousin Aliya presents a more complex form of agency. Unlike Chammi's outspoken resistance, Aliya outwardly distances herself from politics; however, her deliberate and thoughtful approach to migration exposes a subtler mode of political awareness that is expressed through negotiation and restraint rather than confrontation.

Aliya, Chammi's cousin on the other hand, chooses not to engage in discussions around politics. Her aversion to politics stems from her father's involvement in the independence movement, which results in heightened tensions within her home and alters the family dynamics. An explicit expression of her disdain for political involvement is evident in the text: "She'd come to hate politics — *Abba's*[5] goals were so crude, but all the same, she loved him dearly" (Mastur, 2018, p. 98). Aliya's rejection of politics needs to be studied closely. The verb "come to hate" suggests that Aliya was not always apolitical but became so through experience. Perhaps it is not politics itself she hates but her father's engagement with it, which she characterizes as "crude." His deep involvement in politics tore the family apart, leading to him being imprisoned, while Aliya and her mother had to live at her uncle's house—a situation often regarded as disgraceful in wealthy, upper-caste South Asian communities, where living on another's charity implies social humiliation. The phrase "but all the same" shows that despite her political disagreement with her father, filial love persists. This is not apathy or ignorance, but a conscious withdrawal shaped by her intimate understanding of the personal costs of political involvement.

In another instance, when Chammi informs Aliya about the rally she is organising in her room and extends an invitation, Aliya firmly declines, stating, "Not me, Chammi, I don't like such things at all" (Mastur, 2018, p. 110). The firmness of Aliya's refusal asserts agency, but the vague phrase "such things" suggests she avoids mentioning politics directly, as if the very word is dangerous. Her silence is not ignorant, rather it is strategic. She understands politics well enough to turn away from

[5] *Abba* translated as Father by author.

it, having seen its impact on her family, and she chooses to keep her distance. Still, this decision to step back is itself political and later connects to her careful use of migration to avoid an unwanted marriage.

Aliya's choice to migrate to Pakistan at her mother's wish introduces complexities to Spivak's theory. Although she seemingly relinquishes her autonomy in decision-making by complying with her mother's wish, Aliya strategically navigates within the patriarchal framework. She utilises her mother's influence to relocate, effectively escaping an impending marriage to her cousin, Jameel. This decision reflects a nuanced compromise; a conscious choice aimed at securing future freedom. Aliya's resolve becomes more apparent when she rejects another cousin in Pakistan and chooses to be single. This rejection signifies a deliberate rejection of societal expectations and traditional roles imposed on women. This unfolding scenario unveils a hierarchical framework shaping the lives of women, wherein influence cascades from religion to nation, followed by the family (patriarchy), and societal norms, with the family, relatives, or community acting as enforcers. In the context of Aliya's circumstances, the absence of a male figure symbolising religious or national authority affords her a renewed sense of independence, freeing her from traditional constraints. Furthermore, her economic independence plays a crucial role, as her mother, being a woman herself, lacks the authority to enforce *purdah* on Aliya in this evolving social landscape. Pakistan's more conservative sartorial norms unexpectedly transform into a space of liberation for Aliya, owing to the absence of her immediate family.

On the other hand, in the novel *Azadi*, the female characters embody the concept of the "doubly subaltern" as they lack personal agency. They abstain from participating in political discussions and are stripped of the autonomy to shape their own destinies. Nahal's narrative in the book illustrates the migration from Pakistan to India, a decision orchestrated by the male protagonist for his family. Women, in numerous instances, find themselves neither listened to nor consulted for their opinions. They are left with no choice but to sacrifice their lives to manage their families. During periods of turmoil, their lives are upended, and they are relegated to the role of mere bystanders, compelled to witness the changes without having any influence over them.

One example of how gendered silencing of women in *Azadi* operates is seen through systematic dismissal and not through absolute voicelessness. As discussed in the previous section, when Arun warns his father that they must leave Sialkot after violence erupted in nearby Hindu neighbourhood, Lala Kanshi Ram refuses to accept this reality. When Prabha Rani supports her son, stating "He's right," Lala Kanshi Ram "ignored his wife and addressed himself to his son," continuing the argument as though she had not spoken (Nahal, 1975, p. 130). This brief assertion represents one of the rare moments when Prabha Rani voices a political opinion, yet her intervention is immediately nullified. This moment encapsulates the operation of double subalternity with devastating clarity. Prabha Rani does speak and Spivak's question "Can the subaltern speak?" receives a literal affirmative answer. However, her speech produces no effect; it is absorbed into silence through patriarchal dismissal. Lala Kanshi Ram does not refute her position or engage with her reasoning; he simply erases her contribution, proceeding with the male dialogue as if her voice had never entered the conversation. The narrative itself reinforces this erasure as Prabha Rani's opinion is reduced to two words while the men's political debate occupies extensive dialogue. This scene

reveals that in Nahal's construction, the political sphere remains exclusively male even within the domestic space of family discussion. Women might be present, might even speak, but their words carry no weight in shaping decisions that would fundamentally determine their fates. Prabha Rani eventually flees Sialkot not because she participated in the decision but because her husband eventually reaches the same conclusion—on his own terms, through his own reasoning, in his own time. Her predictive warning is retrospectively validated by events but never acknowledged as wisdom.

This pattern of erasure extends well beyond a single moment. Throughout the novel, Prabha Rani remains confined to the margins of the story, and readers learn almost nothing about her inner world. Her thoughts, fears, and desires are conveyed only through her roles as wife and mother. When Lala Kanshi Ram chooses to "indulge" her with political news, the term itself reveals the hierarchy in their relationship. He offers her access to information as an act of generosity rather than equality. Prabha Rani is allowed to listen but not to speak, to receive but not to interpret or challenge. In this way, the narrative itself reinforces her subordination, as male characters disregard her voice and the text provides her with little depth, limited dialogue, and a presence confined mainly to witnessing male actions. Moreover, Prabha Rani's relationships with other women such as Nur and Madhu remain scarcely explored. Unlike *The Women's Courtyard,* where female bonds shape both the emotional and political framework of the narrative, *Azadi* portrays its women as isolated within domestic spaces defined by their relationships with men, whether as wives, daughters, or mothers. This isolation intensifies their marginalization. Deprived of community and collective expression, each woman must face patriarchal authority alone and voiceless.

Similarly, Khushwant Singh in *Train to Pakistan* (1956) portrays how female characters, exemplified by Nooran, often lack political agency and involvement in decision-making during the tumultuous Partition. Nooran, a Muslim girl, finds herself compelled to migrate to Pakistan amidst religious tensions during the Partition. Despite her fierce declaration in front of her father, stating, "I will not go to Pakistan", he dismisses her resistance with the remark, "You may not want to go, but they will throw you out" (Singh, 1956, p. 81). Nooran resists leaving her lover, Jugga, as he has promised to marry her. However, due to her father's wishes and her constrained agency as a woman perceived primarily on her physical appearance, she challenges her position as doubly subaltern by presenting her argument. Nevertheless, she is ultimately forced to depart for Pakistan.

Mukanda's mother in *Azadi* is the only woman who chooses to stay back. Described as losing her sanity, she resorts to cursing and even physically resisting when others attempt to take her away on a truck. Amidst tears, she vehemently expresses, "I don't want to leave. They are taking me away from my Mukanda" (Nahal, 1975, p. 158). Her decision to stay is driven by her son being in jail. This singular instance of a woman exhibiting agency in choosing her nation is grounded in maternal concern. Nahal frames her refusal through madness rather than reason. Unlike male characters whose resolute decisions are portrayed as principled as seen in the case of Niranjan Singh's suicide for religious conviction, Mukunda's mother's choice is attributed to mental instability. This gendered framing suggests that women who defied patriarchal migration decisions could only be understood as insane; their agency is pathologized rather than respected. The novel thus permits female defiance only by rendering it illegitimate, locating it outside the realm of rational political

choice. Even this singular instance of female agency in choosing national belonging is undermined by the narrative's insistence on her madness, reinforcing rather than challenging the assumption that women lacked capacity for political decision-making.

These examples thus demonstrate that subaltern status is not uniform across Partition narratives. While Nahal's women remain largely voiceless and passive within domestic confines, Mastur's female characters speak, argue, and assert resistance even within the confines of four walls. The same domestic setting—the zenana, the courtyard, the inner rooms—thus produces contrasting outcomes: in Azadi, Prabha Rani's speech is ignored; in The Women's Courtyard, Chammi's speech provokes reaction, however violent; and Aliya transforms migration into a subtle act of political agency. This paradox, where the zenana functions both as a site of confinement and as a space of political articulation, invites a deeper exploration of how gendered space operates. U.R. Ananthamurthy's spatial theory of the backyard and front yard offers a useful framework for understanding this dynamic.

**Political Women in the *Zenana/ Backyard*: A Misnomer?**

U.R. Ananthamurthy delivered a talk titled *Towards the Concept of a New Nationhood: Languages and Literatures* (2006) in which he introduced the concept of the backyard and front yard in the context of South India. According to his theory, the front yard, dominated by men, serves as a centre for discussions on politics and worldly concerns, whereas the backyard serves as an informal space for women to engage in everyday conversations and gossip. Ananthamurthy asserted that writers are made in the backyard, "not in the front yard of civilization. The front yard produces professors!" (p. 10). In the context of Northern India, the concept of the front yard and backyard can be paralleled to that of *mardana*[6] and *zenana*, respectively. The two novels - Chaman Nahal's *Azadi* and Khadija Mastur's *The Women's Courtyard* - reinforce and negate Ananthamurthy's stance, respectively.

In Nahal's *Azadi*, the house's quadrangle serves as a backyard akin to Ananthamurthy's description. It is a space for women to exist as they are without having to mask their presence, as illustrated in this excerpt from the novel: "Since no men were around, neither of the women was wearing a headdress" (Nahal, 1976, p. 179). However, political discussions are absent in this domain. Women in *Azadi* use their courtyard as a common space to talk about everyday matters, displaying an apolitical stance. The only politics they are concerned with is the politics of their husbands because inevitably they are going to be affected by it. Some, like Prabha Rani, are not given the agency to voice their opinions, while some, like Nur and Madhu, don't care much about the political situation. This representation aligns perfectly with Ananthamurthy's gendered spatial division but treats it as natural, not patriarchal. Women's political thoughts remain inaccessible to the readers, as narrative focus enforces a divide between male-public and female-domestic spheres. When Prabha Rani voices a political view, the scene shifts to male dialogue, implying the courtyard cannot sustain

[6] *Mardana* is a place reserved for men exclusively.

politics. The space itself is thus depicted as antithetical to politics, not through explicit statement but through systematic narrative exclusion of women's political consciousness.

The concept of the backyard and front yard privileges men, granting them access to both areas where they can freely engage in gossip and political discussions respectively. Thus, Ananthamurthy's concept primarily reflects his own male perspective, with women's experiences being neglected. Women are barred from participating or even observing the political conversations happening in the front yard. Albeit, in *The Women's Courtyard*, the women are confined within the enclosed space of the inner courtyard/ *aangan*, traditionally lacking authority and opportunities beyond the confines of the inner courtyard. However, as previously discussed through Edward Said and Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's theories, Mastur's female characters emerge as vocal proponents of their opinions and beliefs, challenging established power structures. Mastur did not romanticise this political space to suggest gender parity because political speech was still constrained by purdah, limited by economic dependence, and vulnerable to violence. Yet, the novel insists that the courtyard acts as a political space for women and that the constraints don't negate political consciousness. Throughout the narrative, female characters actively engage with the courtyard, utilising it as a hub for various activities, including work, discussions on the deteriorating condition of both the household and the nation, and leisurely pursuits.

The character of Najma Aunty is a potent example who disrupts Ananthamurthy's viewpoint by embodying a contradiction within the conventional expectations placed on women confined to the *aangan*. Regardless of her gender and opposition from her own family members, Najma Aunty assumes the role of an English professor, diverging from the established stereotypes and societal norms. Her behaviour parallels that of an entitled man, frequently making condescending remarks about Urdu education while endorsing the superiority of English education. Despite belonging to the traditional 20th-century notion of the *aangan,* Najma displays a lack of solidarity with other female characters, diverging from the anticipated communal support among women in this setting.

**Conclusion**

The literary representation of the 1947 Partition has been predominantly male-authored, overshadowing women's voices and experiences and denying them significant space in literary and political discourses. However, female-authored works like Mastur's *The Women's Courtyard* deviate from this convention, presenting narratives where women exercise autonomy and engage actively with questions of politics and identity. In contrast, Nahal's *Azadi* confines female characters to conventional domestic roles. The *zenana* thus emerges as a contested political space, its representation varying dramatically between these texts. Nahal depicts it as apolitical, where even Prabha Rani's voiced political opinions are absorbed into silence through patriarchal dismissal and narrative erasure. Conversely, Mastur transforms the *zenana* into a legitimate site of political debate, where Chammi's activism and Aliya's evolving awareness of social change reveals women's capacity to think politically, even within spatial confinement. This paper has demonstrated that the Zenana, far from being an inherently apolitical space, becomes political or apolitical depending on whether female voices within it are narratively recognized or dismissed. While male-authored texts like *Azadi* erase women's political consciousness even when they speak,

female-authored texts like *The Women's Courtyard* reveal the courtyard as a site where political identities were actively negotiated, debated, and formed.

Three theoretical frameworks illuminated this divergence while simultaneously revealing their own limitations when applied to gendered Partition experiences. Said's notions of filiation and affiliation revealed that while male characters exercised autonomy, women's choices remained circumscribed. Yet Mastur's female characters resisted through organizing rallies and voicing opinions that provoked response rather than silence. Spivak's concept of the "doubly subaltern" showed women's compounded marginalization, but Mastur complicated this by representing women who spoke and resisted within subaltern positions. The critical insight was not that subaltern women could not speak, but that their speech was not recognized as politically meaningful. Ananthamurthy's spatial theory further exposed its gendered limitations. While *Azadi* reinforced assumptions that women's spaces were inherently apolitical, *The Women's Courtyard* demonstrated that the *zenana* functioned simultaneously as confinement and platform for political articulation, revealing female solidarity, debate, and collective consciousness. By re-evaluating the *zenana*, not as a site of inevitable female passivity but as a space where women's political consciousness emerged and was either recognized or erased, this paper deepened the understanding of how Partition was experienced, negotiated, and resisted across gendered lines.

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# The European Union's Pact on Migration and Asylum: Examining Colonial Influences and Gendered Vulnerabilities in Europe's Border Externalisation Policies

**Emily Law, Julija Sardelić and Ayca Arkilic**

**Abstract**

This article examines the European Union's (EU) Pact on Migration and Asylum as a case study to unpack colonial influences and gendered vulnerabilities in Europe's border externalisation policies. Drawing on previous literature on the connections between migration and colonialism, this article aims to demonstrate how the legacy of colonial history has contributed to the development of the EU's Pact as a hierarchical migration management system, with implications for access to protection for specific groups. Europe's border externalisation approach, as demonstrated in the Pact's border procedure and Crisis Regulation, sustains the hierarchy and privileged mobility of specific 'Global North' populations by preventing or heavily regularising the entry of most people from the 'Global South', especially from the former colonies of European imperial powers. As argued previously by many scholars, this fits the pattern of the sustained exclusion, hierarchical inclusion, discrimination and human rights abuses against people from former colonies through the securitised and racialised framing of migration. The article also notes that this policy has a gendered dimension, given that most refugees are women and children, and the EU's Pact heightens the vulnerability of this demographic instead of addressing or remediating it. Ultimately, by examining a contemporary example of ongoing colonial influence on contemporary migration management structures through a case study of the EU's Pact on Migration and Asylum, we aim to contribute to the scholarship on the coloniality of migration knowledge and intersectional approaches in migration and border studies.

**Keywords:** EU Pact on Migration and Asylum, gendered vulnerabilities, intersectionality, coloniality, Europe, border externalisation

## Introduction

'Global North' states are increasingly strengthening and extending the reach of their borders to prevent the arrival of 'Global South' asylum seekers to their territories (Isakjee et al., 2020), rather than focusing on the global entanglements that contribute to forced migration, such as persecution, violence and humanitarian crises, among others (Bužinkić, 2025). This aligns with the argument that, under neoliberalism, economic utility, security, and risk-control concerns drive migration governance more than humanitarian or democratic values (Brown, 2010; Walters and Cornelisse, 2010). Recent scholarship in migration studies has similarly shown that current causes of forced migration are not simply connected to the internal politics of countries where forced migrants originate, rather these migration trends are inextricably linked with the colonialism of (predominantly) Western European countries (Abuya et al., 2021; Mayblin and Turner, 2020; Benson and Boatcă, 2023; Collins, 2022; Chimni, 1998, for example). Moreover, international migration management structures, including the refugee protection system, have been designed based on historical European experiences of displacement, specifically after World War II. Even following a number of reforms, this system still has a dubious track record in extending protection to displaced people in and from the former colonised world of the 'Global South' (Abuya et al., 2021; Chimni, 1998).

What are the colonial influences on the current approach to immigration in Europe? This article investigates this question through a case study of the European Union's (EU) Pact on Migration and Asylum (the Pact), which, despite its language of protection, seeks to prevent asylum seekers from reaching the EU (Bužinkić, 2025). In 2016, as part of Europe's response to the 2015 refugee 'crisis', the European Commission put forward a series of proposals to reform their Common European Asylum System (CEAS) and implement a shared EU migrant settlement framework, to allegedly achieve their own values of human rights in international protection. In December 2019, EU ministers agreed that a new proposal for managing migration and asylum would be developed, involving a "whole-of-government and whole-of-route" approach (European Council, 2024). In 2024, the Pact was adopted by the Council and is scheduled to take effect in 2026 (European Council, 2024; European Commission, 2024). The finalised Pact consists of a package of ten legislative files outlining "a set of new rules managing migration … establishing a common asylum system at EU level" (European Commission 2024; IRC 2024). Proponents claim that this pact will "[deliver] results while remaining grounded in … European values" (European Commission 2024). However, the Pact has received significant criticism from numerous scholars (see Bužinkić, 2025, for example) and human rights organisations, as detailed further in this paper.

Human Rights Watch has called this new Pact a "disaster for migrants and asylum seekers" (Sunderland, 2023). They have assessed that this new set of regulations has terrible implications for human rights in the EU, as it gives countries greater manoeuvring space to rush asylum decisions through the bureaucratic process, as well as making it more difficult for refugees to apply for asylum in the first place (Woolrych, 2024). Amnesty International underlined the Pact's new processes and its externalisation approach, arguing that this will expose migrants to greater human rights violations by weakening protections and access to asylum for migrants, and by shifting greater responsibility for migration management to countries outside of Europe (Amnesty International 2024). The European Council on Refugees and Exiles (ECRE) argues that the Pact has an underlying strategy to

limit protection for refugees, exercising tools to restrict movement and reduce the frequency at which protection is offered to asylum seekers in Europe (Woollard, 2024).

In particular, the ECRE highlights the Pact's introduction of a mandatory border procedure. This involves compulsory identity, health, and security screenings for asylum applicants who are assumed to have intentionally misled authorities, are considered a security threat, or originate from countries with an asylum recognition rate of less than 20 percent (European Parliament, 2024; Tsourdi, 2024). Shortly after the Pact's adoption, 250 migration and asylum researchers from the Brussels Interdisciplinary Research Centre on Migration and Minorities signed an open letter opposing the Pact, particularly the introduction of the mandatory border procedure. They argue that this approach, which will fast-track the processing of asylum applications at the border and in detention facilities, is "unfeasible, … difficult to implement, … overtly inhumane, and will not achieve the goals" that the EU claims they want to see succeed (Hantson, 2024).

The Crisis Regulation is another proposal of concern for human rights advocates. It says that in situations of crisis of force majeure, including mass arrivals or the "instrumentalisation" of migration intending to destabilise a member state (European Union, 2024, p. 1), member states may derogate from specific responsibilities outlined in the Pact's Asylum and Migration Management Regulation; a system of solidarity intended to share responsibility for asylum application processing among member states (IRC, 2024; ECRE, 2021). The ECRE argues that the very inclusion of this regulation in the Pact normalises instances that should be exceptions. It encourages its application, resulting in adverse outcomes for asylum seekers and their protection, including by delaying registration and by extending and expanding the border procedure to deter, delay, and ultimately prevent the arrival of asylum seekers in the EU. This regulation creates open-ended opportunities for member states to evade their existing obligations under both EU and international law (ECRE, 2021, p. 4). These regulations and their impacts, among others, will be analysed further below. The Pact is a useful case study because of its recency (adopted by the European Council only in May 2024) and its breadth (establishing a common approach to migration management across all EU member states). The Pact also reflects the growing popularity of the externalisation approach to migration management globally (Pijnenburg and van der Pas, 2025).

Many scholars have already examined the influence of colonisation on Europe's historical and contemporary migration management, concluding that colonial perspectives have, and continue to influence modern migration structures and policy (Achiume, 2022; Collins, 2022; Abuya et al., 2021, for example). For example, their research demonstrates how contemporary borders are influenced by colonialism, concluding that borders are being used as tools to "keep the Third world out of the First" (Achiume, 2022, p. 475). This study builds on these works by exploring colonial influences on this new migration Pact and outlining the ongoing policy and human implications of such an approach.

This article aims to show that the influence of colonial history has (re-)produced a hierarchical migration management system, which has implications for access to protection for specific groups of people. Europe's border externalisation approach, demonstrated in the Pact in its border procedure and Crisis Regulation, for example, sustains the hierarchy and privileged mobility of 'Global North' populations by preventing (or strongly regulating) the entry of people from the 'Global South'. A

securitised, racialised framing of migrants from the 'Global South' leads to the sustained exclusion, discrimination and human rights abuses against people from former colonies. We also cannot ignore the gendered implications that the Pact has, as some scholars have also argued previously (Bužinkić, 2025), given that around half of all refugees are women (UNHCR, 2023a) and around 70 per cent are women and children (UNHCR, 2023b). We highlight that while the pact claims to give special attention to vulnerable populations, including women and children, it reproduces and even reinforces some of the challenges they face (Gerard and Pickering, 2014). Women (as well as children) have also been found to be more vulnerable to violence while in transit (Gerard and Pickering, 2014). By applying an intersectional lens to the experience of migration, or in other words, exploring the "[layered] experiences of discrimination and oppression that arise from intersecting social locations" (Cleton and Scuzzarello, 2024, 343), this paper also explores the heightened vulnerability of migrant women and children to human rights abuses and violence that are exacerbated by the EU's Pact, rather than addressed or remediated.

This study aims to highlight a contemporary example of ongoing colonial influence on contemporary migration management structures, through a case study of the EU's Pact on Migration and Asylum. It is informed by calls for the 'decolonisation of migration knowledge' (Collins, 2022) and seeks to highlight the harms of these prevailing epistemologies and the benefits of alternative perspectives. Theoretically, this research will also draw from intersectionality literature (Crenshaw, 1998; Cleton and Scuzzarello, 2024), as not all migrants face the same hurdles in their migration trajectories; these hurdles are dependent on the gender, class, and, inevitably, the racialised profiles of migrants.

This article will begin with a section on key terms used in this study. We will then provide a brief literature review on what is known about colonial influence on historic migration management, both in its practical implementation and in knowledge production. Subsequently, we will expand on the concept of border externalisation, highlighting the role of 'securitisation' in implementing such policies. Next, we will outline Europe's changing approach to migration management over time, explaining how increasingly strict border externalisation policies were adopted following the 2015 European 'refugee crisis', including the EU's Pact on Migration and Asylum. The analysis of this policy package will first outline the border externalisation policies it enshrines (i.e. its prioritisation of the exclusion of asylum seekers), identify the hierarchical approach to migration the Pact practices, and, finally, using Vimalassery et al.'s (2016) theory of 'colonial unknowing', demonstrate both the ongoing colonial influence on Europe's contemporary migration management and its consequences. We suggest that the implementation of these policies will result in the hierarchically differentiated treatment of migrant groups, manifesting in continued harm against asylum seekers from the 'Global South', particularly women and children, by maintaining hierarchies established by colonialism.

**Conceptualisation**

In this article, the term 'asylum seeker' is used to refer to all migrants who intend to seek international protection, as based on Article 14 of the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which enshrines the right for all people to seek asylum in another country (United Nations, 1948). This term does not exclusively refer to the preceding category of refugee status, but to any person forced to

migrate, including those fleeing circumstances outside of those identified in the 1951 Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees (the 1951 Refugee Convention).

In particular, this article is interested in the position of asylum seekers from the former colonies of predominantly European imperial powers. This study uses the terms 'Global South' and 'Global North' with caution. Their use is informed by scholarship that shows that (as with some other geopolitical terms, such as West and East, First and Third World), such terms are both contested and do not neatly align with the line between the former-colonising and colonised world (Mayblin and Turner, 2021), nor with complex geopolitical inequalities. However, we also contemplate some of the positions of the Third World Approaches to International Law (TWAIL) scholars who argue that refugee and forced migration scholarship is based on the 'myth of difference' that contributes to hierarchies of rights between 'European' refugees and refugees from the former colonies (Chimni, 2008).

Instead, this paper uses the terms to refer to the global division of privilege and exploitation that has been established by colonialism. According to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) Global Trends of 2024, the largest refugee situations are related to the countries mostly situated in the 'Global South', such as Syria, Congo, Sudan, Afghanistan and Myanmar, under UNHCR Mandate, and Palestinian refugees, who are (mostly) under the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) mandate (UNHCR 2025). The exception to this is Ukraine, another major situation from which refugees flee, but which is located in the 'Global North'. However, most refugees from Ukraine receive temporary protection in Europe (Sardelić, 2005, p. 2) and are therefore not among the continent's asylum seekers.

Intersectionality, as briefly mentioned, refers to the exploration of the "[layered] experiences of discrimination and oppression that arise from intersecting social locations" (Cleton and Scuzzarello, 2024, p. 343). Intersectionality considers interlocking systems of oppression and the invisible power relations that influence levels of inequality. This theory was initially developed by critical scholar Kimberlé Crenshaw (1998), who investigated the two-fold discrimination (racism and sexism) that Black women face. In migration studies, intersectionality can help explain how the diverse social locations and identities of migrants influence their experiences of migration, including access to protection for forcibly displaced individuals.

Europe's 'colonialism' refers to any European actions which resulted in exploitation and subjugation of 'Global South' states and people (Sierp, 2020); an imperial, parasitic relationship which created inequality and a hierarchy that benefits former imperial powers (Bhambra, 2022). We argue that the ideas and knowledge concerning these hierarchies established in this historical context continue to shape contemporary international migration management structures, experiences and regulations, such as the EU's Pact on Asylum and Migration.

Increasingly, scholars argue that ideas broadly accepted as the modern status quo are products of the context in which they were established. Quijano (2000) originally hypothesised this idea in a discussion about coloniality and contemporary global power structures. He contended that these structures were established in the context of historical colonial domination, establishing "the model of power that is globally hegemonic today" (Quijano, 2000, p. 533). Modern power structures,

therefore, "[presuppose] an element of coloniality" (Quijano, 2000, p. 533). Collins (2022) concurs with his definition of the 'coloniality of knowledge', which describes the privileging of European traditions in informing methodological approaches to, and assumptions about, topics such as migration (Collins, 2022, p. 1242). Collins argues that, as global powers during the time when knowledge about these structures was being established, the perspectives of European colonial powers defined the norms of international migration. In contrast, non-European experiences of migration, especially from the 'Global South', were simultaneously silenced (Abuya et al., 2021, for example). This privileging of European epistemologies thus sustained and legitimised the migration patterns and management strategies influenced by European knowledge and colonial history.

While historically, border management has concerned the protection of a physical frontier, states are increasingly adopting a 'shifting border', using legislation and policy to detach the border from its physical location in order to selectively restrict mobility from beyond its territory (Shachar, 2019, pp. 97–98). Externalisation can entail the screening of migrants at their source of origin, or the creation of deals between destination states and origin and transit states to contain migrants, for example (Achiume, 2022; Shachar, 2019). Deals of this type have been formalised between the EU and , the EU and Tunisia, the EU and Egypt, and Italy and Libya, seeking to prevent the irregular arrival of migrants into European territory (IRC, 2023; European Parliament, 2019; Reviglio, 2019). Crisp (2019) applies a broader scope to border externalisation, defining it as any actions taken by states to "obstruct, deter or otherwise avert the arrival" of migrants (Crisp, 2019; Murray, 2022, p. 46). Border externalisation, as defined in this paper, is an action that seeks to keep asylum seekers "as far away … as possible" from a specified destination (Achiume, 2022, p. 479).

**Colonial Influences on Contemporary International Migration Management**

There is much evidence of the impact of colonialism on historical and contemporary migration management policies and knowledge. For example, Abuya et al. (2021) consider the foundations of the United Nations' 1951 Refugee Convention and its influence on the contemporary international protection regime. Created in response to the mass displacement of World War II, this convention sought to ensure that those displaced or otherwise persecuted within Europe could provide access to safety in other locations by disentangling rights protection from citizenship. However, with colonial powers as the most influential geopolitical actors at the time and their societies built on a distinct racial hierarchy, these states did not seek the universal promotion of human rights. Not only did these states wish to maintain the primacy of their own people in a global racial hierarchy by providing these additional rights, but the idea of 'universal' rights was not primarily intended to apply to those persons outside of Europe, whom colonial powers saw as inferior to themselves. Thus, protection was limited to only those displaced within Europe before 1951. The 1951 Refugee Convention's 1967 Additional Protocol has since removed these temporal and spatial conditions to theoretically extend its application universally. However, many states remain sceptical of European bias and supremacy within this regime, as the formal refugee definition remains based on European experiences of displacement (Abuya et al., 2021).

Bradley's (2022) analysis of the International Organisation for Migration (IOM) provides another example of colonial influence on contemporary migration management structures. As an increasingly significant agent in global migration governance, working with states to promote humane and orderly migration, Bradley explains that "[the IOM's] creation and early activities also reflected and entrenched legacies of colonialism and related [racialised] inequalities (Bradley, 2022, p. 22). Bradley argues that the harm of the IOM's colonial legacy is not simply its involvement in nefarious migration practices (such as the facilitation of white migration to South Africa during Apartheid), but its failure to acknowledge these foundations, thus allowing "colonial continuities" to persistently influence the work of the IOM unchecked (Bradley, 2022).

European colonialism also contributed to the establishment of mobility regimes and technologies. Initially, migration policies such as slavery and indentured labour of racial capitalism sought to contribute to imperial prosperity before turning to enforcing restrictions, with the establishment of settler colonies and the introduction of race-based immigration policies (Achiume, 2022, p. 473). Early migration management technologies, such as literacy testing and passports, were employed to facilitate this exclusion. While ideas of citizenship, nationality and state sovereignty may be prima facie race-neutral, they were founded in ideas of exclusion, seeking to sustain the racial hierarchies created by colonial powers (Boatcă and Roth, 2016). Some migration policies were overtly racist, including the White Australia Policy. Introduced in 1901 and only abolished in 1975, it was a "government policy aimed at severely restricting non-European immigration and maintaining Australia's racial, cultural, and legal integrity as a white, British nation-state" (Tavan, 2023, p. 315). Contemporary migration governance is therefore inherently bound with racial governance and colonial histories (Achiume, 2022; Collins, 2022, p. 1242).

**European Border Externalisation**

Externalisation policies are typically accompanied by the 'securitisation' of migration, pairing policies with a "narrative of exclusion" created and circulated by the governments, media and citizenry of states. Securitisation frames migration as destabilising and dangerous, with asylum seekers positioned as threats to national security, economy, and identity, justifying their exclusion to prevent societal endangerment (Murray, 2022, p. 53). Prior to the 1990s, European migration policies were broadly open and welcoming, as a humanitarian approach to migration offered geopolitical advantages. During the Cold War, the admission of asylum seekers from Communist states to Western capitalist states was beneficial, as it highlighted dissatisfaction with the Communist regime. However, this approach changed once the tensions of the Cold War receded following the fall of the Berlin Wall, and the political benefits of accepting refugees depleted (Chimni, 1998, pp. 351–352).

Support for stricter migration control in Europe emerged in the 1980s with the arrival of the families of (formerly) temporary workers in Western Europe (Huysmans 2000). Global rates of forced displacement also increased dramatically, with the outbreak of a number of civil wars around the world, leading to growing numbers of asylum claims by 'new refugees' in European states (Orchard, 2014, p. 205; Chimni, 1998, pp. 351–352). At this time, the EU employed what Chimni (1998) calls the 'myth of difference', in which the inherent differences between the formerly white, European, anti-Communist refugee and the 'new refugee' were emphasised. The latter was believed to have no

legitimate grounds for protection and sought to deceive immigration authorities. It was also suggested that there were simply too many asylum seekers for Europe to be solely responsible for their protection (Chimni, 1998).

Furthermore, Huysmans (2000) argues that European integration and the establishment of its free movement zone motivated Europe's adoption of an externalisation approach. Diminishing internal border controls required the strengthening of external borders to retain control over who and what could enter this zone (Huysmans, 2000, p. 759). In 1995, the European Council distinguished between the right of free movement for European nationals within the EU's borders and that of third-country nationals, determining that such movement is the prerogative of the former (Huysmans, 2000, p. 754). In other words, the privileged mobility of white Europeans was dependent on the governing of the movement of "non-white others" (Collins, 2022, p. 3; Blancquaert, 2022). Thus, Europe adopted a securitised narrative of migration. Immigration and asylum became integrated into the policy realm of internal security, managed by the same legal frameworks that attend to terrorism and transnational crime (Huysmans, 2000, pp. 756–757). The events of 9/11 are considered a flashpoint in securitisation scholarship. For many policymakers, these attacks affirmed the necessity of linking the preservation of internal security to the control of immigration, thus facilitating the introduction of exclusionary migration policies (Huysmans 2006, 68).

The management of asylum seekers shifted from a humanitarian concern to an issue of national security, leading to Europe's adoption of an externalisation approach to migration management (Shacknove, 1993, p. 522). In particular, existing literature suggests that border externalisation specifically seeks to address threats posed by non-white migrants (Achiume, 2022, p. 478). In this way, borders reflect racialised anxieties within states, resulting in the exclusion of specific groups of migrants, based on the privileging of whiteness (ENAR, 2023; Achiume, 2022, p. 445).

**European Externalisation Following the 2015 'Refugee Crisis'**

Immediately after the outbreak of the Syrian civil war and subsequent regional unrest, approximately 1.3 million people submitted asylum claims in Europe in 2015, nearly doubling the previous record for annual arrivals (approximately 700,000 in 1992) (Pew Research Centre, 2016). Roughly half of all displaced and refugee Syrians are female (UN, 2018). In 2024, EU countries granted protection status to 437,900 asylum seekers, most of whom came from Syria, Afghanistan, and Venezuela (Eurostat, 2025).

Nicholas De Genova (2018) described the EU's response to what was dubbed the 'refugee crisis', as a 'racial crisis'. In response to increasing asylum applications in 2015, the EU sought to further develop its externalisation regime by creating a 'buffer zone' to restrict migrant arrivals via the Mediterranean Sea, beginning with the EU's 2016 international migration management deal with Türkiye (MacDonald and Arkilic, 2019, p. 26; Martini and Megerisi, 2023). This deal offered Ankara €6 billion from the EU and visa-free travel in return for Ankara's help. At the peak of the 'crisis' in 2015, Greece (a primary destination country for asylum seekers), received 861,000 arrivals. In 2016, following the signing of the EU-Türkiye deal, arrivals decreased to 36,000 (Terry, 2021). However, over time, arrivals have steadily increased again, notwithstanding a reduction between 2020 and 2022, during the COVID-19 pandemic (UNHCR, 2025). Moreover, the deal has worsened precarity through

externalisation and selectivity of migration (Demirbas and Miliou, 2023) and raised questions regarding Türkiye's status as a safe third country (Osso, 2023). Individual European states have established similar bilateral relationships, including Italy's 2017 Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with Libya. Italy provides financial support to Libya to aid its economic development and its migration management capability. Technological assistance supports Libya's border guards in intercepting migrants attempting to cross the Mediterranean and returning them to Libya (Reviglio, 2019). Similar deals were made by the EU in 2023 with Tunisia and Egypt, respectively, to further develop Europe's border externalisation (Khan, 2024).

Europe's leaders are eager to hail the success of these bilateral deals, including European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen, who applauded their effective reduction of migrant arrivals (Meiner and Niederfranke, 2025, p. 1). However, as mentioned above, irregular migrant arrivals have increased since the implementation of the EU-Türkiye deal (UNHCR, 2025), yet similar deals have since been introduced. At face value, these deals may appear to limit the number of irregular arrivals into Europe. However, discussing the EU-Tunisia deal, Meiners and Niederfranke explain that the truth is more nuanced. Statistical outliers of high migrant arrivals in some years allow the EU to claim a drastic decrease as a result of their involvement, as was the case in the summer of 2023. The personal motivations of African leaders to reduce migrant departures (internal pressures) also inflate European success but in reality are unrelated to European incentives (Meiners and Niederfranke, 2025, p. 1). Meiners and Niderfranke (2025) conclude that the reported impact of the EU-Tunisia deal, and other similar bilateral migration agreements, is overstated, yet remains a blueprint for European border externalisation. Similarly, although claimed to be successful, the EU-Türkiye deal created significant tensions between the parties, with Türkiye expressing concerns about responsibility-sharing, unfulfilled pledges, slow payments, and the heavy financial and logistical pressure of hosting a large refugee population (Ovacik et al., 2024; Okten Sipahioglu, 2024).

**Developing European Externalisation with the EU's Pact on Migration and Asylum**

In keeping with the EU's contemporary approach to migration management, border externalisation underpins the Pact's strategy. A central aim of externalisation is to evade the activation of protection obligations without technically violating international law (Achiume, 2022, pp. 476–479; Gerard and Pickering, 2014). This includes the commitments outlined in the 1951 Refugee Convention, requiring the protection of all persons seeking asylum within a state's territory, as well as the fair and legitimate consideration of their asylum claim. The Convention also prohibits the return of applicants to unsafe locations, otherwise known as non-refoulement (UNHCR, 1951). For states to avoid these obligations, they prioritise preventing the arrival of asylum seekers into their territory (Achiume, 2022, pp. 476–479), or, as Crisp (2019) put it, to "obstruct, deter or otherwise avert the arrival" of migrants (Murray, 2022, p. 46). The Pact employs a wide range of externalisation techniques aimed at limiting asylum seekers' entrance to the EU (ECRE, 2024).

The EU claims that the pact was established to create a codified, shared system of asylum for EU member states. However, critics argue that, in reality, rather than developing a shared European policy for the reception of migrants, the Pact establishes a collective approach against immigration (Carton, 2024; Bužinkić, 2025). For example, the Pact seeks to embed migration management into

the EU's international partnerships, further developing their existing international agreements, such as those with Türkiye, Libya, Tunisia and Egypt, to establish a "ring of protection" around the EU, preventing irregular arrivals from origin and transit migration states (Shachar, 2019, p. 55).

As mentioned, the Pact also introduces a new 'border procedure' as part of its strategy to "secure [the EU's] external borders" (European Commission, 2024; European Parliament, 2024). This procedure requires identity, health and security screenings for asylum applicants who are assumed to have intentionally misled authorities, are considered a security threat, or originate from countries with a low asylum recognition rate (under 20 percent) (European Parliament, 2024; Tsourdi, 2024). This procedure claims to improve the efficiency of processing asylum claims, using the screenings to steer applicants directly to asylum, return or refusal of entry procedures (European Parliament, 2024). However, it also functions as a self-fulfilling prophecy: it is EU Member States that make asylum determinations, in which they assess the international relations among countries, rather than just particular asylum claims of an individual. The asylum claims from the countries designated as safe therefore have a much smaller chance of success.

Scholars also fear that the implementation of this procedure will diminish the opportunity to claim asylum, as persons subject to the border procedure are not authorised to enter the EU. Instead, the process is conducted under the 'legal fiction of non-entry'; even if physically present within EU territory, subjects of the procedure are not legally present. Thus, they are not ensured the opportunity to file their asylum claims, as guaranteed by the 1951 Refugee Convention (Tsourdi, 2024). This clause reflects some critics' views that the Pact seeks to criminalise migrating persons, rather than protect them (Carton, 2024). The EU continues to assume that most asylum applicants do not actually require protection and asserts that claims with an unlikely chance of being accepted will therefore "be examined rapidly without requiring legal entry to the Member State's territory" (European Commission, 2020, p. 4; Woollard, 2024).

In addition to limiting applications, these expedited procedures risk procedural errors and mishandling, and time constraints may lead to applicants' protection needs being overlooked (Gazi, 2021). The border procedure also diminishes the applicant's right to appeal, limiting deadlines for challenges, likely resulting in deportation before claims can be reconsidered (Woollard, 2024). Even for successful asylum claims, the Pact states that while "applications made at the EU's external borders must be assessed as part of EU asylum procedures, they do not constitute an automatic right to enter the EU" (European Commission, 2020, p. 4). While states abandon the notion of fixed territoriality in applying their border externalisation policies, this clause demonstrates how, on the subject of protection obligations, states quickly return to the narrower, physical interpretation of their borders (Shachar, 2019, p. 98).

Under its Return Border Procedure Regulation, the Pact also outlines the transfer of refugees to third countries by lowering the threshold of required protection for a 'safe state' designation. It also seeks to broaden the 'internal protection alternative', which would allow safe zones to be designated within unsafe countries. Failed applicants could be returned to these locations, or their requests for protection could be denied based on the existence of such 'safe' zones, supposedly nullifying the necessity of their protection claims (Woollard, 2024). As mentioned, the Crisis Regulation constitutes another

tool to be used by EU member states to limit the arrival and provision of protection for asylum seekers, allowing member states to derogate from specific responsibilities outlined in the Pact's Asylum and Migration Management Regulation in situations of crisis or force majeure (ECRE, 2021; European Union, 2024).

In sum, the EU's Pact is premised on "an underlying strategy of limiting access to protection for [asylum seekers] in Europe" through the implementation of border externalisation policies (Woollard, 2024). These policies clearly outline the EU's intention to prevent the arrival of asylum seekers and thus evade the activation of its member states' legally mandated protection obligations, as signatories of international human rights conventions, including the 1951 Refugee Convention.

**Hierarchies in the EU's Pact on Migration and Asylum**

The EU's immigration management is hierarchical. As seen in the case of the Pact, the primary intention of this policy package is to prevent the entry of asylum seekers to the EU; it is not to prevent all immigration. Comparatively, 'talented' migrants are sought after, with the Pact, for example, establishing safe and legal pathways to attract high-skilled workers to the EU from non-EU states. Similarly, the immigration of international students and researchers is encouraged to increase the pool of academic expertise available to the EU's member states (European Commission, 2020). The EU's Pact on Migration and Asylum does not employ a neutral approach to immigration; each (type of) migrant is subject to a different experience of the EU's border (Bauder, 2017).

This hierarchical immigration preference, designed to include those who benefit European states, is not simply categorically discriminatory but, because of the colonial influence on Europe's migration management, racialised too. As already discussed, this privileging of white mobility was apparent in the EU's comparative response to 'new' refugees seeking protection during the Cold War. However, it is also apparent in Europe's more recent reception of Ukrainian refugees following Russia's 2022 full-scale invasion. The EU's reception of Ukrainian refugees was considered, by many proponents, an exemplary implementation of the international protection regime: states and citizens welcomed white Ukrainians fleeing conflict. These migrants were free from unnecessary border processing or other immigration procedures. Comparatively, the same countries that welcomed these Ukrainians with open arms rejected the arrival of migrants from the Syrian civil war and subsequent regional unrest in 2015, expressing racist, xenophobic, securitised narratives about these asylum seekers (Reilly and Flynn, 2022). This preferential treatment was evident in the inaugural activation of the EU's Temporary Protection framework for emergency migration events in 2022, which provided migrants with the temporary right to stay, work, and access social benefits. The EU chose not to activate this framework (and provide these temporary protections) in 2015 (Costello and Foster, 2022).

However, not all who fled from Ukraine were beneficiaries of this 'exemplary' reception. Third-country nationals of Africa and Asia fleeing Ukraine were reportedly subject to racist treatment and violence, prevented from boarding public transport in favour of Ukrainian nationals, and prevented from crossing borders into safe states (Reilly and Flynn, 2022; Carrera et al., 2022). Ukrainian nationals received a comparatively welcoming response because, as the Belgian Prime Minister explained, Europeans are "[not] afraid of these refugees" (Carrera et al., 2022). This demonstrates the

glaringly apparent double standards the EU employs when granting protection, and their securitised and racialised framing of asylum seekers from the 'Global South'.

Yet Ukrainian refugees are also subject to the hierarchical migration system and have been victims of anti-migration discrimination. While Temporary Protection status guaranteed the legal right to reside in the EU, this right was limited (initially) to one year and did not equate to the full and equal rights of the citizens of the EU states in which Ukrainian 'refugees' resided (Carrera et al., 2022). Far-right Dutch politician Geert Wilders, claimed that, in general, Ukrainians were arriving in the EU, not because of the war, but to dishonestly take advantage of social benefits, including free housing, healthcare and employment (Meijer, 2024). Some scholars have argued that Ukrainians are only welcomed to the EU as a source of cheap labour. Krivonos (2025) discusses how, following Russia's 2014 intervention in Ukraine, asylum proved an inefficient method for emigrating, many instead opting to find employment to regularise their stay in the EU. It resulted that many Ukrainians were engaged in "dirty, dangerous and precarious [work], sending money home to cover the gaps in state provision and [to] compensate for the damage of war and militarisation" (Krivonos, 2025, p. 494). Ukrainian migrant workers have since become a significant labour pool for Central and Eastern European states, largely in the "secondary sector" (Krivonos, 2025, p. 494). Roma (with Ukrainian citizenship, if not identity documents) were also subject to discriminatory responses. In what Stern (2025) calls a "new manifestation of the systemic and individual discrimination that has confronted the community for generations", Roma, in their experience of forced displacement from Ukraine, face the added burden of systemic discrimination, inequality and harassment (Stern, 2025). Indeed, their lack of identification documents prevented many Roma from accessing protection under the Temporary Protection scheme (Müller, 2022).

While the new Pact describes no nationality- or origin-specific exclusion, and its proponents continue to claim that it does not discriminate on the basis of race, the common origins of asylum seekers are statistically Asia and Africa. Thus, by prioritising the exclusion of people seeking protection, the Pact's approach to managing immigration is inherently racialised (ENAR, 2023) and "tailored to exclude refugees originating from predominantly non-white" areas (Achiume, 2022, p. 477). This approach produces a racialised "system of institutionalised oppression… maintained and reproduced by laws…, policies and racist ideology" (Cappiali and Pacciardi, 2024, p. 10). Fundamentally, European migration management, including the Pact, prioritises preventing disruption to the movement, preferences and rights of European people. Thus, Ukrainians are offered preferential treatment to third-country nationals and asylum seekers from the 'Global South', due to the racialised, securitised narrative of migration which informs European preferences. However, Ukrainians (including Roma) rank below EU citizens in this hierarchy, which informs the level (or lack) of protection that is offered to different types of immigrants to the EU.

Implementing this hierarchy in European migration management will very likely result in deaths at the borders (Hameršak, 2024). Because the Pact (and Europe's migration hierarchy more generally) diminishes available legal pathways for migrants forced to seek protection, options are limited to either the increasingly restricted asylum regime or irregular entry (Achiume, 2022, pp. 478–479). By criminalising and preventing their safe admission, asylum seekers from the 'Global South' are forced

by these policies to turn to more dangerous and often fatal irregular routes, such as maritime crossings (ENAR, 2023).

**Colonial Influences and Racialised Vulnerability**

Ongoing colonial influence on the EU's approach to migration management can be explained by the theory of 'colonial unknowing', which describes the failure to acknowledge the entanglements of contemporary racialisation with historical colonialism. Performers of 'colonial unknowing' view colonialism as a fixed and complete phenomenon, unable to see that historical experiences, ideologies and narratives continue to inform contemporary political structures, including migration policies (Vimalassery et al., 2016).

While World War II and the Holocaust, for example, are often discussed as part of Europe's history as unifying "negative founding myths", Europe's colonial past is ignored (Sierp, 2020, p. 692). Member states seem to experience a 'colonial amnesia', determinedly ignoring the destabilising effect their historic conquests continue to have (Owens, 2016). The inequalities that exist between Europe and other countries around the world are not natural. Rather, the circumstances that force people to migrate, including many ongoing conflicts, are (directly or indirectly) the consequence of the destabilising impact of historical colonial exploitation (Bhambra, 2015; Owens, 2016; O'Dwyer, 2018).

To openly accept and acknowledge the arrival of fleeing migrants from formerly colonised states would force Europe to reflect on its past (O'Dwyer, 2018). Bringing attention to colonial crimes could damage Europe's international relationships, normative power, and financial strength (as potential financial reparations for these past crimes, should they be determined by the same formula as the World Wars, would be enormous) (Sierp, 2020, pp. 691–692). Generally, it seems Europe does not wish to be held responsible for, or to draw attention to, its historic actions; it seeks to avoid disrupting the established hierarchy of modern structures that privilege the 'Global North' and its former colonial empires (O'Dwyer, 2018). Bhambra (2019) argues that this ignorance of Europe's colonial past, or the purification of its history, is what enables Europe to argue for the rights of Europeans to be placed above those of others. Comparatively, recognising Europe's past would be to recognise others' entitlement to be there (Bhambra, 2019). Thus, instead, people forced to flee instability resulting from historical exploitation and its consequences are excluded from European territory (O'Dwyer, 2018). Regardless of whether these contemporary migration policies are underwritten with racist intent, in practice, they continue to subjugate and exclude the people from former colonies (ENAR, 2023).

*Racialised Consequences of Colonial Influence*

Should such colonial structures fail to be addressed, they will continue to produce harm and sustain existing inequalities (Collins, 2022; Achiume, 2022). This practice of 'colonial unknowing' creates an ironic scenario in which the EU continues to produce irregular migration (by participating in 'colonial unknowing'), while simultaneously trying to fight it through border externalisation and the prevention of the safe admission of asylum seekers. Both 'colonial unknowing' and border externalisation therefore result in sustained harm against asylum seekers. For example, the EU relies

heavily on its international relationships to achieve its border externalisation. Discussing the EU-Libya relationship, Reviglio (2019) describes the harm of such policies: following their violent interception in the Mediterranean Sea, asylum seekers are placed in Libyan-controlled detention centres (established as part of the 2017 MOU with Italy), in which asylum seekers are subject to torture, violence and other human rights abuses in overcrowded facilities, lacking adequate food and water (Reviglio, 2019; Murray, 2022). Through these deals, the EU distances itself from its international responsibilities and proclaimed 'European values', knowingly leaving asylum seekers in the hands of states not party to international rights-protection conventions and with poor human rights records (Murray, 2022). The relocation of asylum seekers to 'safe' third countries or 'safe zones' within unsafe countries will likely result in similar harms to asylum seekers' rights (Woollard, 2024). These features are strengthened and continued under the EU Pact on Migration and Asylum, as the newest set of regulations, which not only fails to address but exacerbates the impact of 'colonial unknowing'.

**Gendered Vulnerabilities**

Intersectionality is important for understanding vulnerability and access to protection in migration experiences. Each person, or group of persons, has a different experience of borders (or, more generally, migration management policies) depending on their positionality and the context in which they confront that border (Bauder, 2017). Intersectionality allows scholars to examine the "many-layered experiences of discrimination and oppression that arise from intersecting social locations" (Cleton and Scuzzarello, 2024, p. 343). While race has been identified as one such social location in this experience, so too is gender.

Research has shown that specific migration policies can have a direct negative effect on women's experiences of migration. Vella (2024) argues that while all asylum seekers are endangered by exclusionary migration policies, women and girls are especially at risk of instances of human trafficking and sexual and gender-based violence, for example, as a result of border externalisation. As highlighted above, this is particularly because the countries to which asylum seekers are contained, as part of the international migration management agreements developed to enable externalisation, have poor gender equality and human rights records (Vella, 2024). Gerard and Pickering (2013) highlight how the securitisation of migration and the imposition of external border controls are a form of structural (state) violence that exacerbates violence for women in transit. In examining the experiences of refugee women travelling from Somalia to Malta (an EU member state), these authors found that migrant women were stuck in Libya (a transit state) for months or even years, vulnerable to arbitrary detention, to prevent and punish attempted maritime crossings, and sexual violence (Gerard and Pickering, 2014).

In addition to the direct exposure to human rights abuses as a result of Europe's externalisation policy, Mow's (2024) analysis of the EU's new Pact highlights a lack of provisions made to address women's vulnerability in this policy. On the surface, it seems that women and other vulnerable populations are prioritised in this Pact. For example, the Crisis Regulation states that "vulnerable persons [including pregnant women and single parents] should be given primary consideration for relocation, in particular when they have special reception needs" (European Union, 2024, p. 6). However, this

clause assumes that these populations arrive with their existing vulnerabilities, failing to acknowledge how migration and indeed arrival/reception experiences may exacerbate or create vulnerabilities.

Other scholars argue that women and their unique rights have been ignored in this Pact, and specific attention has failed to be paid to the particular experiences of migrant women. For example, no mention is made of providing healthcare access to pregnant women. No provisions are made for addressing women's sanitary needs or their reproductive rights. No psychosocial support is offered for women who have been through hazardous migration journeys, including a lack of specific support for victims of sexual violence. Mow argues that the Pact fails to see migrant women as human (Mow, 2024, pp. 34–37). The EU's Pact is therefore harmful to women in two ways: the externalisation policies it enshrines expose women to violence and human-rights abuses by containing them to dangerous transit countries, but it also fails to acknowledge and address the unique vulnerabilities that are faced by migrant women. The consequences of the EU Pact and its externalisation approach sustain and produce harm and a hierarchy based on the privileging of whiteness, as well as aspects of gendered harm by failing to account for the intersectional vulnerabilities of migration. Hyndman and Mountz (2008) adeptly describe the externalisation policies which produce these outcomes as 'neo-refoulement', as they prevent access to the locations where asylum seekers could be safe (Hyndman and Mountz, 2008).

**Conclusion**

This paper found that the EU adopted its externalisation approach to irregular migration following the end of the Cold War and in response to a growing European immigrant population and global displacement rates. Europe's new regime prioritised preventing the arrival of asylum seekers from the 'Global South', framing the 'new refugee' as threatening, deceitful, and dangerous to the European livelihood. The 2015 refugee 'crisis' (or rather refugee protection crisis (Almustafa, 2021; Sardelić, 2025) further catalysed the development of the EU's externalisation approach, including a reform of the CEAS, eventually resulting in the adoption of the EU's Pact on Migration and Asylum. This Pact enshrines Europe's externalisation approach to migration management by prioritising border procedures, which are more likely to exclude asylum seekers than to protect them as refugees. Furthermore, this Pact demonstrates a racialised approach to border management, in which migration governance is inherently bound with racial governance, due to the persisting, unaddressed colonial influence that formed the foundation of the migration system in the European Union. The EU fails to recognise the ongoing impact of its historic colonial exploits in producing contemporary forced migration. At the same time, its policies simultaneously continue to exclude and subjugate the mobility of persons from former colonies to maintain the established hierarchy that privileges whiteness and the 'Global North'.

As Collins (2022), Achiume (2022) and Bhambra (2015) contend, without dismantling these colonial frameworks and influences, migration challenges and racialised harm will persist. With increasing rates of forced displacement around the world and the introduction of increasingly strict border externalisation by 'Global North' states, harm and fatalities will continue to occur without a significant change of approach. Particular groups remain especially vulnerable. There is a gendered dimension to the vulnerabilities that arise from an externalisation approach to migration management.

Women are made especially and uniquely vulnerable by the EU's Pact; exposed to violence and denied protection as a result of externalisation. As long as the EU (and other 'Global North' states) continue to prioritise exclusion, all asylum seekers, but particularly women, are placed at a heightened risk of violence and other human rights abuses.

This paper did not seek to suggest alternative approaches to externalisation, make suggestions for how to address the wrongdoings of Europe's colonial past, nor establish the motivations of Europe's practice of 'colonial unknowing'. Such suggestions and considerations require their own significant analysis, which could not be achieved within the scope of this article. Rather, it sought only to demonstrate how, by examining Europe's border externalisation policies from a historical context, we can see the influence of colonial histories and how these result in a lack of protection for asylum seekers. The paper, therefore, also aimed to contribute to the growing body of literature calling for the 'decolonisation of migration' (Collins, 2022).

Contemporary migration management remains a significant issue, which becomes more complex as global forced displacement rates increase, necessitating greater attention to the protection of the rights of migrants. This analysis of European externalisation and the EU's Pact on Migration and Asylum demonstrates that current approaches, influenced by colonial pasts, fail to solve and, in fact, perpetuate contemporary migration challenges. Much work remains to be done to ensure protection and equality in mobility, and this investigation suggests possible pathways that could be pursued towards this goal.

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# Research briefs

## The impact of inequalities on the political engagement of young people in Aotearoa New Zealand

**Amanda Hay**

The sociocultural and political context which surrounds young people shapes their understandings of their participatory rights in the political world. It affects their political efficacy and agency, and the way they engage or choose not to engage in the political context. This PhD research explores the impact of inequalities on the political engagement of young people in Aotearoa New Zealand. In the political context age is a significant determinant of legitimately participating in a political community with young people under the age of 18 disenfranchised. Additionally wider structural inequalities such as social, cultural and educational inequalities are frequently encountered by youth affecting their political participation (Arya & Henn, 2023).

Opportunities to practice being political for youth are not fairly distributed in society, privileging some social and cultural groups over others (Wray-Lake, 2019). This differential access impacts young people's political development. Drawing on social constructionist theory to inform its intersectional approach this research explores how inequalities such as age, ethnicity, social class, gender and education may intersect in young people's lives compounding disadvantage and creating barriers to their political engagement. Understanding the impacts of inequalities on young people's political engagement is an important societal issue as it is unclear how wider groups of young people can be supported to exercise their political rights and voice on issues impacting their future. It is hoped that this research will support broader groups of young people to politically engage, informing future policies and strategies to nurture and strengthen their political agency.

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# Silent Strengths: Media Narratives, Cultural Identity, and the Marginalization of Introverted South Asian Migrant Women

**Mariam Tayyab, Fatima Junaid and Sirley Barnett**

This study examines how media narratives about leadership, success, and cultural identity indirectly marginalize introverted South Asian migrant women in Western workplaces. Drawing on a qualitative study of eight self-identified introverted South Asian women, primarily of Pakistani and Indian backgrounds, living and working in Aotearoa New Zealand, this research explores their workplace experiences. It examines how corporate media culture and corporate social media circulate extrovert-centric ideals that shape dominant perceptions of leadership and professionalism, marginalizing quieter, culturally grounded expressions of competence. Perpetuated by broader media norms, these platforms reinforce the limited visibility of such women in both public and professional narratives.

While introverted South Asian migrant women are not explicitly portrayed as "silent" by media, they are often absent from narratives of success, or overshadowed by portrayals of either submissive, oppressed figures or high-achieving, extroverted "model minorities." These portrayals erase the nuanced realities of South Asian women who embody values like humility, modesty, and deference. Participants describe feeling invisible in workplaces where visibility and assertiveness are equated with competence. The lack of relatable role models in media erode their professional identity, contributing to imposter syndrome and internalized marginalization. Many adopted a performative “False Self,” masking their true personalities to meet extrovert-driven expectations.

The study argues for the need to expand media narratives to include diverse expressions of leadership and success, ones that value quiet strengths, cultural humility, and relational intelligence. By critically examining these gaps, the research contributes to conversations on media, marginalization, and inclusion. It offers recommendations for media professionals, educators, and employers to amplify underrepresented voices, challenge extrovert-centric ideals, and foster cultural safety for introverted South Asian migrant women in both public and professional spaces.

*This research brief is based on findings from my Master’s thesis completed at Massey University.*

# Poems

**Hua Dai**

## My karanga

Written at the noho marae on 2nd Aug, 2025

Te whare wananga -the school of learning is standing
In the glittering awakening of the timespace
On this Sunday morning at Te Noho Kotahitanga Marae

The pukeko and other birds are playing
In the peace of the harakeke pa -our flax bush

The stream, te puna, is murmuring
In the peaceful morning, accompanied by the environment's sounds

Peace and well-being of the place
Rest in us all, the wahine on the journey,

To the government of Aotearoa
Don’t interfere and breach the peace
Leave our passports alone.

## A new experience of the attempted murder and the murder of my son

21 Jan 2025 5:00 am

I woke up this morning
Called my son Wonder
To come to me to hold him in my arms
To wrap him up with mother’s love

To turn away from the evil
A second before I was attacked by
The man holding a steel table leg
Before he attacked my son

So my son was attacked by the evil
But died being held in love
And beyond
In the divine mother’s love

# Be Polite

5:00 pm 9 March 2025

I was in the middle of a deep, meditative inner work,
Alarmed by the phone ringing
The person's name came on the screen
The one whose call I did not answer two days ago

I hesitated
Thinking to 'be polite'
I would answer the call and
Let them know I do not have the headspace for a chat

I did,
And they carried on telling me what they have done in the last week
Their conversations with another
About my summer holiday

I found myself not engaging in the chat
I cut his long speech short
Blessed him for being active and keeping well
Thanked for his call (but for what? Do I want to hear from him? No. Then why did I thank him for calling me?! -to be polite.)

He made it short
Still asking how I have been doing,
I again told him
I am a scholar-in-residence at a retreat on a project and do not have the space to chat

He carried on asking which retreat I was at
Was it Piha the women's retreat?
Oh, ok he knows the Vaughan Park as well.

I thanked him again and said goodbye
He said he would catch up with me another time
He did not check if I would want to hear from him
Because I was so polite to thank him for his call

As I tried to find where I was at with my project
I pondered on why I answered his call

I did that to "be polite"
As I was taught at school

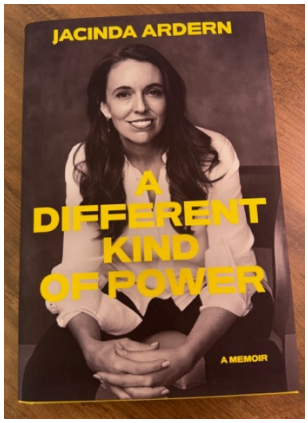
In the patriarchal world,
Being polite
Is for women to disregard their own projects
To respond to attention unasked for
To engage in conversations unwanted
To stay in relationships that did not serve them at all

Being polite
Is to meet others' needs
On the expanses of the women who were taught to
Be polite

Never again
Will I obey this teaching, answering the call
Just to be polite
That wasted my time
Distracted my attention
When I had my energy going for me
For what I was doing

After I wrote down those lines
Forgiving myself for taking the call
Not making it wrong
Taking it a gem wrapped in sticky lolly paper
Receive the wisdom
I finally found what I was doing before the call!
And continue
Living, being, reflecting, accepting, and
Growing in love and light
In wisdom that is in me all along
For me to listen, hear, and find out
My companion, my guide.

# Book review




## Ardern, J. (2024). A different kind of power. A Memoir. Penguin

**Reviewed by Juanita Rojas Palacio**
Postdoctoral Research Fellow, Public Policy Institute, Waipapa Taumata Rau

Jacinda Ardern's *A Different Kind of Power* is the memoir of a young progressive leader who became New Zealand's second female Prime Minister elected, earning widespread national and international recognition for her empathetic and transformative approach to politics. The book arrives at a critical time when global democracy is under threat -from rising populism, growing authoritarianism, and increasing social and economic inequalities-, human rights are being challenged worldwide, and many societies face deep divisions fuelled by misinformation and exclusion. In this context, the book challenges us to rethink leadership not as a form of domination or control, but as empathy, inclusivity, and kindness.

From the opening chapters, Ardern's narrative feels like an open conversation where she weaves personal and political reflections, inviting us to recognize kindness as a transformative force for social change. Ardern begins the book with her upbringing in a small New Zealand town, taking the reader through her modest childhood, shaped by the values of service and community. The story shows how Ardern didn't have an ambition to become Prime Minister, instead, her political journey was a slow process led by a sense of social justice and responsibility. One of the most interesting threads in the book is her very intimate experience of becoming a mother. Ardern writes about her struggles becoming pregnant and finally finding out about her pregnancy while forming a coalition that would take her on to become Prime Minister. Then she expands on the challenges of motherhood as a Prime

Minister: the logistical juggling, the media attention, and the quiet moments that kept her grounded. She frames this part of her journey as a lived example that leadership and parenthood are not mutually exclusive. Indeed, this section might resonate deeply with women who have similar experiences of juggling motherhood while sustaining a career, and other readers who have navigated the pressures of having a career and caregiving roles at the same time.

The heart of the book is found in her reflections on leadership through crisis. Ardern revisits the defining events of her government: the Christchurch Mosque attacks and the eruption of Whakaari Island in 2019, and the COVID-19 pandemic years. She describes the heaviness of delivering news to a grieving nation, the unexpected international popularity, and the personal cost of living in a constant state of public attention. In these moments, Ardern's politics of kindness were not a soft or naïve approach, as some of her critics may have claimed, but rather a deliberate strategy to lead with empathy. In a recent lecture that Ardern gave at Harvard University, she talked about the importance of kindness, especially in a world where there is not only increased polarization but what she rather redefines as entrenchment, a very common behavior in which we lock ourselves into our beliefs so tightly that we stop listening, become hypersensitive, and lose the willingness to even try to understand each other. Jacinda explains that while entrenchment shuts down dialogue, empathy opens space and although it doesn't necessarily mean agreement, it invites us to understand where someone is coming from. The importance of empathy, according to Ardern, is that it allows us to listen instead of reacting, it lowers defensiveness, and it encourages curiosity instead of judgement. Jacinda highlights that in a world where people are more emotionally reactive and ideologically rigid, the practice of kindness and empathy isn't just a nice thing, it's strategic and transformational. It's a way of breaking the cycle of entrenchment.

Some critics argue that Ardern's memoir offers little political analysis. Key moments such as strict Covid border controls, the Managed Isolation system, and her surprise resignation are mentioned but not explored in depth. For New Zealand readers, this may feel familiar yet incomplete, while international readers may find it an inspiring portrait of a progressive woman leader navigating global crises. In my opinion, what the book largely leaves out is the sharp criticism of Ardern's politics and the steep decline in her popularity before her resignation. Though she framed stepping down as burnout, commentators like Dr Grant Duncan highlight other factors: her brand became inseparable from Covid, with restrictions creating social division, and her "politics of kindness" giving way to widespread "Ardern fatigue." At the same time, Duncan argues, the economic impact of Covid -job losses, inflation, rising living costs, and soaring interest rates- hurt Labour, while National Party, under Christopher Luxon, regained momentum and attracted centrist voters. Others, including Professor Jennifer Curtin, argue that Ardern's rhetoric of kindness did not always translate into policy for the most vulnerable. For example, in the lead-up to the 2020 election, her government prioritised wage earners over essential workers and beneficiaries- groups dominated by women in care roles -a group that one might think a female progressive leader will support-. This gap between language and policy raised questions about how far her leadership advanced the interests of the more vulnerable.

Whether one agrees with her politics or not, it is hard to read Ardern's story without recognising how fully she brought herself -young woman, mother, and leader grounded in empathy- into the political space. To me, Ardern shows that the personal is political, and that we do not need to strip away

aspects of our identity to fit into a mould. Yes, there were flaws in her government and much she might have done differently. Yet her memoir left me wondering what politics could become if empathy, care, and integrity were not dismissed as "soft" or weak, but recognised as essential strengths of leadership. As a Latin American feminist, I read Ardern's words as both invitation and challenge: to imagine leadership differently, to reject the false divide between strength and empathy, and to insist that politics can be humane and transformative at the same time. In that sense, her book is not just a memoir but a provocation- reminding us that the way we do politics matters, and that reflecting on what we do and how we do it is necessary if we are to create not only another style of leadership, but the possibility of another kind of world.

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