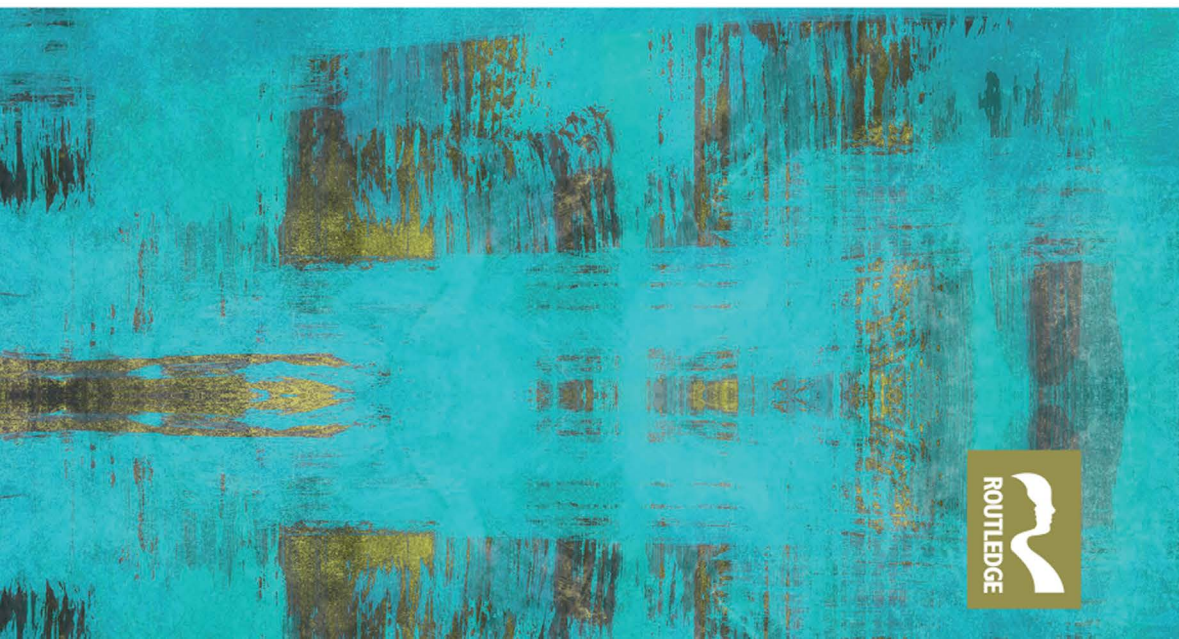
Routledge Advances in Theatre & Performance Studies

PERFORMANCE, RESISTANCE AND REFUGEES

Edited by
Suzanne Little, Samid Suliman and Caroline Wake



PERFORMANCE, RESISTANCE AND REFUGEES

This book offers a unique Australian perspective on the global crisis in refugee protection.

Using performance as both an object and a lens, this volume explores the politics and aesthetics of migration control, border security and refugee resistance. The first half of the book, titled *On Stage*, examines performance objects such as verbatim and documentary plays, children's theatre, immersive performance, slam poetry, video art and feature films. Specifically, it considers how refugees, and their artistic collaborators, assert their individuality, agency and authority as well as their resistance to cruel policies like offshore processing through performance. The second half of the book, titled *Off Stage*, employs performance as a lens to analyse the wider field of refugee politics, including the relationship between forced migrants and the forced displacement of First Nations peoples that underpins the settler-colonial state, philosophies of cosmopolitanism, the role of the canon in art history and the spectacle of bordering practices. In doing so, it illuminates the strategic performativity—and nonperformativity—of the law, philosophy, the state and the academy more broadly in the exclusion and control of refugees.

Taken together, the chapters in this volume draw on, and contribute to, a wide range of disciplines including theatre and performance studies, cultural studies, border studies and forced migration studies, and will be of great interest to students and scholars in all four fields.

Suzanne Little is Senior Lecturer and the Head of Theatre Studies at the University of Otago, New Zealand.

Samid Suliman is Senior Lecturer in Migration and Security in the School of Humanities, Languages and Social Science at Griffith University, Australia.

Caroline Wake is Senior Lecturer of Theatre and Performance at the University of NSW, Australia.

Routledge Advances in Theatre & Performance Studies

This series is our home for cutting-edge, upper-level scholarly studies and edited collections. Considering theatre and performance alongside topics such as religion, politics, gender, race, ecology, and the avant-garde, titles are characterized by dynamic interventions into established subjects and innovative studies on emerging topics.

The Immersive Theatre of Gale Gates
Daniella Vinitski Mooney

Strategies for Survival at SIBIKWA 1988–2021
Landmarks of South African Performance History
Phyllis Klotz and Smal Ndaba

Instruments of Embodiment
Costuming in Contemporary Dance
Eric C. Mullis

Hamlet's Hereditary Queen
Performing Shakespeare's Silent Female Power
Kerrie Roberts

Sport and Performance in the Twenty-First Century
Kelsey Blair

Performance, Resistance and Refugees
Suzanne Little, Samid Suliman and Caroline Wake

For more information about this series, please visit: www.routledge.com/Routledge-Advances-in-Theatre-Performance-Studies/book-series/RATPS

PERFORMANCE, RESISTANCE AND REFUGEES

Edited by Suzanne Little, Samid Suliman and Caroline Wake

Routledge
Taylor & Francis Group
LONDON AND NEW YORK

First published 2023
by Routledge
4 Park Square, Milton Park, Abingdon, Oxon OX14 4RN

and by Routledge
605 Third Avenue, New York, NY 10158

Routledge is an imprint of the Taylor & Francis Group, an informa business

British Library Cataloguing-in-Publication Data
A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data
Names: Little, Suzanne (Suzanne Ruth), editor. | Suliman, Samid, editor. | Wake, Caroline, editor.
Title: Performance, resistance and refugees / Suzanne Little, Samid Suliman, Caroline Wake.
Description: Abingdon, Oxon : Routledge, 2023. | Includes bibliographical references and index.
Identifiers: LCCN 2022035188 (print) | LCCN 2022035189 (ebook) | ISBN 9780367696689 (hardback) | ISBN 9780367696696 (paperback) | ISBN 9781003142782 (ebook)
Subjects: LCSH: Refugees in art. | Arts, Australian—21st century—Themes, motives. | Refugees—Protection—Australia. | Arts and society—Australia—History—21st century.
Classification: LCC NX650.R386 P47 2023 (print) | LCC NX650.R386 (ebook) | DDC 700.4/552—dc23/eng/20221101
LC record available at https://lccn.loc.gov/2022035188
LC ebook record available at https://lccn.loc.gov/2022035189

ISBN: 978-0-367-69668-9 (hbk)
ISBN: 978-0-367-69669-6 (pbk)
ISBN: 978-1-003-14278-2 (ebk)

DOI: 10.4324/9781003142782

Typeset in Bembo
by Apex CoVantage, LLC

CONTENTS

List of Figures *vii*
Acknowledgements *viii*
Contributors' Biographies *ix*

Introduction: Performance, Refuge and Resistance 1
Suzanne Little, Samid Suliman and Caroline Wake

On Stage **17**

1 Refugees, Visual Culture and Theatre: Reinscriptions and Contestations 19
Suzanne Little

2 The Breath of Another: Mediated Testimony in the Play *Manus* 35
Anna Szörényi

3 Eschewing Precarity in Spoken Word Poetry: Towards the Performance of Agency in Refugee Storytelling 53
Sukhmani Khorana

4 Manus Island and Kurdistan in Juxtaposition: Reading *Remain* and *Chauka, Please Tell Us the Time* Beyond the Story of the Manus Prison 68
Zhila Gholami

5 Offshore Onstage: Refugee Policies, Media Ecologies and Migrant Dramaturgies in Australia, 2001–2021 84
Caroline Wake

Off Stage **99**

6 Trouble on the Horizon 101
Suvendrini Perera

7 The Anxiety of Cosmopolitanism in Political Philosophy 115
Nikos Papastergiadis

8 How to Appear? Writing Art History in Australia After 1973 138
Verónica Tello

9 Nomocide or the Nonperformativity of Colonial Law 155
Maria Giannacopoulos

10 Putting on a Show: Considering the Dark Matter of Australian Border Theatre 166
Samid Suliman

Index *186*

FIGURES

1.1 Allegra Di Lallo crosses the stage dressed as a giant seagull in *We All Know What's Happening* 29

4.1 Corridor M, in the Manus Camp, with a Kurdish flag in the background, in *Chauka, Please Tell Us The Time* 70

4.2 Behrouz Boochani, in *Remain*, directed by Hoda Afshar 79

8.1 Abstract for 'How to Appear?' 139

8.2 *Art & Text*, issue 4, 1981 (cover: Juan Dávila, *Spider Woman in 'Playing with Fire!'* 1981) 148

8.3 Juan Dávila, *Untitled fig. 132*, 2013 151

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

First and foremost, we would like to thank our contributors for their immense generosity and patience. In the midst of flood, fire and flu, they nonetheless persevered and sent encouraging and understanding emails as we did so too. In addition, we wish to thank the University of Otago for its generous support. In particular, we are grateful to the Performance of the Real Research Theme for hosting the original *Performing Precarity: Refugee, Representation, Determination, and Discourses* conference that inspired this book. Thanks, too, to Suvendrini Perera and Nikos Papastergiadis for their extraordinary keynotes at that conference, as well as their wonderful contributions to this volume.

On a personal note, Suzanne wishes to thank her co-editors for their wisdom, patience and hard work. She would also like to thank Hazel Tucker who co-convened the conference with her that inspired this book and all members of the Performance of the Real steering committee for their support. Special thanks to Karen, Donna, Sharon, Jonathon and Robin for your encouragement. Samid wishes to thank academic friends and colleagues at Griffith University and further afield for their support and inspiring conversations, the Griffith Centre for Social and Cultural Research and the Performance of the Real Research Theme at the University of Otago for their support of this project, and both coeditors and contributors for their creativity, intellectual bravery and enduring patience. Caroline would like to thank her fellow editors for their support during her parental leave as well as her theatre and performance studies colleagues at the University of New South Wales. She would also like to thank Patrick, Marlon and Frankie for all the joy, humour and chaos they bring to her life. We dedicate this volume to all who have suffered at the hands of the national border regime.

CONTRIBUTORS' BIOGRAPHIES

Editors

Suzanne Little was born and raised in Australia and is also a citizen of Aotearoa New Zealand where she is currently Senior Lecturer and Head of Theatre Studies at the University of Otago. She is an interdisciplinary researcher-practitioner and is director of the Performance of the Real Research Theme (www.otago.ac.nz/performance-of-the-real/index.html). She has published in such journals as *Performance Research* and *Theatre Research International* as well as contributed to many books. She has convened conferences and published on political dance, trauma, repetition and mobilities in performance, Practice as Research, reflective practice, documentary theatre and the witness turn in contemporary performance. Beyond the university, she serves on the board of the Theatre in Health Education Trust as well as on the academic board of Toi Whakaari, the Aotearoa New Zealand national drama school.

Samid Suliman is Senior Lecturer in Migration and Security in the School of Humanities, Languages and Social Science at Griffith University. He is also a member of the Griffith Centre for Social and Cultural Research and has been a Visiting Researcher in the School of Global Studies, University of Gothenburg. Dr. Suliman is an interdisciplinary researcher interested in migration, mobility, security, postcolonial political theory, international relations, regional and world politics, global development, climate change, and the politics of knowledge. Dr. Suliman was awarded the Australian Political Studies Association's 2015 Thesis Prize for his doctoral thesis, titled 'Migration, Development and Kinetic Politics'. His work has appeared in *Geopolitics*, *Review of International Studies*, *Globalizations*, *Energy Research and Social Science*, and *Mobilities*.

Caroline Wake is Senior Lecturer in Theatre and Performance at the University of New South Wales, Australia. Her research focuses on the relationship between theatre and history: how theatre responds to and represents history and, conversely, how theatre's own history is archived and recounted, especially in Australia. More often than not, she writes about artists, genres and organisations that have typically been excluded from Australian theatre history. She is coeditor, with Emma Cox, of a special issue on 'Envisioning Asylum/Engendering Crisis' for *Research in Drama Education* (2018) and, with Bryoni Trezise, of *Visions and Revisions: Performance, Memory, Trauma* (2013). Outside the university, Caroline has served as Chair of the Board of PACT Centre for Emerging Artists in Sydney (2019–2021). She is also a long-time theatre reviewer having worked as a reviewer and online producer for *RealTime* arts magazine for over a decade.

Contributors

Zhila Gholami was recently awarded her PhD in Literary Studies by Griffith University. Her doctoral thesis, 'Roots and Routes: Kurdish Literature as World Literature', explored the negotiations of traumatic memory in English-language Kurdish writing as a way of understanding how the Kurdish people struggle for recognition and self-determination in and through diasporic cultural production. She is currently a Resident Adjunct with the Griffith Centre for Social and Cultural Research at Griffith University, working on the initial phase of a longer-term project on contemporary Kurdish art in cosmopolitan art spaces. This project builds on her PhD research and will explore the mobilities and immobilities through which contemporary Kurdish visual artists are pursuing the struggle for recognition, justice and self-determination in transnational contexts. Her work has recently been published in the *British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies*.

Maria Giannacopoulos is Associate Professor of Criminology in the Faculty of Law and Justice at the University of New South Wales, Sydney. Born to post-war migrants from Greece and experiencing life on unceded Gadigal lands, she remains impacted by and driven to unravel the workings of white supremacy and Indigenous dispossession. She has degrees in law, literature and a PhD in Cultural Studies. She works across the disciplines of law and criminology to reveal the complicity of Australian law with ongoing colonialism.

Sukhmani Khorana is Vice Chancellor's Senior Research Fellow at the Young and Resilient Research Centre at Western Sydney University. Previously, she was a Senior Lecturer in Cultural Studies at University of Wollongong. She has published extensively on diasporic cultures, multi-platform refugee narratives and the politics of empathy. She is the author of *Mediated Emotions of Migration: Reclaiming Affect for*

Agency (2022) and *The Tastes and Politics of Inter-Cultural Food in Australia* (2018), editor of *Crossover Cinema: Cross-Cultural Film from Production to Reception* (2013) and coeditor—with Alberto Bellocchi, Jordan McKenzie, Michelle Peterie, Rebecca E. Olson and Roger Patulny—of *Emotions in Late Modernity* (2019).

Nikos Papastergiadis is Director of the Research Unit in Public Cultures, based at the University of Melbourne. He is Professor in the School of Culture and Communication at the University of Melbourne and founder—with Scott McQuire—of the Spatial Aesthetics research cluster. His publications include *On Art and Friendship* (2020), *Museums of the Commons* (2020), *Cosmopolitanism and Culture* (2012), *Spatial Aesthetics: Art Place and the Everyday* (2006), *Metaphor and Tension* (2004), *The Turbulence of Migration* (2000), *Dialogues in the Diaspora* (1998) and *Modernity as Exile* (1993). He is also the author of numerous essays, which have been translated into over a dozen languages and appeared in major catalogues such as the Biennales of Sydney, Liverpool, Istanbul, Gwangju, Taipei, Lyon, Thessaloniki and Documenta 13.

Suvendrini (Suvendi) Perera is John Curtin Distinguished Emeritus Professor in the School of Media, Culture & Creative Arts at Curtin University. Her most recent book is *Mapping Deathscapes: Digital Geographies of Racial and Border Violence* coedited with Joseph Pugliese (Routledge 2021).

Anna Szörényi is Lecturer in Gender Studies at the University of Adelaide. Her research centres on ethical responsibility and representation in contemporary humanitarian media, particularly artistic and visual representations of forced migration, refugees/asylum seekers and human trafficking. Her most influential work is on refugee photography. She has published in journals including *Social Semiotics, Australian Feminist Studies, Feminist Review, Critical Race and Whiteness Studies* and *Visual Studies*, among other fora.

Verónica Tello is Chilean-Australian art historian based at UNSW Art & Design, Sydney. Her work is dedicated to engaging and animating queer and migratory archives in/across Australia and Latin America. In 2016, she published her first book *Counter-Memorial Aesthetics: Refugee Histories and the Politics of Contemporary Art* (Bloomsbury). Her second book, *Future Souths: 8 Dialogues on Art, Place and History*, is forthcoming with Third Text Publications and Discipline and includes the writing of Dylan AT Minder, Jennifer Biddle, Carla Macchiavello, Zoe Butt, Chandra Frank, Salote Tawale, Rachel O'Reilly and Walter Mignolo, among others. She is currently finalising a manuscript on the exhibition history of *Art in Chile: An Audio-Visual Documentation* (1986, co-curated by Juan Dávila and Nelly Richard) and the accompanying catalogue/book *Margins and Institutions: Art in Chile Since 1973* with Sebastián Valenzuela-Valdivia.


Taylor & Francis
Taylor & Francis Group
http://taylorandfrancis.com

INTRODUCTION

Performance, Refuge and Resistance

Suzanne Little, Samid Suliman and Caroline Wake

> Refugee-related performance is often an attempt to direct itself to the broader sociopolitical context, to seek affirmation, understanding and acceptance and/or to protest. In broad terms, it seeks to insert unfamiliar narratives into familiar bureaucratised or mediatised stories, to produce what de Certeau defined as 'novel citations'.
>
> —Michael Balfour and Nina Woodrow (2013, 19)

Two years after the so-called refugee crisis, the 2017 Edinburgh Fringe featured many refugee-related performances. Indeed, *Borders*, a theatre production featuring the story of a Syrian activist turned refugee, won the Fringe First and Best of Edinburgh awards as well as multiple others in its tour abroad. In contrast to other plays, this English production, written by political satirist turned playwright Henry Naylor and directed by Michael Cabot, was deceptively simple in form and scope. It mostly avoided repeating what Michael Balfour and Nina Woodrow call 'familiar bureaucratised [and] mediatised stories' and images of refugees. *Borders*, published in 2018, featured a male and female actor and two stools used as props on an otherwise black and empty stage (Naylor 2018). While both actors play multiple roles, achieved only through skilful shifts in vocality and position, the production focuses on two characters. Nameless is a young female Syrian artist turned graffiti activist protesting against Assad at the peak of the civil war. Sebastian Nightingale, a young Englishman, is presented initially as a determined and idealistic photojournalist, mentored by an older journalist. Nightingale later succumbs to the call of money to become a celebrity photographer. The two protagonists' paths start separately, with both characters presenting their stories alternately in instalments as monologues directly to the audience. It is only in the closing minutes of the production that their stories merge. Nameless, now pregnant and fleeing Syria on

DOI: 10.4324/9781003142782-1

a smuggling vessel, is plunged into the Mediterranean as her boat disintegrates. Sebastian, partly seeking money and partly urged back into photojournalism by his mentor, is on the same sea and is faced with the decision of whether to reach out and rescue Nameless, who is at the point of drowning, or to capture her photo. The production finishes, snapping into darkness before Sebastian makes the decision.

It is difficult to determine the reasons behind a production's hit status or critical success. Certainly the acting and direction are skilful and there is something very compelling about having actors on a bare stage creating people and worlds through their movement, voices and words—a particular feat of theatre. The script is evocative and sharp, peppered with humour and wry observations alongside more challenging passages that describe life in a war zone. *Borders* reflects on the role of art and politics, the ethics of the media, especially its response to images of suffering others, and Western responses to refugees in general. Sebastian serves as an audience surrogate for European audiences, an amiable and familiar presence with a desire to 'do good' while living a safe and privileged life. His vernacular, references and values seem to be relatable and recognisable to most European festival attendees, particularly those with liberal leanings (perhaps most likely to attend a performance about refugees). He is placed alongside the brave and uncompromising figure of the Syrian activist, a woman under constant threat and one who must take genuine risks to create her art. Arguably, this strange juxtaposition of lives, culture and circumstances gives *Borders* its particular affective and political power. In Michel de Certeau's terms, this is where the insertion of an unfamiliar narrative into the familiar can give rise to 'novel citations' and result in what political theorist Nevzat Soguk refers to as 'expanded empirical and theoretical spaces' which, once legitimised within a field, can reshape that same field's legitimacies (2006, 382).

Borders may or may not prompt audience members to take direct political action. More likely, it will foster new understandings and considerations, if not of refugees, then of European relationships with refugees and the role of the media and political art. As Soguk argues, art in assemblages such as the poetic, aesthetic and theatrical 'acquires active agency, enacting politics and ethics in national and international times and spaces through the rhythms and tempos it employs' (2006, 379). These artistic practices can 'endorse dominant relations of power' or work 'counterhegemonically, or even transgressively' with 'prevailing conditions' (379). Forms of representation, such as theatrical performance, can work on challenging existing depictions and accepted narratives, consequently providing spaces for new understandings and actions to emerge. The broad field of performance, a key focus and organising principle of this volume, includes the performing arts as well as a '"continuum" of human actions ranging from ritual, play, sports . . . everyday life performances . . . the enactment of social, professional, gender, race and class roles . . . healing . . . the media, and the internet' (Schechner 2013, 2). While not all performances in this wider sense may fit under Soguk's rather traditional categories of artistic assemblages, the spectrum embraced in this volume allows for an interdisciplinary exploration of performance in all its iterative forms. Hence, this volume moves from analysing various theatre, visual arts and film responses to

the constructed nature of 'refugeeness' and detailing individual performance acts designed to reappear the disappeared or historically erased migrant.

Australia and Its Borders

Where *Borders* is an appeal to, and critique of, European sensibilities and imaginaries of refugees, this book offers a shift away from the usual focus on Europe to Australia. While such an approach risks what scholars Andreas Wimmer and Nina Glick Schiller (2002) have called 'methodological nationalism', we believe this risk is worth it because Australia—as a settler-colonial state, a migrant majority population and a neo-colonial power within the region—is a rich and complex site for analysis.

Australia is a complicated and contradictory entity founded on unceded Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander lands. Some Aboriginal leaders disavow any relation to the Australian border, insisting that their cultures are defined by principles and protocols of welcome, care and solidarity. For example, in response to the *Tampa* incident Wangerriburra and Birri Gubba man Sam Watson, a founding member of the Aboriginal Tent Embassy in 1972, asked, 'why . . . would they be risking their lives, and the lives of their children, on the open seas. They need medical treatment and deserve a safe haven' (cited by Cox 2015, 149). In addition to identifying with the refugees' need for care, he also recognised the government's tactics, saying that it was 'scapegoating them in the same way as they scapegoat indigenous people' (Cox 2015, 149). However, other Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander leaders have more ambivalence. For instance, in 2001, Marion Hansen pointed out that refugees compete for the State's finite resources and 'detract from social, political and economic focus' on Aboriginal peoples (cited by Cox 2015, 152). Similarly, Indigenous law expert and Tanganekald and Meintangk woman Irene Watson has argued, 'it is the detention of Aboriginal peoples in this country that we have turned our gaze away from; a much more deserving victim has emerged, along with another human rights struggle, the refugee' (cited by Cox 2015, 153). Still other leaders, perhaps having perceived the currency of the refugee, reposition themselves as such. For example, the day after the Uluru Statement from the Heart, Indigenous leader Noel Pearson wrote, 'My first two years of life, I was like a refugee child in detention, stateless and unpossessed of citizenship' (Pearson 2017, 27).

First Nations artists and activists have also contested the logic of Australia's border regime. For example, in 2010, activist Robbie Thorpe, a Krautungalung man, issued Original Nation Passports for asylum seekers stranded on the *Merak*, announcing at a protest that 'we want to make it clear that the Aboriginal people, the true sovereigns of this land, are offering them a passport to enter into our territorial waters, and our land' (cited by Cox 2015, 140). More recently, Rhonda Dixon-Grovenor, a Gadigal, Bidgigal and Yuin Elder, was one of the lead artists on Powerhouse Youth Theatre's *Tribunal* (2016), a mock truth and reconciliation commission in which refugees testified to her about their treatment at the hands of the State. Finally, in 2022, self-determined dance theatre company Marrugeku

premiered *Jurrungu Ngan-ga/Straight Talk*, a collaboration between the ensemble's dancers and dramaturgs and Yawuru leader Patrick Dodson, Kurdish-Iranian writer and former Manus Island detainee Behrouz Boochani and Iranian Australian scholar-activist Omid Tofighian. In short, like Australia more broadly, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders oscillate between quietly lamenting and loudly rejecting Australia's refugee policies.

If the first defining feature of Australia is its status as a settler-colonial state, then its second is its status as a majority migrant country. The most recent census revealed that 29.1% of the population was born overseas, and 50.8% had at least one parent born overseas (Australian Bureau of Statistics 2021; Megalogenis 2022). That is, more than half of the country identified as first- or second-generation migrants. This demographic reality sits uncomfortably alongside the natal fantasy that underpins settler-colonial state-society relations, wherein there is an autochthonous and autopoietic Australian identity into which others from without (i.e. migrants) and within (i.e. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples) either be peacefully (or violently) or be assimilated (or excluded).

The third defining feature of Australia is its neo-colonial ambitions. In 2001, Australia implemented its infamous Pacific Solution, a suite of policies designed to intercept and turn back asylum seekers' boats, excise island territories from the so-called migration zone, exile asylum seekers to offshore detention centres in Papua New Guinea and the Republic of Nauru and then—when they were finally recognised as refugees—offer them only temporary protection (McAdam and Chong 2019, 116–117). While the Pacific Solution was abandoned in 2008 by the newly elected Labor government, by 2012—in response to a dramatic rise in asylum seekers—the same government had resumed offshore processing. In 2013, the Liberal-National Coalition inaugurated Operation Sovereign Borders, effectively Pacific Solution 2.0, with even stricter policies and more brutal practices that have been rightly compared to black sites (Perera and Pugliese 2021). Indeed, Operation Sovereign Borders overstepped the Pacific Solution by dictating that asylum seekers who arrived by boat would have no opportunity to apply for resettlement in Australia. Thus, in addition to processing asylum seekers, the small island nations are charged with resettling asylum seekers. In 2022, the new Labor government vowed to continue this process. These policies bifurcate the immigration process, creating a separate set of rules and policies for those asylum seekers who are diverted before ever reaching the mainland.

The Australian Border Deaths Database, maintained by Monash University, states that since January 2000, 2,031 people have died, including those 'who are missing, who have not been rescued or recovered and are therefore feared drowned' (Monash 2022). The database is a litany of tragedies, listing off murders, suicides, self-immolations, drownings, forcible deportations, car accidents, cardiac arrests, medical neglect and neonatal deaths in the steady dispassionate tone of a coroner. Except that tragedies are written in the stars, and these events were written on the seas as the entirely foreseeable outcomes of Australia's relentless border regime. The poor treatment of asylum seekers, including children, in both onshore

and offshore detention centres, has been extensively documented and criticised (Gleeson 2016). Organisations ranging from Amnesty International to the UN Special Rapporteur on Torture have authored reports on Australia's many breaches of international law. While these have effected the closure of some onshore detention centres, offshore processing persists and the country's intake of refugees remains determinedly small compared to many other less wealthy nations. Worse still, Australia is exporting these policies. Former Prime Minister Tony Abbott told a London audience that Europe should look to Australia 'because people smuggling is a global problem, and because Australia is the only country that has successfully defeated it' (Clarke 2015). More recently, then Prime Minister Boris Johnson announced plans to start turning back migrant boats and send asylum seekers to Rwanda (Gillett 2021), with Home Secretary Priti Patel recruiting Howard-era Foreign Minister Alexander Downer to lead a review into the UK's own 'Border Force' (quoted in Kampmark 2022).

Such 'policy transfer' (Weisbrot 2018) is neither benign nor apolitical. As a poster child for the 'deterrence paradigm' (Gammeltoft-Hansen and Tan 2017), Operation Sovereign Borders and its predecessors have had profoundly deleterious consequences for migrants, refugees and asylum seekers and 'severely curtail[ed] the democratic rights of Australian citizens' (Minns, Bradley and Chagas-Bastos 2018, 3). The adoption of Australian approaches to border security and refugee mobility has clear and troubling implications for the rights of refugees and asylum seekers in the European context and the ongoing viability and legitimacy of the international refugee protection regime. It also demonstrates that Australia continues to play an important role in the putatively national migration policymaking processes that continue 'the transnational policy transfer between settler colonies on immigration and border control in the late imperial era of the British Empire' (Varnava, Marmo and Smith 2022, 3).

Thus, we argue that exploring how artists and scholars have responded to Australia's border regime is pertinent. Hundreds of artists have staged performative protests across various art forms, including stand-up comedy, play-readings, films, visual art installations, sculpture, durational and immersive performances and verbatim and documentary theatre. In turn, Australian and Australia-based political theorists, philosophers, historians and cultural and legal studies and performance and theatre studies scholars have re-examined their disciplinary methodologies, objects and theories to examine this flouting of human rights and the resulting flowering of artistic protest.

Performance, Migrants, Refugees and Asylum Seekers

The book builds upon a growing literature on performance, refugees and asylum that has emerged over the last two decades. In her keynote address to the International Federation of Theatre in Research, which devoted its 2018 conference to the topic 'Theatre and Migration', Silvija Jestrovic argued that this scholarship has unfolded in three waves (2018). The first wave, with a northern hemisphere

focus, emerged from scholars based in Canada, including Jestrovic and her colleague Yana Meerzon (Jestrovic 2013; Meerzon 2011). The second wave of work, which overlaps with the first, is often associated with scholars writing from and/or about Australia and the artistic response to the Pacific Solution. This scholarship is captured in, for example, Helen Gilbert and Sophie Nield's special issue 'Performance and Asylum: Embodiment, Ethics, Efficacy' for *Research in Drama Education* (2008), while Michael Balfour's edited volume *Refugee Performance: Practical Encounters* (2013) offers a more international perspective. In the third wave, the focus shifted predominantly to the refugee crisis in Europe, inspiring several edited journal issues such as Azadeh Sharifi and Steve Wilmer's issue on 'Theatre and Statelessness' for *Critical Stages* (2016), Emma Cox and Caroline Wake's edited issue 'Envisioning Asylum/Engendering Crisis' for *Research in Drama Education* (2018), Szabolcs Musca's special issue on 'Theatre and Migration Between Ethics and Aesthetics' for *Performing Ethos* (2019) and Yana Meerzon's edited issues on 'Theatre and Immigration' for *Theatre Research in Canada* (2015) and 'Migration and Multilingualism' for *Modern Drama* with Katharina Pewny and Tessa Vannieuwenhuyze (2018). At the same time, monographs appeared, again mostly with a European focus (see Farrier 2011; Jeffers 2012; Gluhovic 2013; Jestrovic 2013; Cox 2015; McIvor 2016; Fişek 2017) apart from Mark Fleishman's edited volume *Performing Migrancy and Mobility in Africa: Cape of Flows* (2015). While the third wave suggests a consolidation of this subfield of theatre and performance studies, it is also striking that Australian case studies and perspectives are largely absent from it. This volume hopes to address this gap.

On another side of the disciplinary boundary, critical scholars in international relations and world politics have engaged more directly with performance as both an object of and methodological orientation towards political analysis. Explorations of the performativity of security (e.g. Salter 2008; Bialasiewicz et al. 2007; Hiemstra 2014), state sovereignty (e.g. Weber 1998; Laffey 2000; Dunn 2010), migration and borders (e.g. Amoore and Hall 2010; Wonders 2006; Innes 2016) and transdisciplinary engagements with performance and the aesthetics of world politics (e.g. Edkins and Kear 2013; Rai and Reinelt 2015; Rai et al. 2021) demonstrate that there is much to be gained by analysing the performance and politics of migration. This book focuses on the intersections between theatre, performance studies and relations, seeking new insights and problem-solving practices that may not emerge readily within disciplinary boundaries.

Regardless of discipline, one of the recurring debates concerns terminology. To what extent should humanities scholars rely on and reproduce legal and bureaucratic definitions of 'the refugee'? The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees defines refugees as 'people who cannot return to their country of origin because of a well-founded fear of persecution, conflict, violence, or other circumstances that have seriously disturbed public order, and who, as a result, require international protection' (UNHCR, 'Asylum and Migration'). This definition summarises the aims of the 1951 UN Refugee Convention, which binds countries to offer protection to refugees. However, critics note that, while still important, the Convention

definition is dated and 'falls short on dealing with more recent developments (e.g. it focuses on nation states as oppressors and neglects non-state actors such as terrorist groups; it focuses on persecution and neglects armed conflict as a cause of flight; and it also does not include approaches to large-scale forced migratory movements)' (Crepaz and Wacker 2019, 3). People migrate for economic purposes and various reasons. In 2021, the most recent figures revealed that 89.3 million forcibly displaced people were seeking new homes ('Figures at a Glance'). Unfortunately, this large movement has prompted many countries to tighten their borders and place tighter strictures on what constitutes a refugee. Conventionally, 'asylum seeker' is the term for those seeking protection but who have not yet been granted refugee status. The person may be deemed an 'illegal immigrant' if asylum is refused. The classification of refugees, migrants and asylum seekers is often politically motivated as these definitions dictate an individual's right to enter and remain in a country.

Critical responses to these legal definitions vary. On the one hand, some scholars argue against the term 'refugee' and favour the term 'migrant'. For example, theatre scholar Szabolcs Musca argues that referring to migrants rather than refugees 'lifts migration from a legal and policy context—that differentiates between migrants, refugees and asylum seekers—and helps us to look at migration and indeed migrant theatre within the triad of movement—identity—and community' (2019, 5). This, in turn, arguably facilitates a theatre and a conversation that 'goes beyond encountering otherness; it also entails a critical (re)examination of our own cultural and socio-economic positions and privileges' (Musca 2019, 5–6). However, other writers argue against the term 'migrant' and support the term 'refugee'. For example, in 2015, broadcaster Al Jazeera declared that the 'umbrella term migrant is no longer fit for purpose when it comes to describing the horror unfolding in the Mediterranean', arguing that the term 'migrant' was being deployed as a tool to devalue, dehumanise and distance the plight of those fleeing their respective countries (Malone 2015). In adopting the term 'migrant', the broadcaster contends that the media 'become the enablers of governments who have political reasons for not calling those drowning in the Mediterranean what the majority of them are: refugees. We give weight to those who want only to see economic migrants' (Malone 2015). Within this volume, we have tended to align ourselves with Al Jazeera—not to reinforce legal regimes or avoid examining our cultural and socio-economic privilege, but rather to attend to the specific experience of seeking asylum in Australia.

While scholars and journalists debate the ethics of particular terms, governments have had no such misgivings. Indeed, Australian governments have gone out of their way to avoid the term 'refugee' and its legal rights. They do this via both formal and informal measures. Formally, migration legislation is littered with acronyms such as OEP (offshore entry person), PII (potential illegal immigrant), PUA (possible unauthorised arrival), SUNC (suspected unauthorised non-citizen), TP (transitory person), UA (unauthorised arrival), UBA (unauthorised boat arrival), UAM (unaccompanied minor) and UNC (unlawful non-citizens). Informally, they have employed and encouraged terms such as 'economic migrants', 'forum shoppers', 'illegal immigrants' or simply 'illegals', 'queue jumpers', 'smuggled people'

and 'these people' (Perera 2002, 28). The figure of the refugee is constructed not only linguistically but also visually. For over 20 years, the Australian government has explicitly forbidden the media from publishing 'personalising or humanising images' of refugees (Commonwealth of Australia 2002, 24). Instead, they are depicted as boats on the horizon, 'cargo' on those boats, or blurred and pixelated faces atop fluorescent life jackets. These images, in turn, recall 'imperial images of the abject bodies of "trafficked" natives' and summon associations with 'a long history of western representations of Muslims as violent and fanatical' (Perera 2002, 28).

The verbal and visual culture of the Australian border, or rather borders—in the plural form, since it continues to multiply across sites and colonise various states—is part of an international regime. Political theorist Thomas Nail notes that the 'migrant is a political figure of movement' and that these figures 'are socially expelled or dispossessed as a result, or as the cause, of their mobility' (2015, 11). Their movement may be seen as a challenge to power because the migrant disrupts the illusion of stasis in society (Nail 2015, 12–13; Suliman 2018). Furthermore, because the migrant figure is 'understood from the perspective of states' and because states often write history, the migrant has been perceived as 'without its own history and social force' (Nail 2015, 4). Anthropologist Liisa H. Malkki warns against referring to refugees as a miserable 'sea of humanity', stating that the 'dehistoricizing constitution of the refugee as a singular category of humanity within the international order of things' produces adverse effects (2009, 101). These outcomes include a loss of specificity, where refugees are not seen as individuals with unique histories and circumstances and become 'pure victims in general' (101). This dehistoricisation and the resulting perception of refugees as victims in need can feed into humanitarian and government strategies and processes that reinforce this state (101). Further, it can strip refugees of the 'authority to give credible narrative evidence or testimony about their own condition in politically and institutionally consequential forums' (101). The constructed voicelessness of refugees has prompted some theatre artists and filmmakers to provide a forum for their testimony and stories within creative works. Indeed, there are multiple instances of asylum seekers and refugees working directly with filmmakers and theatre artists to develop works that restore a sense of agency, specificity, authority and voice to varying degrees. A number of these works are documented and analysed within this book. However, as indicated by the broad themes of performance and resistance of its title and its multi- and interdisciplinary approach, the ten chapters in this book work to re-examine the place, border policies, treatment and responses to refugees in Australia from numerous perspectives.

On Stage and Off Stage

Part I—'On Stage'—considers the performance in and of refugee politics. Together, these chapters develop a critical understanding of the politics of refuge in Australia and the possibilities and limits of representing refugees and their stories onstage and onscreen in just and ethical ways. In the opening chapter, Suzanne Little interrogates the capacity and possibility for theatre to challenge, resist and transform